

## **‘Comforted ... tormented’**

In Luke 16 we read Jesus’ account of the rich man: ‘there was a certain rich man’, and Lazarus: ‘and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus’: actual people – this is not a parable. The striking thing about the language Jesus uses is its succinctness: he describes briefly the character of the two men’s experiences in life, records the plain fact that they both alike died, and gives minimal descriptions of their present situations. Therefore the Saviour needed only to use few words to convey profound truths regarding life, death, and the eternal state.

In looking at this passage – which is part of the doctrine of Christ – we can examine ourselves as to where we really stand in life and can judge what our experience will be after death, simply by comparing ourselves with these two men. For you must realise that the ‘rich man’ and the ‘beggar’ represent the only two types of people in the world – spiritually considered, and if you can discern which you are now, then you will know what awaits you after you die.

Then please do read carefully and judge yourselves righteously in the light of the doctrine of the gospel.

I write this in the context of the death of a loved one: someone who lived a long life and who had a relatively sudden end. Much comment has been made to me regarding her length of days – 34,027 to be precise, Psalm 90:12 – but little if anything has been said about the fact that ‘the end’ has been reached and that if she died without Christ – in the fulness of what that means – then the great span of her life will have been nothing to marvel at.

All this has caused me to ponder afresh ‘the end’ of things; for the end is the everlasting state: it comes to us all. Therefore it should be our most important consideration in this life, far above and beyond the fulfilment of all our ambitions, etc. Consider for a moment the following words from Psalm 37: ‘Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off’, verses 37,38. Notice how these characters have an ‘end’: of the one it is ‘peace’; of the others it is ‘destruction’ and a ‘cutting off’.

The wise man spoke similarly when he said, ‘There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness’, Prov. 14:12,13, ‘the end’, ‘the end’. Now although in these verses it is not necessarily the end in death which is being alluded to, yet it is still evident that the scriptures are forward in reminding men and women – and the young also, cp. Ecclesiastes chapters 7 and especially 11:7-12:14 – to consider their latter end, Deut. 32:29, Prov. 19:20,21. Every time I hear on the news that some famous person has died, and listen to equally famous people eulogising them, I think, ‘Yes, but what are they thinking now for all their fame; probably most are shouting out in horror, ‘Stop! Don’t ‘celebrate’ my life, it was all vanity and lies...!’ Famous or not, our end will come too, and then where will we be? My departed loved one has now come to her end: and what is that end? According to the Lord Jesus it is either ‘comfort’ or ‘torment’.

But to judge ourselves in this matter – and it is vitally important that we do judge ourselves – we will look at the two men Jesus described: the rich man and the beggar named Lazarus.

### **The Rich Man**

The rich man in this account is a man with no name – he is not recorded in heaven: in the book of life. The beggar has a name though: Lazarus’ name has been written in that book from the foundation of the world, Rev. 17:8, he having been known to the Lord and chosen in Christ from all eternity, Eph. 1:4. But not the rich man; for all those that are ‘known’ of the Lord are brought to ‘know’ him in this life, John 17:3; 1 John 5:20, and there is no evidence – of course there is no evidence – that the rich man ever knew his Creator. No, all he knew was ‘the good things’ of this life and he was quite content with them. Because he was rich in this world’s goods he had no need – so he thought – of knowing the God of eternity, and therefore had no need to consider seriously his latter end.

But the man was a fool; ‘for what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?’ *in the end!* Luke 9:25. What advantage to the rich man now in his torments; what good, what profit does he now think all his riches, finery and feasting were to him when ‘the end’ has turned out to be so horrendous? If only we would look beyond this brief moment of time we call ‘our lives’ to ‘the end’: to the ultimate reality.

But let us have a look at what made this man rich, and why he thought those 'riches' were all and sufficient; and in the light of it let us see if we too have riches and are likewise content in them. We are told what his riches were: he 'was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day', Luke 16:19; he 'received his good things' in his life, verse 25; he owned a house, verse 20; had a large immediate family: 'five brethren', verse 28; and perhaps most importantly of all, he had access to the writings of 'Moses and the prophets', verse 29.

And what of us today? I read once a statistic which said that if we have the financial means to house ourselves – either by renting or buying – and feed ourselves adequately; if we are relatively healthy and have ready access to good health care; if we can read and write sufficiently to enable us to make our way in this world; and if our income generally exceeds our normal 'cost of living', then we are in the top eight percent – 8% – of the world's richest people! And considering also the benefits of living in a 'social security' society then this figure must apply to just about everyone living in 'the West' today: therefore we are rich!

What is more many of us have the added means to be 'clothed in purple and fine linen', and to 'fare sumptuously' at least three times every day. That is, we can have a varied wardrobe; can dress seasonably, or for the occasion – even though at times we cry in exasperation that 'I have nothing to wear!'; and we all have access to supermarkets which stock the widest variety of foodstuffs – both necessary and indulgent – to cater for what we feel like eating at any given time. Also if we are 'too tired to cook' then we can visit any number of eating establishments who will 'do all the hard work for us' while we just sit there waiting to be fed – either cheaply or finely. And between meals we can always nibble something to 'keep us going' till tea-time. This is being 'clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day'.

