

THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #008
A chronological Study
"The Rich Man and Lazarus"
Luke 16:19-31



"The Rich Man and Lazarus"

"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and uttered things hidden since the creations of the world."
 Psalm 78:2

THE INTRODUCTION

The parables are the direct words of Jesus! Now, open your ears, sharpen your understanding, and hear what He has to say!

COMMENTARY on the setting and The Cast of Characters Involved

“The Friend at Midnight”

The Prelude to the story

Precursors of the Text (where is Luke heading?)

At the very end of Luke, Chapter 13, we are introduced to Jesus and His “Lament over Jerusalem.” Some Pharisees came to Jesus and warned Him that Herod wanted to kill Him. It’s a possibility that Joseph of Arimathea was with this group. He was a believer in the true messiahship of Jesus and He held that belief in secret. He was also a high counselor of the Sanhedrin. It would be this Joseph who would go to Pontius Pilate to ask and receive the body of Jesus so that he could bury it in his own tomb. That story was important enough to appear in all four gospels. I bring this story [the Lament over Jerusalem] up first because it begins the next 12 stories that Jesus speaks of [Luke 14:1-16:18]. Each story shows forth a facet of the errors of the leaders and people of the city of Jerusalem (and all of Judea). Why is this long chain of events important to our parable? It is because our parable clearly presents the final ramifications of not believing in, trusting in, putting your faith in, and submitting to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Ultimately all of these stories and parables are based on the Jewish leadership, and the majority of their people clearly rejecting God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – and completely rejecting the plan and purposes of the Prophets and the Word of God. Here’s a quick list of these events that lead us up to our study of “The Rich Man and Lazarus.”

Chapter 14

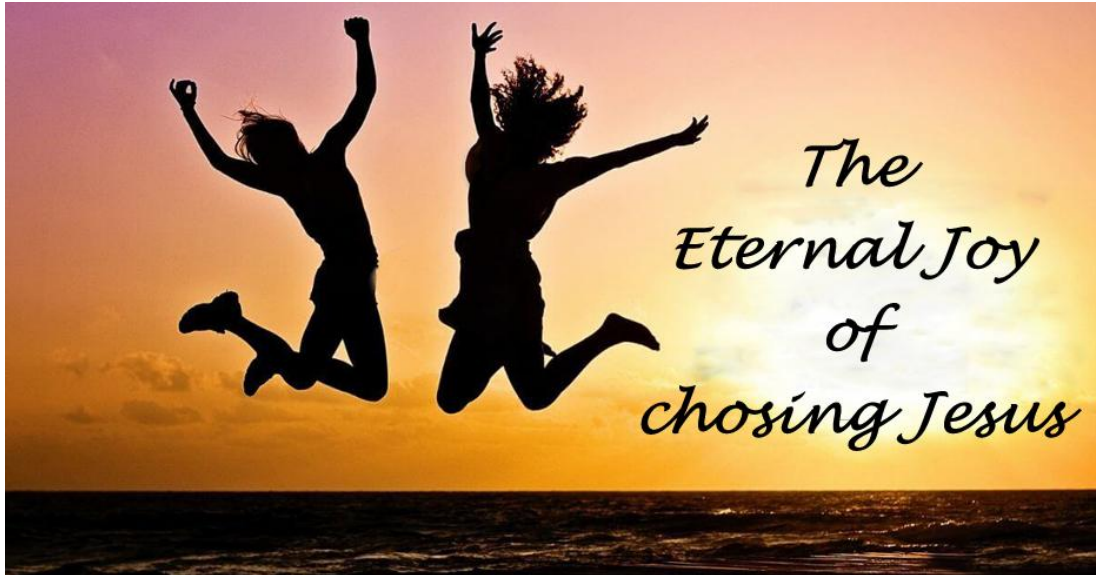
1. Jesus healing on the Sabbath, Law over grace.
2. Parable of the Guests, the need for self-importance.
3. Parable of the invited Dinner Guests – the rejection of the invitation – the meal given to all others.
4. Discipleship Tested – give up everything and follow Jesus
5. Tasteless Salt – He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Chapter 15

