

Luke 16:19-31

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Jesus tells the Pharisees “The Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus.” It is a story about a rich and a poor man who die. Both go to Hades—the place of the dead. The poor man is brought to paradise/Abraham’s bosom and lives on in a state of comfort. The rich man whose master was money (rather than God) is in a place of agony where his riches offer no aid. The formerly rich man calls across a gulf to Abraham with two requests—both of which Abraham denies. The first request is to send Lazarus to him with a drop of water to cool his tongue from the flames. The second request is for Abraham to send Lazarus to his five godless brothers to warn them to repent and avoid the suffering. Abraham tells him it would do no good, because if they do not listen to what God has already spoken through the scriptures, they will not listen to what someone says who has returned from the dead.

There is no apparent parallel for this parable in the gospel accounts.

Luke then records Jesus saying a parable. It is commonly known as “The *Rich Man* and *Lazarus*.” This parable seems to have been offered to an audience composed of Jesus’s disciples and the Pharisees who scoffed at Him (Luke 16:14).

Before we begin, it is important to mention that *poor Lazarus* is not the beloved friend of Jesus who *died* and was raised *from the dead*. That Lazarus was not a poor beggar. That Lazarus’s story is told in John 11:1-46. However, it is interesting that Jesus chose the name of *Lazarus* for the figure in this parable in which resurrection is discussed. If there is a significance connecting these two stories, it is not apparent.

Jesus’s reason for choosing the name *Lazarus* for this story could be because of the meaning of the name *Lazarus*, which is “Whom God helps.” This fits the basic idea that God helps the humble while He scoffs at the scoffers (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5b). Jesus does not name the *rich man*, perhaps to allow anyone to place themselves in the place of that character.

Jesus had just rebuked these Pharisees for flaunting God’s law and justifying their wickedness, calling their sin righteousness. He warned them that God knows your hearts and the human opinions of justice are of no consequence in the sight of God (Luke 16:15). And He reminded them that God’s Law is more enduring than the earth they stood on or the air they breathed (Luke 16:16-17) before mentioning the matter of divorce as one way they violate His commands while claiming to be righteous because they followed their own system of religious regulations (Luke 16:18).

One of the main points of “The Parable of the *Rich Man* and *Lazarus*” is that the consequences of our response to God’s Laws will carry over to the afterlife. Moral consequences do not end with our physical death. Rather, they appear to be more fully revealed and intensified in the next *life*. This point is best seen when it is understood within the context in which the parable is presented. The basic context of the parable was the Pharisees’ scoffing at Jesus’s teachings on

earthly wealth (Luke 16:1-14), and Jesus (who is God) highlighting the incredible durability of God's Law (Luke 16:15-18).

The application of this point of the durability of God's law is that now (in this *life*) is the time to *listen to* God and follow His commands in order to experience better outcomes later in the afterlife. The implication is that those who *do not listen to* God and follow His word (in this *life*), will experience *torment* (after physical death).

The perspective we have in this life and who we *listen to* will matter a great deal in the next. Will we *listen to* men who highly esteem and put their trust in earthly riches that will fail (Luke 16:15, 16:9)? Or will we *listen to* God and His *prophets* and faithfully choose His perspective in how we live and serve (Luke 16:10, 16:13)? Jesus gave this parable prior to His death and resurrection, and God's sending of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers (Acts 2:4). We will discuss the possible applications to New Testament believers later in the commentary.

The Parable's Prologue

"The Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*" begins with a prologue which describes the earthly life of two figures: *a rich man; and a poor man named Lazarus*.

The *rich man* lived a materially comfortable *life*.

He habitually dressed in purple and fine linen. The *rich man's* clothes were expensive and luxurious. *Purple* was a symbol of royalty in the ancient world, because its dyes were rare and difficult to manufacture. The *rich man* is not described as royalty in this parable, but the fact that he was able to afford to *habitually wear purple* clothing indicates that he was ultra-wealthy. *Fine linen* was soft and comfortable as opposed to scratchy course clothing. It too was also the clothing of *the rich* and well-connected (Luke 7:25).

