

The Word of Truth Ministry Presents

Special Full Length Studies

#SS18

Author's Note

This study was originally published in 1941. It has long been out of print. Even though it was well received and widely circulated I have steadfastly refused to reissue it until the whole matter could be carefully reconsidered and rewritten. This has now been done, and it is sent forth with the prayer that it will continue to be a help to many students of God's verbally inspired and infallible Word.

O.Q.S.

Copyright 1962

The writer has copyrighted this book in order to protect its message. Permission to reproduce or to translate it in other languages will be freely given on request.

Printed in United States of America

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

The portion of Scripture which is examined and interpreted in this study is certainly not the most important passage in the Word of God. Nevertheless, it is apparent that many make **Luke 16: 19-31** to be the pre-eminent passage of all Scripture because of the great number of doctrines which they found upon it and which they establish by it.

When a passage is appealed to again and again in support of ideas that are held or are being declared, that passage automatically becomes one of great importance. And there is no single passage *in* the Bible that is appealed to in support of as many beliefs as the one that is now before us for consideration. The commonly accepted and popular belief that is held by the self-styled orthodox concerning man's nature and destiny has entrenched itself within this story. From this supposedly impregnable fortress it calls upon all to drop arms and surrender if they dare to believe or teach contrary to the generally accepted views. For many centuries ideas have been read and preached into this passage so that now men are reading them back out as if they were actually *there*. Many preachers are no longer able to distinguish between their

sermons on the rich man and Lazarus and the record written in the Word of God, even though they are poles apart.

Over a period of many years it has been my happy and fruitful labor to examine with microscopic exactitude every one of the 859 passages in the sacred Scriptures that give testimony concerning the soul. Careful analysis of every one of these passages has resulted in the inescapable conclusion that the Bible teaches that man *is* a soul- not that he *has* a soul as is generally believed. **That man has a soul is the Platonic theory; that man is a soul is the Biblical testimony.** Furthermore, these studies have demonstrated that there is no such thing in Scripture as an immortal soul, or a never-dying soul. However, in seeking to present these findings to others I discover that with many the effort is useless, for they firmly believe that the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which does not even mention the word *soul*, stands in opposition to all that I have found to be true and try to teach.

Over the same period of time I have given much thought to the task of discovering all the truth that God has revealed concerning human destiny and future punishment. But all that I have found is considered by many to be of no value, and the labor expended is regarded as being wasted effort, for they feel that all we need to know about these subjects is presented in condensed form in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. This passage is their *vade mecum*, a passage which they allow to dominate and control the interpretation of the greater part of Scripture. Out of a collection of literature that deals with this portion it can be seen that this passage is constantly appealed to,

to prove that man has a soul,
that the soul is immortal,
that death is another form of life,
that death is simply life in another place,
that death is the continuation of life, and
that at the moment of death a man is ushered into ineffable bliss or frightful woe.

It is used to prove that punishment begins the moment a wicked man dies,
that the punishment is by means of literal fire, and that the lost are tormented by fire eternally.

It is used to describe the nature of punishment between death and resurrection, and is also used to show the nature of punishment after resurrection. It is supposed to show the punishment a man undergoes before he is judged, and it is also used to portray his punishment after he has had his day in God's court.

It is used to prove that the dead are not dead at all, but alive and fully conscious. In fact this passage is used to deny all that the Old Testament says about death.

This story has constantly been used to flay the rich and glorify the poor. It has been used by the clergy to keep the poor in subjection so that they will not desire the things enjoyed by the rich. By it men have proved that there is inherent evil in riches and great virtue in poverty.

This story is the basis of the idea that **hades** is the place of disembodied souls, and the theory of hades as a place of two compartments is founded entirely upon it. It is appealed to, to show that paradise is one compartment in hades, even though the word *paradise* is not found in it. It is used to prove that paradise and "Abraham's bosom" are one and the same. In fact this passage is the basis of almost every idea held today concerning the intermediate state, that is, the state of men between the time of death and resurrection.

Many there are who insist that in this story we find the one place where our Lord drew aside the veil and permitted men to see the conditions that exist on the other side of death - that here we have a record of the condition, the experiences, and even the conversation of those who have died.

I repeat, there is no single passage in all the Word of God that is used to support as many different doctrines and ideas as the story of the rich man and Lazarus. And if all these various doctrines and ideas are taught here, then all must agree that without doubt this stands as the most important and far-reaching revelation of truth in the Bible. Indeed, then this should be the veritable *vade mecum* of the Christian, something that should be committed to memory so that it is always with him and never out of his thoughts. But, of course, if we accept this judgment as to the importance of this portion, it will leave us in the quandary that the greatest revelation of truth in the Word of God was given by Christ to men who were unwilling to do His will, for this message was delivered to the covetous and mocking Pharisees. This fact alone should cause every lover of truth to be somewhat hesitant in accepting the confident assertion of many that in this story the Lord drew aside the veil and gave men a glimpse of the experiences of men on the other side of death.

As one whose life is devoted to understanding, believing, and teaching the Word of God, I can say in all sincerity that if the story of the rich man and Lazarus teaches all the things that have been set forth above, then I too want to be found believing and teaching them. If, as so many claim, this passage is to be understood literally and regarded as a narration of actual events, then I want to accept as facts every idea it sets forth. However, long and careful study of this passage has brought the conviction that these things are not taught in it, and that it is not a narration of actual events that had taken place.

There are many who use this passage as a buttress, using it only in support of what they believe. Yet if they actually went to it to find the truth, as they claim to do, they would find that if this is a narration of actual history, then it teaches many things which they would quickly reject. This story, if it is actual history, makes future blessings to depend upon present poverty, and not upon one's relationship to God through Jesus Christ. And if a man should desire to teach that positions in the life to come will be just the reverse of those in this life, he could find ample support for it by appealing to verse twenty-five of this portion.

It is a simple matter for one to adopt a doctrinal position and then go to the Bible to find support for it. The last place to which men turn is to the Bible. And, if upon turning to it they find that it speaks contrary to what they think, they will turn to it again and again in the hope of finding something that can be used to sustain their opinions. This is the Balaam spirit in Bible study. They consult the Scriptures as Balaam consulted God. His own prejudices led him to try once more "what the Lord will say," to see if he could not find something more in line with his preferences in the matter. Those who are of this spirit cannot refrain from imposing their own conceptions upon the Word of God. They soon convince themselves that a passage contains certain things that are not even remotely intimated in it. In view of this it will be well at this point for us to read carefully and honestly the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

Luke 16:19-31

19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

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

22 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;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 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.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.

26 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.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

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

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

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

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

I repeat, there is no single passage in all the Word *of* God that is used to support as many different doctrines and ideas as the story *of* the rich man and Lazarus. And if all these various doctrines and ideas are taught here, then all must agree that without doubt this stands as the most important and far-reaching revelation *of* truth in the Bible. Indeed, then this should be the veritable *vade mecum* *of* the Christian, something that should be committed to memory so that it is always with him and never out *of* his thoughts. But, *of* course, if we accept this judgment as to the importance *of* this portion it will leave us in the quandary that the greatest revelation *of* truth in the Word *of* God was given by Christ to men who were unwilling to do His will, for this message was delivered to the covetous and mocking Pharisees. This fact alone should cause every lover *of* truth to be somewhat hesitant in accepting the confident assertion *of* many that in this story the Lord drew aside the veil and gave men a glimpse *of* the experiences *of* men on the other side *of* death.

As *one* whose life is devoted to understanding, believing, and teaching the Word of God, I can say in all sincerity that if the story *of* the rich man and Lazarus teaches all the things that have been set forth above, then I too want to be found believing and teaching them. If, as *so* many claim, this passage is to be understood literally and regarded as a narration *of* actual events, then I want to accept as facts every idea it sets forth. However, long and careful study *of* this passage has brought the conviction that these things are not taught in it, and that it is not a narration *of* actual events that had taken place.

There are many who use this passage as a buttress, using it only in support *of* what they believe. Yet if they actually went to it to find the truth, as they claim to do, they

would find that if this is a narration *of* actual history, then it teaches many things which they would quickly reject. This story, if it is actual history, makes future blessings to depend upon present poverty, and not upon one's relationship to God through Jesus Christ. And if a man should desire to teach that positions in the life to come will be just the reverse *of* those in this life, he could find ample support for it by appealing to verse twenty-five *of* this portion.

It is a simple matter for one to adopt a doctrinal position and then go to the Bible to find support for it. The last place to which men turn is to the Bible. And, if upon turning to it they find that it speaks contrary to what they think, they will turn to it again

God's Word is a rock - indeed a precious stone that will stand any amount of scrutiny. It is a lamp unto our feet, and it is not extinguished by examination. It welcomes investigation. It calls upon men to think upon it. If men will cease taking themselves so seriously and accept God's statement that "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Cor. 13: 8), they will not be so fearful of the task of plunging into the study of the Word of God. It may be deep, but if need be, I prefer to drown in it rather than to be battered to death by the waves of human ignorance, error, superstition, and opinion. Those who meditate upon the Word of God day and night are called blessed.

Inasmuch as the story of the rich man and Lazarus is, by most Christians, allowed to negate the entire Old Testament revelation as to man's destiny, this passage demands the most minute examination and prolonged meditation. It is dishonest to build *upon* this passage if this is not done. Many who permit this portion of God's Word to dominate and control the interpretation of the remainder of Scripture seem at times to show an amazing unfamiliarity with just what is said in it.

All who honestly examine this passage will find that innumerable questions, problems, and difficulties arise as a result. These demand full consideration before we can rest assured that we have discovered the true interpretation of this portion of the Word of God.

In this story we have the written record of the spoken words of the Lord Jesus. There can be no doubt concerning this. The translation, with a few exceptions is acceptable; therefore, if we use only the *King James Version* we can rest assured that we have before us what our Lord said. The words ["fared sumptuously every day" need to be more accurately translated to avoid the idea of feasting or banqueting which is not in the Greek. It has been better rendered as follows: "**who every day lived in pleasure and luxury,**" Fenton; "lived sumptuously every day," Moffitt; "making merry day by day, brilliantly," Rotherham; "living luxuriously and in a magnificent style every day," Wuest. The word beggar in verse 20 should be "poor man"; the word "hell" in verse 23 should be "hades"; and "Son" in verse 25 should be "Child."].

Our task then is to discover what the Lord meant by the things He said, just what His purposes were in relating this story. These words express His thoughts on this occasion, and from them we must discover what He was thinking.