Moreover there are other things we can readily enjoy above and beyond mere 'food and raiment'. As the rich man in his lifetime received his good things so we are able to avail ourselves of just about anything our hearts immediately desire. Our homes can be furnished with all and more than we need; we can mix and match; rip out the old and replace with the latest styles when we get tired or 'bored' with what we had before. We can have our hobbies and

pastimes, indulge our interests; enjoy our trips out, and our holidays: ‘where shall we go this year, dear, home or abroad?’ There seems to be no end to the latest gadgets – phones, pads, tablets, etc. – that we must acquire for ourselves or for our children – for us to ‘keep up with the world’; well, we can afford it all, or can afford the repayments on the loans we have to take out to have these things. And the list of ‘good things’ goes on.

We can afford various insurance policies just in case of ‘misfortune’ or the unforeseen. So we can insure our lives, our health, our holidays, and even our pets. We can ‘put something aside for a rainy day’ – what, for when it rains fire and brimstone from heaven?! – well, not that, but at least for our old age: a private pension plan and a lump sum upon retirement, so that we can continue to have security and enjoy our ‘good things’ into old age. Moreover when we are feeling a little generous, or when our uneasy consciences prick us, then we can let fall ‘a few crumbs’ from our ‘table’ to aid the poor or ‘less fortunate’ in the world who will be so grateful for our spare cash, spare time, or our throw-away clothing or goods which we don’t want any more. Well, look how little it costs us to benefit them so much! cp. Mark 12:41-44.

But let us not think that these are the characteristics of the irreligious only, for remember, this rich man, like his brethren, also had ‘Moses and the prophets’ – in other words, the scriptures freely available to be read and obeyed. And no doubt being Jews they were familiar with them, revered them, and heard them read regularly at the synagogue, and did, to some degree, conform to their precepts and commandments – so long as they didn’t interfere too much with their life of acquiring and enjoying their ‘good things’. But notice how Abraham in verse 29 says of the rich man’s brethren, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them *hear* them’, not just *read* them. Thus the father of the faithful exposes the typical attitude of the religious who are devoid of true saving faith: they never ‘hear’ the scriptures though they might read them and even ‘believe’ them. But ‘faith cometh by *hearing*’ specifically, and ‘hearing by the word of God’ – the spoken word; whereas false, presumptuous ‘faith’ can be acquired any number of ways in an outward Christian profession.

So this rich man can be seen to have been someone who was not necessarily devoid of religion, even of the religion of Jehovah; but he nevertheless remains in torments to this day.

Thus we have gradually begun to realise that riches in themselves do not consign those who have them to everlasting torments, it is our attitude towards them which exposes the state of our hearts, and hence gives us an inkling as to what our end might be. And this is a great gospel principle. Money is not the root of all evil, the *love* of money is. Those who are rich in this life – as we all are to a degree – are not automatically condemned in the world to come because we possess them; Jesus never said that it was impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, but ‘how hard it is’ for him to do so, Mark 10:23. Why? Because it is likely that he is ‘trusting’ in those riches, verse 24; because ‘they that will – desire to – be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some have coveted after, they have erred – or been seduced – from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God [Timothy], flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life...’, 1 Tim. 6:6-12.

Notice here the prime fruit of coveting and pursuing wealth in this world is that we will be seduced from the faith, and leanness will be sent into our souls, cp. Psalm 106:10-15. And notice also how Paul didn’t exhort Timothy to follow after *poverty* in light of the fact that the love of money was the root of all evil and a snare; for as we will go on to discover, Lazarus didn’t receive comfort after his death simply because he was an actual beggar in this world. No, riches in themselves are not evil as such, it’s when our hearts are set on them; when we become dependant upon them; when we become used to them and take them for granted – or even as our right, that the subtle snare comes and we loose sight – at least – of the Hand which has bestowed them upon us for the time being.

Paul later tells Timothy to ‘charge them that are rich in this world’ – that is, those in the church who possess worldly riches – not to get rid of them because they are God’s children, but to use their riches wisely and to the benefit of others: ‘that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate’, or share – in accordance with Matt. 6:1-4 of course; because it is God who has given these things to them so that they might ‘richly enjoy them’. And what better way to ‘enjoy’ your wealth as a child of God than to use that wealth for the good of others; especially the

household of faith – even as it was from the beginning, Acts 2:44,45, 1 Tim. 6:17-19.

We must remember also that there are many people who hear the word of the kingdom and receive it with joy; but when tribulation and persecution arise because of the word, they are at length offended and fall away. And what is one of those things that offends them? What gives them tribulation and persecution? Why, their own hearts are offended when the doctrine of the gospel declares that they cannot serve God and mammon – riches; that they are called to deny themselves in this world and to take up the daily cross if they would be Jesus' disciples; and how hard that is; and how quickly they perceive that the axe must be laid to the root of their natural love for the world and the things – the good things – of the world; it is then the offence comes; called 'the offence of the cross' – in the fullness of the meaning of that phrase, cp. 1 Cor. 1:23, Matt. 19:16-30, Luke 9:23,24, 14:27.

But then there are those who likewise hear the word, and the care of this world, *and the deceitfulness of riches*, choke the word, and they become unfruitful – no fruit of the Spirit is seen in them, for he does not dwell in them. These are 'they that would be rich...'

Furthermore, there are those with a profession of the name of Christ – who appear to be part of the body of Christ – but who in time reveal what they really are. Paul writes: 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things', *whose mind is on earthly things*, Phil. 3:18,19. Do you see where the desires of their hearts really lie? Do you see what reigns on the seat of their affections, even though they might apparently be part of the body, the church? 'Earthly things'. 'Thy good things'. Paul's 'set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth' is anathema to them, showing that they have no real union with Christ at all, Col. 3:1-4.

Yes, their 'riches' hold their hearts captive even with a profession of the Lord upon their lips. So their end will be torments, unless they repent.

