

## The Billionaire and the Beggar

### Luke 16:19-31

We have really just slowly plowed our way through Luke 16, haven't we? Now vv. 19-31 wrap up Jesus' teaching triage on stewardship of money. Just for a recap of the context, in vv. 1-13, Jesus taught on stewardship and how the disciple should use his/her money. Then in vv. 14-18, Jesus taught on the love of money and the fulfillment of the Law. In vv. 19-31, He concluded the triage with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. This parable brings together the themes of *concern for the lost* in Luke 15 and *concern for the poor* in Luke 16. This parable brings together a preachers two favorite topics to preach about: Hell, and money. Not really, but if you are going to preach the gospels you are going to preach about Hell and money quite often because Jesus preached about Hell and money very often.

Jesus is the Master story teller. He wove so many truths into this parable that we cannot help but be in awe of the *wisdom* of the *words* of our Savior. Every sentence is loaded with penetrating eternal truth. One of the great lessons to be learned from this parable is that *no sin of commission or omission ever stands alone. The strings of the chord that one touches in this life will echo in eternity.*

Friends, it is a grave mistake, with eternal consequences, to live our lives only for the here and now. Our lives must be lived in light of eternity because eternity waits on us all. We will all stand before God and give an account of our lives. The breath of your life that is breathed *in* here is *exhaled* in eternity.

As we work through the parable, I want to give us four mental hooks on which to hang our thoughts this morning. We will look at *two lives, two deaths, two pleas, and one problem with one solution.*

#### I. Two Lives That Echo in Eternity (vv. 19-21)

Verse 19 says, "*There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.*" The imagery in v. 19 tells us that this man had everything he wanted. To wear *purple and fine linen* in Jesus' day was to dress like a king.

The Greek word for *sumptuously* means *gloriously splendid*. How this man partied was the toast of the town. He was known for his great feasts. It was New Year's Eve in Times Square every day for this man. If they would have had the TV show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* back in that day, he would have been on it. Very few people could imagine living a life like he did.

Yet, in vv. 20-21 we go from riches to rags, "*And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.*"

While this man was throwing lavish parties and living large, Lazarus was in a horrible condition and basically laying at his doorstep. He was in such bad shape that the people of the village had taken him and dumped him at the rich man's gate so that he might receive some help.

Lazarus was like the baby left on the doorstep and had become the rich man's responsibility because he was so sick and weak he could not care for himself. The villagers thought that since the rich man had the ability to help, he might give him aid. The original language indicates that Lazarus was laid in such a way that the rich man would see Lazarus every day and basically almost had to step over Lazarus.

Lazarus must have been a sight to see. His body was covered with sores. Malnutrition and illness were wreaking havoc on his body. He was so hungry that he would have gladly taken the scraps from the rich man's table. I don't mean leftovers that you take home in a box from a restaurant but the scraps that fell to the ground that were beyond the 5 second rule. It would have been the food that the dogs would have eaten. Yet, no servant came and fed him.

The rich man knew Lazarus. He knew he was there. He knew he needed help but he did nothing. He didn't bandage his sores or get him some medicine or take him to get medical treatment. Instead, the poor man was left to the dogs and because he was so weak, the dogs licked his sores and he could not stop them.

By the way, this was not the Lazarus of Bethany, Mary and Martha's brother. This was simply the name Jesus used to tell the parable and the name Lazarus is significant.

The irony of Jesus using the name Lazarus is that the name Lazarus means *God helps* or *God has helped*. Yet, when you look at Lazarus' condition, it seems like God has not helped him at all. His name seems to mock him. Not only did it seem like God had abandoned him, he was a "*son of Abraham*" and yet the "*sons of Abraham*" ignored him. He was neglected by his own people and seemed to be neglected by God.

Jesus is setting us up for a heart check. So, let's consider a couple of things we see so far. Note two things we learn at the beginning of this parable:

1. God helps us in our suffering. He does not forget us. When we think about the meaning of Lazarus' name and look at Lazarus' life it seems like God has not helped him and that He has indeed forgotten him. The story of Lazarus is not complete as we will see later.

Friends, we must take the long view of suffering in our lives. We must live life with eternity in view. If it seems like God has forgotten you in your suffering you need to remember that your story is not yet complete. Hold fast to your faith in God even when the suffering is horrific for God does not forget His own. God is just and will dispense justice in the scope of eternity.

2. We need to ask God to give us eyes to see and a heart to serve the suffering people God puts in our paths.

May is graduation month. Mac graduates from Gilbert this afternoon. We are very excited for him. We are very excited for us as our youngest one finishes high school.

A few years ago, Harvard University asked their MBA graduates to develop a strategic plan for their lives under the title "*What Do I Hope to Achieve in Life after Graduation?*" The top three answers were wealth, notoriety, and status. No one said anything about service. Yet, the Bible teaches us that "*If anyone has the world's goods and see his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?*"<sup>1</sup>

Brothers and sisters, we do not have to be rich to help people. We simply must be faithful with the little God has given you. You don't have to do everything but you and I can do something. When you develop eyes to see those who suffer and have a heart to serve them God will give you what you need.

May it never be said of us that we neglected our own. Let's be a church who use our wealth to relieve the lives of the poor. May the Lord give us eyes to see and strength to serve those who suffer; who are poor; who are in need; and who are helpless.

I think the problem we have is: *out of sight, out of mind*. So, let me make a very specific application right here to help us think about helping suffering people.

Do you have eyes to see and hearts that care about the lives of young women who are being exploited on the altar of the almighty dollar of the abortion industry? Do you see them? Do you pray that this death culture and industry will be stopped? Is there a way you can give of your time and money to help alleviate the suffering of the lives of those caught in this death machine?

Walk for Life is coming up June 1<sup>st</sup>. Perhaps you can just begin there to learn how you can help. Go to Ada Hayden that morning and walk and pray with hundreds of people who want to help those suffering because they have had an abortion, those who are considering one, and those who want to preserve the lives of their babies.

## II. Two Deaths that Live in Eternity (vv. 22-23)

Now let's look at the two deaths that live in eternity. Death is the great equalizer of lives of both men. In life, only a gate separated them but now in eternity there is a great gulf.

Verse 22 tells us that Lazarus had a heavenly funeral. He died and was carried by the angels to *Abraham's side*. Your translation may say *Abraham's bosom*. Jesus point was not for us to get hung up on the imagery. Jesus wants us to know Lazarus was receiving his reward for trusting God and he went to heaven. *Abraham's side or Abraham's bosom* is imagery to communicate that God healed Lazarus and took him to heaven or paradise to be with Him for eternity because he had faith in God. The fact that angels carried him away to *Abraham's side* does not mean that this is the way God does it either.

Remember I said *Lazarus'* name means, *God helps*. We may look at his life and wonder where God was in all of his suffering because it certainly didn't seem like God was helping him. Where was God in the horrific suffering he endured? Where was God in his illness? Where was God in his poverty?

Here is what we know. In spite of his horrible suffering, Lazarus still trusted God even though it looked like God had abandoned him. Some might even conclude that because of his suffering that there really is no God. After all, how can a good God allow His children to suffer like this? This is a common question that people have.

Yet, Jesus does not answer this question. What we do know is that Lazarus trusted God even through his suffering and pain. He still looked to God and believed that He was his help. Lazarus had the faith of Abraham as

<sup>1</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke: Vol. 2: Chapters 13-24, Reformed Expository Commentary*, 197-199.

Galatians 3:7 says, “*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.*” Lazarus trusted God even in his suffering and so he was a *son of Abraham* so when he died he was taken to *Abraham’s side* [heaven].

The last part of v. 22 shifts to the rich man’s death. Jesus tells us that the rich man died and was buried. The people who heard this statement would have had a vivid picture of what that meant. It meant the rich man was buried with all the accompanying pomp and circumstance. Even his burial was an event with five brothers, dressed in fine mourning clothes, family, friends and even professional mourners.

But like Willie Nelson’s song says, *turn out the lights the party’s over*. It all changed in v. 23, “*and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.*” Now we learn the rich man’s fate. Prosperity in this life does not mean God has blessed you.

Riches may be your curse. Don’t mistake riches for blessings or wealth for faith or prosperity for the smile of God on your life. Riches are a stumbling block for many people.

Listen to what the Apostle James says to the rich in our churches in James 5:1-5, “*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. <sup>4</sup> Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.*”

Let’s make some application. Faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ makes you a child of Abraham and therefore is how you go to heaven. Being rich does not send you to hell nor does being poor mean you will go to heaven. Heaven and Hell are never determined by your bank account or your wealth. Faith in anything other than Jesus is what sends you to Hell and in this parable we see that it was the love of money and riches that sent the rich man to Hell.

Why does Jesus focus so much on the love of money, wealth, and possessions? It is because money, wealth, and possessions very easily become false gods for us. *If we are not careful we will love our riches with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love riches more than we love our neighbors.* This is what sends a person to Hell.

By the way, if you live the U. S., you are rich and so we must all beware. I think the temptation is to look around our congregation or around our city and think, “*Well, they are rich and so they must be careful.*” The fact is if you live in the U. S., you have more wealth and possessions than 90% of the world.

One more thing, just so you and I don’t think that it is only the rich that love money, I want to say that even the poor can love money more than God. Even the poor can orient their whole lives around the acquisition of money and thus make money, wealth, and possessions their god.