Most men feel that this is an exceedingly simple task, for they hold this story to be the simple, straight-forward, matter-of-fact history of actual events that took place before the birth of Jesus, and which He witnessed before His incarnation. They insist that this story is literal history, reported by the Lord for the purpose of revealing the conditions that exist beyond death.

Yet, those who take this position will never go through with it. They dare not follow their position out to all its conclusions and accept all its consequences. They will not carry their idea of "historic reality" into every detail. There is always a lapse into the figurative or assumptive. Their position breaks down when they face the actual reality of the poor man being carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. They know not what to do with the statements which indicate that the rich man had eyes and a tongue and that Lazarus had a finger. They cannot fit these bodily parts in with their ideas of "disembodied spirits."

The Rich Man

In many sermons that are preached on this message this rich man is presented as being exceedingly vile, and is set forth as a representative sinner. There is no such picture here, and our Lord exercised care that no idea of great wickedness is set forth. That would have spoiled the picture He is drawing. All that we know of this man is that he was rich, that he wore expensive clothing and that he lived luxuriously every day. This is all we know of him, and it is very little. There is not enough here to form any true estimate of his character, since the facts given deal with his state. They reveal nothing of his character. As Trench says: "He was one of whom all may have spoken well; of whom none could say worse than that he was content to dwell at ease, would fain put far from himself all things painful to the flesh, and surround himself with all things pleasurable." (notes on "The Parables of our Lord", by Richard Chenevix Trench, D.D. [Fleming H. Revell, New York], page 346)

In our smug self-righteousness we are apt to think that these statements describe a great sinner like Ahab or Judas Iscariot, but this is wholly imaginary. The average middle-class American of today probably dresses better, eats better, and enjoys comforts far beyond what this man ever dreamed.

We do not judge a man's character to be bad when we discover that he is rich.

Neither do we judge a man as wicked because he dresses well.

And while we may question the wisdom of living luxuriously and splendidly, we do not question its morality.

Why then should the man in this story be judged as flagrantly wicked?

Do we dare to calumniate one whom our Lord did not?

True *it* is that he may not have fed the beggar, but even of this we cannot be sure.

We are not told how this man gained his wealth, so, if we desire to be among those who "impute not evil" let us not say that his riches were gained dishonestly. Our Lord gave no revelation concerning this, and Abraham made no such accusation when he spoke to him.

In view of this, a simple quatrain fits well here:

Be sure that *you* have Scripture,
For all *you* say or do;
And where God's Word is silent,
May *you* be silent too.

It is evident that our Lord desired to set forth a composite picture of the rich and powerful men in Israel at that time, especially the Pharisees, but also the Sadducees, the Scribes, Lawyers and Priests. Let us not be guilty of taking from or adding to His picture.

The Poor Man

The next character set before us is a poor man, a man *in* desperate need.

In many studies this poor man is represented as being a godly man, a devout man, a saint. But there is no such portrayal *in* the words of our Lord.

He sets him forth as a poor man, *one* afflicted all over his body with ulcerating sores, but nothing more than this. Our Lord seems to have exercised care *in* avoiding any such picture of this man. There *is* not *one* single fact revealed about this poor man that would bring forth admiration or compliment.

His condition arouses *our* sympathy, but we see nothing about him that is worthy of emulation. We would not dare to advise anyone to pattern their life after his, nor can we point to him and say "Go thou and do likewise." We would feel more rapport with him if we had been told that he looked to God to supply his needs, rather than looking to a rich man for crumbs.

We wonder if God's provision of prayer had a place in his life. From what we are told we know only that his expectation was *in* the rich man.

Some who read these lines will feel that I am treating this poor man somewhat harshly. I admit this, but hasten to say that this does not arise from lack of feeling and sympathy for him. It springs only from my desire to maintain the true picture the Lord gave of him, and to counteract the false picture of great godliness that men are so prone to paint of him.

It must be admitted that there are some things about the rich man that deserve censure. He dressed too well and lived too luxuriously, but, all in all, he was not a bad character. But while there are things about him we might condemn, there is not one thing about the poor man we can commend or admire. There is no known fact about him that suggests a righteous man or a man of faith. If he had lived in David's time, David could not have written his great testimony:

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. Psalm 37:25.

The reader can confirm all that has been said about these two men by carefully reading the words of the Lord. The honest seeker for truth cannot accept the idea that this is a story in which the righteous and wicked are set in contrast. There is nothing revealed concerning the rich man that even suggests great wickedness, and nothing revealed about the beggar that suggests righteousness. The rich man is no picture of a sinner. The beggar gives no picture of the saint.

Their Death

As the story continues we find that in course of time the poor man died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Here greater questions present themselves.

Is this an actual historical record? Are we to understand this literally?

If not, then how is it to be understood?

Did the angels actually carry the dead Lazarus?

If one should say, "A man died in the street and friends carried him home" what would this mean? Shall we understand this to mean one thing and the statement concerning "the poor man" to mean another thing?

It is just at this point that those who insist on the historical reality of this passage want to inject the ideas of a "soul" or a "disembodied spirit" But how does one carry a soul and why would a soul need to be carried? No such idea is conveyed by the words of our Lord. It was the poor man who was laid at the rich man's gate, it was the poor man who died, and it was the poor man who was carried by the angels.

This is the first and only reference in the Bible to "Abraham's bosom." This term presents a new problem - one which many solve by saying that this is a new name for heaven or for paradise. But if this is true, why is it never used again? And if, as many insist, it speaks of some compartment in a mythological hades where the spirits of the righteous dead are supposed to be between death and resurrection, then why is it suddenly given this name? Furthermore, what was it called for several thousand years before the time of Abraham?

Even the superficial student must admit that there is something strange about this term and its sole appearance in this passage.

Next, we are told that the rich man died and was buried. There are many who feel that the words of our Lord here need some polishing. They insist that it was not "the rich man" who died, but that it was the rich man's body, and that the rich man was not buried only his body was buried.

After the declaration that the rich man died and was buried, we get a picture of his condition. **"In hades he lift up his eyes, being in torments."** As the story continues we find that he is in the same general locality as Abraham and Lazarus, and that his sufferings are greatly intensified as he looks across a gulf and sees Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. From this it is seen that even though the distance between them was great, yet it was within seeing and speaking distance, since he saw them and carried on a conversation.

If the rich man could see them in bliss, then they must have been able to see him being tormented. And if, as some hold, his torments were shut off from their view, they could still hear him. In view of this can anyone believe that Abraham and Lazarus were supremely happy while they looked upon a man being tormented and heard his pleadings for a few drops of water?

To hear a tormented man pleading for water would cause supreme distress to any sensitive person. Calloused indeed would be the man who could be in bliss under these conditions. No wonder that those who hold to the literal interpretation of this portion conveniently arrange to close out hades as the place of both good and bad, and move the good to heaven within a few months after these words were spoken. *See Scofield Reference Bible* notes on "Hades since the ascension of Christ" (page 1099) for a *brief* summary of this teaching

Those who can get joy out of the sufferings of others, those who can find pleasure in a scene of suffering, are sadistic. Sadism is one form of insanity. Can we believe that Abraham's nature had been so changed that he could be in bliss while witnessing the sufferings of another and hearing his plea for some slight relief? I fully believe that my own nature is such that if I had been there, I would have made some attempt to alleviate this man's suffering even if I had plunged into the great gulf in the attempt. I trust that I will always be willing to risk the loss of my own comforts if by so doing I can alleviate the sufferings of another.

Their Conversation

The conversation between the rich man and Lazarus is one of the strangest to be found in the Bible. The rich man seeing Abraham afar *off* and Lazarus in his bosom called to him, addressed him as "Father Abraham" and pleaded with Abraham to have mercy on him. This causes many questions to arise:

Why did he appeal to Abraham?

Was Abraham the chief man in that place?

Was Abraham tormenting him?

Was Abraham withholding water from him?

Did Lazarus have a finger that could be dipped into water?

Did the rich man have a tongue that could be cooled by it?

The rich man did not cry *out* to God. His plea was to Abraham, and his strange plea becomes even more strange when it is considered in the light of Abraham's answer. Abraham addressed the rich man as "Child", and bade him remember that during his *lifetime* he had received his good things and that Lazarus had received his evil things, with the result that he is now comforted while the rich man is tormented.

This reply of Abraham presents a major problem. How strange it is that when this man appealed for mercy he was not reminded *of* any sin, wickedness or unbelief. He is not charged with idolatry, with having oppressed the poor, *of* being a robber of other men's goods, *of* being a spoiler of orphans, or a persecutor of widows.

The only reply that is made is that the rich man had received his good things during his lifetime so he is tormented now.

If Abraham's statement means anything, if it teaches anything, then what else can it say but that positions are surely reversed in the life to come? But this is repugnant to every passage in the Word *of* God that sets forth the things that affect a man's destiny. From Abraham's lips came no accusations against the rich man, neither were there any words *of* praise for the beggar.

Their cases are summed up in the statement that one got his good things during his lifetime while the other got his evil things.

This statement *of* Abraham should cause some serious thought. It cannot be lightly brushed aside as having no bearing upon the suffering and bliss being experienced by these two. If it has no bearing upon the matter, Abraham should not have said it. If it is an "answer" that is "no answer", our Lord would not have reported it.

As I consider it, I consider my own life, which I must regard as *one* that has been filled with good things. I would be ungrateful and unthankful to consider it otherwise. I was born in a good home, of good parents who loved me and cared for me. I did not have it as easy as children do today, yet my childhood was a happy *one*. My life as an

adult has been filled with innumerable good things. I have enjoyed good health. My marriage has been a benediction. My testimony is, "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." Now, does it follow that since my life has been filled with good things, the life to come must be filled with evil things? And, if my life had been just the reverse, filled with sorrow and evil from the day *of* my birth, would this indicate that the life to come will be filled with good things?

I am sure that if my reader is instructed in the Word of God he will agree that the good things we have during this life, or the lack of good things, have no bearing upon the life to come. *Our* future is settled by *our* relationship to God through Jesus Christ. If a man enters into life it will not be because of poverty, and if he goes into destruction it will not be because he was rich. Yet, this is what Abraham told the rich man in answer to his plea for mercy.

But Abraham said, Child, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Luke 16:25.

We have every right to question why Abraham said this. Was he wasting words *on* such a solemn occasion? Why did he remind the rich man of something that had no relationship to his suffering? Why did he refer to something that had no bearing upon the bliss of Lazarus? The problem of why he said what he did is a major one, but it all becomes even more puzzling when we realize that these words were spoken by one who in his lifetime had been very rich (Gen. 13: 2), and whose life had been filled with good things, even including personal dealings with God. Does it not seem absurd *for* a man whose life has been filled with good things to answer a man's request for a few drops of water by reminding him that he had received his good things during his lifetime. If the rich man was to be reminded of the good things he had enjoyed, Abraham was the last one who should have assumed the task.