6. The Lost Sheep, Who the Father is.
7. The Lost Coin, Who the Father is.
8. The Prodigal Sons, Who the Father is.

Chapter 16

9. The Unrighteous Steward, the killing of the Son.
 10. The Pharisees Scoffing at Jesus' words, no interest in God's Truth.
 11. The Law and the Prophets – easier for heaven & earth to pass away than 1 stroke of the law to fail, judgment and reward.
 12. "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery. This is a story that's not really about what you think it is. It is about the importance of faithfulness to God.
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The Study, from our working translation:

The New American Standard Bible writes present tense English as past tense sometimes when it is helpful to understand the passage. They mark these places with an *. The present tense has been included in the text we will be studying. Also, a few words have been replaced with their literal meaning.**

The Full Text - The Rich Man and Lazarus

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually is dressing in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day, and a poor man named Lazarus had been cast to the rich man's gate, covered with ulcers, and longing to be fed with the scraps which were falling from the rich man's table; even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

Now the poor man died and was carried away by angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was entombed.

*In the unseen place [Hades] the rich man lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and he sees Abraham far away and Lazarus in Abraham's bosom***. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and you be sending Lazarus so that he may be dipping the tip of his finger in water and cooling off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'*

But Abraham is saying, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm has been established, so that those who wish to come over to you from here are not able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

And the rich man is saying, 'Then I beg you, father, that you should be sending him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may be warning them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

But Abraham is saying to him, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

But he said, 'No, father Abraham, if someone should be going to them from the dead, they will be repenting.'

But Abraham is saying to him, 'If they are not hearing Moses and the Prophets, they will not be being persuaded even if someone should be rising from the dead''''

The Text and Commentary: The Rich Man and Lazarus

We will identify the characters of this story (20 verses) which is in a parabolic format but not directly called a parable. Scholars argue about whether the characters are real or symbolic – but we're more interested in the end result. From my standpoint the characters are real people as there is no good reason for them not to be. They are called by name, and who they are is important to the story.

We have Jesus, who is relating the story to His disciples and followers. We have a group of Pharisees who were "listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him." [16:14] We have an ill beggar man, named Lazarus [16:20] [not the brother of Mary and

Martha, whom Jesus raised from the dead] who has been thrown down at the rich man's property gate to beg. We have the rich man himself [un-named] and we have "The Father" of the Hebrew people, Abraham who was in Hades (The Place of The Dead), which is called Abraham's Bosom in the story.

We'll leave the discussion about what and where this place Hades is as we deal with the verses that include it. We will be very interested in the personality traits of our characters and their final disposition.

We will work our way from beginning to end one verse at a time.

THE TEXT Luke 16:19

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.

"Now" – This usage is often taken to introduce a certain time period, however, for these verses I would have you consider what has preceded this verse. Often, when we are teaching someone something new to them, we layout certain elements that will be necessary for the understanding of our teaching goal. As an example, we could be teaching how to assemble something. We would lay out our tools, and our parts. If the first thing we had to do was to remove a screw, we would say, "Now, here's all our tools, which one would we use to remove this screw?" In a similar way Luke has already laid out a list of teaching events – events that teach us, in our case, about the abuses of the Mosaic Law that the scribes, pharisees, and Jewish leaders were involved with [the list above from Luke Chapter 14 to the middle of Chapter 16]. And then Luke reports that Jesus then said, "Now." You can see Jesus has assembled His students, assembled a list of the tools He is using, and then introduced His message by saying "Now."

Here He introduces our first character—a certain man; a certain rich man. A certain rich man who was dressed in very expensive clothes. Why were they expensive? The clothes in this case were

normally only for royalty and the extreme upper class. The purple dye in this case came from the harvesting of the Bolinus Brandaris sea snail. It took 250,000 harvested snails to produce 1 ounce of purple dye. It also was almost the only permanent color dye. Because of the cost of its manufacture... it was only purchasable by royalty and that extreme upper class. It's mentioned in Jesus' story for that very reason: The extreme Rich VS the extreme poor; living on self-worth [money] VS dependency [by faith].

Matthew 19:23-24 tells us, *"And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

There's a number of commentaries that go on about what "the eye of a needle" means. We won't waste our time there. The importance of the statement is that whatever the metaphor... getting a rich man into heaven is nearly impossible. Why? Because being rich makes it extremely easy to be self-dependent, and extremely difficult to give up everything [money and things] and follow Jesus, the servant of God the Father in this matter of salvation. This lesson is primary in the Gospels. Even the men Jesus chose as His closest disciples had virtually nothing (in riches) when they chose to drop everything and follow Him. And thus, we are introduced to the key topic of these verses.

