

The Rich Man and Lazarus Part 3

They have Moses and the Prophets

Last time we looked at what happened to the Lazarus and the rich man when they died.

We saw that the Lord Jesus had specifically chosen the name Lazarus to identify the poor man because Lazarus means “God is helper”. In his poverty, Lazarus put his trust in the blood of the atonement and in doing so he put his trust in Christ and was saved. That’s how all people in the OT were saved, through an active faith in atoning blood, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In contrast, The rich man was satisfied with his home, his good clothes and good food and was happy with his lot. He acknowledged as all Jews did that he was a son of Abraham and yet unlike Abraham he had no heart towards God, and God knew his heart. He had what Abraham called his “good things” – and his wealth fully satisfied him on the earth where he lived without God - though he probably didn’t think he was without God. He no doubt went to the temple, as Jews did, and he would have been brought up to respect God’s law and to know passages in it but IT WAS ALL OUTWARD SHOW. IT DIDN’T TOUCH HIS HEART. LIKE SO MANY OTHER JEWS HE WOULD SAY “ABRAHAM IS MY FATHER” AND BECAUSE OF THAT HE WOULD BELIEVE THAT ALL WAS TAKEN CARE OF, HE HAD HIS TICKET TO HEAVEN AND THERE WAS NO NEED TO DO ANYTHING MORE THAN BE HAPPY IN HIS LIFESTYLE.

When Lazarus died he was carried by angels to paradise to Abraham's side but of the rich man we read:

Luke 16:23

23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. (NIV)

When relating this parable, the Lord Jesus would have been speaking the language of the Jewish people who listened. That language is known as Aramaic and was like the language in which the old testament was written. Just as the Lord Jesus was specific in his choice of the name Lazarus he was also specific in His choice of the word He used for hell. When saying "In hell, where he was in torment" the Lord Jesus would have used the word "sheol" for hell. The language from which the Gospels are translated is Greek and we don't have the originally written Gospels any more. In the Greek, sheol is translated "Hades" and both names refer to the same place – the place of the departed dead. Interestingly, the scriptures repeatedly refer to sheol or Hades, as a place to which people go down. Here's an example from Proverbs:-

Proverbs 15:24 The wise man's path leads upward to life, that he may avoid Sheol beneath.

(RSV)

Here's another which describes Jacob's reaction when his sons presented him with Joseph's bloodstained coat and he believed that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal:

Gen 37:34-35

34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.

35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to sheol to my son." So his father wept for him. (NIV)

In some versions of the Bible including the NIV the word sheol has unwisely been translated “grave” and Jehovah’s witnesses and Christadelphians lay a lot of store by that, preferring to believe that hell is the grave and not a place of eternal fire and torment. However, the OT uses another word for grave – Qeber . In fact it is strange to say that sheol is the grave for a number of reasons.

First, there is no such thing as an individual’s sheol whereas individual qebers or graves are mentioned lots of times For example:-

Gen 35:19-20

19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

20 And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

(NKJ)

2 Sam 3:32 So they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. (NKJ)

II Ki 13:20-21

20 And Elisha died, and they buried him. Now the bands of the Moabites would invade the land in the spring of the year.

21 And as they were burying a man, behold, they saw a marauding band; and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha. And when the man touched the bones of Elisha he revived and stood up on his feet.

(NAS)

However, you never read of the sheol of anybody.

Another reason for not translating sheol or hades as grave is because it is never described as being located on the face of the earth whereas qebers are. For example,

Exod 14:10-11

10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD.

11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? (NIV)

Then, sheol is never in the plural but qebers are, no-one ever digs or makes a sheol in the Bible but people dig qebers. For example:-

Gen 50:5 This is Joseph speaking. 'My father made me swear an oath and said, "I am about to die; bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan." Now let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.'
(NIV)

Bodies are put into qebers lots of times in scripture. Here's an example.

Judg 8:32

32 Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. (NIV)

However, bodies are never recorded as being put into sheol except in one instance in Numbers 16 where the exception proves the rule. Here, the Lord did a new thing where a rebel group in Israel rose up against Moses. We pick up the story where 250 rebels led by Dathan Korah and Abiram were gathered opposing Moses as their leader and we read this:-

Num 16:28-33

28 And Moses said, "Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord.

29 If these men die the common death of all men, or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me.

30 But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD."

31 And as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split asunder;

32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods.

33 So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. (RSV)

The one and only time bodies went to sheol is when the Lord did a new thing. And that passage helps to show us where sheol is located.

Let's go back to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. One day he was instructing the 70 disciples about what to do if they were rejected in towns that they visited and it's almost as if the hackles of Jesus visibly began to rise as he began to talk about what would happen in towns which rejected them. He said

Luke 10:10-15

12 I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

13 "Woe to you, Chora'zin! woe to you, Beth-sa'ida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

14 But it shall be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

15 And you, Caper'na-um, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. (RSV).

The bible teaches that sheol/hades, the place where spirits of dead people go, and the place where the rich man went is down, deep in the earth.

Dathan Korah and Abiram went down to sheol into the earth.

24 The wise man's path leads upward to life, that he may avoid Sheol beneath.

(RSV)

Remember how Kenneth Hagin went down, down, down.

From the teaching of Jesus we see that sheol/hades is a place that has compartments. Lazarus was in one compartment with Abraham, a place known to the Jews as Paradise while the rich man was in a compartment of torment where there was fire and a chasm separated the two. There may be another compartment where fallen angels are imprisoned but we won't go into that in this message.

Now here is something else that the Lord Jesus said.

Matt 12:38-40

38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

39 He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (NIV)

Sheol / Hades, the two compartment place, is down deep in the earth and that statement made by Jesus is interesting. Let's face it, the heart of a lettuce is not just under an outside leaf and the heart of the earth is not just under the surface of the earth where the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The body of Jesus was in the grave but another part of Him was in the heart of the earth.

When Jesus hung on the cross a conversation began. Luke records it.

Luke 23:39-43

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"

41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

(NIV)

Jesus' death and resurrection had not happened yet, and the Church had not yet been born, so the repentant thief did not become a Christian.

Rather, he became an Old Testament saint by his faith. Therefore, after his death the repentant thief went to be with Abraham in Hades, (where Lazarus went) and that place is what Jesus called “Paradise.” In fact, Jesus went to Paradise as well, at least His spirit did, because Jesus told the thief, “today you will be *with me* in paradise.” That’s what Jesus meant when He said He would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

(Dave Root <http://www.layhands.com/DidJesusGoToHell.htm>)

Now people who believe that sheol/hades is the grave believe that in the grave the spirit sleeps and there is no consciousness. Jehovah’s witnesses are such people and they cannot hold with the interpretation given to what Jesus said to the thief on the cross.

As there was no punctuation in the scripture in those days (punctuation as we know it – or should know it – is relatively recent) they tell you that what Jesus really said was “I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise.” Meaning that the dying thief would be in a state of paradise one day but not today.

There’s a big difference between “I tell you the truth, today I’m going to buy you a gold watch” and I tell you the truth today, I’m going to buy you a gold watch.”

The gospels record Jesus using the words “I tell you the truth” around seventy or so other times before he made a statement about something. However, He never once said “I tell you the truth today” before making

the statement. Therefore, to read the alternative interpretation into the statement made to the dying thief is, to say the least, inconsistent with earlier statements delivered in a similar way. Certainly, the accepted truth among evangelicals is that the dying thief went to paradise with Jesus that day.

The reason why Old Testament saints had to go to paradise in the earth and did not go to heaven when they died was because animal sacrifices could not bring about total cleansing from sin. Only the blood of Jesus could do that.

Heb 9:12-14

12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

(NIV)

Heb 10:1-4

1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-- not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices

repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins,

4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (NIV)

In one sense, the Old Testament saints were captive in paradise because they were not free to go anywhere else. However, on the day of his death Jesus went to paradise –and eventually Jesus took all the Old Testament saints who were captive there up to heaven with Him. As a result of that, paradise is now in God’s presence, not in the earth, not part of Hades any more. When a believer dies now, the believer goes up into paradise in God’s presence and not down where it was possible to see those in torment across the chasm that Abraham described.

