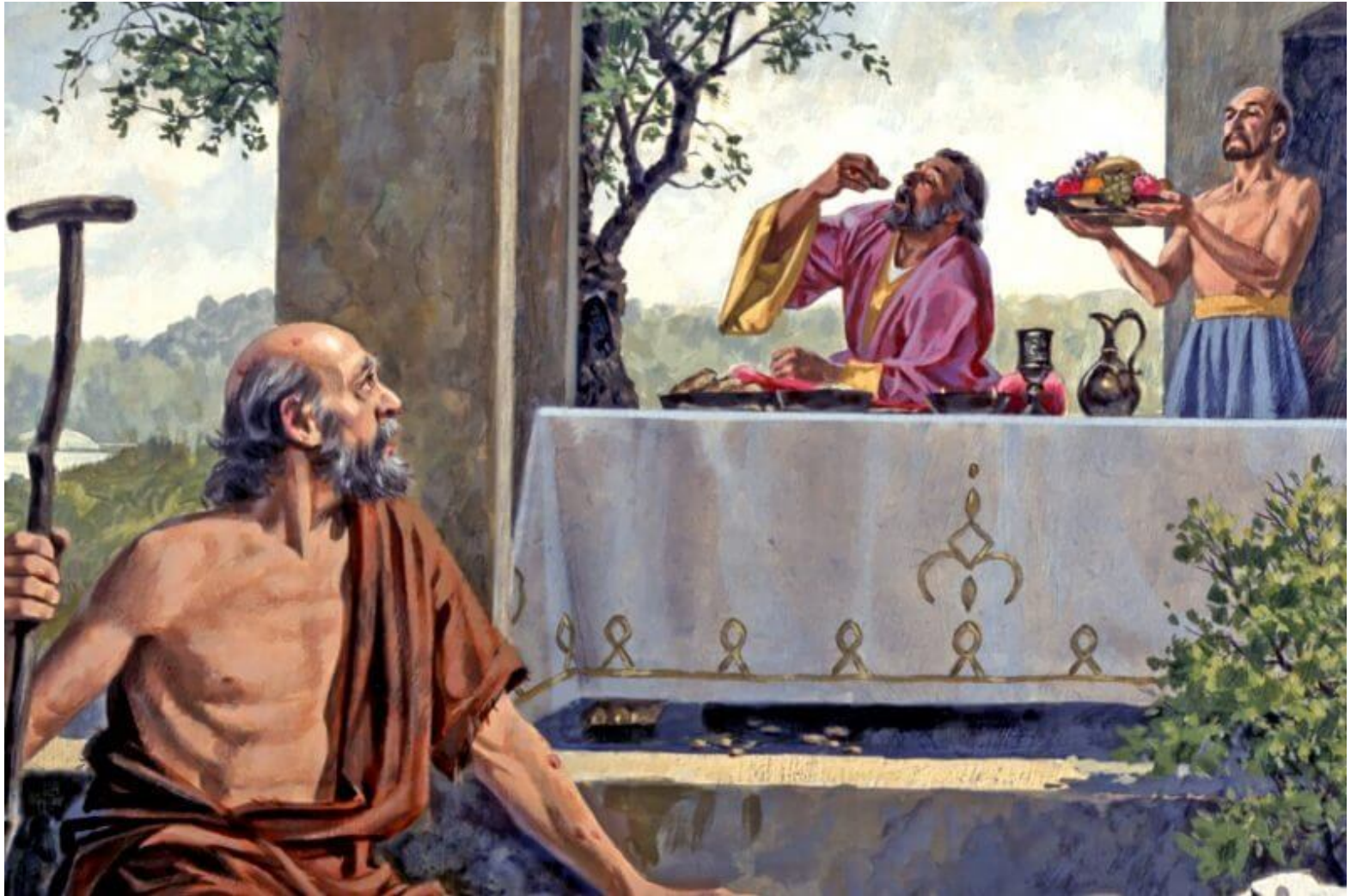


Is The Rich Man and Lazarus Story About Hell Prophecy Parable or both?

written by Alfred Persson | August 30, 2024



*34 All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them,
35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:
“I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 13:34-35 NKJ)*

When Jesus asserted Messianic authority, the Pharisees derided Him. Jesus warns ‘the Law and the Prophets were until John’, after that everyone pressing into the Kingdom accepts His authority:

*13 “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”
14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.
15 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.
16 “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. (Lk. 16:13-16 NKJ)*

Jesus prophesied the Pharisees would reject His teaching against adultery with mammon and end up in hell, even though Lazarus would return from the dead to warn them:

9 Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.

