



Then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door. It came on through the heavy door, and a specter passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him! Marley's Ghost!"

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.

Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes; he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

In Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol, Jacob Marley died on Christmas Eve in 1836. Marley was sentenced to walk the earth for all eternity feeling an "incessant torture of remorse." He dragged a long, heavy chain that he forged by every selfish and callous decision he made. Marley lamented, "'I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free-will, and of my own free-will I wore it.'" As Scrooge observed, Marley's chain was made of "cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel"—all of the things he loved so dearly in life. While he lived he had surrounded himself with immense wealth but all the while he was continually indifferent to the suffering and needs of those around him.

A few weeks ago while I was reading the story of *The Rich Man and Lazarus* in the gospel of Luke, all of a sudden it hit me how close it is to Dickens' Christmas Carol. I saw many interesting parallels as well as relevance to us.

It does not seem that Dickens was a believer, though he thought very highly of Jesus. In his last will and testament, written in 1869, Dickens wrote, "I commit my soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there."¹

As I read the story, see if you can begin to see the parallels.

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. ^[a] The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Comparison #1—Parable or true story?

Obviously, Dickens' Christmas Carol is a piece of fiction but I am inclined to think that this story about Lazarus was either a true story or at least was based on a true story. Jesus does not normally give names to characters in his parables so this one stands out as different. It seems likely to me that Lazarus and the rich man were real people. It could be that that conversation between the rich man and Abraham was added to the story by Jesus, but we can't be sure. In a similar fashion, no doubt Dickens knew people just like Scrooge, Marley and the Cratchit family; a comparison between the super-rich and the working poor. It is a known fact that Dickens hated this kind of suffering. Whether Jesus' story was based on actual people or was just a parable like his others', the truth contained in the story is the same regardless. We can trust what it says, just like all of Jesus' teaching.

Comparison #2—The wealth and poverty of the main characters

Jacob Marley's life almost perfectly mirrors that of the rich man. Both were very wealthy and both completely ignored the poor. You could say that both despised the poor. And of course, Ebenezer Scrooge was following the exact pattern in life as that of his business partner. But since Jacob Marley is the character who died, he is main parallel to the rich man. I'm not sure if Dickens had this parable in mind when he wrote his story. Officially, he was a Unitarian but he did have great respect for Jesus and the New Testament so it's possible this parable was rumbling in his mind when he wrote A Christmas Carol. Some of the parallels are quite stunning.

Comparison #3—Death is final and the judgment is agonizing.

First, let me deal with Jacob Marley with a quote from him. Here's how he described his lot. "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!" First of all, he places the blame squarely on his own shoulders. He did not try to wiggle out of his fate or place blame on someone or something else. Second, his judgment seemed to be without end, like an eternal wandering of remorse. Most importantly, the death and judgment on Marley was final and irreversible. This is why he appeared to warn Scrooge of his impending judgment if he did not change his ways.

While there are some clear parallels here, obviously, the important story concerns the fate of the rich man. If you put all of the descriptions together, his judgment is quite clear.

- in Hades, being in torment—23
- in anguish in this flame—24
- begged for one drop of water to cool his tongue—24
- this place of torment—28
- between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'
- Summary: Eternal, conscious punishment

This is some of the clearest teaching on eternal conscious punishment in all of Scripture. One particularly horrendous part is that the rich man can compare his own fate with that of Lazarus. He is able to see what could have been if he had lived his life differently.

Notice that the rich man did not try to excuse his behavior or blame someone else or something else. If anyone would have ever complained about the unfairness or injustice of his circumstances, it would have been the rich man. But he didn't. He accepted as judgment that was due to him and his only concern was to warn his five brothers.

Comparison #4—Conversion of the main characters

Here is how the liberals interpret this amazing story. "The "moral of the story" seems clear -- rich people have their reward on earth and are punished in afterlife...and, conversely, poor people suffer on earth and are rewarded in the afterlife. In other words—rich people go to hell."²

This comes very close to what Dickens wanted to convey in his story. Here is one commentator's take on it.

The "salvation" of Scrooge comes not from an encounter with Christ, but an encounter with self. He displays the Dickensian view that salvation is achieved by loving your neighbor, giving a cup of water to those in need. The New Testament teaches that such acts are the result of spiritual conversion; for Dickens, they were the means.³

If you ripped this story out of context, you could make a case for this interpretation. At face value, it does seem to teach that wealth is evil and poverty is righteous. But if you rip Scripture out of context, you can make it say whatever you want it to say.

The immediate context would be Luke 15, which contains the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son. The father of the prodigal son was extremely wealthy, yet he was a very righteous man, who represented the mercy and forgiveness of our heavenly Father. Moreover, these parables clearly teach the necessity of repentance. “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). Joseph of Arimathea used his wealth to faithfully take care of Jesus’ body after his crucifixion. Jesus did teach that wealth can be a horrible hindrance to seeing our need for God but wealth by itself is not evil.

The rich man wasn’t lost because he had wealth, nor was Lazarus saved because he was poor. The rich man violated the first commandment. He did not love God or his neighbor. His actions were the fruit of his wicked heart that did not believe. His problem was not money but a lack of faith. The “moral of the story” is the same that all of Scripture teaches—death is final and the judgment is agonizing. And the only way to escape this final judgment is to repent of your sins and place your faith in Christ alone. It’s just that simple.

Comparison #5—The impact of ghosts and resurrections on the living.

In Dickens’ story, Scrooge is saved by the warnings of his ghostly friend. But Jesus taught that even this would be insufficient to overcome unbelief. ³⁰ *And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’* ³¹ *He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’*” Marley’s ghost worked for Scrooge but it would not work in the real world. No doubt Jesus had his own resurrection in mind when he told this story. And he was right. People scoff at Jesus’ resurrection. They reject it. They call it a fairy tale. They say and think whatever is necessary to remain in their unbelief. Such is the power of stubborn resistance. They do the same with the virgin birth

If this is the case, how does anyone ever come to place their faith in Christ? Jesus answered that question in this story.

Comparison #6—The inherent power of the word of God.

Abraham is the speaker in the story, but these are Jesus’ own words: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” Jesus was saying that the word of God has inherent power to convict people of their sin and lead them to faith in Christ. It’s not like the Bible you hold in your hand is a magic book. It’s the Spirit of God working miraculously through the word of God that can have this impact. As I announced in the church emails this past week, that is exactly what I want to do this morning. I want us all to “hear” from Moses and the prophets. And we have the added benefit of not only hearing these words that speak of Christ’s birth, crucifixion, resurrection and glory, we see that all of them were perfectly fulfilled by Jesus.

There are 28 Old Testament prophecies on the powerpoint. Ideally, I would like 28 different people would stand one at a time and read everything on the screen. I have several hopes as we

read these. One, if you have never repented of your sins and trusted Christ for salvation, I pray that the Holy Spirit would use his word to break your unbelief. Second, I pray we would see Jesus' birth in a new light as perfect prophecy and fulfillment. Finally, I hope that your confidence in God and his word are increased and solidified.

Isaiah 7:14—The Messiah would be born of a virgin
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
Fulfilled in Matthew 1:22-23

Micah 5:2—The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem
*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.*
Fulfilled in Matthew 2:5-6

Isaiah 9:6—The Messiah would be born as a Mighty God
*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
Fulfilled in Matthew 4:14-16

Jeremiah 31:15—The Messiah would be the object of a murderous plot
*Thus says the Lord:
“A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.”*
Fulfilled in Matthew 2:17-18

Hosea 11:1—The Messiah would be called out of Egypt
*When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.*
Fulfilled in Matthew 2:14-15

Malachi 4:5,6—The Messiah would be preceded by Elijah the prophet.
Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

Fulfilled in Luke 1:16-17

Genesis 3:15—The Messiah would be born of the seed of the woman

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”*

Fulfilled in Ephesians 1:4 and Romans 16:20

Genesis 12:3—The Messiah would be born in the lineage of Abraham

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Fulfilled in Matthew 1:1

Genesis 49:10—The Messiah would be a ruler in the lineage of Jacob

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;*

Fulfilled in Matthew 1:2

2 Samuel 7:12—The Messiah would be a kingly descendant of David

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

Fulfilled in Matthew 1:6

Numbers 24:17—The Messiah's coming would be announced by a star

*I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near:
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 2:2

Deuteronomy 18:15—The Messiah would be a prophet like Moses

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.

Fulfilled in Acts 3:22

Psalms 2:7-8—The Messiah would be the son of God

*I will tell of the decree:
The Lord said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.*

Fulfilled in Hebrews 1:5

Zechariah 9:9—The Messiah would come riding on a colt

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 21:7

Psalm 41:9—The Messiah would be betrayed by a friend
*Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 26:23

Zechariah 11:12—The Messiah would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver
*Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they
weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 26:15

Zechariah 11:13—30 pieces of silver would purchase a potter's field
*Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the lordly price at which I was priced by
them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:9-10

Isaiah 53:5—Messiah would die a sacrificial death for us
*But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:26

Isaiah 53:7—The Messiah would remain silent before his accusers
*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.*

Fulfilled in Mark 14:61

Isaiah 53:9—would die with criminals but His burial would be with the wealthy
*And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:38 and Luke 23:50-53

Psalm 22:7,8—The Messiah would be mocked.

*All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
“He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”*

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:43

Numbers 21:8—The Messiah would be lifted up
*And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is
bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”*

Fulfilled in John 12:32

Psalms 22:18—The Messiah’s clothes would be cast by lot
*they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:35

Psalms 16:10—The Messiah would rise from the dead.
*For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.*

Fulfilled in Acts 2:27

Psalms 22:1—The Messiah would be forsaken by God.
*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?*

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:46

Psalms 22:16-17—The Messiah’s hands and feet would be pierced but no bones broken
*they have pierced my hands and feet
I can count all my bones.*

Fulfilled in Luke 24:39 and John 19:36

Psalms 118:22—The Messiah would be the rejected cornerstone.
*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.*

Fulfilled in Matthew 21:42

Isaiah 42:6,7—The Messiah would be the light of the world
*I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you;
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

Fulfilled in Luke 4:18-19

Rich Maurer
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¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-27/faith-behind-famous-charles-dickens.html>

² <http://erikullestad.blogspot.com/2010/09/liberation-theology-lazarus.html>

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-27/faith-behind-famous-charles-dickens.html>