

November 2019

Frank W. Nelte

### **LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN**

Luke is the only writer who recorded the parable about Lazarus and the rich man. Most of us are somewhat familiar with this parable. So let's take a closer look at it and let's consider the information presented in this parable.

The plan of God includes three different resurrections. We commonly refer to them as first, second and third.

**The first resurrection is to immortal spirit life. It will take place at Jesus Christ's second coming, at which time Satan will be bound for 1000 years. There will be exactly 144,000 individuals in that resurrection, no more and no less. The destiny of those 144,000 individuals is to reign with Jesus Christ for 1000 years, before Satan is let loose for a very short time. The 144,000 will reign with Jesus Christ over physical mortal human beings.**

**The second resurrection will be a resurrection to mortal physical life. It will take place after Satan has been bound again, this time permanently for all future eternity. This is a resurrection for all human beings who had lived after the flood and died before Jesus Christ's second coming, except for the 144,000 in the first resurrection, and except for all those people who committed the unpardonable sin during their lives. The people in this resurrection will be given a 100-year lifespan, and the opportunity to be given immortal spirit life in the Family of God at the end of that 100-year period.**

**The third resurrection will be a resurrection to physical life for all those who committed the unpardonable sin during their lives. It will take place when that 100-year period for the people in the second resurrection comes to an end. The destiny of all those in this third resurrection is to be instantly burned up in the lake of fire that will engulf not only this planet Earth, but the entire universe. They will all become "ashes under the feet" of members of the Family of God (see Malachi 4:3). After that lake of fire has consumed all physical matter, God the Father will then create the new heavens and the new Earth.**

The question arises: why resurrect anyone just so that they can immediately be destroyed in a universe-consuming fire? Here is why:

When those people who during their lives committed the unpardonable sin died, then **the record of their existence**, in the form of the spirit in man, remained with God (see Ecclesiastes 12:7). So the memory and the record of their existence will still exist with God. The purpose for resurrecting these people to be immediately burned up is to erase totally the record that these people had ever existed in the first place. That destruction in the lake of fire will blot out any knowledge of all of those people. They'll be "as though they had not been" (see Obadiah 1:16).

The reason for this is as follows:

Every person who will be destroyed in that lake of fire, will have some relatives who will be spirit beings in the Family of God, be it a father or mother or son or daughter or brother or sister, etc. So for future eternity there would be many members in God's Family who could perhaps think:

"My own son / daughter / father / mother / brother / sister, etc. was burned up in the lake of fire. **That knowledge causes me sorrow**, because I wish that they too could be here with me for all future eternity. And I will forever live with this knowledge that my close relative had to be destroyed by God."

Such potential memories are blotted out by these people being destroyed in the lake of fire. That lake of fire will totally destroy the memory of the existence of those people who are burned up. After that fire they will truly be as though they had never existed. After that fire no member of the Family of God will be capable of remembering that they had had a son or daughter or father or mother who was blotted out in the lake of fire. **That memory will be erased** by that universe-consuming fire. So there will not even be **the potential** for sorrow or for tears, because all the former things will have passed away.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for **the former things are passed away**. (Revelation 21:4)

This should suffice as some general background for the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. In this parable Jesus Christ refers to two of these three resurrections. So now let's look at the parable.

## **LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN**

There was **a certain rich man**, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: (Luke 16:19)

Jesus Christ obviously had a specific purpose in mind when He told this parable. And to convey that purpose, Jesus Christ presented the details here with certain assumptions.

Jesus Christ used "the rich man" to represent the tribe of **Judah**. As a tribe they were unrepentant. Later in the parable this rich man in a passive way acknowledges that he himself was also unrepentant during his life.

Now this rich man wasn't necessarily a murderer or a thief or an adulterer. He is simply pictured as **extremely selfish** and totally unconcerned for any suffering in his particular environment. He didn't care that other people suffered or lacked enough food just to live. He certainly was not "sighing and crying for all the abominations" that were being committed all around him (see Ezekiel 9:4). **He only cared about himself**. Only the best food and the best clothing were good enough for him.

