

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

A Small Group Outline



1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
 - Sing a few songs of praise to God

2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

- **Notes for the facilitator**
 - Read *Christ's Object Lessons (COL)*, pp. 260-271
 - **"In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ shows that in this life men decide their eternal destiny.** During probationary time the grace of God is offered to every soul. But if men waste their opportunities in self-pleasing, they cut themselves off from everlasting life. **No afterprobation will be granted them.** By their own choice they have fixed an impassable gulf between them and their God" (COL 260).
 - **"This parable draws a contrast between the rich who have not made God their dependence, and the poor who have made God their dependence.** Christ shows that the time is coming when the position of the two classes will be reversed. Those who are poor in this world's goods, yet who trust in God and are patient in suffering, will one day be exalted above those who now hold the highest positions the world can give but who have not surrendered their life to God" (COL 260).
 - **"[The rich man] did not treat the beggar with violence or require him to go away because the sight of him was disagreeable. If the poor, loathsome specimen of humanity could be comforted by beholding him as he entered his gates, the rich man was willing that he should remain. But he was selfishly indifferent to the needs of his suffering brother"** (COL 261).
 - **"There were then no hospitals in which the sick might be cared for. The suffering and needy were brought to the notice of those to whom the Lord had entrusted wealth, that they might receive help and sympathy.** Thus it was with the beggar and the rich man. Lazarus was in great need of help; for he was without friends, home, money, or food. Yet he was allowed to remain in this condition day after day, while the wealthy nobleman had every want supplied. The one who was abundantly able to relieve the sufferings of his fellow creature, lived to himself, as many live today" (COL 261).

- “There are today close beside us many who are hungry, naked, and homeless. **A neglect to impart of our means to these needy, suffering ones places upon us a burden of guilt which we shall one day fear to meet.** All covetousness is condemned as idolatry. All selfish indulgence is an offense in God's sight” (COL 261)
- “**The rich man ... did not pray to God, but to Abraham. Thus he showed that he placed Abraham above God, and that he relied on his relationship to Abraham for salvation**” (COL 263).
- “The rich man had spent his life in self-pleasing, and too late he saw that he had made no provision for eternity. **He realized his folly, and thought of his brothers,** who would go on as he had gone, living to please themselves. COL 264.1
- “When the rich man solicited additional evidence for his brothers, he was plainly told that should this evidence be given, they would not be persuaded. **His request cast a reflection on God. It was as if the rich man had said, If you had more thoroughly warned me, I should not now be here.** Abraham in his answer to this request is represented as saying, Your brothers have been sufficiently warned. Light has been given them, but they would not see; truth has been presented to them, but they would not hear” (COL 264).
- Some see this as an actual occurrence and not a parable, but this cannot be so for the following reasons:
 - It starts in the same way as the 2 preceding parables: ‘A certain man...’ (see Luke 15:11; 16:1) – pointing to it as a parable (a story).
 - Jesus used personification which is a technique common in Scripture (Gen. 4:10; Judg. 9:7-15; 2 Kings 14:9; Hab. 2:11; etc.)
 - According to the parable the rich man, after he had died, had ‘eyes,’ a ‘tongue,’ ‘a finger’ – that is, real body parts. This is contrary to the belief of those who
 - believe in the immortality of the soul. They say that an *immaterial* soul that leaves the body at death.
 - The expression ‘Abraham’s bosom’ is not found in Scripture, but occurs in writings outside of Scripture, referring to the place of happiness to which the righteous go at death (a concept that does not find support in Scripture).
 - **If the parable were literal, then heaven and hell are near enough for a conversation to be held between its inhabitants** – not a desirable situation for either party. If all the righteous go to Abraham’s bosom, imagine how big his bosom has to be!
 - **It would contradict Christ’s other teachings** that say the righteous and wicked receive their reward at the Second Coming (Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Luke 11:31, 32; 14:14). See also the support of other New Testament writers for this concept: 1 Cor. 15:51-55; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; 2 Pet. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Rev. 22:12.
 - The Old Testament writers too are clear that the dead lie silent and unconscious in the grave until the Resurrection (Job 14:12; Ps. 115:17; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10).
 - **According to Scripture, Abraham is not in heaven.** In Heb. 11, the faith chapter, Abraham is mentioned (vss. 8-12). Yet vss. 39-40 say that none of those mentioned in chapter 11 received their reward of immortality yet. For only together with the rest of humanity, will they be made perfect, i.e. receive the eternal inheritance of heaven.
- So what does this parable teach?
 - During the inter-testament period (the 400 year period between the writing of Malachi in the Old Testament and of Matthew in the New) a number of false teachings crept into Israel’s theology, which had become part of Judaism at the time of Jesus. One such was the belief in a conscious existence after death. Jesus, the Master Teacher, was aware of this false belief and used this prevailing popular belief to teach a vital lesson – that **destiny is decided in this present**

