

Is the Rich Man & Lazarus Story in Luke 16 an accurate depiction of what happens when we die?

By Darren Smith – Originally Published: 4/23/2004 Last Updated: 6/3/2016

The following text is an edited version of a paper originally entitled “Luke 16 and the State of the Dead.” The initial version of this paper was presented to the Boards and controlling overseers of three prominent Mid-Acts Dispensational ministries on April 23, 2004. This paper was written because of a controversy that had developed in one of the three ministries, the one in which I actively served as a Board member. The controversy was about teaching regarding the “State of the Dead,” and, specifically, whether the Rich Man & Lazarus story told in Luke 16 in *any* way depicts the true, sound Biblical perspective about what happens to us when we die.

The initial section of the original paper dealt with the passage in Luke 16 directly. This section addressed the specifics of the Rich Man & Lazarus story itself and whether that story – *or any component of that story* - can be taken as an accurate presentation of an “afterlife” that will happen to each of us upon death.

A subsequent (and very critical) section of the original paper sought to address how the Apostle Paul, the Apostle sent to the Gentiles, taught regarding the state of the dead. The information in this section was set forth as a powerful challenge to the three ministries involved, all of which make a distinct claim to follow the Apostle Paul in both doctrine and practice. It is this section which has a significant bearing – not only in regard to whether the Apostle Paul’s teaching allows for taking the Rich Man & Lazarus story literally – but in regard to how every believer today should approach the overall teaching about what happens to us when we die.

Sections of the original paper regarding the doctrinal statements of the organizations involved, circumstances of individual attendees of the meeting, and other details and results of the original controversy have been omitted so that the reader’s focus will remain on the Bible teaching itself. Understanding the teaching of the Scriptures is what really matters.

Finally, the teaching contained herein is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of the Rich Man & Lazarus story in Luke 16 or of Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4. I have since produced other available materials which seek to more fully exposit those passages and attempt to communicate the specific truths I believe each of those passages are designed to convey. The goal of *this* specific scriptural study is to answer this very basic question: Is the Rich Man & Lazarus story in Luke 16 an accurate depiction of what happens when we die? Should we lean on that story’s depiction of death as the truth? Or, has the Lord revealed other teaching about the dead to which we are to hold? That was the original focus of this paper and the burning question that it sought to answer.

It has been many years since the original writing of this paper. This reworked content is sent forth with the fervent prayer that it will help open the eyes of the members of the Body of Christ to the truth I believe our Lord has set forth on this very clouded and misunderstood topic.

LUKE CHAPTER 16

My problems with Luke 16 started with the first nine verses of that chapter, not with the Rich Man & Lazarus story itself. I realize the unjust steward story is not the focus of this paper, but I trust you will see that – while a discussion of these verses will not initially seem to be related to the Rich Man & Lazarus story – it will all fit together in the end.

The story the Lord tells in the first nine verses of Luke, Chapter 16 did not make sense to me. It was as if our Lord is teaching a terrible concept for the first nine verses of Chapter 16 (in the “Unjust Steward” story)...and He doesn’t seem to “come back to His senses” until verse 10.

LUKE 16

¹And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

²And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

³Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

⁴I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

⁵So he called every one of his lord’s debtors [*unto him*], and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

⁶And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

⁷Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

⁸And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

⁹And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

The Lord spoke these words, yes, but I kept asking myself: Are these really HIS thoughts, HIS words? Is this what the Lord is really intending to teach? Would our Lord EVER commend this unjust steward like the rich man does in verse 8? Or would the Lord ever actually *agree* with the Rich Man’s actions, like He seems to in verse 9?

LUKE 16

⁹And **I** say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Note that the Lord introduces verse 9 with the specific words, “And **I** say to you....”

Is this something the Lord would REALLY SAY? Is this really a principle we are supposed to learn and follow?

To confuse the matter further, the Lord THEN – in verses 10 thru 13, DIRECTLY CONTRADICTS the teaching of the story He just told in the first nine verses! These two sections – one through nine – and ten through thirteen – are in DIRECT CONTRADICTION to one another!

The Lord, beginning in Verse 10, says:

LUKE 16

¹⁰He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

¹¹If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

¹²And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

¹³No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

However, I found my key to the apparent “discrepancy” in verse 14...

LUKE 16

¹⁴And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things...

This story was directed to the *Pharisees*. Yes, the story starts out by saying, “And He said also to His disciples...” (because the Lord’s disciples will eventually be the ones taking over the stewardship of the Lord’s riches when the Pharisees are removed from that stewardship)...but it is clear the Lord was directly portraying the *Pharisees* as the unjust stewards in this story.

I suddenly understood where the words and the thoughts in verses 1 through 9 originated. The Lord SPOKE the words in verses 1-9, but the concepts did not originate with Him. The actions of the Unjust Steward in verses 1-9 – and the reaction of the Rich Man – depict how the Pharisees have acted...and how they believe God Himself would respond to [what they believe was] their “wise” and “inventive” handling of the riches with which they had been entrusted!

Thus, it makes sense that verses 1-9 are directly opposed to what the Lord teaches in verses 10 – 13! The Lord depicts how the Pharisees have handled the riches with which they have been entrusted (verses 1-7), shows the Pharisees’ faulty thinking about how God would respond to such actions (verses 8-9), and then blasts their actions and attitudes with what God’s true perspective of the situation really is (verses 10 – 13)!

One may ask, “How can this be possible when verse 9 begins with the phrase, “And **I** say unto you...?”

The notes in my Bible suggest that verse 9 should be read as a *question*....and that there is an IMPLIED “No!” or negative here. This DOES seem to fit the context beautifully. It provides the necessary transition between the opposing concepts. Read it again with the suggested punctuation and implied negative:

LUKE 16

⁸And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. [This is how the Pharisees thought God would respond to what they believed were shrewd actions].

⁹And [do] I say unto you (as a question), Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations [???

¹⁰ [NO! ABSOLUTELY NO!] He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

Again, the Lord presents the Pharisees actions in verses 1-7, which was modifying the Word of God (the riches with which they have been entrusted) to make it seem like individuals really owe God less than they really do. The Pharisees were doing this to curry favor with their followers.

The Lord then presents – in verse 8 - how the Pharisees actually think God will respond to their shrewd actions. They believed that God will approve of these unjust actions simply because the people are now happier about their reduced “debt.”

Then the Lord asks the question: And do **I** agree with this? Is this what **I** am going to teach?

The abrupt insinuation is ABSOLUTELY NO! He states what is really the truth very clearly:

LUKE 16

¹⁰ He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

¹¹ If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

¹² And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? [The following is what is REALLY true:]

¹³ No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

The Lord is saying it is NOT good that the Pharisees manipulated what was owed the rich man. And if the steward was not faithful in such a little thing – like what is owed the rich man – why would they be entrusted with anything else? In fact, why should they keep their job of stewards to begin with? They have not been serving the rich man [representing God], they have been serving the riches themselves [the power and prestige that comes with being the stewards of God's Word] instead.

So the Lord – in verses 1 through 9 (and especially in verses 8 and 9) – has employed a biting, sarcastic literary tactic. In presenting the teaching in this manner, he has created the ultimate, stinging rebuke of the Pharisees' actions and their attitudes.

Now, this is prominent in my mind as I go forward. The Lord has just done something very “funny” to me. He's employed a tactic I had not noticed Him employing before.

And...as I go on...I see more “funny stuff” going on...

LUKE 16

¹⁵ And [the Lord Jesus] said unto them, YE ARE THEY WHICH JUSTIFY YOURSELVES BEFORE MEN; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

¹⁶ The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

¹⁷ And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

¹⁸Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from *her* husband committeth adultery.

In verse 15, the Lord confirms that the Pharisees are the unjust stewards in the story he just told. But two more “funny” things jumped out at me here: The first – and most glaring – is the statement about marriage. My first thought was – WHERE DID THAT COME FROM? We’ve been discussing the handling of money and suddenly He pulls in the subject of MARRIAGE.

Then, the second thing strikes me and starts to help me pull it all together...

The EMPHASIS is on verse 17...

LUKE 16

¹⁷And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

This is about GOD’S WORD...this has ALL been about God’s Word. The unjust steward was entrusted with riches just like the Pharisees were entrusted with riches. But the riches in question were NOT monetary riches...they were the riches of **God’s Word**. In the Pharisees’ perspective, they thought they were pretty shrewd in how they handled God’s Word...and they thought the Lord would actually **commend** this shrewdness.