Paul explains it to the Ephesian church. Here are a few verses from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:-

Eph 4:8-10

8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?

10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (NIV)

Paul also writes an account of a man who went up to paradise. I guess he was writing about himself and this is what Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthian church.

2 Cor 12:2-4

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-- God knows.

3 And I know that this man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--

4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. (NIV)

He talks about the third heaven. Jews believed that the first heaven is the atmosphere and clouds around us, the second heaven is the starry heavens above us and the third heaven is beyond that, the dwelling place of God. Paul calls it paradise and he went up to it, not down.

However, the torment side of sheol/hades remains down in the earth. It continues to fill on a daily basis with those who have not repented of sin and turned to Christ to save them from the penalty of it. It will empty one day, but not to release its captives so that they can be free from torment. It will empty at the time of final judgement but will continue eternally in a

place called the lake of fire. Again, this is no mere story used by Bible writers. Hades is reality now and the lake of fire will be just as real.

So there we have a picture of the place that Jesus was talking about in the parable.

Let's finish with a look at the rich man again.

You will remember the conversation. How the rich man begged Abraham for mercy and how he begged him to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue but Lazarus could not cross over a great chasm which divided the compartment of flames where the rich man was from the compartment of paradise where Lazarus was. The rich man's request was denied but he then asks for something else

Luke 16:27-28

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house,

28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

(NIV)

Luke 16:26

Is this a sudden awakening of compassion in the heart of the man who when he was alive seemed to have none at all – at least not for Lazarus - or is there a hidden agenda? Those in Hell, can think and talk and there's plenty of time to do it to. Some believe that torment in hell can't possible

go on for ever because God won't allow it. There is nothing in scripture to support that view. To the contrary, scripture teaches that punishment in hell will never end.

Jesus himself talks of eternal life in Heaven and eternal punishment in hell and we can be sure that Jesus is never wrong in such issues. Hell is eternal just as heaven is eternal. Here is an instance of what I mean:

This is the Lord Jesus teaching in Matt 25:46

"Then they (those who had not honoured Christ in the way they had treated others) will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (NIV). Eternal is the same word each time. Torment in hell for those who go there will never end.

We don't know how long it took the rich man to think of the next request to Abraham but there was clearly concern about five brothers and the rich man decided to beg on their behalf.

He was concerned that they would end up where he was. Was he concerned for their sake or for his? Do you remember the parable of the rich fool? This is what he said:-

Luke 12:19-20

19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' (NIV)

Well, someone had now got what the rich man had prepared for himself and it was no doubt his five brothers. I sense they were younger than he was. They go it all. His fine clothes, his gated home and his money. They could probably get their own houses now. Perhaps that's why the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house – in other words, send Lazarus there quick in case they buy their own houses, move away and he can't find them. Who knows? However, unless they could be convinced otherwise, the rich man knew that they would be doomed to repeat the lifestyle of their late brother who had left them an example of how to succeed in life. If they couldn't be convinced, he would be faced with the embarrassment of his brothers landing up where he was after leaving them a bad example of how to live. So, it could have been as much for his sake as theirs.

Notice that he wanted Lazarus to go. He didn't even ask if he could himself. Just as the spirit of the rich man knows Abraham without ever having seen him before, the spirit has within it a bit of information by which it knows that this imprisonment in hell is eternal and that there is no escape, not even for a minute. Nobody's spirit will need to be informed of that. It will know.

In fact, I believe that "bit of information" opened up in me on the day that I became a Christian over forty years ago. It was if blinds rolled up

and I saw the reality of hell and knew that I would go there unless I repented of my sin and turned to Christ for forgiveness.

So knowing that he can't go back to his brothers, he begs Abraham to send Lazarus but the answer is "No".

Luke 16:29

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'(NIV)

The former rich man knew that. He was brought up with the Moses and the prophets. He heard it read time and again until it became used to it - and his brothers became used to it too. He would go to the synagogue and hear it read but he never allowed it to reach his heart. Lots of Jews did though. The prophetess Anna was one and Simeon was another and so was John the Baptist. Hannah, Samuel's mother was one too and so were other devout followers of the Jewish faith. But not the rich man. He had not allowed the Law to convince him of his need to be a god fearing man. He never repented of his sin even though he knew he should and it's almost as if God is now being blamed for not doing enough to warn him and his brothers of hell and he wants something else done. God should have sent someone back from the dead to warn him.

