

In my previous post I summarized an Egyptian story about a rich man and a poor man who both die, with the poor man having a fantastic afterlife and the rich man suffering horrible torture. The poor man was righteous and so was rewarded, the rich man was a sinner and so was punished. Is that what the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16 is also all about - rewards for the righteous and punishment for the wicked? So that it's a story that tries to stress that you need to live a good life or you'll pay the consequences later?

It is indeed possible that this biblical story also contains an implicit teaching about righteous living. But since, unlike the Egyptian tale, this parable says nothing about sin and righteousness, some interpreters have suggested different ways of understanding it.

Maybe the problem with the rich man in Luke's parable is not that he is generally wicked, but that, more specifically, he hasn't used his wealth in order to help those who were poor. That would be suggested by the fact that Lazarus lay right outside the man's gate, starving to death, while the man feasted every day in great luxury. The man had no heart. In support of this view is the fact that the rich man knew all about famished Lazarus. When he is in Hades, he calls him by name.

Moreover, this understanding makes sense of the rest of the story. The rich man is clearly a Jew: he calls Abraham "father," and it is implied that he, like his brothers, should have paid attention to "Moses and the prophets." The Law of Moses tells people to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The rich man allowed Lazarus to starve to death when he easily could have done something about it.

Other scholars have argued a more ...

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