

## **Lazarus and the rich man – Luke 16:19-31**

This sobering tale given by Christ is well known by many. The account speaks of a poor beggar called Lazarus, who sat at the door of a rich man each day, hoping to gain the crumbs from the table of the sumptuous feasts put on by the wealthy man.

This man's wealth was significant, as he dressed in the most expensive and regal of fabrics that was 'purple and fine linen'. The man's affluence was plentiful enough to provide poor Lazarus with all the things that he needed, all without making any indentation to the pockets of the rich man. However, the rich man never made any attempt to bring any aid or relief to poor Lazarus. Such a wilful refusal to share his abundance with those who were lacking, goes against the nature of God, who 'withholds no good thing' from those that walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11).

Yet, some may argue that maybe the rich man was simply unaware of poor Lazarus, and that had he known about the sad plight of this broken-down beggar, he would've helped him. Sadly, the evidence speaks otherwise. As we see in verse 24, the rich man has died and gone to hell for his defiance against the Word of God. Here he implores Abraham to send Lazarus down to him to bring him just a finger drop of water. This minute amount of cooling liquid was so longed for, out of the intensity of torment that the rich man endured persistently in hell.

As you may have noticed, the rich man asks for Lazarus by name to be sent to him. To know Lazarus' name, he must have been familiar with the man and therefore know of his sad situation when he lived in mortal days. So, we see that the rich man's refusal to help suffering Lazarus was tragically a knowing refusal, all whilst he had ample to resources to aid the poor beggar.

Now some may say that whilst the rich man's refusal to help Lazarus whilst the two were alive was awful, it's still not as bad as eternally punishing him for a crime done in the briefness of time on Earth. Isn't there some imbalance of justice here? An interesting thought, but before anyone races after this idea that God may judge unfairly, let's review the details of the case further.

Lazarus had been a beggar at the door of the rich man for a long time, long enough for the rich man to know of him and indeed his name! Lazarus' condition was so severe, that the rich man's guard dogs (hardly known for their gentleness!) took pity on him by licking his sores to offer some relief. Here we see one level of condemnation against the rich man. That even the guard dogs, who lack the conscientiousness of man, could discern that Lazarus was suffering and moved to bring some small degree of relief to his plight. How selfish and cruel must have Lazarus been, at his very core, for even aggressive guard dogs to be more compassionate to Lazarus than he was?!

When Lazarus dies, he is taken up by angels to be embraced by Abraham and thus be comforted after all the years of pain and misery he suffered. Whereas the rich man, awakens to find himself in hell, forever tormented for his wilful disregard of God's Word. Let us remember, that the Levitical Law gave clear instruction for the wealthy to provide necessary

care for the impoverished. That Law had been established for 1500 years by this point, so the rich man could again, not plead ignorance on the matter. He lived in knowing defiance of God's command to care of the poor and lived instead for his own pleasure. Now the time for reckoning on his crimes had come.

The rich man thus finds himself in hell for his actions and wilful refusal to submit to the Word of God. The torment is so severe, as previously mentioned, that when he throws his eyes upwards in agony, he sees Abraham embracing Lazarus. Between them however, is a large chasm that cannot be closed, as the time for repentance has closed.

The rich man cries out for Abraham to send Lazarus with a drop of water and place it on his flame dried tongue. Do you notice something here? Something that speaks of the still truly wicked heart of the rich man...Something that God knows and has judged to be worthy of eternal punishment. It is the wilful refusal to change. The rich man, though in the torment of hell, can still see those in Paradise. Part of the torment of the wicked seems to be that they are made aware of the glory that they spurned whilst they lived in sin on Earth in their mortal days.

The rich man can see Lazarus in the comforting arms of Abraham, and yet the rich man does something that confirms that God's seemingly harsh judgment of Him is truly just and wise. The rich man knows Lazarus by name and had likely seen him many times in the flesh. However, he had never laid eyes on Abraham before as Abraham would've lived nearly 2000 years before him. The rich man does not cry out to the man he knows, but to Abraham. Why? Remember that Abraham was an extremely wealthy and powerful man, a man who kings gave respect to. The rich man was quick to recognise the prestige of Abraham, a man he'd never seen before, over the recognition of a poor beggar that he'd known in the flesh. The rich man, even in this torment of hell, could not bring himself to recognise the humble and lowly Lazarus. That coldness of pride and refusal to do God's will still sat deep in his heart, and so his punishment would continue on to match his continuing pride.

Furthermore, note how the rich man, still wilfully refusing to speak directly to the once beggar that is Lazarus, instructs Abraham to use Lazarus as a servant and place the requested water on his tongue. Again, the superior nature of the rich man is on full display and refuses to be quenched even by the fires of hell! Thus, the chasm between hell and paradise is fixed, because the proud hearts of those in hell will never move one inch towards the selfless love of God.

As we can see then, God's judgment of the rich man is wise and just. An eternal punishment to fit an eternal crime. The rich man even in the deepest of torments, would not relinquish his superiority and pride of heart. As a result, his own actions would dictate his placing in hell for eternity.

It is a sobering tale to all those who live in wilful defiance of God's Word, and instead entrench themselves in their own proud ways. We must thank God that He broke our pride, so that we will not cry out for water in our thirst, but we will be in Paradise just like Lazarus. In that spirit of thankfulness, let us seek to warn others of the peril they face, and that the hour of salvation is now! Amen.