

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

by Woody Oliver

The story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 is taken by many to be relating the outcome of people when they die, the righteous going to heaven, and the wicked going to a place called hell, to be eternally tormented. However, when one correctly understands the Bible teaching regarding what happens to a person at death, then this story is very clearly a parable, not about the physically dead, but of the living, who are either spiritually walking in death or life. This idea compatible with the following: **Mt 13:34:** *All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:* (cp Mk 4:33-34)

What happens at death?: Adam was admonished that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *dying you will die* (Gen 2:17 - KJV margin). The concept here is that by mixing man's ideas with God's brings a person to the point of dying spiritually, and eventually they will die physically. These two deaths are the result of sin, and have been passed to all mankind. However, there is a third death that will bring about eternal life (the quality of life in Christ) - it is called death to self. **Rom 8:13:** *for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live.* (American Standard) {See Col 3:5-6 for deeds of the body}

Two parts make up a human being. We have each have a physical body and a mind. Our mental make-up consists of the intellect (stored knowledge), emotions (feelings generated by thoughts) and the will (the force that puts the emotions into action, the disposition to act). We all have physical form which can be seen and touched, but our mind contains who we are and all our life experiences and learning, and ultimately it is the mind that makes a person distinct, and it cannot be seen. Now, the Bible often uses body parts as symbols, i.e. the hand represents works, or outward acts of the thoughts; the right arm is a figure of strength, etc. The mind, however, is represented by its activities - heart = feelings; soul = record of who a person is; spirit = expresses the thoughts of the mind. So, fine tune the question, What happens to the body and mind at death?

Christians pretty much accept that death is the result of sin entering the world, and the curse of death is passed down to all, and that upon death the body returns to dust. (Gen 3:19; Rom 5:12) What happens to the mind? Logically speaking, a body can exist without a mind (brain dead), but a mind cannot exist without a body. So, this idea leaves some scripture to be explained.

Ecc 9:5-6, 10: *5. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. 6. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. 10. Whatsoever thy hand finds to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou go. **Ps 146:3-4:** 3. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. 4. His breath ⁽⁷³⁰⁷⁾ goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. When the physical body dies, knowledge, wisdom, thoughts - all memory perishes.*

Is the soul immortal? *The soul that sins, it shall die* (Eze 18:4, 20), and *all have sinned* (Rom 5:12). What happens to the spirit? The Hebrew ⁽⁷³⁰⁷⁾ and Greek ⁽⁴¹⁵¹⁾ words translated "spirit", both mean "breath or wind" literally. Breath and wind are used figuratively of a person's spirit, or something to do with the mind. **Ecc 12:7:** *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit ⁽⁷³⁰⁷⁾ shall return unto God who gave it.* The physical breath is a picture of the spiritual breath. When God breathed into Adam, he became alive physically and spiritually. When he disobeyed God, he died spiritually, but he did not

lose his literal breath until he was 930 years old. When a person dies physically they lose their breath, but their spirit, their character, is retained in the mind of God until the resurrection, at which time it is restored in a new body. A person's spirit or soul cannot exist apart from the body, except in the mind of God. When God gives a person a new spirit (Eze 36:26) He gives them a new way of thinking, a new character, not a ghost of a thing that walks around on its own. So, the conclusion from the preceding, must be that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable. So, what is the parable teaching?

Rich man: Note these verses: **Pr 23:4**: *Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom*. **Pr 18:11**: *The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit*. A rich man of the flesh walks totally in his OWN knowledge and understanding. Now, look at the rich who follow the Lord: **Pr 10:22**: *The blessing of the Lord, it makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it*. **Pr 22:4**: *By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life*. **Pr 23:3-4**: *3. Through wisdom is a house built; and by understanding it is established: 4. And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches*. The riches regarding the kingdom of heaven are not the material things which men value, but the spiritual things which God values.

A wealthy young man asked Jesus what good thing he could do to inherit eternal life. After Jesus instructed him to sell all that he had, the man left sad because he understood Jesus to be speaking of his material wealth. Even the disciples, as indicated by their response, thought the same thing. (Cf Mt 19:16-30) Mark added some clarification with Jesus' statement, "...*how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*" (Mk 10:24). Is it not true that the literal is a reflection of the inward? Some wealthy believers mentioned in the Bible are Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. In the new testament Joseph of Arimathaea was very rich and is mentioned as being a disciple of Jesus (Mt 27:57). It is not the literal riches that keep a person from heaven, but their trust in them, or making them their salvation.

