**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-063**. **DIVES AND LAZARUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"19. There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22. And 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; 23. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24. And 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. 25, But 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. 26. And besides 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. 27. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28. For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them lest they also come into this place of torment. 29. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."*

*Luke 16:19-31*

This, the sternest of Christ's parables, must be closely connected with verses 13 and 14. Keeping them in view, its true purpose is plain. It is meant to rebuke, not the possession of wealth, but its heartless, selfish use. Christ never treats outward conditions as having the power of determining either character or destiny. What a man does with his conditions settles what he is and what becomes of him. Nor does the parable teach that the use of wealth is the only determining factor, but, as every parable must do, it has to isolate the lesson it teaches in order to burn it into the hearers.

There are three parts in the story--the conduct of the rich man, his fate, and the sufficiency of existing warnings to keep us from his sin and his end.

**I.** Properly speaking, we have here, not a parable--that is, a representation of physical facts which have to be translated into moral or religious truths--but an imaginary narrative, embodying a normal fact in a single case. The rich man does not stand for something else, but is one of the class of which Jesus wishes to set forth the sin and fate. It is very striking that neither he nor the beggar is represented as acting, but each is simply described. The juxtaposition of the two figures carries the whole lesson.

It has sometimes been felt as a difficulty that the one is not said to have done anything bad, nor the other to have been devout or good; and some hasty readers have thought that Jesus was here teaching the communistic doctrine that wealth is sin, and that poverty is virtue. No such crude trash came from His lips. But He does teach that heartless wallowing in luxury, with naked, starving beggars at the gate, is sin which brings bitter retribution. The fact that the rich man does nothing is His condemnation. He was not damned because he had a purple robe and fine linen undergarments, nor because he had lived in abundance, and every meal had been a festival, but because, while so living, he utterly ignored Lazarus, and used his wealth only for his own gratification. Nothing more needs to be said about his character; the facts sufficiently show it.

Still less needs to be said about that of Lazarus. In this part of the narrative he comes into view simply as the means of bringing out the rich man's heartlessness and self-indulgence. For the purposes of the narrative his disposition was immaterial; for it is not our duty to help only deserving or good people. Manhood and misery are enough to establish the right to sympathy and succour. There may be a hint of character in the name Lazarus, which probably means God is help. Since this is the only name in the parables, it is natural to give it significance, and it most likely suggests that the beggar clung to God as his stay. It may glance, too, at the riddle of life, which often seems to mock trust by continued trouble. Little outward sign had Lazarus of divine help, yet he did not cast away his confidence. No doubt, he sometimes got some crumbs from Divestable, but not from Dives. That the dogs licked his sores does not seem meant as either alleviation or aggravation, but simply as vividly describing his passive helplessness and utterly neglected condition. Neither he nor any one drove them off.

But the main point about him is that he was at Divesgate, and therefore thrust before Divesnotice, and that he got no help. The rich man was not bound to go and hunt for poor people, but here was one pushed under his nose, as it were. Translate that into general expressions, and it means that we all have opportunities of beneficence laid in our paths, and that our guilt is heavy if we neglect these. The poor ye have always with you. The guilt of selfish use of worldly possessions is equally great whatever is the amount of possessions. Doing nothing when Lazarus lies at our gate is doing great wickedness. These truths have a sharp edge for us as well as for the Pharisees who were covetous; and they are woefully forgotten by professing Christians.

**II.** In the second part of the narrative, our Lord follows the two, who had been so near each other and yet so separated, into the land beyond the grave. It is to be especially noticed that, in doing so, He adopts the familiar Rabbinical teaching as to Hades. He does not thereby stamp these conceptions of the state of the dead with His assent; for the purpose of the narrative is not to reveal the secrets of that land, but to impress the truth of retribution for the sin in question. It would not be to a group of Pharisaic listeners that He would have unveiled that world.

He takes their own notions of it--angel bearers, Abraham's bosom, the two divisions in Hades, the separation, and yet communication, between them. These are Rabbisfancies, not Christ's revelations. The truths which He wished to force home lie in the highly imaginative conversation between the rich man and Abraham, which also has its likeness in many a Rabbinical legend.

The difference between the ends of the two men has been often noticed, and lessons, perhaps not altogether warranted, drawn from it. But it seems right to suppose that the omission of any notice of the beggar's burial is meant to bring out that the neglect and pitilessness, which had let him die, left his corpse unburied. Perhaps the dogs that had licked his sores tore his flesh. A fine sight that would be from the rich man's door! The latter had to die too, for all his purple, and to be swathed in less gorgeous robes. His funeral is mentioned, not only because pomp and ostentation went as far as they could with him, but to suggest that he had to leave them all behind. His glory shall not descend after him.

The terrible picture of the rich man's torments solemnly warns us of the necessary end of a selfish life such as his. The soul that lives to itself does not find satisfaction even here; but, when all externals are left behind, it cannot but be in torture. That is not drapery. Character makes destiny, and to live to self is death. Observe, too, that the relative positions of Dives and Lazarus are reversed--the beggar being now the possessor of abundance and delights, while the rich man is the sufferer and the needy.

Further note that the latter now desires to have from the former the very help which in life he had not given him, and that the retribution for refusing succour here is its denial hereafter. There had been no sharing of good thingsin the past life, but the rich man had asserted his exclusive rights to them. They had been thy good thingsin a very sinful sense, and Lazarus had bean left to carry his evil things alone. There shall be no communication of good now. Earth was the place for mutual help and impartation. That world affords no scope for it; for there men reap what they have sown, and each character has to bear its own burden.

Finally, the ineffaceableness of distinctions of character, and therefore of destiny, is set forth by the solemn image of the great gulf which cannot be crossed. It is indeed to be remembered that our Lord is speaking of the intermediate state, before resurrection and final judgment, and that, as already remarked, the intention of the narrative is not to reveal the mysteries of the final state. But still the impression left by the whole is that life here determines life hereafter, and that character, once set and hardened here, cannot be cast into the melting-pot and remoulded there.

**III.** The last part of the narrative teaches that the fatal sin of heartless selfishness is inexcusable. The rich man's thought for his brethren was quite as much an excuse for himself. He thought that, if he had only known, things would have been different. He shifts blame from himself on to the insufficiency of the warnings given him. And the two answers put into Abraham's mouth teach the sufficiency of Moses and the prophets, little as these say about the future, and the impossibility of compelling men to listen to a divine message to which they do not wish to listen.

The fault lies, not in the deficiency of the warnings, but in the aversion of the will. No matter whether it is Moses or a spirit from Hades who speaks, if men do not wish to hear, they will not hear. They will not be persuaded--for persuasion has as much, or more, to do with the heart and inclination than with the head. We have as much witness from heaven as we need. The worst man knows more of duty than the best man does. Dives is in torments because he lived for self; and he lived for self, not because he did not know that it was wrong, but because he did not choose to do what he knew to be right.