Then there was another man.

And there was **a certain beggar** named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, (Luke 16:20)

This beggar was in desperate straits. **He was starving** and **he was sickly**. But he was not envious of the rich man, and he didn't covet the rich man's wealth. All he was looking for was the scraps of food left over from the rich man's meals. He made no demands of any kind.

And **desiring to be fed with the crumbs** which fell from the rich man's table: moreover **the dogs** came and **licked his sores**. (Luke 16:21)

So the situation was this:

The rich man had far more wealth than he could possibly ever use up during his own lifetime. He had only the best of everything. And he was also acutely aware of this poor beggar lying at his gate; he could

not avoid seeing the beggar every day when it came to mealtimes. And he certainly knew the beggar's name.

But this rich man had no empathy, no feelings of compassion and mercy for this poor beggar. He ignored the beggar. The rich man most certainly did not love his neighbor as he loved himself (see Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39). As already mentioned, he was extremely selfish.

Now selfishness is a sin that needs to be repented of; i.e. we need to put the selfish way of thinking out of our lives, and replace it with a way of thinking that also incorporates a concern for the well-being of other people, helping other people where we can. This the rich man did not do.

The beggar, by contrast, is pictured as humble with no demands. He was content with leftover scraps that the rich man would throw away. He was patiently enduring his lot in life. He did not envy the rich man. Jesus Christ used this beggar to represent truly converted Christians.

So now the story moves on.

And it came to pass, that **the beggar died**, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: **the rich man also died**, and was buried; (Luke 16:22)

Implied here is that this situation continued for many years. The rich man never changed! He never got to the point of ever expressing any compassion for the poor beggar. He lived selfishly and he died selfishly. His wealth could not buy him immortality.

So both men died. And as the Apostle Paul explained:

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but **after this the judgment**: (Hebrews 9:27)

Now the dead don't really have any consciousness. They do not know anything. That's what Solomon explained.

For the living know that they shall die: but **the dead know not any thing**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

In order for the dead to have some knowledge and some awareness, they must first appear in a resurrection. And so once we have died, then it is appointed unto all of us by God that **we all must appear in one of the three resurrections** that I discussed at the start of this article. How we lived our lives will determine whether we will appear in the first or the second or the third resurrection. But all of us have to appear in one of those three. That's what Paul meant by "after this the judgment".

In our parable Jesus Christ pictured both men as after death being able to talk and to have an awareness. This means that Jesus Christ pictured Lazarus and the rich man each in a resurrection. But they are not in the same resurrection.

Let's notice:

**Lazarus the beggar "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom". Abraham will be one of the 144,000 in the first resurrection. Abraham will have a very prominent position in that group known as "the firstfruits unto God" (see Revelation 14:4). The expression "Abraham's bosom" refers to "a very close relationship with Abraham". That "close relationship" refers to being in the same resurrection that Abraham will be a part of. All of the people in that resurrection will have "a very close relationship" with every other person in that group of 144,000. Collectively those**

## **144,000 will form one body, the bride of Jesus Christ.**

Furthermore, the expression "carried by the angels" makes this same point. This is something Jesus Christ explained in Matthew 24:31.

And He shall send **His angels** with a great sound of a trumpet, and they **shall gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

So **Lazarus** is pictured as one of those who is "gathered" at Jesus Christ's second coming, to have a part in **the first resurrection**.

Notice that for Lazarus Jesus Christ immediately upon the death of Lazarus focuses on what will happen to Lazarus. Christ didn't even mention a burial. There is no delay needed for any explanations. Lazarus dies and his fate is clear: in the next split-second of his consciousness he will be in the first resurrection.

