

This morning we are studying another parable. There is something a little more specific about this parable that has caused some commentators a little bit of consternation.

The difficulty is found in that Jesus, in this parable just does not give the characters of the story titles such as landowner, son, vineyard keepers, good, bad and the like.

In this parable he gives one character a name, Lazarus

So we must endeavor this morning to dispel any myths about this parable before we can give attention to its proper meaning.

Some believe that this is not a parable but a real life story that Jesus is using to illustrate his teaching. Now, there is nothing wrong with referring to real people and real historical narratives in teaching Scriptural truth. Jesus referred to Jonah to illustrate his resurrection.

Paul refers to Sarah and Hagar who were real people but uses them as an allegory to teach the difference between those who are the elect of God and those who are not.

So just because a character in a story has a name does not necessarily mean that it is about real people.

Next we have to look at the main theme or teaching point of the parable and see how many of the details of the parable actually have an equivalent in the teaching as we have done with all of the parables we have studied. Now I stress the idea of actually having clear meaning based on the text, the audience and the context and the main point of the parable. We have discussed that some try to force meaning into the parables that just cannot be supported.

For example, we said that the parable of the vineyard was really a parable that was an allegory because there were counterparts for each of the characters in the story. In the parable of the wedding invitation this was not so. All of the details did not have an equivalent in the teaching and were not important to the main conclusion such as the nature of the wedding garment.

We must also remember that biblical doctrine cannot be contradicted by a parable.

And for some, this is the case with this parable.

There are some who try to determine some facets of the nature of heaven and hell from this parable. This is a regrettable doctrinal error.

First let me say that this parable is taught to Jews who are still under the Old Covenant.

Although the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, the New covenant is not in effect until the cross and the resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

All that they had that was written were the Old Testament Scriptures and they are very vague about heaven and hell. Jesus brings very clear and absolute teaching about heaven and hell.

One of the errors that is taught from this Scripture is that those who have gone to heaven, in our New Testament sense of being in the presence of Christ until our resurrection, observe what is going on in the world. No where does Scripture give any indication that this is true. Angels watch over humanity, we do not.

Secondly, this story presents two men who are already resurrected in heaven or hell. They have eyes to see and mouths to speak and bodies to sense torment or no torment. Only those who were saved in the Old Covenant era could have had any idea about a resurrection in a body and that was not complete, Abraham being one as Hebrews tells us that he understood that resurrection was possible as he offered Issac for sacrifice.

17* By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;18* it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."19* He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Beyond this the people had no idea of resurrection and what it meant. Jesus taught these things and even His disciples had doubts about until He appeared to them.

If these were real people, then Jesus is still greatly exaggerating the details about heaven and hell to make His principle teaching point, which we have yet to discover.

The parable concerns two men, a rich man and a poor man whose name is Lazarus.

Nothing in the parable leads us to believe that there is anything inherently good or bad about being rich or about being poor. Neither person because of their status in life has any special standing with God.

That has not changed. We are all sinners who deserve nothing but condemnation. Wealthy people sometimes help others and poor people sometimes steal and murder. Wealth or poverty is no excuse for sin.

Consider what J.C. Ryle a pastor from the 19th century said about this ,

The rich are not always bad persons, and do not always go to hell. The poor are not always good people, and do not always go to heaven. We must not rush into the extreme of supposing that it is sinful to be rich. We must not run away with the idea that there is anything wicked in the difference of condition here described, and that God intended all men to be equal. There is nothing in our Lord Jesus Christ's words to warrant any such conclusion. He simply describes things as they are often seen in the world, and as we must expect to see them.

Many in every age have disturbed society by stirring up the poor against the rich, and by preaching the popular doctrine that all men ought to be equal. But so long as the world is under the present order of things this universal equality cannot be attained. Those who speak against the vast inequality of men's fates will doubtless never lack an audience; but so long as human nature is what it is this inequality

cannot be prevented.

19* ¶ "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.