Jesus says that this *rich man* delighted in these material luxuries. *He was joyously living in splendor every day*. The Bible does not condemn or call it sinful for people to enjoy material wealth. God gives wealth, in part, for our enjoyment (1 Timothy 6:17). But scripture is clear that we should never put our trust or place our identity in such things. Instead, we should generously use our wealth to serve others and so secure a good foundation in the New Heaven and the New Earth (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

(For global perspective: American households who earn around \$60,000.00 a year in 2022—roughly the national average—have more wealth than 91% of every other household on the planet).

The second figure in this parable was *a poor man named Lazarus*.

Lazarus was apparently a lame beggar, who *was laid at the rich man's gate* to beg for money and provisions. While *the rich man lived in splendor*, *Lazarus was longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table*. In other words, the food that *the rich man* threw away would have been *Lazarus's* best meals. Moreover, *Lazarus* suffered some sort of

affliction and *was covered with horrible sores*. Jesus adds that *even the dogs continually came up and licked his sores*. This suggests that *his sores* were open, untreated, and festering.

In this manner *the rich man and poor Lazarus* lived their lives.

And thus concludes the prologue to this parable.

The Parable's Transition

Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

Jesus says that when *Lazarus died*, he *was carried away by angels to Abraham's bosom*. It was *Lazarus's* immaterial self (*his spirit and soul*) that *was carried away by the angels*. *Angels* are spiritual beings who serve God. Apparently one of their tasks is to help bring the souls of those who physically died to Paradise.

Abraham's bosom, as described by Jesus, is a place or region of *Hades*. It is likely the same as "Paradise."

Hades is apparently the place where people go when they die to await their final judgment at the end of the age (Matthew 25:31-36; Revelation 20:11-13). *Hades* has two compartments for the dead, separated by a *great, uncrossable chasm*. One compartment of *Hades* is *Abraham's bosom*, depicted as a place of *comfort*, with a pleasant *cool* climate and *water*. It is possible that *Abraham's bosom* is the *place of Paradise* to where Jesus promised the penitent thief on the cross he would go after death, where Jesus would be with him (Luke 23:43). The other compartment of *Hades* is a *place of torment, agony, and flame*. This is possibly the same as "Tartarus" (2 Peter 2:4).

[To learn more about Hades, please see "What is Hell? Hades and Tartarus in the Bible".](#)

Abraham was the patriarch of Israel. He was a man of faith, and for his faith, God accounted him as righteous (Genesis 15:16; Romans 4:3). God blessed and promised that He would make him a *father* of many nations (Genesis 17:4-8). The Greek word translated as *bosom* is "kolpos." "Kolpos" is an interesting word. It literally describes the front of the body between the arms. In other words, it describes the space of embrace or the span that a person can carry or hold in their arms against their body. Similarly, "kolpos" can also mean the loose fold of a garment above the chest that is bound by a girdle or sash and is used for carrying heavy things. In this sense, "kolpos" is like a large pocket used to transfer things from one *place* to another.

The literal image that the term *Abraham's bosom* invokes is what *Abraham* carries or embraces. It is what *Abraham's* arms or the fold of his garment hold and carry from one *place* to another. And the term, *Abraham's bosom*, is used to describe the holding *place* that carries the souls of those who were righteous by faith (like *Abraham*) until the end of this earth until the New Heavens and the New Earth are ready to be inhabited after the final judgment.

Though this parable does not explicitly say it, the parable's context implies that *Abraham's bosom* is the *place* where people who lived by faith in God (like *Abraham* did) will go when they die while they await their final judgment. And likewise, the *place of agony, torment, and flame* is the *place* where those who disregarded God and His laws through defiant scoffing or neglect are sent.

As Jesus describes these places *in Hades* within this parable, we see that neither *Abraham's bosom* nor *the place of agony* eradicate a person's identity or consciousness. Selfhood remains intact after we die. It is also clear that sensations of pain and pleasure can also be experienced.