For **the rich man**, on the other hand, there is a distinct time gap. The rich man "died and was buried". This tells us that the rich man's resurrection is at a later time than the resurrection of Lazarus. The rich man has to wait for his turn. So he will be in a later resurrection than Lazarus. And Jesus Christ pictured this rich man not in the second, but in **the third resurrection**.

And **in hell he lifted up his eyes**, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (Luke 16:23)

The Greek text translated as "in hell" simply means "**in the grave**". Where the first (and only) place that is mentioned for Lazarus, after Lazarus had died, is "Abraham's bosom", the first place that is mentioned for the rich man, after he has died, is "the grave". So after death the rich man's future has more steps in it than the beggar's future.

When the rich man "lifted up his eyes" while in the grave, it means that **he is pictured in a resurrection**. But he is already lifting up his eyes while he is still in the grave, before he has even gone anywhere from the grave.

The grave is something physical, and it is for physical bodies. The grave is not for spirit bodies. So when the rich man lifts up his eyes even before leaving the grave, it is telling us that this man is in a **resurrection to physical life**. He is still in the place for physical bodies. His is the third resurrection.

Next, let's look at the expression "being in torments". He is still in the grave! He is not in what people might think of as "hell fire". He is still in the grave! The point is that he is not suffering any physical pain. His pain and torment and anguish are **in his mind**! His mental pain is not because of where he is. His mental anguish is due to the fact that **he knows** where he is going. The universe-wide fire has already started, and he can see his fate in an unmistakable way right in front of him. **He knows that he will be burned up** by the fire that he can see ahead of him! That is what terrifies him.

Next, he can see Abraham in the distance, with the assumption that he will recognize who is Abraham. And he also recognizes Lazarus there in the distance with Abraham. In that resurrection he has 20/20 vision. He can see the 144,000 in the distance.

He is still in the grave, but he is terrified of where he will have to go ... into that fire in front of him. Or, to be more accurate, he sees that fire coming towards him. And in stark terror his mouth and his throat dry up, so that he can hardly speak. That is a fairly common automatic response to extreme fear and terror, a response over which people who are terrified often have very little control.

So now Jesus Christ has this rich man, who still hasn't left the grave, speaking 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**. (Luke 16:24)

The rich man is **not** tormented "**in** this flame", because he is not yet in any flame! He is tormented "**because of** the flame" that he can see in front of him. So it is "because of" and not "in". Once he is in the flame, it's tickets for him! He will be vaporized before he can say one more word. But he can talk very briefly **before** he is engulfed by that flame.

As I have already mentioned, his is an extreme mental anguish and fearful anticipation.

Next, for Lazarus to bring him **one drop of water**, which is all that would stay "on the tip of his finger" is an absurd request if this rich man was already "**in**" some flames. And people who find themselves "in" some flames certainly would not ask for water "to cool their tongues" as a first request.

Let's understand that the rich man is not asking for anything that he might be able to swallow. If we get one drop of water into our mouths, then there isn't anything there to swallow! The rich man didn't want to swallow that one drop of water; he wanted that drop to moisten his tongue and his lips, which had dried up due to his extreme terror. His mouth no longer functioned properly because it had no moisture and no saliva. That's why he wanted one or two drops of water.

Notice that this rich man freely acknowledges that he is terrified. That will be true for every single individual who will come up in the third resurrection. All of them will be terrified to the extreme! Today some of those who have turned their backs on God's truth and on God's way of life sometimes present an air of bravado, kind of a tough-guy image, or a couldn't-care-less attitude. But not when they then actually come up in the third resurrection. Oh no! Then all of them, without exception, will be totally and completely terrified, like this rich man. None of them will be able to put up some kind of front. **It is indeed "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** (see Hebrews 10:31).

Now Abraham responds to the rich man.

But Abraham said, Son, **remember** that you in your lifetime received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and you are tormented. (Luke 16:25)

Abraham says: **remember what you did with your life**. You lived just for yourself. You didn't care about Lazarus or about anybody else. You were extremely selfish. And selfishness will always incur a penalty from God. There is no place in the Family of God for selfish people, because selfishness is really a form of idolatry, placing self ahead of God.