In the parable of the Unjust Steward (Lk 16:1-13), Jesus made two important points: 1) *If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?* 2) *No servant can serve two masters... Ye cannot serve God and mammon*. The true riches are God's wisdom and understanding as given through His only begotten son. The unrighteous mammon is a person's own understanding of the Bible, or what ever is their guide in serving God, and to which if they are faithful, God considers them trustworthy for the true riches. The Rich Man in the parable was *clothed in purple and fine linen* (Lk 16:19), indicative of a king of the earth (unsanctified), and represents those who are unfaithful to what they profess to believe.

Beggar: The Greek word for "beggar" is *ptochos* ⁽⁴⁴³⁴⁾ translated "poor 31 of 34 times in the N.T. Jesus defines what it means to be poor: **Mt 5:3**: *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. The "poor in spirit" are those who recognize that they are destitute of God's spirit, and they hunger and thirst after righteousness, which is the true riches. Here are the poor to which Jesus came to minister: **Lk 4:18**: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.. [literally = broken]. Paul described himself and other ministers of the gospel *as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things* (2 Cor 6:10), because the riches have to do with the inward kingdom of heaven. Lazarus is a type for one who recognizes their need of Christ.*

Sores: Leviticus 13 & 14 discusses leprosy in the skin, clothing and stones of the house. This horrible disease still exists in the world today. In the Bible it is a symbol of for sin. Lazarus desired to be fed with crumbs from the rich man's table, but only the dogs came and licked his sores. A person cannot give another of the true riches if they do not have them. Lazarus represents a person today seeking crumbs of

the truth from his Church, but only dogs lick (wash) his sores, but cannot heal them.

Dogs: Isa 56:10-11: *10. His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. 11. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Dogs are represented as being in the city, and a city is a mind-set (like Babylon). They are symbols of the thoughts of man who has made himself king. They are used in a prophecy as surrounding the Messiah (Ps 22:16); as a fool eating his own vomit - i.e. own beliefs about God (Pr 26:11); and those walking according to the flesh (2 Pet 2:9-22). All the rich man had to offer Lazarus was human wisdom.*

Abraham's Bosom: Abraham is a type of those abiding (hearing and doing) in Christ. He *looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* (Heb 11:10) That city is New Jerusalem, a symbol of the completed mind of Christ (Heb 5:8-9). This is the place in which the beggar resided after death to self.

Hell: This particular word is *hades* ⁽⁸⁶⁾, derived from the Greek *alpha* ⁽¹⁾, as a negative particle, and *eido* ⁽¹⁴⁹²⁾, which means "to know", but when combined, makes *hades* = not knowing, or not having God's knowledge. As you can see, it is the opposite place of where Lazarus dwelled - i.e. The rich man was dead spiritually!

Death: So, where these men were in their thinking and manner of life defines their death in the parable - the rich man was spiritually dead, where Lazarus died to self. These two are symbols: 1) of those hearing and doing as the Holy Spirit guides, or, 2) those walking in their own understanding. The rest of the parable serves to illustrate there is a "great gulf" fixed between the two, which cannot be crossed once the heart is hardened.

Lk 16:23-24: *23. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24. And he 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.* When the rich man lifted up his eyes (understood his mistake) he ask for some of Lazarus' spiritual understanding (finger dipped in water) to cool his fiery tongue (Jam 3:5-6). But it was impossible because the rich man was already spiritually dead. When Esau realized he had spurned the birthright, it was too late to repent (Heb 12:16-17), not because God would not accept it, but because his heart was hardened to the point he would not. When the five unwise virgins realized the bridegroom was there, they sought more oil from the wise, who had extra and were turned down, and eventually shut out of the wedding (Mt 25:8-9). So are those who waste their life time seeking the pleasures of this world, instead of the riches of the kingdom of heaven. A righteous person cannot give of his own character. Everyone must seek to be clothed in Christ's righteousness by their own experience. Can we learn from others? Absolutely! But it is the Spirit that gives life, and it takes time.

Summary: The final request manifests the absolute state of a hardened heart. The rich man requests someone to go to his brethren, but is told: *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead* (Lk 16:31). Israel's problem throughout her history was that of "hard of hearing" (Cf Deut and Jer). Most leaders, and many others rejected Christ, even though he rose from the dead. The key to knowing the preceding story is a parable is to have a correct understanding of death, the spirit and soul. There is also a famine in the land today of hearing God (Amos 8:11). Every person must test the religious traditions taught by favorite pastors or family members, and be careful not to reject the risen Savior. **Ps 49:6-7:** *6. They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; 7. None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom*

for him: