

A Great Chasm: The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

Luke 16:19-31

Outline/Summary

Intro--This is a parable. (Context, introductory "there was a...", personal name not necessarily indicator of historical: "one whom God helps" adds to the story, not consistent with literal revelations of the nature of heaven/hell elsewhere in Scripture...).

1. A contrast of circumstances in this life (19-21)

a. The Rich Man

- *Expensive clothes*
- *Expensive food, lots of it, all the time. No "special" meals (all special). No "parties" (all).*
- *Constant pleasure - "sumptuous living every day"*

b. Lazarus

- *"at his gate laid a poor man covered in sores" (20)*
- *"the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table" (21a)*
- *"even the dogs were coming and licking his sores" (21b)*

"Jesus is saying that the rich man was, in God's economy, dumber than a dog."

2. A reversal of circumstances in the next life (22-26)

a. They both died -- how/when unimportant

b. After death, there's reversal

c. What is Abraham's bosom (side)? (22)

- *not a complete picture of heaven--a meal*
- *pictures Lazarus at a heavenly banquet with father Abraham at the head of the table and Lazarus on his shoulder*

d. This is a story of reversal, but not mere reversal.

- *does not merely elevate poverty and damn riches*
- *rich man's lostness was demonstrated in the use of his wealth*
- *there is regret, but not repentance*

3. A concern for those still living (27-28) --only horizontal, not vertical (no Godward focus)

4. An explanation of unbelief (29-31)

a. "rich man" arguing with Abraham and subtly blaming God (implication... I would have believed if given a miracle...)

b. Abraham: "even if someone rises from the dead, they will not listen" --proved true with Lazarus (Jesus' friend) and Jesus

c. unbelief is persistent--the fallen heart pursues reasons not to believe

d. unbelief is self deceiving--the burden of proof is always higher, always needs something else

ISSUES OF ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION

1. **Identity**-- Are you okay with your sole identity being "the one whom God helps"?

- What about the rich man's name?

"Jesus kept quiet about the rich man's name and mentioned the name of the poor man. The rich man's name was thrown around, but God kept quiet about it. The other's name lost in silence, and God spoke it... You see, God who lives in heaven kept quiet about the rich man's name, because he did not find it written in heaven. He spoke the poor man's name, because he found it written there, indeed he gave instructions for it to be written there." --Augustine

- The connection between care for the poor and salvation

- The poor are the physical, economic representation of what we were/ARE spiritually
- We came to Christ as BEGGARS ... OR WE DIDN'T COME AT ALL!
- Jesus came to preach "good news to the poor" (Lk 4 and 7) – spiritually poor
- He came as a physician to the spiritually sick (Lk 4) – i.e., to those who recognize their sickness
- Jesus became Poor for Us

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His POVERTY might become rich.

- Our riches were only inherited and received, not earned
 - We are rich in Christ, but poor in ourselves--Growing in grace means a growing realization of both: our riches in Christ & poverty in self
 - Certain "works" reflect the heart and disposition of what it means to become a Christian-- Compassion on the poor, help to the poor, are "works" that reflect the heart of the gospel
- While not teaching that riches automatically damn us, it is a vivid reminder of what Scripture says elsewhere that there is a corrupting and blinding potential of wealth

2. **Mission**-- God has sent us outside the gate to serve, to feed, to love, to proclaim his Word, to warn of his judgment.

- As for the rich man, opportunities are literally at our doorstep

3. **Expectation**-- A Christian's expectations about this life should at least partially be informed by the example of Lazarus.

- Job an example of suffering followed by blessing in this life
- Lazarus an example of waiting for blessings after physical death--Are you OK with that?

4. **Heaven**-- Heaven will be far greater than any and all biblical descriptions we have.

- Lazarus was immediately carried to comfort
- Hell is real

Study Helps and Application

Introduction: The *Guilt, Grace, & Gratitude* pattern may be more obvious some weeks than others. This week it's pretty clear. Though each discussion area is based on the points of application in the sermon, not all of these points may have been covered in each service.