Jesus Christ had explained at an earlier occasion:

Blessed *are* **the merciful**: for they **shall obtain mercy**. (Matthew 5:7)

Receiving mercy from God for our failings and shortcomings is conditional. It is conditional on us extending mercy to other people. But that is something the rich man had never done, extend mercy to Lazarus. And so the rich man himself also did not receive any mercy. Selfish people do not receive mercy.

Lazarus had endured hardship and difficult times without complaining and without getting into any wrong attitudes. He had faced difficult trials. And now God was rewarding Lazarus for bearing his trials patiently. Lazarus was an example of Matthew 5:4.

Blessed *are* they that mourn: for **they shall be comforted**. (Matthew 5:4)

Abraham then explained something that the rich man could not understand.

And beside all this, **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. (Luke 16:26)

That "great gulf" was not a geographic distance. That "great gulf" between them was **a condition**, not a distance. At that time Abraham and Lazarus will be immortal spirit beings, while the rich man will be a physical and very mortal being. There is an enormous "gulf" between immortality and mortality.

Nobody who is physical can cross that gulf. It is only the power of God that can make that transition from physical to spirit possible. And God will certainly not do that for anyone who appears in the third resurrection. And likewise, no spirit being can ever again become a mortal physical being. No spirit being can cross that gulf in the other direction.

Don't mistake angels or even Jesus Christ after His resurrection **appearing** in a fleshly human form with actually **being** physical and mortal. No spirit being can ever become a physical being (obviously apart from the extremely complex process Jesus Christ went through in order to become human). Appearing in a physical form doesn't make a spirit being a physical being. For a spirit being to appear in a physical form is something like "**putting on some uniform**", but without changing the real individual inside that uniform.

So Abraham told the rich man: we can't become physical again. The transition we have made from physical to spirit is irreversible. The rich man didn't get this, and so he asked Abraham to have Lazarus make that transition anyway.

Then he said, I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house: (Luke 16:27)

So now the rich man shows a concern for his own family. Send Lazarus to warn my family to help them avoid also heading for the lake of fire.

For **I have five brethren**; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. (Luke 16:28)

Judah was the fourth of Leah's six sons, and he had five full brothers (in addition to six half brothers). So the rich man is saying: send Lazarus back so he can warn my five brothers to change and to repent, so they don't end up like I have.

Abraham said to him, **They have Moses and the prophets**; let them hear them. (Luke 16:29)

It is Israel that has "Moses and the prophets". And the five brothers are a reference to five tribes of Israel.

What Abraham is saying is:

In order to know what God requires of us, how God wants us to live, **all we need** is the whole Old Testament (the New Testament had not yet been written). You don't need anything more than that to really repent and change and to then end up in God's Kingdom. Obviously, years after this parable had been told the New Testament was then written, and we today most certainly also need the New Testament.

The rich man had obviously had access to the teachings of the Old Testament. But he had never been motivated to change. Ready access to the truth had never done anything for the rich man himself. So he now reasons:

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but **if one went unto them from the dead**, they will repent. (Luke 16:30)

He realized that **people lack the motivation** to actually change and live by all of God's laws, because he himself had lacked that motivation. For the rich man it had not been a case of not knowing what God requires of us. As long as things were going well for him, he had lacked the incentive to change.

His statement that then "they will repent" is an indirect acknowledgment that he himself had never repented. It is also an acknowledgment that he knew that God demands that we repent, if we wish to receive immortal life in the Family of God. **He knew what God required**, but he had just never done it.

So now he falsely reasoned that **something miraculous**, like someone returning from the dead, is needed to impress us sufficiently so we will have the motivation to change.

**Now this is probably the most important lesson of this entire parable!**

We erroneously assume that powerful miracles will motivate people to do what is right. But that is simply not true!

