

Dean Hertenstein: Tells Luke 16:19-30, The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Today ends our parable series in which we've looked at what Jesus taught. Do you feel that you know Him better? I do! He tells us everything that is important to Him, and thus to God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "I am the only one who has come from heaven," and He speaks about what He has seen there (Jn 3:31-32). The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is part of that testimony.

So I have good news for you. You will live after you die. Death is not the end. When you die, you will find yourself alive. That's a great thought.

But that brings good news and bad news. You will go to either heaven or to the bad place. And, this parable shares some images of Hades as a fiery and miserable place. Jesus, the one come down from heaven tells us, and His word is trustworthy.

This parable confronts some basic issues of life and of faith that affect your destination in the afterlife. Just like last week's parable of the ten pounds we learn that our earthly actions matter to God. What we do as believers affects the future – our distant, eternal future.

So this is a story of two sons of Abraham. That's a way of saying these two guys are believers. They are members of God's kingdom.

Remember that last week we learned that Jesus gives us gifts, which we are then asked to invest in the kingdom. So, in this story, whatever the rich man had, it was given to him by God. Psalm 24 tells us "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it," so whatever you have, you did not come by it on your own, even though you may have worked hard for it. God blessed you with what you have achieved. And, God has put you where you are and among certain people for a reason.

The rich man had a lot. However, Lazarus doesn't seem blessed by anything, even though the name Lazarus means "the one whom God helps." So the contrast we see, that some people have a lot and some have nothing. And, in this case, Lazarus was dumped on the rich man's doorstep by his friends. Remember, your life is no accident. Wherever you are, God has put you there for a reason.

Lazarus' pain and misery were probably exacerbated by the rich man's blatant pleasure-seeking greed. He shopped at Neiman's. He wore the best clothes, and on top of that he indulged himself with sumptuous food everyday. 24-7 he wasted his days and his money. He was not exactly a spiritual giant. Maybe he went to church, we are not told. But if he did, we are told he went home to a big meal every day.

In contrast, Lazarus lay outside his garden gate, covered with ulcers, too weak to even walk, eating garbage. Lazarus probably cursed him everyday.

But he didn't. Like Bob Cratchit to Ebenezer Scrooge in A Christmas Carol, even though underpaid and ill treated, Bob Cratchit did not curse his employer. In like manner, Lazarus does

not show the least little bit of resentment or fury over his circumstances as he lay outside the rich man's gate day after day, year after year.

The only companions Lazarus had were wild dogs who came and licked his sores. That's not exactly comforting. Dr. Ken Bailey thinks, though, that the dogs were the one positive thing in Lazarus' life; that their saliva was actually medicinal and that Lazarus lived in quiet harmony with these animals, hoping for better, but never receiving it.¹ Meanwhile, the rich man simply went on day after day consuming and eating and indulging himself.

Then both those believers, members of Abraham's family, died. And we know the story. The good, pathetic guy went to heaven and the rich selfish guy went to hell. End of story.

But Jesus graciously allows us to see an inside picture of the afterlife. The rich man wakes up after he realizes where he is. He calls out to the Father of his faith. But Abraham says, "It's too late. No one can come to you where you are." And he realized at that moment that on earth, he was supposed to believe all the stuff in the Scriptures. He realized the choice he had made – a choice he really hadn't understood the implications of and that he hadn't taken seriously. He was horrified.

It's good to ask ourselves this question. Do you believe the Bible? What in your life shows it? If given a test of faith, would you pass?

Have you shopped with cash recently? Some businesses use special pens to mark over a bill to see if it's authentic. Counterfeit bills are worthless and are confiscated by banks without reimbursement. This parable tells us, there's some sort of authenticity test to get into heaven.

Maybe, though, the rich man had beggar fatigue. In southern California homeless people are everywhere. Numerous homeless men hung out around Fuller, my seminary. They were constantly there, every day. We tried many things to give or get them help, but when you see them all the time, you become numb to it.

The rich man didn't even see Lazarus, who had been dumped on his doorstep. It's hard to be responsible, to take on more than ourselves and our own problems. It means self-denial for sure.

But in the afterlife, the rich man still treats Lazarus like a servant. "Tell him to go get me some water . . . send him to warn my father and five brothers." People say, "See, the rich man has not changed! He still thinks he's better than Lazarus." But perhaps that's not the most important issue. What do you suppose he wanted his brothers to know?

Maybe he wanted his brothers to realize this Scripture:

- "If you were really the children of Abraham, you would follow his example" (Jn 8:39). or
- "The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country to the land I will show you . . . and Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (Gen 12:1,4). or

¹Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Downer's Grove: IVP 2008), 385.

- “Lot, let there be no strife between us; take whatever land you see and I’ll take what’s left.” And after Abram’s act of generosity, God took Abram aside and gave him everything his eyes could see. (Gen 13:8-18) or
- When he met the priest of the God Most High, Abram gave him a tenth of everything he owned (Gen 14:17-20) or
- When he was tested to offer Isaac back to God, he was obedient, believing God would provide (Gen 22:1-18, Heb 11:17-19)

Do you see the pattern? Hebrews tells us that life is about living by faith – we don’t always have the promise in hand, but we let faith drive us. Those who live this way – we look forward to our true home, and it is not here (read Hebrews 11).

The rich man lived as if this life was his only life. He was blind to the glorious future God has for God’s children. He did not allow his life to be impacted by God.

So how do we do it? We can’t change the world in one fell swoop, fixing all the ills around us, but each of you has a part. First, while you are here on earth, before it’s too late, apply that pen of authenticity to your life.

Use these parables. Use the life of Abraham. Where are you in this? Do you believe this Book enough to live it?

One person who did this is Catherine Rohr. She worked at a venture firm where she looked for entrepreneurs with vision and great growth potential. By age 24 she made her firm \$32m in venture investments. She was to go out, find more businesses to invest in to make more money for her company so she could make more money for herself. She thought, what’s the end of the game here? What’s the goal, to die with a big pile of money? She became a Christian, and she began searching. She asked every CEO she dealt with, if you died today, why would your life even matter?

Ask yourself that question. If you died today, why would your life matter?

Something was changing on the inside and Catherine began giving control of her life to Jesus. He began showing her the world through His eyes.

She went to Romania to visit an orphanage of kids with HIV. Upon entering a “Lazarus” confronted her in the form of small girl who jumped up on her, wrapped her legs around her waist, gave her a head butt, and licked her face. At that moment she had a decision to make. She could drop that little girl, or she could hug her. And we all have that choice when confronted with the Lazarus’ of life.

To hug her was to embrace the injustice the girl lived with. It is a lot easier to drop our Lazarus, because it protects us from his burdens. To ignore Lazarus is to say, *I don’t want my heart to hurt because of your problems because then I would have to do something about it.* I’d rather return to my cozy home and my own problems.

All of us feel that way. But, Christian, you can walk with Jesus.

That means you say yes to Him, knowing that this is going to hurt and you won't know how to solve all that pain, but then you say to those around you, "I am committed to doing this with you, I am committed to embracing you." Miracles occur when you are on fire for Jesus, when you are devoted to Him. If you want this church to be strong and truly have programs and worship that reach out and are profitable for the kingdom of God, you must have a fire in your belly for God.

For Catherine Rohr, it meant leaving her job to develop a prison entrepreneur program in Houston. Time does not allow me to tell you how she did this, but it's a story worth reading, because every gift she has is being used, and it's greatly profitable for the kingdom of God. (see www.pep.org)

All these parables show us the world through Jesus' eyes. What does our Lord see? He sees all his children as headed toward a destination, and he wants it to be a really good destination where we can be all we can be. The way to get there is faithfulness – not greatness, and not personal success, and not having a lot, but surrendering all to a Savior who has great plans for us and wants us there with Him. So shall we do it? Shall we take it all to heart, loving God and seeing the world through the eyes of Jesus? There's a train a comin.' All you need is faith to get on board.

AMEN