In relation to this the next thing we can say about the rich man – and those like him – is that having received all his good things in his lifetime he could

therefore be said to have ‘gained the whole world’, Matt. 16:26. Though in the West there are differing levels of wealth accumulation amongst us, it is all still only relative. Therefore compared to the vast majority of people living in ‘the third world’ even a ‘poor’ Englishman in his two-up, two-down terraced house; with his low-paid job, small car, and two-week holiday to the sea every year, is still ‘rich’ if he is satisfied with his lot. If he wants for nothing, is settled into his secure routine of ‘life’, then he can be said to have ‘gained the whole world’ just as much, and perhaps even more so than the very rich man with his mansions, yachts, Swiss bank accounts, favourable connections, and playboy lifestyle. For the fact is that the latter will probably always be looking for ‘just a little bit more’ to make him ‘happy’; but not the former; for the ‘world’ that he has ‘gained’ is all and sufficient to his limited expectation.

So let us not think that this rich man who is now in torments is so vastly different to us. We are all like him to a degree – but that degree is potentially a very dangerous degree because it could be leading us into the flames. So as we now come to look at the beggar – Lazarus by name – and if we would have his end, then we must see in ourselves and in our experience a great degree of similarity with him.

## **The Beggar**

There are three things to note about the beggar: that he in his lifetime received evil things; that he is now found in Abraham’s bosom; and that he is comforted. And of course these are all related.

We have already commented that the beggar is named by the Lord Jesus: the Saviour knew Lazarus as one of his own, John 10:14; had called him by name, John 10:3; kept him safe in his hand, and had given unto him eternal life, John 10:27,28. Now although we read of Lazarus being comforted after death, despite outward appearances he had known comfort in his life also, for God says only of his people, ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people...’, Isa. 40:1; and in verse two God commands ‘speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.’ Thus Lazarus, despite the fact that he had been a poor man in this world’s goods, had actually been ‘poor in spirit’ as well, which was a blessed poverty – and the two don’t always go together, Matt. 5:3.

In this life he had needed comforting because of his sins; because of his felt enmity with God which was at one time destroying him; and because of his iniquities which had reached up to heaven. Lazarus had been lost; had been a servant of sin; had been condemned under the law; had been without faith; and had therefore needed a Saviour to come to end the warfare, pardon his iniquity, and cover abundantly and totally all his sins. Such a Saviour was Jesus Christ the Son of God. His work upon the cross – his broken body and shed blood – was to bring redemption, forgiveness and justification to the spiritually poor man Lazarus, and in time he had been given faith by God to look to that finished work as all his expectation, hope and salvation; which, of course brought him that comfort of which Isaiah spoke. Thereafter it could be said of him that he was a child of Abraham – in whose bosom he is now comforted – because he was found in the way of faith, cp. Gal. 3:6-9, John 8:31-44.

In the light of that, what were the ‘evil things’ Lazarus endured in his lifetime which resulted in him now receiving comfort? Well it was not because he had been a beggar, found day by day at the gate of a rich man hoping for a few scraps of nourishment; nor was it because he was full of sores; neither was it for having to suffer the ignominy of dogs licking those sores – I don’t know if that would have been beneficial to him or not; and it wasn’t because of his probable lameness – as one who had to be ‘laid’ at the gate. No, Lazarus’ ‘evil things’ were the hardships he endured through loving and standing for the truth of the gospel; through following Christ, which meant taking up the cross and denying self; through suffering his affliction patiently rather than making a noise about his lack of ‘state aid’ and ‘human rights’. His evil things came upon him through suffering the loss of all things for Christ, and being hated of all men for Christ’s sake; through being spoken well of by few; suffering persecution because he lived godly in Christ Jesus; and through being at times chastened of the Lord and scourged of Him because He loved him.

Perhaps these things can best be summed up in this one verse: ‘We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God’, Acts 14:22; or in this word of the Lord Jesus: ‘in this world ye will have tribulation...’, John 16:33. Yet again this tribulation is not referring to the general trials that all humans go through in this world: family problems; financial problems; health problems, etc.; no, these are the tribulations, trials and temptations

peculiar to those who are in the faith; who are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; who are hearing Christ's voice and following him whithersoever he is leading; and who are discerning the will of the Father and doing it – despite the cost to self, Matt. 7:21.

These are the sheep who, because they stand firm in the truth of the doctrine of the gospel, suffer persecution, opposition, ostracism, enmity and hatred from those who obey not the gospel, and whose hearts are gone after the 'good things' of this world: i.e. from the goats. But the goats at whose hands they suffer the most are those who think themselves sheep – Christ's sheep. They love Jesus, believe in him, live their lives for him, praise and worship him so easily and readily; and yet hate his doctrine; hate his discipline – negating, therefore, their claim to be disciples; are aliens to his correction and chastening; and despise the thought that they cannot somehow serve God *and* mammon while still arriving safely in glory at the end.

