

The Rich Man and Lazarus

By A. F. Ballenger

One of the most terrible scenes ever witnessed by a vast concourse of people occurred at the World's Fair at Chicago in 1893. A number of visitors were dining at the top of the Tower of Observation, one of the Exposition buildings, which overlooked the lake and city.

Suddenly a sea of faces was turned toward the Tower where a curling column of smoke with darting tongues of flame was seen climbing the tower like a monstrous serpent, toward the terror stricken souls at the top. Every way of escape was cut off, and nothing was left for them but to throw themselves down the giddy height to the roasting iron roof below, or await the fate of the furious flames. A few hurled themselves into the lake of fire, but the greater number awaited the ascending flames.

The scene below was only less terrible than that above. The hundred thousand spectators were swayed by the agonizing scene like a field of grain before the wind. Men trembled, and groaned, and staggered. Women screamed, and sobbed, and fainted. Thousands with white faces covered with their hands fled blindly from the scene unable to look longer upon the agonizing sight.

But this scene, terrible as it was, is not to be compared with the agonizing sight which, according to some Bible teachers, is located in full view, and within speaking distance of the Paradise of the saved. And not for a brief half hour, but throughout the never ending cycles of eternity, they tell us, the redeemed will live in the immediate presence of this hell of the lost where they can see their frantic struggles and

hear their agonizing groans. Here, we are told, parents can hear the wails and watch the writhing of their burning children: and children will gaze upon the unspeakable miseries of lost fathers and mothers, while the years of eternity roll.

A misunderstanding of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is largely responsible for this revolting, God-dishonoring doctrine.

Of the forty parables of our Lord, this is the only one which these Bible teachers interpret literally. Now a parable should never be taken literally. On the other hand, the student should study to see what is represented by the various symbols which are used in the parable.

Of our Saviour's public teaching it is written: "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them." Matt. 13:34.

His disciples were slow to understand that He spake in parables, and they were sometimes misled because they took His words literally. On one occasion He warned them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees," and immediately they began to be troubled because they had brought no bread. The Lord rebuked them for taking His parable literally, in the following words:

"How is it ye do not understand that I spake it not unto you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Then understood they how that he bade them not to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Matt. 16:11, 12.

We ought not therefore, to interpret our Lord's parables literally, but study to find what is represented by the various symbols of the parable. Only a few of His parables are explained in detail, but enough are explained so we may understand His method

of instruction. Let the parable of the sower suffice as an illustration. In explanation of this parable our Lord said:

"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

The field is the world;

The good seed are the children of the kingdom; but

The tares are the children of the wicked one;

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; The harvest is the end of the world; and The reapers are the angels."

In like manner should we seek to find what is represented by the different figures used in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. We should inquire what is represented by the rich man, and what by his riches; who is represented by Lazarus, what by his begging, by his sores, by his association with dogs, and by his death. We should study to learn what is represented by Abraham's bosom, what by the death of the rich man, what by hell, or hades, what by his torments, and what by the great gulf, etc.

If the Lord had not expected us to find in His Word an explanation of the unexplained parables, He would have explained them and put that explanation in the Scriptures, but He expects us to understand His parables without a detailed explanation. This is shown by His rebuke to the disciples because they did not understand His parables until He explained them. When they asked for an explanation of the parable of the sower, before explaining it, He said: "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye understand all parables?" Mark 4:13.

Let us therefore study the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, believing that inasmuch as it is not explained, like the parable of the sower, the explanation can be found in the Word.

Who is represented by the rich man?

Evidently the Jewish nation; because in the parable the rich man calls Abraham "Father Abraham" and Abraham calls him "son."

What is represented by his riches?

It must be the great treasures of truth which were deposited with the Jewish nation for the enlightenment of the rest of the world. The whole history of the Jews bears witness to the rich gifts of divine truth given them of God. The apostle Paul sums up their riches thus:

"What advantage then hath the Jew? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God," Holy Scriptures. Rom. 3:1,2.

"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." Rom. 9:3,4.

These are the riches of the "rich man."

What is represented by the purple and fine linen with which the rich man was clothed?

These are the emblems of royalty. Our Lord in His testimony concerning John said: "They which are gorgeously apparelled, and live deliciously are in kings' courts." Luke 7:25. Again in applying the parable of the wicked husbandmen, He said to the Jews: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to another nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Matt 21:43.

Who are represented by Lazarus the beggar?

Evidently Lazarus represents the Gentiles, who in themselves considered, were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12), and who must come to the Jews for the riches of God's revelation to

men. "And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom that God had put in his heart." 2 Chron. 9:23.

His place among the dogs, seeking the crumbs from the rich man's table, further proves him to be a representative of the Gentiles. Our Lord said to the Gentile woman of Tyre who asked healing for her daughter, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs"; to which the woman answered, accepting the lowly place which the Jews had given her, "Yea Lord, yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." Mark 7:26-28. The Lord did not wish to represent the Gentiles by dogs, and so he represented them by a beggar covered with sores, an associate of dogs.

What is represented by Abraham's bosom?