The parable begins however with a description of a wealthy man who prides himself on a display of his wealth. He habitually not just on special occasions dressed in purple. Purple robes were the garments of kings because of the expensive process it took to make purple dye. Remember Lydia in the book of Acts. She was a seller of purple and God opened her eyes to the truth of salvation in Christ Jesus. She would have been a rather successful business woman selling purple dye to the rich.

20. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,

21 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.

Next we have a description of a poor man who obviously also suffers from physical affliction and cannot even keep the dogs away from licking his sores. This is a very sad picture of two different types of people living in the same place. We see the same thing every day in our cities all over the world. Crumbs would be a sufficient diet for Lazarus, but it is obvious that this rich man does nothing to help Lazarus. This is a sin of omission and certainly reminds us of what Jesus taught us concerning how to live as His kingdom disciples. He said, "blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." There is no evidence of mercy from the rich man.

22* "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

Both men die. Lazarus' circumstance in death is obviously rather unique. He is carried away by angels and taken to Abraham's bosom.

Where is Abraham's bosom?

Abraham's bosom is simply a term to describe heaven for Old Covenant God lovers.

It is the Abrahamic Covenant that speaks of salvation for the Old Covenant believer.

All who were justified by faith are the same as Abraham and their sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. They are included at the cross when Jesus dies for all His people past and future at Calvary. We cannot put any significance into the idea of Lazarus being carried away by angels to Abraham's bosom. The Jews did believe this occurred for the righteous at death, but there is no Scripture to substantiate it. Even if Jesus conceded to their idea for the sake of the story, to have the blessing of the Angels accompanying him to heaven is just a way of saying that he was blessed of God. This does not correspond to any other teaching in Scripture to mean that all believers are carried by angels into the

presence of Christ at the time of physical death. It does not mean that it is not possible but we cannot say it is just because of this story. And beside in the story both men are existing in bodies immediately after death and we know this is not what occurs according to Scripture.

The rich man dies and is buried. Does this mean that Lazarus was not buried? Well at least not in the special sense of what a rich mans burial would entail. All of the pomp and circumstance and planning and burial tombs and special monuments would not have been provided for Lazarus.

In Jesus day there was a saying among the Jews:
if a soul is worthy, how many holy troops, or companies,
are ready to join it, and bring it up into paradise? but
if not worthy, how many strange troops are ready to bring
it in the way of hell? these are the troops of the destroying angels.

The rich man suffered more than a physical death. He may have been gloriously buried and had earthly honor at death but he was not in Abraham's bosom. He was suffering in Hades. 23* "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

The rich man is in torment and while suffering he sees Abraham and Lazarus with Him
No one sees people in heaven when they are in hell. There is nothing in Scripture that would support this. But for the sake of the story to illustrate the difference between the two men and to make it clear that those in hell will know a sense of loss and they will suffer and that there is nothing else for them is why Jesus uses this illustration.

Consider how poor the rich man is now and how rich Lazarus is. He who had all now has nothing and he who had nothing now has everything.

It is so obvious based on what Jesus had already taught in the Gospel of Luke that it is the heart that matters in the end. Lazarus even in his horrible state of poverty and suffering was a God lover and the rich man with all his luxury was a God hater.

Brethren don't ever forget that in God's sovereignty there are the rich and the poor. God uses every person and every circumstance for the ultimate purpose of His glory.

Men judge by a different standard than God and it the heart that God looks upon over all other things. If God's purpose is to remove every thing you own from you today will you love him any less? If God afflicts you today will you thank Him or curse Him?

There is a theology that exists today that would say that if these things occurred to you as a Christian that it would be the work of the Devil. That theology has no understanding of the God of the Bible and His sovereignty.

Mans consideration for health and wealth and the value of them both are nothing when compared to the wealth of the grace of God granted to His people. We may all desire more wealth and better health but both may at any time be a stumbling block to a more intimate relationship with Christ.

Ridley and Latimer, two English preachers, had everything taken away from them, cast into prison as criminals, and in time burned at the stake. Bonner and Gardiner, their persecutors for the Church of England, were raised to the highest point of ecclesiastical greatness, enjoyed large incomes, and died content and untroubled in their beds. Yet who can doubt which of the two parties was on the Lord's side?