No, they really hate the truth of the gospel of Christ; loathe in their hearts – which loathing sometimes seeps out onto their otherwise smiley, 'loving', countenance – the true people of God: the beggars with a name; and they will not humble themselves, deny themselves, and abandon themselves, their lives, their thoughts or their things daily into the sovereign hands of Almighty God. So, despite all their religion – their comparatively easy religion in Jesus' name: a 'good thing' to them – when they come to die they will have *no need of comfort*. Why, they don't even look for it now, and have no longing for it because they aren't spiritual strangers and pilgrims among the people of the world. Therefore they never feel their need to enter into that rest which remaineth for the people of God; never feel the enmity of the flesh, to put it off and be clothed with a glorified body – except perhaps when they get old and naturally weary; and never really tire of this world, nor of the things of the world – except perhaps again in old age: in 'the evil days', Eccl. 12:1. So being relatively content in this life they never really long to depart and be with Christ which they feel will be far better; because they never really suffer because of sin, or temptations, nor at the hands of enemies of the truth; never, never, never experience anything particular to the true children of God in this world. So, unlike Lazarus, they will never be comforted. Then, they will be tormented; for that is the only other 'end', according to the Lord Jesus.

Now hear the sentence that many of them will receive from the judge of all the earth – Christ himself – on the coming day of judgment: ‘I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity’, Matt.7:21-23. Depart? But where? Into torments of course! ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment’, Matt. 25:41-46. ‘And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night’, Rev. 14:11. The torment is everlasting, for ever and ever, without rest, without let up, without intermission; for this torment occurs outside of the time state in eternity. Listen to the rich man crying; and listen to what you will be crying if you are like him now in character and die in the same state: ‘I am tormented in this flame!’ *And he is still crying it.*

Now, reader; now professing Christian; where are you found in all this? What is your experience in this life? Are you like the rich man, enjoying life with all your ‘good things’, accompanied by your constantly smiling saviour, and with little real trouble in your soul? If you are; if you are ‘finding’, ‘saving’ and ‘loving’ your life day by day – in other words, if you are always insisting on having your own way – then you will lose it for ever in torments, Matt. 10:39, Mark 8:35, John 12:25. But if you are like Lazarus: poor in spirit but rich in faith; a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth; an alien in this world and even in your own family, Psalm 69:8, Mark 10:29,30; one separated unto Christ and his gospel; one troubled with the workings of the flesh, with that ‘law in your members’ and with indwelling sin, Rom. 7:7-23; one vexed with the enmity of the goats – especially those ‘Christian’ goats; then you have the prospect of comfort at the end – oh, how you need comforting – you will rest in Abraham’s bosom and will be for ever with the Lord.

Judge yourselves. Time is so short, life is so fleeting and full of vanity; eternity is so long. The wide gate of false conversion and the broad way of presumption which leadeth to destruction is so easy and straightforward – many are found on that way. Light, happy – though at times sincere – Christianity is so popular, and so comfortable to the flesh and to the deceived mind; but what a dreadful end it brings: ‘destruction’, Matt. 7:13,14. Judge yourselves. What are your ‘good things’? Are they Christ’s things only? Or are they your things? Phil. 2:21. Are you suffering affliction with the people of God for the truth’s sake, or are you enjoying the pleasures of sin? – including religious sin like hypocrisy, the forms of godliness without the power, and the honouring of God with the lips while the heart remains happily far from

him – and, yes, these can prove very pleasurable... until the end comes. Are you suffering – or are you prepared to suffer – the loss of all things for Christ? If not, you will suffer the loss of all your things without Christ in everlasting torments.

For it came to pass that, in the end, ‘the rich man died, and was found in hell’.

Then do judge yourselves. Judge yourselves. Why won’t you judge yourselves?

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*(This article originally ended there, but then I got taken up with the following ‘afterthought’; it made me tremble to write it, and makes me tremble to read it back.)*

### **‘Comforted’**

In this account of ‘the end’ of Lazarus Abraham says that ‘he is comforted’. Nowhere here is Lazarus recorded as saying anything, it is what he’s experiencing that matters. Comfort is a known experience: an actual state which one feels; therefore after death – the death of the body – those who are then found residing in Abraham’s bosom are actually aware of their continued existence. The same, of course, is true for those who are found in torments. Whereas once they were ‘in the body’: in the flesh, now, the spirit having departed the body, they still know and have feelings. Therefore death is not the end of the person but simply a translation from one realm to another. After we leave ‘time’ we enter ‘eternity’. Everyone who dies – regardless of the circumstances under which the heart stops beating and the life departs the body – immediately relocates their state of consciousness to a place out of the body. Yet they are still the same person, with the same mind and understanding of who they are and how they have lived their lives; only now that knowledge is acute: all those things long forgotten suddenly flood back into mind and are crystal clear in their memory.

But it must immediately be said that this ‘relocation of their state of consciousness... out of the body’ is nothing akin to the New Age thinking of moving onto a higher realm, ascending into a higher self, or returning in some sort of advanced reincarnated state. This translation into ‘the other

world' is a once only and final translation: that is, into either 'comfort' in heaven, or 'torment' in hell. And as it is appointed unto man once to die, and once only, Heb.9:27, then we do not 'come back', we 'cannot be found', and there is no 'second chance'. The spiritual state of our soul at death fixes our eternal state. Jesus tells us here that Lazarus died and was found in Abraham's bosom. Likewise the rich man died and was found in hell.

When the rich man starts calling out to Abraham in his torments the patriarch says very clearly that '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', Luke 16:26. The word 'fixed' here means something which stands established – it is firmly in place and cannot be moved or changed. So both men instantly arrived in places that are separated immutably: it was impossible thereafter for either to change their settled state.

You doubt it? Are you looking for some sort of transitory place after death where you can perhaps be purged from the residue of your sins before stepping up into heaven at last? Well, purgatory finds no place in the doctrine of Christ. If like the rich man you die without Christ then you will go straight into torments with no hope of remission. Just look at that word of Abraham in the verse quote above: '...cannot...' It is an absolute. When you arrive in eternity it will be impossible for your habitation to change... ever.

