The Rich Man and Lazarus

Concordant Studies

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

When interpreted as a parable, the story of the rich man and Lazarus offers no opposition to the teaching of the Old Testament concerning the death state. When read as literal history it negates the entire volume of Hebrew revelation. The alternative that presents itself to the student is that of allowing this passage to dominate and control the explanation of the remainder of Scripture, or else to interpret these verses in such a way as will not conflict with, or contradict it. To the student who adopts the latter course a grave difficulty immediately presents itself. The problem is, How may we interpret as a parable that which is not called such?

THE OMISSION OF "PARABLE"

The advocates of what has often been termed the Platonic philosophy are quick to take advantage of the omission of the word "parable" from the sixteenth of Luke, and the strength of their objection must be conceded by every lover of truth. The evils of "spiritualizing" Scripture are all too painfully manifest in the standard commentaries of Christendom, and are sufficient in themselves to deter us from following their example.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE CONTEXT

The first step to be taken in our examination of this passage is to remind ourselves that the chapter headings of our English Bibles are entirely of human origin, and, as factors in the division of Scripture, are sometimes mechanical rather than logical. And while we thoroughly appreciate these divisions as helps to locate Scripture, we must at the same time depreciate them as so many hindrances to the understanding of it.

In consequence of the isolation of Luke 16 into a separate chapter its contents have often, if not always, been examined as a sort of island in his narrative, cut off from the mainland of the account, as if they were words which had no connection with their surroundings. The consequence is, of course, that the interpreter by so doing excludes whatever light the contextual subject matter might throw upon the passage. That this surrounding material is most helpful and suggestive we shall see as we proceed. As it is our present desire to test the claim that Luke 16 contains no parable, we shall do well to begin our study by eliminating the manmade fences from this portion of Scripture, and commence our investigation at the point where the Master began to speak, rather than at the point where our theological instructors would have us begin to read. This will, in a sense, broaden the field of inquiry, and though at first sight it may seem to make the problem more difficult of solution, eventually it will prove to furnish the key to its explanation.

We are confidently assured in the name of generations of Bible scholars that the account given to us in Luke 16 is to be literally and historically understood; that here we have a picture of the world existing on the other side of death's dark veil; that there it is

definitely proved by One Who knows that the dead are not dead, but, if anything, more alive than ever; and that the death state is one of intense consciousness for the departed, rather than one of "sleep" as represented in other scriptures. This view, of course, is largely dependent on the absence of the dreaded word "parable" from its immediate vicinity. How false the foundation of this conception is may be easily shown.

THE COMPOSITE PARABLE

How many parables have we in the fifteenth of Luke? Every Sunday school scholar will at once reply "three," for so they are always told. But let us go slowly, and apply the rule of interpretation commonly used in Luke 16, to this chapter! Where does it say we have three parables in Luke 15? Is the story of the lost coin called a parable? Is that concerning the prodigal son called one? We search the chapter in vain for the use of such a term in immediate connection with these latter stories. Therefore—let us be logically consistent—we have no parable of the lost coin, and no parable of the prodigal son, no more than we have a parable of the rich man and Lazarus! Such confusion must always flow from that species of myopia which hinders the Bible interpreter from seeing any more than the immediate context, and indeed sometimes hinders him from perceiving even that. The truth is that the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son of Luke 15; as well as the stories of the unjust steward and the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, are not parables in themselves. Instead, each is a fractional part of the complete parable which includes all five pictures within it, commencing with the fifteenth chapter and ending with the sixteenth. It is therefore incorrect to say that in these two chapters we have five parables, but correct to say that in them we have one parable in five parts. And when, in verse three of Luke 15, we read, "Now He told them this parable," this is not to be confined, and does not refer, merely to the story of the lost sheep, but embraces the entire collection of symbol-pictures which in their completeness constituted the parable which He spoke.

The first important result of thus perceiving our Lord's characterization of this story as a "parable" is that we find the chief defense of the usual interpretation to be made of straw, and the way opened up to a study of the parable as such. The second result of importance will be that we shall not study the story of Lazarus by itself, but will rather examine it as grouped with, and affected by, its fellow members in the entire parable. And they will be found, we think, one with it, not merely through juxtaposition, but because they sustain a logical relationship to its contents. Further on we hope to point out some of the affinities between the two chapters. For the present we must content ourselves with drawing attention to that which occasioned the utterance of their contents.

SPOKEN TO THE PHARISEES

The Laodicean ecclesia in the book of Revelation is Pharisaic in its boast, "of nothing have I need!" (Rev.3:17). That utterance embodies in a simple phrase the abominable attitude of the Pharisee towards God and man. It echoes the language of him who thanked "the God within" that he was not as "the rest of men, ... or even as this tribute collector" (Luke 18:11). Little did he glimpse the truth of his real state, one who was even as the Laodiceans, in all their vain self-complacency. Such was the proud boast of, and the real truth about, the Pharisees whose narrow

beliefs on the associations of the Master called forth this parable in its entirety. On the other hand we find the "tribute collectors and sinners," downtrodden and despised, the objects of contempt and loathing from the Pharisaic aristocrats. Both classes are grouped together in Luke 15:1,2, and it is the angry murmur of disapproval from one of these classes that furnished the suggestion for the parable.

