

The Story of Lazarus and the Rich Man The Proper Criteria to Evaluate Our Lives

November 15, 2015

Luke 16:19–31 (NKJV)

¹⁹“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

²⁰But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

²¹desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

²²So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

²³And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’

²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

²⁶And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

²⁷“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’

²⁹Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’

³⁰And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’

³¹But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’ ”

- *The story of Lazarus and the rich man describes how two people’s lives differed, both in their earthly and eternal experiences.*
- *The story of Lazarus and the rich man is not a parable, because a parable is an analogy that uses earthly examples to illustrate spiritual or heavenly truths.*
- *The story of Lazarus and the rich man is clearly a straightforward story describing two men.*
- *The rich man’s experience in Hades is not an analogy of what Hades is like but an actual description of what it is really like.*

- *This story is not a parable, because Jesus never mentioned anyone by name in any of the parables. It is very possibly a true story, since the name of one of the characters is actually given.*
- *The story in Luke 16 raises a number of questions such as, “What is the purpose of Jesus telling the story and how do we apply it to our lives?”*
- *Since the story took place before Christ’s resurrection, Lazarus is not described as being in Heaven, but in Paradise, the bosom of Abraham.*
- *Access to Heaven was opened up only after Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection took place, so the Old Testament saints waited in a place the Bible refers to as Paradise.*
- *The rich man is described as being in Hades or “the place of the dead.” Hades is the place where the unrighteous are held until the final judgment takes place when Death and Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:14-15).*
- *The first thing that stands out about this story is that although Lazarus ended up in Paradise, the bosom of Abraham, there is no direct reference to faith, repentance, or forgiveness of sins.*
- *The only thing that is said in response to why Lazarus was in Paradise and the rich man was in Hades is, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.”*
- *However, it is clear from Scripture that salvation is based solely on putting our faith in Jesus Christ and what He did for us through His sacrificial suffering, death, and resurrection. Salvation is not dependent upon whether or not our earthly lives were filled with hardship or comfort.*
- *There are ample Scriptures that demonstrate that salvation is based solely on putting our faith in Christ.*

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast.

John 3:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

¹⁷For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Romans 10:9 (NKJV)

⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

- *When we study the biblical context of the story of Lazarus and the rich man, it becomes apparent that Jesus' main purpose in telling the story was not to teach the people about salvation, but to correct a misconception about wealth and poverty, comfort and suffering, the rich and the poor.*

Luke 16:13–18 (NKJV)

¹³“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

¹⁴Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

- *Jesus warned the people that one cannot serve both riches and God, for inevitably a person will end up loving one and despising the other.*
- *The response of the Pharisees is very telling. They derided Jesus because they were covetous—they were lovers of money.*
- *Even though the Pharisees were seen as the religious leaders of their day, their true motivation was based solely on the temporal values of material wealth and the comfort and affluence of this earthly life.*

Luke 16

¹⁵And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

- *Jesus went further than just exposing the covetousness of the Pharisees. He exposed their false criteria for evaluating their lives, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.”*
- *The Pharisees did everything in order to gain the attention, praise, and approval of men while forgetting the only one's approval that really counted was God's, for only He can truly save men.*
- *“For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” - Although Jesus was addressing the covetousness of the Pharisees, He was in fact addressing the false criteria of all the people. Even though the people may have resented the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, they still esteemed them and saw them as an example of that part of society that was successful and to be admired.*

- *The thing that was an abomination in God's sight was not the material wealth itself, but the pursuit of the temporal things of this life at the expense of the eternal treasures that God was offering.*

Matthew 16:26 (NKJV)

²⁶For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Luke 8:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

- *For believers it is an abomination in God's sight when we get so caught up in the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life that we forget about the eternal purposes that God has for our earthly lives, and we lose our passion for God and the things of God.*

Luke 12:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

- *It is not wrong to possess material things, but it is wrong when material things possess us. Covetousness is when material things possess us. A covetous person will spend their time and energy and their very lives to serve their god of materialism.*
- *One of the keys to victorious Christian living is that our goal is to seek God's approval and not man's.*
- *When we stop trying to please others or ourselves and our primary goal is to please God, then a new liberty and joy will fill our hearts.*

Luke 16

¹⁶"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

¹⁷And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

¹⁸"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.

- *Jesus then turned to "the Law and the Prophets," because that is God's criteria and the only one that counts. God's criteria, unlike man's, is unchanging and not one tittle of the Law will fail.*
- *Then Jesus said that since John preached the Gospel of the kingdom of God, everyone was trying to enter into God's kingdom. The problem was that many were trying to do it by fulfilling the wrong criteria.*

- *The Pharisees were trying to be justified by seeking the approval of men and by appearing to be successful which only produced hypocrisy and not true righteousness.*
- *Then Jesus cut to the heart of the matter by exposing the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders and how they had distorted the Word of God to justify their own selfish choices. He used the covenant of marriage, as an example of how they had degraded it to satisfy their own selfish whims. “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.”*
- *The religious leaders were motivated to please themselves and wanted to appear pious and successful in the eyes of the people by flaunting their wealth and affluence.*
- *It was in the context of the above verses that Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the rich man.*

Luke 16

¹⁹“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

- *Jesus began the story by describing the wealth, the luxury, and affluence that the rich man continually experienced “every day.”*

²⁰But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,
²¹desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

- *In contrast, Jesus described Lazarus as a “certain beggar” who was not only totally impoverished, but also suffered from physical afflictions.*
- *Upon hearing the first part of the story, the people would have immediately admired the state of the rich man and would have pitied and possibly even dismissed the value of the poor man.*

James 2:1–9 (NKJV)

¹My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

²For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,

³and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,”

⁴have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?