But we are considering the comfort of Lazarus. It is the only word used here to describe his experience in eternity. We have already looked at the poor man's experiences in this life which caused his needing comfort afterwards: it being only because his trials and tribulations were 'for Christ's' sake, not just because he was poor in this world. It is a sorry fact that millions of poor, destitute abjects live in this world who will find torments in the next because they live in their misery and die outside of Christ. 'Misfortune' in this life is no guarantee of rest and comfort in the next. No. People die solely because of sin: sin must pay its wage. The quality or otherwise of one's life 'in sin' is irrelevant. Poor miserable wretches, whose lives in this world were plagued by starvation, disease, hopelessness, despair, instability, lack of love, lack of opportunity; who were used and abused, exploited, enslaved and even brutally done away with in the end will go straight into more torments – torments that they had never known or even imagined – if they died without Christ. Hard as it may be able to stomach by those who have no love for the

truth of the gospel of Christ, this is the only judgment: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned' – *damned*, Mark 16:15,16. Those are the words of the Lord Jesus.

So Lazarus' comfort was not a 'pay back' for his horrible life: a rebalancing of things to 'make it fair'. No. Beware all you who think things must be fair in the end. God doesn't deal in 'fair', he deals in righteousness, truth, justice and holiness. If you are to find comfort in the end you must experience in this life suffering and tribulation as a result of having 'lived godly in Christ Jesus': for the gospel's sake, for Christ's sake: as a result of your walking in the narrow way of the few: in the way of the cross. What other life is there, spiritually considered, that could end in the receiving of comfort from the One for whom you have suffered these things?

Again, do you not like the sound of all this? Is it all a bit too 'harsh' for you? Well, contrary to popular belief, this world does not belong to man, and he does not set the rules. His thoughts, reasonings and judgments do not matter; he is not the final arbiter on what is right and wrong, on what is just and what isn't; and he is not the coming judge of all the earth. The gospel of Christ is not a series of general and vague ideas which the Saviour threw out at the beginning for man – religious man – to take up and develop into something believable and acceptable based on his own standards of wisdom, understanding and taste. No. This earth is the LORD's, *and* the fulness thereof. His commandments and judgments are the only ones which hold any weight in the court of heaven. He only has, and is, Wisdom. His word only stands. In fact, his word has been from all eternity; is, and always has been, 'settled in heaven' long before time and man came into being, and it will endure forever. Christ is the coming judge of all the earth and every man will be judged by his word. The gospel is his gospel, Rom. 1:16, which has been complete from the beginning and cannot be changed: added to, subtracted from, amended, or diluted without it being perverted and changed into 'another gospel'.

Lazarus, for all his temporal poverty, knew, believed and lived in the light of these truths – to his much tribulation: but now he is comforted. Another gospel was abhorrent to him. A gospel of the will of man, or of works for reward – even if it was believing for reward – was alien to the way he had been taught. His faith did not stand in the wisdom of men, and he didn't

trust man's interpretations of the words of God; he only ever found rest and comfort in the Scriptures if God himself had opened the true meaning of them to him by revelation. Salvation he knew to be of the Lord through and through, and even in his receiving mercy, knowledge of his own election of God, and revelation of the truth of the pure gospel into his heart, he never gloried in God's presence like the easy-believer does; never boasted in his acts of faith like the free-willer does; and never counted his obedience to the commandments of the Lord as anything other than 'unprofitable', which the Arminian never does. And among the religious generation in which he lived this caused poor Lazarus much opposition, ridicule, and hatred from them: but now – in the end – he is being comforted.

Lazarus' walk in this world had been characterised by his obedience to the doctrine of Christ, Rom. 6:17. He had taken up the cross of self-sacrifice daily in his following of the Saviour. This entailed hearing his voice often and obeying what he heard. Again, it meant discerning the will of the Father in any given situation and 'doing' that will regardless of what it cost him in the flesh, and regardless of what he might have liked to have done instead. Lazarus had known that because he had been – or was to be – 'bought' by Christ's blood, then he was no longer his own. His will, his desires, his lusts, were all to be 'crucified with Christ', and therefore he counted himself to be 'dead', with his life now 'hid with Christ in God'.

And how most of the professors of Jehovah around him hated that doctrine! As they still do today. But surely, they argue, we now have liberty! We can freely praise, worship and rejoice in our God! Jesus loves us and has forgiven all our sins past, present and future. Our faith and our full assurance guarantees us heaven at last. We are secure in God's hand and nothing we can do now will ever cause us to be plucked out of that hand – hallelujah! So long as we live now in a cleaner way than we did before we 'believed', then everything will be all right 'in the end'. Any doubts we might have regarding our salvation are only attacks of the devil which we easily dismiss with a quoting of our favourite promises. Yes, there is a wonderful victory and assurance to this Christian life, and people like Lazarus who come along from time to time, trying to undermine our faith with questions regarding our assurance, or by quoting Bible verses about self-examination or warnings to the presumptuous – which don't apply to us – just fill us with rage. Therefore we argue against these miseries with 'the authority of the Bible'

and when they shake the dust off their feet against us in their judgmental pride and walk away, we just say 'good riddance' to them in our hearts.

But for all their 'faith', Lazarus is now comforted, and *they* are, and will be, tormented.

