

# Lazarus And The Rich Man

## – Luke 16:19-31

Many Christians believe that all people who do **not** accept the gospel message before they die are eternally lost and without hope.

On one hand, Christians believe that by the Son of God, all things were created, [**Colossians 1:16**] and by the Son's word all things are held together, [**Hebrews 1:3**] and that through the son's human birth, death and resurrection all things are reconciled to God, [**Colossians 1:20**].

Yet, still hold on the idea that the blood of Jesus Christ **cannot** reconcile humans who die before coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

**Acts 4:12** [New King James] *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

The Word of God, the Christian Bible, is very plain that **only** in Jesus Christ is there salvation from deserved death, for all humans have sinned, [**Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8**] and all have only earned death, [**Romans 6:23**].

### **Human religions do not lead to salvation from death!**

**Only in the Triune God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is there forgiveness of sin, healing of minds, redemption and eternal life.**

The question we are dealing with in this article is whether the Word of God, the Christian Bible, tells us that a person must confess Christ before they die or be automatically damned.

We are going to study one or two passages of scripture that are sometimes interpreted as proving that all who die without having come to faith in Jesus Christ are automatically damned.

Some also try to use these scriptures to prove that after death we go to heaven if we are saved from eternal death, inspite of the fact that **no** mention of heaven is to be found.

[Please download and study the articles on this website under the heading '*Death And Life After Death*'].

Before we begin to study the story of Lazarus and the rich man as found in **Luke 16:19-31** we need to read the context in which this account is found.

**To whom was Jesus Christ speaking?**

**What was the subject that prompted Jesus Christ to tell this story?**

**Luke 16:14** [New King James] *“Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.”*

**The group of people to whom Jesus Christ was speaking was the Pharisees who were “lovers of money.”**

These Pharisees were deriding or ridiculing Jesus Christ for what He had just told them.

**Luke 15:1-2** [New King James] *“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’”*

**It was because Jesus Christ related to and ate with tax collectors and sinners.**

Jesus Christ responded to these remarks by telling three parables.

The shepherd who rejoices over finding lost sheep.

The woman who rejoices over finding lost coin.

The father who rejoices over finding his lost son.

**These parables really upset the Pharisees and scribes knowing that they were directed against them.**

These parables extended God’s grace towards sinners which the self-righteous Pharisees could never accept.

**Luke 15:7** [New King James] *“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”*

This pointed remark was not lost on the scribes and Pharisees, for they considered themselves righteous and in no need of repentance.

**If the first two parables irritated the Pharisees and scribes, the third parable really stirred up their hatred of Jesus Christ’s words and person.**

**Here was a father who gives unbridled love and unconditional forgiveness to a son who had dishonoured him, wasted his wealth and assets and dragged the family name through the mud.**

**It was to the scribes and Pharisees a scandalous story that trampled on any sense of common decency, dignity and honour.**

When Jesus finished telling them this parable, He turns to His disciples and addressed them with another story [**Luke 16:1**], but the Pharisees were still listening [**verse 14**].

**The moral of this story, Jesus tells all who were listening, is that you cannot serve both money and God, for you will find yourself devoted to the one or the other [verse 13].**

**If you love money, you will not love God.**

**The Pharisees heard everything that Jesus Christ said, but learned nothing.**

Instead of repenting so that there might be “*joy in heaven*” they ridiculed Jesus Christ.

**His words were utter foolishness to them, because of their great love of money [verse 14].**

Jesus Christ’s response to this was –

**Luke 16:15-17** [New King James] *“And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.’”*

Jesus Christ's message implied *"because you prize the things of men, not the things of God, you are rejecting God's urgent summons to enter His Kingdom, which can only be done through me."*

**Luke 16:18** [New King James] *"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery."*

This may at first appear to be completely out of context. More likely, it serves as a further declaration that the law and the prophets are in fact part and parcel of the Kingdom of God, and that by rejecting Jesus Christ as the Messiah the Jewish religious leaders had *"divorced"* the law and the prophets, with witness to Him, from the Kingdom of God, in so doing have rejected God, [likened to adultery throughout the Old Testament, compare **Jeremiah 3:6** etc.]

**With his background in mind we can begin to study the story of Lazarus and the rich man.**

## **A tale of unbelief –**

**There are three characters in this story.**

**The rich man representing the Pharisees a class of people despised.**

**Abraham, who was a Jewish figure of comfort and peace in the afterlife.**

The point that Jesus Christ is making in this story is the same point He has been making all along.

