

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Interpreting the Parables of Jesus by Craig Blomberg¹

SIMPLE 3-POINT PARABLES

Luke 16:19-31

I. The three main characters and their correlating identities

Main Characters

Abraham
A Certain Rich Man
Lazarus

Who they represent

→ Abraham
→ Rich People
→ Poor People

II. Things to consider about the parable - (Discussing the color provided by Jesus)

- UNIQUE: 1) Only one that includes a reference to the **afterlife**, 2) only one that includes characters with **names**, 3) only one that does not symbolize spiritual counterparts
- The rich man and Lazarus is the first of the parables so far surveyed which does not introduce its authority figure at the outset. Here the story begins apparently just with a contrast between two men who are worlds apart from each other in all but geography. Each epitomizes extremes. The rich man wore the color of royalty and a fabric that usually only the very well-to-do could afford, consistently living in luxury with enough food that Lazarus perhaps could have been sustained by the uneaten bits that fell from the banqueting table. This beggar may already have been close to death, since he had to be carried to his place and was covered with sores. Yet he still did not receive even the slightest scraps from the rich man's table. Dogs were not pets in Jewish households, so these would have been wild, scavenging animals, whose licks on Lazarus's open wounds doubtless increased his agony.
- After these descriptions of the two men (Lk 16:19, 20–21), Jesus recounts their deaths in the opposite order, highlighting the reversal of their status in the life to come. The beggar finds himself in Abraham's bosom; the rich man, in Hades (Lk 16:22a, 22b–23)—two traditional Jewish names for the places of the righteous and wicked dead, respectively.
 - IN FOCUS: _____
- In Luke 16:24 the story shifts from narrative discourse to direct discourse, and Abraham appears as a third, unifying figure who explains the judgments meted out to the other two men. The rich man and Abraham carry on a dialogue until the end of the parable. At first the man thinks only of his suffering (again, most likely described metaphorically—see earlier—but still the real awfulness of complete separation from God and good).

¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Second Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2012). **Almost all of this study is taken directly from Blomberg while small portions are italicized to identify a synthesis of his book or a question generated for the purpose of this study.**

- A turning point in the dialogue appears in Luke 16:26, when, after learning about the unbridgeable chasm separating the two speakers, the rich man stops pleading for himself and turns his thoughts to his brothers who are still on earth and have a chance to avoid this agonizing existence.
- ...the observation that the theme of “too late” winds through all portions of the passage, weaving it into a tightly knit unity. **The rich man pays attention to Lazarus too late, he sees the unbridgeable chasm too late, he worries about his brothers too late, and he heeds the Law and the prophets too late.**

III. Three main characters and three main points

One may thus suggest that the main lessons of the parable follow these lines:

- (1) Like Lazarus, those whom God helps will be borne after their death into God’s presence.
- (2) Like the rich man, the unrepentant, disclosed especially by their miserliness, will experience irreversible punishment.
- (3) Through Abraham, Moses and the prophets (and now through Jesus), God reveals himself and his will so that none who neglect it can legitimately protest their subsequent fate.**
 - In keeping with the amount of attention paid to each character, Jesus was probably emphasizing (2) and (3) more than (1), but all three points nevertheless seem present.

IV. Contemporary Application

The socioeconomic inequities in the Majority World today closely mirror those of Jesus’ era. The West and the North have a much larger middle class, but, especially in the United States (without the welfare states of much of Europe, which have different kinds of problems), far too many needy have no real access to hope for at least minimally adequate material sustenance. The rich man was not condemned for being rich but for doing absolutely nothing to help Lazarus, who was daily laid so close that he could have helped him easily and generously any time he wanted. This was how it was demonstrated that he had never “repented,” that he had no “saving relationship” with the God of the universe, despite all the evidence he needed of the existence of that God who would one day also be his Judge.

V. Personal Application

1. *In what way can the believer find comfort in this parable?*
2. *How does your attitude toward money reflect your attitude toward God? Do you begrudge those richer than you? Do you think less of those poorer than you?*
3. *How might the third point (perhaps the most important one) impact our thinking and our actions?*