

Bible Class – the Parables of Jesus

21st March 2024

The Rich Man and Lazerus**Luke 16:19-31**

This is a passage which many churches become confused about, or use this parable to teach that the souls of the dead go to hell in torment or to paradise in heaven. Instead of seeing it as a parable, a made-up story to teach a lesson, these churches just use it to back up their false teachings, and do not bother to explain what Jesus was teaching. However, just because this is a parable, and many of them are simple stories, it does

not mean to say that everything in the parable should be taken literally. Not all that Jesus said should be taken literally, or that he believed in all the ideas he referred to. Jesus mentioned Beelzebub (Matthew 12:27) but it did not mean he believed in anything to do with it. Anyway, Jesus spoke in parables at times, for the very purpose that those who did not bother to seek truth, would not find it – so he said to his disciples; *Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not*

perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand. (Mark 4:11,12)

This parable was given by Jesus in response to the criticism and mocking of Jesus by the Pharisees – for example in 15:2 ... *This man receives sinners, and eats with them.* This religious group loved the rituals of religion, and the outward appearances to look holy, but rarely practised what they preached. Jesus openly reproved them which made them even more angry and jealous, but he pointed out *The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:* that is they think they are in the place of Moses, and they make the laws! But Jesus observed *...they bind heavy burdens ...and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers....love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues...But ...whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.* (see Matthew 23:4-13) This class of people were a real stumbling block, and obstacle hindering people to understand the truth as it was being declared in Jesus, because of their doctrine and attitudes, and self righteous ideas of piety and holiness which they thought could save them. They also had strange teachings, from pagan ideas which they mixed with the truth.

So Jesus began his parable, and presented two classes of people.

19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously [with showing off] every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

This certain rich man was typical of the Pharisee class. Though the Pharisees pretended to rigour and self-discipline, secretly, though rather obviously to the poor, they coveted the best seats, the perfect type of religious clothing, they coveted power and influence, and to be seen in the company of the rich and famous. They wandered around the temple rubbing shoulders with the priests and lawyers, and loved it when people called them “Teacher Teacher!” They had full access to the law and teachings of the Old Testament, and they talked and argued about this verse and that. But never actually did anything with the information. This was the *‘feasting sumptuously’* that Jesus was talking about. The *purple clothing* was a symbol of their status in society, they liked to be treated like royalty, and looked down on the common people, as the great unwashed ignorant and not worth bothering with.

Was clothed in purple and fine linen – should read was continually clothed

The Pharisees were complaining that Jesus was sitting eating with the “publicans and sinners” The publicans were the tax collectors and this was a job which was regarded as the lowest of the low. The sinners – well that was all the rest of the peasants, who were ignorant and unlearned people. This was the class of people Jesus was referring to as Lazarus. We recall this name, was the name of a friend he knew who lived in Bethany, and later raised to life, when he died of a sickness, which caused absolute astonishment amongst the Scribes and Pharisees and ruling classes, and which made them determined to kill Jesus. But Jesus was the champion of the Lazarus class. Lazarus means *God is my help*. They needed help, they relied on God, and they heard Jesus gladly. (Mark 12:27). These people were supposed to be given spiritual food from the lawyers, priests, scribes and Pharisees. But they had to beg for it, because those

people were just too busy getting rich! They got more kindness from the Gentiles, the dogs – the Romans who ruled over the nation provided more benefits than these rich elites. Caiaphas the high priest who was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus was the epitome of this oppressive greedy corruption, wandering around in his purple and linen garments looking quite the pope!

So Jesus has neatly explained Jewish society in AD30-33 in just three verses. Extreme contrasts.

Jesus continued:

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell [hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

Jesus told this parable using a vivid description of the Pharisees own belief – to ridicule them, and show the silliness of their doctrine, but at the same time expose their hypocrisy, using what we describe today as satire. Hades or the underworld was a place these Pharisees believed in, or at least it was a fashionable idea at the time. This can be seen in Apocryphal writings such as the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* for example. One such popular belief was that Abraham was an advocate for those who in the underworld suffered torments – again see the same writings as mentioned above. Even Flavius Josephus wrote a Discourse to Greeks concerning Hades where he describes the false teachings popular at the time – which the Lord Jesus lampoons.

Jesus uses their own false doctrines, to make them sit up and think. But the important point he makes, is this: that when it really matters,

the situation between the rich Pharisees and the poor beggars would be completely reversed.

This actually happened. The Roman legions besieged the city of Jerusalem. It wasn't the publicans and sinner class that suffered – they fled the city in the thousands. It was the rich and posh elites who remained in the city convinced that God was going to save them, as they argued and bickered among themselves over the stores of corn. It was the priests who were slaughtered by the Romans, and the wealthy who tried to escape who were sliced open by the soldiers to reveal all the jewels and gold they swallowed for later use, and it was the landlords and levities, the lawyers and scribes who were burnt alive as the city was set on fire.

