

### Part VII: The Parables on Wealth

#### 28. The Rich Man and Lazarus

##### Introduction

Some believe that The Rich Man and Lazarus is a parable and some believe that it is an historical account. I believe that it is a true story because the man Lazarus is named. Either way, it has an essential message, so I have included it. It is found only in Luke 16:19-31.

##### The Story

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five

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brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

"'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Luke 16:19-31, NIV

"There was a rich man..." who was unnamed by Jesus, but named *Dives* (from Latin, "wealthy") by someone later.

Dives was "habitually clothed" (meaning of Greek text) in purple and fine linen. Purple dye (*porpora*)

) was very expensive, made from a special fish, and ranging in color from a deep violet through a deep blue to a deep scarlet. Alexander found garments 200 years old that had been dyed with purple and were still vivid in color. Egyptian Fine linen (

*bussos*

) was so delicate that it was called "woven air." It was almost transparent and felt like silk—it was very expensive.

Dives lived in luxury every day. The Greek text literally states that he was daily "making merry in splendor." He had a luxurious lifestyle (Vincent 1886, S.v., "Luke 16:19").

Lazarus was a beggar—the Greek word denotes one who is "utterly destitute." It is interesting to note that Lazarus' name is an abbreviated form of Eleazar, which means "God a help."

Lazarus was laid (Greek, "was thrown"—today, we might say "dumped") at Dives' gate. Dives' gate was "a gate full of artistry and exquisite beauty" (Morgan 1943, 224). Lazarus was

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"covered with sores"—the one Greek word translated by the English phrase of three words is a medical term meaning "to be ulcerated"—the Greek word is found only here in the New Testament. It is reasonable that Luke should use medical terms since he was a physician. Lazarus was very hungry and would have eaten what fell from Dives' table—what the dogs usually ate. (Vincent 1886, S.v., "Luke 16:20).

"The...beggar died.... The rich man also died...." Lazarus died and the angels carried him [his spirit] to "Abraham's bosom," a Jewish term synonymous to Paradise. The word "Paradise" comes from the Old Persian word *pairidaeza*. The Greek equivalent is a compound word *periteicho*, from *peri* ("around") and *teichos* ("a wall"). *periteicho* was chosen to translate the Garden of Eden in the *Septuagint*, an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Paradise was a compartment of Hades, the place of departed human spirits. (Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Sheol.) There is a possibility that Lazarus' body was buried in the potter's field. However, Lazarus body was probably not buried:

A beggar of that type, completely destitute, alone, covered with sores, at last breathing out his spirit in all his poverty, in those times was not buried. Almost inevitably the cleaners passed the dead body, unknown, unclean, and hurried him away in the early dawn until they came to Tophet, Gehenna, the rubbish and refuse heap of fire, where they flung the body in. That is a known fact of the time, and the very fact we are not told he was buried, leads us to suppose such an end for him.

Morgan 1943, 225

It is very interesting to note that Jesus used Gehenna as a symbol of everlasting torment. The word Gehenna is a transliteration of the Greek word *geenna*, which is a transliteration of the two Hebrew words, *ge hinnom* (Valley of Hinnom, which is the same as Tophet), located immediately south of Jerusalem. At one time, ancient Israel sacrificed infants to the false god Molech. King Josiah destroyed the idol Molech and stopped the practice of infant sacrifice. He made the area into a garbage dump. It was not a sanitary landfill like we have today. Bodies of humans and animals, plus filth were dumped there. Because of the rotting material, perpetual fires were kept going. Thus Jesus words, "where their worm

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[maggots]

dieth not and the fire is not quenched." Men consigned Lazarus' body to the garbage dump, a *symbol* of everlasting punishment. Lazarus was dishonored by men.

Dives died. He [his body] was buried, probably with much pomp and ceremony. Men honored Dives. His spirit was carried into Hades also, but to the part for unbelievers. He went into the *real* place of everlasting punishment.

In Hades, where he was in torment [*basanios*, "torment "], he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony [*odunōmai*, "I am in anguish"] in this fire.'

Luke 16:23-24, NIV

Tormented [KJV] (*odunōmai*)

Used by Luke only. Tormented is too strong. The word is used of the sorrow of Joseph and Mary when the child Jesus was missing (Luk\_2:48); and of the grief of the Ephesian elders on parting with Paul (Act\_20:38) Rev., I am in anguish.

Vincent 1886, S.v., Luke 16:23

### The Interpretation

In their earthly life, Dives was clothed in beautiful garments. Lazarus was clothed in sores. The physical realm had become a delusion, a lie. For in the invisible or spiritual realm, Dives was clothed in self-righteous rags and Lazarus was clothed in the righteousness of God.

What was Dives' sin? Some may see his riches as being sinful, but Jesus did not say this. It is hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God, but not impossible. In fact, Abraham was a

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rich man. Trench identifies Dives' sin:

For it ought never to be forgotten, that it is not the primary purpose of the parable to teach the fearful consequences which will follow the abuse of wealth and contempt of the poor, but the fearful consequences of *unbelief* [italics mine], of having the heart set on this world, and refusing to believe in that invisible world, here known only to faith, until by a miserable and too late experience the existence of such an unseen world has been discovered.

*The sin of dives in its roots is unbelief*

[italics mine]: the squandering on self, and contempt of the poor, are only the forms which it takes. His unbelief also shows itself in supposing that his brethren, while refusing to give heed to the sure word of God, would heed a ghost. .... It is most important to keep in mind that this, the rebuke of unbelief, is the central thought and aim of the parable.

Trench 1948, 162

Trench comments concerning Dives' second request:

There lies in it a secret justifying of himself, and accusing of God: "If only I had been sufficiently warned, if God had only given me clear evidences of the need of repentance, and of this place as the goal of a worldly life, I had never come hither. But at least, let my brethren be warned.

Trench 1948, 169

There was another Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. Instead of listening to him, hardened religious leaders tried to put him to death:

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

John 12:9-10, NIV

The chief priests were Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection (Matthew 22:23). They refused to believe someone who was raised from the dead, apparently because they did not believe someone could be raised from the dead—eyewitnesses' testimony did not matter!

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Those who reject God and his Word will become more and more hardened. They will rationalize everything to fit their choice of belief.

Some future day, Dives would leave the temporary Hades and be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). The lake of fire is commonly called hell.

On the other hand, Lazarus' faith was in God and his word. He would later leave the temporary Hades and be with his Lord forever in what is commonly called heaven.

The difference between an eternity in heaven or hell is the simple choice of accepting Christ as our Savior and believing in him:

Whoever believes in him [Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:18, NIV

Central Truth

*God requires that we have faith in him.*

Conclusion

It is God's will that all people trust in Christ and be saved. Let us patiently witness to all concerning the wonderful plan of salvation that our Father has provided through his Son!

Parable 28, Taken from my e-Book, *The Astonishing Parables of Jesus*.

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