

GOSPEL PEARLS

Hell is for the nameless

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Jesus said to the Pharisees: "There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'" (Luke 16: 19-31)

A noteworthy detail from the parable of Lazarus and the rich man is the fact that Lazarus, who is judged worthy of paradise, is mentioned by name. This is unlike the rich man who is condemned to hell and is not named by Jesus. This is the first lesson we may learn from the parable: those who are damned, even in this life, tend to lose their

identity by focusing their desires on earthly horizons. The rich man, once dead, recognizes Lazarus; when he was still alive indeed he had noticed Lazarus and as a man in need and yet looked the other way while distracted by other concerns. Loving our own wealth more than our own brothers and sisters is, therefore, sufficient cause for our damnation. Lazarus, on the other hand, in his suffering lashes out neither against the rich man nor against God. Because of this he is blessed to enter paradise. Who are we most like, Lazarus or the rich man? May we seek to be ever more like Lazarus by accepting God's will, even when it involves privation and suffering...for our reward in paradise is just a step away.