

# The Rich Man and Lazarus

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## Luke 16:14-15, 19–31

### Introduction – why parables?

- We continue this morning with our series on the Parables of Jesus.
- Before we dive into the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus,
  - let's review and look at parables in general.
- A parable is a type of literature found in the bible among other places.
- They are quite simple and true to life but may include surprising twists and turns.
- The actual meaning of a parable may be a bit tricky.
- Parables are powerful communicators.
- Jesus used parables a lot as a teaching tool.
- The Gospel of Luke has the most at 24 parables.
- Jesus wasn't the only person in the Bible to use parables.
- There are **many parables** in the Old Testament.
- For example, in 2 Samuel 12:1–13, the prophet Nathan tells King David of ancient Israel a parable about a rich man who takes the ewe lamb of a poor man to entertain a visitor.
  - David is horrified and condemns the rich man's behavior.
  - When **Nathan tells** David that he is the rich man and
  - the **man David had killed** so David could **take his wife** was the poor man.
    - David is convicted of his **wrong behavior** and replies in v. 13 **"I have sinned against the LORD."**
- A parable can cause **us to admit** that our behavior was wrong and to change.

- As with Nathan's parable, Jesus' parables may be easy to understand but some are **hard to interpret**.
  - For those with a **closed heart**, their meaning is hidden.
  - **Just as Nathan helped** David to open his heart and understand the parable.
  - The **Holy Spirit will** lead those of us with an open heart to understanding.
  - The understanding of a **parable is a gift** of God and it is available to all of us.
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- It has been interesting studying one parable after another.
  - I know that in the past, I've mostly looked at one parable in isolation.
  - In the past five weeks we have looked at:
    - Matthew 13:31 - The Parable of the Mustard Seed
    - Matthew 25:14 -30 - The Parable of the Bags of Gold
    - Luke 13:6-9 - A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard
    - Luke 15:11-32 - The Parable of the Lost Son
    - Matthew 7:24-27 - The Wise and Foolish Builders
  - We continue today with the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

### How do we react?

- **How** do we react to them?
  - Do we hold them **at distance** and look at them as **intellectual objects**?
  - Do we **consume** them like a movie thinking they are **just a story**?
  - Do we think that the **parable is quaint**, but it doesn't apply to me but instead it **applies to** other people?
  - Or do we let their **meaning shake our very foundations** and lead us to question how we think and behave?
- Parables can be **very powerful** – that is if we take **them to heart**?

[[pause]]

- I have to confess, for me my **first reaction** has been a little bit of fear –
  - Am I doing what the parable says, or
  - am I doing enough of what the parable says to do?
- In the past week I have asked myself:
  - Is the seed of faith in me growing enough?
  - Am I wisely investing the riches that God has given me?
  - Am I being producing fruit for the Kingdom of God?
  - Am I squandering my inheritance?
  - Am I placing my trust upon God or upon myself?
- Finally, today's parable makes me ask:
  - Am I rich?
  - If so, am I condemned just because I'm rich?

- Am I helping the Lazaruses around me?
- Am I helping enough?

### Need to understand the context

- However, before we get too hard on ourselves,
- We **need to understand** what is really being said.
- Instead of doubting ourselves we should be asking:
  - **Why** was the rich man condemned?
  - **What** does it mean to be rich?
  - **Who** are the Lazaruses around me?
- We also need to pay attention to **who Jesus was speaking to** when He told the parable.
  - That is why I included Luke 16:14-15 in the reading this morning.
  - Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees—one of the elite groups of religious and political leaders in Jesus' time—who were sneering at what Jesus had been teaching.
- Their **hearts were hardened** to Jesus' message.
- His charge against them was that
  - they justify themselves, that is they try to appear before the public as if they follow God's commands
  - but that their hearts did not value what God values.
- Instead, in their heart they **value money above God**.
- Ultimately, they **love themselves** more than they love God.
- That is something that **we can all be guilty** of.

