

How Do We Understand the Rich Man and Lazarus? (Hellfire Series Part III)

Luke 16:24: (KJV) *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.*



The teaching of a burning hell as the end result for those who reject Jesus is widely accepted in many Christian circles. Our emphatic belief is that this teaching is not based on the Bible, but rather on traditions that have misinterpreted what the Bible teaches. In the first two parts of our series, we addressed what “unquenchable fire” in Scripture does and does not mean as well as how to understand the true meaning of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Here in Part III, we examine what Jesus meant in his teaching about the Rich Man and Lazarus. Of all the verses in the Bible, some of the descriptions in this teaching can most easily be accepted as supporting being consciously tortured in flames. So, what’s the answer? Can being “tormented in this flame” be clearly and biblically explained?

The parable is found in **Luke 16:19-31**. It is about an unnamed rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. They both die and find themselves in different positions than when they were living. Lazarus is at Father Abraham’s side, far away from the rich man who is in “torments,” begging to be comforted but no comfort is given.

This account is often cited as proof of eternal torment, applying the descriptions in a literal way as a warning about the afterlife. Right up front, what is our understanding of these scriptures?

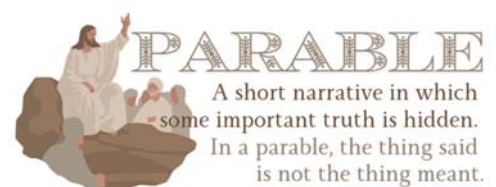


We believe Jesus’ teaching about the Rich Man and Lazarus should be clearly understood to be a parable. The rich man represented Israel and their ruling class, who proved unfaithful to their privilege of being God’s chosen people. They were cast aside. The beggar, Lazarus, represented Gentiles with good hearts, being offered their position of favor as heirs of Abraham and disciples of Jesus.

So, Jesus was really giving a prophecy about the role reversal that would happen between the nation of Israel at that time and the call of the gospel message to the Gentiles. How do we know?

The context establishes this as the last of a series of parables Jesus taught to a mixed audience:

Luke 15:1-3: (KJV) *1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. 3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying...*



Jesus then speaks four parables in succession:

1. **Luke 15:3-7: The Parable of the Lost Sheep** shows the recovery of mankind as “lost sheep” from their lost state of sin. The main lesson is, humanity was lost and Jesus came to recover them. He came to “find” the lost sheep, to buy them back by paying the ransom.
2. **Luke 15:8-10: The Parable of the Lost Coin** illustrates the value of the redeemed race of man. The lost coin symbolizes the race of man. The woman who finds this coin and puts it back where it belongs symbolizes the work of reconciliation.
3. **Luke 15:11-32: The Parable of the Prodigal Son** shows the two classes of Israel: the Pharisees were represented as the older, resentful brother. The sinners and publicans were represented by the younger brother who strayed, but then repented, gratefully returned home and was forgiven by his father. The older brother grumbled about his brother’s return to favor. This showed the discrepancy within Israel.
4. **Luke 16:1-13: The Parable of the Unjust Steward** and its explanation directly attacked the selfish and compromising spirit that the Pharisees displayed and showed their hypocrisy and godlessness.

We see the big picture of ransom and restoration. We see there were problems within the ruling class of Israel and their stewardship of God’s blessings and favor, which was coming to an end. That favor would be passed on to the Gentiles. There is a progression in these parables.

After that fourth parable, the Pharisees are up in arms because they likely knew Jesus was speaking about them:

Luke 16:14: (J.B. Phillips) *Now the Pharisees, who were very fond of money, heard all of this with a sneer. But he (Jesus) said to them, You are the people who advertise your goodness before men, but God knows your hearts.*

Jesus responds to their complaint by calling them out in the next few verses as self-justifying, egotistical lovers of the esteem of men. He then speaks the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

**Lost Sheep
Lost Coin
Prodigal Son**

The first three parables are addressed to the scribes and Pharisees for criticizing Jesus, who taught that the conversion of one deemed “lost” is an occasion for rejoicing in heaven.

Unjust Steward



Then Jesus turns to his disciples with the next parable, showing that the current stewards, the Pharisees, were about to be displaced. They picked up on this and derided him.

Finally, Jesus predicted the transition of favor from the Jews to the Gentiles.