But the Lord corrects the misperception about handling riches...and about the dangers involved that would threaten them with the loss of their stewardship. The Pharisees, who were covetous, did not understand the analogy presented, but the Lord drives the point home here...

LUKE 16

¹⁵And he said unto them, YE ARE THEY WHICH JUSTIFY YOURSELVES BEFORE MEN; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

¹⁶The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

¹⁷And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

This is the issue – they have NOT been good stewards of the WORD and they are in danger of being told they can “no longer be stewards” of Israel’s spiritual things.

Reading verse 17 again in that light makes verse 18 make perfect sense.

LUKE 16

¹⁷And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

¹⁸Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from *her* husband committeth adultery.

The statement about marriage fits perfectly here – because marriage is an example of a Biblical teaching that the Pharisees had CORRUPTED. They had taken what was written in God’s Word about marriage – and reduced it’s requirement on those they were teaching. They specifically reduced God’s requirements about marriage among the Israelites to curry favor with those they were teaching. And, consequently, they filled up their synagogues! They became more popular among the people! They made worshipping Jehovah easier since the marriage requirements

weren't as stringent. And they were absolutely sure God (i.e., the "rich man" they served) would be happy with them...because the synagogues were full. As a result of the unjust steward's actions, the debtors were more favorable to the "Rich Man" and his "representatives."

But in the process God's Word had been compromised! And this was NOT what God wanted! And notice what the Lord's true perspective of this tactic was:

LUKE 16

¹⁵And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men [i.e. YOU Pharisees are those unjust stewards compromising God's Word to curry favor with others]; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men [that which YOU Pharisees think God will accept just because the synagogues are full] is [an] ABOMINATION in the sight of God.

And it is this context that leads into RIGHT INTO the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The context cannot be divorced from the story. The preceding context seems to have set us up for **another example** of how the Pharisees have compromised the Word of God to curry favor with others. The first example was how they compromised the teaching of the Word of God about marriage to curry favor with Israel.

Could the Rich Man and Lazarus story be "example number 2" about how the Pharisees have taken the teaching of the Word of God and compromised it to curry favor with the people?

Let's examine the passage....

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

I will say up front that I had always taken the story of the Rich Man & Lazarus to be a literal story. I never had a reason to contradict what I had always been taught on this passage. During this study in Luke, however, things were quite different. In my initial struggle with some of the confusing elements of the chapter, I, of course, went looking for "help." I'd noticed that – on the introduction page of the Gospel of Luke – it listed both the unjust steward story and the Rich Man and Lazarus story as parables. So I, like any Berean, opened myself up to at least consider this alternate teaching...

And – as I poured over the Rich Man & Lazarus story more and more – it hit me...

I THEN realized that I had MORE of a problem in dealing with this passage as a literal story than I'd originally thought. And it wasn't because of my Bible's suggestion, and it wasn't because of what I have presented thus far about the context. And it wasn't because of the influence of other teachers who had taught on the Rich Man & Lazarus story...

I suddenly had a major problem with the previous interpretation of these verses because of a wonderful message that I had heard years ago about truth in the Gospels. I had heard this message, THOROUGHLY checked out the truth that was taught in this message, and I came to absolutely embrace this truth because I found that it IS demonstrated OVER and OVER and OVER in the Gospels...

A lesson on the Gospels from a Blind Man

Mark 8:22-26

The message I heard was on Mark 8:22-26, the story of a Blind Man who had to be “healed twice.” For brevity’s sake, I don’t want to go into all the details of this passage, but I think it is necessary to hit the highlights that are relevant to the topic of this paper.

As I said before, Mark 8 recounts the story of the blind man who had to be touched twice to be fully healed.

MARK 8

²²And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

²³And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. ²⁴And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.

²⁵After that he put *his* hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

²⁶And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell *it* to any in the town.

To make a wonderful, long story short, the speaker showed that the entire context of the book of Mark unlocks the secret about the method of the miracle. The healing that happens in stages shows spiritual understanding, acceptance of God’s Word, in stages. The blind man couldn’t see ANYTHING to begin with – then the Lord touched him again and he was COMPLETELY RESTORED. This was the challenge of that particular passage: why did it take the Lord TWO touches to heal the man?

Please bear with me so you will see the relevance to the overall topic of this paper...

The verses right after the healing of the PHYSICALLY blind man show Peter, who himself, has his SPIRITUAL “eyes opened” in verses 27-29:

Mark 8

²⁷And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

²⁸And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

²⁹And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

The speaker teaching this message about the blind man explained that, as of this confession, Peter could FINALLY “SEE”...He finally understands that Jesus WAS, indeed, the Messiah. Prior to this moment in the Gospel of Mark, Peter had been SPIRITUALLY “blind” (i.e., he had “eyes” but did not “see,” he had “ears,” but did not “hear” – see Mark 7:15-21). At the moment of his confession, he finally “sees” the truth – that the one with him is the Prophesied Messiah sent from God!

...however...

As we go on in the verses following Peter's confession (i.e., the receiving of his "sight"), we find that Peter's ability to "see" was only like "trees walking." He could not see everything clearly just yet...

He had FINALLY UNDERSTOOD the fact that Christ was the Messiah...but he did NOT YET see the picture clearly. This is recounted in the story right after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ:

MARK 8

³¹And he [The Lord Jesus] began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

³²And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

In this passage, the Lord BEGINS to reveal to Peter what is ordained to happen to the Messiah sent by God...and Peter begins to REBUKE HIM! Peter can see that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah....but does he see everything clearly? NO! He doesn't see the picture correctly yet!

Peter – like the PHYSICALLY blind man...needed to be touched again...he needed to have his PICTURE of the Messiah corrected.

And – THIS is where we arrive at the point of this message from Mark's Gospel: the CONSISTENT truth I have grasped about all of the Gospels, the truth I have embraced, and the truth I now believe gives me immense help with so many passages in the Gospel accounts. It is the KEY PRINCIPLE that the speaker in this message pointed to for the interpretation of ALL the events going on in the Lord's earthly ministry...

...and the verses in question are below. I am presenting two versions of this concept – one from the Gospel of Mark and one from the Gospel of Luke (because those are the Gospels we have been discussing in this paper):

MARK 4

¹¹And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables:

¹²That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them.

LUKE 8

¹⁰And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

The DISCIPLES are the ones who are to know the mysteries of the Kingdom. The principle is that – those "WITHOUT" – they will only get parables SO THEY WILL NOT UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH. This concept alone affects my interpretation of the Rich Man & Lazarus story. The Pharisees – to whom the Rich Man & Lazarus story was directed – are – **beyond a shadow of doubt** – under the classification of being those that are "without." And it is NOT given to "those that are without" to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom, is it? So, the question is:

Would the Lord be telling this story in order to reveal new truth to them? Or would He tell this story to HIDE the truth from them? The answer is critical to properly understanding what the Lord is doing in Luke 16.

But the above verses were not the only verses that the speaker teaching from Mark applied to the Blind Man passage and the context surrounding it. The other verses used to interpret the miracle in Mark apply just as forcefully in interpreting passages in the Gospel of Luke...

Once again, I will show an example passage from each Gospel. The principle is this:

MARK 4

²³If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

²⁴And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given.

²⁵For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

LUKE 8

¹⁸Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

This concept is the foundational concept of how the Lord reveals truth in the Gospels...and it is illustrated throughout the Gospel narratives. The speaker teaching the message from the Gospel of Mark showed how the Lord strictly adhered to this principle whenever it was applicable to His interaction with someone – and ESPECIALLY SO in matters regarding the revelation of TRUTH.

Search ALL the Gospels to see “if these things are so.” Search EVERY INTERACTION and see our Lord’s CONSISTENCY with His Words in the above passages. The examples are too numerous to mention, but here are a few:

Look at the Disciples – symbolized by Peter himself. The Lord calls Simon...and Simon has “ears to hear”...he HEARS...

MARK 1

¹⁶Now as [the Lord Jesus] walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

¹⁷And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

¹⁸And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

Peter drops everything he has, forsakes his life to follow Christ. He HEARD...and then – (remember the “Measure of Faith” principle)...“He who has (or HEARS) is given MORE.” Hearing qualifies Peter for “more!” If he had not heard, he would not qualify for “more.”

