

We live in an age when people avoid the inevitability of death. We don't like to talk about death. When someone dies, often their body is quickly cremated, and those who are grieving try to move on as quickly as possible, avoiding pondering on the destination that we all face: heaven or hell.

Jesus spoke a lot about heaven and hell, in particular the parable of the rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16.

Without getting too caught up in the metaphor of the parable, we must be careful not to miss the real reason for the parable. This parable had a twist at the end that, I believe, revealed the primary reason that Jesus taught it.

### **Two Different Men**

The two main characters in the parable are a rich man and a poor man who was called Lazarus. The rich man remains nameless, but he was exceptionally wealthy and ostentatious in displaying his wealth. The rich man trusted in his riches; this was his downfall.

This is also the downfall of our nation. The irony is that the statement, "*In God we trust*" appears on the currency that we really trust in. Self-sufficiency is a fatal pitfall (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus gives the poor man a name, Lazarus. Everyone in the town would have known the name of the rich man. But Jesus knew the name of the poor man. God sees the downcast, the broken, and the poor.

### **Two Different Destinations**

As the story is told by Jesus, both men die and Lazarus is given a personal escort to the side of Abraham, which in Jewish culture would have been the place of greatest honor.

From a temporal place of suffering and pain, Lazarus is lifted to an eternal place of peace and comfort.

Then the rich man dies, and he is sent to Hades, a place of torment (Luke 16:22-23). At death, the rich man enters into eternal punishment and eternal poverty, while Lazarus is eternally wealthy in paradise.

The difference between the two men was not riches or poverty; it was faith (see Ephesians 2:8).

In his suffering, the rich man cries out to Abraham, asking him to send Lazarus to help him. He still sees Lazarus as a lower-class man, someone to do his bidding (Luke 16:24). Abraham responds by letting the formerly rich man know that his situation is permanently set (Luke 16:26).

Jesus taught that Hell would be a place of excruciating eternal suffering, but the worst part would be the complete absence of the grace of God—that is what makes it Hell.

As Jesus continues to tell the parable, we see the twist in the tail; the rich man seems to fear for the plight of his brothers. This rich man was probably not a bad person by human standards. He displayed concern and love for his family.

The reality is that there will be people in hell who, by our worldly standards, did good things. But all our good deeds are worthless when we stand before Jesus on judgment day; the only thing that matters is our response to the Gospel message.

### **One True Book**

The rich man, again seeing Lazarus as someone to do his bidding, begs Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to go and warn his family.

Abraham responds in verse 29, *“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”*

Abraham is talking about the Holy Scriptures, the Hebrew Bible, which we call the Old Testament. We know, looking back from a New Testament perspective, that all the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus. The Old Testament is a revelation of Jesus fulfilled in the New Testament.

Luke 16:31, *“He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*

I think Jesus added that last sentence knowing that many who were listening to him would refuse to believe in his resurrection just a few months later. Today, we have the complete Word of God, the revelation of Jesus, that explains all we need for life and salvation (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This means that all Scripture is fully inspired by the Holy Spirit. Written by 40 different authors over fifteen hundred years, the Bible never contradicts itself and is as relevant today as it was almost two-thousand years ago. The Bible is a book that is supernatural in its writing and supernatural in its application. Jesus used the Scriptures as his only defense when tempted by Satan.

### **One Illiterate Generation**

Sadly, in our digital culture, people want something trendy and flashy. People look for new revelations from the latest content creator or YouTube channel. But few people are reading and studying the Word of God for themselves. The result is that we have widespread and frequent deception.

We live in a nation of Biblical accessibility and Biblical illiteracy. People come to church to hear an inspirational message and don't even bring their Bibles, which is an indication that they don't open their Bibles at home. As a result, people are easily misled and fall prey to false teaching.

This is the age that Paul wrote to Timothy about in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. The result is that we have a weak but well-entertained church that is fearful of the future with no desire to reach the lost with the Gospel message.

The sad indictment that Jesus taught in this parable is that even if someone would rise from the dead, the people would not believe. Someone did rise from the dead, and the Bible is his revelation to us.

Is reading and meditating on the Word of God part of your daily routine? If you develop this spiritual discipline, you will find that it is living bread for your soul as the Holy Spirit reveals the Scriptures to you. Whether you are rich in earthly treasures or not, you will be rich in the treasures of Christ.