The rich man's plea was refused *on* two grounds. The ground of previous good things and the ground of impossibility. Abraham points out that in addition to the fact that he had received good things, a vast chasm exists between them, "put there in order that those who desire to cross from this side to you may not be able, nor any be able to cross from your side to us."

After this refusal the rich man entered a plea to Abraham that Lazarus should be sent to his father's house to testify to his five brothers lest they should come into this place of torment. Abraham answered this by telling the rich man that his five brothers had Moses and the prophets, that is, the Old Testament, and that they should hear them. The rich man objects that this is not sufficient, they require more than this; that they will believe if one returns from the dead.

Abraham answered that if they would not hear Moses and the prophets, they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

And so ends the story. [I have collected a great number of pamphlets, magazine articles, and primed sermons which deal with this story. With one or two exceptions these all bear the same title, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*. This is ideal, as no title could be more appropriate. But most of these studies have subtitles, and these reveal definite bias in the handling of this passage. They are usually in harmony with that which the author of the treatise is trying to prove by this portion. They announce in advance that the story is going to be made to teach a certain thing. It would be just as honest to say that this story is what Christ taught *about* the fate of the rich, or about the future home of the poor, or about the penalty of getting good things in this life. Why see just one teaching in this passage? Does it not teach about bliss as well as about torment?]

No Portrayal of God or Christ

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a familiar story. When it is referred to the average Christian, he has some knowledge of it. It would be well if each one would ask himself just how this knowledge was gained. Did it come from prolonged meditation upon this passage? Or was this knowledge gained from sermons that were heard? It is often true that we are quite ignorant of things with which we are quite familiar. We are inclined to form certain conceptions which afterwards are superimposed upon that which we may be observing or reading.

The statements that have been made so far in this study will probably open the eyes of many for the first time as to the real character of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. They have long imposed their own conceptions upon it and read their own ideas into it. They vision it as presenting a great picture of God and Christ, of the home of the redeemed and the abode of the damned, of heaven and hell, of a great sinner and a great saint, of the great sinner in torment because of a life of evil, and the great saint in heaven because of a life of righteousness.

This is the picture which many seem to have pasted on their eyeglasses, and they put these on their eyes each time they read or speak upon this portion.

But this picture is not in this story.

It contains no hint of God, and there is no one in it who represents God.

It contains no word concerning Christ or the work of Christ.

No one in the story stands for or represents Christ.

There is no sinner in it and there is no great saint.

There is nothing in it that sets forth redemption or salvation, and no teaching as to how a man can be justified in the sight of God. The only doctrine it contains in regard to the cause of the rich man's torment or the poor man's bliss is repugnant to every revelation of God's righteous dealings with mankind. It sets forth Abraham, himself a rich man, giving an irrelevant and meaningless answer to the rich man as he attributes his sufferings to be the result of a life of good things, of which Abraham's own life was parallel.

These are the problems and difficulties that arise from prolonged meditation upon, and penetrating study of this passage. They demand that we discover some understanding of this portion so that they no longer exist. It is imperative that we discover the true character of this story and the real purpose of Christ in telling it. When we do, all difficulties and problems will vanish and this portion will shine forth with all the glory that God has given to His Word. This is the task that is now before us.

What is the Bible

The Bible is the Word of God. I accept without question and fully believe in its plenary and verbal inspiration. I take second place to no man when it comes to believing that the Bible is God's inspired Word. The more than forty years I have given to assiduously searching its pages permits me to speak with some authority in regard to its character. This Book is God's thoughts reduced to writing.

When thought is reduced to writing it becomes literature. Therefore, the Bible is literature -literature in its highest and best form. It must always be treated as a literary production. Those who ignore this are either ignorant, or else they desire this to be a book that can be made to say what they desire it to say. That the Bible is literature can be seen from this simple illustration.

If one should visit the largest library in the world there would be thousands of volumes in many languages. Yet, there are only eight kinds of words in all these books. Even so it is with the Bible. Every word in it is a noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, or interjection. These words form sentences according to established rules. This is called syntax. Every sentence has a subject and a predicate. In other words, the Bible says something. In doing so it uses the means of communication that are common to man.

In communicating ideas there are many ways of saying a thing. These ways of saying things are usually called literary forms or rhetorical devices. For example when things are said poetically, the literary form is **poetry**. If they are said ironically, the literary form is **irony**, and if they are said satirically, the literary form is **satire**. Then there are also such forms as **fable** (used so cleverly by Aesop), **parable**, **allegory**, **humor**, **proverb**, and many others. All of these rhetorical devices are found in the Bible. Some of them (like parable and allegory) are named in the Word itself. Most of them (such as poetry) are so evident that they can hardly be missed. Nevertheless, many of these are flagrantly ignored because someone wants to use a figurative passage in support of some doctrine which has no other support in the Word of God. [An illustration of this is seen in the action of the disciples when the Lord said: "**Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep,**" John 11: 11. They ignored His use of metaphor and turned figure into fact, saying, "**Lord, if he sleeps, he shall do well.**" They did this because this was the way they wanted it to be, that he was asleep, not dead, Our Lord straightened them out by saying plainly, "**Lazarus is dead,**" In this time of God's silence we do not have the Lord at our side to correct us when we turn figures into facts or facts into figures.]

In the interpretation of any passage it is essential that we determine what literary form, if any, is being used. If we do not we will go astray. We must know how the Bible says things in order to know what is being said. With this end in view let us examine a few of the literary forms found in God's Book.

First, and probably the most abundant of all, is the actual historical narrative. An example of this is seen in the record of the raising of Lazarus as set forth in John 11. Another is the slaying of Goliath by David as set forth in 1 Samuel 17.

Next there is poetry. David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all used the poetical method to give their messages. The Psalms are quickly recognized as poetry, but many do not see this in Isaiah and Jeremiah, Much of the poetic character of these books is lost in the translation.

Then there is the parabolic method of speaking. "**All these things spoke Jesus unto the multitude in parables**", is the divine description of this literary method (Matt. 13: 34). The writings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke abound in examples of this rhetorical device.

The Bible shows that some men spoke their message by means of fables. There are fables in the Bible.

By "**fable**" I mean a narration intended to enforce a truth or precept, especially one in which animals, plants, or even inanimate objects speak and act like human beings. Jotham's fable of the trees is the oldest in all literature (Judges 9: 8-15).

In fact both satire and fable come together in this narration. And even though it is told as though it actually happened, anyone who takes it to be literal history would come under the censure of **Proverbs 26:7**, which while spoken of a parable, is also true of fable, satire or allegory. [Dr. E. W. Bullinger says that Judges 9:8-15 would be a fable, were it not explained in verse 16. I do not agree with this. The explanation is not needed if one has read the seven verses that precede this fable. Would any want to say that the parable of the tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30) would be a parable only if the Lord had not explained it in Matt. 13:36-43? I agree with Joseph Addison, the English poet and essayist, that "Jotham's fable of the trees is the oldest extant," A study of this narration will show that Jotham was an outstanding satirist and fabulist.]

The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. [The fool can never make a parable fit what it was intended to illustrate. Thus, even though the Lord erected safeguards by saying, "**Unto what is the kingdom of God like, and whereunto shall I resemble it?**" as a preface to His parable, men ignore this and find likenesses of the church, the gospel, Christendom, and numerous other things, but never any likeness of the Kingdom of God.]

On one occasion Paul used the allegorical method to give his message, as Galations 4:22-31 will show.

There is both humor and irony in some of the statements made by Christ. But as J. B. Phillips, the translator, has said: "the unvarying solemnity of language makes it almost impossible for us to realize either the irony or the humor of some of the things Christ said." Some of these ironical statements will be pointed *out* later.

That many literary forms are found in the Bible, none can deny. Our question is, therefore; What literary form is used in the story of the rich man and Lazarus?

Is Luke 16: 19-31 Historical Narration ?

My conviction has already been stated that these words of Christ cannot be treated as a narration of actual history. Nevertheless, there are those who strongly insist that since our Lord said, "**There was a certain rich man**" and "**there was a certain beggar named Lazarus**" that these two men must have existed and that everything said about them must have happened.

In the Bible a narration or parable told for the purpose of *pointing* out an important truth can begin with the words "There was" without the speaker actually vouching for its literality. Several parables begin with these words, as can be seen in Matt. 21:33 and Luke 18: 2.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the Greek to support the words "there was" at the beginning of this story. It should read, "Now a certain man was rich."

These words of our Lord could be a parable, a satire, a fable, or a suppositional story, but it is impossible for them to be a narration of actual history. Those who insist upon this will back down the moment they come to the details of the story.

Some will insist that if we do not accept this narrative as being literal history, we will be guilty of making void and destroying a portion of the Word of God. This reasoning is false, as can be easily demonstrated.

A man would be foolish indeed to accept the fable of the trees, as told by Jotham (see Judges 9:8-15) as being literal history, even though Jotham told the story as if it actually happened. Some may believe that the story told to King David by Nathan (2 Sam. 12:1-4) was actual history, but I do not. In fact David was quite sure that Nathan was reporting an actual occurrence until he called for the man to be put to death who had done this foul thing, and then Nathan said "**Thou art the man.**"

It does not dishonor the Word of God in the least to hold that these two men narrated events that never took place. Therefore, it does not dishonor the Word to hold that the events narrated in the story of the rich man and Lazarus never occurred. Let the diligent student read once again Judges 9:8-15, 2 Samuel 12:1-4 and Luke 16: 19-31 and he will see the truth of this. Jotham told a suppositional story about trees and a bramble bush, and Nathan told a story about a poor man, a rich man and a lamb. These were told for the purpose of indicting and exposing the ones at whom their words were directed. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a suppositional story told by our Lord in order to indict, expose and rebuke the Pharisees and all in league with them.

Is Luke 16:19-31 A Parable

Suppositional stories can be parables, but I do not believe that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable. However, I would at this point repudiate the many foolish arguments that are advanced by some who also insist that this is not a parable. There is a marginal note in the Scofield Reference Bible (page 1098) that declares this is not a parable because, "In no parable is an individual named." Yet as a chapter heading for Ezekiel 23 the Scofield Bible gives, "The parable of Aholah and Aholibah." If there is any single passage in the Word that is manifestly a parable it is Ezekiel 23:1-4, and yet two names are given in it. "Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah." I think it would be well for all to read this portion, then cease forever the puerile argument that Luke 16:19-31 cannot be a parable because a man is named in it.

