

The Parables

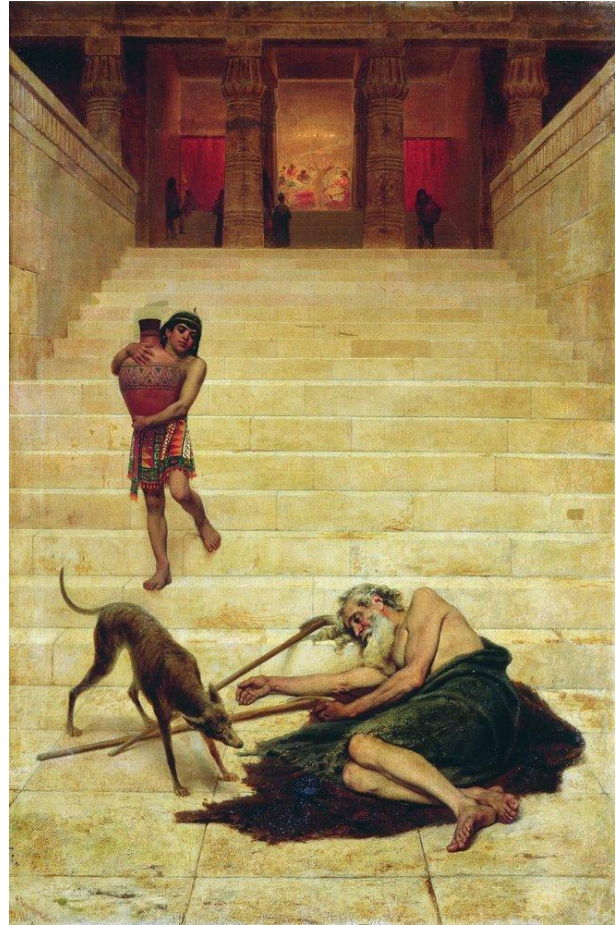
Part 4 – The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

The parable that Jesus told about a rich man who loved money and a poor man named Lazarus is intended in part to hold up a mirror to the Pharisees who were known for their love of money and status.

Perhaps the first thing we notice in this parable is the vast difference between Lazarus and the rich man. One was poor to the extent that he had not even the strength to ward off the feral dogs which fed off the seepage from his open wounds. The other man possessed a measure of wealth that allowed him to live luxuriously every day. But the rich man was no more immune from the inevitability of death than was the poor man.

Notice also that only the poor man was named. Some 2000 years later we still know the name Lazarus. Jesus' denial of a name to the rich man was powerful symbolism. In this world it is the rich and influential whose names are revered and remembered. The poor are simply the masses whose lives go unnoticed. But in God's kingdom these worldly realities are reversed. In God's kingdom the wise and mighty of the world are stripped of recognition and status. But the humble and contrite receive the benediction of Heaven.



Of course, in this parable there is a strong warning of the coming judgment. The picture Jesus painted of Hell and its torments are terrifying even in their sparsity of detail. Jesus intends us to know that the rich man was a member of the covenant community of God's people. Abraham refers to him as "child." He was raised in a Jewish home, had received the sign of the covenant, and had been instructed, along with his brothers, in the Scriptures. And yet he remained unconverted. Let this be a sobering call for all of us who belong to the visible church to examine our hearts and make our calling and election sure.

Main Idea: What we treasure in this life determines our eternal destiny.

1. The Two Men

Vv. 19-23

- In painting a picture of the eternal consequences of our earthly treasure Jesus tells the story of two men. The one man loved money and comfort. Each day he pursued his own material indulgences to the extent that he was indifferent to the needs of those around him. The other man, Lazarus, possessed no earthly comforts and suffered greatly in this life. But, as the story unfolds it becomes clear that Lazarus so bereft of earthly possessions nevertheless treasured God.
- Like so many parables there is a "good guy" and a "bad guy" in the story Jesus tells. It is important to note that what makes the rich man the "bad guy" is not his wealth. In both testaments the Bible tells of wealthy men and women who were godly. Likewise, there is no

direct connection between poverty and godliness. The dividing line between the two men was not their money but their hearts. One treasured his money, the other treasured God.

2. The Two Destinies

Vv. 22-26

- It is most likely not Jesus' intention to give a strictly literal portrait of the construct of Heaven. Certainly Heaven and Hell are concrete realities. But Jesus is likely using a less than literal depiction of these two realities to drive home a point about the relationship between what we treasure in this life and our eternal destiny.
- The two men on different sides of the gate in this life ended up on two different sides of eternity.
- The picture Jesus paints is of the rich man being tormented in Hades and Lazarus being comforted in paradise at "Abraham's side." Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience so the presence of Abraham is significant. Likewise it must be noticed that Abraham addresses the rich man in Hades as "child." He was a son of Israel, a covenant heir of Abraham, a member of God's visible people. And yet he had not responded to these covenant privileges with faith. His membership in the visible company of God's people was not enough to save his soul.

"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 was 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

3. The Two Pleas

Vv. 27-31

- There is nothing else in Scripture that suggests that there will be any communication or contact between the saved and damned in eternity. It may be that Jesus is giving us a look into the ways things truly will be. Or it may be that Jesus is simply employing an imaginative means to make a spiritual point.

a) Mercy for himself

Vs. 24

- Even in Hell the rich man imagines that he can use Lazarus for his own relief. In Hell the rich man pleads for relief not for pardon. There will be no repentance in Hell.

b) Mercy for his brothers

Vv. 27-28

- The rich man, concerned that his five brothers are likely destined for Hell requests that Lazarus be sent back from the dead to warn them. His reasoning is understandable: Seeing is believing. But this is not the way that God works. Indeed the reply of Abraham to this second plea is startling: "Your brothers have the Scriptures. If they do not believe the Scriptures then they won't even believe if a man is raised from the dead." This point runs counter to what we tend to believe. It overturns our expectation that people will believe if only they are given something spectacular to see. But in this parable Jesus establishes the sufficiency of God's Word to produce faith in the heart of the unbeliever. It is also a warning to all who are born into the blessings of the covenant community: You can bear the sign of the covenant and hear the Scriptures from childhood and remain unconverted.