

## Lessons The Rich Man Learned After He Died

(19) *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"* (Luke 16:19-31).

The preceding verses, to some extent, lifts the curtain or veil separating life from death, and gives us an opportunity to look beyond this life and to peer into that region of departed spirits. Herein we read of two men, how they fared in this life, the death of each, and their greatly contrasting circumstances beyond the grave.

The context indicates that Jesus was speaking to "*the Pharisees, who were lovers of money,*" and who "*derided*" Jesus after they "*heard*" Jesus speak, Luke 16:14. Some say these verses are simply a parable, and thus seek to minimize the significance of what is herein stated. However, the word "parable" is translated from the Greek *parabole*, and it denotes the action of placing one thing along side another for the purpose of comparison. For example, Jesus (the master teacher) often introduced a very important lesson by saying "*the kingdom of heaven is like,*" and then would identify that to which "*the kingdom of heaven*" was likened. Cf. Matt. 13:24,31,33,44,45,47, etc. However, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus did not draw such a comparison. He simply began by saying "*There was a certain rich man,*" and "*there was a certain beggar named Lazarus*" (Luke 16:19-20), But even if these verses do constitute a parable, nothing is changed in the message communicated. Wm. Taylor "hit the nail on the head" when he said a parable "is an outward symbol of an inward reality." Parables were not designed to set forth fiction, but to describe **reality**. And this fact makes the story of the rich man and Lazarus even more compelling!

It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast between two people (both in life and in death) than the rich man and Lazarus. The "*rich man*" was "*clothed in purple and fine linen;*" he "*fared sumptuously every day*" (Luke 16:19). Such clothing was generally worn by royalty, and it takes great wealth to fare "*sumptuously every day.*" By this world's standards, the "*rich man*" was a great success, and it is worthy of note that nothing was said in the text to indicate that he was guilty of vice or immorality. On the other hand, there was Lazarus who was "*full of sores,*" who evidently was crippled, for he was "*laid*" at the rich man's gate. But his needs were not alleviated, for he desired "*to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table,*" v. 21. His only real comforters were the dogs which "*came and licked his sores!*" Apparently there was no one to treat or bind up the sores — sores which had to be running sores, or else the dogs

would not have “licked” them.

As will be the case for each of us, both of these men died. Lazarus died “*and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom;*” the “*rich man also died and was buried,*” Luke 16:22. Nothing was said about the burial of Lazarus, whereas specific mention is made of the burial of the rich man. It was probably with great ceremony and pomp, with the grave marked in such a way that all passers by would know that the body of a great and successful person was therein interred.

The contrasts between these two men continue. Lazarus was “*carried by the angels*” (those heavenly pall bearers!) *to Abraham’s bosom,*” an expression denoting paradise conditions. But the rich man was “*in torments in hades,*” and he cried out, saying, “*I am tormented in this flame*” (Luke 16:22-24).

Incidentally, hades, is the unseen region of departed spirits. It is where the spirit goes after it departs from the body. Part of hades is reserved for the righteous, and another portion is reserved for the unrighteous, both of which are separated by a “*great gulf,*” which forbids any crossing from one side to the other (Luke 16:26). Illustrating this point, we state that when Jesus died, His body was buried in Joseph’s “*new tomb*” (John 19:38-42), whereas His spirit went to “*hades,*” where it remained until it was reunited with his body when He was resurrected (Acts 2:30-32).

If space permitted, there is much more that could be said regarding the hades realm, the region of departed spirits, as well as analyzing further the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus. However, we must confine further remarks to the subject at hand; namely, that of noting some “Lessons the Rich Man Learned After He Died.” **He Learned that:**

**1. Death is not annihilation;** it does not terminate our existence. After death Lazarus was “*comforted,*” whereas the rich man was “*tormented*” (v. 25).

**2. Consciousness survives the death of the body.** Lazarus could not have been “*comforted,*” and the rich man could not have been “*tormented*” if they were unconscious!

**3. Earthly riches are of no benefit after death.** The rich man, at death, left all his material goods behind. Indeed, “*we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out,*” I Tim. 6:7).

**4. There are no second chances after death.** The rich man cried out in vain for “*mercy*” and wanted Abraham to “*send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue*” (Luke 16:24), but his request was denied.

**5. Universalism (the theory that all men will be saved) is false.** The rich man, after death, was forever lost.

**6. Memory survives the death of the body.** When the rich man cried out for mercy, he was told to “*remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things*” (v. 25).

**7. Torment is real!** The rich man did not merely imagine that he was being tormented; he was “*in torments,*” v. 23!

**8. The time will come when it will be too late to pray!** With great earnest, the rich man cried out for help (no man ever prayed with greater passion), but his petitions were not answered.

**9. The time for obedience is while we live in the flesh.** The rich man requested that Lazarus be sent to warn his five surviving brothers, “*lest they also come to this place of torment,*” but he was told that “*they have Moses and the prophets let them hear them*” (v. 29). But he replied saying, “*no, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead they will repent,*” and then he was told “*if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead*” (v. 39-41). At the time Jesus spoke these words, the law of Moses was yet in effect; indeed, they had “*Moses and the prophets,*” and they were obligated to heed their teachings. We, on the other hand, have Christ and the apostles,” and we must heed what they taught. If we delay obedience until we die, it will be eternally too late.

Yes, the rich man learned much after he died, but it was too late. I am impressed with the words of George DeHoff regarding the rich man and his family; he said “what a family — six brothers, one in hades and five on the way! No one could say this was a successful family!”

**Conclusion:** We need to learn what the rich man learned after he died. However, it behooves us to learn these truths **now** — while we are alive and in the flesh, for one day we, too, will die (Heb. 9:27), and if we want to be “*comforted*” instead of “*tormented*” we must learn these lessons and act accordingly. —B. Witherington