### Lazarus named

- This morning's parable is unique. It is the only one of Jesus' parables that names a character – Lazarus.
- Perhaps Jesus picked the name Lazarus because in Hebrew name which means "God, the Helper." This could indicate that Lazarus was righteous not because he was poor but because he depended on God.
- There is a real man named Lazarus in the **Gospel of John**. However, the Lazarus of John doesn't fit the description of Luke's Lazarus so I'm not connecting the two.
- The parable also names 2 historical figures, Abraham and Moses.
- Abraham is considered the father of the Jewish people and of ancient Israel.
- Moses was also a **great leader**, in Israel's history.
- He is also a prophet and the first 5 books of the Bible are attributed to him.

### Self-love

- This parable certainly portrays the Rich Man as loving himself just as Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing.
- He certainly had enough wealth, but in his heart, there was no room to share with others.
- Did you catch that his dogs conveyed more **compassion** towards Lazarus than the Rich Man did?<sup>1</sup>
  - They licked his sores, something that a dog does out of compassion.
- The Rich Man thought that he was better than Lazarus. He knew Lazarus' name but **couldn't be inconvenienced** to consider Lazarus' welfare from a humanitarian standpoint.
- If the Rich Man were alive today, he could have used a kind of free enterprise perspective saying:
  - That poor Lazarus.
  - He has made poor choices in his life and now he is paying the price.
  - It is no concern of mine, he was made his bed and now he has to sleep in it.
  - It is only fair.
- And he might add:
  - Thank God that I am not like him.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1884.



## God's perspective

- Jesus' view of the world did not match that of the Pharisees who were sneering at Jesus and His teachings.
- Jesus accuses them *"You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others."*
- For these Pharisees, the only thing that mattered to them was themselves.
  
- Are **we** any less self-centered than these Pharisees?
- Are we only willing to help others as long as it **helps us feel good** about ourselves?
- Are we willing to be involved in ministry only as long as it **is convenient** for us?
- Am we willing to be a Christian only as long as it **isn't much of a bother**?
  
- It is easy to get a hard heart. Our hearts can harden because of
  - Pride or love of self or of our opinion
  - Lack of forgiveness
  - Love of comfort or the status quo.
  
- Jesus is a revolutionary. His words are not convenient.
  - They do **not conform** to the wisdom of those around us.
  - They cause us to be **uncomfortable**.
  - They cause to **examine** ourselves and to change.
  - They cause us to **see** God's perspective.

- What is God's perspective?
  - God cares about everyone.
  - God cares about You and me. The rich and especially the poor.
  - God cares about justice, not the justice of humanity but the justice of God as described in scripture.
  
- Did you notice the contrast in what happened after the rich man and Lazarus both died?
  - The rich man was buried, probably with great honor and ceremony.
    - Perhaps with paid wailers to mourn his death.
  - Lazarus in contrast is carried by angels to Abraham's side – in other words Paradise.
  - God was concerned about Lazarus but in His justice, did not treat the Rich Man in the same way.

- The prophet Isaiah, one of the prophets that Jesus was talking about, says (Isaiah 58:6–9):

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<sup>6</sup> Isn't this the fast I choose:  
 releasing wicked restraints,  
 untying the ropes of a yoke,  
 setting free the mistreated,  
 and breaking every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Isn't it sharing your bread  
 with the hungry  
 and bringing the homeless poor  
 into your house,  
 covering the naked when you see them,  
 and not hiding from your own family?

<sup>8</sup> Then your light  
 will break out like the dawn,  
 and you will be healed quickly.

Your own righteousness  
 will walk before you,  
 and the LORD's glory  
 will be your rear guard.

<sup>9</sup> Then you will call,  
 and the LORD will answer;  
 you will cry for help,  
 and God will say, "I'm here." (CEB)

- These words the Rich Man did not heed.
- From God's perspective, in the Bible we all have been told what His will is through Moses and the prophets.
  - It is our choice whether to listen or not.