The surrounding context of the parable also supports this implication that *Abraham's bosom* is presented as a place for those who served God as their master and the *place of torment* is for those who served money as their master (Luke 16:13). *The rich man* described in this parable seemed to be only concerned with the pleasures that money could buy, and he ignored God's law. And after *he died*, *he* understood that his foolish disregard for God's laws was the cause of his *being in torment* and not in Paradise. Moreover, Jesus spoke this parable as a warning to what would become of the Pharisees who loved money and had just scoffed at Jesus's teaching (Luke 16:14).

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.

Poor Lazarus was tended to by angels and carried away to Abraham's bosom when he died, but when the rich man died, he did not go to Abraham's bosom. He ended up in the place of torment in Hades.

It is interesting that Jesus points out that *the rich man was buried*, but He makes no mention of *poor Lazarus* as being *buried*. This may indicate two things. First, as part of the parable it would be natural for *the rich man* to be *buried* with an elaborate funeral. His many friends and the world *he* lived in would have taken note of his passing and *buried* him with honor. While only a few people would give much thought to *poor Lazarus's* passing.

The second thing Jesus may have meant when He said *the rich man was buried* is that all his earthly hopes and ambitions, and all the benefit of his accumulated wealth came to an end when *he died* and was *buried* with him. His riches and the daily *splendor* they once brought him could help him no longer—they now failed him (Luke 16:9). Both interpretations of *buried* could apply at the same time.

Equally interesting is the fact that Jesus never describes this *man* as *rich in Hades*. The term *rich man* is only used to describe *him* as *he* lived and *was buried* on earth. The rest of the parable uses the masculine pronouns "he" and "him" to refer to *the formerly rich man in Hades*. The reason for this is plain enough: *the man* was no longer *rich*. (We will attempt to reflect this important change as commentary continues).

The formerly rich man had two requests for Father Abraham. The first was for Abraham to have mercy on him. The second was for Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers so they would repent.

The formerly Rich Man's First Request: "Have Mercy on Me"

The remainder of this parable focuses on *the formerly rich man* and his perspective as *he is in the place of torment in Hades*. And it is from his perspective that Jesus draws His main points. His main points were:

1. The master we serve in this life will, at least in part, determine our state of being in the next life. Do you serve a master who can take care of you *in Hades*, or do you serve a master that is *buried* with you when you die?
2. If you won't *listen to* and follow God by faith like *Abraham* did and you ignore His laws as given by His *prophets*, such as *Moses*, you also will ignore and scoff at the teachings of God's Messiah (Jesus) whom He sent to earth to die and rise *from the dead*.

When *the formerly rich man* arrived *in Hades*, *he was in the place of torment* (literally *being in torment*). From *this place of torment*, *the formerly rich man lifted up his eyes and he saw Abraham far away and he saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom*.

The phrase *lifted up his eyes* could be literal and/or figurative. The *place of torment in Hades* could be below *Abraham's bosom in Hades* and therefore *the formerly rich man* literally looked *up* in order to see *Lazarus*. Figuratively, the circumstances of the two men were now reversed (Matthew 19:30). *The formerly rich man* was now *in pain and agony*, while *poor Lazarus* was in a place of *comfort* and in this sense *the formerly rich man* was now beneath *Lazarus* and looked *up* to him. Both the literal and figurative senses of *lifted up his eyes* could apply at the same time.

And it is from this posture that *the formerly rich man* made his first request to *Abraham*.

The formerly rich man cried out to Abraham in Paradise, far away across the great chasm of Hades. He said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me."

The first request was for *Abraham* to *have mercy on him*. The *formerly rich man* saw both *Lazarus*, whom he recognized, and *Abraham* who *he* would only have known by reputation, that *he called out to Father Abraham*. This is most likely because *he* recognized *Father Abraham* as an authority *in Hades* and the person who would be the most likely to render aid. The fact that *Abraham* is still recognizable and retains his identity is noteworthy.

The *mercy* which *the formerly rich man* requested of *Father Abraham* was for him to *send Lazarus* to him so that *he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue*.

