The Story of Two Beggars
by Gene Easley

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every
day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores” (Luke 16:19-20).

The First Scene—This Present Life

There are three scenes in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The first scene represents this
present life. A rich man was sitting in his well-furnished, beautiful home with servants to wait on him. He
probably had expensive imported rugs and pictures by famous painters on the wall. His clothes were of
the finest materials. His table was filled with the best of foods. He had no thought of going to bed hungry.
It looks good so far, but don’t get too excited. Wealth is not all it is made out to be.

There was a beggar sitting at the gate of the rich man. He had a sickness from which he could
not be cured. He daily knew the feeling of hunger pangs. His body was full of sores, and dogs came by
and licked the sores. His life was full of misery.

There is a missionary message in this story. Although the rich man does not represent the
church, there is yet a message here for the church. Have you looked outside your gate lately? Have you
realized there are those who could desperately use your help? How far does one have to look to find a
Lazarus? Maybe our churches our suffering spiritually because we are spending all our time enjoying our
blessings. Will God hold us guiltless if we close our hearts of compassion?

It is difficult to believe that the rich man and the beggar lived so close together. Luxury and
destitution are often neighbors. But they so often are not friendly neighbors. The rich man appears to
have done nothing to help Lazarus. Perhaps the beggar could have received a few crumbs if he begged
hard enough. And why wasn’t a servant sent out to care for the sores? Why did Lazarus have to rely on
the passing dogs to show him compassion? Is the heart of man really so merciless and unkind? I think
so. If we look at the misery in this present world with so few willing to reach out to the suffering, we must
conclude that the heart of man is far from being as compassionate as the heart of God.

Lazarus sat at the gate of wealth and plenty but could not enter in. He must have spent many
cold nights wishing someone would care. But he was not to see that type of response in this life. He did,
however, have one thing going for him. Lazarus loved God. Despite his poverty, his rejection by society,
his bad health, his daily misery; he still maintained a love for God in his heart. We know this is true,
because no one will make it to heaven who doesn’t love God.

The rich man felt that by throwing a few crumbs of bread to Lazarus he had fulfilled the Law of
Love. How deceived! He could claim that he fed the poor, but God did not see it that way. We should be
more concerned about God’s observations. What tragedy awaits us when we feel we can just live for
ourselves and not see the mission in life God has set before us!

Wealth seemed to be the rich man’s greatest friend, but, in reality, as the apostle Paul so aptly
warned Timothy, the rich man’s money was drowning him “in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:9).
Wealth can turn our eyes from God. Instead of wanting to fast and pray, we want to laugh and play. Life
can become one long, happy time of self indulgence.

Today, the church is plagued by leaders who capitalize upon people’s insatiable love for money.
The gospel some preach is simply a message that if you come to Jesus, He will make you financially rich.
Many are flocking to this gospel which clearly puts the material before the spiritual.

The saddest part of the so-called “prosperity gospel” is that its followers are not being led into a
deep experience in the Holy Spirit. They are not developing the type of prayer life that brings the
presence and power of God into the church. As a result, this false gospel does not produce the fruit of the
Spirit in the lives of its followers.
The Second Scene—The Burial

The Scripture says that the beggar died (speaking of Lazarus). It is unlikely that many knew him by name. They just said, “The beggar died.” There was probably no funeral service for Lazarus. No one appeared to mourn for him while he was alive, and it is very doubtful there were mourners at his death. Most likely his body was disposed of quickly. No big fanfare, just get him out of the way. At this point to most on-lookers, it would appear to be the expected end to a tragic life. A sad story had a sad ending and people just tried to forget.

The rich man also died. But the Bible speaks of his having a proper burial. It was doubtless a place where the rich were laid to rest. Probably, it was a large tomb, with an entrance that later was closed and sealed.

Hired mourners were surely present at the rich man’s burial. Wealthy dignitaries came to show their last respects. Both the religious and political hierarchy would have been expected to make known their presence at the death of this important man of the community. Money makes you important and most people like to be near money even where there is corruption along with it. The hired religious leader gave his eulogy of how great this rich man was, how vital he had been to their community, and how he would be so greatly missed.

The Bible speaks of a place where there will be no more sunsets. The sunsets had been difficult for Lazarus. The days were bad, but the nights were horrible. The blackness, the coldness, the loneliness of the night—more than the soul could bear. But it was over now.

To most people the story ended there. They walked away from the grave site of the rich man and thus ended the story of one man’s life. Lazarus’ body was taken somewhere, and it was just one less beggar on the streets. The last chapter has been written, and everyone will now go on with life.

But wait. There is a third scene to the story. And to the amazement of most of the human race, it is in this scene where life really begins.

The Third Scene—The After Life

The rich man had always been in charge. His servants responded to his every wish. In this scene he found himself in a place where the eternal chains of darkness would control his existence forever. “In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments” (Luke 16:23). There is a place where lost souls will have their eternal abode, and it won’t be pleasant. The rich man longed for relief from his pain, but his cries for help could not be answered now. Just a drop of water would have meant so much, but no messengers of comfort could be sent to the place where the rich man was now living.

The rich man prayed that someone would go and warn his brothers about this place of torments. Some have jokingly commented that they will be glad to be in hell because many of their friends and family members will be there. But not so. If one makes the horrible choice of rejecting Christ and finds himself in this place called “hell”, he will not want any of his acquaintances to be there. It would add to the torment to see a family member or close friend descend into that same pit of blackness and eternal doom. There are no welcome mats in hell. Those who arrive there will be cursed for having made their bad choices in life. The rich man’s days of pleasure were over.

As has already been stated, it is doubtful that Lazarus had any type of funeral services, if indeed his death was treated with any concern or respect. But the Bible says that the angels came and took the soul of Lazarus into Abraham’s bosom. It was the place where the godly dead were taken before the death and resurrection of Christ. It was a paradise, unlike anything Lazarus had experienced in his earthly life. He was comforted, while the rich man was tormented.

Suddenly, it seems that death changed the entire story. Now, Lazarus was no longer a beggar. It was the rich man who had his hand out, crying desperately for just a drop of water. He was begging someone to go and tell his brothers to stay away from the torment of hell. The rich man was now the beggar. Death will change a lot of things. Those who have exalted themselves and rejected Christ will be forever abased. Those who have humbled themselves and exalted Christ will forever know the comforts of His eternal glory.

The rich man did not go to hell because he was rich, and Lazarus did not go to paradise because he was poor. Their eternal destinies were determined by their rejection or acceptance of God. This story was given in an Old Testament setting. Christ as yet had not gone to the Cross. His blood had not been shed for the remission of our sins. But even the covenant of the Old Testament gave people a choice. These two men had a choice. Each made his respective decision, and eternity is telling the rest of their stories.

We have a choice today as well. Christ shed His blood for us on Calvary. We can repent and accept His supreme sacrifice, or we can go our own way and live for ourselves. But the day will come when we, too, will enter into scene number three, and it will be forever. Choose Christ now, and no
matter how easy or difficult life may be here on earth, it will be worth it all when we see Him and enter into His glories!