

The Rich Man and Lazarus

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This parable has been insisted upon as proof of the conscious state of men in death, and of eternal torments to the wicked; but we believe it affords no evidence of either. If it could be demonstrated to be a *history*, and not a parable, it would not prove that wicked men are to be endlessly tormented; because the scene is laid immediately after death and *before* the judgment; hence, is not *the* punishment which *follows* judgment: that punishment may be death or literal annihilation for all this case teaches. But the whole is a parable; and this fact is so notorious that scarcely any commentator, or any intelligent writer, pretends to question it. To call it a "*literal history*," in these days, is to manifest fixed bigotry, profound ignorance, or willful opposition to clearly settled truth. We shall therefore occupy no space in proving it a parable, but proceed at once to its exposition.

Parables are never given to teach doctrine, but to illustrate some truth already partially known or about to be announced; and no parable is ever to be interpreted on the principle that every item contained in it was designed to have an application. Bishop Lowth says-"Parable is that kind of allegory which consists of a continued narration of *fictitious* or accommodated events applied to the illustration of some important truth."-The *scope* and design of a parable is all we need to concern ourselves about; and to attempt a particular application of every expression in it is to enter the field of speculation where the most fanciful will be the most successful in turning off eyes from the real design of him who spake the parable.

The *key* to a parable is either in the parable itself or in the discourse connected with it. In the case before us. it is in the context. The *scope*, or design of the parable was to teach the effect to follow upon *two classes of men* by a change from the Mosaic, or Law-dispensation to the Christian, or Gospel dispensation. This fact is clearly set forth in the 17th verse, which is the *key* to the parable, and unlocks it perfectly. That verse reads thus-"The law and the prophets were" [preached] "until

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John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached." That is, a new dispensation of God's favor is now opened; no longer to be confined to the Jews, or *one* nation, but to embrace "all nations" in its offered benefits. This change would affect very differently two different classes of men; viz., the Jews, who were under the law, and the Gentiles, who are to be embraced under the gospel,

or to be made partakers of those peculiar blessings which had been hitherto so exclusively confined to the *sons* of Abraham. The effects of this change are illustrated by the parable under consideration. The parties concerned and to be affected are distinctly marked. The items relating to the rich man clearly mark him as the representative of the Jews, as a people. We note his case first. *His dress.* He was "clothed in *purple and fine linen.*" Now turn to "*the law*" that was "*until John,*" and see what was the clothing of the priests under that law. See Exodus 28; where Moses was commanded to make for Aaron and the other priests "garments for glory and beauty." Verses 5, 6, 8, and 15-"And they shall take gold, and blue, and *purple*, and scarlet, and *fine linen.* And they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, and *purple*, scarlet, and *fine twined linen.* ** And thou shalt make the breast-plate ** of *purple* ** and *fine twined linen,*" Such were the peculiarities of the dress, or *clothing* of these *representatives* of the law and the Mosaic dispensation, or Jewish system. These peculiarities our Lord commences with in his description of the rich man; and they are sufficiently striking to satisfy the unprejudiced inquirer after truth that the Jews, nationally, were to be represented by the rich man in the parable. The Jews were *rich* in those abundant communications of truth, knowledge, and peculiar privileges which God had endowed them with by direct communications, or through the prophets whom he had raised up to instruct them from time to time, till at length he spake unto them "*by his Son.*" Rich were they, indeed, in these high and exalted advantages over all other nations and people. It were easy to enlarge here, but we study brevity. The period of their exclusive enjoyment of those peculiarities was their "*life-time.*" but the time came that those peculiarities were to pass away; and that period is represented as a *death.* It was the death of their whole ecclesiastical polity-it was now *to* be superseded by a more spiritual and universal system, embracing other people: the "*life-time*" of their peculiarities is ended-the change has come over them, symbolized by a death and burial. Where next is this once rich man found? Is it in the *theological hell*? No: it is not even in *Gehenna*; but, in *Hades.* The preceding part of this work has sufficiently explained these terms, and we do not therefore stop to dwell upon them here. The rich man is alive after his ecclesiastical death; but is stript of all his peculiarities and reduced to a state of wretchedness and torment. And does not the history of the Jews, as a people,

