The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

Luke 16:19-31

Introduction

This parable is about a rich self-indulgent man and a poor needy man. Both men died; one went to "heaven" and the other went to "hell". Do you wonder that this story is unpopular and usually ignored?

There is perhaps another source of uneasiness about the story because it seems to teach a role reversal as a solution to the problem of the justice of God. There is an argument that life here on earth is unfair, but in the next life God will "even things up". But the implication of this is that if you are living comfortably here, hell awaits you. If you are homeless and starving here, heaven is guaranteed.

The issue of the justice of God (theodicy) is very interesting in comparative religion – i.e. the Hindu and Buddhist view of re-incarnation, the Muslim view etc. Here is a glimpse of what the Lord Jesus taught about this very important issue. One major reason why so many are unbelievers is that we believers have never adequately given an answer to why, if there is a God of love, there is so much suffering in the world!

In the Arab/Muslim World, there are variations of "pearly gates" stories. The gatekeeper varies (St Peter for Catholics/Orthodox, Jesus or Muhammad for Muslims, Moses for Jews). Most stories are very funny and have no bearing on one's view of eschatology. Usually they are a humorous commentary on current politics. This isn't a new type of humour. It dates back to the inter-testamental period. At least we have documentary evidence this far back.

Many have suggested this parable is a sort of "pearly gates" story. If so, it isn't an accurate view of the Biblical teaching about life after death. Some have thought it is a real story of two people Jesus knew, one of whom was called Lazarus. But whether it is the real story or a "pearly gates" story doesn't alter the certainty and solemnity of what The Lord Jesus is teaching. This is the only Scripture that describes the feelings of the lost after death.

So here we have a "picture" of the other side of the grave and it refutes several popular errors concerning death.

Error One: We can know nothing certain and authoritative about life after death.

But we can! God's Word tells us much in this parable and in other passages of Scripture. All the words of the Lord Jesus were God's words. (Jn. 12:49-50) He received them from the Father and so they are spoken with authority. (Mt. 7:39)

Error Two: Death ends all.

Let us be quite certain of the fact that there is continuity of life beyond the grave. The Lord Jesus said so. (Lk. 16:19-20; Heb. 9:27)

Error Three: When we die we simply go to sleep.

Are the rich man and Lazarus asleep in this story? The body is "asleep" (1 Thess. 4:13-18) but we (our soul/mind) are awake.

Error Four: There is no such place as hell. All people go to heaven.

Most people are unwilling to believe in hell, but are quite happy to believe in heaven! But there is a hell as well as a heaven. (Mt. 13:42, 23:33, 24:51, 25:30, 25:46) So, what is this story all about?

Possibly the Lord Jesus was opposing the Sadducees who claimed there was no resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees were wealthy and had considerable political power. The story makes a number of points:

- Judgment after death is related to our earthly lifestyle.
- In this same chapter the Lord Jesus has spoken about material possessions – "mammon" He said three things about "mammon".
    - You can't serve two masters. It's either God or material possessions. The problem with material possessions is that they have the characteristic of a force that seeks mastery. They are necessary to sustain life and they can be used to serve God, but they press for mastery over us. They are called "unrighteous mammon" seeking to usurp God's place in human life. So we can't serve both masters.
    - The Lord Jesus asks a pointed question, "If you haven't been faithful in unrighteous mammon, who will trust you with the truth?" If you have been unfaithful before God with material possessions, don't expect Him to reveal to you His great treasure – the truth of God – the Lord Jesus!
    - All possessions belong to God because He created them. ***"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."*** (Ps. 24:1) This basic Biblical principle is very foreign to western capitalism. The Biblical view is that everything I have belongs to God and I am just a steward of these things. Is there anything that is really mine? Yes! Whatever part of God's truth we make our own as we struggle to live it out is truly ours. We will take it with us. As we work hard at being faithful stewards of material things, God reveals to us ***"the deep things of God"***. (1 Cor. 2:10) The potential transforming power of such a worldview is limitless.

