

049: Where are Lazarus and Dives? Part 2

(based on Ch. 7 in *The Savior of All Men*)

There are pros and cons to preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God.

- One of the pros is that you cannot ignore passages like Luke 16 merely because they are difficult.
- When preachers favor a topical approach to preaching as their primary method, they often sidestep passages that are difficult and instead lean to their favorite topics.
- Over time, the difficult texts are ignored.
- One of the cons of preaching the whole counsel of God such as preaching through the life of Christ — is that you often encounter those difficult passages that require wrestling with, sometimes over a lengthy period of time.
- But despite the struggle, God wants us to emerge from the wrestling match triumphant, at least in the sense that we understand His Word more fully and arrive at conclusions that we believe are consistent with the overall truth of the Word of God.

That being said, it must be emphasized that humility is required, for no one has a monopoly on truth.

- We need to learn from others and remain open to teaching, not being so quick to condemn as heretics those with whom we disagree.
- Over time my interpretation of the difficult text found in Luke 16:19-31 has changed, primarily as I have come to understand the context of the passage, which I discussed in the previous episode.
- That study led to two problems that I discovered with the traditional view of Lazarus and the rich man:
 - 1. The traditional view ignores the context.
 - 2. The traditional view misses the target of the text.

In this episode, I will give two more problems for consideration, continuing with the numbering sequence from the previous episode.

3. The traditional view forces a literal interpretation.

- What can we learn from the text about the rich man's life?
- Actually, only what we read in v. 19:
- Luke 16:19 There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.
- The only thing we learn about this man's life is that he is rich, he dresses nicely, and he fares sumptuously every day.
- The Holman Christian Standard Bible translates "fared sumptuously" as "feasting lavishly," and the New American Standard Bible translates it as "gaily living in splendor."

The Greek verb translated *fared* is used fourteen times in the New Testament.

- This is the only time it is translated *fared*.
- The other thirteen times "to fare" is used, it is translated "to rejoice, be merry or glad."
- The word sumptuously means "magnificently."
- Thus, all this means is that the rich man is happy, rejoicing, loving life, living magnificently.
- To me, this man sounds like the average American, picking up a Starbucks latte on the way to work, dressed in professional clothing, driving his newer model automobile.
- He takes his wife out to eat a couple of times a week at a nice restaurant, and takes his family on a nice vacation once or twice a year.

Is it wrong to be rich? No, not necessarily.

- Is it wrong to be happy and loving life? No, “God ... gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).
- Is there anything said of this rich man of a negative nature?
- No! Is he lawless and unrighteous?
- We don’t know. Absolutely nothing is said as to whether his behavior is wicked or righteous.
- Those who take the traditionalist position should be wondering:
- Why is he in Hell?

What can we learn from the text about Lazarus?

- Actually, only what we read in vs. 20-21:
- Luke 16:20-21 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.
- Not much is told about Lazarus either.
- The only thing we learn is that he’s obviously poor, because he’s called a beggar, and he is full of sores.
- We have to wonder — are these bedbug bites, or does he have some sickness, maybe even leprosy?
- We know the dogs lick his sores.
- He camps out at the rich man’s gate, desiring to be fed with crumbs, that is, food scraps.

Does the rich man feed him?

- Maybe, but we don’t know.
- All this means is that Lazarus is poor and beggarly, not enjoying life, suffering, while trying to eke out an existence.

- To me, he sounds like a homeless man in one America’s large cities, living under the viaduct at night, begging for change at the corner from the rich man who is driving to work in his late-model auto.
- Is there anything beneficial about being poor? No!
- Is there anything said about Lazarus of a positive nature?
- No! Is he upright and righteous?
- We don’t know; nothing is said.
- So if we take the traditionalist position, we have to wonder:
- Why is he in Heaven?

Is anything said about the spiritual condition of either man?

- No, nothing is said about belief or righteousness or faithfulness or discipleship.
- For that matter, nothing is said about unbelief or sinfulness or unfaithfulness or lawlessness.
- Frankly, we do not know why the rich man is rich and why the poor man is poor.
- Did the rich man become wealthy through honest means?
- Was he merely a frugal businessman?
- Or was he a dishonest crook?
- We don’t know! Nothing is said about this.
- Was the poverty of Lazarus due to laziness?
- Or was he sick and disabled, unable to work?
- Was he born an orphan and forced to become a beggar?
- We don’t know! Nothing is said about this either.

On what basis can traditionalists insist that the rich man goes to Hell and the poor man goes to Heaven?