⁷Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

⁸If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;

⁹but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

- *"But you have dishonored the poor man" – The main point is not that a beggar is righteous or a successful man is necessary a scoundrel. It simply means we must honour and value them alike and not show partiality.*
- *Both the rich and poor are sinners and can be scoundrels, but the important thing is that they both are in need of salvation.*
- *"Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" – The key point is not that poverty makes one righteous or riches makes one unrighteous, but a humble heart of faith and love is what enables us to receive the gift of eternal life.*

Matthew 5:3 (NKJV)

³Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- *The reality is that all people are sinners and spiritually impoverished. The important thing is to recognize that fact and respond to God by putting our faith in Christ.*
- *However, sometimes when people are successful in this world they don't realize they are spiritually impoverished and that is why Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And 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" but the good news is that although "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:23-26).*

²²So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

²³And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

- *These two verses provide a sharp contrast between the final fate of these two men.*
- *Another very significant fact is that while the poor man is named, the rich man remains unnamed.*

Psalm 9:5 (NKJV)

⁵You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and ever.

Proverbs 10:7 (NKJV)

⁷The memory of the righteous is blessed, But the name of the wicked will rot.

- *Often people are driven to leave a legacy and to have their names remembered in history, but the memory of the unrighteous will be forgotten and their names will be blotted out.*

Isaiah 49:15–16 (NKJV)

¹⁵“Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you.

¹⁶See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me.

- *Those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour will never be forgotten by God. Even their very names are inscribed on the palms of His hands!*
- *What a wonderful assurance Christ has given us, that no matter what we face in this life He says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5).*

Luke 16

²⁴“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’

- *We see the rich man in terrible torment in Hades, seeking even a little bit of relief from his continual agony.*

²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

²⁶And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

- *“Son, remember that in your lifetime...” – During his life, the rich man made a choice to pursue his own desires at the expense of seeking God.*
- *During his lifetime, the rich man was ambivalent about the suffering of others and was only concerned about his own comfort. This does not mean that the rich man didn’t allow Lazarus to eat the crumbs that fell from his table. It means that he was never moved with compassion by Lazarus’ plight and never sought to help him in any meaningful way.*

2 Thessalonians 1:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

- “besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us” – *Besides Hell being a place of eternal torment, it is a place of complete and total separation from everyone, and especially from God’s presence and the glory of His power.*

Luke 16

²⁷“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’

- *The rich man’s response to the potential plight of his five brothers showed that the rich man was not some monstrous unfeeling beast, but a man who still possessed compassion and cared for his brothers.*

John 3:18–21 (NKJV)

¹⁸“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

¹⁹And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

- “he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” - *The reason a person is condemned to Hell, is not because of their many sins, but because of their sin of rejecting God’s plan of salvation and what Christ has already done for them.*
- *Believing in Christ is not a matter of the mind, but of the heart.*

John 15:22–23 (NKJV)

²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

²³He who hates Me hates My Father also.

- *In Hell people will suffer according to their sins, but the actually reason they end up in Hell is by their own choice.*
- *"Hell is not a choice of God, it is a choice of man who wants to reject God. The Good News is that we don't have to have man's choice we can have God's choice. The privilege we have is telling people that they don't have to have their choice but that they can have God's choice."*
Ravi Zacharias

- *The rich man's request to Abraham reveals something important about Lazarus, "I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house."*
- *Lazarus had a message of salvation which he could articulate, not only because he was in Paradise, but I believe while he remained alive on the earth. I can just picture him sharing his faith in God even in the midst of his deep poverty and afflictions.*
- *Lazarus wasn't saved because he suffered, but because he looked to God for his hope and salvation.*
- *Lazarus's poverty didn't save him, but it enabled him to see his own spiritual poverty and in faith look to God for what the Messiah would do for him through His suffering.*
- *The rich man was blinded by his material wealth and prosperity and failed to see his own spiritual poverty and his need for the Saviour. The rich man trusted in his wealth instead of God.*

Luke 16

²⁹Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

³⁰And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

³¹But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

- *Abraham's response to the rich man's request to send Lazarus back from the dead was, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."*
- *"Neither will they be persuaded" – The rich man's five brothers needed to be persuaded so that they would not end up in Hades. In other words, they needed to believe the message that was contained in Moses and the prophets about the coming Messiah who would redeem them from their sins.*
- *The rich man's brothers needed to be persuaded first that they were sinners and needed a Saviour, and then choose not to allow their temporary wealth and prosperity to deceive them into thinking they were okay.*
- *Second, they needed to put their faith in the One who was going to come and die for their sins.*
- *If they refused to believe the message God had provided for them through His Word, then they would also refuse to believe even if someone was raised from the dead.*
- *What can we learn from the story of Lazarus and the rich man?*

- *We are to value and honour every person regardless of his or her social standing. God is no respecter of persons. (Romans 2:11).*
- *If Jesus died for everyone, then everyone should be equally precious to us.*
- *Outward success is not necessarily an indication of true spiritual success.*
- *The only criteria we should have in evaluating our lives is this: “Am I pleasing You, Lord?” Faith and obedience to God is what brings joy to His heart.*
- *Our lives on this earth are short. Therefore let us make them count for eternity.*
- *The reality of Hell will help us to cultivate a deep appreciate for what Christ has saved us from and a deep longing to see the lost come to a saving faith in Christ.*