We move ahead to Mark 4...

MARK 4

¹¹And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God...

Peter HEARD the Lord when the Lord called him and – here in Mark 4 – he is given more! He gets the additional explanations about the parables. To HIM it's given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. He gets MORE...and the mystery of the Kingdom that is being revealed to him during this time is the identity of the one he is following. The Lord is leading Peter into further truth. That truth is that He (Jesus) is the promised Messiah of that Kingdom. The miracles that follow are miracles that are designed to show the true identity of Jesus...

But things bog down a bit here in Peter's growth...Peter stops "hearing"...He sees the miraculous feeding of 5,000 men and he sees the miraculous feeding of the 4,000...and he still does not "hear" what is being communicated...he does not recognize Christ for who He really is. We find him in the boat after the miracles of the multiplied bread (and just before the healing of the blind man in Mark 8), and we find him worried – along with the rest of the disciples – about the fact that they don't have any bread! And the Lord rebukes him, saying...

MARK 8

¹⁷...Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?

¹⁸Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?

Because Peter – at this time - does not recognize the Messiah of Israel whom he is following (the same God who fed manna to the Israelites in the Old Testament to constantly sustain them), the Lord CAN NOT – WILL NOT – teach Peter NEW TRUTH yet. The Lord deals with Peter constantly on the MEASURE OF HIS FAITH. If Peter will "hear" the truth of the Lord's identity, by the "Measure of Faith" principle, he will get more. But – it is critical to see – UNTIL PETER GRASPS THE TRUTH BEING TAUGHT TO HIM – HE WILL GET NOTHING MORE.

It is only *later*, after the healing of the PHYSICALLY blind man, that we finally read:

MARK 8

²⁹...And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

PETER GETS IT! HE FINALLY GETS IT! His previously "blind eyes" are opened and he finally HEARS this truth – He KNOWS WHO THE MESSIAH IS. He has finally received the MESSAGE – and the "Measure of Faith" principles is illustrated yet again! Peter is NOW ready to receive MORE...

"If you hear it – it will be measured to you – and you will receive MORE."

And the Lord – true to His Word – DOES give Peter MORE. Only HERE – and only AT THIS TIME – does the Lord begin to tell Peter about His coming crucifixion. The Lord could not tell Peter this information before he "heard" the truth about Jesus' true identity. But with Peter's confession, Peter is now ready to receive MORE TRUTH.

MARK 8

³¹And [the Lord Jesus] began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

³²**And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to REBUKE him.**

This is the part of the message on Mark 8 where the speaker pointed out that Peter, yes – at this moment – could “see,” but he could only see “somewhat.” His vision is still cloudy. For, while he has opened his eyes to the fact that Jesus is, in fact, the promised Messiah, he has his “eyes” and “ears” still closed to the idea that the Messiah *needed to suffer*.

The important thing to grasp (in regard to the topic of this paper) is the fact that – AT EVERY STAGE – the amount revealed to Peter was according to the MEASURE OF HIS FAITH. He would not get “Step 2” before he accepted “Step 1.” He would not have “Step 4” revealed to him before he accepted “Step 3.” The Lord Jesus has been CONSISTENT WITH HIS WORDS ABOUT THE “MEASURE OF FAITH.” Which leads us to a question:

The “Measure of Faith” - Is this just a principle used with the Disciples?

Not at all. We see the Lord applying this fairly, equally to everyone: whether it's other followers, whether it's Gentiles, “saved” or “unsaved” people, etc., etc. Here are some other examples:

MARK 8

²²**And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.**

²³**And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town...**

The physically blind man in Mark 8 was healed next to the town of Bethsaida and one of the odd things about the account of this miracle is the fact that the Lord took the blind man by the hand and led him OUTSIDE of the town before healing him. Isn't that an odd thing to do when you are trying to become a public figure? Wouldn't it be better to perform the miracle inside the town where more people could see this amazing work of God? To take the blind man OUTSIDE of the town HIDES this wonderful miracle from the many in the town who may happen to see it!

Is the Lord being arbitrary here? NO! The Lord is CONSISTENT with His words. He is dealing with this ENTIRE TOWN according to their HEARING – according to the MEASURE OF (THEIR) FAITH! And what was Bethsaida's “measure of faith?”

MATTHEW 11

²⁰**Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:**

²¹**Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, BETHSAIDA! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.**

²²**But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.**

BETHSAIDA HAD NOT “HEARD!” They had seen many mighty works by the Lord and they DID NOT “listen.” They did not “hear.” And their “faith” – or lack thereof - was measured: “he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.”

Bethsaida's Measure of Faith was found wanting...and – true to the Lord's word – He would NOT EVEN PERMIT THEM TO EVEN ACCIDENTALLY WITNESS ANOTHER SINGLE

MIRACLE! THEY WERE TO GET NOTHING MORE! Thus, when the physically blind man is brought to the Lord, he takes that man OUTSIDE the town, AWAY from Bethsaida, so Bethsaida will not receive any further testimony.

So we have confirmation here that the “Measure of Faith” is NOT just applied to the disciples...

MARK 4

²⁵...he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

LUKE 8

¹⁸...whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

It is the SAME STANDARD FOR EVERYONE – the “MEASURE OF FAITH” is consistently applied to believers AND non-believers. Another example is in Mark 7:

MARK 7

²⁶The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought [the Lord Jesus] that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

²⁷But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast *it* unto the dogs.

²⁸And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.

²⁹And he said unto her, **FOR THIS SAYING** (i.e., because of the faith you have exhibited – in recognizing who I am – and in recognizing who you are) go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.

A Gentile woman comes and asks for help from the Lord. Regardless of the fact that she is a GENTILE, she expresses her measure of faith in WHO HE IS...and WHO SHE HERSELF IS. She “sees.” She *understands*. She puts herself in the right place...knowing that she is a Gentile...and that she is pleading her case to ISRAEL’S KING. She knows she has no claim to Israel’s blessing from that King. But she – in contrast to all of the people around her – actually recognizes that the Lord Jesus is the one who is to set the bread on Israel’s banquet table. She recognizes that HE is the coming KING. And that HE controls the blessings that appear on the banquet table. And...thus...she pleads for a small scrap from the one she knows will fill Israel’s table with an overflowing bounty.

And it is “FOR THIS SAYING” – for the MEASURE OF HER FAITH – her request is granted.

There are many more examples...

A centurion sends a word of faith and is dealt with according to that faith (Luke 7:6-10). The Lord testifies that he has not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And the request is granted...according to the “Measure of his faith.”

A sick woman touches him in a crowd (Luke 8:46-48)...and it is SUCH a CRITICAL THING for the Lord to look through the crowd to FIND HER – to deliver to her a VERY IMPORTANT message. And that short, basic message that she needs to know is, “THY FAITH hath made thee whole.”

“Woman, it was according to the measure of your faith in my ability to heal you that made you whole.” It was critical for the Lord to communicate to her that it was upon the MEASURE OF HER FAITH that she was dealt with...

And, finally...

Another steward is illustrated in the Gospel of Luke. Once again, this steward has been entrusted with riches...and he has NOT lost the Lord’s investment...he just hasn’t done anything with it. Is this such a bad, wicked thing? He didn’t STEAL the money – he DID keep the money SAFE and he DID RETURN IT. That would seem justifiable to me...However, it reads:

LUKE 19

²⁰**And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:***

²¹**For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.**

Here is the key question to ask about this particular passage: Is OUR LORD an austere (i.e., harsh) man? Is not our Lord a gracious Lord? Certainly he is **NOT** a harsh Lord! Certainly he does **NOT** deal with us according to what we deserve! If he were a harsh, austere Lord, we would ALL be undone!

So – next – ask this question: what was the MEASURE OF THIS STEWARD’S FAITH? He believed THE LORD to be AUSTERE and HARSH. And – so how did the Lord treat him?

The Lord PROCEEDS to treat the servant LIKE HE IS AN AUSTERE, HARSH LORD! That was the servant’s “measure” and that is what the servant got back! While I initially thought this servant’s offense wasn’t so bad, I failed to initially see that the Lord did not react to the specific *action*; the Lord was reacting to the servant’s “*Measure of Faith*.” The Lord was being CONSISTENT with His word here. With the MEASURE THE SERVANT USED, IT WAS MEASURED BACK TO HIM.

