



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X
Issue 232

A Pillar of Partialism Shaken and Removed –

The Rich Man and Lazarus

by – J.F. Witherell

An Ambassador for Christ, 1843

Mene, Mene, Tekel ... Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting (Daniel 5:27).

Luke 16:19-31¹ has long been considered by our brethren as one of the strongest proofs the Scripture afford of the doctrine of endless misery in the future world. There is probably not another passage in the Bible which has been so often quoted by both clergy and laity in proof of that doctrine. As for the manner in which it has been used by Christian teachers, it has long been, and now is a great stumbling block in the way of inquirers after truth.

A very intelligent lady informed me a short time since that she had read the Bible through, with great care, for the purpose of satisfying herself whether the doctrine of endless misery (in the belief of which she had been educated) was true or not; and that after a careful examination of the whole Scriptures, she had come to the conclusion that the doctrine of endless misery was not there taught, save in the parable which we now purpose to examine. If it were not for this, she declared that she should have no doubt of the truth of the doctrine of a world's

salvation. Doubtless there are many persons who entertain similar views; hence it is of great importance that this Scripture should be correctly interpreted, and rightly understood.

We purpose to show first that the popular opinion concerning the meaning of the text is incorrect; and then give, in as brief a manner as possible, what we suppose to be its true meaning. It is probably well known to the reader that our brethren of other sects have a very summary way of explaining this parable – or rather, they contend that it needs no exposition, but is literally true as it now stands. That is, they suppose that the rich man and the beggar were real bona fide persons whom our Savior knew, and that all which is said of them did actually and literally transpire within His personal knowledge. Yet the truth or falsity of this notion may be better understood as we proceed with our remarks.

The parable commences by saying,

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.

1. This is but the second in a continuing series of studies on *the Rich Man and Lazarus* being provided in the *Bible Student's Notebook*. The first installment was a much more lengthy work entitled, *The Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, by Ivan L. Burgener, which ran in BSN #100 and is also available in book form from StudyShelf.com, (800) 784-6010.

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- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
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- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
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PILLAR (continued from page 2193)

This is all the knowledge we can obtain of the character, circumstances and condition of the rich man. The Savior says nothing more of his character, and we can find no account of him in any other part of the Bible. He was rich, and fared sumptuously every day, as thousands now do. He is not said to be avaricious, dishonest, unmerciful or unjust. Our Savior does not even intimate that he was an immoral man. It would therefore appear not a little surprising, if as our brethren suppose, that the Savior intended to countenance the Pharisaic doctrine of endless misery, that he should not have mentioned some crime of which the rich man was guilty.

We know that our partialist brethren have generally given the rich man a bad character; but this probably has been owing to the fact that they have taken it for granted, that he was doomed to suffer endless misery, and consequently have supposed that he must have been deserving of it. Yet it will be seen, by consulting the parable, that our Savior gives no authority for such an opinion. He simply says that the man was rich and fared sumptuously; but there surely was no crime in this.

If a person by industry and frugality secured to himself a competency of this world's goods, he is regarded as having acted wisely and virtuously. Further, if he who by honest industry has secured to himself riches, seeks to enjoy them by living well, and faring sumptuously, he does but enjoy the fruit of his labor. That the riches of the man in the parable were not honestly acquired, and temperately and properly enjoyed, we may safely challenge the whole world to show. From the lack of anything in the account to the contrary, we are justified in supposing that the rich man was honest, moral, and as good and virtuous in fact as any evangelical church-member in the land!

The reader will perceive that we are now proceeding upon the ground taken by our partialist brethren – that is, the whole story is literally true. We do not admit, however, that the rich man and Lazarus were persons known to our Savior, but we are showing that even on the supposition that this was the case, the parable or story affords no proof of the doctrine of endless misery. So, we proceed.

Now notice the beggar.

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at the gate full of sores.