I have carefully considered the position, set forth by many teachers, that this story is a parable. Some have corresponded with me concerning this, and I have ever been sympathetic to their arguments. It is evident that they are seeking some honest method of understanding this story. They cannot accept this narrative as literal history, since this conception throws it into conflict with the entire Old Testament revelation concerning death, sheol, and the state of men between death and resurrection. However, many of them err in their attitude that if this is not literal history, then it must be a parable. They assume that there are only two literary forms in the Word of God.

Those who declare that this is a parable are forced to interpret it as a parable. Every attempt that has been made to do this has been wholly unsatisfactory. In many cases doctrines are manufactured to fit the things set forth. The Greek word **parabole** means to cast alongside, that is, a placing beside for the purpose of comparison. The story in a parable must be in all main points parallel to that which it is illustrating. Not everything in a parable needs to be a representation, and some things are inserted for the purpose of carrying along the story and linking together the points that do represent. This can be seen in the parable of the tares among the wheat where the men who slept, and the servants who inquired about the tares are passed over in the interpretation given by our Lord.

In seeking to interpret the story of the rich man and Lazarus as a parable, a great number of meanings have been set forth for the figures and actions in it. A composite of these interpretations would seem to be that the rich man represents faithless and selfish Israel; the fine clothing and sumptuous living is made to represent God's great provision for that people, and Lazarus is made to stand for the publicans and sinners who were thrust outside of Israel's blessing by those in control. The deaths of these two men is regarded as being Israel's national death which affected alike all classes of the nation. The flames and torments are regarded as representations of Israel's present sufferings.

Other interpretations follow different lines or differ in details. I have tried to consider all of these in my study of this portion, but find them to be inadequate, incomplete, forced, and quite often contrary to divine revelation. **It is my conviction that to treat Luke 16:19-31 as a parable will only increase our difficulties, leave all our questions unanswered, and all our problems unsolved.** It forces upon us the task of trying to show what each main character, event, action, and place represents. This is utterly impossible, especially when we come to the conversation between Abraham and the rich man, and the "five brethren" who were still on earth and not being tormented.

Again let it be said that if we reject the idea that this story is literal history, and also reject the idea that it is a parable, we have not yet exhausted all methods of interpreting it. There are many other rhetorical devices used in the Word of God.

Is Luke 16:19-31 A Satire ?

The word *satire* is a broad term and its meaning is hard to encompass in a brief definition. As used in this study *satire* means a literary form or rhetorical device, a type of writing or speaking, wherein a suppositional story is told, the object of which is to hold up vices, follies, ideas, abuses or shortcomings to censure by means or ridicule. It is a literary form which is by most feebly understood, and it has fallen into disrepute due to those who have grossly abused the use of it. Nevertheless there are excellent examples of satire in its most exalted form in the Bible, and our knowledge of this rhetorical form can be greatly advanced by examining several of these. [My own interest in the satirical method in literature was greatly quickened in 1946 when my daughter Jane was approaching her final year in college and was casting about for a theme upon which to write her graduation thesis. I suggested that she write on "The Satirical Method of Lewis Carroll", an idea which she adopted. Later her faculty advisor suggested that she enlarge the subject to "The Satirical Method in Literature." It was at this time that I began a study of satire in literature for my own purposes, especially in the Bible]

The Satirical Fable in Judges 9:8-15

In order to appreciate any satire one must be completely familiar with the thing that is being satirized. This is a simple matter in the case of Jotham's satire, for the actual event that caused it to be spoken as well as the background for the event is given in detail in Scripture.

The man Gideon had placed the people of Israel forever in debt to him because of his deliverance of them from the bitter bondage of the Midianites. His grateful countrymen offered to make him king but he declined. Nevertheless, he served Israel as captain and judge throughout his life. At the time of his death he had forty sons for he had many wives, also one son, Abimelech, by a concubine. After his death his good works were quickly forgotten and his house and family were sorely neglected.

Soon after his death, Abimelech went to his mother's brethren in Shechem and intimated that the forty sons of Gideon were going to take over the government of Israel. And, as is so often the case, he had a prearranged solution for the false alarm he had raised. He asked if it were better to be reigned over by forty or by one, and at the same time he suggested himself as the one who should be sole ruler in Israel.

His words that accompanied this suggestion - "remember also that I am your bone and your flesh" - were nothing more than a promise that they would all enrich themselves at public expense when he became king.

So the men of Shechem supplied him with money with which he hired some worthless and reckless followers, and in true dictatorial fashion he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed thirty-nine of his brethren upon one stone. Only one, Jotham by name, was able to hide himself and escape. Following this the men of Shechem made Abimelech king, and a report of this was brought to Jotham.

Upon hearing it Jotham went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim and cried aloud, "Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you." This man had something to say. His purpose was to hold up their sin to exposure, ridicule, and condemnation. The method he chose to do this resulted in one of the oldest and one of the finest satirical fables to be found in all literature. Consider his words:

The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.

But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us.

But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Then said the trees unto the vine. Come thou, and reign over us.

And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us.

And the bramble said unto the trees, If in a truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

Judges 9:8-15.

It can be seen that if this satirical fable is treated as a parable, then we would need to find parallels for each symbol in it, the olive tree, the fig tree, the grape vine, and the bramble. Of course we will have no problem concerning the bramble as it points powerfully and directly to Abimelech, but the rest of this fable fits nothing in history as far as is known. However, if we consider this to be a suppositional story told in a

satirical manner then we are not required to find parallels for the leading actors and events in the story.

In fact this story in no way fits the course of Abimelech. The men of Shechem had not gone out looking for a strong and good man to be king over them, then upon being refused by three such men, offer the kingship to an incompetent as a final resort. It was Abimelech that sought the position; the position did not seek him. It was not a case of the bramble being asked by the trees, but just the reverse. Therefore, we cannot treat this as a parable, as Scofield suggests in his marginal notes; it must be recognized as a satiric fable. Some will even be able to detect a humorous strain in it when the bramble bush is made to say to the trees, "then come and put your trust in my shadow." Imagine, if you can, a cedar of Lebanon finding refuge from the hot sun in the shade of a bramble.

Nathan's Satirical Narration

We read of this in **2 Samuel 12:1-4**:

And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had brought up and nourished up: and it grew together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

This story is mild satire, told to expose and rebuke King David. It is not harsh like Jotham's fable as its purpose is to correct and bring about improvement. Scofield states that this also is a parable, but such a conception creates impossible difficulties. In this story the outstanding event is the killing of the poor man's lamb. *Without* this there would be no story, but there is nothing in the great sin *of* David that is parallel to this. It is a simple matter to say as some do that the rich man represents David, the poor man represents Uriah, the "exceeding many flocks" of the rich man represents David's numerous wives, and that the one little ewe lamb represents Bathsheba, the only wife of Uriah. However, at this point in the story all representations go awry since it was Uriah (the poor man) who was killed, and Bathsheba (the little ewe lamb) became the wife of David. If this were a parable then the story would probably have been that the rich man murdered the poor man, stole his lamb and added it to his numerous flocks.

A very important principle is seen in this. The flow of a parable must always be

in harmony with that to which it is parallel, but in satire there is no such need. A satire is more free since it is not illustrating. Since it points to things but does not represent, it is at liberty to take off in any direction. It does not need to run parallel with that which it is exposing. Once we recognize that in the story of the rich man and Lazarus our Lord was speaking satirically, all difficulties will disappear. However, before we give this detailed consideration, several other principles related to our Lord's words must be established.

Elijah on Mount Carmel, 1 Kings 18:17-41

An important principle in divine revelation can be found in the record of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Elijah seems to have been amused at the great physical efforts put forth by the prophets of Baal in order to stir up their god and cause him to act. He taunted them with these words of mockery and sarcasm:

And it came to pass at noon that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awakened. 1 Kings 18:27.

Would anyone care to say that Elijah was serious in this advice, that he actually believed that Baal may have been in conference, on a hunting trip, or taking a journey? Could his statements be used to show that he believed that a god called Baal actually existed, and that he would answer if he were aroused from his preoccupation? Of course not!

These are words spoken in mockery, and they demonstrate that one of the greatest of all God's prophets made effective use of this sharp weapon to cut down the pretensions of those who worshipped Baal and who rejected the true God. And since it is true that Elijah used the verbal weapons of sarcasm and mockery to demolish these false prophets, then it presents no problem when we find that our Lord used weapons like these against those who loved money, who served mammon, and who made the Word of God void by their traditions. Correct handling of the Word of God means that we must recognize the true character of Elijah's statements. How unjust to him it would be to label his words, "Elijah's conception of Baal"

Careful study of the rhetorical devices used in the Word of God will show that when men deal in sarcasm, irony, or satire they may say things which are not at all expressions of what they believe.

The Ironic Statements of Christ

In the words of Christ we find certain statements that are sarcastic, ironical, and satirical and should not be regarded as expressions of what He believed or taught.

[Irony is a kind of humor or light sarcasm in which the intended implication *is* the opposite of the literal sense of the words used. The distinguishing feature of irony is that the meaning intended is contrary to that seemingly expressed.]

For example, the Pharisees came to the Lord in Perea, Herod's country east of Jordan, and said: "**Get thee out and depart from thence for Herod will kill you.**" (Luke 13: 31). They represented this information as coming straight from Herod, and their purpose was to frighten Him from Galilee into Judea where He would be more in the power of the Sanhedrin which they controlled. In reply He told them to go tell that fox that He had three days of beneficent works yet to do and would remain in Perea until His purpose had come to a full end. Then He added

For it cannot be that a prophet should perish anywhere except in Jerusalem. Luke 13 :33.

This statement is ironical. Its humorous sarcasm should not be missed. Actually a prophet could perish anywhere if people turned against him. But so many prophets had been slain in Jerusalem, that our Lord infers that this city has a virtual monopoly on killing prophets. Thus our Lord states that He feels safe as long as He is in Herod's country, since prophets have a place where they perish, namely Jerusalem. How it must have stung the self-righteous Pharisees who controlled everything in Jerusalem for our Lord to say He felt secure in Herod's country since the only place a prophet could perish was in a city controlled by them [Other examples of ironical statements from the lips of our Lord will be found in Matt. 23:32 and Mark 7:9. Of Matthew 23:32, A. T. Robertson says: "The keenest irony in this command has been softened in some MSS. to the future indicative (plerosete). Fill up the measure of your fathers; crown their misdeeds by killing the prophet God has sent to you, Do at last what has long been in your hearts. The hour is come! (Bruce)." Concerning Mark 7:9, Robertson again says: "One can almost see the scribes withering under this terrible arraignment. It was biting sarcasm that cut to the bone, The evident irony should prevent literal interpretation as *commendation* of Pharaisaic pervasion of God's Word,"]

False conceptions of Christ, based mostly upon the stylized character depicted in stained-glass windows and religious pictures, have caused many to feel that He was a listless man who never showed real physical or mental energy. But He who lashed the money changers with a scourge or cords, lashed the Pharisees again and again with a scourge of words.