LUKE 19

²²**And [the Lord of the servant] saith unto him, OUT OF THINE OWN MOUTH will I judge thee, *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow...**

This is CRITICAL to note: The Lord of the servant judges the servant OUT OF HIS OWN MOUTH – He GIVES BACK to the wicked servant the wicked servant’s OWN “Measure of Faith” and punishes him according to it! The Lord of the servant DOES NOT correct the servant’s misperception, he does not deal with him through His TRUE, very gracious nature to make the servant change his mind, and He does NOT deal with him the way we might perceive as “fair.” After all, the servant DID NOT steal his Lord’s money. No, the Lord takes the WORDS RIGHT OUT OF THE WICKED SERVANT’S MOUTH AND JUDGES HIM WITH THOSE WORDS.

And what do we find THREE VERSES AFTER this parable? Right after the Lord judges the wicked servant as if He himself really IS an “AUSTERE LORD,” we have ANOTHER REMINDER of the “Measure of Faith” principle:

LUKE 19

²⁶For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

It's as if to say, the LORD is **NOT** an austere, harsh judge...He is only dealing with this steward on the Measure of that steward's faith. The Lord is abiding true to His word...TRUE to the principle that he has repeated OVER and OVER.

The "Measure of Faith"

Matt. 13:12, 25:29 Mark 4:24-25 Luke 6:38, 8:18, 19:26

And this principle IS repeated OVER and OVER in the Gospels. The "Measure of Faith" principle shows up everywhere in the Gospels, though direct statements explaining what it is and through many examples showing that the Lord is adhering to it! In the specific Gospel we are considering today, the Gospel of Luke, the explanation of this principle appears THREE TIMES, and it appears on BOTH SIDES of the Rich Man and Lazarus story – BEFORE THE STORY and AFTER THE STORY.

It is reiterated over and over by our Lord SO THAT WE WILL NOT MISS IT...and you HAVE TO TAKE NOTE that this is His CONSISTENT, NEVER-CHANGING "policy" in the Gospel accounts.

Once again – before we go on – this is the "policy:"

MARK 4

²³If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

²⁴And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: WITH WHAT MEASURE YE METE, IT SHALL BE MEASURED TO YOU: and unto you that hear shall more be given.

²⁵For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath."

Now, finally, we can return to Luke 16 and to my major issue with the Rich Man & Lazarus story. The chart on the following page outlines the chapter.

LUKE 16

VERSES 1-9

Unjust Steward Story

We have a story about the Pharisees perspective. The “world” in the story (where the Lord approves his steward’s unjust actions) is a world which the Pharisees have created in their own minds. It is a world where their shrewdness and corrupt handling of their master’s wares will actually elicit a *commendation* from the master whom they have wronged.

VERSES 10-13

Direct Rebuke

...which leads right into a Direct Rebuke...

VERSE 14

Pharisees Response

...to which the Pharisees respond...

VERSES 15-18

Direct Rebuke

...which incites further Direct Rebuke

VERSES 19-31

Rich Man & Lazarus

...which leads right into another story, the Rich Man & Lazarus story.

Now, just based on the structure above, one can see that it would be completely feasible to suggest that the Rich Man & Lazarus story, too, may contain a “world” which the Pharisees have created in their own minds. That would make perfect, logical sense. But we don’t want to assert that claim just yet until we analyze the details...

We’ve covered the fact that – at the beginning of Luke 16 you have a story presented by the Lord – a story from the Pharisees’ perspective – how the Pharisees see things. You could say that perspective could have come right OUT OF THE PHARISEES OWN MOUTHS, if you will. That leads right into the Lord’s direct rebuke of that teaching.

The Pharisees respond in verse 14...which incites further direct rebuke...which leads right into the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

We are, then, at bare minimum, justified in saying that the entire bottom section – verses 15 through 31 – is a response to what the Pharisees have just said in verse 14.

And – as I have already stated, this DIRECT rebuke in verses 15-18 – IN RESPONSE TO THE PHARISEES – takes us to the Heart of the Matter: the stewardship of God’s Word.

This perspective is summarized on the following page:

LUKE 16

VERSES 15-18

15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

THE RESPONSE TO THE PHARISEES

You have justified yourselves before Men, but God knows the truth. His TRUE evaluation of what you've done is that it is an abomination...because...

The Law is immutable and will NOT be changed

You have corrupted it's teaching on marriage...

VERSES 19-31

Rich Man & Lazarus story

And...[you have corrupted it's teaching on....] ?

The Lord emphatically establishes the fact that – no matter what the Pharisees have done to set themselves up before MEN – as in the UNJUST STEWARD story told in verses 1-9 – no matter how they LOOK before men – God's Word is immutable! It cannot be altered, added to, "sugar-coated," glossed over, or taken away from. It is "set in stone" down to the last tiny punctuation marks! Down to the last "jot" and down to the last "tittle!"

He then give ONE example of how they've misused and added to God's Word in verse 18. This example is in regard to marriage. God's word said the man is to "leave his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* unto his wife: and they [the *two*] shall be *one* flesh." Gen. 2:24. The Pharisees, *to curry favor with the people*, had started to make additions to the law wherein you could divorce your wife for even the smallest and most ridiculous reasons! The law said "cleave" and the Pharisees said you can "leave!" The Pharisees changed what God required of those that are married. Or, in other words, they changed what the married "*owed*" to God...which was the lifelong commitment to the one with whom they had become "one flesh."

The Pharisees actions bought favor with the Israelites. It filled the synagogues and made the Jewish religion – and the priests – more popular. But this was an "abomination in the sight of God." It was an abomination because they had corrupted God's immutable, perfect Word.

Now the question is this: if verse 18 – the mention of marriage – is a first example of where the Pharisees have corrupted God's Word to curry favor with mankind...is it illogical to assume the Rich Man & Lazarus story could be ANOTHER example the Lord is giving where the Pharisees have corrupted the teaching of God's Word contained in the Law....??

Could the story of the Rich Man & Lazarus be the Lord using the Pharisees own teaching (“out of their own mouths”) to rebuke their lack of respect and adherence to Moses and the Prophets? Could it be a rebuke of the Pharisees not paying attention to every last “jot” and “tittle” that is in Moses and the Prophets...in regard to what happens when we die?

That would certainly seem to fit, would it not?

Let’s look at the details of the story:

LUKE 16

¹⁹There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

²⁰And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

²¹And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

²²And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

²³And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴And he cried and said, 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.

²⁵But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

²⁶And 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.

²⁷Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house:

²⁸For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

²⁹Abraham saith unto him, They have MOSES and the PROPHETS; let them hear them.

³⁰And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

³¹And he said unto him, *If they hear not* MOSES and the PROPHETS, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

The first thing to note is that the following elements of the Rich Man & Lazarus story are NOT in the Old Testament...*even though this is a story where the Lord is rebuking them for not paying attention to “Moses and the Prophets”....*

ELEMENTS OF THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS STORY WHICH ARE NOT IN THE “UNCHANGEABLE LAW” BEING DISCUSSED

- The Angels carrying the dead to their destination
- Abraham’s Bosom
- The impassible Gulf
- The immediate fire before the judgment
- The communication of the dead

We must conclude, then - if we take the Rich Man & Lazarus story to be a LITERAL ACCOUNT of REAL TRUTH – or even an account based on REALITY (i.e., a real place called ‘Abraham’s Bosom, a real gulf, and a real fire) – that this is a NEW REVELATION of UNREVEALED TRUTH. This would be NEWLY REVEALED TRUTH HIDDEN SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN! This is truth not found ANYWHERE in all the books of Moses and it is not found anywhere in all the Books of the Prophets!

And WHO was this new, hidden truth revealed to? Who were the individuals God chose to reveal this truth to, after not revealing it to Abraham, or Moses, David, or any other of the prophets?

Here we have the audience:

THOSE TO WHOM THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS STORY WAS DIRECTED

LUKE 16

¹⁴And the PHARISEES also, who were covetous, heard all these things (i.e, the Unjust Steward story and the Lord’s comments): and THEY DERIDED (*ekmukterizo*)* HIM.

