

### The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

*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.'"*

#### Background Notes

The context of Luke 16 is our Lord's teaching about money. In the first part of the chapter, the Lord specifically taught His disciples the proper view and the proper use of money. The Pharisees, who were listening in on the conversation, disagreed with the Lord's teaching. These unbelievers justified their love of money by saying it was a sign of God's favor and blessing on their lavish lifestyle. So the Lord turned His attention on them, and told them that they were not only wrong, but hypocrites as well! The very fact that they were justifying their adulteries by writing up "certificates of divorce" showed that they really did not have love and respect for God and His moral laws at all.

The self-righteous Pharisees were in for some big surprises after death, and it was in this context that the Lord gave the account of the rich man and Lazarus. Clearly the rich man represented the Pharisees, who thought that they "had it made" with God. How wrong they were!

Notice that this account is not said to be a parable. It may be a parable, but on the other hand it may be an actual account of a well-known rich Pharisee and a beggar named Lazarus.

It's important to realize that the word used in verse 23 is "hades" - and not "hell" (as in the King James Version). In the context of this account, "hades" is the realm or destination of unbelievers who have died. They are consciously awaiting their final consignment to hell, which will take place at the Great White Throne judgment in the future (according to Revelation 20). If anything, conditions in hell will be worse than in hades for unbelievers, and everything that is said here of hades could certainly be said of hell. In our five doctrinal points, we will use the word "hell" instead of the word "hades."

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Hell is a place of surprising reversal.

In order to conserve time for five doctrinal points, I'll be reading from an essay that I wrote some time ago on this subject. This essay is entitled *Lost Forever*, and can be found on our **Growing Christians Ministries** website, [www.growingchristians.org](http://www.growingchristians.org).

"In verses 19-21, the Lord Jesus taught that hell is a place of surprising reversal. In this life, the rich man had it made, while Lazarus had nothing. The Pharisees who were listening to the story (v14) would have understood the rich man to be someone who was very favorably blessed by God, and poor suffering Lazarus would be understood to be an individual who was under the discipline of God. After all, he appeared to be so far forsaken by God that he was licked by street dogs, which made him ceremonially unclean. But after death, Lazarus, of all people, was resting securely in "Abraham's bosom"! What a surprising reversal!

"Notice that the Lord did not describe the rich man as a Scrooge, or a selfish miser. In fact, verse 21 indicates that he permitted Lazarus to have the leftovers from his table. This rich man would be typical of a lot of Americans today, apparently enjoying God's favor, and by no means deliberately neglecting the poor and suffering. Even token efforts of concern are characteristic of most citizens. Certainly God would not send a "good person" like this to hell! But the Lord corrected this faulty thinking with this story.

"The Bible is not teaching here that all rich people go to hell and all poor people go to heaven. Luke 16 does not even tell us why this rich man went to hell and Lazarus went to heaven - although the rich man's self-centeredness may be a hint. The actual means of salvation, Jesus Christ, is given to us in many other Scriptures, but that is not the focus of this story. This Scripture emphasizes that stature and position in this life may be surprisingly reversed in the life to come. We Christians must share this truth with our status-conscious society: hell is a place of surprising reversal!"

### 2. Hell is a place of painful retribution.

"In verses 23 and 24 Jesus taught that hell is a place of painful retribution. Some unbelievers have the idea that hell will be a great reunion party with all their old friends, but the Bible does not even suggest such a thought. The rich man was

suffering torment (v23) and agony (v24) and did not want anyone to join him in such a horrible place (v28). There was no relief, not even a slightest ray of hope.

“Many people think that God is unfair in meting out such punishment. It’s important to realize that it’s not a question of God’s fairness. A person’s destination after death is that individual person’s choice. As an illustration - suppose I’m drowning and I choose not to take the life preserver that’s thrown to me. Are the consequences fair? Unbelievers *choose* to go to hell because they either refuse to believe the truth, or they refuse to do anything about it.

“In Matthew 13:42, the Lord spoke of hell as a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Because they have chosen to go to hell rather than heaven, some unbelievers will weep forever, with unending regret – but some will gnash their teeth in bitter anger against God forever. If you are not a Christian, fortunately it is still not too late for you to avoid the painful retribution of hell. Choose to commit your life to Christ now before you are lost forever - because hell is a place of painful retribution.”

### **3. Hell is a place of conscious remembrance.**

“In verse 25, Jesus taught that hell is a place of conscious remembrance. Hell is not cessation of awareness or memory. The rich man was aware of what he was missing as he viewed Lazarus, and he was able to vividly recall his past. In fact, he was commanded to think back on his life down on earth.

In this life we are fortunate to be able to blot out, at least partially, bad memories of past mistakes. This human characteristic tends to make life more pleasant. But in hell there will be no such convenience. Every guilty conscience will be fully awake and active. What could be worse than remembering forever the missed opportunities to believe the simple truth of the gospel? Hell is a place of conscious remembrance.”

### **4. Hell is a place of no return.**

“Jesus taught that hell is a place of no return (v26). There is no second chance in hell. Any idea of reincarnation is utterly foreign to Scripture. Hell is not a place of temporary punishment, with eventual admittance to heaven after a period of purification. Nowhere does the Bible teach that ‘everyone is going to make it to heaven in the end.’

The fact that there is a ‘great fixed gulf’ indicates that hell is a permanent situation. Verse 26 makes it clear that even if someone in heaven wanted to help someone in hell, it’s impossible. Mercy is for this life only. The good news here is that the fixed boundary means that believers are eternally secure in heaven. Hell is a place of no return.”

## 5. Hell is a place of awful realization.

“Finally, in verses 27-31, Jesus taught that hell is a place of awful realization. The rich man was forced to realize that rejecting or neglecting the truth of the Scriptures meant that he would be lost forever. Like his five brothers who were still alive, the rich man had access to the teachings of “Moses and the Propheets” (a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures) during his lifetime (v26). For anyone who was open to the truth, the Bible was sufficient evidence - and it still is! Miracles will not convince the hardened skeptic, in spite of what the rich man thought and tried to argue (v30).

“Proof of the declaration in verse 31 took place not too long after our Lord told this story. A man named Lazarus (of all things!) was raised from the dead, and came back to witness to the truth of Christ and the Scriptures (John 11). The Pharisees, who would not listen to Moses and the Prophets, were not persuaded to become believers, even though someone was raised from the dead! Our Lord’s resurrection soon after did not change their unbelief either. How awful for those unbelieving religious leaders, along with the rich man and other rejecters of Scripture (then and now), to realize after death that they are lost forever. Hell is a place of awful realization.

“It is significant that the Lord spoke more frequently of hell than of heaven, according to what is written in the four Gospels. Why would our loving Lord, who always went about doing good, spend so much time talking about such an unpleasant subject? 2 Peter 3:9 gives a simple answer. It’s because our loving God does not want anyone to be lost forever in hell.”

The rest of this essay, *Lost Forever*, is on our website: [www.growingchristians.org](http://www.growingchristians.org)

## Practical Application

### Don’t wish that you could do miracles!

Did you ever wish that you could do miracles? I mean in a good sense - not to be famous, but to convince people to read the Bible and get saved? Well, stop wishing for something that wouldn’t work anyway! This account of the rich man and Lazarus clearly teaches that if people are not open to believing what the Bible says about the only way of salvation, they would not believe even if they saw a miracle.

So don’t waste your time on wishing that you could do miracles!