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## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### Lazarus and the Rich Man; Part 2

After Paul was delivered from the rioting crowds in Jerusalem, how he was sent to Caesarea and the Roman Procurator, Felix. To understand what happened next, you have to understand a little about Felix. He was born and raised a slave in the household of Antonia, the mother of the future emperor, Claudius. Because of his favor in Antonia's house, at some point Felix was redeemed by Antonia and so set free. Having such close ties with Claudius' household, Felix was favored and given political advantage by Claudius (which is how Felix eventually became the Procurator of Judea). Yet he was an immoral man through and

through. In fact, the Roman historian, Tacitus, summed up his character by saying, "...[Felix] exercised royal power with the mind of a slave."<sup>1</sup>

Sensing that there was money to be made on account of the controversy surrounding Paul and the leadership of Judaism, Felix held a trial (Acts 23:16-35) but refused to render judgment as he was looking for a bribe (Acts 24:1-22)- which never came, either from Paul or the Sanhedrin. Accordingly, for the next two years Paul remained in prison in Caesarea where occasionally Felix called for the apostle to speak to him, ever and always looking for that elusive bribe (Acts 24:26). On one such occasion, we read an incredibly sad statement from Felix to Paul:

Acts 24:25, "And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time [the NIV translates this, "...when it is convenient..."] I will summon you.'"

What a tragic statement! There was a time when Felix came close to the Kingdom of God! He heard the gospel. He fell under the conviction of sin and the dread knowledge of the judgment that awaited him. And all he had to do was turn from self to Christ and he would have been saved. Instead, Felix delayed, and this delay most likely cost him his soul!

It is this that serves as a second theme and warning in this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This parable has two movements and so two messages.<sup>2</sup> The first message (vv. 19-25) pertained to those who ultimately make it to heaven — they do so by the blood of the Lamb! The second movement is a commentary on the afterlife.

Luke 16:19-21, "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores."

We have seen that Christ told this parable because of the religious notion common at this time amongst God's people that God helps those who help themselves. If you were wealthy, good looking, powerful, successful, and the like, Judaism at this time took these as a blessing from the Lord on account of something you had done. Accordingly, the "rich man" in this context would have been seen as a man of God and so one who had a lock on heaven, otherwise God would NOT have blessed him so!

In contrast, "the poor man"- here named Lazarus- was crippled and abandoned at the gate of the rich man. The fact that he was in such a state would have indicated that he was a wicked sinner! Recall the disciple's question:

John 9:1-2, "And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?'"

With the parable before us, Christ confronted this faulty view of God, His Kingdom, and Salvation. Truly, those who are saved are those who cannot help themselves and therefore look to God for deliverance!

There is a telling, yet beautiful contrast presented here, on the one hand there is an incredibly wealthy man who was the epitome of godliness at the time; he clearly had helped himself! And then there was Lazarus, a poor, lame, beggar who as a sinner could NOT help himself!

Now as Christ was telling this parable to a crowd that believed that “*God helps those who help themselves,*” all would have been anticipating the great thing that God had in store for the rich man as well as the suffering that no doubt awaited the poor man which brings us to a shocking twist.

Luke 16:22-23, “Now it came about that the POOR MAN died and *he was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom*; and the RICH MAN also died and was buried. And *in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom.*”

This is so typical of Christ’s parables. He tells a story which initially would have drawn His listeners in. Then, just about the time a smile dawned upon their faces, Christ takes the story down a shocking path — which here revolved around the two men’s fate. To the shock of all present, it is the poor man — the helpless man, the invalid, the stinky, smelly, despised man — who enters heaven!

How could that ever be? How is it that the sinner is the one who in the end is saved? We saw the answer when we considered the recompense.

Luke 16:24-25a, “And he [the rich man] cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received YOUR good things [recall that the language here speaks of that which the rich man *merited*. All that the rich man had in life and in death was according to what he *earned* in his time on the earth...] and likewise Lazarus bad things [as this is parallel, we understand that Lazarus also received that which was *earned* or *deserved*!]