As far as real repentance is concerned, miracles **do nothing at all!** Nothing! Miracles can impress us, yes. But we can never be "impressed into repentance".

Understand that any right actions done in response to witnessing a miracle are done from **a wrong motivation!** If those right actions would not have been done without that miracle, then the motivation is wrong. Miracles can **strengthen** our right motivation, but if the right motivation is not there to start with, then miracles cannot engender a right motivation.

A faith that is founded on the foundation of having witnessed a miracle, is on a weak foundation, one that will need to be tested severely to see if it will hold up in the absence of miracles.

The Apostle Paul explained the effect of miracles as follows:

Wherefore tongues (i.e. **miracles**) **are for a sign**, not to them that believe, but **to them that believe not**: but prophesying serves not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. (1 Corinthians 14:22)

It is those who "believe not" (i.e. the unconverted in the world) who are impressed by miracles. Speaking in tongues, i.e. the supernatural ability to fluently speak a foreign language without ever having learned it, is one particular category of miracles. But miracles don't lead people to repentance.

Miracles may well be a sign to unbelievers in the world. But after having witnessed the miracles those unbelievers will still be unbelievers! The miracles don't cause them to become real believers.

And **people don't change simply because they have witnessed a miracle.**

So the rich man's reasoning is false. It is in fact typical of the way the unconverted mind will reason, because the unconverted mind does not understand **how quickly** the effect of having witnessed a miracle wears off and disappears.

So Abraham then explains these facts to the rich man.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, **neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.** (Luke 16:31)

The people of Israel saw hundreds of miracles while they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. They had seen the plagues in Egypt; they had walked through the Red Sea; etc. And in most cases the effects of a powerful miracle lasted less than 24 hours. And we today are no different.

So we need to understand quite clearly that miracles do not lead anyone to a real repentance. What leads to real repentance is **understanding** what is right, and a spirit that is willing to make **an irrevocable commitment** to God based on that understanding.

The foundation for that understanding has to be "Moses and the prophets". Without accepting that foundation real repentance is not possible. The whole New Testament is built on that foundation. And witnessing miracles doesn't feature in that process.

That's the end of the parable in Luke 16. So here is what we have:

- 1) Lazarus comes up in **the first resurrection**, as one of the 144,000. At that time Satan is bound for 1000 years.
- 2) Then the 1000-year rule of Jesus Christ takes place. This period, the millennium, does not feature in the parable with Lazarus.
- 3) Then Satan is loosed for a short time to round up all the unconverted people. They are all destroyed by fire from heaven, and Satan is again bound, this time for ever.
- 4) Then **the second resurrection** takes place. The people in that resurrection will be given a 100-year lifespan to see if they will want to live by God's laws and ways. They will have the opportunity to be changed into spirit beings at the end of that 100-year period. This period also does not feature in the parable with Lazarus.
- 5) At the end of that 100-year period **the third resurrection** takes place. The rich man comes up in this resurrection. Those people from the 100-year period who had repented and accepted God's ways will be changed instantly into spirit beings, together with the repentant people from the millennium. All the rest who still did not repent even after that 100-year lifespan will remain as physical mortal human beings. Then the whole universe will become "a lake of fire" with everything physical burning up. That is the fire in which the rich man's existence will be permanently erased, along with all the other incorrigible people who will be a part of that third resurrection.
- 6) When everything combustible (i.e. this entire present universe together with all the wicked) has been burned up, so that only ashes remain (think of Malachi 4:3), then **the fire goes out!** Where there is no fuel, a fire will always go out. So that fire is only "age-lasting", however long it will take for this entire universe to burn up. There is no such thing as "an ever-burning hell fire".
- 7) Only then does God the Father present **the new heaven and the new earth**, which are briefly discussed in Revelation chapters 21-22. And that will then be the beginning of endless future eternity.

And this is how the parable of Lazarus and the rich man fits into God's overall plan of salvation.

Frank W Nelte