

This Changes Everything!

One of the most thought provoking passages in Luke's gospel is known as the parable of 'The Rich Man and Lazarus' (Luke 16:19-31). The story is given in the context of a series of encounters that Jesus has with the Pharisees, Jewish leaders who are generally described as self-centered and self-promoting (Mt. 23; Luke 15; 16). The story, as told by Jesus, centers around two men, the first being identified only as 'a rich man.' This wealthy man lavished himself with gifts of expensive clothes and fine delicacies for his table. His life was filled with sumptuous, feasting and merrymaking. One thing that this rich man would not do is give any of his abundance to help the other man who we meet in the story whom we learn is named Lazarus and identified as a 'poor man.'

It seems that Lazarus was unable to care for himself, so he was laid at the gate of the rich man. His body was covered with sores and he desired to be fed with even the scraps that fell from the rich man's table, but sadly, the rich man had no time for Lazarus or his troubles. As the story unfolds both men die. At his death Lazarus, the poor man, is carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham which speaks of a place of happiness and blessing. In contrast to this, the rich man is buried and ends up in, 'Hades,' identified as the place of 'torment.' To our surprise, the rich man is able to see and converse with Abraham. He can even see Lazarus relaxing in comfort at Abraham's side. The rich man cries out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Would you send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham replies, 'Now remember, in your lifetime, you received the good things that you wanted for yourself by the choices you made.'

Let me pause at this point for a couple of summary statements. The contrast between these two men is immediately apparent. The rich man represents all those who live for themselves with no real thought for God or others. This is inclusive of investing primarily in their own personal desires with their material wealth, their time, their talents and opportunities. Lazarus, on the other hand, represents all those who are committed to God, seeking, by grace, to live their lives as He has commanded in His word (this is implied by the fact that Lazarus ends up in the place of heavenly bliss).

The last part of this parable is both shocking and sobering. The rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house to warn his five brothers lest they, too, end up in this place of torment. This is the first time in the story that he thinks of anyone but himself. But Abraham replies, 'They have Moses and the prophets (the scriptures); let them hear them.' Imagine if it were possible for someone that you know, to return from the dead—or in this case—return from Hell. And then suppose they were able to tell you to, 'Get right with God. Give your life to Jesus Christ. Hell is a real and awful place!' This seems convincing, right? But Jesus says that, no matter what we might think, it would not persuade us. Listen to these sobering words:

'If they don't hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.' The scriptures are clear. For those who live their lives with no thoughts of God and primarily focused on their own selfish desires, even though some may receive many things in this life they will experience much futility now and a tragic eternity after death. In contrast to this, for those who by grace, trust in Jesus Christ, everything changes. Not only is our future secure, we receive many blessings now. Even in times of difficulty, God is always with us and all things are working for our good and His glory. In summary, Jesus must be Lord of all or he is not Lord at all.

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