Yes, Jesus' parable, so accurate and revealing on so many levels.

The poor man was carried into Abraham's bosom. This was a phrase which represents a favoured place, certainly not a literal location! The rich man though buried was able to see Abraham afar off, and the poor man being in favour.

24 And he [the rich man] cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and you are tormented.

26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from here to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from there.

In so many ways it can be shown that Jesus did not mean this parable to teach souls going to heaven and hell. Much of what he says contradicts his own teaching. For example:

- Father Abraham... Jesus said call no man your Father in Matthew 23:9
- Souls do not live for ever. Ezekiel 18:4,20 *the soul that sins it shall die, all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God-* Romans 3:23
- Jesus promised his disciples that their reward would be to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, not stare for ever at rich people being tormented in flames of fire for ever.

People who think this parable is talking about souls then are mistaken, In fact as we can see these “souls” in this parable have fingers and tongues, eyes and bosoms, hardly an invisible puff of cloud that whizzes off up to heaven or whiffles into so called hell!

Jesus portrays the ultra-religious and elite class grovelling and begging their ‘god’ to allow them to receive some reprieve from the once downtrodden but saved poor of the flock – just a little water because of the torments... but it was not possible they had chosen their path, and so the consequences would follow. We must remember this is not literal, but about classes of people. As the elite scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees etc were symbolised by this fat rich purple cloaked lord, it was really the symbol of Judea as a nation. Bloated with corruption, glorious in its pride, but came down from its heavenly perch with a crash, smashed by the Romans, and dispersed and scattered. Tormented for centuries, as they tried to hang onto their Tradition! Begging for sanctuary and reprieve, but never

acknowledging the reason for their demise – the rejection of the Messiah. That class will forever be condemned.

On the other hand, the despised and rejected, the poor of the flock, the true seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29), have enjoyed the refreshing water of the word, comforted, because they rejected the pleasures of sin for season, because God is their Help. The two classes are separated. 2 Corinthians 6:17: *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*

Jesus was using the Pharisees/Saducees own faith system which had been imported with them from Babylon, to teach them of opportunity lost, and reversal of fortune.

27 Then he [the rich man] said, I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house:

28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Jesus builds to the concluding highlight of his parable... he drops in another detail in his cartoon of the Pharisee/Saducee class to make sure the caricature is recognised *for I have five brethren...* Those listening would quickly associate the rich man continually clothed in purple and fine linen – well there was only one person in Jerusalem answering to that description and that was the high priest Caiaphas—oh and he had five brothers too! They were Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias and Ananus. Such a pointer would have surely made the listening Pharisees red faced, and squirm in their seats, knowing for sure, that Jesus was aligning their religious system with the corrupt wicked man in the parable.

In the representation it might be suggested that these five brothers represented the diaspora – who also had the opportunity of receiving the cold water of the truth (Proverbs 25:25 *As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.*) when the Apostles were sent into all the world to preach the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. But it was the Jews who followed them and turned whole cities against them for envy, they refused to believe, and tried to prevent the Gentiles for believing as well.

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30 And he said, No, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

How Jesus under inspiration of the Spirit would have enjoyed telling this parable: *Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.* Jesus was the Abraham class in the parable the Advocate the intercessor, the go between. But these blind deaf so-called teachers of the law stuffed up with their own self-importance, would miss his delicious irony – how many times did he refer his listeners to the law and the prophets? *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.* John 5:39 *These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.* Luke 24:44

Oh but no, reading their own law and prophets was just much too difficult. So they would never receive the cooling water of

forgiveness to relieve their burning consciences. Because they relied too much on the gibberish of the fashionable pseudo religions and mixed it in with the word of God to get followers – (some things never change) they would not be relieved of the burdens they were heaping upon themselves – But the elites say – OH I will believe in God if He will show himself, or some obvious evidence ... *No, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

Really. So Lazarus, Jesus' friend was raised from the dead, and Jesus used that name in his parable to remind them – of the power of God to raise the dead, but when that happened what did the elites do? John 11: In response to the miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead: 47-50: *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, what do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.*

So one was sent back from the dead, and the elites resolved to kill him, and the one who did the miracle. Jesus the son of Abraham, Jesus the Promised seed of Abraham, the greater than Abraham, was himself raised from the dead, and he sent a message – the Apocalypse, a letter of love to his people. But who repented? So the conclusion of the parable was the observation, that if people can't be bothered to read, understand the simple Truth of the Word of God – the law and the prophets, but prefer to believe gobbledegook about heaven and hell going, eternal souls and eternal torments, then they will never see the plain facts of evidence and proof when it is there in from of their face.

So Jesus said: Matthew 13: 13 -16: *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

Brother Terry