This parable is the third story in a trilogy:

1st story: A prodigal son wastes his father's possessions. (Lk. 15:11-32)

2nd story: A dishonest steward wastes his master's possessions. (Lk. 16:1-8)

3rd story: A rich man wastes his own possessions. (Lk. 16:19-31)

All three stories deal with the theme of salvation.

The structure of the story

1. In life: banquets and pain

2. In death: a banquet and pain

Both "tunes" are played simultaneously. In the second there is a dialogue between the rich man and Abraham. The rich man makes three requests and Abraham responds to each of them.

1.1 In Life – Banquets

The Lord Jesus presents a brief but brilliant outline of the life of a very self-indulgent rich man who cares for no one but himself. He dressed <u>every day</u> in purple robes. (He probably had other clothes.) Purple cloth was extremely expensive. Usually it was only worn by those who were high government officials of the Roman Empire. To sell purple dye it was necessary to have authorisation from the emperor himself. Wearing purple meant you had great power and wealth. This man wanted everybody, every day to know he had money and power.

Then there is some light humour! He dressed himself in "fine linen". This refers to high-quality Egyptian cotton used for the best underwear! So he not only wore very expensive outer clothes, but just in case you're interested, he also wore fine quality underwear!

And the man feasted "sumptuously every day". The word sumptuously in Greek is *'lampros'* which means 'brilliantly' – i.e. a brilliance of display or flamboyantly. So here is a very rich and powerful man displaying his wealth/position – the equivalent of driving about in a gold-plated Rolls Royce and feasting every day with other rich and powerful people. Notice 'every day' so he didn't keep the Sabbath and neither could his servants. So each week he publicly broke the Ten Commandments. His self-indulgent lifestyle was more important to him than the Law of

God! But neither then nor now would any earthly Court of Justice arrest or condemn the rich man. On the contrary, men would justify him and speak well of him for we aren't told he was vulgar and living in depravity. What he did wasn't illegal.

1.2 In Life – Pain

Lying outside the gate of the rich man was a sick hungry, neglected beggar. The poor man had a name, but why did the Lord Jesus give him this particular name? Lazarus is the only individual with a name in all the parables told by the Lord Jesus. All the other characters are anonymous. Lazarus is the sole exception and so his name must be significant.

Lazarus is the Hebrew word that means "the one God helps". But Lazarus lay day by day at the rich man's gate. He may have had a few scraps thrown at him, but he was always hungry. He was so sick he couldn't stand and others had to carry him to the gate and he was so poor he had to beg. He appears to be a person God didn't help!

The community around Lazarus respected and cared for him as best they could. The only man in town rich enough to meet his medical needs was this rich man. So members of the community carried him to the rich man's gate each day in the hope that the rich man or his guests would feel some compassion and help Lazarus. Today in the Arab World, before noon prayers on a Friday, beggars gather outside mosques where rich people go for the same reason.

The rich man had a gate to his property and a door to his house. The word used is *'pulon'* which means a gate full of artistry – a beautiful gate. So possibly there was a nice house surrounded by gardens with a beautiful gate onto the street. It was by this gate Lazarus was laid by his family and friends each day. Covered with sores, probably almost naked and too weak to sit up, he hoped to be fed with something ***"that fell from the rich man's table"***.

The word 'hoped' or 'desired' is used in Luke's Gospel of something one wants and is unable to have. For example:

- Lk. 15:16: The prodigal son wanted to eat pods like the pigs ate but he knew that his stomach could not digest them.
- Mk. 7:24-30: The Syro-phoenician woman near Tyre and Sidon pleads to be given small pieces of bread that are thrown to the animals after a meal.

So in the Middle East leftovers are thrown to the dogs whose role it is to guard the house and estate. Lazarus wouldn't get any leftovers thrown towards him although he longed for them. Rather they were fed to the guard dogs. He might have got a scrap or two, but never enough to be satisfied.

Lazarus was sick, hungry and covered with sores but his deepest suffering was psychological. Middle Eastern banquets are noisy affairs. Windows are wide open for much of the year. At the gate Lazarus would have been in easy earshot of the daily sumptuous banquets of the rich man. So within yards of Lazarus was a group of overfed man gorging themselves while he lay hungry and in pain. These men passed him every day as they entered and left the rich man's house. They didn't need the food – he did! Help was always near at hand, yet always withheld from him.

In Sudan and Egypt among Palestinians and Bedouin, beggars are very common and in some areas you have to 'run the gauntlet' as you pass them. It is easy to survive by rapidly acquiring 'compassion fatigue'. There are so many beggars and your resources are limited. So what can one do to make a difference? Finally, and sadly, you don't notice them anymore. Perhaps this is what happened to the rich man and his guests.

So this wealthy man, wearing the most expensive clothes available, had a banquet every day and lived on an estate with a walled garden. This property was protected by a guard dogs who were fed while Lazarus was not!

"But the dogs came and licked his sores." (v. 21) This might seem to place the dogs on the side of Lazarus' tormentors increasing the cruelty to this poor man. But the Greek word used is 'alla' – 'but'. The dogs weren't joining in the man's torment. Dogs lick their own wounds. They lick people as a sign of affection. Dogs' saliva has endogenous peptide antibiotics in it that facilitate healing. [See H. Mygrind et al, Plectasin as a Peptide Antibiotic with Therapeutic Potential from a Saprophylic Fungus, Nature 437, October 2005) In the first century A.D. people knew that if a dog licked their wounds they would heal more rapidly.

In an archaeological dig in Ashkelon, in graves of the 5th – 3rd centuries B.C. they found over 1300 dogs buried. These dogs were linked to a Venetian healing cult where the dogs were trained to lick sores or wounds. Their owners were paid a fee. [Deut. 23:18 forbids the worshipper to bring "the wages of dogs" into the House of the Lord. Perhaps this is how dogs 'earned' wages.]

Note the contrast between this amazing friendship of Lazarus with the guard dogs and his treatment by the rich man and his friends. The rich man will do nothing for Lazarus, but the dogs who will attack all strangers, somehow know Lazarus is their friend and they do what they can for him – they lick his sores. So as Lazarus lay each day in the heat attacked by flies, the dogs gathered to help him.

In the New Testament dogs are not pets. In Scripture they are seen as very negative animals. (See: Is. 56:10; 66:3; Phil. 3:2; Rev. 22:15) They have the same status as pigs. (Is. 66:3 and 2 Pet. 2:22) Dogs were only kept as guard dogs and were usually badly treated. This is largely true today as well.

So here the Lord Jesus paints an amazing picture with just a few words. It tells us a great deal about this man Lazarus. He was kind, gentle and lived in harmony with the animal world around him in spite of his terrible condition.

Church history (or tradition) tells of many who had a similar relationship with animals:

- Jerome who translated the New Testament into Latin was very friendly with a lion that lived near Bethlehem!
- Francis of Assisi was friends with a wolf and many birds.
- Abba Macarius (a Coptic saint) healed the blind pup of a hyena!
- Cuthbert was saved from the incoming tide by sea lions.

So Lazarus was a gentle person – a man at peace with himself. Did he sense that these dogs were equally unjustly despised and ill-treated? Perhaps they felt a mutual compassion for this man so they helped him and cared for him.