### III. Two Pleas that Come Too Late (vv. 24-28)

As we come to the second half of the parable we see that the lives of these two men are still echoing in eternity. The contrast of their lives is complete but there is a shift in the story. The last part of the parable is like a part two.

The story shifts from “life AND death” to “life AFTER death” and we are made privy to two pleas/prayers by the formerly rich man.

#### The First Plea: Mercy for the Man Himself Who is in Hell (vv. 24-26)

In v. 24, it says the rich man was in agony in Hell and he cried out to *Father Abraham*. Jesus used the Greek word *Hades*. The NIV translates the word Hell. *Hades* means the place of the dead and it is the same place as *Hell*. Jesus describes Hell as a place of eternal torment by fire or something like fire that is more horrific than we can imagine.

The Bible uses earthly language to communicate heavenly and eternal realities. The fact is our earthly language is limited in how it can describe their realities. Heaven will be infinitely better than our limited language and Hell will be infinitely worse than we can imagine.

So . . . what we see in parable is that the rich man was in horrific agony and suffering and so *he lifted up his eyes and saw Father Abraham and called out to him for mercy*. Now we learn that the man knew his Jewish Scriptures because he knew who Abraham was. The sad reality was that he did not submit to them.

We also learn that even in Hell the rich man still does not get it. He called out to Abraham to send Lazarus to run an errand for him as if Lazarus was his servant. He gave no relief to Lazarus while he was alive but now he wants Lazarus to give him relief. Now he wanted mercy but there would be no mercy for the man.

Jesus' goal in this parable was to not give an exhaustive description of Hell. Yet . . . He gave us enough to let us know we should not go there.

Hell is a place of eternal torment. It is a place designed to punish Satan, his demons, and those who reject Christ. It is not a place ruled by Satan or run by Satan to punish people. Everyone who rejects the Son of God will be in Hell in eternal torment.

By the way, there is only one of two places we will spend eternity—Heaven or Hell. There is no purgatory or some other in between places. This was all Jesus was trying to communicate. Heaven good—Hell bad. You want to go to Heaven and you don't want to go to Hell.

In vv. 25-26, Abraham tells the rich man two reasons there will be no relief for him in Hell.

Reason #1: Hell is a place of justice and no mercy (v. 25)

There was no relief for the rich man nor will there be any relief for anyone who does not believe the good news of the word of God and trust Jesus. Hell is a place of justice for those who reject God and His word.

Let me explain. Lazarus was not saved and went to Heaven because he was poor but because he had faith in God. Nor did the rich man go to Hell because he was rich but because he rejected or ignored or did not submit to the teaching of Scripture and had no faith in God.

Now . . . just to be clear. Verse 25 does NOT teach "*what goes around comes around.*" Instead it teaches that you must believe God's word and trust the salvation He provides in Jesus Christ.

If you ignore and reject the word of God, which points you to Christ in this life, God will be completely just for sending you to Hell for eternity. He has made the way plain and to reject God and His word is to reject that which is perfect and most beautiful and is also powerful to save.

Consider what Psalm 19:7-11 says about the word of God,

*<sup>7</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;  
<sup>8</sup> the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
<sup>9</sup> the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;  
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.  
<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.  
<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.*

This is the power and beauty of the word of God. Now let me ask you a question. *Where does God's word get its power and beauty?* It gets it from God. You see . . . the word of God reflects the power and beauty of the nature and character of God Himself. This is the reason God's word can be trusted.

Again, Lazarus' name helps us understand the rich man's problem. Remember Lazarus' name means "*God helps*". The rich man had no name. I want to be careful to not read too much into this parable but I think it is accurate to say that the rich man saw himself as his own help. His faith was in himself and his riches and he enjoyed them in his life and never once took his eyes off of himself or his riches. He helped himself and no one else.

Lazarus, on the other hand, did not have riches but had been given suffering and a very hard life. Yet, what did Lazarus do with his pain and suffering? He trusted in God and His word to be his help. He let his suffering drive him into the arms of God as his help.

Application: Many people today allow evil and suffering to cause them to reject God. They are unable to look through the experience of evil and suffering and trust God. They are unable to take their eyes off of their suffering and put them on Christ Jesus who was the ultimate sufferer.

If this is you today, then let me encourage you to look to Jesus who suffered and died on the cross because of your sin. Jesus was the ultimate sufferer. He suffered because of your sin. It was your sin and my sin that sent the innocent, perfect, Son of God to the cross to die in our place and for our sin. He was willingly laid on the cross for us. Then He was laid in the tomb. Then He rose from the dead on the third day to save sinners. He

is our help in our suffering. We need to take our eyes off of ourselves and our suffering and put the eyes of our faith on Jesus.

If God is not your help and Jesus is not your Savior, who or what are you trusting in for your help, satisfaction, meaning, purpose, and hope in life? Is it your wealth? Is it your job? Is it your talent and giftedness? Those things won't last nor will they save.

