

*The Rich Man
And
Lazarus*



The Rich Man and Lazarus

I would like to talk about the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This is a familiar passage worthy of reviewing to help us have more faith in God and to keep us from falling into these same traps. Peter says in 2 Peter 3:1 that he wants to stir pure minds by way of remembrance so let's refresh our memories of this story told by Jesus and remind ourselves of the lesson Jesus is teaching us.

This story is told in Luke 16:19-31 and Luke has already told us that his purpose was to set in order what Jesus began to do and teach (Luke 1:1-4) and continues this line of thinking in Acts (Acts 1:1-2). These statements will help us understand the lesson Jesus is conveying to us. When we back up a few verses (Luke 15:1-2) we learn Tax Collectors and other notori-

ous sinners often come out to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with sinful people and even eating with them. Later (Luke 16:14), as Jesus was teaching, it is noted that the Pharisees, who dearly loved money, heard all this and scoffed at him. Jesus (Luke 16:15) who knew their hearts starts addressing their failures by saying, "You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God." They were doing detestable things in God's view and we are instructed to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). God is different than what the world thinks so it is important for us to study the word of God because

The apostle Paul had the same kind of thoughts in Romans 7. He states in the beginning of this chapter that the things he knows he should do, he doesn't. The things he shouldn't do, he does. The question really is in Romans 7:24-25, "**O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?**" The final answer to this question is verse 25, "**I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.**"

Through this one parable, we can see what a home builder must understand. You can have great plans for a house, but if the material you use is low grade, the house will be unable to withstand the perils of nature. When Jesus tells us to abide by his words, he is saying to build your spiritual house on him. 1Corinthians 10:4, "**And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.**"

There is a saying in the computer world called GIGO... Garbage in, garbage out. If six days a week we don't read and study our Bibles, if we follow the teachings of the world, are we not building our spiritual house using the computer term above? When the rain and the wind and the floods come, what is our spiritual house standing on? We then call for the foundation people to come check our house for problems. I can imagine the conversation, "Is that your house in a million pieces?" "Yes, it is. Sorry, the foundation was built on a porous material." "I can't help you. Call me when you want to lay a true founda-

tion next time."

Perhaps this is what Jesus is trying to tell all of us in this parable. I love you, please listen to me. Build your spiritual house wisely and follow my sayings. When you do, no matter what comes, you will be fine. Hebrews 13:5, "**Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**"

Perhaps this is what Jesus is trying to tell all of us in this parable. I love you, please listen to me. Build your spiritual house wisely...

To me, this should be our goal in our Christian life. We are all foolish builders in one way or another. We all have structure in our houses that needs remodeling. Given enough prayer time and study, God will remodel those areas. So when the rain, wind and floods come to us, we, too, can say what the Psalmist David said in Psalm 28:7, "**The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.**"

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The Wise and the Foolish Builders

Jesus told the following parable in Matthew 7: 24 – 27:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

I always read this parable and thought it would be prudent to make sure I live in a strong house. I don't want the winds and rain and the floods to beat on my house and have it fall on me and my family. This would be terrible!

If you are reading this and thinking this is not what Christ is talking about, you would be absolutely right. We just discovered the true meaning of verse 26. Hearing and not doing the words of Jesus Christ would put me into the foolish builder category of this scripture. Verses 24 and 26 both say, "These

sayings of mine". Do we believe all of the sayings of the Lord?

If you look in the book of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount starts in Chapter 5 and ends with this parable. Jesus brings up various subjects to the multitude of people. We have the Beatitudes, and then he brings up anger, adultery, divorce, swearing, going the extra mile, loving your enemies, doing good deeds, prayer, where your treasure should be, how many masters you

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can serve, worry, judging others, gifts, false prophets, and ends with the parable of The Wise and Foolish Builders. This is not a complete list; but how are you feeling now? Are you finding out that you, too, may be a foolish builder? How are we with the first commandment? Deuteronomy 6:5, "**And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.**"

I look at the parables in the gospels, and while I understand them, it is truly difficult for me to obey all of my Lord's sayings. Sometimes I feel like I am doing my best and then I come to understand something else and once again I determine myself to be a foolish builder.

the world will not tell us what God, who made the world and us, expects in return. Shortly after this Jesus tells the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus beginning in Luke 16:19. Now that we know Jesus' focus let's look at our story.