Leaders: Again there may be more than you will be able to cover, but please ensure you leave time for Grace & Gratitude discussion at the end.

Discussion 1: *The combination of Word and deed.* When we take the time to study the relationship of faith (as a result of preaching the Word) and deed, we come to the conclusion that we are saved by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

^{ESV} **James 2:14** What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

We see that in judgment God's people are *recognized/distinguished* by their fruit (works--e.g. Matt 25 and the sheep & goats).

- Which lifestyle in this parable **more closely** resembles your own? (essentially all should pick the rich man... in world standards... Do you lack a home? Daily food? Basic healthcare?--be sensitive for differences in your group)
 - Are we guilty for being materially blessed? [NO!--but what we do with those riches reveals much about us.]
- Like the rich man in our response? (Are we wiser than the dogs?)
 - Was the rich man actively oppressing the poor? [no--passively ignoring him... sin of omission vs. commission]
- What are some opportunities on our doorstep to live this out?

Discussion 2: *The Corrupting Potential of Wealth / Fighting Materialism.* Because Jesus spoke so much about money and our text has been revealing those teachings, we've spent a lot of time on serving two masters/God and money.

- Material wealth--is it a blessing or a test? [both!--We see God rewarding people with material blessings (Solomon, end of Job...) & we see people judged for unfaithfulness with it ...]

- *Do your financial records reveal a concern for the poor and helpless (orphans, widows, prisoners, ...)*

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:17** As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Discussion 3: Discuss the sufficiency and urgency of God’s Word.

- *The Word of God is enough for us-- Are you or someone you know waiting for some kind of miraculous sign/undeniable proof before you/they will repent and believe the gospel? [is that wise? does God owe you/them a personal miracle? Was Jesus’ resurrection sign enough? ...]*
- *The Necessity of Heeding the Word of God...and Heeding it Now. Why do we see urgency in the message of the cross? [death/return of Christ are unexpected events..., no evidence of post-mortem “repentance” such as the rich man’s being evidence of saving faith]*
- *As an ambassador/witness for Christ, how should these affect your message/testimony?*
 - *Urgency?*
 - *The Word + something-extra? [Whenever we add something-extra to the Word, the something-extra always tends to take priority (experiences, personal promptings/messages from God, promises of health, wealth, relationships...). **The gospel you win them with is the gospel you win them to;** what happens when the bottom falls out of those something-extras?]*

Discussion 4: A Question of Identity – Are you okay with simply being “one God helps”?

“We are beggars: this is true.”

--The last recorded written words of Martin Luther

- *How much of your testimony is about what you’ve done vs. what God has done?*
- *Do you take comfort and hope in your status as a Lazarus?*
 - *If we learn to see the Great Commission as “Lazarus, go forth!”¹ --how might that affect our attitudes as Kingdom builders?*

¹ Yes, a play on words and no, not the same Lazarus. But Jesus’ friend was definitely “someone whom God helped,” and the Great Commission is an area where we are completely dependent upon God’s help.

Wrap-Up: Gratitude for God's Amazing Grace

Discussion 5: Heaven-- far greater than any and all biblical descriptions we have

"It's not that life is so short, it's just that you're dead for so long!"

--Somebody's T-shirt

- Try to wrap your mind around an eternity comforted as God's cherished adopted Children. [no... you can't even come close!]*
- Can such an eternal perspective help answer tough questions about temporary suffering? [Extended or even life-long suffering on earth is temporary (and but a vapor) with respect to eternity--this is no excuse for callousness though]*
- Spend some time in prayer giving thanks to God for His undeserved favor. Specifically for one another's salvation.*

Memory Verses

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 6:17-18** As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share

Resources for Further Study

- Whatever Happened to Hell? by John Blanchard
<http://www.amazon.com/Whatever-Happened-Hell-John-Blanchard/dp/0852343035>*
- The Parables of Jesus from Monergism.com's directory of theology:
http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/The-Parables-of-Jesus/*

Next Week's Text

Acts 2:42-47