

# The rich man and Lazarus

## Luke 16: 19-31 – The Rich Man and Lazarus

<sup>19</sup> “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

<sup>22</sup> “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

<sup>25</sup> “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

<sup>27</sup> “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

<sup>29</sup> “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

<sup>30</sup> “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

<sup>31</sup> “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

## Introduction

### What is a parable?

- NOT a literal teaching....
- NOT used to establish the reality or character of hell, NOT trying to settle issues about the afterlife, eternal punishment.
- An **illustrative story** about something familiar, thrown up alongside something unfamiliar **in order for us to grasp the unfamiliar something**.
- Rich with images
- Memorable, Jesus told lots of them
- They **invite** us to identify with certain characters; often they **help us to read ourselves into the story**.
- Significantly, if we can understand the parable, we’ll understand Jesus better.

### This Parable and concerns/themes of Luke/Acts

- This parable is the third in a trilogy
  - A prodigal wastes his father’s possessions (Luke 15 11-32)
  - A dishonest steward wastes his Masters possessions (Luke 16:1-8)
  - A rich man wastes his own possessions. (Luke 16:19-31)
- shows relentless concern over possessions, and relentless concern for the poor

- 'seeing' : Because before you can have compassion for people, you have to *see* them, & 'hearing' – whoever 'hears' or is hearing Jesus is being saved, are coming to faith
- This parable has familiar folk lore ring to it: most of Jesus' hearers already believed something along the lines of "**life is unfair, but never mind God will 'even things up' in the next life**"

The Rich Man and Lazarus

<sup>19</sup> "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury (feasted sumptuously) every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate **was laid** a beggar **named** Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and **longing** to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even **the dogs** came and licked his sores.

<sup>22</sup> "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and **was buried**. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

(The Dialogue)

<sup>24</sup> So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

<sup>25</sup> "But Abraham replied, '**Son, remember (the voice of the prophets)** that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that **those who want to** go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

<sup>27</sup> "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family,<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

<sup>29</sup> "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

<sup>30</sup> "'**No**, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if **someone** from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

<sup>31</sup> "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

- ❖ Two Key players – **they do not interact**

**Rich Man:**

Vs 19: <sup>19</sup> "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury (**feasted sumptuously**) every day.

- *brief yet brilliant picture* painted of **self indulgence, sumptuous living**
- Only the very wealthy could afford **purple cloth**
- He drove a **gold plated HSV**
- With the **best quality Egyptian cotton underwear** (light humour)

- In **feasting** everyday he **did not observe the Sabbath** – his servants never being given a day of rest. If the wellbeing of his servants mean nothing to him, what of Lazarus ?

#### Lazarus:

'At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup>and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup>The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.

This poor man has a name - the **only individual with a name** in all of Jesus parables.

- Lazarus **was laid** at the gate – unable to stand, too sick to walk, probably unable to move.
- Members of the **community carried** him to the gate every day and returned him to wherever he stayed each night, in the hope that the rich man or his guests would feel some compassion toward him.
- What do you make of the dogs? The dogs, **why didn't the dogs drive him away** from the place at the gate where he laid?
- *brief yet brilliant picture painted of Lazarus as a gentle soul*, a man at some sort of peace with his sufferings and his surrounding regardless of how harsh it was
- He **dies, is too poor for a funeral** and it taken to the arms of Abraham. The rich man also dies and has a proper burial.

#### The Dialogue between Abraham and the rich man:

The drama and tension of this story between Lazarus and rich man **continues into the afterlife.....**

<sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was in torment, the rich man looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

Vs 24 "'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

- **The rich man recognises Lazarus and knows his name!!!!**
- The rich man doesn't call out Lazarus, **instead father Abraham** – He plays his '**racial**' card, **he has the blood of Abraham flowing in his veins**, Abraham is the patriarch of his clan, and after all the rich man is circumcised! Surely this would guarantee him assistance.
- The rich man's demands the services of Lazarus!!
- All the years of Lazarus' pain, ignored by the rich man. Now that the rich man is in pain something must be done immediately.
- Entrenched in his privileged attitude, the rich man might well have said "Now that Lazarus is feeling better and is on his feet, I would like a few things. Given who I am, and given who he is, a few things are expected. So Abraham send him down and hurry up about it, unlike Lazarus I am not accustomed to discomfort"

