



# Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 10

The Rich Man and Lazarus

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day morning, 13th April, 1986**

**Text:** *“And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16. 30, 31).*

What the Lord Jesus said about the rich man and Lazarus is surely one of the most solemn parts of the whole of Scripture. Why, does it not make you tremble even to read it? There was this rich man clothed in purple and fine linen who fared sumptuously, and there was the beggar named Lazarus who lay at his gate, full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

We read that both of them died. Death being the fruit of sin, all must die, the rich and the poor, those who have fared sumptuously and those who have had to beg their way through life. They both died. It is recorded of only one that he was buried. The beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, this of course, being an expression that the Jews used for heaven. They had a few different ways of describing heaven, and this was one: Abraham's bosom. “The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.” We do not even read that he was buried. We do not even read that he had a funeral. But O what heavenly transport! He was carried by the angels into heaven. “The rich man also died, and was buried.” And the implication is that as he fared sumptuously in life, so he fared sumptuously in death.

“And the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” I want to be very clear that the rich man's sin was not being rich. I want also to be clear that the poor man did not go to heaven because he had had a life of hardship and suffering here below. Although not clearly stated, the poor man went to heaven as a sinner saved by grace, blessed with repentance and with faith in the Lord Jesus. We do not read of any particular sin of this rich man. The whole point was this: he lived for this life and for this life alone. He had no thought about his soul. He had no concern about his sins. Eternity never entered into the

reckoning until he opened his eyes in hell. He died as he lived, without God and without hope.

Most people do not perish through gross sins or open immorality, but it is this: to go through life without any real concern about your soul, without any repentance, without any cries to the Lord for mercy. You see, you can attend a Strict Baptist chapel all the days of your life from your birth to your death, and you can follow in the footsteps of this rich man. It is no wonder that Brownlow North speaks of the rich poor man and of the poor rich man! What a difference there was between them on earth – one admired and honoured, the other despised. What a difference there was between them eternally! But again I say, the emphasis here is not between riches and poverty. The emphasis here is in the eternal state, and the one was prepared for it, and although the one suffered here below, he is eternally blessed in heaven, and although the other was perfectly satisfied with his lot on earth, he had never any concern about eternity and he perished in his sin.

This passage is very solemn concerning heaven and hell. I do feel that we need to speak very quietly and carefully on these things. Didn't that hymn we have sung just now (78) make you shake and tremble about the eternal gulf between the righteous and the wicked? And was there one person here asking the question as to which side you will be found on in the great day? Well, the important thing is to be prepared now, because as the tree falls, so it also lies. You will die as you live. If, through grace, you have lived a life of faith and prayer, then you will go to heaven. If you live without God in this world, without concern, then you will not go to heaven.

If this passage is one of the most solemn in Scripture, and left on record as a warning, also it is one of the most mysterious – I mean, the rich man seeing Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and speaking, making his requests to Abraham. Now it is very mysterious. But one thing is very clear. This is the only occasion in the whole of the Word of God where we have prayer made to the saints, and that prayer was made by a lost creature, and that prayer was never answered.

“Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” O what an earnest prayer! There was not any

formality about it, was there? The urgency of it – there was not anything half-hearted about it. The reality of it – there is no hypocrisy in it. But it was too late. O that this man whilst on earth had prayed prayers, not to Abraham, but to the God of Abraham! But now it is too late. “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

“Abraham said, Son.” He acknowledged the relationship. This rich man was a son of Abraham. He was never a son of God. By his birth and upbringing, he belonged to God’s covenant people, and he claimed the relationship and Abraham acknowledged the relationship. It was not sufficient to take him to heaven. “But Abraham said, Son, remember.” One of the most awful things concerning the lost is the remembrance, especially with those who have witnessed grace in the godly, especially with those who have heard solemn warnings, especially with those who have heard of Christ and turned from Him.

“Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.” Now I say it in much love and affection. There are many of you this morning who in this life have received good things. You have been blessed in providence abundantly and many of you in natural things, with earthly riches and earthly possessions, have been blessed well above the majority of your fellow men and women upon earth. But beware lest this should be said to you in the great day, “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.” Tell me, are you satisfied with them? Or is there a worm at the root of them all? Is there a thorn in your nest? Can you say – not hypocritically, but really –

“These can never satisfy;  
Give me Christ, or else I die”?