10 But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. (Jn. 12:9-11 NKJ)

Therefore, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is prophetic, a revelation about the afterlife the Pharisees were certain to experience:

19 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

20 "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

21 "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "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.

23 "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 "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.'

25 "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.

26 '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.'

27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,

28 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

30 "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

31 "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.'" (Lk. 16:19-31 NKJ)

A prophetic warning to repent must be literal, or the warning becomes mere comedy. But does "retributive justice" exhaust the symbolism of this parable, or does it imply there is hope the unsaved dead ?

Ask yourself, aren't Abraham and Lazarus "on the Lord's side" completely supporting God's retributive justice? (Exod. 32:26-27) How is it they want to cross the gulf and comfort the Rich Man? (Lk. 15:26) As that would be rebellion against God's judgment, the rich man's torment must have another purpose than "retributive justice". It must have as its goal the possible redemption of the Rich Man.

22 *"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.*

23 *"And being in torments (931 βάσανος basanos) in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

24 *"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 (3600 ὀδυνάω odunao) in this flame (5395 φλόξ phlox).'"*

25 *"But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted (3870 παρακαλέω parakaleo) and you are tormented (3600 ὀδυνάω odunao). (Lk. 16:22-25 NKJ)*

If the "torment" (3600 ὀδυνάω odunao) is the classic idea of hell-fire, the Rich Man would ask for a lot more than a little water to cool his tongue. *Odunao* here refers to mental anguish (Luke 2:48; 16:25; Acts 20:38). Its antithesis is *parakaleo* 'to be consoled for sorrow' like Lazarus (Lk. 16:25).

Christ chose the word "torment" (931 βάσανος basanos) to describe the Torment in Hades:

Meaning: 1) a touchstone, which is a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the colour of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with either metal 2) the rack or instrument of torture by which one is forced to divulge the truth.-Strong's Concordance

This "torment" is the kind that brings truth to the surface, resulting in "anguish" and "sorrow" (3600 ὀδυνάω odunao cp. Acts 20:38) for sin. The imagery of purging from sin is common in the Old Testament (Zech. 13:9; Ps. 51:7; 66:10; Isa. 1:25; 4:4; 6:7; 48:10; Ezek. 24:13; Dan. 11:35):

2 *"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap.*

3 *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness. (Mal. 3:2-3 NKJ)*

In Luke 16:24 the "flame" (5395 φλόξ phlox) causes the "agony" or "anguish" (3600 ὀδυνάω odunao). The Rich Man is being purged (Mal. 3:3; Job 23:10; Zech. 13:9 cp. 1 Pet. 1:7) by the "flame of God's inspection": "His eyes like a flame" (Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 19:12). The "flame" is the

“visible aspect of a fire that springs upward and is usually orange”(Logos Bible Sense Lexicon). God is revealed in the “flame” (Ex. 3:2; Judges 13:20; Isa. 66:15 LXX; Acts 7:30; 2 Thess. 1:8).

The “torments of Hades” are designed to bring the true person to the surface, liberate their free will from all bondage to sin and delusion. After suffering for their sins “judged according to men in the flesh” , if they choose to believe the gospel preached to them in Hades they will “live according to God in the Spirit” apart from any torment (1 Pet. 4:6), eagerly waiting for the Second Coming of Christ when they will rise with the dead in Christ (Heb. 9:27-28) [2]:

6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. (1 Pet. 4:6 NKJ)

[Compare the similar wording in 1 Peter 3:18 θανατωθεῖς μὲν σαρκί, ζωοποιηθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι “put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit”. This implies the “trial/judgment/torment” in hades ends” when they repent and “live according to God in the Spirit” (ζῶσιν δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι). Their “spirit” quickened is now abiding surrounded by the Holy Spirit (Compare ἐν ᾧ καὶ “in which also” 1 Pet. 3:19) shielded from any torments.]

