

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

“No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Luke 16: 19-31

Context

This parable is full of contrast and parallelism.

- The rich man wore purple linen. Purple linen was extremely costly, far out of reach of most people.
- The name "Lazarus" means literally "God is my help."
- In those times, food was picked up and eaten with your hands. Instead of napkins, people would wipe off their fingers on a piece of bread and toss it under the table. These are the crumbs Lazarus was waiting for.
- After death, the rich man begs for a drop of water from Lazarus just like Lazarus waiting for crumbs from the rich man.

It may be helpful to look back over the tips for reading parables (on the handout for the Parable of the Sower). Remember, parables are stories that illustrate a spiritual message, they usually have one main point, and not every detail will have a specific meaning.

Large Group Outline

- Parable shows extreme contrasts
 - The rich man's linens could be equivalently valued at \$50,000 today
 - Lazarus was cored not with fine linens but with sores
 - The rich man experienced extreme wealth in this life but didn't realize his extreme inward poverty that was revealed after he died
 - Lazarus's destitution showed him his helpless and dependance on God. He reminds us of the beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."
- In the afterlife in the parable, two things are certain:
 1. When you die, you go to Heaven or Hell.
 2. Wherever you go is permanent.
- We cannot understand either the love of God or hell without the other. When looking at hell, we should remember the extreme grace and love that Jesus showed, for instance, when Peter cut off his attacker's ear (John 18:10-11).
- Col. 1:17 says, "In Him, all things hold together." The opposite is also true, that apart from Him, things fall apart.
- People choose live apart from God and with it, its consequences. But in love, Jesus absorbed those consequences so that if we turn to Him, we can have eternal life.

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ vere latitat—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.

C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory"

Potential Questions

- What contrasts do you see in this parable? What is being emphasized in these contrasts?
- What is the rich man's sin?
- Why can't Lazarus bring water to the rich man? What does this mean?
- How should this parable change our focus? What should we be attentive towards?
- Abraham tells the rich man that his family won't take heed even if a someone rises from the dead to tell them. Does this seem true of the people you know? What would it take to change their minds?