The father's bosom is the place of repose for the child. Listen to Moses: "Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldst say unto me, carry them in thy bosom as a nursing father beareth the sucking child." Num. 11:12. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." John 1:18. As therefore, the bosom is the rightful place of the son and heir to the father's riches, so the rich man, the Jewish nation, the heir of Abraham's riches is represented in the parable as being separated from this place of privilege, and Lazarus the Gentile, by birth, is represented as coming into possession of this sonship with all its privileges.

What is represented by the death of the rich man?

The casting off of the Jewish nation is here represented by the death of the rich man. John the Baptist said to the Jewish leaders, "And think not to say within your-

selves, we have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now the axe is laid unto the roots of the trees; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." Matt. 3:9,10.

And this cutting down and casting into the fire is what did happen to the Jewish nation when the kingdom was taken from them and given to the Gentile. And the cutting down and casting away is what is represented by the death of the rich man. Paul speaking of this casting away represents them in this cast-away condition as dead.

"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead." Rom. 11:15.

Again the loss of the prodigal son is represented as his death. "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Luke 15:24.

What is Represented by the Death of Lazarus?

The Gentiles do not inherit the place of a son except through death. It is not the Gentile in the flesh who inherits the riches of Abraham. He, too, is cut off from the wild olive and grafted into the tame olive before he becomes partaker of the root and fatness of Abraham's family tree. Rom. 11:17.

Paul, speaking to the Gentile converts, said: "For ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God," Col. 3:3, R. V. It is through this death that the Gentile becomes Christ's and therefore the seed or the son of Abraham. "If we be Christ's, then we are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Gal. 3:29.

Thus the Jews (the rich man), were broken off (i. e., death), from the tame olive, representing the riches of the prom-

ises to the children of Abraham, and the Gentiles (the beggar), were broken off (died) from the wild olive and grafted into the tame olive, thereby becoming partakers of the riches of which the children of Abraham are heirs.

What is represented by the flame in which the rich man is tormented?

The word "hell" in this parable is from the Greek word "hades," meaning grave, and is so translated in the Revised Version. It is not from the Greek word, "Gehenna," which describes the final place of punishment where the wicked will be destroyed when the earth is cleansed with fire and brimstone. If the Lord had here desired to describe the final place of punishment He would have used Gehenna. What then is meant by the flame and torment? The Lord speaks of the afflictions of the Israelites in Egypt as an "iron furnace."

"For the Lord hath taken you and brought you forth out of the iron furnace—out of Egypt." Deut. 4:20.

In the parable of the sower the Lord has explained the meaning of scorching heat when used in a parable.

"Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth . . . and when the sun was hot they were scorched."

"But he that receiveth seed into stony places the same is he that heareth the word . . . yet hath no root in himself, but endureth for a while, for when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, by and by he is offended." Matt. 13:5, 6, 20, 21.

Another strong proof that the torment of the rich man in the flames of fire is a symbol of political afflictions is found in the book of Revelation, which is a series of parables or symbolical representations of important events in the history of churches and governments. Here under the symbol of a fallen woman the apostate church is represented as being tormented with fire. Such

expressions are used: "Her torment;" "the smoke of her burning;" "she shall be utterly burned with fire." This torment is explained to be something which shall be accomplished by the kings of the earth. "These (the kings), shall hate the whore, and shall burn her utterly with fire." Rev. 18:8, 9 and 5:17, 18. R. V.

Thus it is made clear that torment in flame is a figure which the Lord uses to represent political tribulation or persecution.

How literally has this been fulfilled in the history of the Jewish nation! Beginning with the terrible siege of Jerusalem, when fathers and mothers ate their own children in the horrors of hunger, down through the dark ages, even to our own time, when they have been tormented in the flames of persecution by Russia, and Jew-hating Germany and Austria, the Jew has been in torment.

And what is meant by the great gulf between the rich man and Abraham's bosom?

This represents the separation from the privilege of sonship, which has resulted from Israel's casting away as a nation. Once the Gentile was "far off" and the Jew was "nigh," as regards the privileges of Abraham's bosom; but now, through the unbelief of the Jew and the faith of the Gentile, the relative position is reversed; and the Gentile is in Abraham's bosom and the Jew "far off."

And there is no possibility of the newly adopted son's going to the relief of the unbelieving Jew while he remains in unbelief. And there is no possibility of the Jew's reaching Abraham's bosom, while he continues still in his unbelief. But "if they abide not still in unbelief shall be grafted in: (life from the dead) for God is able to graft them in again." Rom. 11:15, 23.

What is meant by Moses and the prophets?

"They have Moses and the prophets." This expression which refers, of course, to

the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, is added evidence that the rich man represents the Jew. The Gentile has more than the Old Testament, he has the New Testament as well; but this rich man and his brethren have only "Moses and the prophets."