After death is a trial, a judgement, so Christ was offered to bear their sins to make possible they pass the Trial by believing the gospel preached to the dead (1 Pet. 6:4) and then eagerly wait for Christ’s return, for salvation.

27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,[1]

*28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. **To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.** (Heb. 9:27-28 NKJ)*

Context confirms the torments in Hades have redemption in view. The Rich Man is clearly sorrowful. He has Christian like concern for his family, that they not end up like he. Moreover, the redeemed in heaven want to comfort the Rich Man (Lk. 16:26), but that would be out of place if he were irredeemably wicked and was being punished eternally for sin. That would be rebellion against God’s judgment (compare: Deut. 19:21).

If the Rich Man knew his torment was eternal, if he were irredeemably wicked the entire conversation is irrational. Its much more likely he would curse God and Abraham and everyone else. Therefore, his rational demeanor, his concern for his family are consistent with his still having hope for future relief.

Finally, it follows from God’s love for humanity (John 3:16) Hades is among the “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom.

8:28) because the majority of these would be eternally lost if postmortem evangelization does not occur. Hades is an “intermediate state” before the final judgment; therefore its logical purpose is re-education, not judgment. If that is not so, from whence these who rise from Hades to a resurrection of life?

28 “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice

29 “and come forth— those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (Jn. 5:28-29 NKJ)

13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them...

15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:13-15 NKJ)

John is viewing this terrifying event and observes only those NOT written in the book of life were cast into the Lake of Fire. For John to know that, he had to see those who WERE written in the book of life and notice they were NOT cast into the Lake of Fire.[4]

That fits the scripture revealing God is in Hades, no doubt to save as many as He can:

If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. (Ps. 139:8 NKJ)

And he said: “I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice. (Jon. 2:2 NKJ)

18 You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there.

19 Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! Selah

20 Our God is the God of salvation; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death. (Ps. 68:18-20 NKJ)

Upon repentance and belief in Jesus Christ, it follows torment in Hades ends once God’s anger for sin is turned away (Isa. 12:1-2; 54:8; Ps. 30:5; 126:5).

The purpose of Hell is to liberate those who are slaves to sin, restoring their free will so they can choose life in Christ rather than eternal death. Having been “judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet. 4:6), compare the similar wording

in 1 Peter 3:18 θανατωθεῖς μὲν σαρκί, ζωοποιηθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι “put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit”. This implies the “trial/judgment/torment” in hades ends”[3] when they repent and “live according to God in the Spirit” (ζῶσιν δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι). Their “spirit” quickened and now abiding in the sphere of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 139:8; Jonah 2:2). Now that their “judgment” ended they eagerly wait for the return of Christ (Heb. 9:27-28) when their “spirit will be saved in the Day of the lord Jesus (cp. 1 Cor. 5:5) either rising with all the dead on Judgment Day (Jn. 5:28-29; Rev. 20:13; Da. 12:2) or at His coming. [2]

In other words, once ‘judged according to men in the flesh, they live according to God in the Spirit’ (1 Pet. 4:6; Psa. 86:13; 139:8; Jonah 2:2). Although they remain in Hades (Luke 16:26), when they repent and believe the gospel preached they live according to God in His Spirit apart from torments eagerly waiting for the Return of Christ (1 Pet. 4:6; Heb. 9:27-28; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). Like Lazarus they are in a restful state.

