

CONCLUSION

A Contextual Study

The key to understanding Luke 16:19-31 can be found in the contextual background. The remote background, the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Lk. 16:1-13), is the story of a dishonest steward who did make preparations for the future. Both this parable and the account of Lazarus and the rich man treat such subjects as riches, time and eternity, and death. The concluding words of the Lord upset the Pharisees (verse 14) and opened the way for His next words to them.

In the immediate background of the account of Lazarus and the rich man, the Lord points out three main problems of the Pharisees: their love of money, love of self, and disregard for God's Word. In Luke 16:19-31 Christ answers these three problems.

An Exegetical Study

The main body of information centered around a study of the poor rich man--in life, in death, and in Hades. In life the rich man is insensitive, in death he is suddenly impoverished, and in Hades he is in agony and entreating. His death and burial are seen in sharp contrast to the bliss awaiting Lazarus at his death. Lazarus is carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, a place of comfort which the Lord explained as actually existing.

From a study of the rich man in Hades some general conclusions were drawn. Hades is clearly a place where sensual perception occurs,

where both mental and bodily torment take place, where Abraham and Lazarus are at least in view, and where a yawning chasm has been fixed. A number of things are not told about Hades, such as the nature of the rich man's body, the nearness of Hades to Abraham's bosom, and whether or not Hades includes Abraham's bosom.

This passage allows for a two-compartment understanding of Hades but does not require such an understanding. Hades is presented as an actual place (τόπος), and is called a "place of torment." Abraham's bosom is a place of comfort. A great chasm has been fixed, separating those in comfort from those in torment. Abraham's bosom may be part of Hades (as other passages indicate). No further conclusions regarding the two-compartment view of Hades can be reached from a study of this passage alone.

The rich man's entreaties to Abraham were also examined. From Abraham's answers the listeners learned that the reversal of circumstances was fair, just, and absolutely final; that spectacular revelation will not cause those to repent who have ignored existing revelation, and that God's Word is all-sufficient to bring men to repentance. The godless Pharisees were shown a very uncomplimentary perspective of their selfish and covetous lives, and their tendency to flaunt clear Scriptural teaching.

A Hermeneutical Study

When this writer began studying Luke 16:19-31, she believed it to be a parable with some kind of allegorical meaning. After a detailed examination of the passage, such a position was no longer

possible. The chapter on hermeneutics is an explanation of why the passage must be interpreted literally (at face value), and why the writer does not consider it to be a parable.

The "literal" meaning of an expression is its "customarily acknowledged meaning" in the particular context. "Allegorizing" an account is using a point by point comparison to make it say something different than the ordinary words would suggest. A "parable" is an extended simile, a means of teaching unknown truths through truths taken from a known field (nature, human life). Luke 16:19-31 is not considered to be a parable because of its striking uniqueness when compared with New Testament parables. In no parable (unless it be this one) did the Lord describe things outside the realm of human experience, use a proper name, mention a historical person (Abraham), describe where the dead go, or mention angels.

Liberals, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses all play havoc with the text by making the teachings of Luke 16:19-31 conform to their preconceived doctrinal position. Even many evangelicals allegorize the passage and find veiled references to the Jewish and Gentile nations.

However, Luke 16:19-31 cannot be pushed into a figurative (allegorical) mode for at least two reasons. First, the Lord did not make any corrections concerning the concepts of the Pharisees. If He were merely using their ideas to illustrate other truths, He would certainly have pointed out needed corrections. Secondly, the narrative form of Luke 16:19-31 cannot be taken as an indication that the Lord was teaching anything less than clear truth. Even if one were to

insist that the account is a parable (a position the writer does not hold), it must be acknowledged that a parable can be used to teach truth the same way a historical account can be used. Christ, Who IS Truth certainly could not misrepresent facts regarding the eternity of the soul. When He taught His disciples about heaven, He said, "If it were not so I would have told you" (Jn. 14:2). The Lord taught about Hades. If this teaching was only a figurative illustration, then He surely would have explained. No alternative is open but to take Christ at His Word and to interpret His teaching in Luke 16:19-31 literally.

A Practical Study

The account of the rich man and Lazarus has been a painful study because it is so contemporary and practical. Surely the reader is well acquainted with men who are ignoring the most important thing of all: the preparation for eternity. When the "great reversal" occurs--when man's values are devastated in the face of God's justice--repentance will not be possible. Furthermore, no spectacular evidences will persuade the unbeliever to change. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets"--if men ignore the clear message of Scripture--"neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (verse 31).

May this account of Lazarus and the rich man be a warning to the contemporary believer, lest we should ever love the passing "good things" of life, or esteem too highly our position among men, or disregard even the smallest teaching of God's Word.

May we accept Christ and His Word; may we have God's clear perspective on selfish materialism; may we see life and ourselves from eternity's viewpoint!