It is NOT wrong to stand before God on the basis of merit; everyone does! What is wrong is to think that man could earn the merit necessary to stand before God and not be condemned! So both the rich man and Lazarus stood before God on the basis of merit.

- The rich man stood before God on the basis of his own merit and so was condemned!
- Lazarus stood before God on the basis of Christ’s merit and was saved!

Where in the parable does it show that Lazarus stood before God on the basis of Christ's merit?

Of the 46 parables Christ told, this is the ONLY ONE in which He names one of the characters, Lazarus! "Lazarus" (Λάζαρος [*Lazaros*]) is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, Eleazar, which means, "whom God has helped." Lazarus stood before God on the basis of the help that God gave him, which we know from the rest of Scripture involved the righteousness of Christ imputed to His account (see our study last week)!

From this we saw that mankind ever and always stands before God on a legal basis! When it comes to our eternal destiny, all that is experienced is earned! If a person stands before God on the basis of their own merit, they will earn death on account of their sin (cf. Romans 6:23a)- which was the fate of the Rich Man! However, if a person stands before God on the basis of Christ's merit, they will enjoy the life Christ earned and so spend eternity with God! That is what is pictured here with Lazarus- the "one whom God helped"!

This brings us to the second movement of this parable, introduced to us by a description of the permanence of the eternal state.

Luke 16:26, "And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed [in a country where such 'yawning gorges' are numerous<sup>3</sup>, this image would have hit home], in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us."

Again, as this is a parable, we do NOT derive truth-statements from *The Story*. And so here we do NOT conclude that there is a canyon that separates those in heaven from those in hell.

However, as we have entered the second movement of this parable, we are introduced to the permanence of the eternal state. When once an individual enters into eternity, their place is fixed!<sup>4</sup> R. H. Stein wrote this:

Not only was the rich man's request of 16:24 not granted because of God's justice [that is, to have Lazarus relieve the rich man's suffering], in addition the situation in which he found himself was irreversible. Here lies the real horror of his situation. His punishment was eternal. (Stein, 1992, p. 425)

That is the point here! So get this! Right now everyone alive on this earth has before them a choice when it comes to their eternal destiny, Christ exhorted us this way:

Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

This was the exhortation Christ gave as He walked the earth. Before every man, woman, and child is a choice as it relates to their eternal destiny. What a glorious and profound option

that all have today!

Yet when once a person dies, the time for choosing is over.

Hebrews 9:27, "...it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment..."

Talk about permanency! When once a person dies, they are judged. After that judgment, there are no other chances, no probation... no court of appeals which might free the one in hell. That is what is being portrayed here as Lazarus and the Rich Man are pictured in heaven and hell! That which they earned in their lives — the Rich Man by his actions and Lazarus on account of Christ's actions and so God's help — would be that under which they would live for the rest of eternity! This brings us to the request made by the Rich Man.

Luke 16:27-28, "And he said, 'Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house- for I have five brothers- that he may warn them,<sup>5</sup> lest they also come to this place of torment.'"

This beautifully captures the point of this second movement. While our place when once we enter eternity is fixed/permanent, today for any living on this earth there remains the glorious option of redemption- which is why the Rich Man made his appeal on behalf of his brothers! In fact, it was in light of this that Paul exhorted his listeners...

2 Corinthians 6:1-2, "And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain- for He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you'; behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'"

The grace of God, the kindness of God, is present daily throughout this world! Today it is accessible to you. Tomorrow it may not be. Accordingly, you must understand this as if spoken to you personally this day, "Don't receive God's grace in vain! Now is the acceptable time... now is the day of salvation!"

Sadly, that time came and went in Felix' life! He wanted to wait for a more "convenient" time... but it never came! How many countless millions of souls have perished thinking that they had more time?!