O but what an awful word this: “Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented” – for ever – “And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.”

And then, you see, there is a second prayer of the rich man, and again this prayer is rejected. This time the rich man thinks of his five brethren who are still alive, the implication being that he had no children, which only aggravates his unkind treatment of Lazarus, the beggar at his

door, if he had no children to care for. But he had five brothers and his prayer is that Lazarus might be permitted to visit them and to testify to them, “lest they also come into this place of torment.” Now this request was refused. “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” But you see the importunity of his prayer, a lot more importunate than a lot of our prayers on earth. “Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.” He even contradicted Abraham.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

There are a few vital lessons for us here. The first is *the vital necessity of repentance*. It seems that the rich man here clearly realised that this was where he went wrong: he did not repent. It seems that this was his one desire for his five brothers, not that they should fare sumptuously or be clothed in fine linen, but just this one thing, that they should be blessed with repentance. There is a message here even from the realms of the lost, that the one thing that really matters is repentance, and what the rich man here said in hell is confirmed throughout the whole of the Word of God, that the vital thing for you and me before we die is repentance. That is, to be sorry for our sin. That is, to depart from it and forsake it. It is not so much one particular sin. You find sometimes that people do something wrong and are sorry for it, perhaps because they are found out, or perhaps because of the effect. But it is really because of the whole of our past life, not lived to the Lord’s honour and glory, not lived by faith, those lives like the life of the rich man, lived completely to ourselves. The point I am after this morning is not so much whether you are committing this particular sin, or that, but are you living for yourself, for the comforts of this life, for your own pleasure, or are you living in the light of a never-ending eternity? The great multitude of humanity perish through this above everything else. They live to themselves and for themselves. They may not be doing any particularly evil or wicked things, but there is no thought of God.

We have it in the following chapter. “As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.” Tell me, what is wrong with eating and drinking? What is wrong in marriage – it is

God's own institution? The point is this. They were completely swallowed up with earthly things. They had no thought of God or eternity. They were living only to themselves, until the flood came and destroyed them all. The Lord Jesus could have said many, many other things. Those people before the flood were exceedingly wicked. Their wickedness cried out to heaven. But the Lord Jesus passed by all these gross outward things, all this immorality, and He brings it down to all these lawful things: eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage – right things, even good things. But they lived without any thought of God and without repentance, until the flood came and destroyed them all.

“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded.” Now here the Lord Jesus adds one or two more things. They were buying and selling – that is, they were engaged in trade, in business. Now what is wrong with that? You have been doing this this week, some of you. You have been selling things. They were planting and building. Some of them were builders, and some were farmers. What is wrong with that? They were completely swallowed up with earthly things. There was no praying to be made right, no thought of repentance. “But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”

And then the application: “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” What does the “even thus” mean? Well, there will be multitudes just swallowed up, immersed in earthly things: eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage, buying, selling, planting, building – nothing wrong with those things, but God left out. “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” Take heed, that that day come not upon you unawares.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved.” What are all these things? The eating and the drinking, the marrying and giving in marriage, the buying and selling, the planting, the building, even the lawful things, as well as the becoming rich, faring sumptuously, being clothed in fine linen. “All these things shall be dissolved.” In another fifty years, another one hundred years, what will all these things matter? But you and I will either be with the rich man or with Lazarus.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what, manner of persons ought ye to be?” Well, what manner of persons are you? “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation.” May we ever live as in the light of eternity.

But the vital thing is repentance. The Lord Jesus began His ministry by preaching repentance, and so did John the Baptist, and so did all the apostles. We need to die to our past life and live to God. We need to be sorry for our sins, to weep over them, to confess them, to flee to Jesus’ blood to be cleansed from them. But it is not just to be sorry, but to forsake our sin, to forsake our past life, to live to God. “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” And it is only the power of God that can ever make a sinner repent.