Secondly, there was no uncomfortable toil in this rich man's life. In fact verse 19 tells us that he was, "Joyously living in splendor every day." There was no trouble, no pain in this rich man's life. He had no need of a savior in his life, he had no need to even think of what life after death would be like... he was extremely rich and happy—and always would be, he thought.

THE TEXT**Luke 16:20**

"And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his [the rich man's] gate, covered with sores,"

Next, Jesus tells of a second character in His story. A poor man (desperately poor) who, had been laid at the rich man's gate to his estate. The original text tells us that he had been "thrown" there. The text intimates that this poor man, whose name was Lazarus [not the Lazarus that Jesus raised from the dead], had some kind of servant relationship to this rich man. This poor man was also suffering from some disease that resulted in his body being covered with sores, ulcers, or boils.

THE TEXT**Luke 16:21**

"and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores."

Our poor man who was cast to the rich man's gate yearned to be "satisfied" by eating the scraps that "fell" (not handed to him) from the rich man's table.

His only comfort in life was that wild dogs (dogs were not kept as pets at this time) would come and lick clean (debriding) his open sores.

So, now we see the first two characters in the story. A very rich man who has no regard for the very ill and poor man who was placed at his property entrance. The disparity between the two is of great importance – someone who has everything, and someone who has nothing.

THE TEXT

Luke 16:22

"Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried."

We'll divide this verse right in half at the semicolon. Once again take note of the first word? "Now." We have the basic facts in this first part of the story. "Now" let's focus on how we will use these facts in understanding the rest of the parable.

The poor man died... The poor man was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

In the language of the New Testament the word for angels is just plainly "messengers." Who the messenger is at any particular place in the text is determined by the context in and around the verse. These messengers were carrying a recently dead righteous man to his resting place in the domain set aside for the righteous in Hades, the unseen underworld. He was there to await resurrection and eternal life. He is brought into the presence of Abraham – the father of the Hebrew people (the Jews). We know from the Old Testament that those who are of faith in the Old Testament times went to a place for the faithful and those who were not of the faith went to a place for the unfaithful. I bring it up here so we can understand that the poor man was carried by good messengers to be with righteous Abraham, and thus these messengers were God's angels.

The Rich man died... The Rich man was buried in the ground.

We are to notice that the Rich man was not carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom and he found himself in the place of the unrighteous [wicked] dead, called Hades, the unseen underworld, just like the poor man... except he was now in this temporary location, in torment and fire, awaiting his resurrection... to the eternal second death in the Lake of Fire.

Abraham's Bosom

According to Jewish tradition the time of a meal and the relaxation of friends in a home situation was carried out sitting and lounging on, pillows upon the floor. The host of the dinner event would sit centered among the guests. If there was an important guest at that time, they would be the major attraction and be placed to the right of the host (think of the pictures you have seen of The Last Supper with Jesus at the center and His favorite, John, at His right side. In fact there's a wonderful version of that scene by a painter named Jacopo Bassano, showing John reclining on Jesus' bosom). The important guest held the greatest place of honor. So, in our story, we have Abraham who would be the most important person at the table. The greatest guest would be seated, immediately and most likely, to the right of Abraham. Following the meal, still sitting upon cushions on the floor, the guests reclined upon each other for fellowship and comfort. The most important guest would recline upon the host's chest or "bosom." So, in our story the poor man, who was so lowly on earth, was now carried by angels and placed in the highest guest position at Abraham's table, honored, well fed, and relaxing upon his host's bosom.

THE TEXT

Luke 16:23

[preceded by: "The Rich man was buried in the ground."]

In Gehenna (that part of Hades that was reserved for the unrighteous, named from the valley where Jerusalem's garbage was burned). *"He lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and is seeing Abraham far away and Lazarus resting upon Abraham's bosom."*

Imagine the Rich man's shock when, while suffering in flames and torment, he sees the poor man reclining upon the bosom of Abraham in "air-conditioned comfort."

[More about Abraham's "Bosom" near the end of this lesson]

TEXT**Luke 16:24**

And he [the rich man] cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

Now we have to be careful to notice the details of this story. So, we will take this one facet at a time.

The rich man cried out – remembering that in the previous verse Lazarus and Abraham are a great distance away from the rich man. And said, 'Father Abraham' – Probably the most honored man among the Hebrews – ever! The Covenant Promises were given to Abraham. Isaac, Jacob, and David all participated in this promise and were recipients of promises of their own – but Abraham was the father of the whole race.