It reminds me of the story William Barclay told:

There is a fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and to ruin men. The first said, 'I will tell them that there is no God.' Satan said, 'That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God.' The second said, 'I will tell men that there is no hell.' Satan answered, 'You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin.' The third said, 'I will tell

men that there is no hurry.’ ‘Go,’ said Satan, ‘and you will ruin men by the thousand.’ The most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time. (Barclay, 2001, p. 317)

It is this that is reflected in the second movement of this parable. While the fate of the Rich Man in hell was determined, such was and is NOT the case for those living on this earth! For them there remains the hope of the gospel!

In light of this, consider: How long will this grace remain in your life — the ability to trust Christ for your salvation? The fact of the matter is that the door of salvation may be closing on you this very moment. Right now, you have before you the option of redemption. Yet by this evening, you may be in eternity! It reminds me of *another* Parable Christ told:

Luke 12:16-20, “And He told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?” And he said, “This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.” And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?””

Any and all hearing me... don’t assume you have tomorrow to decide your eternal destiny- or even this evening! According to God’s providence and grace, this moment the gospel is offered to you! You can choose to continue to stand before God on the basis of your own merit and die (as did the Rich Man). Or, you can stand before God on the basis of Christ’s merit and live — as did Lazarus!

How I exhort you! Turn from self-trust and the illusion in which you hope that you will be good enough at the end of your life to enter heaven. One sin is all that it takes to damn a soul to hell (Romans 6:23). Accordingly, turn from yourself... your sin... your rebellion, and go to Christ. Ask Him to forgive you, and you will be saved!

And yet I know what some might be thinking, “*How do I know if Christ/Christianity is true? If you could give me a sign this moment, then I’d believe in your Savior!*”

The truth be known, this world witnessed the greatest sign that could have ever been given, and still it rejected Christ- which brings us finally to the witness.

Luke 16:29-31, “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them [that is, “*Let them submit or heed their teaching!*”].’ But he said, ‘No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ [This gives us great insight as to why this Rich Man was in hell... it was NOT a lack of warning or knowledge, BUT his failure to repent while living!] But he [Abraham] said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone

rises from the dead.”

The language here is very specific! Throughout Redemptive History mankind has been privileged to witness the resurrection of many from the dead. Think of the resurrections that have occurred:

- The Son of the Widow of Zarephath, 1 Kings 17:17–24)
- The Son of the Shunammite woman, 2 Kings 4:18–37.
- The man raised out of Elisha’s grave, 2 Kings 13:20–21.
- The Son of the widow of Nain, Luke 7:11–17.
- Jairus’ daughter, Luke 8:52–56.
- Lazarus of Bethany (not the Lazarus of this parable), John 11.
- Various saints in Jerusalem after Christ rose from the dead, Matthew 27:50–53.
- Tabitha, Acts 9:36–43.
- Eutychus, Acts 20:7–12.

And incidentally, none of these generated a massive turning from sin to God. That having been said, none of these resurrections are in mind here. Notice the language, “...neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead” (in the Greek ‘rise’ is active, not passive)! The text does NOT say, “...if someone *is raised* from the dead,” BUT “if someone *rises* from the dead.”

Who in the course of World or Redemptive History rose all by Himself from the dead? Who alone broke the power of death? Only Jesus! Which is exactly what Christ predicted of Himself, at the beginning of His ministry, we read of Jesus:

John 2:18-21, “The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews therefore said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.”

What a revealing passage! The self-resurrection of Christ was indeed a Sign which testified to His deity. We know this from Paul as well:

Romans 1:4a, “[He] was declared the Son of God with power BY the resurrection from the dead...”

In light of this, what did the Jewish leadership who asked for a sign do when the sign was given? What did they do when they looked upon deity in the flesh? After witnessing the resurrection of Christ said:

Matthew 28:11b-13, “...some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief

priests all that had happened. And when they [the Jewish leadership many of which were the ones earlier who asked for a sign] had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, ‘You are to say, “His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.”’”