Rich Man and Lazarus



Mark 12:12 tells us they sought to lay hold on him because he spoke a parable against them. A parable! They knew these parables were against them, and they didn't like it.

Luke 16:19: (KJV) *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.*

The rich man: Pictured the Pharisees and ruling class as representatives of all Israel. While the religious rulers loved money, in the bigger picture, they were definitely “rich” in the promises of God. **Amos 3:2:** *You only have I known of all the families of the earth.*

Romans 3:1,2: *Then what advantage has the Jew?... 2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

The rich man is wearing some interesting clothes. What do they tell us?

Clothed in purple: Purple symbolically indicates royalty. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth.* Israel was set above and apart from the rest. They were God's chosen seed of Abraham who would bless all of humanity.

Clothed in fine linen: Fine linen symbolized the righteousness (**Revelation 19:8**) Israel received from the provisions of sacrifice under the Law. God saw all those who didn't have the Law as unrighteous, but Israel was justified—had a relationship with God— under the Law Covenant.

The rich man's clothing perfectly reflects his being the royal nation under Jewish Law.

Fared sumptuously every day: (J.B. Phillips Translation: *led a life of daily luxury.*) The Pharisees and ruling class reaped the benefits of their positions. Israel reaped the benefits of being God's chosen people.

So, this “rich man” (Israel) had God's favor, even while under Roman rule. They were “royalty” and blessed because they alone had a relationship with God under the Law Covenant.

Who else is in this story?

Luke 16:20-21: (KJV) *20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.*

Lazarus: Represented the Gentile nations, the “everybody else” outside of God's favored people.

The name means “whom God helps” or “God as my help.” The name Lazarus is appropriate because the Gentiles would not have been included in the promised seed of Abraham without God's help.

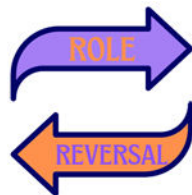
Laid at his gate and full of sores: Lazarus is pictured in this wretched, unfavorable position, literally locked out of the gate. He was sin-sick and not able to share in Israel's atonement sacrifices and favor. The truth-hungry Gentiles are referred to in **Ephesians 2:12**: *Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Desired crumbs: Hungry for a relationship with God because up until this time the promises of God primarily belonged to Israel.

Company with the dogs: Jews, especially the ruling class, considered Gentiles as fit associates of dogs.

In **Matthew 15:21-28** and **Mark 7:24-30**, we learn of the Syrophenician woman, a Canaanite, challenging Jesus to heal her daughter. Through the metaphors of "crumbs" and "dogs," Jesus taught her that the Jewish nation must be "fed" first and she and her daughter (the Gentiles) would be "fed" later.

The term "dog" was widely used by Jews to refer to Gentiles. (**Matthew 7:6, Philippians 3:2, 2 Peter 2:22, Revelation 22:15**) To call someone a "dog" meant to give them a very pointed and harsh label. In the ancient Jewish culture, dogs were unclean animals. They roamed wild on the streets. They were undesirable scavengers, considered dangerous and often carried diseases. Calling someone a dog in the New Testament was meant to warn of and acknowledge the brazen, unclean and dangerous characteristics of a wild dog.



Now for the surprise. The roles of favor are about to reverse:
Luke 16:22: (KJV) *And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom...*



Why is Abraham introduced into the parable? We know the Pharisees greatly respected their ancestor, Abraham.



The whole point of this story is to show the privilege of being a "son" of Abraham and the devastation of potentially losing that privilege. As we go through this parable, notice the rich man being a "son" of Abraham and how Abraham is spoken of as Israel's "father."

This promise was repeated to Abraham several times, as well as to his descendants:
Genesis 22:17-18: *17 Indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore... 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.*

Israel was promised to be a blessing nation in God's future kingdom. This promise is worded to Abraham's seed, to his children. We need to understand the father/son relationship as described in the promise.

At this point in the parable, we know the beggar was poor and desired mere crumbs from the favored one's table. But he was outside the favor. He was not one of those "sons."

Abraham's bosom: (Other translations say *Abraham's side* or *Abraham's arms*.)

The Gentile Christians are brought to a position of favor with God because they are now recognized as being in the position of the "children," the seed of Abraham.

We are told this in the book of Galatians, written to Gentile Christians:

Galatians 3:29: *And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*

If this is about role reversal, it makes sense that Abraham's bosom means INTO Abraham—into the condition of being a part of Abraham's promised seed that would eventually bless all the families of the earth. If one is by Abraham's side, it's a place of great favor.