What will you do when suffering lays waste your life? Will you trust God or will you turn away from God? What is your help? King David prayed in Psalm 18:6, *"In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears."*

If you reject Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then God will be completely just to send you to Hell for eternity. Hell will be a place of justice for you.

Reason #2: Hell is inescapable (v. 26)

The second reason there was no mercy for the rich man in Hell is because there is no escape. The great chasm that separated Abraham and Lazarus from the man was meant to communicate there is no going back or going back and forth between Heaven and Hell. There is no leaving Hell. Once you are there it is over. It is final and it is too late.

Every religion except Christianity provides some kind of "get out of Hell" card. Greek mythology told of men and women who would descend into Hell and then leave or of people who might be given an opportunity to leave. In Jesus' day Greek Mythology was not considered mythology. It was considered religion 101. Yet, these kinds of ideas are still taught today in heresies and cults.

There are some Christians who believe in annihilationism. Annihilationism teaches there is no hell because those who would go there will simply be annihilated. They will no longer exist. Some Christians try to teach this and other religions teach it as well. However, Jesus' parable disproves that.

Roman Catholics teach that people go to purgatory where you can eventually pay your debt over eternity and then you can go to heaven. Some Muslims teach this too but they do not call it purgatory. The Bible does not teach there is a purgatory. Jesus' parable disproves purgatory.

Other religions believe there is reincarnation where you come back as some other kind of lower life form. Those who do better the second time around get to move up and those who do not keep moving down. Jesus' parable disproves reincarnation.

Rob Bell, a former Christian pastor and teacher, wrote a book called *Love Wins*. In his book Bell says that eventually everyone will go to heaven. Bell was already a very influential author and preacher so many people fell for his heretical teaching. We must be careful there are wolves and false teachers who call themselves Christians today and Rob Bell is one of them.

What Scripture teaches about Hell is the only true teaching on Hell. All other teachings on Hell are heresies and deadly. They are to be rejected as false teaching by false teachers.

Bottom line: No one wants to believe there is a Hell or that they will go there. Everyone wants to go to Heaven and this is true across the board. The fact is there is a heaven and there is a hell and people will spend eternity in one or the other. Those who repent of their sin and trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior who died in their place and for their sin and that He rose from the dead on the third day will be in Heaven. Those who reject Christ will go to Hell. There are no "do overs" or "get out of Hell free" cards.

Hell will be horrible. The rich man figured this out too late. It was too late for him but it is not too late for you. If you are hearing this parable this morning but you have never trusted Christ then God is showing you mercy. He is calling you to Himself. He is calling you to turn from living life your own way and putting yourself first to submitting to Jesus and trusting Him as your Lord and Savior. You may not understand what all of this means but it simply means that you give up and look to Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. You love Him and trust Him. The Second Plea by the rich man was: Mercy for His Brothers (vv. 27-31)

The man only briefly experienced the horrors of Hell, then he became concerned for others and in particular that his brothers might not come there. Hell causes him to become a missionary and an evangelist. But it is too late. He waited too long.

Notice what the man said. He begged Abraham to send Lazarus on a different errand this time. This time he wanted him to raise him back to life and send him to his five brothers and warn them so that they would not come to *this place of torment*.

We learn two things here. First: a right understanding of Hell will make good evangelists and missionaries of all of us. We must believe the message in this parable. Hell is not a place where we want anyone to go. You and I don't need to go there to know that. We don't need to have some special revelation of Hell. We simply need to believe the word of God because this is the ultimate revelation.

Second: a right understanding of mercy will make good evangelists and missionaries of all of us. The man misunderstood mercy. He thought it was some supernatural act that might save his brothers and keep them from going to Hell. The man did not realize that more than enough mercy had already been given in the word of God.

Jesus teaches us something vitally important in vv. 30-31 of this parable—God's word is all the mercy you need because God's word is sufficient to save. The theme of the importance of God's word has been running through this parable and now Jesus drives His point home. It is not faith in some supernatural acts that save but simple faith in the simple proclamation of God's word—the gospel.

Let's be good evangelists and missionaries and believe the word of God. Hell is horrible and the mercy gloriously given in Christ is sufficient to save. We must be about the business of telling others about Jesus. We must be fluent in the gospel so that it simple rolls off our tongues like honey.

The Problem: we are all sinners and headed to Hell and God is just to send us there. The Solution: God sent Jesus to satisfy His own justice for our sin by living a perfect life and fulfilling the Law of God and then He died on the cross to pay for our breaking of the Law of God. Then He rose from the dead on the third day to prove He can give us new life.

Friends, God's justice and mercy meet at the cross of Christ. Have you repented of your sin and trusted Christ today?