

The Lesson of Lazarus

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In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus Christ gave a parable that warned against the self-serving proclivity of human leaders. Also, within this same message was an explanation of what is required to inherit everlasting life. The latter is the primary lesson of this parable.

Before examining what Christ said, it must be emphasized that acquiring money and/or power, of and by itself, is not wrong or sinful (cf. Eccl. 5:19). However, when the pursuit of money and power becomes “an over-riding objective”, the better interests of citizens, that leaders are supposed to be concerned about, become secondary. This principle applies to every type of leadership, including those who claim to represent God.

*Now **the Pharisees, who were lovers of money**, also heard all these things, and they derided him (Christ). ¹⁵And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God (Lk. 16:14-15; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

These religious leaders were more focused on improving their status in the community, and with the Roman authorities, than honestly and effectively serving those who followed them,

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but **he who does the will of***

God abides forever (1Jn. 2:15-17; cf. Mt. 19:17; emphasis added).

With this brief background, the parable of Lazarus can now be examined.

*There was a certain rich man who was **clothed in purple** and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores (Lk. 16:19-21; emphasis added).*

As Christ’s parables emphasized moral and spiritual lessons, consideration should be given to the symbolic language he used. For instance, why mention the color of the rich man’s garment? Is this color associated with a specific class of people?

*Of the blue **and purple** and scarlet thread they made garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron (the High Priest) ... (Ex. 39:1a; cf. Ex. 39:2; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

Is it a coincidence that Christ mentioned the color purple, or was it intended to point to the vocation of this rich man? After all, Christ had just revealed that the Pharisees were “lovers of money” in Luke 16:14. Also, is it coincidental that dogs are pictured licking the beggar’s sores? At this time in history, the term “dog” was sometimes applied to Gentile people who were regarded as “unclean” by the Jewish community. Ironically, these “unclean” were doing more for Lazarus than the rich man who may have been associated with the religious leadership of the day, or somehow profited from it.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried (Lk. 16:22).

As Jesus Christ stated a number of times, the dead await his return; at which time there will be two resurrections that are separated by a one-thousand-year period of time. Therefore, Lazarus being "carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom" needs to be unpacked in order to understand exactly what is being revealed.

No one has ascended to heaven but he (Christ) *who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man* (Jn. 3:13; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Most assuredly, I (Christ) say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him (God the Father) who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment (during the 2nd resurrection), but has passed from (everlasting) death into (everlasting) life.
²⁵***Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live*** (Jn. 5:24-25; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

*Do not marvel at this; for **the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice*** ²⁹***and come forth*** – *those who have done good, to the resurrection of **life** (everlasting; 1st resurrection), and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of **condemnation** (Gr. krisis – **judgment**; during the 2nd resurrection at the end of Christ's millennial rule on earth; cf. Rev. 20:4-15) (Jn. 5:28-29; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

This truth, about everyone remaining dead until Christ's return, is not limited to the writings of the New Testament. It was well known by God's servants throughout the Old Testament period.

*For the living know that they will die; but **the dead know nothing**.. (Eccl. 9:5a; emphasis added).*

*.... for **there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going** (Eccl. 9:10b).*

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down in silence (Ps. 115:17; emphasis added).

So contrary to popular belief, Lazarus did not "consciously" ascend to heaven. Instead, the spirit that God gave to him returned to God and will remain "in storage", figuratively speaking, until Christ's return.

And the spirit will return to God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7b; emphasis added).

*Then they (Moses and Aaron) fell on their faces, and said, "O God, **the God of the spirits of all flesh**, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"* (Nu. 16:22; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

*Let the Lord, **the God of the spirits of all flesh**, set a man over the congregation* (Nu. 27:16; emphasis added).

Going back to Luke 16:22, God's loyal angels are pictured as agents involved with the transfer of Lazarus's spirit back to God the Father who granted it. This should not be a surprise because these angels are messengers sent by God to serve of those who will be in the first resurrection,

*Are they (God's loyal angels) **not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for** (serve) **those who will inherit salvation?*** (Heb. 1:14; cf. Gen. 28:12).

So these angels placed Lazarus's "spirit" alongside those who will be in the first resurrection, including Abraham. Hence, "the spirit of Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom."

At the time of Christ's return, Lazarus's "spirit" will be transformed through the process of a resurrection, and he will not resemble the person he was previously.

But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"³⁶Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.³⁷And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain – perhaps wheat or some other grain.³⁸But God gives it a body as he pleases, and to each seed its own body (1Cor, 15:35-38).

So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.⁴³It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.⁴⁴It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.. (1Cor. 15:42-44a).

And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (Christ) (1Cor. 15:49; Ed. note in parenthesis).

*If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service **I will wait, till my change comes.**¹⁵You (Christ) shall call, and I (Job) will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands (Job 14:14-15; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

So the spirit of Lazarus will remain "temporarily" dead until Christ's return. We know this because Lazarus is pictured with Abraham, who is referred to as God's friend (cf. Jas. 2:23) and God does not regard Abraham as permanently dead (cf. Mk. 12:26-27). Instead, God's views his

faithful servants as being in a state of sleep, or suspended animation.

