

# THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God  
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#04-1035

## ***The Rich Man and Lazarus***

April 5, 2010

**(19) “Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. (20) And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, (21) and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. (22) Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.”** (Luke 16:19-22 NASB)

A good friend of mine was at a Bible study recently when the pastor’s wife said something to the effect that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is proof positive that the saved go to heaven and the lost go to hell, as if Jesus laid out a theology of heaven and hell in this one story. On the same day that I heard this, I was driving down a country road and passed a denominational church building with a sign out front that read: “The party in hell has been cancelled due to the resurrection.” What? It might be a catchy phrase, but it makes no biblical sense whatsoever. Is it any wonder that the so-called church of our day is in such confusion and the message of Christ and His kingdom has become so convoluted (twisted) and distorted?

The catchy phrase about the party in hell will be taken up in another issue; but first, let us consider the rich man and Lazarus. I devoted a whole chapter to this parable-story in my book *The Purpose and Plan of the Eons*, Volume 2, Chapter 6, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, so I refer you to this to fill in the details. In this issue, I simply want to list some of the reasons why Jesus’ account of these two men does not lay out a theology of heaven and hell but speaks of a national divorce and death.

First, it is not a literal story but a parable, a figurative story. No one literally resides in Abraham’s bosom. Living in a place of peace and rest (supposedly heaven) and being able to continually hear the supposed screams and cries of loved-ones in torment (supposedly hell) would be torment, not joy, to the ones in heaven as well. Further, the human body cannot endure fire without complete annihilation, and a little water on the tongue cannot bring true relief to one’s thirst. Interpreting these things literally defies logic and sound reasoning. We must discern what it signifies as a parable, and to do this, we need to take into account the context and the audience to whom Jesus spoke.

Second, this parable did not originate with Jesus; it was an adaptation of a pagan parable that the Jews had adopted as they commingled with the nations against the will of God. In other words, it was pagan in origin and did not come from Moses. Jesus was simply using it to drive home the point of how far the Jews of His day had fallen. After all, it was not unusual for Jesus to use pagan references in putting His finger on the apostasy that had come upon the sons of Jacob. For example, He referred to the god of mammon (the god of riches) and to Beelzebub, the Philistine god of the flies or filth (Matthew 10:25; 12:27). To believe that Jesus taught on false gods in order to support or sanction their existence or to create some new doctrine based on them is most untenable.

Third, it is not merely a stand-alone parable but one in a series of five parables starting at Luke 15:3. The fifth parable is connected to the preceding parables, all of which pertain to two groups within the house of Israel: the unrighteous publicans (tax collectors) and sinners, and the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. The entire series starts off with the religious elite grumbling against Jesus: “**This man receives sinners and eats with them**” (Luke 15:2). The self-righteous were complaining that the Righteous One was reaching out to the Jewish sinners that the self-righteous abhorred. Jesus was accused of being **a friend of tax collectors and sinners** (Matthew 11:19).

Fourth, the first three parables speak of entering the coming millennial kingdom of Christ and how God’s people can miss the mark through their own wandering (lost sheep), someone else’s carelessness (lost coin), or their own rebellion (lost son), but that God is always concerned for the waywardness of

His people. The fourth parable deals entirely with the scribes and Pharisees who loved money and had become slaves to the god of mammon. As such, they had divorced themselves from God. This is why Jesus made reference to the good news of the kingdom of God and to divorce and adultery (Luke 16:16-18). The ancient nation of Israel had been called to enter the kingdom, but they could not do so because they had divorced themselves from the Lord and had married themselves to the nations, becoming adulterers and harlots (see Jeremiah 31:4, 21, 32). In God's eyes, His called-out nation was dead in the day in which Jesus the Messiah stood in their midst; they were in a national death, and this is the real meaning of the last parable in these series, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Fifth, the rich man wore a garment of purple, which refers to kingly function, and cambric, which refers to priestly function. Ancient Israel was called out of Egypt to be God's kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6); however, they were nothing of the sort as the Messiah stood in their midst over 2,000 years ago. The rich man represented the spiritual condition of God's people. They were spiritually dead, and because of this state, they rejected the Messiah, which led them into the fire of persecution and their final destruction as a kingdom-nation when Jerusalem fell in 70 AD at the hand of the Romans. The kingdom was taken away from them (Matthew 21:43).

Sixth, Jesus quoted Abraham calling the rich man "child." This is an acknowledgement that they belonged to Abraham. In hearing this, the Pharisees would have had no doubt that Jesus was referring to them. He was not denying their connection to Abraham but rather was reinforcing it. As such, it is untenable to view the rich man as a lost gentile that needs "eternal salvation" or faces an "eternal hell" created by man in his own image.

Seventh, there was a great chasm between the two dead men. This represents the gulf between those who will enter the coming kingdom of Christ and those who will not. The Jordan River flows through the greatest and longest visible chasm (rift valley) on earth. In type, crossing the Jordan to inherit the promised land signifies the experience of Tabernacles in which the conquerors inherit immortal bodies and enter into eonian life in the oncoming eon to reign with Christ in His kingdom.

Eighth, of the twelve sons of Jacob, six were born of Leah, one of which was Judah, meaning Judah had five brothers. Thus, the five brothers of the rich man represent the house of Judah that was not lost but had returned to Jerusalem. Jesus stood in the midst of the house of Judah (Luke 17:21) to take the scepter (Genesis 49:10) as the King of Judah. The Judahites of that day that accepted Jesus as the Messiah were the good figs, and the ones that rejected Him were the bad figs, as prophesied by Jeremiah and confirmed by Jesus as He spoke of the barren fig tree or the fig tree with leaves but no fruit (Matthew 21:19; 24:32; Mark 11:13, 20, 21: 13:28; Luke 13: 6, 7; 21:29-30). Except for a remnant of believers, the majority of Judahites rejected Jesus as the Messiah, something that continued even after Jesus was raised from among the dead. They fulfilled the conclusion of the parable: **"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead"** (Luke 16:31 NASB).

Ninth, Lazarus was a poor man, a beggar. To the Pharisees, this was the worst kind of person and sinner. As such, Lazarus represented the very ones that Jesus sought out, the Jewish publicans and sinners that the Pharisees disdained and rejected. The fact that the dogs licked his wounds is a further indication that Lazarus was a Jew, for those outside the commonwealth of Israel (i.e., non-Jew nations) were considered dogs by the Pharisees. In this case, even the non-Jews (i.e., gentiles) tended to Lazarus as the rich Judahites, the ones who loved money, ignored him.

Tenth, the name *Lazarus* itself adds to our understanding of this parable. Some have suggested that the name, which in Hebrew is *Eleazar*, refers to Abraham's gentile chief steward that lost the right of inheritance to Isaac. I explain this in my book. But there is another possibility that I do not explain in my book that adds to the thought that Lazarus represented the Jewish sinners. It is possible that Jesus was referring to His friend Lazarus whom He raised from the dead. After all, the chief priests later planned to put Lazarus to death as well, which constituted a further rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

Some food for thought! To me, it seems clear that Jesus was attempting to impress on the religious elite, in particular, and all the Jews, in general, the severity of their stubbornness and blindness to their true adulterous condition in light of His future kingdom. They were apostate and dead; divorced from God!