**Ekmukterizo: to MOCK, to SNEER. To DERIDE, SNEER, or SCOFF AT. Syn. Katagelao, to LAUGH AT SCORNFULLY.*

THESE are the receivers, the “hearers” of this “new truth,” the Rich Man & Lazarus story, the “truth not made known in other ages,” and the supposed “truth” that has become the foundation of so many of our teachings about what happens when we die!

The point is this: Not only have these Pharisees NOT HEARD the Lord; not only do they not exhibit ANY “measure of faith” at all, these men are RIDICULING HIM! THEY ARE DERIDING HIM! THEY ARE SNEERING AT HIM!

What, then, is the principle the Lord is following?

“If you hear it, you’ll get more. If you don’t hear it, even what you have will be taken away from you. However – if you mock me and ridicule my teaching – I will reveal truth to you that no other human being in history has been privileged to hear!”

DOES THAT MAKE ANY SENSE AT ALL?

IF the elements of this story are REAL – if there really is an “Abraham’s bosom” into which we are carried when we die, if there really is a gulf separating the “saved” and “unsaved” when we die, if there really is a fire, and if there really are conversations going on after we die – then the Lord is revealing NEW truth that is NOT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT!

So, then, IF the elements of the Rich Man & Lazarus story are real, has the Lord BROKEN – in this ONE INSTANCE – his “Measure of Faith” principle which is laid out over and over in the Gospels – and described THREE times in this same Gospel account (Luke) alone? Has he dealt with these deriding Pharisees differently than he has dealt with EVERY OTHER SINGLE PERSON he has come in contact with?

Do we not have the explicit Word of the Lord that it was THE DISCIPLES who were GIVEN TO KNOW the “mysteries of the Kingdom?” And shouldn’t something as DOCTRINALLY “foundational” as “what happens when we die” be directed to them first, apart from any sneering unbelievers? These disciples has LEFT EVERYTHING! They had the “measure of faith” and SACRIFICED THEIR WAY OF LIFE for Christ...and are we to believe the Lord reveals this new doctrinal truth in a conversation with PHARISEES who are DERIDING HIM?

It’s one thing to say the Lord inadvertently slighted some of His followers for His ultimate plan & purposes, but to say He broke His word – the very principle He Himself defined – is unfathomable. Yet, those who hold to the idea that the Rich Man & Lazarus story is talking about reality have to believe these premises to be true!

So, we have an inconsistency – a MAJOR inconsistency – if we take the story of the Rich Man & Lazarus to be describing LITERAL THINGS.

THE INCONSISTENCY IF A LITERAL STORY

**Everyone Else
Dealt with on the
“Measure of Faith”
Principle**

**Deriding Pharisees
Revealed New Truth about
Death – Truth hidden since
the World Began**

With everyone else in the Gospels – in regard to THE TRUTH – the listener is dealt with according to their “Measure of faith.” These DERIDING, RIDICULING Pharisees, on the other hand, are taught what would be revolutionary, foundational doctrine in spite of their contempt for Christ.

Some, however, would assert that taking the elements in the Rich Man and Lazarus story as NOT REAL also creates an “inconsistency.” They would assert that all of the other parables of the Lord are set in reality, so saying the Rich Man & Lazarus story is NOT set in reality would be inconsistent. They would diagram it as follows:

THE INCONSISTENCY IF AN UNTRUE STORY

**All other Parables
and/or “stories” of
the Lord had a setting
in Reality (i.e. real places)**

**The Rich Man and
Lazarus Story would be the
only story NOT based
on actual truth (reality)**

So, we are left with a REAL dilemma, as diagrammed on the following page:

THE DILEMMA

**A STORY BASED ON
REALITY - CONTAINING
REAL PLACES / EVENTS**

**Inconsistent according
to the “Measure of
Faith” principle and
Revealed NEW truth.**

**A STORY NOT BASED
ON REALITY – NOT
REAL PLACES / EVENTS**

**Inconsistent with the
premise that every other
parable was based on
Reality – real places, events**

If our dilemma is laid out in this fashion, we will have an inconsistency **WHICHEVER SIDE** of “the fence” we land!

If we take the elements of the Rich Man & Lazarus story as **LITERAL TRUTH**, we believe that the Lord **DID CHOOSE** to reveal **NEW TRUTHS** to Pharisees who were ridiculing Him. And we would have to believe that the Lord chose **NOT** to reveal these things directly to those to whom it was “given to know” the mysteries – the Apostles!

If we take the Rich Man & Lazarus story to be based on **UNTRUE** teaching – based upon an **UNTRUE** reality which the Pharisees had created in their own minds (i.e., “out of their own mouths”) – then we have the Lord telling a story with untrue things in it. We would say that the invented, unreal things were not the Lord’s inventions, the same way that the thoughts of the Unjust Steward’s Lord were not the thoughts of our Lord. This perspective would say the Lord is using the elements that the Pharisees have added to “the Law and the Prophets” to rebuke them for not following “the Law and the Prophets” accurately. And the rebuke would come right out of the mouth of the “Abraham” who appears in the “Abraham’s bosom” of the story, an “Abraham” that the Pharisees have created by their own teaching. In essence, the rebuke would come out of their “own mouths.”

So how do we resolve this dilemma? Which inconsistency are we willing to live with?

The choice is not difficult. And I believe further investigation will show that we don’t have to live with any imagined inconsistency...

I submit this: The Lord **DID** promise that everyone would be measured by the faith that they had...and by how well they had “heard.” Would He go against His **OWN WORD**? He stated over and over that people **WILL** be judged by the Measure of their Faith. And that “Measure of Faith” principle is repeated **THREE TIMES** in the Gospel we are considering!! (Luke 6:38, 8:18, and 19:26).

On the other hand, the Lord **NEVER** says He will not use someone’s own false teaching against them – even if it’s in a story or parable He is telling. In fact, we find Him doing this very thing – convicting someone “out of their own mouths” – before and after the Rich Man & Lazarus story!

Right before the Rich Man & Lazarus story, the Lord tells the story of the unjust steward. Remember, in that story, the Lord of the unjust servant actually “commends” the steward for being so shrewd, for reducing the debt of the Lord’s debtors so that the steward could help

himself! THE STEWARD TOOK THE LORD’S MONEY AWAY SO HE HIMSELF WOULD LOOK GOOD! Would ANY master really “commend” his servant for doing that? IS THAT REALITY? NO! NOT AT ALL! That is a dreamworld! So the unjust steward story is a clear example of the Lord telling an unreal story that is based upon the hearer’s thought process.

Another example appears after the Rich Man and Lazarus story in the parable of the ten servants in Luke 19:12-27. The “wicked servant” thinks his Lord is a harsh, austere man, so the Lord in the story turns out to be a harsh, austere Lord. Is that reality? Is our Lord really a harsh and austere Lord? NO, not at all. Thankfully, He is gracious and His mercy knows no end.

So you would have:

THE DILEMMA

**A STORY BASED ON
REALITY - CONTAINING
REAL PLACES / EVENTS**

**Inconsistent according
to the “Measure of
Faith” principle and
Revealed NEW truth.**

**Negated by Scriptures:
Luke 6:38, 8:18, 19:26**

**A STORY NOT BASED
ON REALITY – NOT
REAL PLACES / EVENTS**

**Inconsistent with the
premise that every other
parable was based on
Reality – real places, events**

**The premise that every other
parable was based on Reality
is a FALSE PREMISE!**

I, too, initially struggled with the fact that these words in the story of the Rich Man & Lazarus would come out of the Lord’s mouth if they were not based on absolute truth...but then – I understood from the context of the story and the “measure of faith” principle – that the untrue elements in that story were NOT our Lord’s words....they were not His thoughts. He was giving back to the Pharisees the “measures” that they used. He was giving them back their own thoughts – and then used those very thoughts to rebuke them for not adhering to the Lord’s actual words in the Scriptures!

The Lord prepared us for this type of rebuke in telling the Unjust Steward story first! He showed us in that story that he would use the Pharisees’ thoughts in his stories!

Who is to say the Master of Language is never going to use a powerful literary tool such as a satiric fable to forcefully condemn His opponents? The Scriptures certainly show that our Lord *does* use literary tools like these in other places throughout His Word! (See Appendix I).

The principle of the “Measure of Faith” works BOTH ways – positively and negatively. If you hear the truth, you get MORE. If you don’t hear the TRUTH, the truth will be taken away from you. It will be hidden from you. The measure you use is EXACTLY the measure you are going to get back.

