



There are many who believe and teach that the Rich Man and Lazarus is literal and Jesus uses the story to warn us about Hell Fire. Others firmly believe the story is a parable and the characters and events described are fictional, but Jesus warns about something else. What does the Bible indicate. Is the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus literal, or is it a parable/

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in

torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”—[Luke 16:19-31 NIV](#)

[Luke 16:19-31](#) is a parable. Parables are not meant to be understood as actual events.

“All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables” ([Matthew 13:34 NAB](#)). Jesus never spoke to the crowds without using parables.

“Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men . . . ” ([Luke 16:14,15 LSB](#)). The Pharisees were in the crowd that Jesus was speaking to.

[Luke 16:19-31](#) is widely acknowledged to be a parable:

“This phrase introduces a parable told by Jesus, often referred to as ‘The Rich Man and Lazarus’. . . The parable serves as a critique of those who prioritize worldly pleasures over compassion and righteousness”—Bible Hub Study Bible note on [Luke 16:19](#)

“The parable of the rich man and Lazarus again illustrates . . . Jesus’ attitude toward the rich and the poor”—NAB note on [Luke 16:19-31](#)

“The dead do not know anything . . . there is no working or explaining or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol” ([Ecclesiastes 9:5,10 LSB](#)). Those who are dead don’t know anything, nor can they do anything. Thus, the rich man having knowledge and carrying on a conversation cannot be literal.

Some admit the parable is not literal, and then contradict themselves by claiming that those in Hades can literally do something. The problems with that are multiple, such as . . .

1. Is heaven literally Abraham’s bosom? (**v 22**).
2. Jesus said, **“no one has ever gone into heaven” ([John 3:13 NIV](#))**. He wouldn’t contradict himself by teaching someone (Lazarus) had gone to heaven.
3. Abraham was one who **“died in faith, without receiving the promises” ([Hebrews 11:13 LSB](#))**, so he could not have been in heaven when Jesus spoke the parable.
4. Those in Hades can literally see into heaven (**v 23**), contradicting the truth that the dead don’t know anything ([Ecclesiastes 9:5,10](#))
5. Those in Hades can literally converse with Abraham, and/or God (**vv 24-31**), contradicting the fact that the dead can’t do anything ([Ecclesiastes 9:5,10](#)).

6. Someone in heaven could travel to visit someone who is roasting in Hell Fire.
7. Water on the tip of someone’s finger could could lessen the intense flames of Hell Fire.