Meeting these two distinct classes on the threshold of the narrative, it is no wonder that the entire parable is colored by their presence. In the first part of the parable, the "tribute collector and sinner" is the principal subject, the Pharisaic class being, at best, in the background. In the second the sinner alone is seen, without any reference being made to his self-righteous opponents. The fourth section parallels the second inasmuch as there the Pharisaic class is also seen by itself without any reference to their group. And as the lost piece of silver showed forth the utter helplessness of the sinner in the most absolute of all the symbols used, so in the case of the Unjust Administrator the true character of the Pharisee, with his utter disregard of true righteousness, is most vividly portrayed. The third and fifth sections group together both of the classes mentioned, and fitly bring to a climax through their impressive symbolism the great disparity which existed between them, first in a moral, and then in a dispensational way. That the fourth section of the parable, in which the Pharisaic character alone was portrayed in all its hideous hues, brought home a stinging truth to its hearers, is plain in verse fourteen which shows how, unable to longer bear the scorpion lash of presented fact, the lips that cannot deny the charge seek vain relief in bitter derision of the speaker. The interruption by those whose souls had withered beneath the scorching words of Him who was Truth, draws forth the parenthetical remarks of verses fifteen to eighteen. The interruption here does not bring the parable to an end, it merely suspends it until the digression is consummated, when its onward flow is resumed. And it may as well be argued that the words "Now He said" in 15:11 break off the parable at that point, as that the words "Now He said to His disciples also" in 16:1 break off the symbolism there. Indeed on this point we think we may confidently claim that the contents of these two chapters are so obviously run in the same mold, and possess so many indications of being suggested by the same occurrence (the grumbling of 15:2), that they may best be understood as a variegated presentation of the same subject.

The relation of the different parts of the parable may be displayed structurally as follows:

- (A) THE SHEPHERD—The Divine Attitude Towards the Lost.
 - (B) THE LOST COIN—The Tribute Collector Alone.
 - (C) The Prodical (and his brother)—The Moral Difference between Publican and Pharisee. The "Far Away" One Brought Near.
 - (B) THE UNJUST STEWARD—The Pharisee Alone.
 - (C) THE RICH MAN (and Lazarus)—The Dispensational Difference between Pharisee and Publican. The "Near" One Cast Far Away.

We must now give some attention to the details of the parable. As the spiritual wealth of each of its sections has been well explored, and as the reader is well acquainted with the many beautiful applications which have been taken from them, there is no necessity for us to enter into endless repetitions of the practical truths deducible from these chapters. We shall, however, draw attention to the dispensational atmosphere which pervades the string of symbols employed by the Master.

THE SHEPHERD

The figure of the sheep is peculiarly associated with Israel. It saturates Old Testament thought, is prominent in the imagery of the Gospels, is employed by Peter in his epistles to the dispersed kingdom believers, and colors the contents of the book of Revelation. It is not, however, used by the apostle Paul in any of his writings. The "members" to which he ministers are not members of a flock, but of a body. In keeping with this, while in "Old Testament" type, and "New Testament" teaching, the Lord is represented as the "Lamb," in the Pauline revelations He is not so seen, but rather as the Christ. And the Body which God is now creating is always termed the Body of Christ, while the Bride, the product of Israel's kingdom, is ever referred to as the Bride of the Lambkin.

As this is a parable which we are considering, a study of the usage of this word will determine from the nature of the symbol employed that it must be a kingdom parable—one that has to do with Israel and not the nations, and which must not be interpreted into it. That impudent determination to pass unnoticed the inspired discriminations of God's Word, so observable today, is the cause of more confusion in the church than is the learned ignorance of the Higher Criticism.

In Isaiah 53 when the repentant nation speaks, it does so with a united voice. "All we like sheep have gone astray" is a confession that knows nothing of a ninety-and-nine which never strayed from the

Shepherd's fold. The figure of irony would seem to be present in the reference to those "just ones having no need of repentance." That those needing the shepherd-ministry of Messiah amounted to but a mere percentage of the nation is obviously untrue. The idea that the number of those who knew their lost condition, and so were prepared to use the great national confession of Isaiah fifty-three, was a negligible quantity. Scripture shows to have been the case. The connection between this item and the remainder of the parable seems to consist in its exposure of the false valuations of the Pharisees, for the sheep that seemed to be the nearest to destruction proved to be the closest to salvation, the supposedly "safe" ones missing the security which the shoulders of the shepherd provided. Similarly, in the story of the Prodigal, it was the one away from home who was nearest the father's heart, the real prodigal being the stay-at-home who could praise his own virtues while he derided his parents' stinginess. And this line of constructive thought runs into the texture of Luke 16, for there we find the rich man poor, and the poor man rich.

THE LOST COIN AND THE UNJUST STEWARD

The first element of disproportion which strikes us, when we compare the second and fourth sections of the parable, is that which exists between the values represented in them. The fractional value of the coin which the woman seeks, is dwarfed by the larger amounts in which the administrator deals. Naturally this deepens the intended contrast between the two characters symbolized, and helps to better display the crookedness of the one who trifled so callously with the principles of righteousness, while the other's solicitous search is magnified thereby.