There were times when our Lord took the very words of men, even though false, and turned them back upon them. If men are to be held responsible for their words, then He who will hold them responsible has the right to use these words against them. [He took false positions and principles as well as words and turned them back against them, He did this by putting their principles and positions into words, It is easy to find a hundred men holding false positions and acting on false principles which not one of them would dare to put into words.]

This is seen in one of His parables.

Parable of the Pounds - Luke 19 :11-27

As the Lord traveled toward Jerusalem, His disciples knew that His presence in that city would create a major crisis. Hopefully they supposed among themselves that the kingdom of God would immediately be manifested, solving all their problems. In view of this He spoke a parable about a certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Upon his departure he called his ten slaves and delivered to them equal sums of money with the instruction that they should engage in some business enterprise until he returned.

There can be no doubt but that this nobleman represents the Lord Jesus. Passing over some of the details in this parable, let us consider the case of the slave who kept his pound wrapped in a handkerchief. His explanation of his failure to transact any business with the money trusted to him was:

For I feared thee, because thou are an austere (harsh) man: thou takest up that thou layest not down and reapest that thou didst not sow. (Luke 19:21)

The slave's estimate of his lord was that he was mean and grasping, also a thief; for he who picks up what he did not lay down or reaps what he did not sow ignores the simplest requirements of honesty.

His lord did not deny the accusation or bother to refute it. He accepted the slave's declared estimate of his character and said:

Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked slave. Thou knewest that I was a harsh man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping what I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required my own with usury? Luke 19 :22, 23.

It is evident that we can build no doctrine concerning the character of Christ upon this statement. Even though the nobleman in this parable is a representation of our Lord, we repudiate any conception of Him that might be based upon these words. Did He not declare in another place that He was meek and lowly in heart? Did He not instruct His own disciples to "lend, hoping for nothing again" (Luke 6:35)? Did He not say that He came not to get but to give? It is from statements such as these that we form our conceptions of His character, not from Luke 19:22, 23.

These words were not spoken for teaching. They were spoken to reveal the utter falsity of the wicked slave's position. His master was not this kind of man, and the slave did not believe him to be. He claimed he acted out of fear, but the truth is that he was lazy. If he had really believed his lord to be grasping and dishonest, he would have felt assured that he would welcome the opportunity to get some exorbitant interest.

In this parable the nobleman is made to speak with sarcastic irony. From it we learn that we can expect Christ to take the words of others, even though they be false, and turn them back upon the one who uttered them. There is much of this very thing in the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

Prolonged study of this portion which has extended over a period of many years, during which I have read and considered most of the available material that has been written on this portion, has resulted in

the following three convictions

1. This story is not a record of literal history, not even of literal history couched in figurative language.

2. This story is not a parable. My reasons for this conviction have already been stated.

3. This is a suppositional story. The events set forth here never happened. The literary device used by our Lord here is pure satire. In fact we have in this story one of the finest pieces of satirical speaking to be found in all literature. Furthermore, it is a scrupulously fair satire -- something which can hardly be found, if at all, in secular writings.

As suggested before, a basic necessity for successful satire is that the reader or hearer be familiar with that which is being satirized. This satire of our Lord was instantly intelligible to His hearers in the days when these words were spoken. They were quite familiar with their own wicked principles and purposes even though these were hidden from others. They knew they were being scourged with their own rods. Yet any objection they might have raised or any answer they might have given would have served only to show openly that they understood what the Lord was rebuking and that the truth had reached its goal.

However, while this satire was instantly intelligible to those at whom it was directed, it is not at all intelligible to the average reader today. His complete unfamiliarity with and misunderstandings about the conditions that existed and the things taught by the Pharisees in that day will mislead him into thinking that this story is a historical narrative, or a parable. [I remember as a boy reading and delighting in "Gulliver's Travels" because of its fantasy, never once knowing that it is a satire on man and his institutions. This was to be expected since I knew nothing about the things being satirized by Jonathan Swift. However, I did think he must have been poking fun at someone when he described the scientists on Lagado trying to extract sunbeams from cucumbers.]

Since appreciation of any satire depends upon some degree of familiarity with the thing being satirized, it is evident that the satirical story about the rich man and Lazarus cannot be understood by those who are ignorant of the situations and conditions that caused these words to be spoken. Steps must be taken to correct the ignorance that exists concerning these. Since many of these same conditions still exist today, this satire has not lost its message of exposure and rebuke.

The Hearers

It will be helpful if we fix in our minds certain well defined groups to whom the words of Christ were spoken. These can be listed on the basis of their nearness to (or distance from) Christ.

1. **THE THREE.** This group was made up of Peter, James, and John. It was to them that the Lord granted the most intimate revelation and visions. See Luke 9: 28.

2. **THE TWELVE.** These were His disciples who became apostles. They represent all who were learners in the school of Christ. To these he gave revelations that were simple and expedient. If He used a parable in teaching them, He gladly explained it at their request.

3. **THE PEOPLE.** As described by Luke, this group was made up of those who listened to His words and considered them diligently. They were taught by Him, and they heard Him gladly, but they were never given as much as were the disciples. Further light for them depended upon them taking their place as disciples.

4. **THE MULTITUDE.** This was the careless, confused mob. They were the sensation seekers of their day. They trailed after Christ to see His miracles, to be with the crowd, to get a meal, or just to see what might happen. They accepted no teaching, they rejected no teaching. They did not know what they desired. To them our Lord never spoke without a parable (Matt. 13:34).

This does not mean that every word spoken to them was a parable, but that in speaking to them He always included a parable in the message. It is as if we should say of a speaker: "He always uses illustrations, and never fails to use an illustration when speaking."

5. THE PHARISEES. This party dominated and controlled a group in Israel which included the Sadducees, scribes, and priests. They formed the aristocracy in Israel. This group controlled all life and thought in Israel. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were doctrinally opposed to each other, but they were united in their enmity toward Christ. Since the story of the rich man and Lazarus was pointed at the Pharisees and their associates, it is essential that consideration be given to their beliefs, practices, and character if we expect to understand this satire.

The Pharisees

Of the three sects in Judaism at the *time* of Christ, the Pharisees were the most powerful. The actual group *is* believed to have numbered only about six thousand, but this was the inner circle. In the Gospels the scribes and Pharisees are constantly mentioned in the same connection, and in such manner as to imply that they formed the same party. The strength of their influence was such that they dominated everything in Israel. They controlled the Sanhedrin, the priesthood, the civil courts, and all Jewish *society*. The Sadducees opposed them, but their opposition was so weak that the Pharisees tolerated *it*, knowing that the conservative Sadducees would not push *it* too far, and that they had sufficient power to crush *it* at any *time*.

The Pharisees had arrogated to their party all the right and authority that God had vested in the kings of Israel. They were a plutocratic oligarchy exercising all the kingly powers. This explains why the royal family was so insignificant when Christ was born in the household of Joseph. The Pharisees had taken to themselves the real work of the priests, that of teaching the people, leaving the priests to carry on the empty ritual, which without true instruction was devoid of any meaning.

The inspired record in the four Gospels tells us much about the Pharasaic character. They were described by John the Baptist as being a generation of vipers (Matt. 3:7); they made use of calumny in dealing with those whom they opposed (Matt. 9:34); they did not hesitate to murder to accomplish their ends and maintain their power (Matt. 12:14); they rejected all signs given by the Lord then demanded a special sign be given to them (Matt. 12:38); they transgressed the commandments of God by their traditions (Matt. 15:2); they were hypocrites (Matt. 23:3); all their works were done to be seen of men (Matt. 23: 5); they devoured widow's houses, then made long prayers in pretence (Matt. 23:14); they were lovers of money (Luke 16:14); and they rejected the commandments of God in order that they might maintain their own traditions

(Mark 7:9).

Having made void the Word of God, the Pharisees had adopted most of the platonic philosophy concerning the nature of man. From a *mixture* of Greek ideas and old Egyptian and Babylonian myths they had developed a doctrine of purgatory and of prayers for the dead. Josephus declares that the Pharisees taught that every soul is incorruptible, that only the souls of good men pass over into another body, while those of the wicked are punished with eternal suffering. They held that there is an immortal vigor in souls, and that under the earth there are rewards and punishments for those who have lived virtuously or viciously in this life.

Their shameful treatment of the poor in Israel shows that they loved only themselves and not the people or the country of Israel. Long before the time of Christ the wealthy and ruling classes were taken to task by the prophets for their cruel and unjust treatment of the poor. The Pharisees held that the distinctions between poor and rich were part of God's plan, and they made poverty to be a virtue that would be rewarded with wealth in the life to come. The Sadducees on the other hand had worked into their beliefs the idea that poverty was a crime, and that to be poor was evidence of the displeasure of God.

One of the worst features of the Pharasaic system was the expulsion or excommunication from the life of Israel of those who had transgressed. At times their acts may have had some justification, but the Pharisees had carried it so far that once a man came under their strictures, there was no possible way for him to get back again into the life of Israel. These were the "sinners", so often mentioned in the gospel record's. As a rule they were guilty of nothing more than refusal to bow down to the despotic power exercised by the ruling clique of the Pharisees.

Once a man brought down upon himself the wrath of the Pharisees, there was no hope of pardon. They never forgave him. Once excluded and branded as a sinner, no one dared to help him, or to do business with him. The testimony of "sinners" was not valid in courts, and if anyone wronged them, they had no recourse to law. They stood, in their miserable condition, as examples of what happened to any who challenged the position or claims of the Pharisees.

In their distress many of them were forced to do business with or collaborate with the Roman occupation forces. This paid them well, especially if they became tax-collectors (publicans). This explains why publicans and sinners are often linked together in one group. They were shunned as traitors in Israel. Nevertheless, their real character is seen in the fact that many of them became the first disciples of John the Baptist and of *Jesus Christ*.