*.....he (Christ) said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."¹²Then his disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well."¹³However, **Jesus spoke of his death**, but they thought that he was speaking about taking rest in sleep.¹⁴**Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead"**(Jn. 11:11b-14; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

Going back to the parable in Luke 16.

*And being in torments in **hades** (coming out of **the grave** at the 2nd resurrection), he (the rich man) *lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom* (Lk. 16:23; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

So the rich man will be resurrected at the end of Christ's millennial rule on earth, which is the second resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6). This will consist of everyone who refused to obey God's word during their previous life. They will be grieved, like the rich man, because they will now experience a time of judgment that will not be pleasant. This is explained using figurative language as follows.

*And I (Christ) say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.¹²But the (potential) sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. **There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Mt. 8:11-12; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

During this period of judgment everyone who was not in the "better resurrection" (cf. Heb. 11:35b; 1st resurrection), will have an opportunity to repent of the sins they committed

during their previous life. We know this because Almighty God is merciful and always willing to forgive those who genuinely repent.

*The Lord (Almighty) is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us (you), **not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance** (2Pet. 3:9; Ac. 2:38; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

*For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but **He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled** (cast out forever) **from Him** (2Sam. 14:14; Ed. note in parenthesis).*

*"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. ¹⁹**If you are willing and obedient...** (Isa. 1:18-19a; emphasis added).*

The shed blood of Jesus Christ is "the means" through which sinners can be forgiven and restored in their relationship with Almighty God. But, they still have to willingly repent before that can occur (cf. Ac. 2:38). This includes Satan and the fallen angels because they are also children of God the Father, and He gave them "a spirit" that allows them to continue living, even though they are in rebellion against Him right now.

*For they are **spirits of demons**, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14; emphasis added).*

In contrast to the demons, who will also be part of the 2nd resurrection, the spirit of each person in the 1st resurrection is described in terms that

describe a reformed individual. This reformation occurred under the guidance and direction of their delegated teacher and leader, Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 23:8-10). Therefore, "the spirit" of these individuals is pictured as being "perfect".

*To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God, the Judge of all, to **the spirits of just men made perfect** (Heb. 12:23; emphasis added).*

Going back to Christ's parable, the rich man is pictured as being alive again, but this is in the 2nd resurrection which is a period of judgment. The figurative language in the following segment illustrates how uncomfortable this will be.

Then he (the rich man) 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.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' (Lk. 16:24-26; Ed. notes in parenthesis).

Christ is pointing out that the rich man cannot have direct access to those who have already inherited everlasting life in God's kingdom. The apostle Paul knew this truth as the following scripture confirms.

*Now this I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; nor does corruption inherit incorruption** (1Cor. 15:30; emphasis added).*

Therefore, the rich man can receive instruction and correction from those who are already in

God's kingdom, but he cannot have direct contact with them because he is still composed of flesh and blood. If the rich man acknowledges his sins and willingly repents, he will be forgiven and allowed to fully participate in God's kingdom.

The rich man's following request indicates he is not aware that everyone's past life is over, including the lives of his five brothers. In reality, this man is being dealt with on an individual basis, as everyone else will be during the time of the second resurrection (cf. Rom. 14:11).

Then he (the rich man) said, 'I beg you therefore father (Abraham), that you would send him (Lazarus) to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment (judgment).'²⁹Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them' (Lk. 16:27-29; Ed. notes in parentheses).

The last verses in this parable confirm that part of the rich man's rehabilitation during the second resurrection will include understanding that God's instructions in righteous behavior were available all the time, as detailed in the writings of Moses and the prophets, but he obviously ignored these during his previous life. Therefore, the rich man did not believe that his behavior was contrary to God's word, which meant that he continued in a state of sin until the day of his death.

And he (the rich man) said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead (acknowledgment that Lazarus was now resurrected), they will repent.'³¹But he (Abraham) said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead' (Lk. 16:30-31; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Certainly, most of the Jewish religious leaders of Christ's day did not repent of their evil deeds even after Christ's resurrection from the dead; so Abraham's statement was completely correct. And this same principle continues to this day. In other words anyone, who believes they can ignore God's word as recorded in the writings of Moses and God's prophets, will find themselves in the 2nd resurrection where they will have a final opportunity to make the connection that willing obedience to God's word is a prerequisite to inheriting everlasting life. After this truth is understood, everyone during the second resurrection will be "tested" to see whether they will choose to obey God's word willingly or not, and their everlasting life will depend on what decisions they make (Dt. 30:19-20). Sadly, this truth is not understood by mainstream Christianity today (cf. Mt. 7:21-23; 13:40-43). Hopefully, this lesson of Lazarus will help clarify the importance of seeking to obey every word of God while there is still time to do so (Mt. 4:4).

So the real "methane threat from dung" is the consequence associated with the persistent emittance of our sinful actions upon this world.

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