- Just like, when you work at Subway you can't smell the bread; the **rich man was oblivious to both what he did in the past to Lazarus and what he continues to do in the present.** He certainly had not absorbed the new realities of where he is – it's like he just simply **can't image a world where social stratifications do not apply.**
- Abraham says a nice no. (This is a real **surprise to the readers..** folk lore says that this type of request is usually granted)

Now those listening to the parable are on the edge of their seats:

- The tables are turned: Lazarus is in the *position of 'power'* (he is reclining at Abraham's table of a man of great influence) **How will Lazarus respond to being treated like a servant?**

Like this: "You dog, I see that you recognise my face and can call my name! You saw me outside your gate and you did nothing to alleviate my pain. Even your dogs were kind to me. But you are scum of the earth, where were you when I needed your help. Now you want me to serve you!!? Abraham, leave his monstrous ego to fry in hell – it's only half what he deserves"

- What does Lazarus say?  
He is quiet, **(have a quick look again at the text)** it seems that this long suffering man has no reservoir or anger ready to explode, he hasn't been lying awake at night plotting how he will retaliate, he has no score to settle.

As the story continues, all eyes are on Abraham...

'My dear Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but **now he is comforted here** (not healed or fed) and you are in agony.

Abraham continues

<sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

- "And besides..." – "great chasm" – yes that is easy to understand... But "Those who want to pass from here to you cannot"

Who, for heaven's sake would want to journey from heaven to hell!!!!????

I have a very suspicion that Abraham has a volunteer – it's like **there is now another person on the stage – Lazarus is whispering** in Abraham's ear saying something like

*"Father Abraham, that's my old neighbour down there. We have known each other for years. Poor guy – he's in a difficult situation. We have plenty of water here, if it pleases you, I will be glad to take a glass down to him".*

- Here we learn something more about Lazarus – he has put his anger toward the rich man **(hand gesture)** so far away and this motivates this **deep deep level of compassion** over this rich man's predicament

**I'm sensing Jesus isn't talking about Lazarus so much as about God!**

- “meeting Christ in distressing disguise” Mother Theresa
- Matthew 25 **Jesus tells us he is Lazarus.**  
<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

The rich man then says:

‘Then I **beg** you, father, send Lazarus to my family,<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

- A noble interest in his brothers. But **if Lazarus can’t be his table waiter** then surely he can be an errand boy to serve the interests of the rich man’s siblings.
- Once again, the rich man’s class structured world is still intact.

But Abraham said:

‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

<sup>30</sup> “‘No, father Abraham,’ the rich man reply’s, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

Firmly, Abraham concludes the conversation

<sup>31</sup> “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Concluding thoughts;

This story about Lazarus and the rich man is an all too realistic picture of so much of the world where the divide between the rich and the poor reflects gross injustice.

(If time allowed we could share stories.... about that homeless guy, you see in town, on your way to work, at the bus stop. **Covered with sores** and lying on a pile of newspapers and covered by a rough blanket, perhaps with a dog for safety. People walk past him, or step over him..... Or in **your travels** you’ve probably run the gauntlet of beggars, or seen (on TV or internet) whole camps of people in lean-to and plastic bag shelters right on the edges of large high rises, rich cities.

### **The invitation and challenge of Parables:**

#### **Challenged to act:**

how we act in response to what we see and experience; i.e. how we respond to/ what do we **do with** the grace (good things) and pain of life?

- Think back for a minute about how the rich man responded to the good gifts given to him?
- How did Lazarus respond to his pain?

#### **Invitation to faith:**

Having faith is a choice we must make deliberately, not magically. (And it is so easy to avoid this deliberate choice.)

So may we let faith rise up in us as we hear the message of Good news – “read the Bible, its reliable”

- God is speaking to us what he has done for us in Christ, Christ who speaks to us *words of eternal life*, sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways.

Let's choose faith, because as Abraham's answer reminds us; we will always find ourselves in the situation of hearing a word from another and trusting it – or not. We are always in the place of having to have faith. Even if Lazarus returned, the brothers would have to believe that this was really Lazarus, that he had really died, and that he really had a message from their brother.