There is one thing we need to beware of, perhaps more than anything else, you girls and boys, you young people, church members, everyone, and that is our hearts becoming hard. A hard heart that is left in that state of hardness is a clear mark of being found amongst the lost. We do need our hearts to be made soft and impressionable, that we might repent and believe the gospel, that we might confess our sins and flee to Jesus’ blood, that we might rightly pray for the Lord to save us, flee for refuge to the hope set before us. We do need that soft heart, that deliverance from hardness, that there might be a gracious separation from the world. This is God’s work. It is not something you are going to work up. It is something that God must send down. So perhaps one or two of you will go home with a cry in your heart that the Lord will give you real repentance, not allow you to live and die without repentance, for unrepenting souls are lost souls; that there might be a prayer that He will give you the spirit of prayer and supplication, that you might look upon Him whom you have pierced, and mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. There is the place of repentance, at the foot of the cross.

“See the Lord of glory dying!  
See Him gasping! Hear Him crying!  
See His burdened bosom heave!”

That is the place of repentance, at the foot of the cross, seeing what sin made the Lord of life and glory suffer.

So the first vital lesson from these two verses I have read to you is the complete necessity of repentance. The second important lesson here is that *sensational things in themselves will never do any good*. You see, he wanted someone actually to rise from the dead and actually to visit his five brothers, and he said that if they saw a person who had actually been dead and buried and risen from the dead, then immediately they would repent. Abraham said, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” There are many people who set great store on sensational things. That is why the Roman Catholics have brought so many sensational things into their religion. None of these have ever had a gracious, sanctifying effect. Then we have the opposite extreme in the Evangelical churches today, with all that has been brought in by the Charismatic movement, all the gifts of tongues and the healing. All these sensational things will never lead people to repentance.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Many people sometimes think, even if they do not say it: “If only I had lived on earth at the time when the Lord Jesus was here, how different things would have been. I would actually have heard His voice, or seen Him with my eyes, dying on the cross, or witnessed these remarkable miracles, or listened to the wonderful words He spoke, or even seen Him when He was risen from the dead.” And the feeling in your heart is, what a good, gracious effect it would have had. Beloved friends, it never would. There were hundreds when the Lord Jesus was on earth who witnessed His miracles, who saw these amazing things happen. It did not do them any good at all. Something more than outward things was needed, even more than miracles, even more than sensational things. “Ye must be born again.” There must be that sovereign power of the Holy Ghost bringing to repentance and faith.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Many people think that if something really sensational happened, they would believe. Sometimes atheists or agnostics in their arguments say that: “If I were to witness some great miracle, this would make me a believer.” Now it never does. There have been people who have been dying of some incurable disease and they have prayed for the first time, and promised that if God would heal them,



what wonderful Christians they would be. And God has healed them, and they have gone on in the ways of sin, even after this miracle has been performed.

One example of this was the case of Samuel Medley, the hymnwriter. He was an officer in the navy and present at a sea battle. He was so badly wounded in his leg that the ship's surgeon said the leg was in such a dreadful condition that the very next morning it must be amputated. In those days before anaesthetics, it was like going into a torture chamber. Samuel Medley prayed for the first time. He prayed that the Lord might perform a miracle. When the surgeon came the next day, he could not understand it: the leg was healed. But Samuel Medley went right back into the world and his sins. He had to prove,

“Judgments nor mercies ne'er can sway  
Their roving feet to wisdom's way.”