When Christ came and started to teach the people, He, in so doing, challenged the Pharisees assumption that they alone were the teachers in Israel. When He presented His credentials, which were the gracious miracles He performed, they stepped into the

arena to challenge Him. They could not match His wisdom so they plotted to destroy Him (Matt. 12:14). They refused to yield to anyone even one grain of the authority they had gathered to themselves. Their attitude toward Him was summed up in the words spoken by Christ:

But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. Mark 12 :7.

When the Pharisees appeared at the baptism of John, he wasted no time trying to change them, but branded them immediately as a "**generation of vipers.**" Jesus Christ called them whitewashed graves, hypocrites, serpents, children of Gehenna, thieves and murderers.

One important principle that must be kept in mind in studying the story of the rich man and Lazarus is that these words were spoken to the implacable enemies of Christ, the Pharisees.

They were spoken to men whose doom was sealed when they charged that Christ performed His miracles by the power of Beelzebub the prince of devils. In doing this they blasphemed the Holy Spirit and committed the sin that had no forgiveness (Matt. 12: 22-32) . These words were spoken to men who were rigidly set against the will of God. Therefore, no revelation of truth was given to them (John 7:16, 17). And since this story is not a revelation of God's truth, it has to be an answer to, a rebuke, an expose of the Pharisees. In other words, it is not a revelation of truth about *future* life, of the state of the dead, of *future* punishment or *future* bliss; but it is an expose of the base and warped ideas, principles, and practices of the Pharisees. Since satire is a type of writing or speaking, the object of which is to hold up vices and *follies for* ridicule and reprobation, then this is satire pure and simple. With these facts in mind we are ready to resume consideration of the story spoken by our Lord in the presence of the Pharisees.

The Occasion of the Story

It has been said that this story has always erroneously been considered "as a sort of an island in the Lucan narrative, cut off *from* the mainland of the Gospel, and having no necessary connection with its surroundings." Those who regard it as such exclude all light that the context may throw upon the passage.

The key to the character of this story and to its meaning and purpose is found in the material that precedes it. [When a speaker announces that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is to be the text of his message, it would be well if someone would arise and say, "Now that we know your text, will you tell us what your context will be." This story is as a rule placed in a context of human opinion and traditions about

heaven, hell, death, life, and future punishment. It is seldom if ever left *in* the context that God has given to it.]

We must eliminate all man-made fences, such as chapter divisions and paragraph headings, from this portion of Scripture and begin our studies at the point where the Lord began to speak, then follow through to His last word on this occasion. The record begins at Luke 14:25 and continues without interruption to Luke 17: 10. Every word spoken has a bearing upon the meaning, character and purpose of the story. It is evident that our Lord never moved out of His place while He spoke the words recorded between the two references just mentioned. It was the longest battle our Lord ever fought with the Pharisees.

As the scene opens in Luke 14.:25-35 our Lord is seen speaking to the multitude that followed Him. His words to them consisted of one dark saying, I refer to this as a dark saying (or, enigma) because a message about hating father, mother, wife and children, also about bearing his cross is bound to be quite a puzzle to any who hear it unless their minds have been enlightened by the Spirit of God , and three parables.

The closing words of His last parable spoken to the multitude were, "**men cast it out.**" While these words were spoken of the savorless salt, they seem to have caught the ear and made an impression upon the publicans and sinners, for this was what the despotic aristocracy in Israel had done to them. And since these words were followed by an invitation to those who had ears to make use of them, all the publicans and sinners drew near to Him in order to hear.

This scandalized and enraged the Pharisees since Jesus was receiving men whom they rejected and ostracized. They had assumed all the rights of kings and priests in Israel, but in no way did they accept the responsibilities toward others that were set forth in the shepherd and mediator character of kings and priests. The Pharisees never sought a sinner, and never brought one back to God. Between the aristocracy and the sinners there was a vast chasm that none of the people could cross and none of the Pharisees would cross. They maintained this irrevocable separation by their teachings. They insisted God had given them their place and only God could take it away. Our Lord ignored this caste system and went to the aid of those they had branded as sinners. This brought out their deepest hatred. They could not tolerate anyone alleviating the harsh punishments they had imposed upon certain men. They justified their lack of mercy by claiming that God was harsh, therefore they had to be.

When the publicans and sinners drew near to hear the Lord, the Pharisees and scribes began to murmur and to hurl their accusations (Luke 15:1, 2). And it seems that the publicans and sinners, long used to deferring to the Pharisees and desiring to spare the Lord any embarrassment that their nearness might cause, began to withdraw themselves from His presence.

But His great love for the lost could not permit this, so our Lord spoke a parable to the Pharisees in the hearing of the publicans and sinners. This parable had two purposes - to rebuke and expose the Pharisees and to offer encouragement and hope to the publicans and sinners.

This parable is in three parts. There is a story about a lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), and a lost son (Luke 15: 12- 32). Each part rebukes and exposes the Pharisees and offers encouragement and hope to the sinners in Israel.

While the story of the lost sheep is a parable, we should not miss the fact that the story is satirical. Many will never see this, since this parable is usually treated in a superficial manner. Hundreds of ideas have been preached into this passage, resulting in the most astounding importations. Every statement and every word has been loaded with extravagant fancies, many of which have their origin in Dr. Sankey's well-known hymn about the "ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold." This line has no real foundation in this parable. The importation of such ideas blinds the minds to the satirical character of this story which so effectually exposes the sordid miserliness of the Pharisees. To expose and rebuke their inordinate love for material possessions is the purpose of this parable. The word *shepherd* does not occur in it.

The question, "**What man of you having an hundred sheep?**" is directed at the Pharisees. When faced with the loss of one sheep their greed is so aroused that they leave the ninety-nine shepherdless in the wilderness and open to the attacks of wild beasts. Sheep were common in Israel. They were an article of commerce, and any man that risked ninety-nine to get back one that had strayed revealed a cupidity that cannot tolerate the thought of losing one bit of anything already possessed. Furthermore, the idea of a man calling together his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him over the recovery of a lost sheep is amusing, to say the least. Such actions would be quite proper if a child had been lost and found, but they are preposterous in the case of sheep. A covetous man would think that all should respond to his invitation to rejoice, but there must have been one who said, "If that is all the party is about, I'm not going,"

Our Lord used a parable somewhat like this in Matthew 18: 11-14, and it is to this that we should go for a great picture of the seeking Savior. In this parable all satirical elements are omitted, This was spoken to His disciples, not to the Pharisees.

However, in Luke 15 the statement about "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" is pure satire which borders an sarcasm. There was no such thing in Israel as a just person who needed no repentance, but the Pharisees regarded themselves as such. **The Lord Jesus took their assumed position, put it into words, then used these words in His satire against them.**

The story of the last coin is a further rebuke to the Pharisees (Luke 15:8-10). It emphasizes what He has already said. Their attitude toward a lost animal or a lost coin was one thing, Their attitude toward a lost sinner was something quite different. The addition of the story about the lost coin demonstrates that their search for the lost sheep was not due to their love for dumb animals since they showed the same care toward a piece of money. It was preposterous for the woman in this story to invite her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her over the recovery of a lost coin. It is normal for anyone to seek a lost coin, even to seek for it diligently if the value warrants it, but to call for people to rejoice over it is absurd. But it is only by a preposterous story that preposterous acts and attitudes can be satirized.

There could be no joy among the Pharisees over a sinner that repented, but there was joy in the presence of the angels of God. The Pharisees made diligent search for lost animals or lost coins, but never for a man. They esteemed animals and coins to be of more value than men.

The story of the prodigal son portrayed the sinners in Israel. In it there is no condoning or excusing of their sins. All satire and sarcasm is left out, as it would be out of harmony with His expressed attitude toward them. His statement about the prodigal "joining himself to a citizen of that country" in order to avoid starving is probably a veiled reference to the fact that some in Israel were forced by want to take the demeaning labor of collecting the burdensome taxes imposed by the Romans. No greater or more positive words *of* encouragement could have been given to the publicans and sinners than those contained in the story of the prodigal son.

The record *of* the elder son (Luke 15:25-32) sets forth the attitude *of* the Pharisees. The younger son was lost in the far country but this *one* is lost in his own father's house. The *reception* given the younger son caused all the hardness *of* the self-righteous brother to boil to the surface. From boasting about himself he turns to blame *for* his father.

The parable ends abruptly, and rightly so. No application is made. It is left to the Pharisees to make their own application. One is prone to wish they had asked the Lord, "What did that brother do in answer to his father's appeal?"

All these words were spoken to the Pharisees in the hearing *of* the publicans and sinners. But our Lord is not yet through with the Pharisees. Without leaving His place He turned to His disciples and spoke to them in the presence *of* the Pharisees. [This is characteristic of the satirical method. Satire is not as a rule addressed to those whose foibles it exposes. It is pointed at them]The story He told them is one of the strangest to be found in the Bible, but it is the real key to the character *of* the story of the rich man and Lazarus which follows it. Therefore, it must be examined with care.

Luke 16:1-8

1 And He said also unto His disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. .

2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write *fifty*.

7 Then said he to another,. And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

8 And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

This strange story has perplexed Bible students throughout the entire Christian era. It is quite reasonable and believable as far as the seventh verse, but when the eighth verse is added, it becomes unbelievable, preposterous, and absurd. However, this is what our Lord intended it to be since absurd ideas and principles can be satirized only by means of an absurd story. **The absurdity is all the more glaring if the story is paraphrased so that it appears in modern dress.**

A certain man of great wealth and many holdings had a business manager who was in charge of all his affairs, and a report was brought to him that this manager was wasting his possessions. So he summoned him, questioned him concerning this, and finally told him to prepare a complete audit of his dealings, as he did not consider him fit to manage his affairs any longer. This greatly troubled the manager, for he did not, know what he would do for future employment. His record of dishonesty would follow him and bar him from a like position, he was not physically able to do hard labor, and he was too proud to beg. The future seemed entirely black.

Thinking it over he hit upon a scheme to make quickly some friends and put them under obligation to him, all at his employer's expense, so that when he was discharged, they would have to find a place for him in their establishments.

Putting his plan into action, he called in everyone that owed his employer money. The first one who came owed ten thousand dollars, so the manager told him to take his contract and write a new one for five thousand. The second one owed four thousand, so he told him to take his contract in exchange for a new one showing an indebtedness of two thousand, and so on down the entire list. They were very glad to do this, and they thanked the manager for it, telling him that they would be glad to return the favor if they could ever do so.

When the wealthy man discovered what his crooked manager had done, he commended him for acting so shrewdly in looking after his own interests and continued him in his position at a good increase in salary.

