

## Christian Retirement

### Part 51

By [Thomas Reade](#)

1837

#### ON THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

The parables of our Savior are full of wisdom and beauty. They are intended to convey some great truth, to which the various appendages are in general to be considered rather as natural accompaniments than as each requiring a forced or fanciful interpretation. We should, therefore, endeavor to ascertain what was the primary object which our Lord had in view, when he delivered these exquisitely beautiful lessons of divine truth, that we may derive that instruction which is inculcated by them.

The parables of the net, containing good and bad fish; of the ten virgins, five of whom were wise, and five foolish; of the marriage feast, where one guest was found without a wedding garment; of the tares which sprang up among the wheat; of the vine with fruitful and barren branches; are all designed to show, that, in the visible church, the righteous and the wicked will live together, until the general separation at the day of judgment.

The parables of the seed springing up imperceptibly; of the grain of mustard seed, growing from the smallest seed to a great tree; of the leaven, secretly working until the whole lump is leavened; beautifully point out the progress of the Gospel throughout the earth.

The parables of the lost sheep, of the lost piece of money, and of the prodigal son, reveal to us, in the most affecting manner, the great love of God in coming to seek and to save that which was lost; the readiness with which he receives returning sinners; and the joy which angels feel at the salvation of men.

The parables of the great supper and of the husbandman in the vineyard most strikingly show how men in general, and the Jews in particular, to whom our Lord then addressed himself, despise the offers of divine mercy, and persecute the faithful servants of God who speak to them in his name.

The parables of the treasure in the field and of the pearl of great price, call upon us, from the common feeling of worldly prudence, like the wise merchantman, to

part with a smaller possession for one of superior value; to give up the trifles of time for the glories of eternity.

The parables of the ten pounds, of the talents, and of the sheep and goats, speak directly to the heart, and are calculated to produce the deepest concern respecting that strict account which we must render of every talent committed to our trust.

The parable of the barren fig-tree exemplifies the divine patience, through the intercession of Jesus.

The good Samaritan beautifully enforces the extensive duty of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The unmerciful servant is a faithful picture of the divine compassion, and of man's hard-heartedness and ingratitude.

The unjust judge, by way of contrast, conveys consolation to the suffering church under all her protracted trials. If this judge, so unjust, avenged the poor widow because she wearied him, shall not a God of justice much more avenge his own elect, though he bear long with them?

The Pharisee and the publican gives us a striking view of spiritual pride and spiritual humility.

The laborers in the vineyard is full of comfort to the Gentile world, who shall be called by the Gospel, even though it be at the eleventh hour; into the church of God.

The two sons very pertinently shows the vast difference between saying and doing.

The two debtors, spoken to Simon the Pharisee, and which, from its simplicity, drew from him the confession, that he would love the most to whom the most was forgiven, proves how pardoning mercy melts the heart into love.

The sower, by its beauty and perfect adaptation to the human heart, is calculated to enlighten every mind in quest of truth, respecting those hindrances which prevent our profitable hearing of the Word of God.

The servant waiting for his Lord shows us in what posture every believer should be; not sleeping, not rioting, but diligently waiting to meet his Lord at his coming.

The rich fool, addressed to the man who so unseasonably interrupted our Savior in his discourse, manifests the folly of heaping up treasure to ourselves, instead of laboring to be rich towards God.

So, in like manner, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus contains much valuable instruction, on a subject which men in general treat with awful indifference—the realities of a future world.

This very impressive parable teaches us:

1. That riches and poverty are no sign either of God's favor or displeasure. His enemies often abound in temporal mercies; his friends in temporal affliction. (19, 20, 21) His enemies grow harder under the beams of prosperity. His friends are softened and melted in the furnace of adversity. Hence the latter pant more ardently after heaven; the former cleave more closely to the earth.
2. That death is making steady advances towards all, both rich and poor. (22) The rich man's wealth could not bribe death, nor avert his blow. The poor man's poverty did not cause him to be overlooked as too insignificant for the notice of this general destroyer.
3. That our state in the next world has no connection with our outward condition in this world. (23) Here, the rich man fared sumptuously every day; there, he was destitute of a drop of water to cool his tongue. Here, Lazarus was hungry and wretched; there, he was blessed and happy in Abraham's bosom.
4. That there is no mitigation of pain in hell. (24 and 25) Not one drop of water could be allowed by inexorable justice to alleviate his sufferings, or allay the intensity of the flame.
5. That the torments of hell are eternal. (26) A great gulf is fixed, which forever prevents escape from hell, or relief from heaven. Oh wretched state of unutterable woe!
6. That the soul in hell is in a state of consciousness. (27, 28) The rich man looked back and remembered his former life and connections. He had five brethren. He dreaded their coming into the same place of torment; knowing, probably, that his example had helped forwards their impiety. He anticipated only five additional tormentors.
7. That the appearance of a spirit would not convert a soul. (29 to 31). Conversion is the work of God. He has appointed means for this blessed end; "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead." Lord! make me wise in time, that I may be happy in eternity!

This parable speaks at once to the understanding, the conscience, and the heart. Yet, it is painful to think how little the human mind is affected by the most solemn truths of revelation. People who profess to believe in the divine inspiration of the

Holy Scriptures, and who would on no account be deemed infidels, can and do act, from day to day, as if the future eternal world was unreal, and all the promises and threatenings of the Bible without a meaning. If their earthly prospects are likely to be blasted by some improvident connection, and they are timely forewarned of the coming danger, how anxious are they to avail themselves of such friendly intimation, placing the most implicit reliance upon the veracity of their informant, and acting promptly and decidedly upon it.

But the reverse is the case, as it respects their spiritual concerns. They are forewarned and admonished in vain. They hope things will end better than religious people imagine; and thus madly venture upon the awful issue, rather than act as in temporal matters they would have acted. With all their boasted faith, they are unbelievers in practice. They acknowledge the veracity of Scripture, but refuse to obey its dictates. "They have loved idols, and after them they will go."

The state of Christendom, it is to be feared, too much resembles this picture. There is a verbal veneration for the word of God, combined with a secret aversion to its holy requirements. But what is faith without works? No better than a tree destitute of its fruit. The faith of God's elect is according to godliness. The word of truth must not only be believed, but practiced; not only acknowledged, but felt. Its solemn, its consoling, its purifying doctrines must have a transforming influence on the heart. Then, and only then, will the believer be made clean, being sanctified by the truth as it is in Jesus. This change constitutes the characteristic difference between the nominal professor of Christianity and the real believer. They are known by their fruits.

It is truly surprising that the human heart is so little impressed with the nearness of eternity. This insensibility only proves the powerful prevalence of unbelief. A very slight accident or disease, if it affects a vital part of our frame, soon dissolves the natural union between soul and body.

We are constantly walking upon the very borders of the invisible world, where all is unchangeable and eternal; yet we live as if time would never end; or, at least, as if its termination were very distant from us. This can arise only from the earthliness of our hearts; from the astonishing power which visible objects have over us; and from the small influence which unseen, future, eternal realities have upon our hopes and fears. But this small influence springs solely from unbelief. We know that we must die; and yet we live as if we did not believe it. We know that life is uncertain; and yet we lay our plans for years to come, as if nothing were so certain as our continuance here. We profess to believe that God will render unto every man according to his works; and yet we act as if our works would never be noticed in the day of general retribution. We acknowledge that out of Christ there is no salvation; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; and yet we neglect the Savior, and treat the work of grace upon the heart as fanatical and delusive.

Lord, what is man! What a compound of contrarities and inconsistencies! Oh give me a heart devoted to your glory, broken off from sin, and weaned from the world.

Dear Jesus, to your cross I bring  
This treacherous heart of mine;  
Oh save me from the serpent's sting,  
And make me wholly thine.

From unbelief and inward guile  
Oh! keep my conscience clear;  
Midst every deep Satanic wile,  
Preserve my heart sincere.

Whatever I am, or wish to do,  
Whatever my thoughts devise,  
Is all exposed to your view,  
Though hid from mortal eyes.

Whenever my devious footsteps stray,  
May I remember thee;  
And know, through all the dangerous way,  
That "You, God, seest me."

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).