The "administrator" is a fit personification of Israel's corrupt officialdom. Nor need we wander beyond the limits of the "Gospels" to learn of their corrupted state (cf Mark 7:1-13). They yield ample testimony to the manner in which the Iews discounted the righteous claims of the law, as the administrator in Luke 16 discounted the just claims of his master. The administrator had no more authority for thus reducing his master's claims than the various sects had for daring to alter the demands of God's holy law. In this comparison we have a strong suggestion as to who it is we find shadowed in the conduct of the rich man's representative. And, as we shall see later on, the unrighteous servant had the approval and praise of his unrighteous lord, showing forth that priests and people, rulers and ruled, teachers and taught, were all alike in Israel.

One cannot read "Hebrew" history and fail to notice how at various times the ministry of women received the seal of divine approval. In Judges the history of failure on the nation's part is lightened by the contrastive successes of feminine valor. And does it not seem in place in Luke that the administrator's failure (the collapse of official Israel) should be offset by a woman's faithfulness? The strength and pretentiousness of official position belonged to those who failed: the weakness belonged to those who shared the shepherd's attitude to the sheep that was lost. The irony of the reference to "ninety-nine just persons who have no need of repentance" is not repeated in this section, hence the entire action and meaning of the symbol centers around the patient shepherd-like search on the woman's part for the lost silver coin. And as the Pharisees are not found here, so neither are the "tribute collectors and sinners" to be found in the story of the unjust administrator, the "debtors" in the latter portion being introduced merely as necessary, though not typical, actors in its movement.

ANOTHER RICH MAN

The fourth section of the parable demands a little careful attention on our part. In it we have "a certain man, who was rich" introduced to us who, by similarity of descriptive phrases at least, seems linked up with the other "certain man [who] was rich" spoken of in the next and last section. There is similarity in more than descriptive phrase also, for the rich man of the fourth section is as calloused to the demands of righteousness as the other rich man of the fifth section is hardened to the demands of charity in regard to Lazarus. This has often been called the parable of the Unjust Steward, but with equal justice it might be named the parable of the Unjust Lord, as the servant merely reflected the unrighteous character of the master who commended his servitor's cunning in guarding his own interests. The "steward" was the official representative of the rich man, even as the Pharisees were representative of the nation, insofar as they reflected in themselves the self-centered condition of the people.

That any should read the "lord" mentioned in verse eight as being the Son of God is astounding, especially when such a view would make God's Holy One to speak in approval of the dishonest servant's conduct. If understood as being the latter's master, in other words the "certain man, who was rich," the difficult vanishes, and the Spotless One is saved from even the shadow of the stain the alternative view would suggest. The Lord Jesus does not counsel His disciples

to "make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9, A.V.) The passage is rhetorical, and should be translated as a question. When it is thus considered, the unity of the passage, and the infinite purity of the Messiah, will both be very evident. The difficult portion is: "And am I saying to you, Make for yourselves friends with the mammon of injustice, that, whenever it may be defaulting, they should be receiving you into the eonian tabernacles? He who is faithful in the least is faithful in much also, and he who is unjust in the least is unjust in much also" (Luke 16:9,10, C.V.).

"The parable of the unjust steward confines itself to the Pharisees and scribes, the stewards of Israel's wealth. They were dissipating His treasures and were fond of money and served their own greed for gain rather than ministering to the glory of God. They were prudent in the things of this life to the extent of jeopardizing their prospects in the eons to come. The emphatic I shows that there is a contrast intended between the lord of the unjust steward and Christ. This cannot be expressed in the indicative. Moreover, the Lord does not commend unrighteousness, and advise deceit. Besides, the sentiment immediately following is quite opposed to such double dealing. Faithfulness, not shrewdness, is the requisite for honors in the kingdom.

"Money or means of any kind are only trivial and temporary factors in the life of faith, unless we view them as tests with a view to the acquisition of the true riches. Those who are faithful stewards of material wealth, which is theirs only to use for a time, and not to possess forever, may expect a reward in kind in the kingdom. The Pharisees died rich, and will have no place in the glories of the Messianic reign. Christ died

in the most abject poverty, yet He will be weighted with the wealth of all earth's highest glories. Even in this day of sovereign grace, present riches are too often a hindrance to future reward, when they may well be a means of preferment by their faithful and gracious dispensation. Neither the most conservative investment nor the most fortunate speculation will yield as safe or as profitable proceeds as a share in the concerns of God. It yields, not only temporary returns, but eternal dividends" (Concordant Commentary, p.121).

JOTHAM'S PARABLE

That the recording of what is called "Jotham's Parable" in Judges 9, which he used against the men of Shechem. is the fruit of inspiration we fully believe, though it is not equally obvious that the words spoken by him were inspired. His incorporating in his speech the great symbols of the fig, the olive and the vine so prominent in later Scripture-would suggest that he "builded better than he knew." The main point to which the writer would draw attention is that historical actuality is not absolutely necessary to a parable. Timeless truth may be taught in graphic fashion by personifications which appear impossible of actual occurrence. Language may be attributed to mute and sometimes inanimate objects: "If the foot should be saying, 'Seeing that I am not a hand, I am not of the body.' "That which is molded will not protest to the molder, 'Why do you make me thus?' " (1 Cor. 12:15; Rom. 9:20).