Do you know how that man was called by grace? His old grandfather insisted on reading a sermon by Dr. Watts. It was not by having his leg saved that called him by grace: it was by having to sit reluctantly and against his will to listen to a sermon read by his grandfather – not sensational things and not miracles.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Some people are tempted like this: “If only I had lived in the days of Whitefield or the days of Jonathan Edwards, when perhaps in a town there were more people praying and on their knees crying for mercy than there were those unconcerned.” We read of some towns and villages where almost every person was under deep concern about his soul. Beloved friends, if we had lived then, it would have profited us nothing, apart from the power of the Holy Ghost in the new birth. Now beware of thinking that sensational things will do. There are many people in the professing church of God who want these sensational things. It has never been God's means. The normal means God has used has not been to shock people into salvation, nor to frighten people into salvation. I say this tenderly and advisedly, that is why I do not think all those magazines of Victorian days that were full of accounts of children dying did much good. It has not been God's method to shock people into salvation, to frighten people into salvation by something sensational.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” This is not God’s way. Right down the ages, people have been trying to prove something sensational. A few years ago, there were people trying to prove that they had found Noah’s ark on Mount Ararat. God’s holy Word has been given. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” A year or two ago there was all this about the Turin shroud. Was it really the shroud that wrapped up the sacred body of the Lord Jesus in the grave, or was it not? Not just the religious world, but almost the whole world was thinking of the wonders that could be performed if this could be proved to be the actual shroud, and the blood on it to be the blood of the Lord Jesus. If it could be proved, it would not make the slightest difference. It would not turn one sinner from earth to heaven. The point is this: there *was* a shroud. The Lord Jesus did die, and He was buried, and there was a shroud. But blessed be His name, it will never be needed again. Whether that Turin shroud be the right one or only a fake, it will never be needed again. He rose to die no more. It is not sensational things God uses: it is the power of the Word by the Spirit.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Really, a remarkable thing did take place, didn’t it? The rich man wanted Lazarus the beggar to be raised from the dead so that it would be a witness, and he felt that if Lazarus the beggar were raised from the dead, his five brothers would immediately believe. The remarkable thing was this: soon after this, a man rose from the dead and his name was Lazarus – a different man, but the identical name. We do not read of one person, not one single person, that it turned to repentance. Rather, it angered the Pharisees and the scribes. Rather it made them more hard in their opposition to the Lord Jesus. We read that all they did was to seek to kill this man Lazarus who had been raised from the dead. It is very remarkable that in a sense –and I emphasise that, *in a sense* – the rich man’s request was granted. There was a man called Lazarus raised from the dead, albeit a different Lazarus. But it did not do any good.

But the standing witness, the standing miracle to people in all ages is this: that the Son of God Himself, the Lord Jesus, has returned, has risen from the dead. There is the very fact of it, that cannot be denied. The fact

is just as clear this morning as if the beggar Lazarus had come forth to appear to his brethren. But the very fact, the bare fact, certain as it is, of the resurrection of the Son of God, in itself does not bring one sinner to repentance. More is needed than that.

“And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” The third vital lesson we learn from these two verses is *the extreme importance the Lord Jesus puts on His holy Word*. When Abraham here referred to Moses and the prophets, he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures as they had them, that is, all the Scriptures they had. In present-day language, what Abraham said was this: “They have the Bible in their homes. They have the Bible to read. If they will not listen to the Bible, neither will they be persuaded if one rose from the dead.

Now you see what a weight of value and authority the Lord Jesus here puts on His holy, sacred Word. They only had the Old Testament Scriptures, but really He is speaking of the Bible. This is the means God has ordained for salvation. This is the means God will use. This is the means God will bless. Never despise it. It is not sensational things. Do not look for sensational things. And beloved friends, even when we have them at times in a right way, because at times the Lord does work in a very remarkable way, never exalt them over Scripture. It comes to this: “We have also a more sure word of Prophecy.” We have Moses and the prophets. We have the written Word of God, given by inspiration. We do not need someone to rise from the dead, some ghost to visit our homes to frighten us. And if we live and die unaffected by the Word of God which we hear preached, then we will perish in our sin. The Word of God includes all that is necessary. It tells us what we are, our lost, ruined, sinful condition, our great need. It speaks of heaven and the judgment day. It tells us of heaven and hell. It solemnly warns us. It tells us the only way to heaven, to be forgiven through the infinite merits and precious blood of the Lord Jesus. There is everything in God’s Word. Nothing could be added to it. The only thing that is necessary, is not something sensational, but the vital power of the Holy Ghost in your heart and mine making over to us what is found in Scripture, blessing us with true repentance and

bringing us to be concerned about eternity, to pray to be made ready, to pray to be right, to flee from the wrath to come.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”