- There is no basis for this; it’s merely an assumption.
- For that matter, is Hell ever mentioned in the text?

- No! the word used of the rich man's destination is Hades, which is the equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew word Sheol.
- The Greeks may have thought of Hades as a place of fiery torment, but the Jews did not.
- The Jews understood Sheol merely as the place of the dead, the grave, as clarified in a previous episode.
- There is no mention in the Old Testament of Sheol being a place of torment.
- The bottom line is that the rich man is not in Hell, and Lazarus is not in Heaven.
- Abraham's bosom is never equated with Heaven in the Scriptures.
- Heaven and Hell are forced on the text by traditionalists.

Why does v. 22 say that the beggar, after death, is carried by angels to Abraham's bosom?

- Traditionalists say this is referring to the man's soul.
- But if so, then why does an immaterial soul need to be carried?
- For that matter, this bizarre method of escort cannot be found anywhere else in the Bible, neither Old Testament nor New Testament.
- It is rather fanciful, the stuff of parables.
- Verse 22 mentions that the rich man also dies and is buried.
- It is only natural to assume both men are buried.
- That's what happens to bodies after death, particularly in Jewish culture.

Seeing that the bodies of both of these men are in the grave, why is Lazarus described as having a finger in his supposed afterlife (the rich man wants him to dip it in water to cool his tongue)?

- Why is the rich man described as having a tongue and presumably a body that is tormented in the flame?
- Furthermore, he can speak!
- So can father Abraham!
- Speaking requires a brain, a mouth, and a tongue.
- If we take the traditionalist position that Lazarus and Dives are mere souls in Heaven and Hell (which is an assumption), then why do they have body parts?
- Souls are immaterial; they don't have body parts!
- Recognizing this inconsistency, some have suggested that God gives men a temporary body of sorts with which to function in the afterlife.
- Is that not another assumption?
- But it doesn't make any sense.
- Why would God go to that kind of trouble for a mere temporal existence?
- What would be the purpose for the body going into the grave?
- What purpose would resurrection serve?

Another big problem with forcing a literal interpretation on this text is that it assumes judgment has already been pronounced upon these men.

- That is why one is in Heaven, and the other in Hell.
- But no judgment is mentioned in the text.
- No verdicts have been handed out by Jesus.
- We don't even know if these men are righteous or unrighteous!
- What will happen when these men are finally resurrected?
- Will they have to face Jesus in judgment again?
- If not, why would they be resurrected?
- They are already functioning quite well in the afterlife, according to the traditionalist position.

- In my humble opinion, the traditionalist position has been forced on this text and, frankly, it is quite troubling.
- That leads to the fourth problem with the traditional view of Luke 16.

4. The traditional view refuses to see a parable and metaphors.

- What happens if we treat this text as a satirical parable?
- As we are going to see, this makes much more sense because it fits the context that we examined in the previous episode.
- Let's now approach this text through the lens of the kingdom paradigm that views both of these men as Old Testament believers.
- The Pharisees, like their countrymen, are Old Testament believers who need to repent and get right with Jehovah God, because they are inwardly corrupt and stand guilty before God of the sins of greed and covetousness and disregard for the poor in their lives.
- Nevertheless, they refuse to submit to repentance and continue to reject Christ's teaching.
- In fact, they constantly argue with Him and cause Him grief, thereby, keeping others out of the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus has had enough of their nonsense.

- So, using satire, he turns the tables on their understanding of what will happen to them in the kingdom.
- They think that because they are descendants of Abraham, they automatically stand to inherit a place of rulership in the kingdom.
- Jesus uses a masterful tactic to show them otherwise.

- Keep in mind that the Pharisees relied heavily on tradition.
- So Jesus uses the Pharisees' own traditions against them, to upset the applecart of their thinking.
- One of the erroneous traditions that they picked up from the Greeks was the transmigration of souls — the belief that, after death, the soul passes from one body to another and pays for its sins in the previous life.
- In the Scriptures we find evidence of this unbiblical belief having crept into Jewish culture.

For example, John 9 records the passage about the man born blind.

- The disciples wanted to know who had sinned — this man or his parents — that had resulted in his being born blind.
- If it were the man, then he had sinned in a previous life.
- That thinking had pervaded the culture, thanks to the Pharisees.
- The Pharisees got their ideas from the rabbinic traditions, and it is believed by scholars that the rabbis likely picked it up from the Greek culture around them during the intertestamental period.
- The view was heavily taught by Pythagoras and Plato a few centuries before Christ.