Yet God had done everything necessary at that time to lead the rich man to repentance and if he had done so his brothers may well have followed. God has done even more since by sending Jesus to die for us. In fact, God has almost made life an obstacle race. He has put so many things in the

path of human beings to cause them to turn to God that it's almost impossible for people to miss the way to eternal life, and yet they do. The teaching of the Old Testament on sheol alone should have made the rich man sit up and think of eternity but he didn't and his five brothers didn't either.

I was converted in a Pentecostal church in town and most of the family on my mother's side went there too. Every Sunday night, the pastor would make an appeal for people to repent of their sin and turn to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness. He would say "Everyone bow their heads and all eyes closed" and then he would make an appeal for hands to be raised if anyone wanted to come to Christ. I knew a man there that sat in the meeting every week. He never bowed his head and never closed his eyes. He just sat up in his seat with his eyes open. It must have been a real challenge each week for the pastor as he looked at this man and wondered if he was born again. The man went there for years and never changed. He sat in the seat, heard the preaching and was as friendly as anyone else but did the gospel ever touch his heart? Only God knows. Many churches have people who know the right things to say, sing the songs, listen to the preacher and say "the Lord bless you pastor" as they shake his hand on the way out. The pastor will question in his mind whether or not they are born again and will sometimes conclude that they are and other time he won't be so sure but God knows their hearts just like he knew the hearts of the rich man and Lazarus.

There's a scripture which I think is scary. This is it:-

Jer 8:19-20

19 Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?" "Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?"

20 "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved."
(NIV)

I knew another man who was not known for attending church. He came to the Pentecostal church one night but was far from complimentary about it when he came back to my parents' home afterwards. Years later, he became terminally ill and was taken to hospital. One day his wife went to visit him and couldn't find him in the ward. Eventually, she found him. He had gone to the hospital chapel. Why was that? Because the summer of his life had ended, the harvest was past and he was not saved – and he knew it.

Going back to the rich man, he wanted Lazarus to go to his brothers. Can you imagine the beggar Lazarus turning up at the gate and telling them about his brother in torment and that he had come to warn them. What would they had said "Oh yeah? He was a son of Abraham like we are. Clear off". That's how people treat God's messengers.

When God was about to destroy Sodom and Gommorah, Lot went out to warn his sons in law. Listen to this:-

Gen 19:14

14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. (NIV)

After the resurrection women came from the tomb to the other disciples and said Jesus has risen from the dead but it says

Luke 24: 11

11 And their words seemed to [them] *the apostles* like idle tales, and they did not believe them. (NKJ).

Even though Jesus rose from the dead his enemies were no more inclined to accept him than they had been before. (Wycliffe Commentary)

God has caused churches to be built where the Christian message is preached Sunday after Sunday and anyone can go and listen without fear of persecution in the UK – yet many churches are badly attended.

God has given Christians a testimony of how Christ has come into their lives and made a difference, but many just don't want to hear.

There have been healing miracles through prayer which are well documented but people look for other explanations.

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin and works to persuade people to come to Jesus – but his promptings are rejected .

Finally, God has given us his word. A letter from the King. It's on the shelves of nearly every W H Smiths and other bookshops in a language that a seeking child could understand and at a cost that anyone could afford – but if someone can't afford a new one nearly every charity shop has one for sale – yet people can't even be bothered to pick it up.

What else can God do? If they won't hear the church, or testimonies of those who have turned to Christ or believe well documented healings or reject the promptings of the Holy Spirit or can't even be bothered to pick up a Bible available anywhere, neither will they believe if someone rises from the dead and God has even done that and still they will not believe.

If anyone will not hear the teaching of the Son of God and the warnings of the Scriptures, it's likely they will not be persuaded by anything else and will NEVER escape the place of torment. Be they rich or poor, they will, like the rich man, one day close their eyes on this life and open them in hell in the next.

It's a sobering reality.