life by the use made of its privileges and opportunities. He held up before His hearers a mirror, wherein they might see themselves in their true relation to God.

- **This parable was directed at the Pharisees (see Luke 16:14) who falsely believed that riches were a sign of God’s favour, and that salvation was based on Abrahamic descent rather than on character.** Jesus addresses this false theology through the parable, showing that the reward for the rich man was opposite to what was expected. The poor man (who made God his dependence) is carried to Abraham’s bosom, while the rich man (who didn’t) is tormented in hell.
- This parable, as the rest of the ones in Luke 16, **deals with the use of resources.** The rich man illustrates the teaching of Luke 16:9-13 – **if you do not use your resources to bless others, you cannot expect to receive true riches in heaven.** This does not mean that helping others will save us by our works, but that the changed heart, brought about by the gospel, will of necessity show itself in outward deeds of kindness.
- The ‘great gulf’ is the permanent division that death fixes between the good and the bad at the close of earthly probation. While alive one may pass from the state of the condemned (John 3:18) to that of the pardoned. But when death comes, that gulf is forever fixed. **There is no second chance. This life is the only time given to prepare for eternity.**
- Thus Jesus used a scenario, which was familiar to His audience in order to illustrate His point that **destiny is decided by the way we use privileges, opportunities and resources in the present life.** To drive home His point, He lifted the curtain to show where the destinies of these two characters ended up – which was the opposite of what most people expected.
- *Read Luke 16:19-31. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
- **Discussion Questions** *(use only a few). The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
 - Contrast the lives of the rich man and Lazarus.
 - What is the right, and wrong use of riches in the present life?
 - How can riches, if wrongly used, make us insensitive to the needs of others?
 - How might the rich man have been a blessing to Lazarus, at a time when there were no hospitals to care for the sick?
 - What danger is there in thinking that our success in this life is an indication that God’s special favour is on us, and a guarantee of our eternal life?
 - What evidences are there in this parable that it cannot be a literal story?
 - Why do you think Jesus ‘pulled back the curtain’ to reveal the eternal consequences of present day actions?
 - Why do you think the rich man wanted Lazarus to be sent to his brothers?
 - Why do you think that if people reject God’s plain writings in Scripture, even miracles would not convince them to believe in Him?
 - In vs 24, the rich man prayed to Abraham and not to God. What do you think he did this?
 - What is the danger of depending on our spiritual heritage for salvation?
 - A great gulf (or chasm) after death indicates that there is no second chance to correct things after death. What are the implications of this for daily living?
 - What changes, if any, do you see in the rich man’s attitude while he is in Hades? How would you explain that? *(ask one question at a time)*
 - What are the things we need to invest in now that have eternal value?

- How do you think this parable could encourage people who are poor, sick or disadvantaged?
- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
 - What personally stood out for you in this parable?
 - Do you tend to put your faith more in the supernatural (signs, dreams, miracles, etc.), than in the plain word of God?
 - What is one way you could use your resources for eternity? Are you willing to do that consistently? (*ask one question at a time*)
 - Is there someone, like Lazarus, who could benefit from your support and compassion this coming week? Elaborate.
 - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I will create a small fund for the next 3 months in order to be more intentional in helping disadvantaged people."

6. Share (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

7. Closing prayer

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