

**Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**  
**Luke 16: 19-31**  
**Pastor John E. Dubler**

**Central message: Remember the poor**

Other interesting teachings resident in this parable:

- a. When believers die, angels escort them to heaven
- b. Hell is a real place of torment
- c. Unbelievers cannot be convinced even by proofs of the resurrection of Jesus



Concern for the needs of the poor is the central message of the parable, but woven into this teaching are three other very interesting lessons: First, when believers die, they are escorted by angels to heaven. This gives great hope to all who are close to crossing Jordan and to their families. Second, hell is very real and it is hot; certainly a place of great torment. Third, unbelievers who reject the Word of God do so even though Jesus rose from the dead with many convincing proofs. Nothing will persuade them

once they have rejected God's word. Only the Holy Spirit can perform the life-changing work of changing hearts.

**Here is the parable found only in Luke's gospel, 16:19-31**

“Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house — 28 for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

**The rich man and Lazarus while on earth.**

There are two men in the story: one rich one poor. The rich man is indeed very rich. He dresses in purple and fine linen, the color and fabric of wealth and royalty. The soldiers on the day of Jesus' crucifixion mocked Him as a "king," putting a purple robe on Him (John 19:2 ff). The rich man is living in luxurious splendor each day and could well afford to give at the very least some of his great wealth to the poor. The rich man, though he does not know it, is very near death.



The poor man, given the name Lazarus in the story, stands in contrast to the rich man. He is very poor indeed. He is a beggar. He is also sick; so sick that he can no longer beg. He is carried to the rich man's gate, no doubt by some friends who are beggars themselves. They lay him there hoping that the rich man will notice him on his way, going to and fro in his beautiful purple robes. The poor man is so debilitated that he is unable even to fend off the dogs which are coming, licking his sores. The listeners would understand the nature of this final insult dealt the poor man in this life. Lazarus is very near death and knows it.

### **A vivid contrast on earth—and later in eternity.**

The states of these two men on this earth could not be more different. What a contrast of wealth and poverty. And their states in the next life also present a huge contrast as well, as we shall shortly see. A sobering and as yet unseen fate awaits the rich man. He is oblivious to how his choices on this earth will affect his future happiness and security in eternity.



**The rich man with no name.** The poor man is named, while the rich man is not. This has little significance on the story itself. Jesus' best friend was named Lazarus, (John 11) but the brother of Mary and Martha, and the one Jesus raised from the dead, was a man of some means and not a mendicant, laid sick and suffering at the gate of a rich man. Some suggest that Jesus had some other particular poor man in mind when He used the name Lazarus. We shall not know the answer to that question this side of glory. Lazarus was, after all, a common name in the time of this story's telling. In Hebrew his name is "*el'azar*," meaning "him whom God has helped." In Greek the name is *Lazaros*. Tradition has assigned a name to the rich man, just as names were subsequently given to the wise men who came to Bethlehem at the time Jesus was born. Thus, the rich man has become known as "Dives," meaning "rich."

## Lazarus dies and is carried away by angels.



**The Death of Eva from  
Uncle Tom's Cabin Illustrated**

him to his eternal destination of Hades. Apparently not even the demons came to escort the rich man to hell. He goes alone, unattended and unknown, and unescorted to face his eternal life in Hell.

So, I attach truth to Jesus' words here, and significance for all of us who love the Lord. Lazarus is not the only one to have the escort of angels to heaven, and certainly on this score, God is no respecter of persons. The redeemed will find this as a comfort: At the moment of death, angels come and escort the believer across the boundary of time and space and into eternity. There they will carry him to the very presence of the Lord Jesus, and there, for the first time, they will see God, face to face.

Therefore, beloved, I urge you not to fear death. Death is an enemy. Death will eventually be destroyed. But until that great day when the last enemy dies, we shall experience death. It is a heavy thought. However, God has given us this eternal hope. We shall not go alone. We will have a rather grand escort. Therefore fear not death itself.

After his death, angels carry Lazarus away to Abraham's bosom. Some commentators relegate this bit of intelligence as merely an artistic gloss woven into the story by the Master Teacher. But I see more to the comment than they, even though I agree that care must be taken when building doctrine on the stories used to convey the basic and fundamental message of the parable.

So let's be clear: The message of the parable is care for the poor. The Word tells us to "Remember the poor." We cannot escape our responsibility to do so. This small line of comfort regarding the angels carrying us at the moment of death cannot and does not distract from that message. Therefore, let us not ignore or dismiss this interesting bit of intelligence.

I cannot but wonder at Jesus use of this statement: "carried away by the angels." If it is not in fact and truly so, then why would He say it at all? It is especially significant that He does not say so of the rich man. The rich man died, "and was buried." No angelic escort for

### **The scene changes to eternity.**

“In Hades<sup>1</sup>, he [the rich man] lifted up his eyes, being in torment . . .” How many times had Lazarus lifted up his eyes at the sound of the rich man’s gate opening? He was starving, sick and sore, longing for even a crumb from the rich man’s table. Perhaps he heard the sound of the iron gate being opened and looked up to see the rich man coming toward him. But he was summarily ignored and never helped.

Now the rich man is the one to look up from a place of agony. He sees Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. The contrast is complete. We may imagine that Lazarus is at a heavenly banquet, dining with Abraham—reclining at the table is the picture we get from the description here. And here Lazarus will be for eternity, while the rich man is deprived of all but torment and flame.

There is no way to give you a picture of Hell. It is far worse than any painting or drawing you may have seen.