2.1 Lazarus in death – a banquet

Lazarus was too poor for a funeral, but the angels transported him to heaven where Abraham gave him a great party. A destitute beggar wasn't usually buried. In Jerusalem, street cleaners, passing an unknown dead body, would carry it away to Gehenna – the burning rubbish tip – and fling the body in. The Lord Jesus tells us that when the beggar died he was carried by angels to Abraham. The souls of believers are especially cared for by God in the hour of death. In Jewish tradition this is the first time the concept of a "party" is introduced. "The Kingdom of God is a party"! Reclining in Abraham's bosom meant that he was reclining on a low U-shaped couch around a table. In John 13:23 John reclined on the bosom of Jesus. The host always lies at the head of the table – i.e. at the bottom of the 'U'. The important guest is on the immediate right of the host in the place of honour. This is where Lazarus was placed! And Lazarus is 'comforted'. The word used is the great word *'parakaleo'.* He was 'called near'.

2.2 The rich man in death – pain

Shortly after the death of Lazarus the rich man died. He was given a funeral and was buried. Death comes to all, but it does not end all. It does not end all for Lazarus and it does not end all for the rich man. Perhaps to no one's amazement, the rich man found himself in hades enduring

its torments. Remember, this is the "pearly gates" story, so there is no need to wonder if the people in hades can see what is taking place in heaven. The word used is 'hades'. Both the rich man and Lazarus were in hades – the realm of departed spirits. Clearly there are two sections.

The dramatic tension between these men continues in the afterlife. The listener to this story sees that the rich man recognises Lazarus and knows his name. So people recognise each other beyond the grave. Paul tells us he looks forward to seeing his converts in heaven. (2 Cor. 1:14)

The rich man knew Lazarus was at his gate in a desperate plight. So what would he expect to happen? Surely the rich man seeing Lazarus honoured by Abraham, would apologise profusely to the former beggar and ask his forgiveness for the way he had treated him in his life! But no!

The Dialogue between the rich man and Abraham

- **The rich man starts: *"Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame."***

Amazingly, the rich man doesn't bother to speak to Lazarus. The listener concludes that the rich man never talks to what the Hindus call 'untouchables'. Instead he speaks to Abraham. What he says tells us a lot about the man!

"Father Abraham, have mercy on me." In Aramaic, in old Syriac and in Arabic what he says is "Abi Abraham" – "my Father Abraham". The rich man is playing 'the racial card'. He has the DNA of Abraham. Abraham is his patriarch – his progenitor. After all, he was circumcised. Surely this would guarantee assistance from Abraham. Family/tribe is everything in the Middle East. A person in need can always return to the current head of the extended family or tribal chief and throw himself on his mercy because the patriarch is honour-bound to offer help. But Abraham doesn't help!

You might expect the rich man to be deeply embarrassed talking to Abraham. Abraham was a man of faith who went out not knowing where he was going. He left his country, his father's house and his gods in costly obedience to the One True God who called him. Is this rich man truly a son of Abraham? Did he pay a price for obedience to the God of Abraham? But the rich man shows no evidence of any embarrassment!

After reminding Abraham of their family connection, the rich man gives the traditional cry of the beggar, ***"Have mercy on me!"*** (Lk. 16:24) This same cry comes from the mouth of a blind beggar by the road. But the rich man doesn't like beggars and refuses to talk to them. His attitude is that if you feed beggars, they will return to you daily like stray dogs. But now he has become one of them!

The rich man's demand is unbelievable! When Lazarus was in pain day after day, he was ignored. Now the rich man is in pain and something must be done about it immediately! The rich man wasn't used to such a situation. Instead of offering apologies, he demands services and from the very man he refused to help!

In effect, he is saying, "Now that Lazarus is feeling better and is on his feet, I would like him to serve me since he is of the lowly servant class." It is said that if you work all day in a bakery, you can't smell the fresh bread. So it is with the pain of others. The rich man saw Lazarus with his eyes, but never with his heart. James has a few things to say about those who see the hungry and say, ***"Go in peace, be warmed and filled"***. (James 2:16)

The listeners to the story as Jesus told it must have been electrified with anticipation as to what Abraham was going to say! The tables were turned. Lazarus was in the position of power reclining beside a man of great influence – Abraham himself. So how will Lazarus respond to being treated as a worthless servant and asked to leave the place of comfort to relieve the pain of the rich man? He has no score to settle, no vengeance to demand. Lazarus is a model of what the Lord Jesus taught, ***"Love your enemies and do good and lend expecting nothing in return and your reward will be great and you will be the sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful even as your Father is merciful".*** (Lk. 6:35-36) Lazarus is silent just as he was outside the rich man's gate.

