

WEEK 6: THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Luke 16:19–31



The Place of the Passage

As Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem, Luke records a number of the parables he tells on the way, including the parables of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18–19), the leaven (vv. 20–21), the lost sheep (15:4–6), the lost coin (vv. 8–9), and the prodigal son (vv. 15:11–32). Jesus will tell five more parables before he enters the holy city, including two parables related to the issue of wealth: the parable of the dishonest manager and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

The Big Picture

Following Jesus' famous saying "You cannot serve God and money" (Luke 16:13), he tells a parable about a man whose wealth-induced idolatry leads to God's eternal judgment.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Luke 16:19-31. Then think through and write your own notes on the following questions. (See ESV Study Bible notes on pages 1991-1992; online at www.esv.org.)

Both this parable and the previous one begin, "There was a rich man" (Luke 16:19; compare v. 1). Who is the audience for both parables?

Lined writing area for the first question.

How are the rich and riches depicted throughout Luke? Review Luke 1:53; 6:24; 8:14; 12:16-21; 14:12; 18:18-25; and especially 16:13-14. Are you surprised by what Jesus teaches? Based on what you know or have just learned about Jesus' teaching on these topics, how do you think the rich man in this parable will fare?

Lined writing area for the second question.

Read the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Is it possible for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of God? Now read the parable right after Zacchaeus's story (Luke 19:11-27). What light does the parable of the minas¹ shed on the theme of how to handle money?

Lined writing area for the third question.

Turn back to Luke 16:19-31. How is the rich man described? The poor man?

Lined writing area for the first question on page 47.

How should we act differently than the rich man did—in relation to both our use of money and our care for the poor?

Lined writing area for the second question on page 47.

When the poor man dies, he is "carried by the angels to Abraham's side"² (Luke 16:22). Considering what we have just learned about Jesus' teaching on the rich and riches in Luke, what is notable about introducing Abraham as the person in the place of comfort after death (see Gen. 13:2)?

Lined writing area for the third question on page 47.

The term *Hades*³ is used, and some sort of depiction is given of what Christians commonly call heaven. Do you think this story is a real depiction of the afterlife? What might be a true depiction, and what might be an exaggeration to prove a point? (Our Lord Jesus was known for his use of hyperbole—intentional exaggerations to evoke an emotional response.)

Lined writing area for the fourth question on page 47.

When Abraham says to the rich man in torment, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish" (Luke 16:25), is Jesus teaching that God's judgment is merely a reversal of fortunes? If someone has a prosperous and enjoyable earthly life, will he then have a deprived and awful afterlife? If not, what is at the heart of Jesus' teaching?

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What is surprising about the damned man's dialogue with Abraham in Luke 16:25-30?

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What is perhaps more surprising about Abraham's answers in Luke 16:29 and 31? What do those verses teach about Jesus' view of the Bible, which he labels "Moses and the Prophets"4?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

MERCY FOR THE NEEDY. Jesus' words and deeds throughout Luke contrast self-reliance with dependence on mercy: guests at a banquet vie for honor, while Jesus heals a man disfigured by disease (Luke 14:1-11); the host invites wealthy friends and family, when he should invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (v. 13; compare v. 21); a pitiless rich man endures torment, while a beggar "is comforted" (16:19-31). Jesus is teaching a twofold lesson: first, deep desire for saving mercy is fueled by recognition of our desperate need; second, receiving such mercy will make us eager to serve, rather than neglect, others in need.

SAVED FROM GOD'S WRATH. Lazarus is saved not only from a terrible earthly life but also from a horrid eternal judgment. This is true for all believers. Jesus, whom God "raised from the dead," is also the one who upon his return will "[deliver] us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). This pattern of salvation through judgment is found throughout the Bible, such as with Noah and the flood, the Passover, and the parting and closing of the Red Sea.

Whole-Bible Connections

GREED AND JUDGMENT. Found throughout the Bible is the tragic pattern of human greed that leads to God's judgment. In Joshua 7, Achan sins by stealing treasure devoted to destruction, bringing guilt and judgment on all Israel. In 2 Kings 5:15-27, Gehazi's lie to Naaman leads to Gehazi's suffering from leprosy. The early church was also tempted by greed and the misuse of spiritual power, such as in Ananias and Sapphira's dishonesty (Acts 5:1-11) and Simon the magician's attempted bribery (Acts 8:18-24). Most infamously, the greedy thief (see John 12:6) Judas Iscariot betrays Christ, the precious Son of God, for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14-15).