This, also, is all the information we have respecting the character, condition and circumstances of the beggar. Our Savior does not say or even intimate that the beggar was a good man – that he loved and served God, and that he walked humbly, loved mercy or dealt justly. He simply says that he was a beggar, full of sores; but there surely was no virtue in this. Thousands of persons have reduced themselves to poverty, nakedness and starvation by their own prodigality, idleness and licentiousness, and brought upon themselves the most painful diseases and afflictions. For ought that appears to the contrary, we are justified in supposing that the beggar was reduced to his miserable condition by his own folly and idleness. Nay, we might even proceed further, and prove by the strongest circumstantial evidence, that the rich man was a good man and the beggar a wicked man. For throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, wealth, riches and earthly enjoyment is promised to those in Israel who were pure in heart, who loved God and kept His commandments, while poverty, disease and disgrace is threatened to those who did wickedly.

The reader will please keep in mind that we are not laboring to prove that the rich man was virtuous and the beggar vicious – we do not suppose that any such persons as are here described ever existed – but we are laboring to show, on the supposition that it was true.

The parable goes on to say that

It came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Now, it is worthy of remark that our Savior does not say that the soul or spirit of the beggar was carried to Abraham's bosom; but that *the beggar, i.e., his dead body* was carried there.

It is also remark-worthy that it is said that Lazarus was carried into Abraham's bosom, and that there is *not another place* in the Bible where mention ►

is made of any one being carried into Abraham's bosom at death. Yet our partialist brethren suppose that Abraham's bosom means heaven – a place of unmixed felicity? How absurd, dear reader, is this idea, on the supposition that the story is to be understood literally? What is "Abraham's bosom" more than the bosom of any other saint?

The story goes on to say that

The beggar died, and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment.

Now on the supposition that our Savior intended to inculcate the doctrine of endless woe, does it not appear very remarkable that He should have selected such a person as a fit subject for that awful fate, especially when this is the only place in the whole Bible where any intimation is given of suffering after death? It certainly appears to us altogether unaccountable; but there is no end to the difficulties presented by the common exposition of the parable, not the least of which is,

THE PRAYER OF THE RICH MAN TO ABRAHAM

And 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."

Now the reader must be aware, that our partialist brethren have always been in the habit of representing the damned as being filled with cursing and blasphemy. Yet here is one whom they suppose to be in the prison-house of woe, praying, and that most earnestly and fervently.

It should be observed, however, that his prayer is offered to Abraham instead of God, which makes the common exposition of the passage still more difficult. For supposing the common view of the subject correct, what should induce the rich man to pray to Abraham? Did he suppose that the patriarch had authority and power to mitigate his sufferings and alleviate his distress? Then his request was most singularly strange.

"Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."

Here again almost innumerable difficulties are presented. Supposing the rich man to have been actually in a flame of fire in the spirit world, what possible good could he have expected from a drop of water? If both he and the beggar were in the spirit world, why should the one be represented as having eyes and a tongue, and the other fingers? From where was the drop of water to be obtained? What authority had Abraham to send Lazarus to the rich man? Then again, why should the rich man have requested Lazarus to be sent to him? Did he suppose the beggar to be indebted to him for the crumbs with which he had permitted him to be fed?

No satisfactory answer ever has or ever can be given to these questions on the ground that this is a statement of literal facts. Let us notice the answer of Abraham to the prayer of the rich man.

And Abraham said, "Son remember thou in thy life receivedst good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

The reader will please observe that the patriarch does not even intimate that the "torment" of the rich man was a punishment for sins, committed while on earth; neither does he reprove the rich man for offering his prayer to him instead of God; but he simply tells him that in his lifetime he had received good things, and Lazarus evil things. Then as a further excuse for not complying with his request, he tells him that,

"Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

Now if the hell here spoken of was such a place as it is generally supposed to be, and Abraham's bosom is the place of immortal blessedness, is it not rather a novel idea to suppose that, in order to keep the saints out of hell, it was necessary to confine them by fixing a great gulf between the two places? For it will be seen that the first object of this gulf, as stated

by Abraham, was to prevent the inhabitants of what is supposed to be "paradise" from emigrating to what is supposed to be the world of woe! Is it not surprising also, that it never has occurred to the minds of those who suppose this parable to be a relation of literal facts that a gulf, however wide and deep, would be no sort of hindrance to a "disembodied spirit" upon which the laws of matter could have no power or control?