In 1 Cor. 13:4-7 Paul gives a list of characteristics found in God like love (agapé). The list begins with one form of patience *(makrothymia)* and ends with another form of patience *(hypomome)*. *Makrothymia* is a composite word consisting of *makran* (far away) and *thymos* (anger). So *makrothymia* means 'putting one's anger far away'.

This is the patience of one who has great power and could wreak vengeance on an enemy, but chooses to be patient and doesn't do so. An example of this patience in the Old Testament is David standing over a sleeping King Saul. (1 Sam. 26:6-25) Saul was seeking David in order to kill him. David managed to penetrate Saul's camp at night. David's companion urged David to kill Saul, but David demonstrated *makrothymia* and did not.

The other form of patience at the end of Paul's list of characteristics of love is *hypomone*. This word is also a composite of two words '*hypo*' meaning 'under' (a hypodermic injection – under the skin) and '*mone*' meaning 'endurance'. *Hypomone* in a person is a willingness to remain under great stress or suffering. Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus showed this watching the crucifixion of her son, staying until he died, choosing not to walk away. *Hypomone* is usually translated 'long-suffering'. Lazarus created meaning by what he chose not to. He was silent in his days of powerless suffering and he remained silent in his days of power.

- So how will Abraham respond to this outrageously insensitive request? He says 3 things:

- ***"And Abraham said, 'My dear son*** (*teknon* = my dear boy)***, remember that in your lifetime you received good things'."*** (v. 25)

  First, Abraham begins with a gentle, affectionate name for the rich man. Abraham doesn't deny the rich man is of his extended family. He speaks to him in a friendly way despite being insulted by the rich man's insult to Lazarus and so to Abraham, since Lazarus was his guest.

  Then Abraham utters the cry of all the Old Testament prophets – "**remember"!** (See Micah 6:5.) The rich man was called to remember. ***"In your lifetime you received good things."*** The verb is passive. The rich man had neither earned nor deserved the good life he had enjoyed. It was a gift from God. All his possessions as well as his assumed good health were free gifts from a bountiful God.

- ***"And Lazarus, in like manner, evil things and now he is comforted here and you are in anguish."***

  So God gave good things to the rich man and that rich man passed evil things to Lazarus. This is reminiscent of the story Jesus told of the Unforgiving Servant. (Mt. 18:23-35)

- Abraham, then points out a further problem and reveals a new and stunning surprise.

  "And beside all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed and those who want to pass from here to you cannot and none may cross from there to us."

  The fact of a great chasm is easy to understand. There is a permanence of destiny beyond the grave. There is <u>no such place</u> as purgatory where the souls of men are purified and made ready for heaven. Why does Abraham remind the rich man that ***"those who want to pass from here to you"*** cannot? Who in heaven would want to go from heaven to hell? Well it seems Abraham had a volunteer! There is only one other person on the stage of the story – Lazarus. Perhaps Lazarus whispered in Abraham's ear, 'Father Abraham, that's my old neighbour down there. We have known each other for years, poor man. He is in such a fix and we have plenty of water here. If it's okay I will be glad to take him a glass of water.'

  If this is part of the story, then this is *makrothymia*. He doesn't gloat over the rich man's predicament, but shows compassion for his fallen oppressor. Perhaps there is a hint that the rich man would like to join in Abraham's banquet but it's too late. Anyone wanting to join the party can't cross the great chasm.

- **The Response of the rich man to Abraham**

Abraham had just told the rich man to "remember" the good gifts that had been freely given to him. But he chooses to disobey Abraham and change the subject!

