

Parable Of Lazarus And The Rich Man (Part One)

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In Luke 16:19-31 appears the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, which Jesus spoke to those who would not repent. Jesus uses it to help them understand His earlier words: "Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:27-28). In the parable, the rich man—representing all workers of iniquity, all sinners—illustrates what is to befall the unrepentant.

The wicked will be raised to physical life in their resurrection, and then, immediately knowing that they are doomed, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire designed by God to consume them. The Lake of Fire will burn them up completely and finally. Jesus pictures the rich man crying out for help because of his mental and physical anguish at this time, but he is not burning eternally in hell fire. He is soon consumed while Lazarus the beggar dwells safely in immortality.

1. Where is righteous Lazarus the beggar taken? Luke 16:19-22.

Comment: Jesus describes Lazarus as being taken to Abraham's bosom, which is simply the human breast, with the arms as an enclosure. His words depict a loving embrace, suggesting an intimate relationship. Lazarus, therefore, comes into an intimate relationship with Abraham and receives salvation (Galatians 3:29). Since Lazarus had given himself to Christ, he became one of Abraham's spiritual children and an heir to the promises of God (Galatians 3:7).

The "bosom" metaphor occurs frequently in Scripture. God will care for His people as a shepherd for his sheep, carrying them "in his bosom" (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus was "in the bosom" of the Father (John 1:18), enjoying His blessings and close relationship. Moses carried the children of Israel in his bosom (Numbers 11:12). Lazarus had gained such intimacy with Abraham, while the Pharisees, who considered themselves to be the recipients of God's promises to Abraham, had not.

2. What was the promise Abraham received from God? Genesis 12:5-7; 13:15; 15:18; Romans 9:6-8.

Comment: God promised Abraham's descendants *land* on earth—the land of Canaan, and later it was all the land he could see. God even included the actual boundary line of the property in His agreement with Abraham. "Your seed" refers primarily to Christ, the chief of "Abraham's seed, and heir according to the promise." Since God's promise of the land of Canaan was forever, it is an eternal inheritance and includes eternal life (Hebrews 9:15). Because the angels carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom, he became one of Abraham's children and thus an heir to the Promised Land on this earth—not in heaven—and eternal life.

3. When was this beggar to inherit eternal life in this Promised Land? I Corinthians 15:50-53; I Thessalonians 4:16-17; Matthew 25:31-34.

Comment: A son who is heir to his father's property cannot inherit and possess it before his father inherits it. Lazarus could not inherit either eternal life or the land before his father Abraham received the promises. Abraham, however, died without actually inheriting these promises (Acts 7:2-5; Hebrews 11:8-13). He was still dead at the time of Christ's earthly ministry, and he still is in his grave today (John 8:52). He will inherit the promises at the time of the resurrection of the just. Human beings in Christ, living and dead, receive eternal life at Christ's second coming, Abraham among them (Luke 13:28).

4. What happens to the wicked rich man? Luke 16:22-23.

Comment: Jesus does not say the rich man is taken immediately to an eternally burning hell. He says the rich man dies and is buried. People are buried in a grave and covered with earth. *Hades* (verse 23) is the Greek word for "grave." The King James Version generically translates *hades* into "hell," as it also does the Greek words *tartarus* (the present condition of darkness and restraint of the fallen angels or demons) and *gehenna* (a place at the bottom of a high ledge at the south end of Jerusalem where garbage and dead bodies were dumped and burned). Other Bible translations correctly distinguish the different meaning in these words. The rich man went to the same kind of place Jesus did when He died—"hell" (KJV) or "Hades" (NKJV)—but the Father did not leave Him there (Acts 2:31-32).

Daniel 12:2 speaks of those who will be resurrected to eternal life (the just) and of those who will be resurrected to damnation or judgment (the unjust). In the parable, Jesus speaks of two different, separate resurrections (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:4-5, 11-12). Jesus pictures the rich man as wicked and lost, but even he will open his eyes and rise from his grave after the Millennium. Having passed up his opportunity for immortality by choosing this world's temporary, material riches and pleasures rather than eternal, spiritual riches, he is without hope, doomed to perish in the Lake of Fire.

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man shows the resurrection from the dead, not an instantaneous going to heaven or hell. It is a resurrection from death, not from life. It depicts mortals who die and are dead, not immortals who never lose consciousness and live forever under punishment in a fiery hell. Jesus describes bringing back to life one who was dead, who had no conscious realization of the lapse of centuries and millennia since his death.

Part Two will explain how Jesus illustrates the Second Death in the Lake of Fire as an eternal punishment that totally destroys the wicked, who become ashes under the feet of the saved.