Finding himself repulsed in the first request, the rich man proceeds to make a second and different one.

"I pray thee, therefore Father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come to this place of torment."

Now we have always understood our good brethren who contend for the doctrine of future wretchedness to say that the poor, unfortunate victims of Almighty wrath and vengeance become, as soon as they enter their gloomy abode, dead to every feeling of sympathy, pity and compassion, and that they are there filled only with evil passions and desires, and exult even when one is added to their number. Yet it seems to have been quite different with the rich man!

His own wretchedness seems, for the time, to have been forgotten in his anxiety for the safety of his five brethren! Why was this? Our partialist brethren readily confess that they are unable to tell. Let us notice the patriarch's reply.

"They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them."

Hear them upon what? And about what? The rich man had requested Lazarus to be sent to his brethren "*that he might testify unto them,*" and give them such instruction as would enable them to escape the "*place of torment*" in which he was suffering. But Abraham replies "*they have Moses and the prophets let them hear them.*" Now this implies that Moses and the prophets had given instruction, as would, if heeded, preserve them from the awful fate of their brother. But if Moses or the prophets had counseled their fellow men how to escape, they must have known from what it was necessary to escape. And hence if the popular view

of this subject is correct, Moses and the prophets must have taught the doctrine of endless misery! But where in all the writings of Moses and the prophets, can such a doctrine be found? It cannot be found. Even our partialist brethren themselves, the most enlightened and intelligent of them, freely admit the doctrine of endless misery is not taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. This then, of itself, aside from all the objections before raised is sufficient to prove the falsity of the common exposition of the parable.

We have thus gone through with the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and shown as we humbly believe, the utter impossibility of reconciling it with reason and the general tenor of the scriptures, if we adopt the popular view of it. We therefore infer that it is a parable, and as such we shall proceed to explain it. But before we do this, we will notice very briefly,

THE WORD "HELL"

There are three words in the original language of the New Testament which are translated "*hell,*" viz., *Hades, Tartaros* and *Gehenna*. The first, being the origin of the word hell in the parable we are noticing, is all that need our attention.

Hades is a translation of the Hebrew *sheol* (into Greek) which is the original word that throughout the Old Testament Scriptures is rendered "*hell*" in our English Bibles. It occurs 64 times in the Old Testament, and is rendered "*pit*" three times, "*grave*" twenty-nine times, and in every other place where it occurs it is rendered "*hell.*"

No person whose mind is free from prejudice will say, after a careful examination of all the places where it occurs, that there is a single instance where it means a place of misery in the future world. In its original and primary sense, it signified, says Dr. Campbell, "the state of the dead," in general, without regard to their goodness or badness, their happiness or misery.

Dr. Whitby says "all men go to *sheol* (hades or hell), where Jacob, and Job, and David and Hezekiah expected and even desired to be."

Hades occurs in eleven places in the New Testament, in ten of which it is translated "*hell.*" The following ►

are some of the places where it occurs.

And thou Capernaum which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell (Matthew 9:23).

That the word hell does not here mean a place of misery in the future world is proved from the fact that our Savior was speaking of a city.

Because thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption (Acts 2:27).

The obvious meaning of the passage is that the soul of Christ was not left in the grave, nor His body permitted to corrupt and perish.

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire, this is the second death (Revelation 20:14).

The reader will at once perceive that if we understand "hell" to mean a place of punishment after death, then the passage is entirely without meaning; for "hell" is represented as being cast into "hell," as it were, i.e., into itself, for the lake of fire here spoken of, all believers in endless misery suppose to mean the place of the damned.

O grave where is thy victory? (I Corinthians 15:55).

