

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

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The Rich Man and Lazarus

Scripture

Luke 16 deals primarily with the topic of possessions. The parable of the dishonest manager in the first part of the chapter deals with the *abuse* of possessions. And the account of the rich man and Lazarus in the second part of the chapter deals with the *use* of possessions. The rich man used his possessions in such a way that he enjoyed a marvelous life, and yet he ended up in hell.

Let's read about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31:

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And 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.’ ²⁵But 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. ²⁶And 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.’ ²⁷And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹But 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.’” (Luke 16:19-31)

Introduction

A majority of Americans believe in heaven and hell. However, most Americans believe that they are going to heaven rather than to hell. Sadly, many of them are mistaken and will realize that truth too late.

In a sermon titled, “The Lostness of Humankind,” Ravi Zacharias said,

[Hell] is sobering. When I was asked by Dr. Billy Graham to deal on this theme, I was not sure I was qualified. It is one of the most solemn truths in all of the Word of God. As I prayed and studied, I was reminded of what Robert W. Dale once said: “The only man I can listen to preaching on hell is D. L. Moody, because I have never heard him talk of it without breaking down and weeping.”¹

Jesus spoke about hell in today’s text. In fact, Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else. He spoke about it because it is a sobering reality, and every person should carefully consider his or her eternal destiny.

Before examining the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, I should make a comment about whether this narrative is a parable or an account of actual event. Scholars are divided on the question.

Some scholars say that it is an account of an actual event because no person is ever named in any of Jesus’ other para-

¹ Ravi Zaharias, “The Lostness of Humankind,” *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 118.

bles. But there is nothing in the nature of a parable that requires that persons not be named. And, as we shall, there is a good reason for the name of Lazarus.

Other scholars say that Luke 16:19-31 is a parable because Jesus used a common parabolic formula to introduce the narrative. "There was a rich man" is consistent with the way Jesus introduced some of his other parables (cf. 10:30; 14:16; 15:11; 19:12). And second, some of the details in the narrative are not literally true. For example, nowhere in Scripture do we read that those in hell can see into heaven and speak with those there. In addition, Scripture does not elsewhere depict angels carrying Christians to heaven at death.

So, I am inclined to say that the account of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable designed by Jesus to impart spiritual truth to his hearers.

Lesson

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 teaches us the necessity of repentance to escape hell and go to heaven.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Two Persons (16:19-21)
2. The Two Places (16:22-23)
3. The Two Petitions (16:24-31)

I. The Two Persons (16:19-21)

First, let's look at the two persons.

A. A Rich Man (16:19)

First, there was a rich man.

The rich man is really the focus of the story. Jesus said in

verse 19, **“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.”** The man was fabulously wealthy. He had the finest clothes that money could buy. He ate a feast daily. He lacked nothing.

B. A Poor Man (16:20-21)

By contrast, there was a poor man.

Jesus said that **at the rich man’s gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores** (16:20). Lazarus had some ailment so that his body was **covered with sores**. Jesus did not name the ailment. His friends kindly carried him to the rich man’s **gate** because Lazarus **desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table** (16:21a). The rich man had so much food that it fell off his table, and poor Lazarus looked at it and **desired** it, but was not given any food. **Moreover**, Lazarus was in such a pitiful condition that **even the dogs came and licked his sores** (16:21b).

I mentioned earlier that the name **Lazarus** is significant. This **Lazarus** is not the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus raised from the dead. It is a name Jesus used because it means, “Whom God helps.”² Jesus chose it because it symbolized the only way he could enter heaven: God helped him enter heaven by giving him faith and repentance.

In just a few words, Jesus painted a striking contrast between the rich man and the poor man in life. John MacArthur captures well the extreme contrast between the two:

In life, one was enormously wealthy, the other an impoverished beggar. The rich man was inside the house, the poor man outside. The poor man had no food, the rich man had all the food he could eat. The poor man had needs, the rich man

² Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 367.

had none. The poor man desired everything, the rich man desired nothing. The poor man suffered, the rich man was satisfied. The poor man was tormented, the rich man was happy. The poor man was humiliated, the rich man was honored. The poor man sought crumbs, the rich man feasted. The poor man needed help, the rich man gave him none. The poor man was a nobody, the rich man was well-known.³

II. The Two Places (16:22-23)

Second, let's note the two places they each found themselves after they died.

A. *Abraham's Side (16:22a)*

First, the poor man found himself at Abraham's side.

Jesus said in verse 22a, "**The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.**" There is no mention of a funeral, burial, or any memorial of **the poor man** at his death. However, **the angels** carried him to **Abraham's side**. This is the only place in the Bible that mentions **Abraham's side**. It simply means that when Lazarus died he found himself with the father of the faithful in the abode of the saints.

The Pharisees would have been shocked to hear Jesus say this. They viewed poor people as outcasts, not only on earth but also not worthy of heaven.

B. *Hades (16:22b-23)*

So imagine the shock of the Pharisees when they heard Jesus say that the rich man was in Hades.

The Pharisees believed that wealth was a sign of God's

³ MacArthur, John (2013-03-26). *Luke 11-17 MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) (Kindle Locations 5964-5969). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

blessing and favor. So they were stunned when Jesus said in verses 22b-23, **“The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.”**

Hades is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Sheol. In the Old Testament it referred to the realm of the dead. Commentator Darrell Bock says, “In the New Testament, Hades is where the dead are, while Gehenna is where they experience final judgment.”⁴ So, **Hades** in the New Testament is where non-Christians are held until their sentencing to the final phase of hell.