Oh, what comforts Lazarus now feels! He has been taken out of the world at last – fully: out of that world which lieth in wickedness, vanity and lies. He has been released from the influence and enmity of false religion – especially from that which is practised in Jesus' name. He has been finally and eternally separated from all contact with the goats – what comfort! The flesh – his own flesh – which so often rose up in enmity against the right way will trouble him no more. He will never again suffer at the hands of a subtle deceiving devil who was always seeking to turn him from the narrow way into the accommodation of the flesh and of 'self'. He has finally been rescued from the vicious attacks of that same Satan: whose accusations harassed, whose insinuations harangued, and whose lies caused endless fears – none of which ever materialised. He has been liberated from the workings of a lustful mind, from an often lethargic will, and from the law in his corrupt members which constantly seemed to war against the law of his mind – for he did have the mind of Christ – which brought him so often into captivity to the law of sin which, although it had been put away by Christ, still dwelt in his members. Lazarus had known and mourned over the fact that when he would do good evil was present with him; and when he found himself doing that which he did not really desire to do he knew that it was no longer him that fell into it, and did it, but sin that dwelt in him.

Needless to say this caused the poor man many tears, not a little heaviness in mind and spirit, and caused much crying to the Lord to save him out of them: indeed, his often cry was, 'Lord, save me from this hour', as well as, 'O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.' And when sometimes he related these things to those others who said they 'loved Jesus', he more often than not... usually... always! got a quick rebuff for being 'faithless', constantly having 'wonderful' texts quoted at him to cheer him up. All this, of course, just added to his pain. But now, at long last, he is comforted completely.

But before that the time had arrived for Lazarus to die. And for some of that time when he knew his end was near his strength and hope left him. For a child of God; for one in the faith; it seemed strange to those others at

synagogue that he was often 'in trouble'; *they* were never in trouble, Psalm 73:1-5. Lazarus was no presumer, you see. He knew the enmity of the flesh, the corruption of his heart, the oppression of temptation, and the assaults of the enemy of his soul. These others would live and die in full assurance; marching triumphantly to the gates of heaven with no doubts or fears. But that was because Satan was not their enemy; and so he would never attack them at the eleventh hour as he does Christ's sheep. But then, in the end, Lazarus does breathe his last, the enemy can do no more, and comfort comes. But they, for all their 'blessed assurance' till the end – who die peaceably – are tormented.

Comfort is that which brings all sighing and tears to an end. Comfort soothes bruised spirits. Comfort brings an end to the life of faith, and endurance. Comfort fully satisfies and justifies hope. Comfort follows great tribulation. Comfort fulfils desperate longings. Comfort is the end of experiencing 'evil things'. Comfort is accompanied with rest, and peace, and joy, and amazement, and wonder, and thanksgiving, and gratitude, and real praise and worship. Comfort is the fulfilment of grace, and mercy, and election, and redemption, and justification, and sanctification, and every exhaustive part of the doctrine of the gospel of Christ. Comfort is experienced, rejoiced in and dwelt in... for ever. The God of all comfort who spoke so comfortably to his people in their lives here on earth, consummates his relationship with his bride – his people – in comforting their hearts in his presence for ever.

### **'Tormented'**

But relatively few find this comfort. In Matthew 7:14 Jesus calls this place of comfort 'life': 'and few there be that find it.' A little later he calls it 'the kingdom of heaven'; but not every one that calls him Lord will enter into it. No, for most – the 'many' in comparison to the 'few' in Matthew 7:13,14 must be the most – with a Christian profession will find no comfort when they die, but torments only. They will be tormented in the flame of hell.

To be tormented is to be troubled. They had experienced little or no real trouble in this life amidst the enjoyment of all their 'good things', so now trouble is theirs. Why? Because sin specifically was not a trouble to them: well, after they'd easily 'believed' in their youth their lying Sunday School teachers and false preachers assured them that sin was now more or less gone and forgotten. Every time thereafter they 'did something wrong' they

simply had to say a prayer for forgiveness to receive instant pardon: so they went on throughout their lives until the end. Therefore it had been a trouble-free life of faith! But sin troubles them now; because one thing they failed to realise was that God never actually answered and spoke pardon to them, they took it presumptuously for themselves from the Bible, claiming promises which didn't apply to them.

Torment is tribulation. Their trials in this life had been the same as were common to all who are born in sin. The fact that they said prayers to their God when these tribulations came upon them and – amazingly – those trials subsided shortly afterwards – with strengthened faith and peace of mind – didn't negate the fact that never once were their tribulations because of obedience to Christ's commandments. So now they receive tribulation.

But this tribulation is also theirs because they troubled the people of God – the saints. In this we are reminded that this torment is suffered at the hands of God himself, for Paul writes to the Thessalonians: 'Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you', 2 Thes. 1:4-6. 'Inasmuch as ye did it to one of these – the least of my brethren – ye did it unto me', Matt. 25:40-46. Beware, then, how you treat those who tell you these truths.

Torment is pain. Again they may have suffered pain in this world: medical pain; the pain of heartbreak or lost love; the pain of disappointment or unfulfilled desire; the pain felt as the result of sin and self-centredness. But they never felt the pain of spiritual starvation at the hands of false, dead, dry preachers. Never felt the pain of wandering in a solitary way devoid of the love and fellowship of other sheep – wherever they might be. Never felt the pain brought about by seeing those who said they were Christians being satisfied with vain, light, fleshly religion, while shunning and caring nothing for the true gospel of Christ. They never felt the pain of a longing soul to hear from their Lord words of eternal life spoken by revelation into their hearts. No. Never experienced pain on the broad way: well, it is a pain-free way after all. But now in the end they have the pain of torment.