**You Pharisee type people consider yourselves the high and mighty blessed by God because of your wealth, but the truth is you love money and hate God.**

This is why you are so rankled that I spend my time in fellowship with unvarnished sinners.

**This is why you despise your fellow human beings and will not humble yourselves and believe in Me and find true riches.**

**Luke 16:19-22** [New King James] *"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 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. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried."*

**This is exactly the opposite to what the Pharisees expected would happen to a man like Lazarus.**

**To the Pharisees such people were poor and diseased beggars because they were under a God's curse, they assumed therefore it was only natural that such people go to be tormented in Hades when they die.**

*"Not so."* Says Jesus Christ, *"Your worldview is upside down. You know nothing of My Father's Kingdom. Not only are you wrong about how My Father feels about Lazarus but you are wrong about how My Father feels about you."*

**Luke 16:22-24** [New King James] *"So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. '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.'"*

**Jesus Christ completes the turnabout by telling them that it was the rich man who finds himself tormented in Hades.**

**The rich man's request to Abraham to send Lazarus with a drop of water to cool his tongue, is interesting.**

**The tongue is one of the organs of speech, and by the torment of the tongue the rich man is reminded of all the wicked words that he had spoken against God and fellow human beings.**

The Greek word translated "torment" is "basanō" meaning any test or criterion.

**By his words he was judged so it was his tongue that was in torment, [Matthew 12:36].**

The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus with this water because he knows him, and thinks, in his self-righteousness, that Lazarus would be willing to do it for old acquaintance sake.

There is a time coming when those who now hate and despise the people of God will gladly receive kindness from them and be willing to learn from them.

**Luke 16:25** [New King James] *"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.'"*

Abraham did **not** grant this request, **see how justly this rich man was rewarded.**

**He that had denied a crumb is now denied a drop!**

Abraham calls the rich man "son," a kind and civil title, he had been a son but a rebellious one.

**"Remember son" these are cutting words, [Hebrews 4:12] sinners are called upon to remember and to repent, [Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13-14].**

Remember what a bountiful Creator God we have and give to him the praise and worship that is His by such love and mercy being extended to us, [Romans 12:1-2].

**Matthew 19:23-24** [New King James] *"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'"*

The eye of the needle refers to the small side gate next to the main gate into a city, which was closed at dusk.

To get through this small gate the goods loaded on the camel would have to be taken off.

**Remember how he could have helped Lazarus, his nearest neighbour, without any real loss of his own comforts, [Matthew 25:31-46].**

## **The bridge across the chasm –**

**Luke 16:26** [New King James] *"And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us."*

**Human beings cannot pass across this great gulf between life and death.**

**But God has provided One who can cross chasms for the sake of human sinners.**

**John 3:16-20** [New King James] *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 'He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has*

*not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.’”*

God the Father sacrificed His beloved only Son for all sinners, that everyone who believes and trusts in Him and His sacrifice can pass from death into life, [**John 5:24; 1 John 3:14**].

Jesus Christ’s condemnation of the unbelief of the Pharisees in this story concluded with the rich man arguing that if someone would warn his brothers, they would not come into the place where he was being judged.

**Luke 16:27-31** [New King James] *“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 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.’”*

### **This has happened.**

Abraham’s reply pointed the rich man towards all the prophets had said about Jesus Christ the Messiah that they all looked forward to coming, to the nation of Israel.

The Pharisees and all the Jews who looked to them as righteous leaders, not only rejected Jesus Christ but conspired the chief priests to have Jesus Christ crucified and conspired to have the soldiers to lie about his resurrection, *“coming back from the dead.”*

Then they proceeded to persecute and even kill those who became believers of Jesus Christ.

**This story of Lazarus and the rich man is primarily about the refusal of the Jewish leaders to believe in Jesus Christ and the willingness of others to do so, and secondarily about the reversal of common assumptions as riches being a sign of God’s favour.**

**This story is not given to paint us a portrait of heaven and hell.**

It is a parable of judgement against the unbelieving Jewish leadership and the unkind rich, using common Jewish imagery of the afterlife, [Hades and being with Abraham] as a literally backdrop to make a point.

Jesus Christ was **not** satisfying our itching curiosities about what heaven and hell are like.

Jesus Christ was teaching us about God’s secrets, [**Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:9, etc.**], the mystery of the ages, [**Ephesians 3:4-5**] that in Him, Jesus Christ, God has always been reconciling the world to Himself, [**2 Corinthians 5:19**].

**Do not allow a preoccupation with other worldly geographical trivia lead us away from the very point missed by the rich man in the story.**

**Believe in the One who came back from the dead, our Saviour Jesus Christ.**