This simple act would mean a great deal of relief to *the formerly rich man*, for *he was in agony in this flame*. It is possibly comparable in meaning to taking the effort to go retrieve a cup of *cool water* from a well and giving it to someone in Jesus's name. Christ promised that anyone who

does this will not lose his reward (Mark 9:41). *The formerly rich man* was not merciful to *poor Lazarus* when they both lived on earth. We know he did not bring the *poor* sick man into his home and take care of him. The most we are told that *the formerly rich man* did for *poor Lazarus* was to perhaps allow him to eat *the crumbs* that fell from his table from time to time. Now as *the formerly rich man* was unmerciful to *poor Lazarus*, he was now receiving the same measure of mercy in Hades (Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:38).

From across *the great chasm* of Hades in paradise, *Father Abraham* answered *the formerly rich man* who was in the *place of torment*. It is interesting that they are able to communicate across *the chasm*. He addressed *the formerly rich man* as *Child*. This indicates that *the man* was Jewish, and a descendant of *Father Abraham*.

Abraham said, 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.

It is notable that *Abraham* seems to know the deeds of the *formerly rich man*, even though *Abraham* has been dead for roughly two thousand years at the telling of this story. We are not told how *Abraham* gained this knowledge. Revelation contains another glimpse of earthly knowledge by those who are in heaven, when saints martyred for their testimony ask Jesus how long He is going to wait before He judges those who murdered them (Revelation 6:9-10).

The word *remember*, spoken by *Abraham*, is important because it draws a clear link to each man's respective *place in Hades* to their *life* on earth. This is another reminder that how we live on earth matters in the next life (Matthew 10:32-33; 19:28-29; Luke 9:23-26; Romans 8:17-18; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 9:23-27; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Colossians 3:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Hebrews 10:35-39; 11:6; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:3-6; 4:12-19; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-28; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21).

The connection between this current *life* and the *life* after death in Hades is explained by *Father Abraham*. He pointed out to the *formerly rich man* how both *he* and *poor Lazarus* found the good that they sought: the *formerly rich man* sought and found luxury on earth; *poor Lazarus* sought true riches in the next *life* (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; 16:10-11).

The formerly rich man had received the full extent of his reward of the good things that he sought in his *life*. He got to enjoy the *splendor* of fine clothes, etc. But those things were buried with him and were no more. There was no more *splendor* in the rewards he sought. The good of those things had run out and was no more. *Abraham* told *the formerly rich man* that you have received all your good. In other words, "You had gotten all you had wanted, you have had your reward in full, but now it's gone."

Now *poor Lazarus* was receiving his good. Apparently *poor Lazarus* followed the principles that Jesus advised His disciples to seek treasure from their Father in heaven and not from men or the things of earth (Matthew 6:1; 6:19-21; Luke 16:8-13). *Poor Lazarus* seems to have trusted God through the trials of his sufferings—things we typically consider bad, but actually working for our eternal weight of glory beyond all measure (2 Corinthians 4:17). He was now being comforted and rewarded with the crown of life (James 1:2-4, 9-12). In the parable, *poor Lazarus*

was now receiving *the good* that he sought during this *life*. The formerly *poor man* was being helped by God (the meaning of his name, “Whom God helps”).

The formerly rich man sought temporary *good*, which he enjoyed for a time but now failed him and left him in agony. *Poor Lazarus* endured his suffering (like Job) and sought to please God and was now receiving the lasting and true *good* he hoped to gain. Each man was ultimately reaping the consequences of what they did in life. It would be unjust to alter things *now*.

Abraham told *the formerly rich man*: *now Lazarus is being comforted here in Abraham’s bosom, and you are there in agony*. This was a firm denial of his first request.

This place *in Hades* is not “the eternal lake of fire” mentioned in Revelation 19-20, because *Hades* will be thrown into the lake of fire when the old heaven and earth are destroyed (Revelation 20:14).

