

The Parables of Jesus #34
The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man
(Lk. 16:19-31)
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INTRODUCTION

A. There is some dispute over whether this is a parable or an actual event

1. Some believe that because Lazarus, the beggar, is named that it is sufficiently unique to identify this as an historical event, not just a story
2. They also emphasize that Jesus did not say this was a parable
3. However, we might also note the following
 - a. it is simply an assumption that by naming the beggar that Jesus refers to an actual event
 - b. Lk 16:1 -- Jesus did not say that the story of the unjust steward was a parable, yet it is accepted as such
4. For the our purposes, in this series, we will treat this story as if it were a parable, for there are important lessons to be learned

B. Let me set this story up by asking a question

1. When it comes to your possessions, your “wealth,” what kind of person are you?
2. Would those around you who don’t have what you have describe you as generous or stingy; selfish or selfless; caring or unconcerned; compassionate or hard-hearted?
3. Sometimes in reading this story, we get all caught up in questions about what happens after death, about the state of the dead, about terms like hades and Abraham’s bosom
4. While there may be some things to learn about those topics, the point of the story is much simpler than that
5. It has to do with how the kind of person you are now affects the kind of eternity you will inherit

C. Jesus is still dealing with the scribes and Pharisees

1. Following the parable of the unjust steward, there is an interesting exchange that occurs between Jesus and the Pharisees
2. Luke 16:14-15
Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." (NKJ)
3. It appears that the story of Lazarus and the rich man was part of Jesus' continued confrontation of the attitudes and practices of the Pharisees

D. There are valuable lessons about living that we should learn here

I. THE PARABLE (Lk 16:19-31)

A. The story compares the fortunes of two men

1. A certain rich man
 - a. clothed in purple and fine linen - symbols of wealth/royalty
 - b. he fared sumptuously - generally, a reference to a life of ease and prosperity; specifically, a reference to plenty of food
2. Lazarus
 - a. we don't know why Jesus names this man, and there is most likely no connection with the Lazarus who was raised from the dead
 - b. his name means "whom God helps"
 - c. Lazarus laid at the rich man's gate, so we know the rich man was aware of him
 - d. Lazarus was diseased with sores
 - e. dogs came and licked his sores -- meant to contrast Lazarus with the rich man, who was tended by servants and all that wealth could attract -- Lazarus was comforted by the scavengers who roamed the streets
3. Lazarus wanted only one thing - to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table
 - a. this is the greatest contrast between the two
 - b. it defines the two men
 - c. it is this contrast that sets the stage for the rest of the story

B. Both men died

1. Lazarus died
 - a. few, if any, knew or cared or mourned his death
 - b. it may be that his body was simply thrown into Gehenna which was the city garbage dump of Jerusalem
 - c. his death produced little, if any, response from others
2. The rich man also died and was buried
 - a. it is a different matter when the rich die
 - b. the funerals of the rich are often elaborate affairs, with great display of things that point to the wealth, position, honors and accomplishments of the dead
 - c. he was buried in a grave, much different than the generic disposal of Lazarus
3. There was only one difference noted in Lazarus' favor
 - a. he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom
 - b. Mt 13:49 -- in judgment, angels separate the wicked from the just
 - c. Heb 1:7 -- angels are ministers who serve us
 - d. the rich man went to hades (the realm of the dead)
 - e. there, he was in torment (torture and pain)
4. In that torment, he could see Abraham and Lazarus there with him

C. The rich man conversed with Abraham

1. He pleaded to Abraham for mercy
2. He wanted Lazarus to come, dip his finger in water and cool his tongue for he was tormented in the flame
 - a. does he still want to be served as he was on earth?
 - b. though his body lies in a tomb, there was some kind of pain and suffering that afflicted the rich man after death
3. Abraham informed the rich man about how things really work
 - a. you received good things in life while Lazarus received evil
 - b. now Lazarus is comforted and you are tormented
 - c. this is a clear statement condemning the human way of looking at life and deciding who is "rich" and who is "poor"
4. Abraham informed him that the gulf between the two places was impassable
 - a. there is a finality at death; eternity is fixed
 - b. only things done while alive may affect one's assignment at death

5. The rich man asked for yet more service from Lazarus
 - a. send him to my father's house
 - b. have him testify to them so that they will not come to this place of torment
 - c. Abraham reminded the rich man that they had Moses and the Prophets and that they should listen to them

6. The rich man persisted believing that if one returned from the dead that they would listen and repent
 - a. repent -- he now knows something was wrong about his life that he wants his brothers to avoid
 - b. Abraham isn't convinced -- if they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they listen to one who rose from the dead

II. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. The main lesson is a simple one -- selfishness and lack of compassion during life results in torment and punishment after death

1. I refer you back to the Sermon on the Mount -- what Jesus taught was that God is looking for one's heart to change; for his character to be shaped by the character of God

2. Pharisees followed a prescription for failure
 - a. they thought following God's will was a matter of perfectly following the rules and regulations
 - b. they did not understand the God of the inner man; the God of the heart
 - c. they had "spiritualized" worldly attitudes and convinced themselves that they were what God wanted

3. We would do well to examine ourselves with regard to selfishness and lack of compassion
 - a. are there any beggars outside your gate?
 - b. you better look again
 - 1) are there people you look down on
 - 2) are there people who don't fit your "level"
 - 3) are there people you think of as rubbish
 - 4) are there people who could benefit from your crumbs

4. Mark 10:45
 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (NKJ)

B. Eternal judgment is based on a standard different from the world

1. According to the world, the rich man should have received great honor and continued blessings
2. According to the world, Lazarus was a nothing that didn't count
3. On the other side of death, things are quite different
 - a. wealth, position, honors, accomplishments, etc., while wonderful to experience and useful for great things, isn't what determines one's eternal reward
 - b. John 15:5
I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (NKJ)
 - c. are you really ready for death?

C. There are no more opportunities when life is over

1. Abraham's testimony to the rich man was a simple one
 - a. there is an impassable gulf between us now
 - b. we can't go there, and you can't come here
2. The time to learn the lesson is before you get into the rich man's place

D. Was Abraham correct to say that people wouldn't be convinced, even if one rose from the dead?

1. What a powerful condemnation of the Pharisees
2. Don't let it be true of you
3. You have one who was raised from the dead, who offers his own life in the place of yours so that you might receive the same reward as Lazarus

CONCLUSION

A. Let me ask my question again: "When it comes to your possessions, your "wealth," what kind of person are you?"

1. Don't miss the point here -- don't get the idea that it's the act of giving things to the needy that we're talking about
2. It is the heart of compassion, concern, selflessness that moves us to act -- that's what we're talking about
3. What kind of person are you? It matters beyond this life

B. Invitation