In Jotham's parable, language, thought, and some form of governmental order, are ascribed to the vegetable kingdom without any suggestion of impropriety on the speaker's part. We wonder how many champions of orthodoxy there are who as strenuously insist on the literalness of the events in Judges 9 as

they do on those of Luke 16, since the basis of their literal interpretation is common to both, the word "parable" being as absent from Judges 9 as it is from Luke 16. Consistency, however, is one of the marks of truth, and its absence is one of the distinguishing features of Platonized theology.

The objection that the Master would hardly draw truth from that which could have nothing more than a fictitious existence, or from experiences which could have no experimental reality, must fall flat, for it may be brought with equal force against any of the figures of speech used by the holy spirit throughout the Word. Indeed, is not the supposition of the clay speaking to its molder, or of one member of the body individualizing itself in pride against another member, somewhat removed from the sphere of experience? Our parable is mainly a collection of just such figures as those referred to, as when a tongue is imputed to the one whose fleshly member has corrupted in the grave, or as when the supposedly disembodied Lazarus can still enjoy the physical relief which water bestows on a parched tongue. When understood as figures these matters occasion no difficulty: when understood literally they breed unanswered questions, and propound riddles to which no solution may be found. That other parables are historically possible cannot be denied, but he who would lay down as a principle of interpretation that every parable must be drawn from the real happenings of everyday life, while entitled to his opinion, must nevertheless produce solid proof to support it before we can accept it as unquestionable.

The writer's attention must be devoted to the two chapters which contain the five-fold parable he is considering. He will be forgiven, however, if he pauses for a moment to suggest that the five pictures presented here by Luke have not merely a reciprocal relationship between themselves, but have a direct bearing on other portions of this account. For instance, in the twelfth chapter the coloring of Luke's narrative reminds us strongly of the parable presented later in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters. In 12:15 the Master enunciates the truth that "one's life is not in the superfluity of his possessions."

Certainly, that is all that life meant to the rich man of Luke 16. The truth which the Lord declared is pointed with a parable, which contains much that links on to the latter chapter. The phrase "a certain" man who was rich" again confronts us; the similarity between the two "certain" rich men does not end in the parallelism of their descriptions, but continues in the character which both are shown to possess in common. Here, too, is wealth, and wealth alone. Here is a man who may be described more fitly by what he has. than by what he is. But to this rich man as well as to the other, does disaster come. In both parables we have rich, self-centered fools, to whom total loss occurs by reason of "death" (cp the prodigal widow, who, "though living is dead," 1 Tim.5:6; and the profligate son who "was dead and [yet] revives," Luke 15:24).

In Luke 16 our attention is directed to two particulars: Verse 22 of chapter twelve seems to bridge the gap that lies between these two portions of Scripture by directing the disciples not to worry about what

[&]quot;The word "certain" represents the Greek indefinite relative pronoun tts; its standard is ANY. Unlike some usages of the English word "certain," the Greek word "tts" never denotes specificity; instead it points the reader to generality or indefiniteness.

they should eat, or what they should wear. In considering the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters, it would seem as if the "prodigal son" obtained what the "rich man" was deprived of. In the parable of the rich fool in chapter twelve, attention is not at first directed as to who should obtain the wealth the poor blind miser would leave behind him, but the approach to that aspect of the matter is prepared in the question asked of him. "Now, what you make ready, whose will it be?" (Luke 12:20). There the question is asked but not answered, but in verse 31 we find these words addressed to the despised disciples: "Be seeking the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you." Note also that there the kingdom is advised to be sought, but in 16:16 it is described as being opposed. Immediately preceding the story of Lazarus we have a reference to divorce (16:18), but here we seem to be in a different sphere, for the thought of a bridal feast, and wedding festivities, is made to illustrate the truth (12:36). The fourth section of the parable in chapters 15 and 16 dealt with a servant's unfaithful service: but if we have an unfaithful servant there, we have here the administrator who is both faithful and prudent (12:42).

Luke 16 may be briefly summarized in three words: Deprivation; Divorce; Death. The shadow of coming removal of the unjust administrator from his office. the removal of the unfaithful wife from her relationship, and the removal of the unthankful miser

from his riches.

ISRAEL DIVORCED FROM YAHWEH

In this reference to divorce, an illustration is probably given of the manner in which the stewards of Israel were lowering the high standards of their divinely given laws. They were reducing them to the low levels of their conveniences. In contrast to such an attitude, we find the holiness and unchangeableness of those laws not diminished, but if anything increased, magnified, and emphasized, by the utterance of Messiah, "Not one serif shall fall."

In a parable so essentially dispensational as this, the reference to divorce is evidently not without its special meaning. The laws of wedlock and of social purity were being relaxed in their severe requirements by the nation. The sullied purity of the marital relation within the nation was but a shadow of the loosening of the bond which bound Yahweh's wife to Himself. And indeed the difference between the divorced one in chapter sixteen and the harlots of chapter 15 is but one of degree, consisting mainly in the fact that the harlots had not necessarily ever known the marriage covenant, and thus perhaps stand more for the nations with whom Yahweh had never entered into covenant relationship, and to none of whom He could cry: "I am married unto you." Israel's coming degradation as the Harlot of Antichrist is shown in the book of Revelation. But God is not man, and so the weakness of man is not copied by Yahweh in His dealings with His unfaithful wife. God honors His own law of separation, and puts upon it such a glory as only He could be tow. He does not look to man for a pattern of His ways (cf Jer.3:1).