How do we know this doesn't mean heaven? Abraham was considered a friend of God. He was good. He was righteous.

Some who think this means heaven will quote:

Matthew 22:31-32: (ESV) *And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.*

And Lazarus was *carried by the angels*.



Isn't this all a reference for going to heaven?



No. All "angels" aren't in heaven. Angel means "messenger." Angels don't have to be spirit beings. Even humans can be "angels," messengers. The Apostle Paul was a messenger (angel) of the word of God in **Galatians 3:29** to show the Gentiles they were in the same position of favor.

Carried by the angels: The angels were the apostles and ministers of the gospel, especially the Apostles Peter and Paul, declaring to the Gentiles that, whereas once they were separated from Christ, **Ephesians 2:13:** *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Being *the God of the living* refers to the future resurrection in God's kingdom. All those who ever died will be made alive again in the kingdom. From God's standpoint, they only sleep but are not blotted out forever. They will be raised because God is a God of the living.

If this was NOT a parable, where would Abraham's bosom be? NOT in heaven!

Why?

John 3:13: *No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.*

Jesus himself made that perfectly clear.

Hebrews 11 describes those faithful ones in the Old Testament. Here is the end result:

Hebrews 11:39: *And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised.*

If you lived and died before Jesus' sacrifice, heaven was not available to you. Abraham will be resurrected on earth because he died before Jesus opened the way to be of his "bride."

Remember what Jesus said about John the Baptist in **Matthew 11:11:** *Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Heavenly resurrection of Christians is greater than earthly resurrected prophets. Remember, God's kingdom is both on earth and in heaven.*

Up until this time, Lazarus (the Gentiles) had survived outside of God's favor. Now he (they) would have the opportunity to live in God's favor and be counted as part of the seed of Abraham and a disciple of Christ. This was previously impossible! That is what Jesus was foretelling with this parable.

Luke 16:22-23: (KJV) *22 ...the rich man also died, and was buried; 23 And in hell (Hades) he lift up his eyes, being in torments <931>, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

The word hell in both the Old and New Testaments means the grave. It is Adam's death sentence:

Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death (not eternal torture), but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*



How do we bridge the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament? How do we know the words mean the same thing?

Old Testament Hebrew: *Sheol*
(translated as hell/grave/pit)

New Testament Greek: *Hades*
(translated as hell)

Psalms 16:10: (NIV) *Because you will not abandon me to the grave (Sheol), nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*

Psalms 16:10 is quoted in the New Testament:

Acts 2:27: (NIV) *Because you will not abandon me to the grave (Hades), nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*

Hell is the grave, the state of being dead.

And (being) in hell: Figurative language meaning being dead to his previous favor.

Just as the beggar “died” to his old life of disfavor, so the rich man “died” to his old life of favor. It is the same kind of picture language. The rich man (Israel) would now be subjected to surviving outside of God’s protection. He had never been in such a state before.

To clarify: The parable describes the rich man as being dead and in the grave. We know from other scriptures that “dead” means dead. For example, **Ecclesiastes 9:10** says, *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.*

How is this rich man *in torments* able to see Abraham? Remember this is a parable—the thing said is not the thing meant.

Being in torments: Being revealed for the indifference with which he had handled his great favor.

Torments: Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon #931 *basanos* (primary use) a touchstone, which is a black siliceous (containing silica) stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with either metal

This method is still used by jewelers today and can be used on coins.



(Source: Wikipedia, “Metallurgical assay”) The age-old touchstone method is particularly suited to the testing of very valuable pieces, for which sampling by destructive means, such as scraping, cutting or drilling is unacceptable. A rubbing of the item is made on a special stone, treated with acids and the resulting color compared to references. Red radiolarian chert or black siliceous slate were used to view the resultant treated streak of the sample. Differences in precious metal content as small as 10 to 20 parts per thousand can often be established with confidence by the test. It is not indicated for use with white gold, for example, since the color variation among white gold alloys is almost imperceptible.

Rather than being tortured, we suggest that this rich man had been tested for purity as a son of Abraham and obviously was revealed as failing.

The rich man was revealed as not being genuine to the promises he (Israel) was given. He has been revealed as a fraud, a false son, not living up to his responsibilities and privileges.