Whether we read it in the *King James Version* or recast it into modern language, the story is still absurd. Such a thing never happened, and it never will happen. This steward worked these creditors into a position where he would be able to blackmail them into supplying all his needs when his position was gone. They are parties to a crime, a conspiracy to defraud, to illegally enrich themselves at the expense of another. No employer will ever commend a man for such crooked dealings. A man of the world would never believe that such a thing would happen. Nevertheless, there were *some* who were supposed to be "the children of light" who were actually believing that such a thing was going to happen in their dealings with God. How true it is that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

The Lord's story about the dishonest steward was told in order to expose the preposterous and absurd position of the scribes and the Pharisees. They controlled everything in Israel, but they used their position and power to bring gain to themselves. They discounted every requirement of God in order to make friends for themselves and to perpetuate their own systems and powers. They looked with pride and satisfaction upon their accomplishments, and actually thought they were commended by God since they were commended by men. They were *out of* favor with God, so they used the things of God to secure favor with men.

Our Lord laid bare their ridiculous position by telling a ridiculous story. It is a masterpiece of satire. No stronger rebuke could have been spoken. He summed it all up by calling to their attention the obvious fact that even men of the world would not believe that an employer, who planned to discharge a man for unfaithfulness, would change his mind and commend him when he became guilty of still greater unfaithfulness. No man of the world would ever believe this, but the scribes and Pharisees, who regarded themselves as children of light (John 9:41), acted as if they believed it. He put their principles into words and lashed them with this story.

This is then followed by *one* of the most ironic statements in the Bible.

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Luke 16 :9.

Many and varied have been the attempts to explain these words. Ingenious translations have been worked *out* in order to try to bring this statement of our Lord into harmony with His later statement, "**Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**" There is no need to do this. The difficulty here is man-made. This passage does not set forth a moral precept. Failure to recognize that **the** mode of expression here is irony has caused much confusion. **In irony the meaning of the words is directly opposite to that which is literally stated.** These words are parallel in character with the declaration of God found in **Judges 10: 14.**

Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

The disciples did not take His words as a moral precept. They knew they had already made friends of the One who alone could receive them into everlasting habitations (John 6:68).

The Lord continues speaking to His disciples, but the character of His words change to literal truth. All satire and irony is dropped, but every statement is a barbed shaft pointed at the Pharisees. They are to hear what He literally taught His disciples. This is what He says to them.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Luke 16:10-13.

Luke informs us that "**the Pharisees also, who were covetous heard all these things,**" (Luke 16:14). He was not even speaking to them, yet they got the meaning of His satirical and ironical remarks. They knew better than anyone else the things He was satirizing. They could not deny the truth of His words so they sought vain relief in bitter derision of the One who spoke them.

It was their love of money that prompted this derision of Him. In fact the love of money was behind most of their acts. Their love of praise was strong, their love of attention was stronger (Matt. 23: 5), but their love of money was strongest of all.

Love of God, love of parents, or love of mankind would never move them, but love of money would cause them to act every time. There were no appeals that could cause

them to untie the strings of their purses. Many of the teachings were devised for the purpose of getting more money or holding on to what they had. A Scriptural example will illustrate this.

The law said "Honor thy father and thy mother; and who so curseth (dishonors) father and mother, let them die the death." In view of this it would seem that if the parents of a Pharisee were in want that parental love would rise above their love of money. But this was not so. To keep from supporting their parents they had promulgated a teaching where all they had to do was say to their parents "It is Corban", that is, that all their money was dedicated to God and therefore could not be used to relieve destitute parents. According to their teaching this freed them from all obligation to their parents. See Mark 7:9-13.

This derision of Him by the Pharisees as stated in Luke 16: 14, caused the Lord to interrupt His message and to speak directly to them. Luke records His words which I will paraphrase in order to expand them. This is what I believe He meant (Luke 16: 15-17).

You deride me and scoff at me, but you cannot deny the absurdity of your teachings, neither can you deny the charges I have brought against you. You have perverted the Word of God in order to justify yourselves and your acts before men, but God knows your hearts. By dealing unjustly with the oracles of God you have gained the esteem of men, but your acts which are highly esteemed among men are detestable in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were God's means of dealing with Israel until John, but you have made the commandments of God ineffective by your traditions. Since John the Baptist the kingdom of God has been proclaimed, and everyone is showing great enthusiasm for it, but not you. You lock the doors of the kingdom of God against men. You will not go in yourselves, neither will you allow those who purpose to enter to go in (Matt. 23:13). But I tell you it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for the minutest part of the law to fail. Consider this one example. It is true that God through Moses permitted divorce and gave the grounds for it. But you have degraded this in order to fulfill your own desires. You have worked out a system to get around God's law and in your own eyes be free from the sin of adultery. Nevertheless the law stands and all who accept your teachings concerning divorce, then enters into relationship with another woman is guilty of adultery.

The interruption caused by their sneerings did not bring an end to His message. His words to His disciples are only momentarily suspended. After His direct rebuke to the Pharisees the onward flow is resumed. Other things are yet to be exposed and rebuked.

By the preposterous story about the unjust steward our Lord exposed the ridiculous practices of the Pharisees who discounted the righteous claims and requirements of

God. They did this in order to make friends for themselves and to perpetuate their own system. But this was only one of their absurd actions. Our Lord referred to these when He said in Mark 7:13: "**And many such like things ye do.**" In continuing His discourse our Lord exposes and lays bare a number of these things. They are quite evident in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Some of these are:

1. Their assumption of the position and rights that God had ordained for the king in Israel.
2. Their intrusion into the priest's office. They had taken over the chief work of the priests - that of teaching - leaving the priests to perform the empty ritual.
3. The luxurious and magnificent style in which they lived at a time when most of Israel was suffering great hardship due to the Roman occupation.
4. Their shameful neglect of the poor in Israel in direct violation of God's instructions in Deuteronomy 15:7-11. They justified this by their teachings.
5. Their harsh treatment of the sinners in Israel.
6. Their teaching that at death certain angels carried good men to a place which they called "Abraham's *bosom*," while others were taken to a place where "temporary punishments" were meted *out* to them "agreeable to everyone's behavior and manners." They held that poverty and hunger were God's punishments upon men while they were upon earth, and if men accepted their punishment without complaint they would not need to pay for these sins in the future. They held that riches were a sign of God's favor, and that poverty was evidence of His displeasure. They claimed that if they helped the poor they would be acting contrary to God.
7. The caste system which they had established in Israel and which they rigidly maintained.
8. Their idea that God would speak to them in a special way, and not in the manner in which He spoke to the common people. They were so exalted in their own minds that they rejected the idea of God speaking to them in the same signs He gave to others. This is seen in their actions of demanding a sign from heaven immediately after the Lord had fed four thousand from a supply that was hardly enough for one man.
9. Their teaching that if a man received evil things in this life, he would receive good things in the life to come. This teaching was concocted by the rich rulers in order to keep the poor in subjection. It was a "pie in the sky" sort of doctrine which was intended to keep the hungry from demanding bread here and now. The Pharisees never followed this teaching out to all its conclusions. Our Lord in His satire made this teaching a "two - way" street.

These are some of the things taught and (whenever convenient) practiced by the Pharisees. They are woven throughout the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. Many of them will be found in the history written by Josephus

[The thirteen volumes of the collected writings of John Lightfoot, especially volumes 11 and 12, give the best record of things believed and taught in Israel before and during the times of Christ]. Many of them will be seen in the things censured and condemned by our Lord. These are the things exposed, ridiculed, and rebuked by our Lord in the satirical story of the rich man and Lazarus.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

There was a certain rich man. This character in the Lord's story points to the aristocratic ruling class in Israel. This was composed of Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and scribes. The word *rich* in Scripture does not refer exclusively to those who had money. It described a class of men, a definite caste. A place in it was usually hereditary. An idea of the general character of those in this caste can be gained from such passages as James 2:5, 6 and 5:1-6. This caste system was rigidly maintained in Israel. The gulf between rich and poor had no bridges, and the rich would permit none to be built.

Which was clothed in purple. The word *purple* describes a cloth which was customarily worn by kings. The kingly claims of our Lord were mocked by clothing Him in purple (John 19:2). The statement that this rich man was clothed in purple points to the fact that an aristocratic class in Israel had assumed the place of . kings. They had assumed the authority while disregarding altogether the responsibilities that God had laid upon rulers in Israel. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." 2 Sam. 23:3. The ruling class in Israel was tyrannical and oppressive. They were not just, they did not rule in the fear of God, and they lacked entirely the shepherd character that God expected of those who governed His people.

And fine linen. This was the garment worn by the priests in Israel. It points to the fact that a clique in Israel controlled the priesthood and had assumed the chief prerogative of the priests, that of teaching the people. "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat," was the Lord's words concerning them (Matt.23:2). His words stated a fact, but they do not admit the right of these men to Moses' seat. They were not called to this seat as Moses had been. He assumed that seat reluctantly, but these men had assumed his seat of their own accord and were determined to hold it. They were self-appointed usurpers and acted as though their pronouncements were as binding as the revelations God gave to Moses. They taught precepts and bound them upon others but would not apply them to themselves. "They say, and do not" (Matt. 23:3).

And fared sumptuously every day. This points to the splendid manner in which the rich ruling class in Israel lived. Their position shielded them from the oppression and sufferings which most Israelites had to bear because of the Roman occupation. .

And there was a certain beggar. This character is brought into the story to point to the poor in Israel. In English the word *poor* is used to emphasize the poverty of the person or persons so described, but in the Hebrew and Greek the prominent idea is that of the ill-treated or miserable. Even though the poor were often, no doubt, persons in need, they were primarily those suffering from some kind of social disability or distress. Passages such as Amos 8:4; Isa.3:14-15; 10:1,2; 32: 7, Ezek. 16:49; 22:29, show the poor to be those who were oppressed by a high-handed and cruel aristocracy. In the writing of the prophets we find that the wealthy, ruling classes are constantly taken to task for their cruel and unjust treatment of the poor. This had not changed in the least in our Lord's day.

Named Lazarus. The fact that this name is used is a definite part of our Lord's satire. This name means "God a help" and it has reference to a practice that seemed to be common in Israel that of the rich referring to God all requests by the poor for help. They would answer all requests for food and clothing with the stock phrases "Go in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled" and yet do nothing to fulfill these needs (Jas. 2:15, 16). These words actually mean "God will warm you, God will fill you", but the word God does not appear due to the fact that the Jews would not use His name in ordinary conversation.

