

LIFTING DEATH'S VEIL (1)

BY KEITH GREER

One of the best known Bible stories is that of the rich man and Lazarus {Luke 16:19-31}. We would all do well to read it carefully and soberly from time to time. In this powerful story, our Lord left us a picture from the other side. Not only does this short narrative discuss the things these two men did during their lives, it also gives us a brief look at what happened **AFTER DEATH**. Much has been said about whether the story is true or a parable (I believe it to be a true story); it matters little. The lessons learned are just as powerful, regardless whether the account is a true story or a parable.

A story of vital contrasts. Jesus used this story to show the contrasts in the lives of two different men who were going in two different directions, both here and beyond. An earlier story {*Luke 12:16-21*}, which concerned a rich fool, gave this reflection to ponder: “*So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*” The rich man in our story was about to learn that none of the riches amassed in this life would follow him to his grave. He fared sumptuously every day in this physical life. Yet, in death little comfort was forthcoming during his lifetime on earth, others pleaded with him to share his wealth, but he turned deaf ears to those pleas. Now the tables have turned; no one hears his pleas for mercy and compassion.

Lazarus, suffering sores all over his body, had begged for the crumbs from the rich man’s table. Lazarus’ status in this life was pretty miserable, but that changed greatly following his death! Both men died, and the contrast changed drastically. The rich man may have had a grand send-off, with many flowers and mourners and an elegant funeral service. Lazarus died and “*was carried off by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.*” Who had the better funeral procession? Let’s consider the poignant lessons to be learned from the lives and deaths of these two men.

Fear God and keep His commandments. “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.*” {*Ecclesiastes 12:13*} While he lives here on earth, man has a God-given duty to obey His commandments. But the rich man in our story chose to follow a different set of rules. From the story, we correctly conclude that he was more interested in self-satisfaction than in practicing the golden rule. His rejection of Lazarus showed lack of compassion

for his fellowmen and their hardships. He sought to gain, by his wealth, other people's approval and honor; he chose to disobey God's commands and do his own thing. But God, who instructs those who are rich to be "*rich in good works*" {1 Timothy 6:17} had the final say.

To be saved, we must obey God. "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*" {Matthew 7:21} No passage in the sacred record teaches that God will save the disobedient. Because of the life He lived on earth, the rich man learned that divine truth. "*Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.*" {Hebrews 5:8,9}

So how can the lost be saved? "*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*" {Revelation 22:14} One would do well to study the record of man's actions, in contrast to God's commands, and the results of rebellion and disobedience. Can we find just ONE example where someone disobeyed the instructions of God and were still blessed for their efforts? Why does God give men instructions and guidelines? Free will is a blessing from God; but it is accompanied by consequences. One has the right to disobey what God has instructed him—but we must accept the consequences for such a decision! The rich man made his choices, and Lazarus made his; consider what followed.

In the next article we try to show more truths about "death behind the veil." ***