[To learn more about the Lake of Fire, please see: “What is Hell? The Eternal Punishment and the Lake of Fire”.](#)

After *Abraham* gave *the formerly rich man* a firm answer that *Lazarus* would not leave paradise to relieve his *agony*, *Abraham* gave an additional detail that demonstrated why this was impossible.

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.

This detail is interesting and important. It is interesting because even though *the formerly rich man* could see people across the chasm in *Abraham’s bosom* and communicate with *Abraham*, neither side could cross the *chasm* to the other. Whether this *chasm* is a literal gulf separating them or it was a dimensional separation is unclear.

In addition to being an interesting detail it is an important detail to include. Ironically, it is important because it adds virtually nothing to the story. The reason Jesus included it then is because he was explaining how the actual *Hades* is laid out—with *Abraham’s bosom* being a *place* for the faithful *dead* and a *place of torment* for the unfaithful *dead* with a wide *chasm* separating these two compartments. It is unlikely that Jesus would have added this thought unless it meant something—and since it is redundant to the parable, the most likely conclusion is that Jesus was not only speaking in metaphor but giving real details about the afterlife in the parable.

The formerly rich man’s second request of Abraham: “Send Lazarus to warn my brothers.”

Being denied his first request for *Abraham* to have *mercy* on him, *the formerly rich man* asked a second request of *Father Abraham*.

Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

The formerly rich man's request was considerate of those he loved, namely his five brothers in his father's house. He did not want them to experience the torment that he was experiencing. And he knew that if they continued to live their lives as he had lived his, that they would be sent to the place of agony within Hades and not Abraham's bosom. This was why he asked Abraham to send poor Lazarus to them from the dead—to warn them to repent and change their ways before it was too late. Again, it is notable that the formerly rich man remembers his life on earth, and has compassion for his family who still live there.

It is interesting that the number of *brothers* in this parable is six—the formerly rich man plus his five brothers. Six is often a symbolic number for man or humanity in the Bible. (God created man on the sixth day of creation—Genesis 1:26-31). This could be a way to suggest how the *brothers* were self-sufficient and foolishly believed that they were able to take care of themselves and did not need God. This was the attitude of the Pharisees who are represented by the formerly rich man's brothers in this parable. The Pharisees had just scoffed at Jesus and did not listen to God's Son and Messiah. Neither the six brothers, nor these Pharisees, seemed to follow the wisdom of Solomon:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.”
(Proverbs 3:5)

Abraham reminded the formerly rich man, that his brothers had Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. The law of Moses gave God's commands and the Prophets delivered God's warnings to Israel. Together, the expression Moses and the Prophets was a reference to the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament. These laws and prophecies were available to his brothers and were a sufficient warning to them to live according to God's will.

The phrase, *Moses and the Prophets*, is also a reference to what Jesus had just said to the Pharisees a few lines earlier when He told them, “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it” (Luke 16:16).

The formerly rich man feared that his brothers would be unlikely to listen to the authorities of Moses and the Prophets, perhaps because they scoffed at God's word (like the Pharisees). The formerly rich man pleaded with Abraham, “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!”

It would truly be remarkable if someone returned from the dead and warned the living what the afterlife was like and how to best prepare for it. “Surely,” the formerly rich man thought, “even scoffers such as my brothers would listen to someone who came back to life from the dead, and respect what such a remarkable person shared, and then they would repent and be spared the agony.”

Abraham had more disappointing news for *the formerly rich man*.

“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

Within this parable *Father Abraham*’s answer was clear. *Even if someone* were to rise *from the dead* to warn his *brothers* it would do *them* no good if they ignore or scoff at God’s teachings in the scriptures. *The formerly rich man*’s second request was also denied.

Of course, all who reject the message of Jesus are actually demonstrating the truth of this exclamation by Abraham, for Jesus did rise from the dead.

The Points of the Parable

One of Jesus’s points was that those who do not listen to the scriptures will not listen to the resurrected Messiah.

Within *Father Abraham*’s explanation of how it would do no good to *send someone* who *rises from the dead* to warn *the formerly rich man*’s *brothers* if they do not listen to the scriptures was a subtle but powerful message to the scoffing Pharisees.