Jesus starts by saying "a certain rich man" or "a rich man", depending on the version we are using, but either way he is going to address a particular type of rich man. There are many types of riches, one may have a wealth of talent and another may have a wealth of knowledge while yet another may be wealthy financially. So we need to pay attention to the type of wealth Jesus is addressing here because a wrong view of the type of wealth could cause us to miss the lesson. This type of wealthy man was decked in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. Now we get the picture, Jesus is clearly talking about the priest working in the temple. Who else was decked in purple in this crowd besides the ones Jesus had addressed when they scoffed? The Pharisees would work in the temple and wear purple, the color of authority, fine linen, the clothing of the

rich in kings' houses (Matt 11:8), and would fair sumptuously every day. Every day is the clincher because only priests could work on the Sabbath and be blameless (Matt 12:5). We know the sons of Aaron, who held the office of the priesthood, were dressed in this manner because of such passages as Exodus 28:1-5. God wanted the sons of Aaron to be dressed beautifully (verse 2) and one of the colors He mentions is "purple" (verse 5). Now purple was a sign of wealth and authority among all men and we see this used in some religious organizations today, so I imagine the boys back there scoffing at Jesus were decked with an abundance of purple because Jesus tells us in Matthew 23:5-7 that they loved to be honored and it is obvious that they were very jealous of all this attention Jesus was getting with thousands of people crowding him everywhere he went. Purple was also the color of the robe the Roman soldiers put on Jesus in mockery (John 19:2), thinking Jesus was faking being a king. Think about how it must have been, with the rich man decked out in these fine clothes and the greetings

and gifts he would receive. He was loaded with power and every financial need. I think of how it must have been in discussions with his five brothers, maybe in taking up money at the temple. Can you imagine conversations like what might have taken place with the poor widow giving just two mites? It would be like an adult giving two pennies today. We know there were observers because Jesus commented to His disciples that she had given all she had, and much more than all the others. Think of the conversation this rich man might have had with his brothers if he was there taking up the collection that day! The Pharisees were greedy (Luke 16:14) so they would probably say something like: "Hey bro, how much money did you collect today?" We know rich men of financial means were there that day because of Jesus comments (Mark 12:42) so the rich man would probably have raked it in and would have been bragging to his brothers; but the story of the poor widow would also be a topic of conversation that might have gone something like this, "Man, so and so was here and he gave a

huge amount; not only that, his friend, who is also loaded, matched it but do you want to hear something funny? This lady in line right in the middle of these big boys gave two mites! I couldn't believe it; I mean, why bother? She might as well have picked up a rock on the way in and put it in there!"

Jesus looks at things differently than the viewpoint of the world for sure!

I'm sure they had a big laugh out of that and probably spread the word to share the humor with the others, but Jesus also spread the word about this same lady. His was a story of honor and reward. Jesus looks at things differently than the viewpoint of the world for sure!

Now that we have the "certain rich man" identified let's move on to Lazarus; who would he be? Lazarus was laid at the gate of the rich man. Where would that be? The house of the rich man Jesus was talking about was the temple; but we might say no because that was God's temple. Jesus in Matt 23:38 addresses

look up toward Abraham only to find that Abraham was far off. This man had broad phylacteries filled with scripture and thought that he was right there beside Abraham, but now he finds out Abraham was actually far off. We need to make sure we draw near to God so He will draw near to us (James 4:8). The rich man sees Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, a place that Lazarus sought but for which he felt unworthy because of his sores. He now has what he had for so long desired. Who do we desire to see in heaven? Paul wanted to be with Jesus and I believe that Lazarus realized his hope. We need to hope in Jesus because he is the one who has made us rich in his blessings, as all blessings are in Christ (Eph 1:3).