In addition to the transmigration of souls, the Pharisees also held to numerous unbiblical rabbinic traditions much like those found here in Luke 16.

- John Lightfoot, a 17th century English churchman, rabbinical scholar, and Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, studied the Talmud extensively.

- The Talmud is the written record of the rabbinic traditions and teachings that the Pharisees revered and upheld.
- Lightfoot studied both the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds, and he wrote extensively about his findings.
- In his commentaries he points out that the Pharisees at the time of Christ were quite knowledgeable of the rabbinic traditions.
- They held to all sorts of strange traditions, such as righteous people being carried by angels to Abraham's bosom after death and wicked people going to a place of torment after death.
- There is even a gulf of sorts between the two places in the rabbinic traditions.
- This is all well-documented in the Talmud and in IV Maccabees.
- Josephus also confirmed this in his writings (and Josephus was an unbelieving Pharisee).

Of course, none of this is found in the Old Testament.

- Traditionalists say that's because Jesus is giving new revelation.
- However, that view poses two serious problems.
- First, Jesus would then be teaching as new revelation the pagan teachings of the Greeks that had been held by the rabbis for centuries.
- There's no way Jesus would have done that.
- Second, by doing so Jesus would be negating much of the teaching of the Old Testament.
- For example, the Old Testament never mentioned people going to Hell or being tormented after death.
- That came from the Greeks.

- Not to mention, if Old Testament-era people were headed for Hell after death, it wasn't very nice of God not to warn them in Old Testament times.
- I believe the traditionalists are wrong.

Here in Luke 16, Jesus is using common traditions held by the Pharisees and putting a spin on them with some satire.

- How so? In the Pharisees' traditional belief system, they were never the subject of punishment or torment.
- That was reserved for the tax collectors and harlots — the sinners in Israel.
- Furthermore, the Pharisees sidestepped their responsibilities to care for the poor, by proclaiming that while the poor will suffer in this life, they will be rich in the next, just like the Pharisees.
- They taught this because it was their way of neglecting their responsibility to help the poor.
- After all, if the poor are to be blessed and made rich in the next life, then they will have to remain poor in this life.
- How deceitful of these Pharisees!
- In other words, they taught that they couldn't help the poor because it would rob them of blessings in the next life.

Jesus puts a spin on the rabbinic traditions in this parable by using satire.

- In the parable, the lot of Lazarus improves in his next life.
- That is to be expected — think transmigration of souls.
- But notice what happens to the rich man.
- Luke 16:22b The rich man also died and was buried.
- 23 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.”

There is no doubt that Jesus intends for the rich man to represent the Pharisees.

- Yet in this parable their role is also reversed in the next life.
- That’s not part of the rabbinic tradition.
- The Pharisees go from being rich and comfortable to being stripped of everything and being made to suffer.
- That’s not supposed to happen.
- The Pharisees are dumbfounded.
- Jesus is subtly teaching that the Pharisees will be stripped of inheritance in the kingdom.
- It is important to remember that this parable is not about matters of salvation.
- Does it not make much more sense in the broader context to say that Jesus is sharing a parable, and satirizing the rabbinic traditions in the process?
- By doing so He is condemning the attitudes and actions of the Pharisees with respect to wealth and possessions.

Will the Pharisees learn their lesson?

- No, according to the parable, Jesus has the rich man asking for Lazarus to run and get him a drop of water.
- The Pharisees will continue to condescend to the poor, represented by Lazarus.
- At best, Lazarus is fit to be a water boy for the rich man.

- Incidentally, what good will a drop of water do if a man is suffering in Hell-like torment?
- It won’t do any good.
- Thus, the point of that addition by Jesus is to demonstrate that the Pharisees will not change.
- Abraham tells the rich man that the roles are now reversed, so he cannot expect Lazarus to help him.
- So the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers lest they also experience a reversal of fortune.

In the end of the parable, Jesus brings in the truth through Abraham — no more traditions of the Pharisees here.

- The truth is not found in a spirit-being or ghost going to them from the dead; that will accomplish nothing.
- The truth is found in the Word of God — the law and the prophets.
- The rich man’s brothers simply need to take heed to God’s Word.
- The rich man protests —
- “No! If someone goes to them from the dead they will *repent*.”
- Notice that word *repent*.
- Again, this is not about salvation from Hell.
- It’s about Old Testament believing Israelites repenting of sinfulness and getting right with Jehovah so they can inherit the kingdom.