So – what if you bury the truth, or completely change the truth into non-biblical superstitions? Couldn’t you expect to receive back a rebuke clouded in the very superstitious nonsense you

have created? That would be giving you back “the measure” you yourself have used! The Lord has to be CONSISTENT on “both sides of the fence” or He contradicts Himself!

One may ask, “Will the Lord come so close to “the edge” of teaching untruth in His interaction with unbelievers?” Once again, I reiterate the fact that – when the Lord does this – we see that the Words and thoughts are NOT HIS – He is giving back the “Measure” that was given to Him.

Here is another example, a final “Measure of Faith” example in the same book, the Gospel of Luke. These types of interactions always bothered me the in the past...

LUKE 10

²⁵**And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**

²⁶**He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?**

²⁷**And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.**

²⁸**And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.**

My reaction to verses like these was always WHY DOESN'T HE TELL THIS GUY THE TRUTH? The Lord KNOWS, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that THIS GUY CAN'T DO THIS! HE CAN **NOT** LOVE THE LORD HIS GOD WITH ALL HIS HEART, WITH ALL HIS SOUL AND WITH ALL HIS MIND! THE LORD **KNOWS** THIS GUY CANNOT USE THIS ROUTE TO TRY TO OBTAIN ETERNAL LIFE!

I would want to SCREAM, “LORD, THAT IS NOT RIGHT!” I wanted to say “Don’t you care about this guy? Don’t you want to tell him that he needs to “believe on the one that God the Father has sent,” like you told others? Lord, you are hanging this guy out to dry! He may be lost forever because YOU DID NOT TELL HIM ABOUT HIS INABILITY TO DO THIS!”

But the Lord is, once again, only acting TRUE TO HIS WORD...

He is dealing with this man – as He does EVERYONE ELSE – on the “Measure of his faith.”

LUKE 10

²⁵**...a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I DO to inherit eternal life?**

²⁹**But he, WILLING TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF...**

This man is TESTING the Lord. This man wants to JUSTIFY HIMSELF – he *does not* want God’s help in justifying himself. This man was to prove he is already “O.K.” with God, that he HAS ALREADY done all that is required. This man wants to DO something to obtain eternal life – and HE THINKS HE HAS ALREADY OBTAINED IT BECAUSE OF WHAT HE UNDERSTANDS AND WHAT HE ALREADY DOES! HE ACTUALLY THINKS HE CAN DO IT! THAT IS HIS “MEASURE OF FAITH.”

So Christ deals with this man according to his measure of faith! He deals with this man based on the man’s thoughts and beliefs. The “measure” the Lord has been given is the “measure” that He

is going to give back. It is like the Lord saying back to the man, “You want to do this YOURSELF? O.K., then here is how you accomplish obtaining eternal life on your own...!!”

You cannot help a man who is not seeking help. And you cannot teach a DERIDING PHARISEE TRUTH ABOUT MOSES’ LAW when that Pharisee had put HIS OWN teaching in the way!

There is much more to review on the Rich Man & Lazarus, but – to remain focused on the topic of this paper - I want to leave this segment with some questions that need to be posed. These are questions for those who still take the Rich Man & Lazarus story to be a literal story...or even a story which contains some elements of an “afterlife” that really does exist...

The “Measure of Faith” principle shows up ALL OVER the Gospels. In the book we are considering (Luke), it is reiterated THREE TIMES, and it appears on BOTH sides of the Rich Man & Lazarus story – BEFORE and AFTER.

It is repeated over and over by our Lord...and you have to see that this is His CONSISTENT “policy” in the Gospels. Here are the questions, then:

Questions

1. What “Measure of Faith” do you believe the Pharisees were displaying in Luke 16?

2. Do you believe that the Lord revealed to these “deriding Pharisees” truth “not made known since the world began” while – at the same time – rebuking them for not paying attention to what was already in the revealed Law?

I suggest that the following points be considered when answering these questions:

Points to Consider

1. The Pharisees were deriding – scoffing at – the LORD’s TEACHING.

2. What would an appropriate “Measure” be to GIVE BACK to these Pharisees if the Lord were to follow His principle?

I would say this: If the Pharisees are DERIDING THE LORD’S TEACHING, would not the exact “measure” be for the Lord to DERIDE THEIR TEACHING? To rebuke them “out of their own mouths” by creating an appropriate conversation in the mouths of the “world after death” that the Pharisees have imagined? That certainly seems LOGICAL to me...

And – while that is my major issue with taking the story of the Rich Man & Lazarus literally, I still have some other issues with the story itself.

To prepare the reader for the eventual issue I am about to raise about the Rich Man & Lazarus story, I would reiterate here – once again – the fact that this story was told to Pharisees who were ridiculing the Lord’s teaching.

LUKE 16

²²And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

²³And in hell [hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁶And [Abraham said] between us [Lazarus and Abraham] and you [the Rich Man] 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.

The story of the Rich Man & Lazarus has the Angels carrying Lazarus (which we generally say would be **the saved**) to “Abraham’s bosom” while the Rich Man is left in fiery torment with a great, FIXED gulf between the two. It is imperative to note that – in this story – the “saved” and the “unsaved” are BEING SEPARATED. And they are BEING SEPARATED AT THE MOMENT OF THEIR DEATH.

If we go back to Matthew 13:24-42, we have an apparent “discrepancy.” The parable that appears here in Matthew was spoken – *not to ridiculing Pharisees* – but to the Lord’s **disciples** and a multitude. And it is critical to note that the interpretation of the parable was given ONLY to the disciples.

MATTHEW 13

²⁴Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

²⁵But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

²⁶But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

²⁷So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

²⁸He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

²⁹But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

³⁶Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

³⁷He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

³⁸The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*;

³⁹The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

⁴⁰As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

⁴¹The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

⁴²And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The symbols in this parable are all explained to us. And there are critical instructions which need to be noted.

MATTHEW 13

³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest...

Here, we have EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS to leave the Wheat and the Tares TOGETHER...and they are to be left together UNTIL THE HARVEST, which we know is the END OF THE WORLD (or age).

MATTHEW 13

³⁷...He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man...

Now the identity of the SOWER is critical here – the fact that the SOWER is the SON OF MAN and NOT His followers or those who will come after Him. This is about “children of the Kingdom” made as a result of the SON OF MAN’S ministry. And I ask – how many of the “children of the Kingdom” begotten by the Son of Man’s sowing – by the Son of Man’s ministry on the earth – have passed on to the state of death? Of a surety, they have ALL died.

We need to ask ourselves if they have been SEPARATED from the unsaved yet...and who separated them if they ARE, indeed, separated.

MATTHEW 13

³⁹...and the reapers are the angels.

The identity of the REAPERS, then, becomes CRITICAL for this discussion. The reapers are the ANGELS...and the ANGELS have been given VERY EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS.

MATTHEW 13

³⁰...I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares...

As we stated above, the wheat and the Tares are to be left *together* until the end of the Age. When it DOES come time to separate the believers from the non-believers, WHO ARE THE ANGELS ORDERED TO GATHER FIRST?

It is NOT the WHEAT, but the TARES. It is NOT the “Saved,” but the “Unsaved!”

LUKE 16

²²And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried...

When we look at the ANGELS in the Rich Man & Lazarus story, we find them DOING THE SEPARATING BEFORE THE END OF THE WORLD...and we find them DOING THE SEPARATING BY GATHERING THE BELIEVERS – NOT the UNBELIEVERS. The explicit directions of our Lord in Matthew was “not until the end of the age”...and, then, “gather the UNBELIEVERS first.” The Angels in Luke 16 (if Luke 16 is an accurate depiction of real Angels) would not only be working against the direct order from the Lord (about not separating the wheat and the tares until the end of the age), but they would also be disobeying the direct order to them about which ones they are to separate FIRST.

Shall we believe, then, the story given in rebuke to “deriding Pharisees”...or do we believe the story the Lord told to those to whom “it was GIVEN to know the mysteries of the Kingdom?”

Both of these stories can not be accurate depictions of reality because they clearly contradict each other!

As diligent Bible students, we make SO MUCH of who is being spoken to! We try to distinguish whether it is Israel being addressed in the passages we are studying or whether it is the Gentiles being addressed. We belabor the idea that identifying who is being addressed has a significant impact on how we are to understand and how we are to apply – or not apply – a particular passage. Shall we not be as cautious regarding this story in the Gospels – especially with so many warnings that occur in the Gospels about the “Measure of Faith?”