Without unduly pressing the point, the close grouping of these two well-known symbols of divorce and death is suggestive of a dispensational connection between the two. National divorce, or the separation of Israel from its covenant union with Yahweh, was a national death. In Ezekiel 37 the well-known vision of the Valley of Dry Bones carries us forward to the time

when Israel's night of death shall vanish in the morning of resurrection, as Hosea 2 brings us on to the time when the straying wife of Yahweh returns once more to the bridal freshness and joy of union with her covenant Husband.

THE MEANING OF THE SYMBOLS

We must now endeavor to interpret the symbolism of the last portion of the parable. The absence of any divine, or inspired explanation of the typical persons who figure in the action of the parable, may best be accounted for by considering the meaning of them as being so obvious and so well known to its original hearers as to render their interpretation superfluous. The absence of such a commentary in the fifteenth chapter has led many to the conclusion that the father who is there seen welcoming his returning child is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing in the parable itself which would definitely warrant such an interpretation. If, however, we note the parallelism between this section and the last part of Luke 16, it will be acknowledged that as in both we have the portraval of a father and his two sons, and as the father of these two sons is plainly called Abraham in the sixteenth chapter, so the father of the two sons in chapter 15 is in all probability the same personage.

Again, the clothing of the rich man, to which attention is specially called, needs no explanation. The royal purple of the king mingles with the linen garment of the priest. And this is what Israel was called out to be, what Israel failed to be, and what Israel will yet be through *grace*: a kingdom of priests unto God (Exodus 19:6).

The well-stocked table, at which the rich man dines, reminds us of God's unstinted provision for His earthly

people. But Israel's failure resulted largely from her occupation with the gifts instead of the Giver. The purple and the linen recalls the garments in which her national place and privilege were laid aside. That Israel's blessings became Israel's curses is clear from Romans 11:9 where the divine pronouncement is recorded: "Let their table become a trap." Was this the sumptuous fare on which the rich man feasted? Was it not Israel's false attitude towards the good things God had given them which spelled disaster to the nation? The law with its condemnatory glory was but cause for pride to their Pharisaic self-right-eousness. What they were, and what they had—their prophets, their kings, and their position led the nation on to its awful fall.

LAZARUS, THE SINNER

Another person is introduced to us in Lazarus, whose name (Hebrew, HELPLESS) is the antithesis of Pharisaism. Their hope was in themselves; his hope was in God alone. We must be careful how we interpret the description here of Lazarus' condition. A reference to the opening section of the parable may keep us from missing the true point of view. In the story of the lost sheep we saw that the ninety-and-nine "just persons" were merely just and without need of repentance in their own minds. As in the story of the sheep, we have the Pharisees' conception of themselves, so in the story of Lazarus we have their conception of the tribute collectors and sinners whom Christ received. They virtually placed themselves outside the bounds of Israel's national favor; as having no part in the nation's wealth; and without any claim to its prerogatives. The dog—the accepted type of the Gentile—who comes and licks his sores may tell of the plane to which the tribute collectors belonged in the Pharisees' estimation. The dog had no part in the rich man's feast, though bones and scraps were not denied him. Lazarus had merely the dog's share of the rich man's banquet.

HUSKS AND CRUMBS, SWINE AND DOGS

In comparing the parallel or companion section of the parable, we note the use of a similar symbol. When the younger son has spent his substance in riotous living, and has run down the gamut of degradation to beggary and want, the abjectness of his state is described in his vain attempt to fill his belly with the husks which the hogs ate. The poverty of the profligate or "prodigal" son is evidently akin to that of Lazarus; the "husks" of the one to the "crumbs" of the other, and the "hogs" in the one to the "dogs" in the other. The choice of these two unclean animals as symbols of sinfulness is repeated by Peter in his second epistle where he likens apostate Jews to "a cur turning to its own vomit," and "a bathed sow to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet.2:22). Peter groups the symbols which Luke employs separately and distinctly. Their use, in conjunction with other considerations, helps to bind together the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of Luke as forming one parable.

But the state of wretchedness and disease in which Lazarus is pictured may also represent the tribute collectors' and sinners' estimate of their own sad condition. The returning prodigal could cry out in the tense agony of his soul "I am no longer worthy." Back he came as a whipped hound to its master's feet. In chapter eighteen the tribute collector's vision is focused on his own vileness, and he pleads in contrition, "Be propitiated to me the sinner." The

Pharisee was all too conscious of his robes of purple and fine linen; but the tribute collector saw himself clad in the tattered rags of his unrighteousness.

When we come to the mention of "death" in connection with the Rich Man and Lazarus, we touch on the vital spot of the parable's interpretation. If it refers to the physical death of two specific individuals, then the teaching of Christendom touching on the intermediate state is correct, and the speculative guesses of Plato, the heathen theorist, were in advance of Scriptural revelation. We need but to remember. however, the unity of the entire five-fold parable, and the fact that it was employed by the Master to illustrate the difference between the two classes into which the nation could be divided, to recognize the "death" as national and dispensational, instead of individual and physical. The "death" which came upon the nation necessarily involved the nation in its entirety, and affected each and all of the different classes within it.