Notice the truth that Jesus clarifies in the end:

- 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.”
- Jesus is not teaching that the soul goes to an intermediate state of Heaven or Hell after death, like the traditionalists hold.

- Nor is He going to allow the Pharisees to get away with their rabbinic traditions about transmigration of souls.
- In the end of this magnificent parable, Jesus teaches the doctrine of resurrection! — “neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”
- Sadly, the Pharisees — and, by default, the nation — did not believe when Jesus rose from the dead.
- The rich man represents the Pharisees, who are rich.
- They are the leaders of Israel and the national response to Jesus rises and falls on them.
- In a broader sense, the rich man represents national Israel, i.e., Judah, the portion of Israel that remains.
- This is implied by the rich man’s five brothers. Judah had five full brothers—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar and Zebulun.

The rich man’s clothing of purple and fine linen points to national Israel’s responsibility to be a kingdom of priests, as outlined in Exod. 19.

- Purple was the color worn by kings, and linen was the garb of the priests.
- The beggar may represent the poor element within Israel that the Pharisees have neglected.
- However, I believe there’s something more significant here.
- The beggar may instead represent the Gentiles who, throughout Old Testament history, ate spiritual crumbs from Israel’s table, so to speak.
- Interestingly, the beggar’s name is Lazarus — which is Greek for Eliezer in Hebrew — meaning “God is my help.”
- The Jews would have known this.
- In the book of Genesis, Eliezer was Abraham’s Gentile servant (from Damascus).

- Doubting that he would ever have an heir, despite God’s promise, Abraham said to God, “I am too old to have a child; Eliezer can be my heir.”
- God told him, “No, you will have a child, who will become your heir.”

But how fascinating that, in this parable, Eliezer does become the heir in another sense, for we find him at Abraham’s bosom.

- Incidentally, what does it mean to be at Abraham’s bosom?
- In ancient times, particularly in the Middle East, people would recline on couches, often leaning on an elbow when dining.
- To be at Abraham’s bosom was to have a privileged place at the table near to him.
- This is likely a reference to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and inheritance along with faithful Abraham.
- Notice the vivid metaphor.
- The Gentiles, as represented by Eliezer, will be included with faithful Abraham at the Marriage Supper, for the Gentiles have been grafted in as Abraham’s spiritual seed through the church of Jesus Christ.

The “kingdom of heaven” offer that Jesus made to national Israel — which they rejected — was taken away from Israel and given to the predominantly Gentile church.

- This offer is about inheritance in the New Jerusalem, the ruling realm of the Messianic kingdom.
- Matt. 21:43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

- Could not the role reversals of Lazarus and the rich man represent Israel's decline (for a time) and the church's rise?
- In the parable, the rich man — representing the Pharisees in a specific sense, and national Israel in a general sense — is disinherited from the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus spoke of this on another occasion as well.
- Matt. 8:11-12 I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If Luke 16 is a parable, then the rich man's suffering is not literal hell fire; it's a metaphor for disinheritance, being cast into the darkness outside the New Jerusalem.

- Incidentally, the word *tormented* — used twice in the text (vs. 24-25) — is from a Greek word used in two other places in the New Testament.
- In both places, it refers to psychological suffering, not physical torment.
- In Luke 2:48 when the parents of the boy Jesus finally found him in Jerusalem after searching diligently for him for three days, "His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.'"
- Also, in Acts 20:38 when Paul met with the Ephesus elders for the last time, at the point of his departure, they were "sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more."

It seems the rich man's torment is not physical torture from actual burning flames.

- It is psychological suffering, akin to anxiety and sorrow.
- Incidentally, that fits the picture of weeping and gnashing of teeth in Matthew's Gospel, which is an oriental idiom for conscious regret.
- Furthermore, the Greek word translated flame in Luke 16:24 — "I am tormented in this flame" — is used three times in the book of Rev. to refer to Christ's eyes, which are as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 19:12).
- So the fire here does not need to be literal either.
- It is symbolic.
- Perhaps, the rich man is psychologically torn apart by the eyes of Jesus at the Judgment Seat.
- Isaiah felt like this when he saw God high and lifted up on His throne.
- The prophet said, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isa. 6:5).

The rich man is disinherited and suffering the consequences in the coming kingdom, which is what will happen to the Pharisees and anyone else who ignores God's commands.

- The interpretation given in this episode fits the kingdom paradigm and the context of Luke 16.
- Thus, Luke 16 cannot be used in defense of the Intermediate State view.
- Tragically, so many have misinterpreted this parable because they have accepted erroneous traditions unwittingly.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS!