

The Parables of Our Lord

The Parable of “The Rich Man And Lazarus” - Luke 16:19-31

Sunday August 7th, 2022

By way of reminder:

- Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived
- The crowds were astonished by the way He taught
- He used parables
 - Only used by Jesus in the NT
 - Rare in the OT (Nathan the Prophet & King David is one example)
- Parable means “to throw something alongside something else” ie, a comparison thrown alongside a truth
- Jesus used parables to reveal deeper truths to those who have been given understanding but used them in judgment against those who had not been given understanding.
- Main theme of most parables was the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven)
- We never interpret parables allegorically
 - Look for a single, clear main point in a given parable (though there are sometimes exceptions)

Now, the Parable Of The Rich Man And Lazarus which we find in Luke 16. (Read Luke 16:19-31). The Lord is speaking to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of their day, who are leading most of Israel in religious matters. Chapter 16 opens with Jesus giving the parable of “The Unjust/Shrewd/Unrighteous/Dishonest Steward/Manager”. These Jewish religious leaders were “lovers of money” (v.14) and “those who justify [themselves] before men...” (v.15). But God

knew their hearts (and what they exalted before men, was seen as an abomination in the eyes of God).

Hell is for the religious. But the Pharisees were certain that they would never see that place. So Jesus tells them a parable and it will expose them for who they really are. It becomes clear that Jesus identifies them as the Rich Man in the parable. Self-righteous lovers of money who couldn't care less for the poor and who rejected Truth.

Some don't believe this to be a parable at all, but rather an historic account of something that really happened. And the people who say that, do so because there is one very interesting difference between this parable and all the other parables that Jesus spoke: and that is that someone in the parable has been **named**. Lazarus is the only one ever named in all the parables of our Lord. Personally, I happen to believe that his being named has more to do with the overall theme of the parable. In any case, most theologians agree that this was indeed a parable. It has all the marks and elements of a parable. The introduction is common to other parables i.e., "There was a rich man". The main character has no name (the Rich Man, not Lazarus, is the main character of the parable). In the parable, Lazarus never speaks because he isn't the point of the story. The main character is the Rich Man. It's about him experiencing Hell and what it's like there. He speaks with Abraham. He's the one giving an account of what it's like to be in Hell and understands the need for repentance. Even the imagery that Jesus uses in the parable is make-believe. For example, there isn't any indication anywhere else in Scripture that someone in Hell can look up and know who is in Heaven. Also, there's no indication anywhere else in Scripture that someone in Hell can speak with people in Heaven (let alone Abraham). These are some of the reasons that we understand this to just be a parable.

Going back for a moment to the fact that a man in this parable was named. The name Lazarus is an abbreviation of the name “Eleazar” (like Bill for William or Jim for James, etc). And that’s apropos because the name Eleazar actually means, “the one who God helps”.

The Lord uses powerful imagery within this parable to paint a terrifying picture and He uses vivid contrasts to illustrate His point. We are introduced to the Rich Man who isn’t named (though some translations use the word “Dives” which just means “Rich Man” in Latin). And we are introduced to the poor man, named Lazarus. The Rich Man is described as living lavishly, in opulence. He’s dressed in purple which is the color of royalty. He was extremely wealthy and was on full display. He eats the best foods; he eats sumptuously **every day**. While Jesus is speaking this parable, the Pharisees stand before Him in agreement with the Rich Man, identifying themselves with him because in order to be so wealthy, they figured that he must have been so favored by God. After all, they were described in Verse 14 as “lovers of money”.

The first contrast of the parable: Lazarus, an ailing beggar whose whole body was covered in sores. And apparently he must have been crippled as well, because he wasn’t even able to move himself around, he had to be carried and LAID (as the text says) at the gate outside this Rich Man’s house. The Rich Man saw this man (he was laid at his gate, he later referred to him by name) and he gave absolutely no help to him whatsoever. And having been laid there, he desired to be fed with what fell from the Rich Man’s table. Beyond that, we’re then told that the dogs would come and lick his sores.

In the areas of Palestine and Israel, dogs were seen as some of the very worst scavengers and were totally despised. And yet, these dogs were the only source of comfort to this poor beggar named Lazarus and were far kinder to this man than the Rich Man was.