Confirming repentance and eventual salvation is possible for the elect in Hades, Jews who died enemies of the Gospel are still God’s Elect (Rom. 11:28) He will not forsake (Rom. 11:1). God’s election to predestination (Rom. 8:29), the gifts and calling of God; are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). Although they died enemies of the Gospel (Rom. 11:28), and so judged according to men in the flesh, they can choose to live according to God in the Spirit (1 Pet. 4:6), eagerly waiting (Heb. 9:28) for their Deliverer:

*26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”
28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.
29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:26-29 NKJ)*

When God’s mercy and love, His righteous judgments are made manifest, all the earth will see His glory and cry out:

Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.” (Rev. 15:4 NKJ)

END NOTES

[1]

*27 Καὶ καθ’ ὅσον ἀπόκειται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαξ ἀποθανεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κρίσις·
28 οὕτως καὶ ὁ χριστός, ἅπαξ προσενεχθεὶς εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνενεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας (Heb. 9:27-28*

The article doesn't appear before *krisis* so this does not refer to "the Judgment" before the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11). The parallel with humans is elegance with a twist. Both Christ and humans were appointed to die once for sins. His death is a sacrifice for our sins, while our death for our sins. The Divine "determination" or "Judgment" is we bear their cost in Hades, but the Divine "determination" for Christ's sacrifice is He became our Redeemer who takes away the sins of the many who repent and "live according to God in the Spirit" (1 Pet. 4:6). That is why these human dead eagerly wait in Hades for the coming of Christ a second time apart from sins when He will raise them from the dead in Salvation:

so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Heb. 9:28 NKJ)

[2]

It is possible those who died and repented before Christ's Second Coming rise with the church (Consistent with the precedence set in 1 Pet. 3:18-22; Eph. 4:8 compare 1 Thess. 4:13-18); but its possible they must wait until Judgment Day (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Rev. 20:11-15; Compare Luke 16:26 but see Mt. 19:26). **Perhaps the most likely scenario is a combination, those who repented before Christ's coming rise with the Church's dead at His coming, those who repent after rising on Judgment Day.** *That is consistent with all these scriptures.* As for the wicked who die during the Millennial Kingdom, including those with Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7-9), they die "accursed" (Isa. 65:20) and so rise to a resurrection of condemnation.

[3]

Objections have been raised on two grounds. 1) Faith in Christ is a gift and not a "work" (Eph 2:8-9); 2) There is no work possible in Hell (Eccl. 9:10).

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1 NKJ)

1). Faith without "seeing" "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) is materially different than faith in what one sees (John 20:29). Christ calls those having faith in Him because they saw Him "a work" therefore those obeying Christ's preaching in Hades can be saved:

28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (Jn. 6:28-29 NKJ)

2). No works in the grave like building houses, making money or getting married or any of the other works related to the “vanities of life”. This scripture does NOT rule out all works in the grave:

9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.
10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going (Eccl. 9:9-10 NKJ)

[4]

And if any (εἴ τις) was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:15 ASV)

James Boyer incorrectly includes Revelation 20:15 εἴ τις (if any) in his “Corpus of First Class Conditions in the NT” discussing its use in discourse:

If the first class condition states or implies the actual truth, then it could not possibly be used by Christ to say, “If [or according to this view, since] I by Beelzebub cast out demons...(Matt 12:27), nor “Since I do not do the deeds of my father...” (John 10:37), nor “Since I have spoken evil...” (John 18:23). Paul could not have written “Since there is no resurrection...” (1 Cor 15:13), nor “Since Christ is not raised...” (1 Cor 15:14). These are not isolated, peculiar examples; they represent 12% of all the first class conditions in the NT. It is simply not true that first conditions indicate the external objective truth or reality of the condition.-First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?”(Grace Theological Journal Vol 2, p.75)

Revelation 20:15 isn’t discussion, it is a prose report of what is being seen by John. This is NOT a conditional argument, John is reporting what he saw as a statement of fact. Therefore, when John notices “if any was not found written in the book of life he was cast into the lake of fire” it implies some raised from Hades were written in the book of life and therefore not cast into the lake of fire. Why express it negatively? Whether the multitude of Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:8-9) are judged first (cp. Mt. 20:16) or last, the impression of so many not written in the book of life and cast into the lake of fire would be searing, set the tone for the entire horror.

God’s Plan for the Lost
Elect Rise From Hell On Judgment Day?
Preaching to the Dead (Postmortem Evangelism)
Does the Lake of Fire Symbolize Eternal Torment for all cast into it?
Jesus Preached to the Dead

What did the apostle John reveal when he said: “It is the last hour”?

Where Is The Judgment Of Fallen Angels?

The Origin of Satan and Demons

The Coming False Christ and His Followers Revealed