Jesus would be that *Someone* who *rises from the dead*. He was the One who fulfilled the Law of *Moses* (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Matthew 5:17) and the Messiah whom *the Prophets* foretold (Matthew 1:22-23; 12:17-5; 21:5; John 1:45). Even though the Pharisees taught the scriptures, they did not follow them or *listen to Moses and the Prophets*.

Earlier Jesus rebuked the hypocritical Pharisees for disregarding God’s commandments to act justly and love God and others,

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”
(Luke 11:42)

The Pharisees had just now scoffed at what Jesus (God’s Son and Messiah) was teaching about the life to come (Luke 16:14). And sadly, many of them, along with the Sadducees, would continue to reject Jesus and His teachings after He rose from the dead and try to eradicate the message of the Gospel and His followers (Matthew 28:11-15; Acts 6:9-8:3).

This was one of Jesus’s main points in this parable: If you *do not listen to* the scriptures, you will not *listen to* the Messiah even after He has been raised *from the dead*. If you reject one, you will reject the other also.

There is a warning in this point for readers today. We too may be tempted to tell ourselves that we would *listen to* and follow Jesus if only He were to appear before us today. But as Abraham told *the formerly rich man* in the Lord’s parable, if we do not listen to what God tells us to do in

the scriptures of *Moses and the Prophets* (and the Gospels and Epistles) then we would not really be interested to *listen to* the resurrected Lord if He were to speak to us in person. To tell ourselves otherwise would be to adopt the empty delusions of *the formerly rich man*.

This point not only foreshadowed how Jesus would rise *from the dead*, it was also a prophecy that the Pharisees would continue to scoff at His teaching and reject Him as the Messiah, even after His resurrection. We observe this to be the case in Acts, where the religious authorities continued to reject the kingdom message of Jesus even after He raised *from the dead*.

The second point of “The Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*” is that the consequences of our choices regarding whether to follow God’s Laws carry over to the afterlife.

Moral consequences do not end with physical death. Rather, they appear to be more fully revealed and intensified. Decisions on how to live in the physical world (faithfully or unfaithfully, listening to God or scoffing at Him) will affect the experience of *life* in the next (in comfort or agony). Jesus gave this parable prior to His death and resurrection, and God’s sending of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers (Acts 2:4).

We will now discuss the possible applications of this parable to New Testament believers.

Possible Applications for New Testament Believers

Since “The Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*” is a parable and not plain speech, it is important to take it in that context. However, Jesus seemed to add details for our enlightenment regarding the afterlife.

As previously mentioned, Hades is a place where the spirits of humans go after they die. The Greek word Hades comes from Greek mythology, where it described a place with two compartments, one for the righteous and one for the unrighteous. Apparently Greek culture had remembered ancient knowledge sufficiently to retain something that was close enough for Jesus’s use. It seems likely that Jesus added His own labels for the compartments, rather than using the Greek names, in order to appropriately revise the Greek concept to adapt it to what is true. Instead of “Elysium,” Jesus called the paradise division “Abraham’s bosom.” And He made clear that those in paradise would be those who sought their reward in obedience to God while living on the earth.

Does *Hades* still function for New Testament believers? We are told that *Hades* will exist until it is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). We are told that when believers die, they enter the presence of the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). We are also told the Lord is on His throne in heaven. Given that we are being given glimpses of a spiritual dimension, it seems unlikely we can draw a complete picture. It does not seem material whether Hades is still applicable to New Testament believers, but the principles in Jesus’s “Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*” are repeated in the New Testament.

First, we know that God will ultimately save every believer from the eternal fire at the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-33; Romans 8:29-39). This is important, as God will never reject His

children. According to Jewish tradition, the formerly *rich man* that was recognized as a child of *Abraham* could have spent only a time *in Hades* for a period of refinement. That position might be supported with biblical verses such as Romans 11:26, and God's covenant with Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). However, that does not seem consistent with the details of the parable, since there are details about *Hades* and *Abraham's bosom*, but no indication that the formerly *rich man* is being refined, which would include being brought to repentance. *He* just wants the pain to stop, and is looking for *comfort*, which is the same basic attitude that brought *him* the condemnation of *Hades* in the first place.