In Verse 22, we're told that the poor man died. And the precise moment he died, something really incredible happened: the first thing Lazarus sees when he opens his eyes once he passes into eternity are the angels of God. And this poor, sore-ridden beggar is personally escorted to Heaven by them. There isn't anything mentioned in this text about a funeral or so much as a headstone or anything. But look what happens to Lazarus when he dies.

And here comes a powerful set of contrasts. The Rich Man too, died. But he was not taken to Paradise, nor to the side of Abraham. The Rich Man opened his eyes in Hell. In Verse 23 it tells us that he could see Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side in Paradise. The contrasts are vivid:

- In life, the Rich Man had everything and Lazarus had nothing and now Lazarus has everything and the Rich Man has nothing.
- In life, Lazarus had no food to eat and the Rich Man feasted every day but now Lazarus will feast everyday while the Rich Man won't ever enjoy another bite of food.
- In life, the Rich Man was dignified and Lazarus suffered humiliation but in death Lazarus enjoys eternal dignity while the Rich Man suffers the most humiliation of all.
- In life, Lazarus suffered every day and the Rich Man was satisfied every day and now the Rich Man faces an eternity of suffering while Lazarus enjoys an eternity of rest.
- In life, the Rich Man was known by everyone and Lazarus was regarded as nothing more than a throwaway but now The Rich Man has no name and is forgotten by time forever and Lazarus is the only one named in all the parables and we still speak of him today and is remembered forever.

In Verse 24, the Rich Man called out to Abraham. He didn't cry out to God! He calls out to Abraham to do something to give him relief. He says "*Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus...*". Even here in Hell, he STILL gives no regard to Lazarus; he doesn't even

address Lazarus directly. "...send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.". How bad does it have to be for the Rich Man at this moment where even just one little droplet of water, dripped from the tip of a finger, could ease one iota of suffering? The kind of hopelessness and torment of that place cannot be understood and escapes human words. "Hell isn't a place where Christ is forgotten; it's where He is unavailable" (MacArthur). And here is the man who according to the parable "feasted sumptuously every day" BEGGING for just one droplet of water on his tongue.

Abraham responds in Verse 25, "...*'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.*". It's too late. He should have cried out while he was still alive. He didn't give one single iota of concern to Lazarus in his suffering, even though he lived so lavishly. And in Verse 26 Abraham says, "...*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.*". There is an *immeasurable* chasm between him there in Hell and Paradise. It makes me think of mountain climbers in the Himalayas where they cross the unbelievably large crevasses in the glaciers. These crevasses (cracks in the glacier) are hundreds of feet deep in places. So these mountain climbers will rig up a series of ladders that they'll lash together to make something of a bridge in order to walk across the crevasse (chasm). But the point here is that it's **too late**. The Rich Man is where he is and he's there forever. And there is no way that he can come here from there, nor Lazarus from here to there. In Hell, there aren't any arrangements for reprieve. The sentence that he has received is eternal. There is no bail bondsman that's going to come and bail him out and there is no second chance there. In life, he had been totally self-centered and devoid of any compassion. He laughed at the idea that there might be a day of reckoning.

Haven't we all been warned again and again and again by the Son of God Himself? Don't you know that Jesus spoke of Hell FAR more than He ever did about Heaven. Do you realize that at the Judgment, Jesus said that every idle word we have ever spoken will come into that judgment? Do you realize that NOTHING escapes the Father's notice? At that judgment, every tongue will be silenced and that every excuse you have ever tried to give will be wasted. No one can argue or debate or give excuses before a Holy Judge who knows all things. Abraham says to the Rich Man, "...*those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.*". So now the RICH MAN becomes the miserable beggar.

In Verses 27 & 28 he says, "...*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.*". He's saying, "Ok fine - if you can't send him to me because of the chasm between us, then at least send him to my father's house where he can warn my brothers so that they don't come to this awful place". I can just hear Abraham saying, "You want me to send him on an evangelistic crusade to your father's house? You want me to take him away from the enjoyment he's experiencing in God's presence and send him to go to your brothers and give them Bible Tracts? They have Moses and the Prophets. Let your brothers listen to THEM".

"...*And [the Rich Man] said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'* Isn't it interesting that the Rich Man understood that his brothers needed to repent? And that if they didn't that they were going to end up in the same place? But in Verse 31, Abraham answers him and says, "...*if they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.*". Jesus is saying to these Pharisees, "You don't listen to Moses. You don't listen to the Prophets. And when I am raised from the dead, you won't listen to Me".