Again we can look at Asaph's revelation of 'the end' of the ungodly: while speaking with his Lord about these wicked he suddenly realised, 'Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.

How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors', Psalm 73. Utterly consumed with terrors!

So torment brings fear. Now they fear. They'd had no fear of the Lord in their lives, and they did not fear – barely believed in – the judgment to come; but now they are experiencing that judgment at the hands of the hitherto ignored God; so fear is now their meat 'day and night' – perpetually, proving the scripture to be true: 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God', Heb. 10:31. Added to that they fear for others also: 'Send Lazarus to my brethren that he may testify to them lest they come into this place of torment!' But no. The fear – the horror – is that the warning will never be heard; because those who are being comforted never go back to 'tell how it is on the other side', and so the fear is a dread and a frustration that nothing can now be done from the place of torment to warn those loved ones still alive who are happy to go on living in contradiction of the truth.

Fear hath torment. A fear arises with the realisation that 'the end' has come and is fixed. In an instant this fear teaches that all the good things enjoyed in life were vanity and less than vanity. It shows that those things cannot now be seen to have been merely a waste of time but a hindrance. They were a lie. They said, 'All this is worthwhile; beneficial; to be valued'; but they proved to be the opposite. They deceived and deviated the mind, heart and soul from the supreme occupation of man: to turn from a life of rebellion and self-indulgence to seek the Lord; to consider eternity; to number the days of our lives; to redeem the time and follow the voice of conscience; to believe in and seek to flee the judgment to come; to have an eye – nay, both eyes – on our latter end; on 'the end'.

But none of these things were done – none were even sought. And what fear this now brings. The fear of righteous judgment. The fear of constant torment because of rebellion. Fear born of the despair that there is no hope of let up. And this fear is an eternal fear; that is, it is a fear experienced outside of time. So it is a constantly experienced fear, a fear lived in the eternal moment of now. This fear won't wane; it will not diminish or become more bearable 'with time', or 'through experience'. For this fear is now: and now constantly. Just think of those moments in life when you are the most afraid; just that first moment when the rush of fear comes into the mind, senses and bowels. Well, capture that moment and live in it constantly, with no remission, and then realise something of what this torment is to be like.

Torment is regret. Jesus speaks three times of the worm – the maggot – that never dies, Mark 9:43-48. This is the gnawing sensation of regret and remorse – but not repentance – for things done and said which cannot now be reversed. The agony of the sleepless night, the tossing and turning, the ringing of hands, the cries and tears, the torment! born of ‘if only I hadn’t...’ But you did. And you did it a million times in your short life. Every act of rebellion; each moment lived in unbelief; each word, thought and inclination of contention against the truth: every single idle – spiritually unprofitable – word uttered; each one is a worm which will burrow into your tormented body and mind, reminding you constantly of what you did, or what you didn’t do; of what you said; of what you thought; of what you imagined: over and over and over: ‘where their worm dieth not.’ This worm, this maggot, will never cease its work. It is an eternal worm which is never filled for all its consuming. The worm will just go on eating, go on gnawing away; ever busy; ever hungry; always finding fresh matter in mind, body and battered conscience to feed upon. And the torment is that this worm is *in* you.

Think of all those people who hear the truth of the gospel – like the reader is now – and yet they refuse it, disobey it, will not receive it, and contend against it. Well, they will remember that rebellion for all eternity. I often think of the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 10 where he says that it will be ‘more tolerable’ for the Sodomite in the day of judgment than it will be for these religious people who reject the true gospel, cp. verses 14,15. Yes, it will be more bearable for those who defile themselves with mankind than for those who profess the name of Christ but believe ‘another gospel’. Whereas the worm of the former will still have its work, the worm of the latter will be even busier in its tormenting gnawing; having even greater depths of sin and rebellion to bring to mind. You false, presumptuous, hypocritical Christians have been warned again.

Then torment is brought about by fire and burning. ‘I am tormented in this flame.’ Jesus taught constantly of those who would be cast into hell, into the fire, into the furnace of fire, into everlasting fire, into the fire that shall never be quenched, into hell fire (yes, Jesus was a ‘hell fire’ preacher, Matt. 18:9, etc.). John the Baptist likewise spoke of the chaff – actual people – burning with fire unquenchable, Matt. 3:12. Paul again to the Thessalonians wrote of the Lord Jesus himself taking vengeance ‘in flaming fire’ upon them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Thes.

1:7,8; after all, this torment is said to be suffered 'in the presence of the Lamb', Rev.14:9-11. Also in Revelation we read of 'the lake of fire and brimstone', and 'the lake of fire', while Jude had written of 'eternal fire', Jude 7. So let us not be in any doubt but that the doctrine of the gospel speaks readily about the existence of this fiery place of torment after death. (Actually the lake of fire spoken of in Revelation is that very final place of torment into which 'death and hell' will be cast after the day of judgment, Rev. 20:11-15.)

Therefore the main sensation in this fire is of being burnt – and it will be 100° burns – of being charred, scorched, blistered; in perpetuity. And what torment that must bring. But then there is the unbearable heat of the fire: as the rich man confessed: '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.' But there is to be no cooling sensation there; no drop of water will ever be given to quench – but for a moment – the dreadful thirst; for there is no water in hell. There is no dew; no mist; no condensation; no dampness at all. Not a drop of moisture can be wrung out of anywhere to cool the tongue: the only thing in this 'lake' is flames of fire: for ever; for the fire will never be quenched.