Luke 16:24: (KJV) *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** <3600> in this **flame** <5395>.*

We will come back to the drop of water shortly, but this certainly sounds like the traditional notion of hellfire! What does it mean?

Tormented in this flame: In other words, *I am deeply grieved as the true nature of my actions have been revealed.*

This might sound like a stretch of interpretation until we realize this is a different Greek word than the previous *torment*, meaning “a test of purity.” This one means “to grieve.” There is nothing about physical pain and torture.

Tormented: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #3600 *odunao*; to grieve

The only two other uses of *odunao* express GREAT sorrow. Here is one of those uses:

Luke 2:48: (KJV) *And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee **sorrowing** <3600>.*

Jesus was lost at 12 years old, and his parents were heartbroken, grieving in this situation.

In this flame: Interestingly, the word *flame* does not describe destructive fire; it describes the brightness associated with fire.

Flame: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5395 *phlox*; from a primary *phlego* (to “flash” or “flame”); a blaze

In all cases except for this parable, this word is used with the additional words of *fire*, as in *flame of fire*. (See **Acts 7:30** for a literal example and **Hebrews 1:7** as a symbolic example.) This parable takes the “fire” out and leaves the “flame” in.

Jesus’ lesson here is not one of torture, but one of grieving and revealing of great misuses of God’s favor. The “flame” is not destructive; it is revealing in the way a light is revealing.

Here in **Luke 16:24**, *tormented in this flame* describes the brightness of a fire without the actual fire. In other words, *You’ve been tested and come up short, and it’s obvious to all.*

Luke 16:25: (KJV) *But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art **tormented** <3600>.*

Tormented here is the Greek word for grieving. In other words, *You, rich man, (the nation of Israel) you had favor but didn’t do what you should have done with it, so now Lazarus has what you have.*

Step outside the parable for a moment and see that Jesus is having “Abraham” do the preaching. In a sense, he will put his own words into the mouth of Abraham. This was a clever teaching technique because of the status Abraham had in the minds of his audience, the scribes and the Pharisees. They would definitely be paying attention!

Lazarus is comforted and the rich man is grieving. These are opposite emotions. We see the brilliance of how Jesus is unfolding this story.

With this understanding of torment being anguish, and flame being a revealing light, let's suggest a paraphrase: *Father have mercy on me. Send Lazarus, who represents the Gentiles, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water (which represents truth), and give me just a drop of it because I am in deep anguish of heart in this light that has revealed my irresponsibility, my pride and now my fall.*



Let's circle back to the drop of "water" in **Luke 16:24** and then put together what we have so far. We see the absurdity of the situation when the rich man decides to make his one request. What does he ask for? The touch of a wet finger on his tongue. If we were in that situation, we would ask for a whole glass of water, or a gallon or two. Or, if we had only one request, it might be, *Get me out of here!*

Notice the contrast. Remember how we started out, where all Lazarus wanted was a few crumbs. He didn't want a loaf of bread. He didn't want ten percent of the rich man's money. He wanted just a few crumbs. He got nothing. Here the rich man is asking for just the touch of a wet finger on his tongue, and he gets nothing. More on the water in a moment.

To sum up, this is about lost opportunity—but not about forever. Suddenly, we are not seeing hellfire and torment; rather, we see the anguish of heart resulting from a new awareness of past sinful behavior as revealed from the light of truth. This agony is not caused by physical pain, but by the realization that there is no place to hide from the sins brought to light by this flame. Rather than destructive, the flame is revealing and bright. It's a light that uncovers all things.

Jesus was forcefully teaching that the ruling class representing all of Israel was about to lose favor with God (favor being represented by being close to Abraham). The Gentiles (represented by Lazarus the beggar) were about to gain that favor.

Here is Jesus' beginning of the fulfillment of what this parable is teaching:

Matthew 23:37-39: *37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!*

We know this pronouncement sadly came to pass with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The Jewish nation literally ceased to exist until 1948. In this way, the "rich man" died and was buried—nationally, Israel went into oblivion.

This is a parable about the nation of Israel going away! They were not around anymore; all of their favor was gone. However, Jesus said, *For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!*

This shows Israel will not be cast off forever! Israel did not exist as a nation from 70 AD until 1948. They were dead to their previous favor, but we are assured they still have an important role to play in the future as promised to Father Abraham.

