

Supplement to: Revelation's Hot Topic

Doesn't the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 teach an eternal hell of torment?

No, it is simply a parable and many facts make it clear that this is a definitely a parable. A few are as follows:

(19) **"There was a certain rich man"** – This is classic parabolic language. This is the same way Jesus begins many of His other parables.

(19) **"rich man"** – This is the fifth of a string of parables that concern money, lost sheep, lost coin, prodigal son, unjust steward, and the rich man and Lazarus. The reason is because some in his audience were the Pharisee's. Luke 16:14 "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money..." He was appealing to them by telling stories that involved money.

(19) **"fared sumptuously every day"** – This phrase introduces one of the spiritual themes of the story. Israel "fared sumptuously" because they had the blessings of God, the truth, and the Messiah would be an Israelite.

(21) **"the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table"** – The Gentiles needed the truth that God entrusted to Israel, but they kept it to themselves for the most part.

(22) **"the beggar died"** – The parable did not say whether or not the beggar was righteous or wicked. So do poor people go to heaven because they are poor?

(22) **"to Abraham's bosom"** – A Jewish idiom, meaning "paradise." The Talmud (Kiddushim 72a; in Soncino ed., p. 369) mentions "Abraham's lap" as a place of the blessed dead. However, Abraham's bosom is not heaven (Hebrews 11:8-10, 16) If Abraham's bosom is the place of the saved then he must have a huge chest. Furthermore, Lazarus couldn't have literally been taken to heaven because Abraham didn't even go to heaven when he died (Heb 11:8-10). Hebrews 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises..." What was one the promises? Heaven! Abraham is still in his grave sleeping (Ps 13:3, 1Thess 4:13) until the second coming of Jesus (1Thess 4:16-17). People are rewarded at Christ's second coming, not at death (Rev 22:12).

(22) **"rich man also died"** – verse 23 goes on to tell us that he supposedly went to hades/hell. Again, the parable did not say whether or not the Rich man was righteous or wicked. So do rich people go to hell because they are rich? If so, Abraham himself can't go to heaven because he was very rich.

(23) **"saw Abraham afar off"** – Can people burning in hell talk to those in heaven? (see Isa 65:17, Rev 20:9, 21:1).

(24) **"Father Abraham"** – In John 8:39 The Pharisee's declared to Jesus that "Abraham is our father." Then they also said, "we have one Father—God" in verse 41. The rich man in torments calls out to "father Abraham," just as the Jews of Jesus' day were mistakenly pointing to heritage as proof of their assurance of salvation. That is why Paul taught you had Abraham as you father if you were Christ's (see Gal 3:29, Rom 2:28-29).

(24) **"dip the tip of his finger"** – If a drop or two of water on the tongue of someone burning in hell can cool a person down then hell must not be very hot. Furthermore, the popular belief is that when a person dies, their soul either goes to heaven or hell. Do "disembodied souls" have body parts? The rich man was in bodily form with eyes, a tongue, etc. How can literal water cool off a supernatural or immaterial soul? Obviously, Jesus is relating an imaginative story designed to make clear a certain particular truth concerning the relationship between this life and the next and does not intend His words to be taken literally.

(24) **"great gulf fixed"** – In the language of the parable, Jesus was referring to the distance between the place where the Rich man was tormented and Lazarus was comforted. It is assumed by many that these places are heaven and hell? In reality, Jesus was referring to the fact that once a person dies, their spiritual standing cannot change, nor can they had contact with the living. There was a great difference or "gulf" between the character of the Rich man and Lazarus.

(27) **"send him to my father's house"** – The Bible plainly teaches in Ecclesiastes 9:5 that, "the dead know nothing." Also Job 7:9-10 says that when a man dies he cannot have contact with the living. Only in a parable or some Hollywood creation is this possible.

(29) **"Moses and the prophets"** – Jesus was seeking to lead His hearers to understand that only faithfulness to God's Word would prepare them to enter into eternal life. Miracles are not enough to convince the mind. Jesus later resurrected a man named Lazarus and the Pharisee's still didn't believe in Jesus.

What are the lessons of this parable?

Riches and poverty are not a sign of God favor or disfavor. God does not spiritually honor one nation over another. The decisions we make in this life determine our eternal destiny. The supreme authority of scripture.

FACT: If we take the rich man and Lazarus literally then that creates many hermeneutical (interpretive) problems because hundreds of verses in scripture contradict a literal rendering of this parable.

Everyone in Jerusalem knew about the fire of Gehenna. This was why Jesus used it as an example of the final destruction of the wicked, everyone would understand it. But in doing this he in no way offered support for the doctrine of eternal torment.

What about Gehenna, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched?

*Mark 9:43-48 (43) "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched. (44) where **'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'** (45) And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched. (46) where **'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'** (47) And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. (48) where **'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'**"*

What is Jesus saying here? Some feel as if these words of Jesus prove the dead face eternal torment. We just explained eternal fire & the "forever" idea, but what about the worm that does not die? First: There worm does not die does not refer to a man's soul! Scripture never calls a man's soul a worm. This worm is a common Maggot, that feeds upon dead bodies, not living bodies!

Here's proof: Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 66:24, which says "the redeemed shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses or dead bodies of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall there fire be quenched." The picture is maggots praying on dead bodies after a battle.

Now what about Gehenna? The valley of Hinnom which is translated as Gehenna was a ravine south of Jerusalem, just outside the city wall. It was used as a garbage dump. All types of trash, animal carcasses, and even the corpses of wicked criminals that didn't deserve burial were disposed of there! That place was constantly burning, and the smoke could be seen rising up into the sky above Jerusalem.

This fire burned day and night. And any part or piece of a body or trash that fell out of the flames the worms would devour it. So as long as there are dead carcasses in the valley of Hinnom the worms would be able to eat them. Of course this is an indelicate picture for the mind to think upon, but this is the reality of what Jesus was speaking about.