When Lazarus died he is said to have been carried by the messengers into "Abraham's bosom." Though God did not leave them without comfort, when the place and priority of blessing was taken away (for the present) from Israel, the kingdom believers necessarily lost it too, even as the unbelieving bulk of the nation. They then became associated with Abraham, and identified with him in his faith and expectation. To Abraham the kingdom was cast in the future tense. Its glory, to him, lay on the horizon of hope. It was not a present possession. It lay "beyond." He was one of those who "died in faith, not being requited with the promises" (Heb.11:13). With Abraham, then, in his faith and expectation, the Lazarus class must hereafter be linked.

THE FLAMES OF ANTI-SEMITISM

But what of the rich man's words in "hades" ("hell," A.V.), "I am pained in this flame" (Luke 16:24)? Has Israel's lot during the centuries of its dispensational death (cf Rom.11:7-15; Acts 28:25-27) been other than this? What country has not been drenched with Jewish blood? The flame of torment has ever pursued the tribe of the weary foot. The wandering Jew, weary and worn, has found but few havens of rest, and but short respite from the tyrant's lash. History, then, interprets the rich man's doom. The story of Israel is the story of the flame of fire.

Again we would point out a parallelism between the story of the Prodigal and that of Lazarus. In both cases a certain relationship is claimed, and acknowledged to exist. In chapter 15 the father addresses the elder brother as "son," so also does Abraham acknowledge the relationship to which the rich man laid claim (16:25).

And let us deplore the persistent attempt to add to the divine words. The Abrahamic utterance that a great chasm had been established which made it so that those wanting to cross hence "may not be able".**

[&]quot;The Greek term hades (UN-PERCEIVED) in modern English is "unseen." The old English equivalent for "hell" was "hel," and simply referred to that which was unseen. In the Scriptures, hades refers not to an unseen place (as in Greek mythology), but to the unseen state, whether of a city (Matt.11:23) or of the human soul (Acts 2:27,31). Likewise, in the Scriptures, "soul" (psuche, cool) refers not to some supposed noncorporeal form of life, but to the sensation resulting from the combination of an organic body with breath or "spirit" (cf Gen.2:7).

^{**}me dunōntai, a present (or incomplete), active, subjuntive phrase, employing the relative negative, not the absolute.

(Luke 16:26), must not be warped into declaring that it can never be crossed. The employment of such careless and ignorant assertions when handling the inspired Scriptures involves not merely an adding to the Word itself, but a subtracting from one's proper respect for it.

Let it be carefully noted as well that if inability is taught, as it certainly is, in this twenty-sixth verse, it is man's inability and not God's. What man can, or cannot do, is not the measure of divine might or weakness. If Abraham in the unwise goodness of his heart did desire to bridge the gulf in order to alleviate the torments of his son, he would be but similar to many modern saints who, in the largeness of their hearts, would seek to convert the world before its time. It is too large a work for weak humanity to do. It is a divine work which God alone may successfully perform.

THE PRAYERS OF THE PRODIGAL AND THE RICH MAN

Another parallelism between these two portions of the parable may be found in the fact that prayer is prominent in both. The prodigal prays in the fifteenth chapter. The rich man prays in the sixteenth. But with the fact of prayer the parallelism ceases. In character the two petitions differ immensely. The prodigal in his rags is burdened with his sin. The rich man—so lately clad with purple and linen—thinks only of his suffering. "I sinned" is the prodigal's plea. "I am pained" is the rich man's cry. In his plaint no word of guilt, no consciousness of demerit, is to be found. The flame was all without, there was none within. Was not this moral blindness on the rich man's part the real gulf between him and Lazarus? It certainly is the gulf

existing now between the world and God. And until Israel cries, "All we like sheep have gone astray," the gulf will also remain fixed between Yahweh and His chosen people.

The contrast of a drop of water with a crumb of bread is apparent. It is employed here to point up the moral of the story. Not even a drop of relief could be had from Lazarus, for while the opulence of the rich man's estate had vanished, the hardness of the rich man's heart remained. While it does, the gulf must also remain established. Between the prodigal (who confesses his sin rather than his suffering) and his father, there is no chasm. When sin is confessed distance is removed. And the contrast is heightened by comparing the impossibility of the father (Abraham) in the sixteenth chapter even sending Lazarus, with the father in the fifteenth chapter who himself runs to greet his repentant son. Lazarus' finger is denied to one, while the father's arms are bestowed upon the other.

The rich man's plea for his brethren is not so much that they should be saved from his sin as his pain. He mentions the fact that his brethren were five in number. But why five? If this is not a parable we can hardly see the reason why the number of his brethren should be so definitely enumerated. If it is a parable then the number given is as symbolic, and pictorial, as any other item in the story. It has been suggested that as the people of Palestine were mainly composed of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and were symbolized in the parable as the rich man himself, that the five "brethren" mentioned here must stand for the ten remaining tribes, who are supposed to have been more largely found outside of the land. One thing, however, seems plainly taught concerning

them: they were in the same callous, hardened state as that of the rich man.