Let's continue with the parable:

Luke 16:26: (NIV) *And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.*

The chasm fixed between the two: A chasm (or *gulf* in some translations) is a giant pit or hole. There is a prophetic facet of this chasm. Jesus declared the beginning of their desolation to occur in 70 AD as we just read in **Matthew 23:38**. Here in **Luke 16:26**, Jesus refers back to a prophecy in **Zechariah 9** to make his point.

This refers to the end of Israel's period of disfavor—the disfavor the Pharisees were about to enter:

Zechariah 9:11-12: *11 As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with you (the New Covenant), I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. 12 Return to the stronghold, O prisoners who have... hope...*



You have been set free *from the waterless pit*. Asking for a drop of water pictured how Israel was without the favor of God's truth. This was a national warning of what was going to happen to Israel for generations and generations. They "died" to their favor.

This great chasm is the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. It was the gulf between the Jewish nation remaining under the Law and Christianity moving forward under the liberty of Christ. This gulf could not be crossed.

The rich man responds to Abraham:

Luke 16:27-28: (NIV) *27 He answered, Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of *torment* <931>.*

Begging for mercy for his five brothers: In other words, *Warn my brothers! Save them from this humiliation of revealing and anguish of heart. I am sure that if one risen to such favor from such humiliation as Lazarus were to go to them, they would believe and avoid this suffering.*

Who were the five brothers? Ever since Solomon, Israel was divided into two tribes (the tribes of Benjamin and Judah) called "Judah" and ten tribes called "Israel." The Jews in Israel in Jesus' day were primarily from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, while the majority of the other ten tribes were scattered.

Two tribes were represented in the one rich man, the other ten tribes were represented by the five brothers. Mathematically it fits. Jesus is making a big point here: the rich man is begging for ALL of Israel to have an opportunity.



Father Abraham replies:

Luke 16:29: (NIV) *Abraham replied, They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.*

The rich man and his brothers are indicted by their past. Imagine the deep-seated regret you feel as you hear these words: *You have Moses and the prophets, and their message has always been clear! Let your brothers hear them! They have all they need!*

The religious leadership—the scribes, the Pharisees, Sadducees and lawyers had Moses and the prophets. These are the same people who wouldn't believe Jesus was the Messiah when he was standing right in front of them, performing all kinds of miracles.

Luke 16:30: (NIV) *No, father Abraham, he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.*

Surely if someone were to rise from the dead they would believe, right? Wrong!

He is begging Father Abraham. That father/son relationship is at stake. The rich man is still pressing and hoping against hope. *The drama of one going to them from the dead would surely wake them to hear the message! Just give them a chance!*

Luke 16:31: (NIV) *He said to him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*

Remember, Jesus is putting these words in “Abraham’s” mouth. This is foreshadowing! This verse predicts the outcome. If the Jews can't believe the Scriptures, even raising someone from the dead won't persuade them. Recovery is not possible, for their hearts are too hard!

The parable ends with a clear lesson: The ruling class as representatives of the Jewish nation had sealed Israel's fate by a continual rejection of the teachings and miracles of their Messiah.

This lesson would be accentuated by one more DRAMATIC fact. Jesus used the proper name “Lazarus” in this parable. Why? Approximately two weeks after speaking it, Jesus actually raised a man named Lazarus from the dead!

Lazarus had been dead for so long that his body was already decomposing. There was no doubt this was a miracle! This parable about Lazarus' role reversal is in the book of Luke. The raising of the real Lazarus from the dead is in **John 11:43-46**. Putting the two together reveals this unexpected twist.



 Lazarus, come forth!
 John 11:43-44

How did the ruling class react to this most dramatic of all of Jesus' miracles?

John 11:46-48,51-53: (after raising Lazarus from the dead) *46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. 47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 ...and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. 51 (Caiaphas, the high priest) ...prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that he might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad (as represented by the other five brothers). 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill him.*

Not only did they not believe in Jesus as the Messiah—now they wanted to kill him!

Within this grouping of five parables in Luke, Jesus showed the Pharisees their gross errors and the consequences that were about to take place.

He not only predicted the raising of someone from the dead and who it would be by name, but also that they wouldn't believe even with such a dramatic display!



This is the only parable in which Jesus uses a proper name, and it's not by some random chance that he used the name Lazarus.

