

THE HORROR STORY OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS IN LUKE 16

Jesus in Stephen King style tells the horror story of the rich man being damned for not noticing the poor man Lazarus who needed help is in Luke 16. He is in fire and Abraham says Lazarus cannot so much as give him a drop of water to cool his tongue for a second. That the rich man asked him shows how much he wanted relief. The rich man asks if Lazarus could rise again and warn his brothers about Hell and Abraham said they don't need a warning for they have no excuse for they have the Jewish Bible of the Law and the Prophets.

It is noticeable that the rich man is not said to have murdered anybody or anything. It is a warning that ordinary people go to Hell for ordinary things.

There is nothing in this whole passage or anywhere else in the Bible that indicates that this tale from Luke is a parable or that what it describes is not true. The supposedly silly bits are all approved in the Bible elsewhere.

We have to take the story as a true one for it is a sin to assume that something is a parable or a joke without reason. The message can be made ineffectual and lost that way. If we start doing that then where do we draw the line?

There is no hint in the story that it is a parable. Jesus meant it literally. It was intended to show that the fires of Hell are extremely tormenting and are so bad that you would do anything even for a seconds relief on the pain on your tongue. It was intended to show that you can go there for forgetting the poor. It was intended to show that the damned do indeed have concerns about others and stopping them going to Hell. It shows there is no escape. The Rich Man did not ask that he be raised to warn his brothers. This illustrates the point.

Luke 16 is a shocking description of Hell and what Jesus meant it to be, the worse thing it could be – a true story. The terrifying thing is that it says that the fate of the person who dies rejecting God cannot be altered. If he goes to Hades he stays there forever (page 121, Why does God?). The vigilance that Jesus wants in preparation for his return to earth supports this terrifying doctrine.

The Christian booklet, Hell – What the Bible Says About It?, tells us that the story is not a parable especially since Jesus went to the trouble of naming Lazarus and did not mention the name of the other man to spare the feelings of those who might know who he was (page 6).

The Worldwide Church of God during the Armstrong days used to say that the narrative was not about what happened immediately after death for death is the end of the existence of the person but what will happen at or after the resurrection. They say that the fire that was hurting Lazarus was the fire that God sends to put the sinners out of existence. It burnt him because it was getting very close. They deny that the story supports everlasting torture. If that is true then how could his tongue have been so painful? It was inside his head after all! His nose would have been hotter for it was nearer the flames. Or was it because he shouted to Abraham and the flames got into his mouth and burnt his tongue? No for he says he was in the flames and in torment and it still would not have been as painful for the tongue was inside the mouth most of the time. He talked too much for one that was suffering the excessive burning of his tongue. His tongue was not the worst part of him. All of him was suffering terribly that even the slightest relief for a moment was of infinite value to him. And notice that he believed that his surviving brothers were still living on earth and that the general resurrection hadn't happened yet when he told Abraham to let Lazarus walk out of the tomb alive. Abraham did not tell him he was wrong to assume these but agreed with him. They all talk as if the brothers were still alive so they were.

The brothers could have been long dead. Abraham who speaks as if they are still alive might not have been aware of this for he talks as if they are still alive. The suffering man still cared for his living relatives. If there is no friendship in Hell it is because

But it is simpler to assume that they were alive so they were.

Speculation is worthless. Everybody likes to see things in the story that are not there.

Some would speculate that the Rich Man and perhaps Abe thought Lazarus could be sent back in time to change history but that is unlikely and there is no hint of it in the story. Nobody would be going to Hell at all if that were possible. To imagine somebody can be sent back in time to change the present by altering the past is mad.

Some would speculate that the account refers to temporary suffering for the wicked in the period between death and the resurrection to judgment. If they don't repent they will suffer until they do or they will be annihilated. But our Rich Man did repent for he loved God and was still trapped so he was probably damned forever. And Jesus' main point was that there can be no crossing over from paradise to Hell or vice versa. The story was told from the Rich Man's perspective implying his fate will never change.

There is no reason for taking the parable to denote some place other than that of eternal misery. If it had meant a place other than that of eternal misery; if it had meant a place different from Hell, Jesus and the author would have made that clear when there is no biblical evidence that the wicked go after death to somewhere other than Hell.

The story makes a good warning for Catholics who chase after revelations from apparitions and visionaries instead of reading the Old Testament. No true revelation from God would encourage and welcome their activities.

The story is a true story in Jesus' mind because it is all about making the point that if people don't think the Jewish scriptures are true and from God then even somebody rising from the dead to tell them that they are true and in danger of Hell for not believing will not help. Jesus could simply have made that point without the story. The story was told because it was true and not just because it had a moral. Jesus made a simple point in the story, that people should listen to the prophets which was something his hearers had been listening to all their lives. This shows that he would not have given cause for confusion. He was indicating the existence of and importance of clear revelation from God.

The story is as meant to be literal as the story of the resurrection of Jesus is and it is reckless to take it any other way.

FURTHER READING

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THE WEB

The Bible Vs the Traditional View of Hell by Babu Ranganathan www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/5862/hell2.html This page argues that the wicked will suffer agony for a while in punishment for their sins for a while after their death and then be put out of existence. It says that Matthew 10:28 promises that the wicked will be destroyed body and soul in Gehenna meaning be destroyed entirely. Then it points to Isaiah 34 where Edom is said to be destroyed by unquenchable fire that has smoke that ascends forever and ever. But you would know from the context that this is only poetry and that it does not entitle us to question if Jesus meant his references to eternal fire literally. Isaiah however says the fire will not be quenched

but that does not mean it won't burn itself out and the smoke could literally ascend forever and ever. The page is full of bad logic. Then it argues that when God said a slave under some conditions is his master's property forever that when he said the punished of the wicked will be forever he did not mean it literally. But we know that the slave cannot be enslaved forever for he will die one day but no hint in any context is given that forever in relation to eternal punishing is not forever. Then it indicates that when Jesus in the parable about Lazarus said that the rich man was in Hades that he meant the mythical Greek Hell indicating that the story was a myth or parable. But Hades was believed to be a real place among the Greeks and Jesus using this word and not Gehenna actually supports the thesis that it was not a parable. The fact that the Jews were unfamiliar with Hades supports this even more for you cannot say he just used the word Hades to hint that it was a myth. And as for making out that the Book of Revelation is being symbolic when it discusses eternal fire and the eternal punishment it is ridiculous for the whole volume is not symbolism and can't afford to be. Also, when all Christians believed in eternal torment the book could not risk misleading them with a symbolic eternal hell. And even when a symbolic book says suffering lasts forever it must mean it literally for what else could it be? You can get across the horror of eternal loss without going that far. The Book of Revelation never uses exaggeration.