It is not clear *if Hades/Abraham's bosom* has any function for New Testament believers. But with respect to New Testament believers, there is no need to sort out details about either, since the New Testament gives sufficient details of *life* after death to create a good working model that leads to the same practical application as this "Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*": faithfulness *in this life* will pay enormous dividends in the next.

The New Testament asserts that all who have believed upon Jesus will be with Him forever in heaven, even if they are unfaithful in the way they live their lives (2 Timothy 2:13). However, this does not mean that God will spare us from the consequence of our choices, including disobedience. The Bible tells us to expect terrifying judgment if we go on sinning willfully after we have received knowledge of the truth (Hebrews 10:26-27) for "The Lord will judge His people" (Hebrew 10:30).

This admonition can apply to life on earth, as well as the afterlife. As described in Romans 1:24,26,28, we bring the wrath of God upon ourselves *in this life* when we obey our lusts rather than obeying the commands of Jesus; God's wrath pours out upon us by giving us what we asked for, resulting in being turned over to our own flesh. Jesus's use of the picture of Gehenna might apply to this situation ([See our Tough Topic Explained: Gehenna](#)). Choosing sin is like choosing to live in the garbage dump, where decaying carcasses rot and burn. This was the circumstance of the Hinnom Valley (known as Gehenna) which Jesus used as a picture of judgment. Gehenna is often translated as "hell." In this application, it would be "hell on earth."

This admonition to avoid God's judgment also applies to New Testament believers' life in heaven. The New Testament makes clear that each New Testament believer is judged by the fire of God's holy presence. Just as the prophet Isaiah's lips were cleansed by a coal of fire when he visited God's throne room, our lives can be cleansed in the fire of God's judgment (Isaiah 6:5-6). This is for our good, that we be fully conformed to the image of Christ, which is our destiny (Romans 8:29).

Paul pictures this judgment for believers like building materials being assayed for their quality. He uses the metaphor of our choices and deeds during our lives being like constructing a building upon the foundation that is Christ. Then the fiery presence of Jesus burns away the deeds that are temporal (like wood, hay, and straw). These are like the deeds of the *rich man*, where believers received their rewards on earth. There is nothing left of these earthly deeds that is lasting in eternity. But other deeds are like gold, silver, or precious stones, that only gain more purity in the fire. These are like the lasting deeds of *Poor Lazarus*, who lived for God's approval. From Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth:

“...each man’s work will become evident; for the day (of judgment) will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.”

(1 Corinthians 3:13-14)

The main things these New Testament teachings have in common with the parable of the *rich man* and *Lazarus* are that:

- What we do in this life affects our rewards in the next life.
- Everything we do in this life will either be left behind (wood, hay, straw) or taken with us (gold, silver, precious stones).
- The way to take things with us is to seek to live in obedience to Christ, obeying His commands, and serving others.

Irrespective of the complete story of the rich man, it is clear that for New Testament believers, even those whose earthly works are burned up, they will be saved from eternal separation from God. From the same passage in 1 Corinthians 3:

“If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

(1 Corinthians 3:15)

Jesus’s telling of “The Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*” provides opportunity for reflection on ramifications of the process each believer will endure in their refining. There could be substantial time and pain associated with the process of the judgment of works being burned (wood, hay, straw), of being conformed to Christ through the judgment of facing and reflecting upon selfish deeds done in our lives on earth. We might experience regret, as the formerly *rich man* did. Upon reflection, *he* wished *he* had lived *his life* on earth very differently. After *his* opportunity had passed, *he* wished better for *his brothers*.

