



The Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus

Explaining the Gospel Reading Luke 16:19-31

In this parable, which Luke alone records, Christ again uses the theme of the right use of riches. The aim of this parable is clear: that there will be terrible punishment after death for those who live in riches and luxury and are callous towards the sufferings of the poor, whereas the latter, if they bear their poverty and sufferings patiently and with trust in God, may hope for happiness hereafter. Christ does not intend to teach directly the nature of the punishments and rewards after death but the fact that there are rewards and punishments awaiting the just and the wicked immediately after death is an integral part of this story.

Christ does not give the name of the rich person in this parable. No other sin is mentioned against him except his willful failure to share his wealth with the poor. Lazarus is the only name given to anyone in Christ's parables. His name is mentioned to signify his enrollment in the Book of Life (Revelation 3:5) while the rich man, in his grievous sin, is completely forgotten about by God. (Revelation 17:8) Additionally, Christ mentions the name of Lazarus because of its meaning which is *God is (my) help*. The Lord wished to show thereby that the poor man went to heaven not merely because he was poor but because he bore his poverty out of love for God and with faith and trust in Him. St. John Chrysostom makes a point by saying: *there is no virtue in being rich as there is no virtue in being poor*. The point is this: what does a person do with his position in life. St. John states that a poor man can steal just as can the rich. But both can certainly also honor the Lord, the Giver

of all that is good. Love, faith and trust in God are the most important considerations. Lazarus showed all three, while the rich man forsook each one. Lazarus bravely endured his affliction, while the rich man looked upon him with contempt and continued with his feasting offering nothing by way of assistance.

Upon death each encounters a role reversal and this new change is unalterable. Now for the first time in the Gospel does the warning and instruction about material things come vividly to mind. Riches and a luxuriant life can lead the soul to eternal damnation. (Matthew 6:24) Lazarus enjoys the bliss of Abraham's bosom while the rich man lies in Hades. Abraham is the Scriptural symbol of hospitality. (Genesis 18:1-15) Lazarus, having been denied hospitality in this world is offered it for eternity, while the preoccupation of merry-making and the luxuries of this world have taken hospitality away from the rich man in the next world.

Luke points out a second vital point, that Scripture is sufficient for faith, and when men do not believe in God's inspired word and reject it out rightly, then not even an event as extraordinary as a resurrection will generate belief. (Micah 2:9 & Isaiah 58:7) The rich man's brothers, if being blinded by avarice will, like him, disregard any divine supernatural encounter.