

## Parable Of Lazarus And The Rich Man (Part Two)

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In the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus illustrates death—total unconsciousness—as being followed by a resurrection from the dead and a restoration to consciousness. Secondly, Jesus describes the second death, eternal death, in the Lake of Fire that will totally destroy the wicked. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), not endless torment.

Jesus shows that the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear the voice of God and come forth—those who have lived righteously to the resurrection of life, and those who have lived wickedly (including the rich man) to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29). We need to understand how vital it is to hear and submit to God's voice now.

1. Is the rich man conscious of a great lapse of time? Luke 16:22-23, 27-30.

**Comment:** Lazarus, who represents those who are Abraham's spiritual children, is resurrected at Christ's return with all the firstfruits (I Corinthians 15:23). These saints will live through the Millennium (Revelation 20:4), but the rest of the dead will not live until the thousand years have past (verse 5). The rich man, then, will not return to life until a thousand years after Lazarus and all the saints have been made alive. All human beings know they will die (Hebrews 9:27), but the dead have no thought or knowledge—they know nothing and can do nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). They are totally unconscious (Job 14:21). David writes: "His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day, his plans perish" (Psalm 146:4). The rich man, at the time of his resurrection after the Millennium, will come to consciousness, knowing absolutely nothing of the centuries that have passed since his death. To him, it will seem that only a fraction of a second has passed.

2. What is the flame in which the rich man is tormented? Luke 16:23-25.

**Comment:** The flame he sees and feels upon his resurrection is the ultimate fate of the wicked: being burned up—destroyed—in Gehenna fire, the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15). The Lake of Fire represents the second death from which there is no return to life. This death is final and permanent; it is the absence of life for all eternity. It is eternal *punishment*, not eternal *punishing*.

When the rich man opens his eyes in the resurrection, he sees the flame of fire that is about to destroy him permanently, and it paralyzes him with terror, making his mouth go dry. He complains that the flame is tormenting him. In these verses, the Greek word translated "tormented," *odunomai*, means "to cause pain; to pain, distress; pain of body, but also pain of mind, grief, distress." This rich man, resurrected to *physical* life, sees this Lake of Fire and realizes the terrible doom he is about to face. Sobbing, he suffers mental anguish and despair and begs for a little water from the tip of Lazarus' finger to cool his tongue. Nevertheless, he must reap what he sowed—death!

3. What is the "great gulf fixed" between Lazarus and the rich man? Luke 16:26.

**Comment:** Abraham and Lazarus were separated from the rich man suffering for his sins. The latter had received his reward in the material things he had sought, craved, and acquired during his mortal lifetime. The gulf Abraham mentions that prevents the wicked from escaping death in the Lake of Fire—and that also keeps the righteous from being burned—is immortality. Those who are immortal will never die because they are composed of spirit like God (Revelation 20:6). Only the saved possess immortality as the gift of God (Romans 2:7).

Conversely, human beings who have not been resurrected or changed to spirit are still physical and subject to corruption and death. They can be consumed by fire because they are composed of flesh and blood. The wicked will reap anguish and wrath, the fiery indignation that will devour the adversary (Hebrews 10:27). For such people, there will be a time of anguish before they die when the fire consumes their bodies. The parable ends with Abraham's words ringing in the rich man's mind and flames of judgment engulfing his body.

4. What was the significance of the rich man's final, anguished thought? Luke 16:27-31.

**Comment:** The rich man's last thought flashes to concern for the fate of his five brothers. He utters a final cry to Abraham, begging him to send Lazarus to plead with his brothers to heed his warning testimony. Abraham replies that they had the writings of Moses and the prophets. The rich man, however, thinks his brothers would listen to one from the dead, indicating that he believed in the power of resurrection. Abraham replies that, if they would not follow the Scriptures, they would certainly not be persuaded even by one raised from the dead. These final verses show that Jesus' purpose in giving the parable was to reveal the truth of the resurrection.

Other scriptures tell us what happens where this parable leaves off. Matthew 13:30 speaks symbolically of the wicked being gathered into bundles to be burned. Matthew 3:12 records John's warning to the Pharisees that they would be burned up as chaff if they did not repent. They are to be burned in a fire so hot that no amount of water could put it out because the flames would turn the water to steam. When God punishes the wicked, the fire will be unquenchable. This does not mean, however, that it will not burn itself out when it has no more combustible materials to burn. An unquenchable fire cannot be put out, but it can burn itself out when it has consumed everything. Malachi 4:1, 3 also speaks of this fire, reporting the end of the wicked: They will be ashes and smoke (see Psalm 37:20).

In this, Jesus is preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, revealing salvation, the resurrection to eternal life as the gift of God, and inheritance of the Kingdom of God on this earth. Jesus teaches that if we refuse to hear Moses and the prophets—if we refuse to believe the inspired, written Word of God—we have no hope of salvation. All Scripture, the whole Bible containing both the Old and New Testaments, is profitable for doctrine and instruction in receiving the gift of salvation.