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RICH TO HELL – POOR TO HEAVEN

– *MAY 17.* – *LUKE 16:19-31.* –

"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." – PROVERBS 21:13.

DID our Lord mean that all rich men and all rich women are to spend eternity in misery because of faring sumptuously every day, and wearing purple and fine linen? Can it be true that in order to get to Heaven we must be poor beggars, covered with sores, and have them licked by dogs, and must eat crumbs from a rich man's table? Has character nothing to do with future rewards and punishments? Again, will it be so that for all eternity the rich, tormented in fire, will see the poor in bliss, and the honored poor see the rich in eternal misery? Can this be the arrangement of an all-wise, all-loving Creator – one who knew the end from the beginning?

For many years this parable has caused distress of mind to the more saintly of God's people; both heart and head have rebelled. We remembered that Abraham was very rich, likewise Isaac, Jacob, King David, King Solomon, etc. We remembered that God Himself is very rich. Then we looked up the subject in the Hebrew and the Greek, and found that Abraham did not go to [R5444 : page 123] Gehenna, the hopeless condition, the Second Death, but to Sheol, Hades, the tomb, the grave, the state of death, where there is no fire.

Our greater knowledge increased the mystery; for the Scriptures declare that Sheol, Hades, the tomb, is to be destroyed, that all are to be brought forth from it in the resurrection. No other Scripture seemed to agree with this parable. It stands in a class by itself, except as we might use for its support one text in Revelation which speaks of a symbolic beast and a symbolic false prophet in

torment. Thus have the thinking people of the Church been stumbled and perplexed by the story of this lesson.

NOW ALL IS CLEAR, PLAIN

Now we see that our lesson is a parable. It is not to be taken literally, any more than are the other parables and dark sayings of our Savior; such as, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you"; or again, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out...; if thine hand offend thee, cut it off." Indeed, we find that Jesus spoke to the people only with parables. (Matthew 13:34.) None were ready for the depth of His teaching until after the Holy Spirit at Pentecost began to give qualification.

How simple it all seems now! how beautiful! Many of God's people are rejoicing that in the light of the present understanding of the Bible the Divine character is shining forth, beautiful in its Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power.

It is not difficult for us to understand that our lesson is a parable. To take it literally, as we have seen, would involve the absurdity of supposing that all beggars go to Heaven, and that all wealthy go to Hell; for the parable says nothing about character – either that the poor man was good or that the Rich Man was bad. Viewed as a parable, we see that the thing said is not the thing meant. Thus in other parables wheat and sheep represent children of God; tares and goats represent those dominated by the Adversary, the god of this world.

THE RICH MAN OF THE PARABLE

In the parable under consideration, the Rich Man represents a class, and the poor man, Lazarus, another class. Let us see: The Rich Man was the Jewish nation, which had been in God's favor for more than sixteen centuries. To the Jew had been given the promises, the Prophets, the blessings and privileges of the Law

Covenant. These symbolically were their purple, fine linen and sumptuous table. The fine linen symbolized their typical justification through typical sacrifices. Their purple raiment symbolized royalty; for they were the typical Kingdom. Their sumptuous fare represented the Divine promises, as St. Paul's words imply. – Romans 11:9.

In Jesus' day Jewish favor began to wane. They were completely cut off in A.D. 70, as all Jews will admit. During the interim of forty years the Rich Man, the Jewish nation, sickened, died and was buried. Nationally, they went to Hades, to the tomb; and their resurrection has not yet been accomplished, although Zionism is the beginning of it.

But although nationally dead and buried, the Jews individually have been very much alive during the last nineteen centuries. They have had anguish of soul, as they have received persecutions – sometimes, alas! from those who profess the name of Jesus, but who deny Him in their practises. For all these centuries the Jews have cried out to God, who in the parable is represented as Abraham, the Father of the Faithful. The only answer that they have had is that there is a gulf of separation between them and God. Thank God, this cannot much longer be the case! The New Dispensation dawns, in which the Rich Man will return from Hades. Israel will be nationally rehabilitated, and God's favor will again come to those of them who shall learn needed lessons.

THE POOR MAN OF THE PARABLE

The poor man of the parable represents an outcast class. It included publicans and sinners, who had alienated themselves from God's favor. It also included Gentiles, to whom Divine favor had never been extended – "aliens and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel." (Ephesians 2:12.) These had no fine linen of typical justification, and no purple, representing a share in

God's favor as part of His Kingdom. None of the promises belonged to them. All that they could have would be merely such crumbs as would fall from the Rich Man's table.

The Scriptures illustrate two such crumbs given to this class by Jesus. When He healed the Roman centurion's servant, it was a concession at the request of the Jews, who declared that this man was a friend and had done them good, by building a synagogue, etc. The healing of this servant was a crumb. Similarly, the Syro-Phoenician woman got a crumb when she came to Jesus entreating the recovery of her daughter, who was possessed of a demon. The Master answered, "It is not proper to take the children's bread and give it unto dogs." He here used the customary Jewish phraseology respecting Gentiles – Gentile dogs. The Syro-Phoenician woman was not a Jewess and had no claim on God's favor, but she replied: "Yea, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the children's table." Jesus noted her faith and gave her the crumb which she desired.