LIFE FROM THE DEAD

To those who do not look upon this section as a parable, but as a literal account of the happenings of the intermediate state. Abraham's reference to the result, should one be allowed to arise from the dead, is interpreted as referring to a physical resurrection. Having determined its parabolic character, and consequently interpreting the "death" referred to as being dispensational, we must consequently interpret the "resurrection" here as being of the same nature. And if the allusion to the five brethren does have reference to the Israel scattered abroad, how the history and ministry of Paul in its kingdom aspect, as given in Acts, suggests itself here! Not that he is mentioned, or even typified, but the passage, if it does not bring him in, at least makes room for him. Abraham does not say either that one will or will not be raised from the "dead," but contents himself apparently with stating the result should such an event take place. "Neither will they be persuaded" was the Abrahamic prophecy which verified itself in Israel's treatment of the Pauline ministry. And we must also remember that no direct mention of this "resurrection" ministry was possible at the time the Master spoke, for it was largely, if not altogether, a hidden one.

Here the parable comes to an end. It bears the marks of being an unfinished picture. The revelation of truth concerning the rich man's future rests, so to speak, while waiting the further unfolding of the divine will concerning him. That unfolding takes place elsewhere in Scripture. This particular passage does not contain the entire history of this unhappy

nation. It is but the darker side of it. There is glory beyond the gloom, as Romans 9 to 11 makes clear: "what will the taking back be if not life from among the dead?" (Rom.11:15).

In conclusion, may we ask those who interpret the death of Luke sixteen as being physical and literal, because it is not called symbolic in the immediate context, to give us an equally literal interpretation of the father's words in Luke fifteen: "this your brother was dead and lives again"? Was this death and resurrection physical? A consistent interpretation of both passages would be interesting to read.

Alan Burns

It is important to perceive the setting of this story concerning Lazarus and the Rich Man. It is not some sudden and disconnected literal revelation concerning the state of the dead, certainly not one which is contradictory to the law and the prophets!

At this juncture, the Lord was at the summit of His condemnation of the Pharisees for invalidating the word of God by their traditions. He avails Himself of some of those very teachings, adapting them for His own purpose, judging them out of their own mouths (cf Luke 19:22). When the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man is read in the light of the rest of the Scriptures, and especially in the light of the context, we may readily perceive in it the traditions of the Pharisees, which were "high among men," yet "an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Following these words, the Lord declares, "The law and the prophets are unto John; thenceforth, the evangel of the kingdom of God is being brought, and everyone is violently forcing into it, and the violent are snatching it. Yet it is easier for heaven and earth to pass by than for one serif of the law to fail. Everyone dismissing his wife and marrying her who has been dismissed from a husband, is committing adultery" (Luke 16:16-18; cf Matt.12:39).

These are the words which immediately precede those concerning Lazarus and the Rich Man. "God's revelation was made by many modes, each appropriate to the time when it was used. 'The law and the prophets,' a title of the Hebrew Scriptures, which we now misname the 'Old Testatment,' was His means of dealing with Israel until John the baptist, the greatest of all the prophets. He was the forerunner of a new method of divine revelation through the incarnation of Christ. The proclamation of the kingdom did not receive the response of contrite hearts, according to the law, but rather awakened a desire for its establishment by carnal means. At one time they would have taken Christ by force, because He had satisfied their hunger, and would have made Him king. This would have meant a revolt and war and bloodshed.

"Not only does He intimate that the Pharisees are to be dismissed from the stewardship, but this apparently unconnected statement [concerning adultery and divorce] suggests that the nation is to be divorced from Yahweh, and left desolate. This is a fitting link to lead us up to the final section of this five-fold parable, in which Israel's fate during her divorce is discussed" (Concordant Commentary, p.122).

The Talmud (Hebrew, talmudh, "instruction") is the traditional, uninspired, body of Jewish civil and religious laws (and related commentaries and discussion). In it "we have those very traditions gathered up which the Lord refers to [through the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man] in His condemnation [of the Pharisees]. We can thus find out exactly what

those popular traditions were.

"'Paradise,' 'The carrying away by angels,' 'Abraham's bosom,' etc., were the popular expressions constantly used. Christ was not the first Who used these phrases, but He used the language of the Pharisees, turning it against themselves.

Take a few examples from the Talmud:

"(1) In Kiddushin (Treatise on Betrothal), fol. 72, there is quoted from the Juchasin, fol. 75, 2, a long story about what Levi said of Rabbi Judah: 'This day he sits in Abraham's bosom,' i.e. the day he died.

"There is a difference here between the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds—the former says Rabbi Judah was 'carried by angels;' the latter says that he was 'placed in Abraham's

bosom.

"Here we have again the Pharisees' tradition as used against

them by our Lord.

"(2) There was a story of a woman who had seen six of her sons slain (we have it also in 2 Macc. vii.). She heard the command given to kill the youngest (two-and-a-half years old), and running into the embraces of her little son, kissed him and said, Go thou, my son, to Abraham my father, and tell him: Thus saith thy mother. Do not thou boast, saying, I built an altar, and offered my son Isaac. For thy mother hath built seven altars, and offered

seven sons in one day, etc. (Midrash Echah, fol.68. 1).