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from the overthrow of their temple, city, and sacrifices there, unto this day, or present century, fully justify the parabolical description given by our Lord of the misery to which they would be subjected under the new dispensation which was to follow theirs? No one can doubt this who has any knowledge of their history for the last eighteen hundred years: and if we have not understanding of their history, read the prophecies of the judgments threatened them, Lev. 26th and Deut. 28th chapters, and "be no longer faithless but believing." "Wrath has come upon them to the uttermost." 1 Thess. 2:16. And Jesus said relative to the overthrow of their city and the tribulation to attend and follow that event-"These be the days of vengeance that all things *which are written may be fulfilled.*" Lk. 21:22.

Since the ecclesiastical and national death of the Jews-the rich man-there has been a claim maintained among them that "Abraham" is their "father;" but no relief has come to them from that quarter.

The desire expressed by the rich man, that further light or information should be given to convince the nation or people of Jews, by a resurrection of one from the dead, is met, in the parable, by showing that no further information would avail with those who had rejected all the previous light God had given them: and the answer-"neither will they be persuaded though *one rose* from the dead,"-was shown to be true by the conduct of "the chief priests and Pharisees," when Jesus actually raised a "*Lazarus*" from the dead, [John 11th,] they called a "council," and "from that day forth took counsel together for to put Jesus to death." How true that they would not "be persuaded though one rose from the dead;" and after they had accomplished their bloody purpose, and put Christ to death, and he also had been raised from the dead, under such circumstances that there was no chance to doubt the fact, the same obstinate unbelief remained; and they gave large sums of money to the soldiers to tell the most silly and improbable *lie* that was ever invented; viz., That the disciples of Jesus came by night and stole Jesus away while they slept!!

Thus the parable, so far as the rich man is concerned, has a fair and full application, and illustrates the obstinate unbelief and consequent misery and torment of that people, after their final refusal to receive Jesus as the Messiah.

It only remains now briefly to consider that part of the parable relating to the poor man, or Lazarus. Prior to the change in the dispensations, from the Mosaic to the Christian, the Gentiles were poor indeed in religious knowledge, and excluded from the *peculiar* privileges of the Jews-the rich man. They could only approach the "*outer court*"-or "gate"-of the Temple service: where some of them sought the "*crumbs*" of knowledge which might better their condition. Still their general condition

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in regard to divine "things" was "evil." The time at length arrives when they are no longer to remain in this condition, and that change-to keep up the harmony of the parable-is represented by a death. They pass out of their previous state and find themselves in "Abraham's bosom"-*partakers in that covenant* God made with Abraham; for, "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Gal. 3:29. To this honor they are brought through the ministration of angels-*aggellon-messengers*. Christ gave his *messengers* commission to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Under this commission they brought many Gentiles into the Abrahamic covenant; for, The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [the Gentiles,] through faith, preached before *the gospel* unto Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." Gal. 3:8. And the apostle adds-"So then they which be of faith *are blessed with faithful Abraham*:" they are in "Abraham's bosom:" a phrase which imports a partaker of his blessings and being in the same covenant relation to God. In this condition are all believing Gentiles, and are now "*comforted*;" while the obstinate unbelieving Jew from the time of Christ, or from the introduction of the Christian dispensation, has been "*tormented*:" and the "*gulf*" between the two

dispensations is "*impassable*"-they cannot be joined in one: to come into the blessings of the Christian dispensation is impossible to any one still cleaving to the Mosaic for justification; and to return from the Christian to the Mosaic is to "fall from grace," and to be swallowed up in the gulf.

We might greatly enlarge the proof that the foregoing is the true scope and design of the parable; but we believe enough has been said to satisfy the candid inquirer after truth, and we have no expectation that obstinate bigotry will be removed, even tho' another Lazarus should arise from the dead and affirm the truth of the exposition we have here given.