The rich man still hasn't learned the lesson because he is not pleading for forgiveness but only asking for hell to be made more comfortable. Unfortunately we are like that today with people constantly asking for money from the churches without seeking the true purpose of the church and that is to save us from sins. Abraham reveals the impossibility of changing now because the rich man had

spent his life digging a deep and wide gulf that separated him from God instead of seeking and building bridges to God and God's children. Money and power had blinded his eyes from the true value and purpose of man. The rich man now realizes his eternal fate and knows his family is headed for the same place. So many times we are blinded by this world's goods and it keeps us from having this desire to save our loved ones. We must see the need now and not fall into this same trap. The answer given to the rich man should be an eye opener for us in that the beloved Bible in our homes is all we need to be with Jesus forever. John tells us we have everything we need to believe and have eternal life (John 20:30-31).

There so many lessons in this story that hopefully will inspire all of us to make our election sure by searching the scriptures and examining ourselves. In light of our LORD Jesus may we give him glory and honor by serving him as he desires so we may be with Him forever.

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Pharisee, he didn't see the lesson nor seize the opportunity to realize what changes he needed to make. Lazarus was not faking; it was obvious this man needed help. The rich man saw Lazarus every day, saw obvious needs but simply walked by on the other side as in the story of the good Samaritan, where the priest did exactly the same thing. When Lazarus dies, the angels carry his spirit away, but his body probably was just carried as a dead animal and thrown in the dump. No more clear pictures for the rich man on obvious things he should be doing for the LORD. God had sent his servant Lazarus, just like he had sent the man born blind, in order to reveal the value of Jesus. For the rich man all opportunities are gone because the next thing we hear about the rich man is his death. He purposely rejected clear opportunities to have compassion on a poor, suffering man he knew by name.

The rich man died and was buried. The word buried indicates a ceremony and can you imagine the accolades spoken at this man's funeral? Perhaps they extolled his great dedication in his responsibilities and never

missing a day at the temple; his status and respect were enviable in the sight of the world but, of course, Jesus had a different view of these vipers and tombs of dead men's bones. We now get a picture of the other side of death. Some may say that it is not a reality but just a parable; but I know of no other parable in which Jesus told an untruth to explain a truth. Although the picture is horrible, I believe it is truth and a dose of reality. The

Hell on this side is a warning to save our souls

scriptures tell us that in hell he lifts up his eyes. Hell is an eye opener for all of us whether we face hell or torment on this side or other. Hell on this side is a warning to save our souls, as in the example of Paul warning the man living with his father's wife in 1 Corinthians 5:5. We need to learn that missed opportunities to submit to God on this side lead to a rude awakening of hell on the other side. This rich man had spent his life looking down on people like Lazarus, and did it every day, but in hell he examined himself and understands his horrible, eternal condition... to

the temple as "your house" because the Pharisees had corrupted the house of God with their own ideas and not the ideas of God. They had perverted God's plan, so God was no longer in that temple; it was desolate of God. Now that we know the actual gate he was talking about our picture begins to focus. Lazarus means, "God is my helper or whom God helps" according to Thayer.

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This is a brother, a man close to God and who is seeking help from God. Who laid him there? I would assume the same ones that picked him up when he died. God created this situation by placing Lazarus at a place these Pharisees would see every day and that is the gate of the temple. Lazarus was covered with sores so, although he desperately wanted to be as close to God as he could, he would not be allowed to go into the temple because of his sores (Lev 13:14). It was very important for one to be able to go into the temple.

The story of the man who was born blind's parents (John 19:22-23) gives us the idea of not only the value of being able to go into the temple but the power of the priest whom Jesus is addressing in this story. Jesus, knowing this, would tell those whom he healed to go show themselves to the priest (Luke 5:14).