As the Jews died to their favor, so the outcast publicans, sinners and Gentiles died to their disfavor; such of them as desired the favors of God, hungering and thirsting for His Word of promise, were received by Him. The early Church was made up of this Lazarus class, rejected by the Pharisees as publicans, sinners and Gentiles. Instead of being any longer alienated from God, these became the children of God and heirs of His promises. In the parable they are represented as children of Abraham – in his arms. In the type, Isaac was the beloved son of promise to the literal Abraham. In the antitype, Jesus and His followers are the Spiritual Seed of Abraham, received to God's bosom and favor. Thus St. Paul writes, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the Promise" – made to Abraham. – Galatians 3:29.

"A GREAT GULF FIXED"

The great gulf between Judaism and Christianity has been fixed for more than eighteen centuries. During all this period no Jew has been permitted to come near to God, and no Gentile permitted to take the former position of the Jew, or in any manner to claim favor aside from Christ. In the Divine Plan the gulf was fixed unalterably. "There is none other name given under Heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved" – whereby we may come into heart relationship with God. This gulf dates from the time that Christ came and offered Himself to Israel, and was rejected and crucified.

Thank God, His Word points us to another change of dispensation at the Second Coming of Christ! Then the Lazarus class, now children of God by faith, will be made actually and gloriously His children beyond the veil. In association with Jesus their Lord, they will take control of the world; for they will be His Bride and Joint-heir in the Kingdom. What will happen to the Rich Man then? Oh, he is to have a resurrection from Hades! **[R5444 : page 124]**

While God's Kingdom will be represented on the spiritual plane by the Lazarus class, it will be represented on the earthly plane by another class, which will be Jewish. The Jews who crucified Jesus will not be made princes in the earth in association with Messiah's spiritual Empire, but some of their brethren will be – a class whom they have been accustomed to call fathers will be made Princes. These Scripturally are known as "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the Prophets," and all who during the Jewish Epoch proved themselves loyal to God and faithful, described by St. Paul in Hebrews 11:32-40.

St. Paul refers to this recovery of the Jews to Divine favor in Romans 11:25-33. He there points out that as we who are now the people of God were not always so, but were received to Divine

favor when Israel was broken off from God's favor, so in due time those Israelites cut off from the favor of God will receive favor through our favor. That is to say, when the Church shall have attained the prize of glory, honor and immortality, as Spiritual Israel, then the gulf separating Natural Israel from God's favor will have been passed. Then favor will return to Natural Israel. Coming to them through the **[R5445 : page 124]** glorified Spiritual Israel, it will extend through them to all nations, peoples, kindreds and tongues of humanity, during the Millennial Age.

This is the Divine Promise, "In thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." The Spiritual Seed of Abraham, the Church, gets the first share in this Promise, and the natural seed of Abraham gets the second part; but both together will be used by the Lord in rolling away the curse and pouring out, instead, favors and blessings upon humanity, upon whomsoever will accept them.

DIVES' FIVE BRETHREN

The parable represents Dives as praying for a drop of water to cool his parched tongue. Symbolically, parabolically, this represents the Jewish people in great distress, asking God to allow Christians to give them some help from their troubles. Have the Jews ever appealed to God for help? Have they prayed for relief from the persecutions which have come to them in the past and which to some extent still continue in Russia? Surely they have! Moreover, they have appealed to representatives of the Lazarus class – representatives of Christianity – desiring that their release and relief should come through them.

An illustration of this prayer for relief in our own day was afforded in the appeal of the Jews to President Roosevelt that he would use his influence with the government of Russia for the amelioration of Jewish persecutions. Did they get this drop of water? Nay! Mr. Roosevelt replied that the comity of nations would not permit such a communication from a friendly nation.

The parable goes further and develops the fact that the Rich Man had five brethren in danger of joining him in the trouble that was upon him. Who were his five brethren? We reply that the Jews of Palestine in Jesus' day represented chiefly the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, while the majority of the other ten tribes were scattered abroad in various lands. The question raised is, Did this trying experience affect merely the Jews of Palestine, who had enjoyed most of God's favors, or did it include also the Jews scattered abroad? The answer is given in the parable, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." This proves that Jews only were referred to; for no Gentile had Moses and the Prophets. The number five is in full accord, also. Whereas two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were represented by the one Rich Man, so proportionately the other ten tribes would be represented by five brethren.

And so it was. The Message of the Gospel, which began with the Jews in Palestine, was extended to every land; and the Apostle Paul, in going to any cities amongst the Gentiles, preached first to the Jews, saying, It is expedient that the Gospel should be preached first to you; but seeing you reject the grace of God, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:46,47.) In other words, the test upon all Israelites was the same.

Thus we are finding a depth of wisdom in Jesus' teachings beyond anything we could even have dreamed. We are finding, too, that the horrible nightmare doctrines of the Dark Ages poisoned our judgments, crossed our spiritual eyesight, and hindered us from seeing the beauty of the Lord's Word. Thank God for the New Day and the light that it is shedding upon the Bible!