Those are my primary issues with taking the Rich Man & Lazarus story in Luke 16 as having any bearing on our understanding of the “State of the Dead.” As you can see, I, when asked about the Rich Man & Lazarus story, will teach that story as a NON literal story. I will teach it as the Lord’s biting, stinging rebuke of the Pharisees who were deriding HIS teaching. The Lord was condemning these Pharisees from their own mouths – from THEIR own teaching.

As we have seen, the alternative position (that teaches the Rich Man & Lazarus story is based on some type of reality) is fraught with major problems. Should we believe that when Cain killed Abel that Abel was carried by the Angels into “Abraham’s Bosom”...before Abraham was even born? If the Rich Man was not consumed by the fire, does that mean he was a spirit? How does an Angel carry a spirit? How does water cool a spirit’s tongue? And, most alarming, do we believe we will actually be able to hear the unsaved suffering in the “afterlife?” And would that be considered “comforting” for us?

I believe that the context of the Rich Man & Lazarus story clearly shows that the story was told as the Lord’s second example of how the Pharisees had been improper stewards of God’s Word. They had compromised the truth of Moses and the Prophets on marriage and the Rich Man & Lazarus story showed they had compromised the truth of Moses and the Prophets regarding death. If, in fact, my interpretation of Luke 16 is correct, then the Lord’s evaluation of believing in this Pharisaical “world” is clear: that teaching is an ABOMINATION in the sight of God.

This closer look at the Rich Man & Lazarus story shows that the Lord is exposing the nonsense which originated in the minds of the Pharisees. It was an abominable nonsense that contradicted Moses and the Prophets and brought forth the Lord’s justified, stinging rebuke.

So, then, what is proper, Biblical teaching in regard to the state of the dead? I believe the answer can be found laid out very clearly and very concisely...in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

The PAULINE “State of the Dead”

This is about The STATE OF THE DEAD...according to Paul. I finally realized what was missing in most of the debates and controversies among churches and ministries about the Rich Man & Lazarus story. I finally grasped what is usually missing in ALL the verses exchanged and ALL the concepts explored and all the Pastors’ opinions cited when it comes to the “state of the dead” debate: we – who are supposed to be Pauline (because Paul was sent to the Gentiles) – never landed on how the APOSTLE PAUL addressed the issue...

AND THE VERSES INVOLVED ARE NOT EVEN IN MOST CHURCH AND MINISTRY DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE DEAD!

How does a PAULINE believer answer a question about the “State of the dead?”

We need to ask ourselves HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO ANSWER ANYONE WHEN THEY ASK US ABOUT THE DEAD?

We have the answer. The Thessalonian Church either asked Paul – OUR APOSTLE – through Timothy – or Paul thought it necessary to address the issue outright. If someone says to us, “Hey, what about my brother who DIED?” The answer is laid out before us...

1 THESSALONIANS 4

¹³But I would NOT HAVE YOU TO BE IGNORANT, brethren, concerning THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

¹⁷Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and SO SHALL WE EVER BE WITH THE LORD.

If we – as GENTILE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST WHO FOLLOW PAUL – are asked questions “concerning them which are asleep,” BRETHREN, WE HAVE THE ANSWER THAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO GIVE. What more do we need? This is OUR APOSTLE’S answer to the “State of the Dead” question. And, if Paul would “not have them to be ignorant” on this subject, can we REALLY charge him with leaving any “NECESSARY stone – or issue – unturned or unexplained?” IS there something ELSE we need to stand on – or some OTHER words that the Thessalonians needed for their comfort – OTHER than the words that Paul uses here? Would Paul have left them “ignorant?”

PLEASE TAKE NOTE: 1 Thessalonians was one of Paul’s EARLIEST LETTERS. If the Scofield Bible’s dates of each writing is correct – and 1 Thessalonians was written in 54 AD and the Gospel of Luke was written in 63-68 AD – chances are that this early GENTILE church did NOT have any copies of the Gospel of Luke to use as help with the doctrine of the dead. I would also point out that the Jerusalem church had NOT gone to the Gentiles (except for Peter’s special visit to Cornelius) at the time that the church of the Thessalonians was founded and, in fact, the Jerusalem church had already confined themselves to the circumcision. Beyond doubt, THIS INFORMATION HERE IN 1 THESS. 4:13-18 IS ALL THE INFORMATION THAT A PAULINE CHURCH NEEDED IN REGARD TO THE STATE OF THE DEAD.

Paul, here, does not want them to be ignorant – UNAWARE – of ANYTHING THEY NEED TO KNOW about the dead. If Luke 16’s teaching regarding the “state of the dead” is “essential” or “foundational doctrine” – or even real doctrine at all – about the dead, then Paul surely DID leave these brethren in Thessalonica “ignorant” about “those which sleep.”

THE COMING OF THE LORD – our blessed hope – is the CAPSTONE of Church truth – and it is WHAT WE – AS PAULINE BELIEVERS – ARE TO USE WHEN WE DISCUSS THE

STATE OF THE DEAD – JUST LIKE OUR APOSTLE DID. The saved dead STILL have a hope – and we still have a hope about our saved dead – that the Lord will bring us and them together again and WE SHALL **EVER BE WITH THE LORD**. Do we need more said to us? Do we need more clarification?

But – we have lost the ENTIRE point if we miss the last verse of Chapter 4...

1 THESSALONIANS 4

¹⁸Wherefore comfort [or beseech] one another with THESE WORDS.

Is someone asking you – a Bible-believing Christian – about the dead? THESE ARE THE WORDS we are to use when we discuss “them which are asleep.” THESE are the WORDS – and no others – that we are to use to “comfort [or beseech] one another with.” And THESE are the WORDS about our blessed hope and our wonderful ascension with our Lord. Please note the EXACT WORDS of the verse. If you use ANY OTHER “WORDS” to comfort or beseech anyone about the dead – about “those which are asleep” – you are DISOBEYING THE APOSTLE PAUL.

The following questions, then, supercede all other questions raised in this paper: Based on these **SPECIFIC PAULINE INSTRUCTIONS**, DO WE HAVE **ANY RIGHT** TO GO BACK AND USE “OTHER” WORDS TO DISCUSS WITH PEOPLE ABOUT “THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP?” DO WE HAVE ANY RIGHT – IF WE ARE PAULINE – TO GO BACK AND DISCUSS LUKE 16 LIKE IT APPLIES TO “THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP” TODAY? DO WE HAVE ANY RIGHT – IF WE ARE PAULINE – TO DISCUSS **ANY** OTHER CONCEPT – **OTHER THAN THE COMING OF OUR LORD** – REGARDING “THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP” AS IF THEY ARE APPLICABLE TO US TODAY?

COLOSSIANS 3

⁴When Christ, *who is our life*, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

The coming of the Lord is consistently set forth as our hope by the Apostle Paul. In Colossians 3:4, Paul says, “When Christ, [who is] our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” It is THE COMING OF THE LORD that is supposed to be our answer to the “State of the Dead” question. It is how our Apostle answered the question...so shouldn’t it be how we answer the question?

This blessed hope is for the DEAD AND THE LIVING. An “Abraham’s Bosom” or a “paradise” is NEVER ONCE set forth by the Apostle Paul as OUR HOPE. It is never set forth as OUR HOPE that WE will go to HIM. It is set forth as our hope that HE will COME FOR US. Those are the WORDS that Paul used in dealing with the state of the dead, and those are the words that he specifically instructs US to use when we deal with the state of the dead.

So many churches have the return of the Lord in their doctrinal statements under the sections dealing with future events, but under the “State of the Dead” sections they do not mention the coming of the Lord at all! Is that a Pauline approach to the issue? The truth of the return of our Lord is brought forth by OUR APOSTLE in a DIRECT ANSWER about the DEAD. How can we not – being Pauline – hold THIS forth as our “ESSENTIAL” doctrine? How can we not – being Pauline – hold THIS forth as our “FUNDAMENTAL” doctrine about the dead? The Apostle we claim to follow does...

