

PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

(A parable beautifully explained by Pastor Russell, 1911 Convention Report, Page 16.)

QUESTION.—EXPLAIN THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Answer.—First of all we must prove that it is a parable, because so many dear friends believe that it is not a parable, but the statement of a literal occurrence. They say, “It reads that there was a certain rich man, and it does not say, ‘this is a parable.’” We agree to all of that, we must therefore prove it is a parable. And in order to prove it is a parable, it is necessary to show that if interpreted as a literal statement, it would be an absurdity and anything that would be an absurdity to interpret literally, we would be bound to look upon as a parable and seek to find some parabolic interpretation. That this would be an absurdity if taken literally, note this. It is not said that the rich man was a bad man; it is not said that the poor man was a good man. There was a certain rich man. To be rich is not necessarily an evil. There have been good rich men. Abraham was very rich. Our heavenly Father is very rich. It is not poverty, merely that makes goodness, is it? And our Lord is rich and for our sakes became poor. So we are not to think that riches merely, mean wickedness. We do not read that this rich man was a bad man, or profane, or anything of the kind, but merely he was rich and fared sumptuously every day—ate three or four good square meals each day, and wore purple and fine linen; that was his crime; whatever it was, it was connected with that matter somehow. Now to say that any man would have to be roasted to all eternity because he wore purple or because he wore fine linen, and had plenty to eat, and because he was very rich, would not be rational.

Then take the poor man. There is nothing said about his being a particularly good poor man, nor that he prayed a great deal—not a suggestion about his ever praying; he was simply a poor man and he lay at the rich man’s gate, and he was full of sores, and the dogs came along and licked his sores, and he ate of the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table, and he was carried by the messengers to Abraham’s bosom. Now to take that literally would be also absurd. It would mean, in the first place, that the only persons that would go to Abraham’s bosom would be some who had laid at some rich man’s gate. That would not take you and me in—at least would not take me in, for I never had any dogs lick my sores, and I never ate crumbs, etc. So you see it would be an absurdity. Besides, if Abraham’s bosom only had two or three lusty looking Lazaruses, he would have his arms out like that, trying to get them into his bosom. If it is literal at all, the whole thing is literal, and if it is symbolic at all, the whole thing is symbolic. Therefore we say without any question, this is a parable, because to take it literally would be to involve ourselves in statements of absurdity.

When we take it as a parable it is a very beautiful one, very consistent with all the Word of God, from first to last.

That rich man who fared sumptuously was the Jewish nation; he fared sumptuously upon the gracious promises of God's Word. All of those precious promises of God's Word, for the time being belonged to the Jews—not one of them extended beyond his boundary to the Gentiles, except all the families of the earth were to be blessed through the Jews. All the precious promises belonged to Israel. Then he had a purple robe. Purple has always been a symbol of royalty. In what way did they have royalty? Why they had the divine kingdom or Theocracy established in their nation, and although the crown had been taken off in Zedekiah's day, God had promised that he would give it in due time to him whose right it is, and that Messiah should be of the stock of David. So they still had the purple. They still claimed to be God's kingdom. And they had fine linen. What does fine linen symbolize? It symbolizes righteousness, purity. Fine linen in the Scriptures represents righteousness. Where did they get righteousness? Where did they get more righteousness than the Gentiles had? We answer that in God's covenant with them, the covenant of the law, he made a special arrangement by which upon the offering of certain sacrifices year by year, each year, the nation was clothed with righteousness for a year. At the end of the year they had a new Atonement day, and made fresh sacrifices for sin, and then their righteousness was renewed for another year, in this national manner. So that this rich man, this Jewish nation, at the time our Lord uttered these words, had all of these conditions fulfilled. He had more than he could appropriate of God's promises in the Scripture, and all the holy prophets and the types and shadows of the law—all of those things.