"You, have mercy on ME" – I suppose if we all found ourselves landing in torment and fire, and we saw someone we knew – far away – but not in torment and fire, we would shout the same thing... but, the point here is that the rich man is commanding Abraham to have mercy upon him. "You be merciful to me."

"You, send Lazarus" – The text reveals that the rich man considers himself to be more important than Abraham, and that Abraham is to send Lazarus, as a slave would be sent - to that place of fire and torment"

"That Lazarus should be dipping the tip of his finger in water and cooling MY tongue" – Again, the rich man sees himself as the master to his servant Abraham and Abraham is to send the poor man to comfort him because "he should be dipping" and "cooling" the rich man's tongue.

“For I am pained in this flame.” – The rich man is not at all concerned about the well being of the poor man, after all he’s just a low-life servant and who cares if he gets burned by the flames and is in torment?

THE TEXT

Luke 16:25

“But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are being in agony.’”

“But, Abraham said, ‘Child’ – These first words of Abraham are putting the rich man in his place. ‘Child,’ little one, offspring of mine... You’re not the boss here. You are to be reminded that you received your good things in your life and Lazarus, likewise, evil things. Yet... here he is being consoled, and you are in agony.

Abraham tells the rich man that the lives of the rich man and the poor man are now switched. The rich man had pleasure all his days and the poor man had pain all his days. Then this life became over and a new life had begun where the rich man was now in pain, and the poor man had pleasure and joy.

THE TEXT

Luke 16:26

“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.”

“And besides all this” – I can almost hear Abraham saying, “well I’d really like to send Lazarus over there, loaded down with cool water... you had everything you ever wanted in your first life and he had nothing but pain and sorrow. But he can’t get over there to you, and you can’t get over here to us. That gulf was purposed and set there to prevent that from ever happening – ever!

THE TEXT**Luke 16:27**

"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—"

"Then I beg you, father," – Abraham, like father to father, "send Lazarus to MY father's house." So we see that even the results of death have not changed this unrighteous rich man – not even the pains of burning. The original is clear, "*You, father Abraham*" another command to Abraham, "You send Lazarus (My slave) to do this for ME!"

THE TEXT**Luke 16:28**

"for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."

At last, our rich man now understands that no help for him on the unrighteous side can come from the righteous side of the place of the dead. But, maybe, perhaps, "*You Abraham – send Lazarus back to the place of the living [resurrected] and have him talk to MY sons.*"

THE TEXT**Luke 16:29**

*"But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'"*

The living have Moses (The Law) and The Prophets (the Word of God) – "***You who have ears to hear***" – **be hearing!**

THE TEXT**Luke 16:30**

"But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'"

Not hearing and not listening the dead rich man tells Father Abraham, "No!" And then, perhaps the most important statement made by this rich man... *"but, if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!"*

Important? Yes, for this story is about what God has done and how those who reject God respond to His goodness and love. Someone will return from the dead, and they will not repent.

THE TEXT**Luke 16:31**

"But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

"But he said to him," – Abraham's final statement tells it all. The Jewish community of Jerusalem and Judah had totally denied Moses Law and the warnings of The Prophets. Jesus then tells His hearers that they, even after God sends His beloved only Son to die for their salvation, and even if He is resurrected from the dead before their very eyes – they will not be persuaded that their first death has no hope of salvation. They will only have the fact of eternal pain and torment for those who refuse to believe in Jesus as their Lord and King. And then, for them, the second death.

More: ABRAHAM'S BOSOM (κολπος, κολποι, Ἀβρααμ). A figure of speech used by Jesus in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:22, 23) to designate the state or place of security and significance with which Lazarus was honored upon his death.

The figure is drawn from the ancient eastern banqueting custom of reclining upon one's side on couches at the meal. The configuration of the gathered company was such that the head of one would reach the chest of the one next to him. For purposes of conversation and fellowship, the one would lean his head back against the breast of the other. It was especially gratifying to be placed next to a special guest, and even more so, next to the host. To have leaned one's head against the breast of the principal guest, or that of the host, was proof of the existence of a special and intimate relationship with that person (see, e.g. John 13:25; 21:20). Lazarus, therefore, who, in his diseased earthly life had had to beg to maintain his existence in contrast to the rich man who had fared sumptuously, is pictured as feasting in the realms of bliss with the father of the race. Indeed, he is seen to have been given the place of highest honor, being able to recline in the "bosom of Abraham." In the story, Abraham's bosom is seen in strong contrast with Hades.