Was laid at his gate. A gate in Scripture was the symbol of authority. The poor in Israel were the responsibility of the rich, but the rich threw the responsibility back upon God. They would devour a widow's property, then make long prayers to God for her help.

Full of sores. A further description of their miserable condition, as is ever the case of the poor in an occupied and oppressed country. They suffered many wounds from the tyrannical and oppressive Roman conquerors. They also suffered deprivation from tax-gathers and lawless neighbors, and heaped upon this were the wounds they suffered from the aristocratic class in Israel. Indeed they were full of sores.

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. There is no record of a revolt of the poor in Israel against the rich. All they ever asked for was a little easing of their hard lot, a thing well within the power of the Pharisees to grant. But they refused to fulfill the directive of God as set forth in Deuteronomy 15: 7, 8.

Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. There can be no doubt but that this

statement points to the fact that many merciful acts were performed for the poor in Israel by individuals in the Roman army of occupation. Cornelius was one who gave much alms to the people (Acts 10: 2) .

Up to this point in His story our Lord has set the stage and placed the characters upon it. Now He is going to take these characters, move them about and cause them to speak, but in harmony with the principles and teaching of the Pharisees.

All teaching in Israel was rigidly controlled by the Pharisees. No one could teach without their authority. No matter how preposterous or unfair their teachings became, none dared to question or criticize them. What they bound upon others, none dared to bind upon them. The scribes took their precepts and repeated them parrot-like to the people. This is why they spoke as those having no authority (Matt. 7: 29) . The scribes did not believe what they taught, but they had to teach it or risk the anger of the Pharisees.

When the Lord appeared upon earth He took their doctrines and turned them back upon them. He exposed their principles by putting into words the things they practiced. By so doing He incurred their deepest hatred.

Among their teachings was one that implied that if a man were poor and needy in this life, he would be rich in the life to come. This kept many satisfied to be poor, helped maintain the gulf between rich and poor, and spared the Pharisees the task of helping them. They intimated that if this life were filled with evil things, the life to come would be filled with good things. But this was as far as it went. They never allowed this idea to go so far as to say that if a man were rich in this life, he would be poor in the next; or if a man enjoyed good things in this life, he would receive evil things in the life to come.

The motive behind their lopsided teaching is evident. No commands in the Word of God could be plainer than those which made it the duty of the rich in Israel to care for the poor. Even the crafty Pharisee would have difficulty in explaining away such plain statements as those found in Deuteronomy 15: 7 -11. So they made these words void by a tradition that made poverty to be a virtue that carried a guarantee of great bliss in the next life. **By getting the people to accept even gnawing hunger as being the will of God, they saved themselves from the unpleasant duty of untying their own purse strings.**

While it is only surmise it may have been that by some such teaching as this the Pharisees had committed some grave offence against one whose name was Lazarus, and this could be another reason why the Lord gave this name to the character in His

story. There may have been a man who was wretchedly poor and pitifully sick. Day after day he lay upon the streets, too weak to help himself in any manner. His condition may have touched the hearts of many, but they were in no position to help. Their sympathy and pity for him called for something to be done - but what could be done. Someone may have suggested that in view of this man's desperate need, his case should be brought to the attention of the rulers in Israel. Certainly in view of their wealth and power they would not refuse the few crumbs required to relieve this poor man's distress.

It may have been that a committee was sent to the Pharisees. We can imagine the fear and hesitancy that accompanied such a task, but their sympathies drove them on. So this man's case was laid before the Pharisees.

This placed them in a difficult position. They could not deny that the poor man needed help, and they could not say they lacked the means to help him. If they bluntly refused, it would hurt them in the eyes of the people. It appeared that for once they would have to open their purses.

But the Pharisees were masters of every situation, always ready with some teaching that would relieve them of their obligations. They probably expressed their deep compassion for the poor man, wiping away a few tears as they did so. This always made a good impression. They recounted with sorrow how his whole life had been one of poverty, filled with evil things. But, said they, better times were sure to come soon for him. He had received his evil things in this life, and this signified that he would get his good things in the life to come. Why, then, should they go against God, and change the wretched state of this man when that very state presaged a better state in the next life.

If the people saw the contradictions in teaching such as this, they dared not state it, for the Pharisees were in authority and the common people never questioned or answered back. They may have reasoned within themselves that if evil things were the guarantee of good things in the future life, then good things in this life must signify evil things in the life to come. However, if they did reason after this manner they never expressed it. **Few there were who dared to brave the wrath of a Pharisee (see John 12 :42, 43).**

Thus the Pharisees protected their wealth and position by leading the people to believe that poverty was a cardinal virtue. But it was a virtue which no Pharisee cared to possess.

When the greatest of all teachers appeared upon earth, He was not afraid of them. They demanded to know of His authority to teach, but He refused to tell them. In His censure of them He took their own teachings, held them accountable for their idle

words, judged them out of their own mouths, and bound upon them what they had laid upon others. He, by means of satirical stories, developed their teaching to all its logical conclusions and forced upon them all its consequences. If one position was to be reversed in the life to come, then all positions were to be reversed. If the poor were to be rich, then the rich should be poor. If a man on the good side of a great gulf in this life, then he should be on the evil side in the life to come. This is the situation we find in the second part of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Our Lord caused all actors to move and be in complete harmony with the teachings and principles of the Pharisees. The result is most startling, especially so when dead men begin to act and talk.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. This is the way it would take place according to the traditions held by the Pharisees. To keep this idea from being preposterous, men have been forced to insert here the idea of a disembodied soul or a disembodied spirit. But such things are unknown to the Word of God. There is no hint of soul or spirit in the words of our Lord. That which lived, died, and that which died was carried by the angels. Our Lord was not revealing here what happens at death. He is exposing a teaching of the Pharisees about the angels carrying the dead to a place they called Abraham's bosom. This is a thing and a place that is unknown in the Word of God. But it was not unknown in the traditions of the Pharisees, as the Talmud and the writings of Josephus give abundant witness.

The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell (hades) he lift up his eyes being in torments. The one who died was buried, and the one who was buried is set forth as being tormented in hades. Since no one has been able to tell us how he got out of the grave and into a place of torment, men are forced to insert here some vague idea about a soul. This statement makes no more sense than if I should say "that a certain man died, and was buried, and in the penitentiary he was found in solitary confinement." This cannot be true. And our Lord is not presenting the story of the rich man in harmony with the truth, but in full harmony with the traditions of the Pharisees about the transmigration of souls. From Genesis 1 to Luke 16 there is no Biblical record anywhere of a man being anywhere after death except in the tomb. God's word to Adam was:

In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken; for you are dust, and unto dust you shall return. Gen. 3:19.

In view of these words anyone who believes that Adam is anywhere except in the dust of the earth does not believe this declaration of God.

[One grows weary of the bold claims made by many that they believe the Bible to be the Word of God, yet refuse to believe when pointed to a specific statement made in

God's Word. They take refuge in the statement that "it is a matter of interpretation." Very well - but let them interpret this passage, without rewriting it to bring in ideas about Adam's body, and see how they come out.]

And seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. This is the way it would be according to the teaching of the Pharisees, so this is the way that the Lord presents it in His story.

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. This presents a conclusion which the Pharisees never included in their teaching. Since on earth Lazarus begged for crumbs, then, in hades the rich man is seen begging for a drop of water. And the ideas about Abraham's bosom, the rich man's eyes, Lazarus' finger, the rich man's tongue all serve to heighten the satirical story told by our Lord.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 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. In answer to his plea for a few drops of water, Abraham is presented as setting forth all the Pharasaic traditions about the poor becoming rich in the life to come. His answer is pure gibberish. It could have no possible bearing upon why the poor man was where he was or why the rich man was in his condition. It is completely foreign to the truth about the grace of God which alone fits a sinner for blessing in the life to come. And it denies the justice of God, since it presents a man suffering simply because in his lifetime he received good things. Yet it is all in harmony with Pharasaic teaching. Furthermore, if the caste system were God's will for earth, it should continue after death. So, our Lord presented it in this manner, but He placed the rich on the evil side of the gulf. This is the way it would have been if the Pharasaic tradition about the reversal of positions in regard to the poor were true.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

This request by the rich man points to another attitude assumed by the Pharisees which also needs to be exposed and rebuked. Their place as a privileged class in Israel caused them to feel that they were not required to believe the evidences given to ordinary men.

"A sign from heaven", was the demand they made of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 16:1). They imply the signs He has hitherto wrought are insufficient, and their position requires that they be granted some special sign which in outward grandeur will exceed all other signs that He has wrought. This false attitude is exposed by the words the Lord puts upon the lips of Abraham.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. This was the divine provision for all in Israel, high and low, rich and poor. If men believed Moses, they would have believed Christ (John 5:46).

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. The rich man declares that the written word is not sufficient, but if one comes to them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

The Pharisees are here exposed for their superstitions. This man knows that while his brothers do not believe the Word of God, he is sure they will respond if one returned from the dead. There will always be those who will give credence to every strange portent, but refuse to give any credence to the sacred Scriptures. As in the case of a woman who attended a seance and claims her dead husband materialized as a bubble, telling her many wonderful things. She readily believed this bubble, but refuses to believe the Bible. There are many who would gladly listen to a ghost, but who will not listen to the Word of God. Superstition and unbelief always go hand in hand.

With the statement that since they had failed to hear the written Word, no miracle would persuade them to believe, our Lord ended His long battle with the Pharisees. His satirical story has reached its end. The Pharisees are stripped naked by it. Their exposure is complete. They can make no answer. Any attempt to reply will only reveal that His satire is understood, that it has reached its mark. Their sole hope now is to retire from the open field of battle, then seek more devious ways of silencing Him.

Inspired Satire

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a divinely inspired satire. Its study is the study of a satire that was spoken by God. It is as much the Word of God as any other portion of Scripture. It was not given for the purpose of teaching men about the ways and works of God. Its purpose was to turn the light upon the Pharisees. It is not the place to go to find what our Lord taught about death, the state of the dead, future punishment, or future bliss.

It Is Not the Gospel

An objection is anticipated. Some will say that to treat this portion as a satire is to offer an interpretation that is so complex that it puts it beyond the reach of the simple, unsophisticated seeker of God's truth. But is not this also true when Luke 16 is treated as historical narrative?

This story is not "the gospel." The gospel concerns "His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1: 3) and Christ is not even referred to in this story. This is not the place to bring an honest seeker who is looking for the Savior, neither is it the place to bring the simple believer who desires to learn more about God and Christ. This story was aimed at the sneering, unbelieving, self-righteous Pharisees. When handled rightly it still carries a powerful message to all such today.

The End #SS18