

# THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

OR

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

I would say without doubt that the story we are about to examine is the most misunderstood passage of Scripture in the whole of our Bibles. From it comes most of the teaching we receive regarding death and the afterlife, especially the doom and torment of the lost.

The question is, are the preachers who say these things correct? Did our precious Saviour mean for this passage to be taken as doctrinal truth, or was there some other reason for telling this story? These are the serious issues we intend to prayerfully examine in this little booklet.

To start with, let us be clear that anything we believe about death and the beyond has to be firmly based on Holy Scripture. This narrative in Luke's gospel raises lots of problems, but the traditional gospel preacher chooses to ignore these in his blind endeavour as he scares sinners by telling them they will burn forever in an eternal hell, tossed on the billows of God's wrath.

Yet have you ever heard any of them trying to explain how the righteous could be happy as they listen to the cries of the damned being tormented? Or where this place called Abraham's Bosom is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, or what in fact it is? Or can they explain where the righteous who died hundreds of years before Abraham was born went? People like Abel, Methuselah, Noah and a multitude of others? Or do souls have eyes, fingers and tongues? Or where in Scripture do we read of anyone being carried by angels into the great beyond? Let them if they can, answer these questions.

These and many other problems are simply passed over so that blind tradition can be preached.

It must be plainly stated from the outset, to avoid any misunderstanding, that the Bible plainly teaches that the unjust and sinners will not escape the judgement of God. One has only to read passages like 2 Peter ch. 2.v.9., or Revelation ch. 20.v.11-15., or Acts ch. 17.v.31 and many others which could be quoted, which show that there is a day of judgement which lies ahead, when the unsaved will have to stand before the Divine Judge, but that day is at least 1000 years away, and no one can be punished before they have been judged. If such a thought is repugnant to human reasoning, how much more so to the one who has given us the ability to reason. What we are being told is that an intermediate state exists between death and final judgement. Such conclusions have been reached through a faulty understanding of this important passage of Scripture. It is to rectify this that our little booklet has been written.

It would be impossible in such a short booklet to deal with every detail of the story but we intend to look at the salient points which will guide us to a true understanding of what the Lord Jesus is actually doing and saying.

We must recognise to whom these words are addressed and we are clearly told in verses 14 & 15. They were directed exclusively to the Pharisees, Christ's greatest antagonists and enemies who wanted nothing short of his death.

The Lord had been involved in a long discourse with them as a reading of chapters 14. v.1 to 17. v.10 will show. He had exposed them as proud and arrogant in ch.14, self righteous and

hypocritical in ch.15, and dishonest and greedy, as we can see from the story of the unjust steward in ch.16 v 1-13.

The Lord had on previous occasions challenged them on their mishandling of the Word of God. They held many man-made traditions which had been handed down over the centuries by rabbis and Jewish teachers, these were virtually held on par with Holy Scripture and were recognised as equally inspired.

The Lord refers to these in Matthew ch.15 v.2-14 and in Mark's gospel ch.7 v 3-13. He said that the Pharisees had made the Word of God of none effect through their vain traditions and that they were teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, Mark ch.7 v 7. We also see glimpses of this same problem in Matthew ch.5 where our Lord repeatedly uses the phrase "it has been said" or "it was said by them of old time" referring again to traditions which the Pharisees were teaching, and he counteracts this with the words "but I say unto you".

What we need to recognise in this story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke ch.16 is that Jesus is not teaching truth, but refuting error. How could we possibly imagine that the Lord would give to these Pharisees who hated him, a revelation of the other side, which he never spoke of or showed to his disciples who loved and followed him?

He had already made it clear that true riches cannot be entrusted to those who he says have been unfaithful, and who love unrighteous mammon and popularity more than God.

This is what the parable of the unjust steward is all about, it was to expose these hypocritical Pharisees, and we can see from verse 14 that they certainly got the message.

These verses from 19-31 are not what the Scriptures taught about life after death, but the Lord is exposing what had been handed down by tradition, and what was being taught by the Pharisees as the state of things on the other side of death.

Is it not also amazing that the apostles who heard these words spoken by the Lord concerning "Hades", this so called place of intermediate punishment, never once refer to it in any of their writings. Nor does the great apostle Paul, who wrote most of our New Testament. Not even once does he mention hell in any of his epistles, nor preach about it in any of his 11 sermons recorded for us in The Acts of the Apostles. Yet to listen to some of our preachers you would think it appears in almost every other verse. Just to be completely clear on the matter, the Lord himself mentions "Hades" 4 times in the gospels. There is another word "gehenna" which has been wrongly translated hell, it appears 11 times in the gospels, but he refers to Heaven over 100 times. So much for Jesus speaking more about hell than heaven.

