

-Save This Page as a PDF-

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16: 19-31

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus DIG: How do the lives of the rich man and Lazarus compare on earth in verses 19-21? After death in verses 22-24? From verses 30-31, what is the determining factor for entry into heaven? Why do you think Jesus used a beggar to illustrate this and a rich man to represent those qualities that prevent one from entering heaven? What does verse 31 show us about human nature? Is sh'ol the same as purgatory? Why is it so difficult for people to be convinced that God's ways are best?

REFLECT: The description of eternal damnation is quite vivid in this parable. After reading it, can you think of someone you need to witness to? Who did the rich man symbolize? What frightens you about this parable? What gives you comfort? Why?

The one main point to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is that riches do not guarantee one's entrance into the kingdom of God.

God had promised that **He** would bless **His** people if they obeyed **Him** (Deuteronomy 28:1-4). And **the Pharisees**, through a perversion of the principle, taught that material possessions guaranteed the favor of **ADONAI**. **They taught, "Whom the LORD loves He makes rich."** Therefore, **they** sought material possessions to prove that **they** were accepted and approved by **God**. In order to correct this perverted attitude toward material things, **Yeshua** gave this parable to **the Twelve** and also to **the Pharisees** to teach the proper attitude toward material things and the right stewardship of one's possessions.¹¹³⁴ The context of this parable is connected to the previous instruction (**to see link click [Hw](#) - The Parable of the Shrewd Manager**) where **Messiah** taught **His apostles along** with **the Pharisees**, who loved money, and they heard all this and were sneering at Him.



There was a certain **rich man who** had everything **he** wanted. **He was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day (Luke 16:19).** **He** was accustomed to wearing the finest and most costly clothing, **his** outer garment being made of the most costly Egyptian cotton dyed **purple**, something only worn by princes, and the under garment of **fine linen** made from Egyptian flax. **Every day he** entertained friends with tables full of the best food and the most expensive silverware. But **his** money was spent entirely to satisfy **his** own desires. **He** showed no concern for the needs of others.

The poor diseased **beggar** of the parable, to whom **Christ** gave the name **Lazarus**, was a picture of the wretched that was always seen in Judea. **He** had been brought, helpless as **he** was, **and was laid down at the gate of the rich man's** luxurious home. **A beggar named Lazarus was covered with sores** (probably ulcers) **and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table.** No doubt **Lazarus** sat at **the rich man's gate** in hopes that as **he** passed by **he** would be moved with compassion and out of **his** wealth would feed **him**. But **the dogs** showed more compassion than **the rich man** did. **Even the dogs came and licked his sores (Luke 16:20-21).** The Greek indicates this was the culmination of **Lazarus'** misery. In Jewish thinking at the time, **dogs** were not romanticized as household pets, but were seen as impure, disgusting scavengers. There could be no greater contrast in material possessions of the two men than in the first scene of this parabolic-drama.

Then the scene changes. **The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side,** a place of blessing (Luke 16:22a). **Abraham's side** is a rare phrase in early Jewish writing, but not unknown. **John, the talmid whom Jesus loved, was**

reclining at Christ's side at the Last Passover (**John 13:23-25**). A Jewish historical document dating from around the time of **Christ** says, "After **His** suffering of ours, **Avraham**, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov will receive us, and all our ancestors will praise us" (4 Maccabees 13:17). Thus, being at **Abraham's side** suggests both being in **paradise** and being present at the wedding feast of the Lamb (see my commentary on **Revelation E**g - **Blessed Are Those Invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb**).¹¹³⁵ **Contrary to the Pharisaic concept that God hated the poor and loved the wealthy, Jesus said that Lazarus was carried to Abraham's side.**

Next, the scene unfolds from **sh'ol**. **The rabbis taught that paradise, or Abraham's side, was in sight of Gehenna, the place of torment, both being in sh'ol, the place of departed spirits.** **Jesus** couched this parable in the language of the day to refute the lie that wealth was a sign of divine favor. We should not press this detail of the parable and believe this is a **great divide** spoken of below is biblical doctrine. This is symbolic language.



The rich man also died and was buried. Even in death **he** was treated differently from **Lazarus**, who **was** not **buried**. **In sh'ol he was in torment.** The parable does not see the wicked as being annihilated, but continuing in a terrible conscious and irreversible condition for eternity. **He looked up and saw Avraham far away, with Lazarus by his side (Luke 16:22b-23).** The parable pictures **a great divide**, symbolizing the eternal gulf that exists between heaven and hell. **The rich man** was conscious of this **great divide** and fully perceived the blessings that **he** was being deprived of. To facilitate **Yeshua's** point, the parable allows **the rich man** to speak with **Avraham**. Here is another good example of not pressing the details of a parable. Obviously, people in hell cannot talk to people in heaven.