Granted, there are other questions that will spring out of this information, questions that can prompt a multitude of other doctrinal studies, but the HEART of the “state of the dead” matter is established. When we speak about the dead, our WORDS are supposed to be about our Lord’s coming. We have the words – and the hope – in 1 Thessalonians 4 – that we are supposed to use when discussing “them which are asleep” – and, further, the REST of the Bible must be taught IN LIGHT of the revelation the Lord Jesus gave to the Apostle Paul!

When Paul was asked about the dead, he did NOT tell the Thessalonians about our “conscious or unconscious state” and he did NOT tell them about the dead’s “intermediate destination.” He did NOT tell the Thessalonians about a dead patriarch’s bosom or a clearly delineated gulf that separates the “saved” and the “unsaved.” The Apostle Paul told us about the COMING OF THE LORD – and then he told us TO SPEAK THE SAME IN REGARD TO THE DEAD.

Christ’s RETURN is the event that Paul says will initiate us “ever being with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). Christ’s RETURN is the action that Paul says will be the moment we are “made alive” (1 Cor. 15:23). Christ’s RETURN is the moment when our corruptible, mortal bodies will be changed into incorruptible, immortal bodies (1 Cor. 15:51-53). Thus, it is Christ’s RETURN that should be emphasized as our hope to the world today. We are not to beseech the unsaved with details of a dead, unsaved rich man’s fire, a dead rich man’s suffering and torment, or the impassible, permanent gulf of Luke 16. Instead, having the Pauline revelation which “fulfilled the Word of God” (Col. 1:25), we are to beseech the unsaved with the message that Christ is coming back for his own...to receive us up in the air. That is the grace of God! It is the “goodness of God” that the Scripture says “leadeth men to repentance” (Rom. 2:4)...NOT the threat of an imaginary fire.

In the Apostle Paul’s writings, we have everything we need to know about the dead. And I would reiterate, in closing, TO BE PAULINE – WE MUST USE THE TEACHING OF THE LORD’S RETURN when discussing the dead. Yes, questions may arise out of this teaching that can be answered by Paul’s other teachings....but....

1 THESSALONIANS 4

¹³But I would NOT HAVE YOU TO BE IGNORANT, brethren, concerning THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

¹⁷Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and SO SHALL WE EVER BE WITH THE LORD.

...THESE are the WORDS we are specifically instructed to use when we discuss “them which are asleep.” I would call for every Bible student – when considering the doctrine about the dead – to consider the revelation given to Paul for us today. Consider what it contains...and what it does not contain.

Throughout the conflict over Luke 16 – BEFORE I came to 1 Thessalonians 4 – I struggled and struggled over the LACK of information given to us by Paul on this issue. I was EXTREMELY frustrated that he had – to say it correctly – “left us ignorant” about these all the “important issues” like the dead’s consciousness or unconsciousness, “Abraham’s Bosom” or some other destination, burning upon death or “delayed” burning after the Lord’s return...

But then I came to 1 Thessalonians...and the profoundness of Paul’s silence...and his instruction about the specific words to use in dealing with the dead struck me. Does Paul want people concerning themselves with how DEATH is going to be? Or does Paul want us to focus on what our RESURRECTION will be like at Christ’s return? Surely, THIS is why Paul tells us to use THESE words – and no others. Surely – in light of this truth – we should emphasize the same?

Brethren, we should not feel dismayed if – through a detailed examination like this study – Luke 16 is “taken away from us”...because we are NOT ALLOWED TO USE IT TO TEACH THE STATE OF THE DEAD ANYWAY! I believe – especially in light of Paul’s instructions - that is a CLEARLY a message about the dead we are NOT TO SEND.

When one of our dear brethren loses a loved one to the sting of death, let’s follow Paul. Let’s lift their chin to the sky and tell them to look for our coming Lord. Let’s talk about how our Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, how he will catch up our dear departed dead first, and how we will all meet together in the air! It will be a glorious moment...and a lasting moment. For from that moment on, we will be “ever with the Lord.”

Even so, “Come Lord Jesus!”

Literary elements used in the Scriptures

We are not at liberty to assume that the Holy Spirit's inspired text – or our Lord's words – will never contain effective literary tools such as satire or fable – any more than we could state that the Scripture doesn't implement other literary tools like poetry, irony, allegory, or proverb. Examples in the Scripture bear this out:

- Judge 9:8-15 When we read this story about “talking trees,” our first inclination is to equate it on the same level as a story like the “Wizard of Oz,” where we find Dorothy arguing with a “talking tree” over the apple she had just picked. However, a closer examination of the passage in Judges will make us realize that the literary device of a satirical fable here is a wonderfully effective, extremely appropriate and – I would add – a God-inspired – evaluation of the situation. Jotham's purpose was to expose, condemn, and – yes – ridicule the positions being held by his hearers. And he did it by telling a story that COULD NOT have possibly happened.
- 1 Kings 18:17-41 In verse 27, “Elijah mocked them, and said, ‘Cry aloud; for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awakened.’” Here we have the plain uses of mockery and sarcasm.
- 2 Samuel 12:1-4 The story that Nathan told to David was certainly a satirical story. In the story, the “lamb” – representing Bathsheba – is KILLED. In reality, though, she lived and became David's wife. In the story, the poor man loses a sheep. In reality, Uriah lost his WIFE and his LIFE. The “story” does not match the reality, but the use of satire drives Nathan's point home much more effectively than a simple reiteration of the truth. The story – *as it is told* – accurately depicts the depths of David's sin and total disregard of others. THAT, after all, was the story's purpose.

Finally, in the very book we have been discussing:

- Luke 13:31-33 Here, we have Christ using SARCASM towards the Pharisees. They warn Him that He shouldn't stick around Herod's territory because He might be killed...and Christ responds that “certainly...CERTAINLY – a prophet can't die outside Jerusalem!”

The Bible communicates to us using many literary forms. There is no more masterful user of all of literature's techniques of communication than the Creator Himself. We dare not limit the Master of language by our set of “rules” or pre-conceived ideas.

The Apostle Paul and “Dead People”

Some primary references where Paul addresses the dead or death in general are:

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: - He DIRECTLY deals with the question of the dead. He points us to the **coming of Christ** as the solution.
- 1 Corinthians 15 – He deals with the resurrection of the dead (v. 1-34) and what type of body we will receive at that resurrection (v. 35-57). In the first section of this discussion, he says the dead will be “made alive” “**at [Christ’s] coming** (v. 23) and states that we will receive our new, incorruptible body “at the last trumpet” (v. 52), which is at the **coming of Christ**.
- 2 Corinthians 4:7-13 – He deals with the risk of witnessing for Christ that may end in death and then he says “[God] will raise up us also by Jesus,” clearing comparing that resurrection to the type of resurrection Christ experienced when “[God] raised up the Lord Jesus.” This can only be referring to the **coming of Christ**, when our resurrection takes place.
- 2 Timothy 4:6-8 – Finally, Paul mentions his own coming death and he does not include ANY talk about the immediacy of “being with the Lord” or immediately receiving his “crown of righteousness.” The Apostle – as he always does – refers to the **coming of Christ**, i.e., “that day” or “HIS appearing” – as the specific time when he will receive his crown.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it seems that OUR Apostle, the Apostle to the Gentiles, had a CONSISTENT FOCUS when it came to the subject of the dead and death. At almost every instance that Paul talked about death, he talked about the COMING OF CHRIST as the solution for it! Doesn’t introducing concepts like the literal interpretation of Luke 16 create a direct contradiction of Paul’s teachings or – at bare minimum – raise major questions as to why Paul did not reveal to the Gentiles the “comfort” of “Abraham’s bosom” and being carried there by the angels upon death? If angels and comfort happen immediately upon death, Paul most definitely left the Thessalonians “ignorant” about “them that sleep” – even though he said he DID NOT want them to be ignorant!

We must concede that the picture of death given in Luke 16 are NOT the thoughts of Paul. HIS handling of the subject of death...and his direct instructions to US on how WE should handle the subject (1 Thess. 4:18) should speak volumes to us.

Our Apostle repeatedly avoids – at every instance of discussing the dead and death – ANY talk about an intermediate state. The emphatic caution that should be raised by this fact is this: if we teach Luke 16’s Rich Man & Lazarus story as the TRUTH regarding death, we will make death and the comfort of Abraham’s bosom the “blessed hope” for the saved...instead of exalting the coming of our Lord as our “blessed hope” – as the Apostle Paul clearly does.