"He said, 'Then I beg you send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, to warn them lest they also come into this place of torment'."

So again the rich man becomes a beggar. The first time he begs for water and now that his brothers should be told how awful the place of torment really is. It is noble of him to care for his family – a very important Middle Eastern value. Other people, especially the poor, don't count. So there is no hint of repentance before Abraham or apology to Lazarus. The rich man's class structure is still intact.

- **Abraham's Response**

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

It has been estimated that not more than 6% of the population of Palestine were literate in the first century A.D. A religiously observant Jew could hear the Law and the Prophets read in the synagogues. But the rich man and his family spent the Sabbath in banquets and not in the synagogue. If they had gone to the synagogue, they would have learned that God called His people to compassion for the poor.

In Semitic languages – Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic – "to hear" means "to listen and obey". But the rich man and his family made no attempt to listen let alone obey! The request is denied. The rich man isn't used to being denied anything. So he tries again.

- **The rich man again**

"And he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent'." The rich man contradicts and tries to correct Abraham as if Abraham was inferior. In effect, he tells Abraham he was wrong! Amazing! As he endured the heat and saw Lazarus enjoying a banquet with Abraham, none of the rich man's attitudes changed at all.

- **Abraham's concluding remark**

"And he said to him, 'If Moses and the prophets are not listened to, not even if one rises from the dead will they be convinced'."

And this is true! The High Priest had clear evidence that the Lord Jesus raised another Lazarus from the dead, but he didn't repent. It just strengthened his determination to kill Jesus. (Jn. 11:45-50) The High Priest succeeded. And when Jesus was raised from the dead the High Priest became busy trying to put to death all those who followed Him.

It is good and wise to study the historical evidence for all Scriptural teaching – the existence of God, the authenticity of the Scriptures, the life of the Lord Jesus and especially His death and resurrection etc. We can have overwhelming evidence from the facts, but a decision of faith is required. It is faith that brings about change.

This story provides a realistic picture of the world today where the divide between the rich and the poor reflects gross injustice. It should not be this way. The story encourages us to create a just society in which there is good care for the poor.

The Major Themes in the Parable

The major focus is to answer the question, **'How are we to respond to the grace and pain of life?** The parable deals with the following themes:

1. The question is not why, but what now?

The events in our lives have meaning. We access or fail to access the meaning by the way we respond to those events. It is what we **do** with all the good gifts and all the pain in life that matters. The rich man responded to the good things given him with self-indulgence, indifference to the needs of others, arrogance and class pride. Lazarus responded to his pain with patience, long-suffering, gentleness and implied forgiveness. He made friends with the guard dogs and show gratitude to his friends who carried him each day to the rich man's gate.

2. Who is El'azar (the one whom God helps)?

From Lazarus' response to suffering in this life and his implied forgiveness of the rich man in the next life, it is clear that God was with him and helped him all the way. Only with God's help is such a response possible. Lazarus was truly El'azar. In life the rich man refused God's help. He had money and managed his affairs successfully by himself. In hell he begged to become El'azar, but it was too late.

3. Repentance after death

There is no opportunity for repentance after this life. Call upon God while He is near. Now is the only acceptable time.

4. Pride of race

The rich man was a member of the family of Abraham as are the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula. So it was correct that the rich man could call on "Father Abraham". But even the family link with Abraham wasn't enough. Racism takes many forms and this rich man was infected with one of them. If anyone could claim privilege on the basis of racial connections, surely it was this son of Abraham. John the Baptist was faced with the same attitude. In Luke 3:8 he cried out, ***"Do not begin to say to yourselves,, 'We have Abraham as our father!' For I tell you, God is able from the stones to raise up children to Abraham."*** Clearly in the eyes of God no racial identity has any intrinsic merit.