Amazing! The greatest sign as to the authenticity of Christ — the Resurrection of Christ from the Dead — was given to the Jews of Christ’s day. But rather than repenting and turning to God, these very same Jews endeavored to suppress the truth!<sup>6</sup> Why? Because they were blinded by their disbelief!

- They were “dead in their trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1-3).
- They were “...held captive by [Satan] to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:26b).
- They “...[did ] not know where [they were] going because the darkness... blinded [their] eyes.” (1 John 2:11b).

Truly, the problem with the non-Christian is NOT a lack of evidence or the absence of a sign, BUT a mind that is darkened and so cannot believe and will not believe- which is why salvation comes only to those whom God has helped~ Lazarus!<sup>7</sup> Dr. John MacArthur wrote:

Since unbelief is at heart a moral, not an intellectual issue, no amount of evidence alone can turn unbelief to faith. (MacArthur, 2013, p. 368)

Accordingly, in the second movement of this parable — which was given to warn mankind of the permanence of eternity and so the need to respond today to the free offer of the Gospel — a closing exhortation is given! Mankind does NOT need the miracle of a person rising from the dead to influence his will; RATHER what he needs is to become dead to self and alive to God! He needs the help of God — Lazarus! That is their only hope!

Accordingly, I exhort you... Eternity is quickly closing in upon each and every one of us. Our need clearly is NOT for more evidence, BUT the willingness to “take up our cross” — which speaks of going on a death-march to self— and “follow Jesus.” If you delay... if you choose NOT to choose this day, you will have made a choice!

Come this day to Christ, Confess your need for His cleansing blood! Turn from self-trust! Cry out to God for salvation! Be as “Lazarus” and accept *the help* that Christ in His life, death, and resurrection grants to all who trust Him! And you most certainly shall be saved!

To the child of God listening, let us renew our appreciation for God’s word. We live in an age of mysticism where what is accepted as valid is that which is experienced. Yet get this, if we are to grow as it relates to our salvation, it will NOT be because of what we experience. RATHER, it will be on account of what we nourish our souls upon.

In the words of Peter referencing the sign of the Transfiguration of Christ, “...we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a



dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19)!

It is in light of this truth that Paul exhorted the Ephesian Elders:

Acts 20:32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Christian, if you would grow in Christ, it will only be as you spend time with Christ in His word! It is that which God has given that we might be “built up” and so receive the fullness of “the inheritance”!

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, (Marshall, 1980, p. 390)

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Stein wrote, “The second part of the parable (16:27–31) teaches that unbelief and the refusal to repent are not the results of lack of evidence (or lack of a sign) but due to a stony heart.” (Stein, 1992, p. 442)

<sup>3</sup> What is meant is a ravine, vast in depth, length, and breadth; a wadi, gorge.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris wrote, “This is no doubt a pictorial detail, but it means that in the afterlife there is no passing from one state to the other (the Greek implies that this is the purpose and not simply the result of the great chasm).” (Morris, 2008, p. 271)

<sup>5</sup> Joel B. Green wrote, “The idea of the dead returning to visit the living was common in the ancient world, with some literary expressions of this idea oriented toward the return of the dead for the purpose of revealing his or her own fate or the fate of others in the next world. Against this background, Jesus’ story is remarkable for its narration of the refusal to allow for such a return.” (Green, 1997, p. 609)

<sup>6</sup> They did this as well in response to Lazarus’ resurrection, cf. John 12:10-11!!! In this regard, Hendriksen wrote, “Someone from the dead did actually appear to the people. And his name was Lazarus (though not the Lazarus of the parable). The story is found in John 11. Was the result that everybody was converted? Not at all. The result was that Christ’s enemies planned to put to death the risen Lazarus (John 12:10) and were more determined than ever to destroy Jesus (John 11:47–50).”

(Hendrikson, 1978, p. 787)

<sup>7</sup> “Jews demand miraculous signs” (1 Corinthians 1:22), but only the preaching of Christ crucified is necessary for those with a tender heart for God.