As well as heat the fire produces smoke: 'the smoke of their torment', Rev. 14:11. Smoke exacerbates the sensation of thirst because it is so drying. When in autumn you've got a good bonfire going you can put damp leaves on top which will dry out in the smoke so the flames can consume them. Smoke also dries and burns when it gets into the eyes and down the throat: drying, burning and tormenting.

And then, as well as all these sensations, there is the darkness. Those who find themselves in such a stifling situation at the end of their lives will experience darkness: well, they *had* loved darkness rather than light in this life, John 3:19, so now they have it to the full. But this darkness won't be like any darkness they'd known before; for this is 'outer darkness'; a place so dark that it could almost be described as being beyond darkness. This is a darkness which may be felt. In childhood we are afraid of the dark because we don't know what might be 'there' in the dark. Being in darkness means we cannot see. On earth we may at least be able to pick out shapes or forms in the dark, and in time our eyes adjust and we get used to the dark. And if we are blind or go blind then at least we are able to form images in our minds

based on memory or imagination causing us to 'see' to a degree. Again, our other senses might become heightened to compensate for our loss of vision so that 'a blind man can sometimes see better than a sighted man'. But not in outer darkness. There, there is no seeing at all; even the 'flames' give no light. All is dark; all is unknown – more fear; there is no perception of the surroundings which could perhaps give at least some vain hope of security – even for a moment.

But even this outer darkness – terrible as it is – does not come alone; for in the three times that the Lord Jesus mentions it – and he is the only one who does – he always couples it with 'weeping and gnashing of teeth', Matt. 8:12, 22:13, 25:30. Weeping is born of sorrow. This is the exact opposite of the experience of those who are comforted for eternity, for their previous tears have all been wiped away, Rev. 21:4. Weeping comes about because of the sorrow of remorse, loss, broken pride, and despair. Those weeping in eternity are suffering retribution because of rebellion; the wrath of God because of sin; unadulterated wrath from the Lamb. They are suffering 'indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish' because of contentiousness against and disobedience of the truth. All their fears are now coming upon them; for all their sins and iniquities they are receiving 'double'; they are weeping in torments and the weeping will never end. But no, not even then will tears roll down the cheeks onto the tongue to quench the thirst – that just doesn't happen in a place where there is *no comfort whatsoever*.

But this weeping is not a silent, private, stoical, weeping; this is an out and out wailing. This is tormented crying, full throated howling, and is accompanied by 'gnashing of teeth'. This is not just sorrow for sin, tears of regret, or a self-reprimanding because of stupidity. This is hatred towards God, against his Son, his truth, his gospel, cp. Acts 7:54, and against his righteous judgments unleashed. This is a wild fury at the Person of God and against all his attributes. Their love of darkness in life had been because their deeds were evil; but God – whose eyes are in every place and are as a flame of fire – had seen the evil they had committed; and now they hate him for it. They had believed the lie that they could be as gods – in control of their own lives – and now they hate and resent the fact that that was a lie, and that there was actually a true and living God apart from themselves who is now meeting out his vengeance upon their beloved rebellion. And they will scream their foul hatred against him for as long as they are in the dark, for as long as the flame torments, and for as long as the worm continues its work;

because contrary to the godless humour of the world: hell will never freeze over.

What a terrible state to be in, then; to be gnashing ones teeth for ever and ever. What pain, what fear, what torment, what terror, and still what risings up again of pride in the face of holy rendering must be present to cause unremitting anger from so miserable a wretch in such a dire situation. But such is the end of sin. Death is horrendous; this 'second death' which all out of Christ will experience for all eternity: a living, conscious, felt – highly felt – death. For the doctrine of the gospel is very clear: one is either 'in sin' when he dies, or he is 'in Christ'; and those in sin will go to hell; while those in Christ will go to heaven.

You don't believe it? You don't think 'a God of love' would mete out such vengeance upon the disobedient? Well, what does it matter what *you* think. The truth of the gospel stands without the opinion of fallen man. Perhaps you think all this has been too unremitting. Well, you had better get used to it. The word 'unremitting' describes the very essence of the experience of the place of torment – but, of course, you will never 'get used to it'. Or perhaps you stand back in your 'knowing' pride: full of the advanced 'wisdom' of this age and quietly chuckle to yourself to think that there are still some around who believe the 'out-dated' message of that dusty old Book; well, laugh on; enjoy your lives now; but be warned: 'Woe unto you that laugh now! Ye shall mourn and weep', 'ye *shall*', says your coming judge. Oh yes you will. Luke 6:25.

And a word to those who might like to wriggle out of their accountability upon reading this article with a quoting of the hymnwriter: 'Law and terrors do but harden... etc.' – and these people know who they are. But just remember this: the hymnwriter was wrong; *unbelief and rebellion* harden. The law has been designed by God to convict his people of their sin and lead them unto Christ; and terrors are designed to cause them to flee to Christ for salvation. But instead of being engaged in this work of the Lord you carelessly ape the words of the hymnwriter and sit back passively waiting for some imagined 'sense of blood-bought pardon' to dissolve your heart of stone; but until then you'll remain in 'unbelief and hardness of heart' by your own rebellion: and for that you can expect to be tormented, Psalm 95:7-11, Mark 16:14.

In the light of these things then, if you were to die tonight where would you be? In torments? Or would you be comforted? Do you care? Many don't care. If you don't, you will care when you are in the flames; but it'll be too late then. It is no wonder then that 'God now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained [Jesus Christ]; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead', Acts 17:22-31.

Heed the word. Heed the truth.

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'And [Jesus] lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

'Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

'But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.'

Luke 6:20-26.