GOD'S HEART FOR THOSE SUFFERING. God cares for those suffering injustice and affliction. When Israel is enslaved in Egypt, God hears their cries, sees their affliction, and knows their suffering (Ex. 3:7). Then, after redeeming Israel from Egypt, God gives his people his law, replete with instructions to protect the poor, outsiders, and orphans and widows (Deut. 10:18-19; 15:7-11).

HELPING THE POOR. God exhorts his people repeatedly to care for the poor among them. This becomes a resounding theme throughout the early chapters of the Bible (e.g., Ex. 22:25; 23:11; Lev. 14:21), especially in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut. 15:4-11; 24:12-15). It is later picked up frequently by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 58:7; Jer. 2:34; Amos 5:11). In the New Testament it is clearly an important theme as well (e.g., Acts 6:1; James 1:26-2:7; 5:1-6). The early church collects funds to provide supplies for believers facing poverty (Acts 11:27-30; Gal. 2:10).

James views mistreatment of the poor as a mark of unbelief (see James 2:1–6). The apostle Paul undertakes relief efforts for poor believers (e.g., Rom. 15:25–26; 1 Cor. 16:1–3), demonstrating the biblical principle that God cares about people’s physical needs as well as their spiritual ones.

Theological Soundings

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE. As Jesus makes absolutely clear in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the Hebrew Scriptures are sufficient to lead people to an understanding of salvation, and, if someone rejects God’s written revelation (“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets”), then he or she will even reject the miraculous works of God in history (“neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead,” Luke 16:31; see also 1 Cor. 15:1–3). God’s Word, contained in both the Old and the New Testaments, is sufficient in all matters pertaining to salvation, as well as for doctrine and instruction in moral behavior.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE. Before Christ returns to carry out final judgment, the souls of those who die will enter into what is known as the intermediate state—an experience of blessedness in God’s presence for the souls of the faithful (heaven) and of punishment apart from him for unbelieving souls (hell⁵). While not all of its details should be pressed for doctrinal significance, Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) is foundational to our understanding of this interim state. The parable offers comfort to those who endure affliction now and an urgent warning to those who refuse the biblical call to repent, for “none may cross from there [hell] to us [in heaven]” (v. 26).

THE RESURRECTION. Christian doctrine affirms not only the resurrection of Christ but also a general resurrection in which, at Christ’s second coming, the bodies and souls of the deceased will be reunited. (Those who are alive at Christ’s return will receive resurrection bodies, though they will not have experienced death; see 1 Cor. 15:51–53.) Some will be raised “to everlasting life” and others “to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Jesus views the future glory of the “resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14) as greater than any glory we could secure for ourselves in the present, and therefore as a motive for loving those who have nothing to offer us in return.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Luke 16:19–31 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin,

and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the *Personal Implications* for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) the passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Luke 16:19–31

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Jesus' parables. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

¹ **Mina** – A unit of measurement of money, roughly equivalent to 1.25 pounds. A mina of silver was worth about three months' wages for a first-century laborer.

² **Abraham's side** – An image of what Christians often call "heaven." That after death believers are welcomed to "Abraham's side" (lit., "bosom") is symbolic of reception into fellowship with other believers already in heaven, particularly Abraham, the father of our faith and the one to whom God promised many offspring.

³ **Hades** – In the New Testament, the abode of the dead prior to the second coming of Christ. Essentially equivalent to *Sheol* (commonly translated "the grave") in the Old Testament, it was associated with descriptions of a dark, prison-like place in the underworld, where the souls of the deceased resided.

⁴ **Moses and the Prophets** – Moses (or "the law of Moses," or simply "the law") and the Prophets (from Samuel to Malachi) is shorthand for the entire Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.

⁵ **Hell** – *Gehenna* in Greek, used to describe the trash heap outside of Jerusalem that was regularly set on fire. According to Jesus, hell is the place of "eternal fire" (Matt. 25:41), "eternal punishment" (25:46) and terrible suffering, where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).