The original of the word "grave" in this passage is the same as the original of "hell" in the parable of the rich man and the beggar. This passage is a quotation from the prophecy of Hosea 13:14 where the word *sheol* occurs twice. It reads thus,

"I will ransom them from the power of sheol, I will redeem them from death. O death I will be thy plagues, O sheol I will be thy destruction."

Sheol, *hades* and "hell" are therefore to be destroyed, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

Were it not for wearying the patience of the reader, I might quote other passages to the same purpose, but enough no doubt has been written upon this point to convince every candid and intelligent

mind that neither *sheol* in Hebrew, *hades* in Greek, or "hell" in our own language properly signifies a place of punishment after natural death. The plain and obvious meaning of these words, (or this word, for properly, it is but one word repeated in different languages) is the grave, or the state of the dead.

We may therefore pass, to give what we suppose to be the true meaning of the parable; premising by the way, however, that in the study of the Sacred Scriptures, especially dark and difficult passages the context or connection should always be taken into consideration in order to determine the signification of the passage; and in no case should a single passage of Scripture be separated out from its connection, and used as proof of any doctrine or tenet whatever.

By carefully reading the chapter previous to the one in which this parable is found, it will easily be perceived that there is an intimate connection between the two, being in fact but one discourse of the Savior, delivered at one and the same time.

The several parables which are recorded in these chapters seem to have been spoken with the design of showing the unreasonableness and inconsistency of the Jews in finding fault with our Lord because He received sinners and ate with them. According to their own self-righteous pretensions, they were in no need of the counsels, instructions and forgiveness of the Savior, while the publicans and sinners with whom He ate and associated were, according to their views, in a most wretched and deplorable condition. If, therefore, they could justify themselves in searching for a stray sheep or a lost piece of silver, how could they condemn him for using all proper means to reclaim and save lost and sinful men? In the parables of the prodigal son and the unjust steward he not only severely rebukes their self-righteousness and selfishness, but portrays their pride and arrogance in such a light as to mortify and humble them.

Then to show the folly of blindly adhering to the Jewish mode of worship and observing the rites and ceremonials of the law, as also the painful consequences which would result from so doing, he spoke the parable, or figure of speech, designed to show the extent and heinousness of their guilt.

"Whosoever putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, committeth adultery."

Those who understand the parable which we are noticing to be a relation of literal facts, have found no little difficulty in accounting for the occurrence of this passage in this place. To suppose that "*He Who spake as never man spake*" broke off in the middle of an animated and interesting discourse and went away to talk about the sin of adultery is, to say the least, not a little extraordinary.

The learned and celebrated Methodist commentator, Dr. Adam Clark, in his commentary upon this subject says, "This appears to be a part of the Sermon on the Mount, and would stand in a much better connection there than here." We should be of the same opinion indeed, if this and the parable following it, are to be understood literally, as our opposing brethren contend. Yet if this language is understood parabolically, as it was evidently designed to be, the whole appears plain and simple, and there is great propriety and aptness in the figure used by the Great Teacher.

The Savior's meaning was in all probability this: as a man who should forsake his wife and marry another woman would be guilty of adultery, so the Jews, if they had forsaken their form of worship and adopted some other before the law was abrogated, would have been guilty of a similar impropriety and sin. Through the "*doctrine of the Pharisees,*" "*the tradition of the elders*" and "*doctrines and commandments of men,*" they committed an offense which might be aptly illustrated by adultery. Of this impropriety and sin the leaders among the Jews, more particularly the Pharisees and the priest were guilty.

They continued in their "*leaven*" even after the promised Shiloh, for Whom they should have been looking, had made His appearance and had given such proof of His Messiahship – "*by signs, miracles, and wonders, which God did by Him in the midst of the people*" – as ought to have convinced even the most skeptical among them.

Their adherence to man-made traditions and doctrines negated the very Word of God.

Making the Word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye (Mark 7:13).

