

## **Luke 16:19-31**

### **Great Reversals and Eternity**

Intro: We come to another one of Jesus' parables. Jesus did not tell parables to entertain, or even illustrate. Jesus used parables to call people to action.

For example:

Prodigal Son (Ch 15) — Be like the Father and have compassion and celebration.

Dishonest Manager (Ch 16)—Put your money to good use in ways that matter for your eternal future.

Good Samaritan (Ch 10)—Love your neighbor as yourself.

Sower (Ch 8)—Be a fruit-bearing hearer of the Word.

To understand a parable is to know the action step.

Context: This parable is part of the extended teaching on wealth and stewardship that stretches back to the beginning of Ch 16, so the action step will involve a challenge regarding money.

Main Idea: Careless use of our wealth in this life carries real eternal consequences in the next. So be generous to those in desperate need.

- I see the parable functioning as a diagnostic tool to check inside our heart.

#### **Question 1: Am I like the Rich Man? (v19-20a)**

- When we hear the words "rich person" we usually don't think of ourselves. It's easy to look at someone else more affluent than us, and say we are not rich.
- Let's look at the Rich Man in the parable and see if we fit the mold: are we like the Rich Man?

Clothing—Purple and fine linen. Purple dye was very expensive. The color reminds us of royalty. He is dressed in ways for others to notice.

Consumption— feasted sumptuously every day. The idea is that he enjoyed eating every day (NASB catches that).

Housing—He had adequate housing. Had a gate installed which means he can afford to put an added layer of security up.

Sum: Let's run a comparison with ourselves. If we can afford anew outfit, never have to skip meals, and have a roof over our head and can lock the door for added security, then we are rich.

Here are some stats that give the reality of consumerism in America.

{Stats from minimalism blog, Joshua Becker [becomingminimalist.com](http://becomingminimalist.com)}

— There are 300,000 items in the average American home (**LA Times**).

— 3.1% of the world's children live in America, but they own 40% of the toys consumed globally (**UCLA**).

—The average American woman owns 30 outfits—one for every day of the month. In 1930, that figure was nine (**Forbes**).

—The average American family spends \$1,700 on clothes annually (**Forbes**).

— Americans donate 1.9% of their income to charitable causes (**NCCS/IRS**). While 6 billion people worldwide live on less than \$13,000/year (**National Geographic**).

—Over the course of our lifetime, we will spend a total of 3,680 hours or 153 days searching for misplaced items. The research found that we lose up to nine items every day—or 198,743 in a lifetime. Phones, keys, sunglasses, and paperwork are at the top of the list (**The Daily Mail**).

— Americans spend \$1.2 trillion annually on nonessential goods—in other words, items they do not need (**The Wall Street Journal**).

So, are we like the Rich Man? I think it's fair to say we are not like the Rich Man in the parable.

We are richer than the Rich Man. Not only are we well fed, clothed, housed. How much money do we spend on our kid's sports, entertainment, and vacations? How much do we spend only to throw it away?

## **Question 2: Can I ignore Lazarus at my gate? (20b-21)**

- Lazarus is the polar opposite of the rich man.
- He is clothed in his illness; his home does not exist.

- The comment of dogs licking his sores some take as an act of compassion—the problem is that you don’t usually see that—dogs are unclean animals. It makes more sense to see this as a picture that Lazarus is at death’s door (1 King 14:11; Ps 22:16).
- And what does Lazarus have to eat? *Nothing*.
- What Jesus says here connects back to what he said back in 14:13, “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.”

Since the Rich Man feasted every day, he could afford to have Lazarus at this table every day. The Scripture calls God’s children to be generous with their possessions: (Jas 2:15-16)

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

(1 John 3:16-18)

<sup>16</sup> By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup> But *if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?* <sup>18</sup> *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

If we claim to have faith, follow Christ, and love others, we can’t ignore Lazarus at the gate. We can’t have Jesus and lack his heart for the poor.