A change came—he died; he died to all those blessings. Did he? Yes. Does everybody agree to that? Yes. Do the Jews also agree? They do. They know they are not enjoying the blessings they formerly had. They know that since the year 70 when their nation perished they have not been in the condition of divine favor in which they were previously. Where are they now? As a nation they are still dead. As a nation they are still in *hades*—oblivion. [NOTE – Remember that this article was written PRIOR to 1948 when Israel was restored as a nation.] You cannot find any Jewish nation, in the proper sense of that term. The Jewish nation, or government, has gone to *hades*, to the tomb. Will it be resurrected? Oh yes, the Jewish nation will be resurrected, as we tried to show last night. Zionism is the forerunner of the resurrection of this Jewish nation. Whatever goes into *hades* must come out. That is the very thought of *hades*. It means a temporary stopping place from which the person or thing will come out. So when the Jewish nation is said to have gone to *hades*, it implies that that nation will have a resurrection, or come out as a nation from that *hades*, or *hadean* condition. But while the nation is unconscious, the people of that nation have been very much alive all of these hundreds of years. They are very much alive people today. There is no more alive people in the whole world than the Jews are, and they have some of that very suffering that is pictured there in that parable at the hands of the Christians—or those said to be Christians.

Those who were deluded into thinking they were Christians have persecuted the Jews, and they have had the tribulation that is there symbolically pictured. And they have desired that the Gentiles might cool their tongues. Was that fulfilled? Yes. When and how? Many times. I will give you one illustration in your day and mine. Not long ago when President [Teddy] Roosevelt was in office, the Jews of the United States got up a monster petition asking President Roosevelt, after he had had some good interchange with the Russian nation, if he would not use the kind offices of the United States and his own personal influence with the government of Russia to bring about some cessation of the severe persecution against the Jews in Russia—"Do something to cool our parched tongues" is the very thought. "Give us at least a drop of cold water." President Roosevelt could not do it. Just so in the parable. We read that the drop of water was denied. President Roosevelt said he would like very much to do something in response to this invitation. He was in individual sympathy with the Jewish race, but he said it would be out of the way entirely for the United States government to attempt to criticize a foreign nation with which we are at peace, and to dictate to them any policy they must pursue in their own government. So the poor Jew could not even get that little bit of help. That is exactly true of the parable. The parable does not go on to show that the time will come when the Jews will come out of that time of trouble. It merely leaves it there in the trouble.

The parable speaks about five brethren. Who would they be? We answer that while all twelve of the tribes were represented in Palestine at that time, yet the major portion belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. These two mainly constituted the rich man. The other tribes were mainly scattered around in Greece, Rome, Asia Minor, etc., and the question here is raised to show that God's dealings with the Jews that were scattered abroad amongst the Gentiles would be exactly the same as his dealing with the people in Palestine. For the answer is, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. If they do not hear them, then they must take the consequences." Who have Moses and the prophets? The heathen? No, the heathen never had Moses and the prophets. Who ever did have Moses and the prophets that they could hear them? Only this Jewish nation, only this rich man and his brethren—two tribes, and the other ten tribes. Two tribes represented in the one rich man, and the other rich men represented in the five brethren. You see two make the one, so the ten would make the five proportionately.

We have seen the rich man, now how about Lazarus? Let us see where he comes in. Lazarus was that poor man in the parable who lay at the rich man's gate, desiring to be fed with some of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. What class was that? That was some outsiders? Yes. Who were they? They were some godly Gentiles. I remind you of some of them in the Scriptures. You remember in the new testament there is mentioned a centurion, and they besought Jesus that he would heal the centurion