To this end God was about to punish them, by giving them over for a time to hardness of heart and blindness of mind; while the Gentiles, whom they regarded as no better than dogs, would be admitted to a participation in the joys of the gospel. To portray in the most glowing colors to the minds of his hearers the consequences of blind adherence to the law, and also the reward of believing, our Savior spoke the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

It may be proper to remark, in this place, that this story was not original with the Savior, but was simply used by Him to illustrate His subject. The story was probably familiar to His hearers, and our Savior for that reason took occasion to make a practical application of it.

In *Paige's Selections*, we find the following from Dr. Whitby,

That this is a parable, and not a real history of what was actually done, is evident (1) Because we find this very parable in the *Gemara Babylonicum* whence it is cited by Mr. Sheringham, in the preface to his *Joma*. (2) From the circumstances of it, *viz.*, The rich man's lifting up his eyes in hell, and seeing Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, his discourse with Abraham, his complaint of being tormented with flames, and his desire that Lazarus might be sent to cool his tongue; and if all this be confessedly parable, why should the rest, which is the very parable in the *Gemara*, be accounted history!"

By the Rich Man, our Savior evidently intended to represent the Jewish priests, who were literally clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. The Mosaic law provided for the support of the Priests, and granted to them certain portions of the sacrifices or offerings which were brought by the people to be offered to the Lord. Not only so, but they were also blessed above all others in that, specifically "*to them was committed the oracles of God.*" They therefore not only fared sumptuously with respect to temporal

things, but they were also privileged with spiritual food.

By the beggar is meant the common man of Israel who, from the Pharisees' moral point of view, were poor and degraded.

By the crumbs which fell from the Rich Man's table, and with which the beggar desired to be fed, our Savior represents the willingness, and even anxiety of the common man of Israel to acquaint themselves with God.

By the dogs which came and licked his sores, is probably meant the Gentiles, who sought to come to God by blessing to the sons of Abraham in their afflictions.

And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

The term "angel" is a name of an office, and not, as is too generally supposed, of nature. It literally signifies a messenger, minister or servant, and might therefore be appropriately applied to the Twelve Apostles of Christ.

The Rich Man's lifting up his eyes in hell, "being in torment," is designed to represent the disappointment and misery of the Priests on finding that their office, with all its appurtenances and blessings, was going to be taken from them. Thus this misery would be heightened by their witnessing the happiness enjoyed by the believing remnant. They would see those whom they had despised filled with joy and rejoicing, and receiving tokens of the divine favor and approbation.

And 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."

The priests, finding that their leaven was not accepted and that "the little flock" was receiving peculiar blessings of the kingdom and manifestation of God's favor, would gladly participate in their joys and blessings.

A change was taking place and the "little flock," by embracing the gospel of the kingdom, had become

the recipients of "good things"; while the Priests, by rejecting the gospel, had brought upon themselves the "evil things" which their pride and unbelief merited.

They moreover had continued in unbelief and had opposed the gospel for so long that God had, for a time, given them over to blindness of mind, and thus "a great gulf was fixed" between them and Christ's followers so that they could not believe in Christ as the true Messiah, however ardently they might desire to become partakers of the joys of those who had embraced His gospel.

This state of things our Savior had elsewhere predicted.

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'" (Matthew 23:38-39).

The priests had so long and so bitterly opposed the Savior, that they could not bring themselves to believe that He was the very Messiah.

Yet they and their followers (their "five brethren") had "Moses and the prophets." Both Moses and the prophets had written of the coming of Christ, and had described His character and the object of His mission in so plain a manner that all who examined their testimony without prejudice, and with their minds open to conviction, could not but be convinced that Jesus was the very Christ.

Such is the use which we suppose our Savior to have made of the parable. What the original meaning and design of it was, we, of course, have no means of knowing, nor is it of consequence that we should know. It is sufficient for us to know the use which was made of it by our Savior. We have, as we believe, clearly and fully proved that He used it solely and exclusively to show the effects of the rejection of the gospel by the Jewish leaders.

Thus, one of the main pillars in the temple of Partialism is therefore shaken and removed!

Five Pillars in the Temple of Partialism, Shaken and Removed, 1843
Balm of Gilead, Concord MA, 1843