Sheol, Hades, Hell, Lake of fire, Paradise, and Abraham's bosom.

First off, The Bible does not support the idea that death leads to the complete annihilation of a person's being of either the righteous or the unrighteous person. Instead, it offers a transformation from physical existence to a spiritual realm.

Sheol [Hebrew]: The Old Testament describes Sheol as the realm of the dead where both the righteous and unrighteous went after death.

Hades [Greek]: The New Testament word for the same concept. Jesus taught that the place of the dead was divided into two places, a place for the righteous, and a place for the unrighteous. He referred to the place of the righteous with a figure of speech, "Abraham's bosom." This figure, spoken of above, was used to denote a place of honor, comfort, and rest. Indicated in the parable by the poor man named Lazarus and the Father of the Israelites, Abraham, reclining together in a pleasant place, with Lazarus leaning against the honored Abraham's "bosom," chest or lap.

HELL: (Gehenna) a word Matthew uses as a symbol of the place of judgment for the unrighteous after death. It was a place outside of the city of Jerusalem, at one time used for pagan sacrifice, and regularly used as the dumping and burning place for the city's trash and garbage.

The Lake of Fire: The book of Revelation states that this is the final place of torment for Satan, his angels and demons, and all the collections of evil, unrighteous, persons that once occupied Sheol, Hades, and Hell. This place is "apart" from God – not ever to be in His presence or in His Heaven.

Abraham's bosom, Paradise, Heaven: Jesus used both Abraham's bosom and Paradise as word representing Heaven. That place that is the final abode of God's chosen righteous men, women and children whose names have been recorded in His Book of Life. The souls of the righteous, at death, go directly into the presence of God. It is also believed that when Jesus died and went to the place of the dead, He released the Old Testament righteous men women and children and took them to heaven with Him. The unrighteous dead will be resurrected after the second coming and millennial reign of Christ, and is followed by judgment and eternal sentencing to the Lake of Fire.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. The point of Jesus' ministry and the telling of stories and parables changed back in Luke Chapter 10. What changed?

Jesus finished His Message to Jerusalem and Judah and began his focus upon Galilee. The Galilean people were more faithful to God's word than those in Judah. Jesus sends out 70 of His disciples to find people and homes that would welcome Him and His gospel.

2. In this Parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus, what is the main message to be learned?

In order to be a person of effective faith... you need to be able to discard your reliance upon wealth, money, and things. Being a true follower of Jesus requires that one truly relies upon Jesus in order to be saved. Becoming a Christian is both easy and difficult - depending on where you put your faith. Having money and things is not unrighteous, but depending upon them as important to your eternal standing will cause you to fail at faith in Jesus Christ. The story is the basic fact that those who "have" tend to not trust in Faith. One having great wealth, in our story, is contrast with one who has nothing. One who doesn't need to trust in "faith," and one who has no other option - but to trust in faith.

3. What is the secondary message to be learned?

For all mankind, every person, will eventually find themselves in one of two situations upon their death. Two contrasting end destinations. This story takes place before Jesus has been on the Cross but it teaches the importance of having faith. It is Jesus who is teaching this lesson. His message is about trusting in things that can be seen, used, touched, owned, and master in nature - that lead to an eternity in the place of pain and torment versus trusting in that which is truly spiritual, unseen, untouchable, and servant in nature, which lead to an eternity in the place of love and acceptance.

4. What doctrinal truth is evidenced in this story concerning death?

The non-Christian world views and some Christian movements teach so many ideas about death, dying, and destinations that are not supported in the Word of God. This parable is clear that there are two destinations, before and after the Cross of Jesus: post judgment pain and suffering, for the rejection of God in this life requires an eternal judgmental destination. One of pain and suffering; and post judgment Joy and relationship to God as a family member. The parable clearly demonstrates, by Jesus, that no one may pass, or be sent, from one destination to the other. No reincarnation, no ghost-like existence following physical death, and no purgatory, no second chance or time spent in a penalty box.

References

- * *The New American Standard Bible*, Zondervan, 1995
- ** *The Interlinear Scripture Analyzer Software*
- *** A. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1883

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Jeremiah 18:15
 "Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"
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