Again, the rich man asks for a sign. When told that his brethren have Moses and the prophets, which, if they believe they will not come into the place of torment, he insists on a sign, saying that if one rose from the dead and went to them they would believe. This was the constant demand of the Jewish rulers. "We would see a sign from thee." John 6:30. "The Jews require a sign." 1 Cor. 1:32. But to this Jewish demand for a sign, Abraham, who believed without a sign, is represented as saying:

"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

From this it is plain that the rich man, or the Jewish nation, was cut off from its place of privilege because it failed to believe Moses and the prophets, or the Old Testament Scriptures. And that they did not believe them, is plain from the words of Christ.

"Ye search the Scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life, and these are they which bear witness of me."

"How can ye believe which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not. Do not think that I will accuse you unto the Father. There is one that accuseth, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believe Moses, ye will believe me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" John 5:39, 44-47. R. V.

Thus it is seen that the Jews, though professing to believe the scriptures, did not believe them, and "because of unbelief, they

were broken off," and it is here that the parable is a solemn warning to the Gentiles who have been received into the bosom of Abraham, or the place of sonship, with all its sacred riches and solemn responsibilities. The Jews hoarded these riches and prided themselves on their place as children of Abraham and trusted for their salvation in the old rather than the new birth. They despised the Gentiles and had no real burden for their salvation. Dressed in the robes of their royal priesthood and hoarding their wealth of truth, they haughtily passed the sinner by or deigned to drop a few crumbs as he lay begging outside the gate. But because of their selfishness and unbelief of the Scriptures the riches of the kingdom of God—the riches of revealed truth were taken from them and given to another nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

And just as certain as the natural branches—the natural Jews—were cut down and cast into the fire of oppression and persecution, because he did not believe the Scriptures, so sure will the grafted branch be cut off if it loses faith in those same Scriptures, And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; but boast not against the branches; but if thou boast, thou barest not the root but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, the branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well; by their unbelief they were broken off and thou standest by thy faith. Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare thee." Rom. 11:17-21.

Who are represented by the rich man's brethren?

They must be Jews also; for it is said of them, "They have Moses and the prophets." Not all of the Jews were broken off from

Abraham's family tree. Paul says: "Some of the branches were broken off." Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and Saul of Tarsus, with the Apostles were Jews, according to the flesh, which believed and were not broken off. Nor were all those who were broken off, broken off at the same time. And as all the trees were not hewn down at the same time, so all were not cast into the fire at the same time. Since they were not broken off because of unbelief, it was necessary for them to hear the message before they could reject it and be broken off. Jerusalem was broken off and cast into the furnace first, because Jerusalem heard and rejected the message first; but the "dispersed among the Gentiles," those Jews who lived in the cities outside Judea still had opportunity to accept the testimony of Moses and the prophets and escape the furnace of affliction into which their Jerusalem brethren were cast. As the Jews who were dispersed among the Gentiles, heard the message of Moses and the prophets concerning Christ and rejected it, they, too, were hewn down and cast into the fire of persecution where their Jerusalem brethren were cast.

This parable comes with a solemn warning to the adopted son of Abraham—to us who are Gentiles by nature, who have been adopted through Christ as children of Abraham and are now enjoying the blessings of Abraham's bosom. The growing unbelief and indifference manifested by many professing Christians today, toward the Old Testament Scriptures, cannot be far behind the unbelief and indifference of the Jews in the time of Christ. And since the Jewish nation was rejected because of a failure to believe in Moses and the prophets, let the ingrafted Gentile beware lest he be broken off because of the same unbelief.

Thus it is seen that this parable, when properly understood, contains a solemn warning applicable not only to the people

to whom it was first spoken, but to those today who occupy the place and enjoy the privilege of children of Abraham.

However, when taken literally, it becomes absurd and dishonoring to God. Absurd, because it deposits all the saved in the bosom of Abraham, which is far too small to accommodate them all: dishonoring to God, because it makes out that God has located a hell of torment at the very gates of Paradise, within hearing distance of the saved, where throughout the endless ages of eternity they see the tortures and hear the groans of their lost friends and relatives.

And not only is it absurd and dishonoring to God, but it is in direct opposition to the whole tenor of Scripture, which places the punishment of the sinner after the resurrection and the judgment as the following scriptures prove:

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." 2 Pet. 2:9.

"But the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." 2 Pet. 3:7. R. V.

"And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved unto everlasting chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

Thus it is seen that the angels that sinned, though they are in hopeless darkness, so far as salvation is concerned, are not now suffering the punishment that they will suffer at the judgment. The idea that "fallen angels are devils, are now in the torments of hell, cannot be reconciled with the teaching of the Scripture that they are now engaged on the earth in the work of tempting men to their destruction. That the fallen angels are not now in torment is

plainly proved by the following scripture:

"And when he was come to the other side into the country, of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And behold they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come here to torment us before the time?" Matt. 8:28, 29.

Certainly the devils ought to know whether they are in torment or not. And here is testimony which agrees with the whole tenor of the scriptures, which locates the time of punishment after the judgment and in connection with the destruction of the earth by fire. With this interpretation of the parable, it is found to be in harmony with the rest of the scriptures, and the God-dishonoring horrors and absurdities of the common interpretation are seen to contain no support from the parable.

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