The purpose of this story was to illustrate the imminent withdrawal of God's favor from Israel as a result of them squandering their opportunities, and the subsequent transfer of God's favor to the Gentiles. Jesus knew the blessings would go to the Gentiles and the Jews would be out of favor because they were not obeying God.



The practical lesson for us:

Hold onto the favor and blessing we are given.
Never take them for granted.

With the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus brilliantly completed his teaching of those five parables. This final lesson was sobering and blunt as it described how Abraham's descendants had lost their compassion, ignored their righteous responsibilities and had become egotistical and indifferent.

As a result, they would lose their favored status. The privilege of becoming followers of Jesus would be offered to those they considered outsiders, the Gentiles. Their decision to kill Jesus after the raising of the real Lazarus was living proof of their hard hearts!

This is a story that tells us about a major prophetic event we have already seen happen. It is a story, in Jesus' own words, that shows Israel's rejection and loss of favor and the beautiful opportunity we, as Gentiles, are privileged to receive as a result. Take the story to heart!

**So, how do we understand the Rich Man and Lazarus?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



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Why did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?

<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/jesus-raises-lazarus-from-the-dead/>

Why did Jesus speak in parables?

<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/speak-parables/>

Why didn't some people like Jesus?

<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/why-didnt-some-people-like-jesus/>

Who were the scribes and Pharisees?

<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/who-were-the-scribes-pharisees/>

Luke 16:19-31: (J.B. Phillips) *There was once a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and lead a life of daily luxury. And there was a poor man called Lazarus who was put down at his gate. He was covered with sores. He used to long to be fed with the scraps from the rich man's table. Yes, and the dogs used to come and lick his sores. Well, it happened that the poor man died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And from among the dead he looked up and saw Abraham a long way away, and Lazarus in his arms. Father Abraham! he cried out, please pity me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames. But Abraham replied, Remember, my son, that you used to have the good things in your lifetime, while Lazarus suffered the bad. Now he is being comforted here, while you are in agony. And besides this, a great chasm has been set between you and us, so that those who want to go to you from this side cannot do so, and people cannot come to us from your side. At this he said, Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers. He could warn them about all this and prevent their coming to this place of torture. But Abraham said, They have Moses and the Prophets: they can listen to them. Ah no, father Abraham, he said, if only someone were to go to them from the dead, they would change completely. But Abraham told him, If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they would not be convinced even if somebody were to rise from the dead.*

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1346: How Do We Understand the Rich Man and Lazarus?

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/rich-man-and-lazarus/>

See:



1. What is a parable? How do we know parables should not be interpreted literally?
2. Give a brief overview of the four parables in Luke that precede the Rich Man and Lazarus. To which groups in Jewish society was Jesus aiming these parables? How were the parables related to each other? (See Luke 15:3-7,8-10,11-32, Luke 16:1-13)
3. What was the reaction of the scribes and Pharisees upon hearing these parables? (See Mark 12:12)
4. Describe the symbols used in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and what they represent. Explain the connection between Genesis 22:17-18 and Galatians 3:29.
5. Why did Jesus introduce Abraham into this parable? How do we know "Abraham's bosom" does not refer to heaven? (See Luke 16:19-31, John 3:13, Hebrews 11:39, Matthew 11:11)
6. What is the proper translation of the word "hell" in Luke 16:22-23? What scriptures corroborate "grave" as the correct translation of "hell?" (See Romans 6:23, Psalm 16:10, Acts 2:27, Ecclesiastes 9:10)
7. What are the correct meanings for the words "torments" and "tormented" (or "agony") as used in Luke 16:23-24? What other scriptures use these words and how are they translated in those scriptures? What is the true thought in the word "flame" in Luke 16:24? (See Luke 2:48)
8. Paraphrase the meaning of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. What was Jesus' message here to the ruling class of Israel? (See Matthew 23:37-39)
9. How do we know the period of Israel's disfavor will end? Until that time, to what does the "gulf" or "chasm" refer in Luke 16:26? Why can't it be crossed? (See Zechariah 9:11-12)
10. Who do the five brothers represent in Luke 16:28? What was Abraham's response to the rich man begging for mercy for his brothers? Why did Abraham respond the way he did? How did the scribes and Pharisees react when Jesus actually raised Lazarus? (See Luke 16:27-31, John 11:46-48, 51-53)
11. What are the lessons in this parable for us as Christians?