**Hades, a place of torment.** It is well that we take another lesson from the parable, and that concerning the nature of Hades. Three striking if not terrifying words are used to describe the scene: Agony, Flame and Torment. Hell is not an analogy, not an idea or concept expressed only symbolically without being backed up by reality. Indeed, figurative language is used in describing Hell, (the tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, for example,) but these figures, as one person wrote, “stand for the most terrible reality.” Hell is real and hell is hot.

Jesus taught about Hell. Interestingly, the teachings of Jesus provide our most extensive and almost exclusive source for knowledge about Hell. He spoke emphatically and rather frequently on the subject. Hell or Hades is mentioned 23 times in the New Testament, 16 of those times by Jesus.

Jesus taught us that whoever is angry with his brother and says “You fool,” shall be “guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.” It is better to lose an eye or a hand than for “your whole body to be thrown into Hell.” The tree that does not bear good fruit, as previously noted, is “cut down and thrown into the fire.” And these references to Hell are found solely in the Sermon on the Mount.

### **Rewards on earth vs. Rewards in Heaven.**

After his first appeal to Abraham, the rich man is reminded that he received his reward in the earthly life, Abraham tells him that Lazarus, who suffered in the earthly life is being comforted now. This does not imply that wealth received and enjoyed with proper appreciation and administration on earth closes the door to heaven. Rather, wealth obligates us to use wisely the resources for the Kingdom of God. Hoarding instead of helping is wrong and condemned by the message taught in the parable of the Rich Fool.

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<sup>1</sup> Hades is “Hell.” In Hebrew it is “Sheol,” a place of the dead. In the New Testament the term is used ten times (twice in Luke), and never as an eternal dwelling place for the believer.

Building monuments for ourselves with no concern for the poor is certainly a sin. Yet, for all this, the person who does good with his wealth cannot “buy his way” into heaven. Rich or poor, slave or free, man or woman, each person must for himself make peace with Christ. Only by His blood can our sins be forgiven. Only when one is “in Christ” can he be welcomed into the eternal dwellings with the Father.

### **Remember the Poor.**

Having noted the plan of salvation is entirely apart from works, we can safely observe that this parable is about caring for the poor and not ignoring their plight. In Galatians 2:10 Paul recounts how the apostles in Jerusalem who were ministering to the circumcised, instructed Barnabas and himself to “remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.”



Just as Jesus taught about Hell, He also taught about the poor. Jesus is the speaker in more than half of the 39 New Testament references to the poor. He is a realist when He says, “you will always have the poor with you,” (Matthew 26:11.) But this does not diminish in any way His concern for the poor. Indeed, He came to preach the gospel to the poor, and tells us to be concerned for their needs.

### **No possibility of escaping Hades or receiving aid.**

After Abraham reminds the rich man that he received his reward while on earth, additional truth is revealed about the distance and inaccessibility of one realm from the other. That is to say, the distance between the two destinies of these men is absolute and final.

The rich man wants Abraham to send Lazarus to him to dip his finger in water and cool off this tongue, because of his agony in the flames. But Abraham refuses, noting that travel between the two realms and thus, the possibility of assistance is impossible. There is a “great chasm” fixed between these realms. The idea of it being “fixed” means that the situation will not change. It is permanent.

### **No person going to the living from the dead will be believed.**

The rich man wants to warn his brothers about the dangers of becoming complacent about one’s eternal destiny and falling into the permanency of Hell. As verse 27 recounts:

“And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house — 28 for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’”

But Abraham reminds the rich man that Moses and the Prophets are clear in their warnings—his brothers should listen to them. Verse 29:

“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’”

The rich man is very accustomed to giving orders and responds to Abraham, insisting that an emissary from heaven would indeed be believed.

30 But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’



Of course, Jesus is telling this before the reality of His crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. He is the one who will go from the dead to the five brothers. Naturally, He will not be believed on the basis of a brute-force conversion. Jesus himself said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:44.

It is for this reason that the parable concludes with Abraham telling the rich man:

31 But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

### **In Hell forever**

It is indeed a sobering thought that the rich man is living forever in Hell, his eternal dwelling place, and cannot escape. Nowhere in scripture do we find any evidence of the eternal souls of the dead being able to cross over from one eternal state to another. No amount of prayers for the dead (which are not scriptural) can change one’s eternal state.

### **What is your eternal destiny?**

Are you sure that you will go to heaven when you die? If not, be assured that you can answer the question today. Here is an outline of God’s plan of salvation:

a. All have sinned:

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Isaiah 53:6

All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him.

b. Sin has a penalty: Eternal death and separation from God in Hell.

Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Hebrews 9:27: “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.”

c. Christ paid the penalty:

Romans 5:8-9: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 Peter 3:18: “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”

d. Salvation is not obtainable by works—only through Jesus’ sacrifice:

Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Titus 3:5: “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

e. You must receive Christ’s sacrifice:

John 1:12: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

f. Assurance of salvation and heaven as your eternal home:

1 John 5:13: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

John 5:24: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

**You must profess openly that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord**

a. Romans 10:9-10

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

b. Matthew 10:32-33

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

**Hell was never intended for man**

Matthew 25:41 tells us that Hell was not created for man but for Satan and his demons:

Then He will also say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.”

But we, as a race, chose to join Satan’s rebellion against God when, in the Garden of Eden, we purposefully did the one thing God told us not to do. God could have walked away from us at that moment and left us to suffer eternally with Satan and his horde. However, a rescue plan was in His heart from before the foundation of the world. He would Himself become a man, taking on human flesh, and be made in the likeness of men. As both God and man, Jesus God’s only Son, would live among us, experiencing all the pain, suffering and temptation of this life, yet without sin. He would become the perfect sacrifice for sin. All who accept the sacrifice of Jesus to wash away their sins by His blood shall be saved and free from Hell and death forever.