So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the

tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire” (Luke 16:24). We see in this parable, then, that the wicked remember the opportunities for salvation they had rejected. They are fully conscious of their separation from **God** and the consequences of their actions (or lack of actions) before death. They are in torment.

Avraham’s response contrasted the state of the two men when they were on the earth. **But he replied, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony” (Luke 16:25).** Although **the rich man** was a descendant, or **son** of **Avraham** physically, apart from repentance, **Abraham’s** offspring, like the rest of humanity, will experience **God’s** judgment. Blessing is only for the righteous, and **the rich man’s** actions had proved that **he** was more interested in **his** lush lifestyle than placing **his** faith in **the Son of Righteousness**. All **his** former wealth was of no use for **him** now. **He** was no longer **a rich man**, but merely **a tortured man**. **He** had based **his** whole life on a pharisaic lie and **his** wealth had no bearing on **his** relationship with **God**. Now it was too late, **he** would be in **agony** for all eternity.

“And besides all this, between us and you a great divide has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:26). Both the Talmud (Pes. 54a; Ned. 39b) and the Targum teach that **paradise** or **Abraham’s side**, and **sh’ol** were created before this world. So the rabbis taught that **paradise** and **sh’ol** were supposedly to be adjacent to each other, only separated - it was said, perhaps allegorically - by a couple of **centimeters** as seen symbolically in this parable.¹¹³⁶

It is important that we understand that **sh’ol** is not purgatory. The Roman Catholic Church has developed a doctrine which contends that all who die at peace with the church, but who are not perfect, must undergo penal and purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as purgatory. Pope Gregory the Great established this doctrine in 593. It was proclaimed an article of faith in 1493 by the Council of Florence, and was later confirmed by the Council of Trent in 1548. The basis for purgatory comes from one of the apocryphal books (Second Maccabees 12:39-46). Once again tradition rears its ugly head.

The Roman Church teaches that only believers who have attained a state of Christian perfection go immediately to heaven (I have always maintained that if you want to find out if a man has attained sinless perfection in this life, just ask his wife and she could probably answer all your questions, or *vice versa*). Official Catholic doctrine teaches that all unbaptized adults and those who after baptism have committed mortal sin go immediately to **hell**. All the rest of the Catholics dying in fellowship with the church, but who nevertheless

are loaded down with some degree of sin, go to purgatory, for a longer or shorter time, they suffer until all sin is purged away, after which they are transferred to heaven.

The doctrine of purgatory is not based on the Bible, and ignores **Christ's** declaration from the cross when **He** said: **It is finished (John 19:30a)**. What was **finished**? The full payment for sin, that is what was **finished**. **Jesus** had paid for every sin, past, present and future. The cross eliminated the need for any such doctrine of purgatory. In addition, the Bible teaches us that to be **absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:8)**. Undaunted, the Roman Church teaches that while **God** forgives sin, **His** justice nevertheless demands that the sinner must suffer the full punishment due to him or her before being allowed to enter heaven. So, in reality, the Roman Church says that **Messiah's** sacrifice on the cross was insufficient to atone for our sin. She says purgatory is needed!

Roman Catholicism is often described as a religion of fear. According to the Holy Fathers of the Catholic Church, the fire of purgatory does not differ from the fire of hell, except for duration. But one might ask, "How can spirits suffer the pains of real physical fire in purgatory before they have resurrection bodies (**First Corinthians 15:22**)?" In answer to this question the Roman theologians have invented a theory that in purgatory the soul takes on a different kind of body - the nature of which they do not define - in which the suffering can be felt. But that is like the doctrine of purgatory itself, a purely fictitious assumption without any Scripture proof whatsoever, and in fact contrary to Scripture.¹¹³⁷



The rich man answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him witness to them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment" (Luke 16:27-28). This request expresses **the rich man's** desire **to warn his brothers** of **their** need to act prudently like **the shrewd manager**, prepare for the future and escape the **agony** in which **he** found **himself**. In short, **they** needed to

repent.

Abraham replied: They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them. No, father Abraham, he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent. This indicates that **the rich man's** fate was not due to **his** being **rich** but **his** lack of **repentance**. **Abraham said to the rich man, "If they do not listen to Moses,** that is the Torah, **and the Prophets,** which means the entire TaNaKh (**Luke 24:44-45; Matthew 5:17**) **then they will not be convinced even if someone raises from the dead"** (**Luke 16:29-31**). Just a short time later **Yeshua** did raise a man **from the dead**, another man named **Lazarus** (see [Ia](#) - **The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah**). The result was that **the Pharisees** began to plot more earnestly to kill both **Jesus** and **Lazarus** (see [Ib](#) - **The Plot to Kill Jesus: The Rejection of the First Sign**). There is never enough proof for unbelief.