Baxter, the famous clergyman, was persecuted with savage hostility, and condemned to a long imprisonment by a most unjust judgment. Jeffreys, the Chief Justice who sentenced him, was a man of shameful character without either morality or religion. Baxter was sent to jail and Jeffreys was loaded with honors. Yet who can doubt which was the good man of the two, the Chief Justice Jeffreys or the author of the Christ honoring book, "Saint's Everlasting Rest"?

One man pampers his body with every possible delicacy, and clothes it in the richest and softest apparel. Another scarcely has enough food to eat, and seldom enough clothes to put on. Yet both are hurrying on to a day when "ashes to ashes, and dust to dust," will be proclaimed over them, and fifty years later no one will be able to say, "These are the rich man's bones, and these are the bones of the poor, for they will both be nothing but dust.

Death is common to all men and all men are made common in death.

24* "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25* "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'

There s a time for mercy and a time for judgement. Men have opportunity to show mercy to others but all too often fail when the opportunity is present because they think always of themselves first. The rich man had all his comfort in his earthly life. Lazarus had all his suffering. God is the great leveler in these matters. And so the rich man now suffers.

26* 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

His plea for mercy receives no sympathy and a clear fact is established. Once this earthly life is over, the result cannot be changed concerning eternal matters. There is no second chance, there is no earning a parole or pardon once condemnation is complete.

27* "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house--

28 for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'29* "But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'30* "But he said, 'No,

father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31* "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

It is far too late for someone to consider the spiritual consequences of even our loved ones once we are gone from this life. The rich man pleads that Lazarus be sent to his family to warn them about hell. But Abraham's response is they have the Law and the Prophets. What they need to now about salvation is contained in their words. What an Israelite needed to know about salvation before the cross was contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. But even more so Jesus is saying if they do not listen to them then they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.

And here is the main point of the story. Jesus will rise and prove to be the resurrection and the life and He will be rejected as will His disciples who preach that truth.

They who are spiritually resurrected in Christ will come and warn of hell but they will not persuade many compared to the whole nation of Israel.

Even as Jesus has preached His own death burial and resurrection as a fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, the Jews even after His resurrection will on the whole reject Christ even with the proof of His resurrection before them. They will take pride that they are the children of Abraham and yet will not believe as Abraham believed.

God is the judge of the heart. It does not matter whether ones says they are sons of Abraham. How they live according to the truth of God word is what God judges.

A second application for us is to be warned of selfishness and a lack of being merciful.

It is an act of mercy to look upon those who, regardless of their station in life, are in darkness and are ignorant of the truth of the Gospel.

We are also to look upon those who are suffering in this life and use it as an opportunity to be merciful by doing what we can to help them in their distress even if they reject the Gospel.

We are told to go into all the world and preach the gospel. That means to all kinds of people, rich poor, and of every ethnic origin as God puts people in our path.

As Christians we better not deny crumbs to those who are in need as we have ability to help.

I quote again from J. C. Ryle,

"It is not enough that we are able to say, "I live a moral and respectable life. I pay every one his due. I discharge all the affairs of life with integrity. I attend church, I read the Bible, I pray to God." There remains behind another question, to which the Bible requires an answer. "To whom do you live? to yourself or to Christ? What is the great end, aim, object, and ruling motive in your life?" Let men call the question extreme if they please. For myself, I can find nothing short of this in Paul's words: "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live

for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” [2 Corinthians 5:15] And I draw the conclusion, that if, like the rich man, we live only to ourselves, we will destroy our souls.”

Brethren I close with these questions this morning.

Am I selfish or selfless?

Regardless of what appears externally to others, is my heart desiring God and obedience to Him in all things as the first concern of my life.

Do I cultivate the attitude of mercy in my life?

Am I grieved when I see the mistreatment of others?

The rich man was faulted and condemned for his sin of omission. He showed no mercy to Lazarus. Lazarus suffered his entire life but was shown the mercy of God.

Regardless of your position in life, do you know the mercy of God through salvation in Christ Jesus or will you end up like the rich man, satisfied in this life and wanting in eternity?

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