It was the Pharisees who believed in such a place, and we are thankful that an extract from a prominent Pharisee has been preserved for us which reveals exactly what was held and taught.

This man's name was Josephus AD 37-100. He was a historian, and tells us that at the age of 19 he sought to know and follow their teachings.

Among his writings there is an extract of a discourse to the Greeks concerning Hades, and in it we find practically all the imagery contained in the story we are dealing with. If this is so then we must be prepared to face up to and accept the consequences.

We are going to place side by side what Jesus said, and opposite what Josephus said about this place.

## Luke 16 v 19 -30

"It came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's Bosom.

The rich man also died and in Hades he lifted up his eyes . .

Son remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.

And seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom

Father Abraham, have mercy on me. . . .  
I am tormented in this flame.

Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue . .

between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.

## Josephus on Hades

"There is one descent into this region, at whose gate we believe there stands an archangel with an host; which gate when those pass through that are conducted down by the angels appointed over souls.. Are guided to the right hand . . . While they wait for that rest and eternal new life in heaven, which is to succeed this region, this place we call The Bosom of Abraham.

Now as to Hades wherein the souls of the righteous and unrighteous are detained, it is necessary to speak of it.

This region is allowed as a place of custody for souls, in which angels are appointed as guardians to them, to distribute them temporary punishments agreeable to everyone's behaviour and manners.

They are struck with a fearful expectation of a future judgement, and in effect punished thereby; and not only so but they see the place of the fathers and of the just even thereby are they punished.

Now these angels that are set over souls, drag them into the neighbourhood of hell itself, who when they are hard by it continually hear the noise of it, and do not stand clear of the hot vapour itself.

A chasm deep and large is fixed between them; that a just man, that hath compassion on them, cannot be admitted, nor can one that is unjust, if he were bold enough to attempt, pass over it.

This is the testimony of Josephus as to Hades, the place of temporary punishment. Such teaching finds no grounds in the canon of Holy Scripture.

When the rich man would ask for Lazarus to be sent to warn his 5 brethren these words are given in reply, "let them hear Moses and the prophets". In other words if such a place with its 2 compartments and temporary punishment exists, Moses and the prophets will have wrote about it. We read from Genesis to Malachi in vain to find any reference and are left with the unacceptable conclusion that for 4000 years God allowed people to drop into this place, and yet never even warned them of it.

It becomes clear that our Lord is exposing the error of the Pharisees, but how sad that the Christian Church is teaching as truth that which our Lord has clearly shown was Pharisaical tradition.

The whole narrative is satire, a picture of the Pharisees themselves and representative of the kingly and priestly position they aspired to, they sought to be both the religious leaders and also rulers of the nation. Their disregard for the poor and their covetousness, pictured in the beggar lying at the rich mans gate desiring to be fed on crumbs, the dogs, a term used of gentiles, showing the beggar more kindness than the rich man. All this in spite of the fact that the law of Moses provided for the poor man at the gate and legislated how the better off were to treat such, also their unscriptural views of hades / sheol which finds absolutely no basis in Holy Scripture.

Our Lord never intended these verses as doctrine, there is no gospel message here. God's name is not even mentioned but Abraham is given the prominent place, in keeping with the elevated position he held in the eyes of these Pharisee / hypocrites.

### **What happens when we die?**

So, perhaps you are saying, "What exactly does happens when we die?" The answer to that question depends entirely on your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ before you die.

If you know Him as your Saviour, then you have nothing to fear. When you die you will go "*down into silence*" in the grave (Ps. 115.17), until He returns and awakes you from the sleep of death. Although a hundred or more years may have passed it will seem to you but an instant. On the resurrection morn you will be raised with all other believers who have died 'in Christ' "*to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*". (1 Thes. 4.17). This is what the Lord promised his disciples, "*I will come again and receive you unto myself*". (John 14. 3). He did not say, "you will die and come to me". In Job 14.12 we read: "*So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.*" The psalmist said "*I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.*" (Ps. 17.15).

If on the other hand there has never been a time in your life when you have put your trust in Christ for salvation and known your sins forgiven, then the future for you is very different. You too will go *down into silence* from whence you will be resurrected, not to be with Christ, but to meet Him as your Judge at the Great White Throne judgment where you will be judged for your sins. We read in Rev, 20: 12. *I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. v.15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

Much more could be said, but we leave our readers to carefully examine what we have written and what they have heard preached, and then to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them into the truth of such an important subject.