Jesus wants his hearers to understand that there are two different places where people go when they die. Bock says, “The point is that both Lazarus and the rich man know where each other are.”⁵ One is in heaven and the other is in hell.

John MacArthur again highlights the contrast between the rich man and the poor man in death and after death. He says:

The poor man had no dignity in death, not even a burial, the rich man had dignity in death and a lavish funeral. The poor man possessed no hope, the rich man possessed all hope.

After death, however, the situations of the two were completely reversed. The rich man became poorer than the poor man had ever been, while the poor man became richer than the rich man could have ever imagined. The poor man was on the inside (heaven), while the rich man was on the outside (hell). The poor man enjoyed the great heavenly banquet, while the rich man was totally deprived. The poor man needed nothing, while the rich man lacked everything. The poor man had all his desires fulfilled, while the rich man’s desires would go eternally unfulfilled. The poor man was satisfied, while the rich man suffered. The poor man was happy, while the rich man was tormented. The poor man was honored, while the

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1370.

⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, 1369.

rich man was humiliated. The poor man enjoyed a lavish feast, while the rich man longed for a drop of water. The rich man desperately sought help, while the poor man was unable to provide it. The poor man had a name, while the rich man did not. The poor man had dignity, while the rich man had none. All of the poor man's hopes were realized beyond what he could have imagined, while the rich man's hopes vanished forever.⁶

III. The Two Petitions (16:24-31)

And third, let's examine the two petitions.

A. *The Petition for Himself (16:24-26)*

First, there was the petition for himself.

1. The Request (16:24)

First, notice the request.

Jesus said that the rich man **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"** (16:24).

The rich man appealed to his Jewish heritage when he addressed Abraham as **Father Abraham**. But heritage or nationality does not get a person into heaven.

The rich man begged for **mercy**. But he got none because there is no mercy in hell. The time for mercy is now.

2. The Refusal (16:25)

Second, notice the refusal.

⁶ MacArthur, John *Luke 11-17 MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Kindle Locations 5968-5977).

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” (16:25).

By addressing the rich man as **Child**, Abraham acknowledged his heritage. But the rich man’s heritage could not keep him out of hell.

3. The Reason (16:26)

And third, observe the reason for the refusal.

Jesus said in verse 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.”**

Jesus was saying that death permanently fixes a person’s eternal destiny. There is no such thing as purgatory. There is no opportunity to go from hell to heaven after one dies.

That means that a person must make a decision about eternity before he or she dies. Because after a person dies, it is too late.

B. The Petition for His Brothers (16:27-31)

And second, there was the petition for his brothers.

1. The Request (16:27-28)

First, notice the request.

The rich man **said, “Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment” (16:27-28).**

Notice the rich man’s evangelistic zeal once he is in hell!

2. The Refusal

Second, notice the refusal.

There is no verse stating a refusal, but it is implied.

3. The Reason (16:29-31)

And third, the reason for the refusal.

Actually, there are two reasons given.

The first reason is that Scripture is sufficient.

In verse 29, **Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."**

Friends, Scripture is sufficient to give us knowledge about heaven and hell. It is sufficient to tell us how to get to heaven, and how to avoid hell. Nothing else is needed.

And the second reason is that Scripture supersedes signs.

The rich man **said** in verse 30, **"No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."**

But Abraham **said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead"** (16:31).

Jesus did rise from the dead just a short time after he taught this parable. Did vast numbers of people repent? No. Jesus again affirms the sufficiency of Scripture. It, rather than supernatural signs, is sufficient for salvation.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, we should examine ourselves, to see whether we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Your eternal destiny is decided this side of death. Once you die, you go either to heaven or to hell. Therefore, you must

decide today where you will spend your eternal destiny.

Preacher Will Willimon learned this hard truth at a funeral. He says:

Early in my ministry, I served a little church in rural Georgia. One Saturday we went to a funeral in a little country church not of my denomination. I grew up in a big downtown church. I had never been to a funeral like this one. The casket was open, and the funeral consisted of a sermon by their preacher.

The preacher pounded on the pulpit and looked over at the casket. He said, "It's too late for Joe. He might have wanted to get his life together. He might have wanted to spend more time with his family. He might have wanted to do that, but he's dead now. It is too late for him, but it is not too late for you. There is still time for you. You still can decide. You are still alive. It is not too late for you. Today is the day of decision."

Then the preacher told how a Greyhound bus had run into a funeral procession once on the way to the cemetery, and that that could happen today. He said, "You should decide today. Today is the day to get your life together. Too late for old Joe, but it's not too late for you."

I was so angry at that preacher. On the way home, I told my wife, "Have you ever seen anything as manipulative and insensitive to that poor family? I found it disgusting."

She said, "I've never heard anything like that. It was manipulative. It was disgusting. It was insensitive. Worst of all, it was also true."⁷

Believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose again from the dead. Believe that his perfect obedience can be credited to you. And then repent of your sin. It is not too late for you.

Do so today and you will have the gift of eternal life. Amen.

⁷ Will Willimon, in his sermon "The Writing on the Wall," PreachingToday.com.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Father, Jesus' teaching on hell is sobering. The rich man did not go to hell because he was rich. He did not go to hell because he was guilty of heinous sin.

The rich man went to hell because he never repented of his sin. He went to hell because he did not believe the Word of God. He went to hell because he did not believe the plan of salvation that you give us in your Word.

Oh, God, if there is anyone here today who is in peril of going to hell, will you grant that person repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!