The story tells us that Lazarus, a man who looked to God, desired just the scraps or crumbs from the Rich Man's table. I certainly can understand this concept, as many times I have thought how wonderful it would be to be close friends with the wealthy. Can you imagine having a friend that owns one of those Lear Jets, uses it like a car, and to be this man's friend? If you had such a friend you would be able to fly with him to the big games and sit beside him in the best seats in the house! You would not really be coveting his wealth but just be a friend that would be able to eat his crumbs. Okay maybe not everyone is like me but you know people like this who reap these kinds of benefits.

By the meaning of Lazarus' name let's do some speculating on what Lazarus was seeking. A

man who could not go to the services would feel separated from God and would have a desire to just be able to listen to the word taught and glean some of the wisdom and knowledge of the Pharisees who were experts in the law. Can you imagine the hope he might have of his sores healing so he could go into the temple with the priest? How wonderful it must be to actually go into the temple and be close to God, with all this knowledge, and to do God's work. How many times he must have dreamed and imagined how it would be to be one of these guys, but he felt that he was so sinful and unworthy. God knows how sinful I am and has stricken me with these sores. That is what the disciples thought concerning the man born blind (John 9:2) and I'm convinced the poor man must have thought this, too. He considered himself worthless and destitute in the sight of God, a man that had no value. But the Pharisees were rich and valuable for God. However, here is a man that God can help because in Matt 5:3 that the word "poor" is the same word that is used in this story and is sometimes translated as

"beggar". As Christians we need to understand that we are worthless compared to God's rightness and we are only righteous because Jesus paid our huge debt; we need to realize how much we need the bread of life, as revealed in this story of Lazarus desiring just the crumbs, because Jesus tells us with this attitude we will be filled (Matt 5:6). In this passage, Jesus mentions how blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. We need to be so thankful to Jesus and appreciate his value enough to know more about him.

The story of Lazarus continues with "the dogs would come and lick the sores". Who do the dogs represent and what is the lesson Jesus wants us to learn? Identifying the dogs seems to be pretty easy as they would be non-Jews, such as in the story of the Samaritan lady where Jesus referred to her as a dog and she admits being a dog (Matt 15:27 and Mark 7:27). With just a little research we know from the story of the Good Samaritan what he did for the beaten man after the priests passed him by in Luke 10:33-35. The dogs had compas-

sion on Lazarus and licked his sores, which would have relieved some of the discomfort. The non-Jews who came by Lazarus did what they could for him. Let's think about the dogs and those who are not brothers and sisters in Christ or, we might say, non-Christians. Before we give the dogs too much credit, let's think about dogs that would be out on the street. They are not our little rover who is pampered and fed with the finest dog food but would be eating dead things that stink and whatever scraps they could find. This passage uses "dogs" which would be more than one. Have you ever observed dogs together and what they lick on each other? Okay, now they come over and lick your sores! Not real comforting but in view of Lazarus, pretty comforting. The truth is that it was not what Lazarus desired or needed but only a temporary relief. The world today will respond in compassion to tragedies by sending money and supplies to needed areas and, of course, this is important and a valuable work but of little comfort to those families that have dying loved ones. They need faith that God

is in control and is taking care of those who have gone, something lasting and enduring, some valuable spiritual food to relieve the pain and give them hope and trust to see them through. Yes, it is important to offer material help but as Christians it is our responsibility to fill the hungry with actual food. Jesus referred to doing the will of the Father as

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meat (John 4:32-34) and spiritual water as quenching thirst (John 4:14). Who else but a Christian has the real food and necessities of life itself? None in my view, yet many of us today respond to physical needs with compassion but we fail to share the true riches with the people that God lays before us every day.

We now know who the characters represent so let's proceed in our story to the end results. Lazarus dies, and his misery is cut short; his purpose was fulfilled and, unfortunately for the