5. Compassion for the poor

Lazarus has a name – a name of deep meaning – and he becomes one of Abraham's guests. His neighbours, the guard dogs, the angels and Abraham love him and help him. He is the hero of the story which emphasises compassion for the poor.

6. False formulae

The formula **'Wealth necessarily equals God's blessing'** and other related formulae such as, **'Suffering always means you must have sinned'** are totally rejected. Such formulae are justified and promoted by Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. The story depicts an arrogant rich man whom God doesn't bless and a humble sick man who is loved, served and honoured by dogs, humans, angels and Abraham.

So this story teaches us that a man's worldly condition is no test of his state the sight of God. Never let us give way to the common idea that people are to be valued according to their income. Poverty is no mark of God's displeasure.

7. The corrupting potential of wealth

Wealth, whether great or small, isn't condemned in Scripture. What is criticised is the failure to see that all material possessions belong to God. We are merely stewards of God's wealth. The story reflects the corrupting, blinding potential of wealth and is very critical of the socially irresponsible wealthy. The rich man used his resources for his own self-indulgent living. He cared nothing about God, his household staff or the needy in his community. Even in hell he remained unrepentant and continued to see Lazarus as an inferior, who should serve him as a waiter or an errand boy. Mammon (material things) had become his master.

8. Mission at home

Mission is found on our doorstep. But just as in the case of the rich man, compassion fatigue and just business can prevent us from seeing it.

9. Eternal Life

There is life after death – a point against the Sadducees – and our earthly life is related to it. After death there is not extinction. There is consciousness.

10. Theodicy (the justice of God)

The question, "Why did Lazarus suffer?" is not fully answered. We are not told how or why Lazarus became ill. Life is not fair, yet Lazarus had no complaints. He was even more patient than Job! Some have called this story, "The New Testament Job". Job was wealthy, lost all, suffered, was vindicated by God and in the end recovered and prospered. Lazarus died in the midst of his hunger, sores and anguish. This gentle, forgiving man was respected, loved and served by the community, the dogs, Abraham and the angels. The mystery of suffering isn't fully revealed, but this story is a significant move beyond the book of Job.

11. The call to repentance

The only call to repentance offered us is the witness of Scripture and this is enough. God doesn't owe us supernatural visitations or signs and wonders or dreams, but He does often give them to those who have little or no exposure to the Bible.

12. Social justice

In this story wealth is not distributed justly. Economic resources are wasted by the rich and powerful on themselves. The story presents a realistic picture of the world we live in. But we, who pray that God's Kingdom may come on earth, are stimulated to promote the kind of economic equality that eliminates the sort of suffering in this parable.

13. Judgement

Death is not the end. The rich man's failure to love God and his neighbour does not pass unnoticed. God is not indifferent to evil. The rich man apparently thought he was! The Lord Jesus sets out plainly that the rich man was ***"tormented in the flames"*** and longed for a drop of water to cool his tongue. There are few more awful passages in the whole Bible that this. The Lord Jesus is the one who ***"delights in mercy"***. In this story the rich man only finds out the value of a soul after he has died when it is too late. Someone has said, "Hell is nothing more than truth known too late!"

14. Historical verification and faith

Historical proof of resurrection doesn't necessarily create faith. The rich man saw Lazarus resurrected and failed to repent. So to demand proof for great mysteries is to cheapen faith. The Scriptures contain all we need to know in order to be saved. There is no more evidence needed to get us to repent. If the dead came back to life they could tell us nothing more than what the Bible says. It is the waiting for what we do not have and the neglect of what we do have that ruins thousands of people. Faith in what the Bible says all that is needed for salvation.

Conclusion

So the focus of this story is not so much on **"justice that settles the score"**. It is rather in discovering the meaning of our responses to God's good gifts and to the suffering that life brings. The silence of Lazarus is very impressive. He never murmurs against God's distribution of wealth or against people's abuse of wealth. He doesn't exult in the change of position in the afterlife. He was indeed Lazarus – the one whom God helped.