- It could be that we will have opportunity to have brought to mind and repent for each good deed we could have done but did not (James 4:17).
- It could be that we will have opportunity to repent and seek forgiveness of wrongs we did not right while on earth. (Interestingly, the formerly *rich man* did not appear to repent of *his* treatment of *poor Lazarus*, which could indicate that *his* permanent station would be in the lake of fire).
- Jesus’s agonizing confrontation of Peter for his rejection of Jesus could be a picture of Jesus confronting us with times when we could have made a faithful stand for Jesus and did not (John 21:15-19).

In Revelation, the lake of fire is described as the second death (Revelation 20:14). We are not told what the lake of fire is, but we are told that it consumes death and *Hades* (Revelation 20:14) and that it consumes those who did not believe, whose names are not written in the book of life (Revelation 20:15) which was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Although believers cannot be consumed by this consuming fire, it appears they can be hurt by it, since not being hurt by the second death (lake of fire) is a reward for those who overcome as Jesus

overcame (Revelation 2:11). The convergence of this passage, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, and Jesus's "Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*" could be a picture that all sin New Testament believers fail to deal with during this *life* will be dealt with in the next.

If so, then it would be readily apparent that whatever difficulty, discomfort, or cost we might endure to deal with sin *in this life* will be more than offset by difficulty avoided in the next. The happy corollary would be that any difficulty, cost, or rejection we suffer as a result of following Christ's commands will be more than offset by the rewards we will gain *in the next life*. The scripture is explicit about this as well:

- Jesus insists that anything we give up *in this life* for His sake will be repaid a hundredfold, which is a massively lopsided reward (Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:30).
- Paul asserts that the reward God has in store for those who love Him (and therefore keep His commands) will be beyond anything of which we can conceive (1 Corinthians 2:9).
- Paul further asserts that the glory of that which we can obtain as rewards for faithful obedience is the greatest prize of *life* that can be gained (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).
- Revelation asserts that those who are faithful witnesses, who do not fear death or loss, will gain the greatest of blessings (Revelation 1:3; 3:21).

This future comfort or agony can be the experience of believers (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). It was to believers, who had the [Gift of Eternal Life](#) that the author of Hebrews warned: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). It is interesting to note that scripture proclaims that "Our God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29).

New Testament believers can apply this "Parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*" as a guide on how best to gain good rewards, both now and in the age to come, if we:

- Are shrewd to use our material wealth to bless people and advance the kingdom (Luke 16:8-9);
- Are faithful in the little things, God will entrust us with true riches in kingdom come (Luke 16:9-12);
- Make God our Master and not money, He will reward us with a blessing that will not fail us after we die (Luke 16:13; Matthew 6:24).

One of the greatest rewards available is for those who overcome, which will be to reign with Christ. As stated by Paul:

"If we endure, we will also reign with Him."
[\(2 Timothy 2:12a\)](#).

And also stated in Revelation:

"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."
(Revelation 3:21)

In all this, it is important to remember that God's acceptance of us is given freely as a gift, for all who will receive. God granted this through Jesus because of His love (John 3:16). God's grace on account of faith, not acts of obedience, is how God grants eternal salvation from estrangement from Him, birthing them into His family (John 3:14-16; Ephesians 2:8-9). This is unconditional. But even though our new birth places us unconditionally and irrevocably into God's family, we still have responsibility for our choices, and our choices have immense consequences.

Eternal rewards, such as celebrating with the Messiah at His inauguration is awarded to believers who are faithful to listen to God and obey His commands by faith, but a lack of obedient faith will result in a loss of these rewards. The Gift of Eternal *Life* can neither be earned nor lost, but the reward of eternal life is only experienced by those believers who choose to walk in God's ways (Matthew 7: 21; 8:10-12; 10:32-33; 25:1-13; Luke 19:12-26; 2 Timothy 2:11-13).

[To learn more about how to receive the Gift of Eternal Life, please see: "What is Eternal Life? How to Gain the Gift of Eternal Life."](#)

[To learn more about the rewards of Eternal Life, please see: "Eternal Life: Receiving the Gift vs Inheriting the Prize."](#)

Biblical Text

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 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. 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. 23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 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. 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.' 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.'"