### **Question 3: Will eternity be a surprise? (22-23)**

- Look back to v14. The target audience was Pharisees who were physical children of Abraham and covenant children.
- I think they would have been stunned at the Great Reversal. Especially since the Rich Man was a child of Abraham.

Yet the Great Reversal is in line with other things Jesus says:

(Matt 25:31-46)—the context is the second coming; Look at the *basis* of his judgment

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

<sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ <sup>46</sup> *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*”

Friends, will eternity be a surprise? For clarification, I think that Jesus is speaking about how we care for the needs of other believers. But notice the surprise aspect of v44.

When did we see you hungry and fail to act?

Jesus to us in 2019 — “Rich Americans, when you lived in one of the most affluent times in all of history yet wasted so much and helped those in need so little.”

Before moving on, we can’t escape the reality that Jesus describes hell as a place where conscious torment is irreversible (v24).

#### **Question 4: Is my heart depraved? (24-28)**

- Initially we don’t get much info about the Rich Man other than that he was rich. But as the parable unfolds, more of his nature surfaces.
- There are two things that the Rich Man says in hell that reveal his heart.
- First, look again at vs 24. In a twist of irony, the merciless asks for mercy.
- Then his heart surfaces “send Lazarus.”

*Do you catch that? Send Lazarus. He thinks Lazarus is employed in the eternal service industry. The Rich Man still thinks that people exist to serve his self-interest.*

*Hell is filled with people who think that the world exists to serve their own self-interest.*

*Therefore, they have little concern for others unless they benefit them in some way.*

- Also, note what is lacking. It's a key concept in the Bible. It's what keeps people out of hell. Repentance is lacking.
- Hell is a place where people consciously still live narrow, inwardly self-focused lives because they refuse to repent.

*Also, the scariest thing about the Rich Man is that he does not appear to commit any huge sin. He simply lives for himself and does a good job at ignoring others.*

*And yet he stands eternally condemned.*

#### **Question 5: Will I tremble at the Word? (29-31)**

- The final request of the Rich Man is to send Lazarus to warn his brothers not to make the same mistake he did. There is a foreshadowing of Christ's resurrection here.
- We also get the root problem: not with wealth, but neglect of God's Word; in other words, not taking action.
- Jesus stresses the truth in v29: God's Word is sufficient. Why do you need a sign when you already have God's truth?

I preached this text some years ago, with the right heart but wrong understanding. It was at a small country church in rural Kentucky. I remember two things. The head deacon said, "Boy you really spit at us today." The other thing I remember is that I stressed eternal torment because I really wanted people to tremble at the thought of hell. We should tremble at the thought of hell. Being separated from the joyful presence of God and facing his unending wrath is very disturbing.

But I think I was off on the main point somewhat. The trembling that Jesus stresses is not trembling at hell but trembling at the Word of God (v29).

(Is 66:2)

But this is the one to whom I will look:

he who is humble and contrite in spirit  
and trembles at my word.

In other words,

We need to get repentance right. Think of how that is true of many who claim to be Christian, yet they are comfortable with a life where self remains at the center.

No surprise that Luke begins (1:53) “he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty”

*There will be surprising Great Reversals in Eternity.*

### Conclusion

Parables call us to action. We can live a life of sacrifice and generosity or self-indulgence? Heaven or Hell? So what does it mean today for you to get repentance right? For some, you’ve neglected giving to the poor altogether. Repentance is to start helping now. Not just a token gift to eliminate low-grade guilt but eagerly from the heart (Gal 2:10). Others, the Spirit may be nudging you to accumulate a lot less and sacrifice a lot more. As we tie up this section on money and stewardship we need to ask this - at the end of the day, *has Jesus Christ invaded what I truly value?* Is money my master or is Christ? If Christ has not invaded what we value (possessions) then he has not invaded our lives.

Finally, remember the gospel is about great reversal.

(2 Cor 8:9 CSB) “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

Our eternal hope rests solely on an infinitely Rich Savior who chose a life of Great Reversal.