"(3) Another example may be given out of a host of others (Midrash on Ruth, fol. 44, 2; and Midrash on Coheleth (Ecclesiates) fol. 86, 4): 'There are wicked men, that are coupled together in this world. But one of them repents before death; the other doth not; so the one is found standing in the assembly of the just, the other in the assembly of the wicked. The one seeth the other and saith, Woel and Alas! there is accepting of persons in this thing: he and I robbed together, committed murder together; and now he stands in the congregation of the just, and I, in the congregation of the wicked. They answered him: O thou most foolish among mortals that are in the world! Thou wert abominable and cast forth for three days after thy death, and they did not lay thee in the grave; the worm was under thee, and the worm covered thee; which, when this companion of thine came to

understand, he became a penitent. It was in thy power also to have repented, but thou didst not. He saith to them, let me go now, and become a penitent. But they say, O thou foolishest of men, dost thou not know, that this world in which thou art, is like the Sabbath, and the world out of which thou comest is like the evening of the Sabbath? If thou dost not provide something on the evening of the Sabbath, what wilt thou eat on the Sabbath day? Dost thou not know that the world out of which thou camest is like the land; and the world, in which thou now art, is like the sea? If a man make no provision on land for what he should eat at sea, what will he have to eat? He gnashed his teeth, and gnawed his own flesh.

"(4) We have examples also of the dead discoursing with one another; and also with those who are still alive (Berachoth, fol. 18, 2—Treatise on Blessings). 'R. Samuel Bar Nachman saith, R. Jonathan saith, How doth it appear that the dead have any discourse among themselves? It appears from what is said (Deut.xxxiv. 4), And the Lord said unto him, This is the land, concerning which I sware unto Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob, saying: What is the meaning of the word saying? The Holy Blessed God saith unto Moses, Go thou and say to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the oath which I sware unto you, I have performed unto your children. Note that: Go thou and say to Abraham,' etc.

"Then follows a story of a certain pious man that went and lodged in a burying place, and heard two souls discoursing among themselves. 'The one said unto the other, Come, my companion, and let us wander about the world, and listen behind the veil, what kind of plagues are coming upon the world. To which the other replied, O my companion, I cannot; for I am buried in a cane mat; but do thou go, and whatsoever thou hearest, do thou come and tell me,' etc. The story goes on to tell of the wandering of the soul and what he heard, etc.

"(5) There was a good man and a wicked man that died; as for the good man, 'he had no funeral rites solemnized'; but the wicked man had. Afterward, there was one who saw in his dream, the good man walking in gardens, and hard by pleasant springs; but the wicked man 'with his tongue trickling drop by drop, at the bank of a river, endeavouring to touch the water, but he could not.' (Chagigah, fol.77. Treatise on Exodus xxiii. 17).

(6) "As to 'the great gulf,' we read (Midrash [or Commentary] on Coheleth [Ecclesiastes], 103. 2), 'God hath set the one against the other (Ecc. vii. 14) that is Gehenna and Paradise. How far are they distant? A hand-breadth.' Jochanan saith, 'A wall is between.'

But the Rabbis say 'They are so even with one another, that they may see out of one into the other.'

"The traditions set forth above were widely spread in many early Christian writings, showing how soon the corruption spread which led on to the Dark Ages and to all the worst errors of Romanism. The Apochryphal books (written in Greek, not in Hebrew, Cents.i. and ii.B.C.) contained the germ of this teaching. That is why the Apocrypha is valued by Traditionists, and is incorporated by the Church of Rome as an integral part of her Bible.

"The Apocrypha contains prayers for the dead; also 'the song of the three Children' (known in the Prayer Book as the Benedicite), in which 'the spirits and souls of the righteous' are called on to bless the Lord.

"The Te Deum, also, which does not date further back than the fifth century, likewise speaks of the Apostles and Prophets and Martyrs as praising God now."

From all this it is clear that the Lord was not giving a special revelation of His own as to the death state, but was taking the current, false teachings of the Pharisees, and using them against themselves.

The testimony of God's Word is clear concerning the state of the dead. In all cases, reference is not made merely to man's body, but to man himself. All such passages are words of faith, and are "beneficial for teaching, for exposure, for correction, for discipline in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped, fitted out for every good act" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Since we have need of them, God has given them to us. Let us freely and unreservedly accept them, and intensely believe them. It is ideal to be like the apostle Paul, "believing all that is written, according to the law and the prophets" (Acts 24:14). There are many passages of Scripture which are

^{*}SELECTED WRITINGS, "The Rich Man and Lazarus," pp.135-137, E. W. Bullinger: Bagster.

concerned with the state of the dead. Here are a few examples:

"I will praise Yahweh in my life, I will make melody to my Elohim in my future. You must not trust in patrons, In a son of humanity in whom is no salvation. His spirit will fare forth, He will return to His ground, In that day all his reflections perish" (Psalm 146:2-4).

"The dead are not praising Yah, Nor any descenders to stillness" (Psa.115:17).

"Return, Yahweh! Liberate my soul! Save me on account of Your kindness! For in death there is not remembrance of You. In the unseen, who is acclaiming You?" (Psa.6:4,5).

"This evil is in all which is done under the sun, For one happening is for all. And, moreover, the heart of the sons of humanity is full of evil, And blustering is in their heart in their lives, And after them—to the dead! For anyone who is joined to all the living, forsooth, has trust, For a living cur, it is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, And for the dead there is no knowing aught" (Ecc. 9:3-5a).

"All that your hand is finding to do, do it with your vigor, For no doing or devising, or knowledge, or wisdom, is in the unseen, where you are going" (Ecc. 9:10).

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