### How should we act?

- As a Church, we demonstrate God's love and concern for all of his people, not just ourselves or our immediate family. Among the many activities we do are:
  - We host **Crash Zone** which provides a safe after school environment for Middle School kids.
  - We send people to **RSM** to serve orphans and disabled children.
  - **Service Worship** projects reach out to others in need and feed the hungry near us.
  - We offer a **Grief Support** group and others for those who need encouragement and comfort.
  - Last August, we opened up our church campus to **Onnuri** Church (oh-new-re') who needed a new home.
- The Church both **demonstrates** care and **provides opportunities** for us to care about others.

## Our behavior

- On a personal level, I suspect that none of us literally have a beggar living at our front door like the Rich Man in the parable did.
- However, are we rich in money or in other ways that lead us to think only of ourselves as the Rich Man thought only of himself?
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  - Are we rich with time but squander it on amusement that we forget minutes after it is over or
    - Do we volunteer an hour a week at Crash Zone?
    - Do we start or attend a small group bible study?
  - Are we rich in our perceived self-image? And
    - are we more afraid of what those around us think of us or
    - Do we fear God and obey His instructions
      - by witnessing the Gospel at work, school, and with the people that we meet?
  - Are we rich in comfort and wallow in the comfort of how things have been in the past or
    - Do we welcome change and look for what God might be doing in our lives and in the world around us?
    - Do we look for ways in which we can grow closer to God?

- Jesus says that The Rich Man needed to look beyond himself and his friends to see others as God does,
  - with love and justice for all.
- Jesus **asks us** the same question.
- The Rich man needed to look at his wealth **not as his**,
  - but as **a gift from God** to be shared with others and
  - **used** for God's glory and honor.
- The message of the Bible is that the **sin of humanity is selfishness** –
  - thinking only of ourselves.
- The reality is that everything belongs to God.
- This is the teaching of Jesus.

### Through God's eyes

- If we are looking at the world through God's eyes:
  - We should look at **this church**,
    - not as “my” church, or the organization called West Valley, or an ECO church
    - but as part of God's universal church.
  - We should be **overjoyed that Onnuri** has joined us.
    - Not because we occasionally get some great Korean Food but
    - because they can share the Gospel with Korean speakers in ways that West Valley can't.
  - We should be overjoyed that West Valley has **programs to reach** out to the needy.
    - Not because it makes us feel good that we belong to a church that does good things
    - But because we see ourselves and other people living out God's will and showing God's love.
  - We should **view change**
    - Not as bad just because it can be hard,
    - but as an opportunity to grow in Christ, and
    - see how the change helps the mission of the universal Church.

### Being rich

- Dear Friends, being rich is not necessarily a curse. Later in Luke 23 we meet Joseph of Arimathea, who provided Jesus with His tomb.
- Joseph was obviously a wealthy man but Luke's description of him focuses upon his character and not his possession.
- Luke calls him in Luke 23:50 "**a good and upright man.**"
- Being rich is not a sentence to Hades but love of our riches may **tempt us** to sin and to turn our backs upon God.
- Don't let your riches, in whatever form you are blessed, **cause you to stumble.**
- Don't be contented here and condemned later.
- Instead, hold your riches in trust to be used for God's glory.



## Conclusion

- We aren't told of the Pharisees reaction to Jesus' words. Perhaps more sneering.
- What about us?
- What does Jesus want to teach us?
- What is our reaction?
  - Do we see others as God sees them?
  - Do we listen to Moses, the prophets, and to Jesus?
  - Do we open our heart to God and to those around us?
- An open heart shows itself through action. **Decided to act now!**
- How will you share your riches this week?
- **If** we do,
  - we will be rich in the eyes of the kingdom and
  - like Joseph of Aramathea, we will be known for who we are.

## Prayer

- Dear Jesus,
- Thank you for our riches, whether it be in money, time, or talent.
- We hold them in trust for the benefit of Your kingdom on this earth.
- We desire to see the world through Your eyes and
  - not through the **dark lenses** of our own desires.
- Lift from us all selfishness and fill us with your concern for everyone.
- Speak to us and help us listen as you bless us
  - with opportunities to use our riches in Your service.
- Amen.