

The Rich Man and Lazarus

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[Luke 16: 19-31] "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 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. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "Then 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.' 25 But 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. 26 And 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.' 27 "Then he said, 'I beg you, therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

Lord Jesus told this story of the rich man and Lazarus to the general public, which included His disciples and the Pharisees, and perhaps some rich people as well. This story illustrates hell and paradise, which are the two destinations of all people after death. It is unique in that it was told by the Son of God and that it describes the two post-death destinations of human souls in great detail. We may ponder over the following lessons from this story for our benefit.

1. Hell and paradise are the only two destinations of all souls after death and the souls' positions cannot be altered once they get to either location. Abraham, in this story, tells the rich man in hell that there is a great gulf 'fixed' between the two locations so that no one may pass from one place to the other. In other words, the lot of a person in hell cannot be improved to merit advancement to paradise no matter what you attempt to do after death. This is contrary to the Catholic doctrine of praying and making contributions on behalf of deceased relatives or friends for their transfer to paradise.
2. The remorse and frustration of the souls in hell cannot be relieved when they realize that their blood lineage as Jews, or as so-called Christians because what they call themselves while they are living on earth will not determine where they end up after death nor will it bring any mercy or relief from the paradise side to the suffering lot they are in hell.
3. The rich man who ended up in hell is not there just because he had wealth but because he was poor toward God although he was rich in material wealth, as Lord Jesus had already described his character in the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21. We read of numerous rich people who were wise and favored by God in the Scripture. However, we also read of rich people who are only rich materially but out of God's favor because they forget who has blessed them.
4. The belated remorse and wisdom of the rich man in hell cannot be delivered to the living relatives because God has set the time limit of human learning and the window of opportunity for choosing our eternal destiny wisely. Therefore, we should fear God and choose wisely while time and opportunity are available to us.
5. Jesus named the beggar in this story 'Lazarus' because He would make alive the Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Martha and Mary, from death to life as this rich man requested [John 11]. It is God's mercy that Lord Jesus performed several miracles of raising dead persons to life to help people believe. Moreover, we have definite proof that Lord Jesus rose from death on the third day and showed Himself to hundreds of His disciples before being raised to heaven to be with His Father.

After He died on the cross, Lord Jesus went down to paradise as He promised to the repenting thief who was also crucified on His side.

[Luke 23: 42-43] Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

When He rose from death, however, He took with Him all souls in paradise to be with Him and the Father in heaven. When true Christians die in Him in the New Testament age, their souls go directly to heaven where God the Father and Son of God are in His glory.

[Ephesians 4:7-9] But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." 9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions)

Thus, the gulf between hell and heaven is now much greater than what was in this story. However, those suffering in hell are still able to see the chosen souls enjoying their presence in honor and glory of heaven although they are separated by a great distance. The suffering souls in hell still feel acutely remorse and pain of lost opportunities with no hope of relief in sight.

Lord Jesus told this story of the rich man and the beggar to help people understand what is waiting for all human souls after death so that they might be prompted to choose wisely while there is still opportunity. That is why the lost opportunities and the remorse of the rich man are emphatically illustrated in this story. Let us choose wisely and choose to be with Christ and God in heaven after we die by repenting and coming to Jesus today.

"Almighty God our Father! We are eternally thankful that You have prepared the avenue of salvation for souls who fear You to come to heaven where You reside. Your Lamb, Jesus Christ, came to this world to become that way of salvation for us. However, we are also awed that You have prepared hell for those who do not believe and have no fear of Your majesty. We pray that the living souls come to see the seriousness of their choices during their life so that they choose wisely and be on Your side instead of the enemy who is interested only in taking their souls to sin, death, and damnation. May all honor and glory be with You, Almighty Father! Amen."

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