servant; they said, “He is a godly man, and he has built us a synagogue and has done much good to our people;” and so Jesus healed the servant. He desired to have some of God’s favors. Yet he knew they belonged to the Jewish nation, they were not his; he was an outsider. I remind you of Cornelius, of whom we read that he served God daily, prayed always, gave much alms to the people, and revered God. A pretty good man, wasn’t he? Yes. Yet none of his praying and none of his alms-giving came up to God. God did not accept any of that. It is, so to speak, like the incense that rose so high and could not go any higher. Why not? Because he was a Gentile. What difference did that make? Because all of God’s blessings belonged to the one nation of Israel. When God said, “Ye only have I known [recognized] of all the families of the earth.” he was speaking there of Israel and the special privileges and blessings belonging to Israel, but just as soon as the middle wall of partition, or separation, between the Jew and the Gentile was blotted out, just three and one half years after the cross, just as soon as that particular period of special favor to the Jew was over, the Gentiles came in to have just the same favor as the Jews—no more, no less. And at that time God blessed Cornelius, and he sent a messenger to Cornelius and said, “Now Cornelius, your prayers and your alms are come up before me.” Why not before? They could not raise any higher, but now the special favor for Israel having passed, your alms and your prayers are come up before me as a memorial. Send now therefore to Joppa to one called Peter and when he comes he will tell you words which shall be to the saving of thyself and thy house; and you will come into fellowship with me then; when Peter came he preached Christ to Cornelius. And Cornelius received the message and was blessed with the Holy Spirit, and had all the privileges and favors thenceforth that any of the Jews who had heard and had accepted the Gospel received—the Pentecostal blessings came on him also.

Now go back to the poor man lying at the rich man’s gate. This is before the change; this is before the house of Israel was left desolate, before the Gentiles were blessed. The Gentiles were in that poor condition represented by that poor individual, with the sores on his body, represent sin and sickness. I presume, as Bible students, all here grasp the thought that sores would represent sin, and the dogs licking the sores would represent the Gentiles, because this was a prominent expression among the Jews, that all others than Jews were mere Gentile dogs. They did not count them on a parity with the Jews at all. But he desired to be fed with the crumbs falling from the rich man’s table. That is to say, I would like to have some of the blessings God has given to the Jews. Let me remind you of one particular case. You remember the Syro-Phoenician woman of whom we read that she came to Jesus saying, Lord, My daughter is sick of a fever; I entreat you to heal her. Jesus for the time paid no attention, and she entreated and entreated; finally Jesus said to her, “Never mind, go away, it is not proper to take the children’s bread and give it to the dogs.” Don’t you know you are a Gentile dog? Have you not had that idea right along? She answered, “Yea, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the children’s table.” She was willing to confess herself one of the Gentile dogs, she was willing to confess she had no right to claim any of those blessings of healing for her daughter,

because she was not of the Jewish nation—but Lord, do not the dogs get a crumb occasionally from the table? “Let me have this crumb, heal my daughter.” Jesus admired her faith, and said, “Go thy way, your daughter is healed.” So she went her way. The daughter was healed. She was a type of this Lazarus, you see, getting a crumb from the rich man’s table.

Now then, Lazarus died, that is to say, this Lazarus class died to their unfavorable conditions, and the angels carried them to Abraham’s bosom. What does that mean? They were not buried. When the Gentiles died to their unfavorable condition, the angels that carried them to Abraham’s bosom were the Apostles. See how Saint Peter carried Cornelius right off to Abraham’s bosom. Why he explained to him he should be one of the children of Abraham, didn’t he? And that is what is meant by the figure of getting into Abraham’s bosom. If you are a father and have any love for your family, and have some children come to you, you take them into your bosom; they are your children; you are their father. And that is the picture. That is the whole thing—Abraham and his children. Now the Jews were the natural children of Abraham, but they failed to get into Abraham’s bosom, and the Gentiles who were outcasts, who in their humble condition were more ready to receive God’s grace in the way God was pleased to give it, became children of Abraham through faith. And that is exactly what the Apostle says, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, Abraham’s children?” You are in Abraham’s bosom now. I am glad to be in Abraham’s bosom, glad to have some blessings there also. I am glad that God’s favor to natural Israel is so soon to come. They will all be coming into Abraham’s bosom, not on the spiritual plane, but the natural seed will be coming back into the obedience and faith of Abraham, and I rejoice in that glorious prospect.