

Valley Bible Church – Parables of Jesus

Parables Lesson 21: Your life lasts forever. Prepare for it!

THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGER

Luke 16:19-31

Introduction:

Today we consider another parable told at a dinner. Again we are at Simon's house where Jesus actually used twelve of them to teach a whole range of lessons about people and about the kingdom.

Remember this whole interaction began with a confrontation recounted in chapter 14, verses 1-4:

And it came about when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on {the} Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching Him closely.

And there, in front of Him was a certain man suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they kept silent. And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away. And He said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"

Thus began an ongoing dialog contrasting the letter of the law with the spirit of the law, the form of righteousness with the heart of righteousness, and tradition with the truth.

The majority of the guests at this dinner were Pharisees, Scribes, and government officials, most of whom were rich, arrogant and self-righteous. They practiced a particularly hypocritical brand of religion that made Jesus angry especially since they ignored the very people God has pledged to protect. Their Old Testament Scriptures are filled with this truth:

Ps. 68:4-6 – "Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Lift up {a song} for Him who rides through the deserts, Whose name is the LORD, and exult before Him.

A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land."

The Pharisees taught that the poor were miserable because they were sinners and obviously not worthy of God's blessing. And they were everywhere in Jerusalem conspicuous in their rich outer robes, pure inner tunics, oversized phylacteries.

They followed Jesus around with perfumed cloths protecting them from the odor of His lesser followers and dogged His footsteps seeking to protect their people from this latest

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false Messiah. They were the heroic "official observers" from the Temple sacrificing their comfort and peace to report on this rabble-rousing heretic.

This parable is told in reaction to their self-righteous sneers. Jesus will expose their hypocrisy to the world.

The Pharisees put on a pious face. They seemed so holy, so loving. In

Luke 18:12 one of them told Him "I fast twice a week, I pay tithes of all I get. In fact they were so into tithing some would even count the grains of their spices in order to give a tenth even of that possession. But God knew their hearts and said in Luke 11:42-44,

"But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every {kind of} garden herb, and {yet} disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over {them} are unaware {of it.}"

So they tithe but ignore justice, the love of God, and the needs of others.

Matt. 23:14--"*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.]"*

So they pray beautifully in public but they use their office to take everything from helpless widows.

Mark 7:10-13-- "*For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH'; but you say, 'If a man says to {his} father or {his} mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given {to} {God}),' you no longer permit him to do anything for {his} father or {his} mother; {thus} invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."*

So claiming to be holy and keep they pledges to God they teach their followers to withhold the support they are commanded to give their parents.

They are a mess and they are face to face with the living God in bodily form and He will not ignore their hypocrisy. He will confront it with a very clear and powerful parable. In fact, this story is so specific and detailed than some scholars believe it was a true story. They also point to early church documents naming the rich man Dives and the use in the parable of the name Lazarus for the poor man. In reality Dives is the Latin word for rich, and Lazarus was a common Hebrew name that meant "God is my help."

Before we consider the parable we need to deal with two fundamental questions that confront Christians all the time.

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Why do the righteous suffer?

Why was an obviously good man like Lazarus allowed to suffer destitution, abuse, and disease if "God was his helper?"

The Scriptural answer is plain. Life does not consist of an abundance of things a man possesses. God is more interested in what we are, our character and heavenly treasure, than what we have, our earthly possessions.

Why do the wicked prosper?

The Biblical answer is equally as plain. What does it profit a man if he gains the entire world and loses his soul. What the wicked amass on earth is all their ever going to receive throughout eternity.

THE STORY IN THREE ACTS *Read Luke 16:19-31*

ACT ONE: TWO LIFE STYLES

The Rich Man Lived the Life of Luxury

He was "dressed in purple and fine linen gaily living in splendor every day." He was an important man, a wealthy fashion plate among his rich friends. He ate, drank and made merry. (Does that have a familiar ring to it?) He was served by a host of slaves, loved by his family, admired by his friends.

In fact, his beautiful life had only one eyesore . . .

The Poor Man Lived the Life of a Begger

He was dressed in rags and covered with filthy sores living a life of poverty, sickness, and pain every day. He was an outcast, a helpless and lonely man who had to depend on others to carry him to the rich man's gate in order to eke out a bare existence.

He was a nuisance shunned and detested by everyone.

In his book, *The Parables of Jesus*, George Butterick wrote this moving paragraph:

" . . . Dore's famous painting shows Lazarus being whipped away from the door by servants, but this assumption is unwarranted. The fact that a beggar was brought daily implies that he had been fed. An oriental beggar is shrewd in choosing his "pitch." Dives dispensed the customary charities; he was no more unfeeling than fifty other men in this town. But his love (if such it could be called) was so thin and perfunctory as to be almost an offence. He passed Lazarus several times every day, but never really saw him. He felt no genuine compassion. Rags and ulcers left him unmoved; they were merely a part of life's familiar and accepted scenery. (As perhaps the scenes of world

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poverty are to us today.) *Dives went his carefree way, selfish and essentially heartless. Being rich, the story hints, was his opportunity. His crime was self-love.*"

ACT TWO: TWO DEATH STYLES

The Rich Man Died

The rich, healthy, affluent man was DEAD! Remember last week. The rich farmer said I have lots of stuff so I'm going to retire and lay back and enjoy a long, fun, comfortable life.

But God said, "This very night, you're dead." WHO WINS?

Was it a surprise? Yes! Was he missed? Yes! Did he get a big funeral? Yes! There is no doubt he was laid to rest with all the formality, pomp, ceremony, and trappings available. He had the best casket, flowers, eulogies, and the best private plot in the celebrity section of Forest Lawn, Jerusalem. It was impressive.

The Poor Man Died

The poor, sick, needy man was DEAD!

Was it a surprise? No! Was He missed? No! Was there a big funeral? No, in fact looking at verse 22 it looks like there was no funeral at all. He was a beggar, and beggars were left dead and untouched, unclean and abhorred until the public "cleaners" hurried the body out to the "Tophet Gehenna," the ever burning garbage pit, or at best buried it in a paupers field.

ACT THREE: TWO AFTER DEATH STYLES

The Rich Man Lives On

He leaves all his stuff and becomes a beggar. Look again at verse 24: *"And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.'*

Stripped of his wealth, his royalty, his pride, he now lives in loneliness and want and torment. Hell was everything he never thought it would be:

Verse 24 – Agony and never quenched thirst in flames forever

Verse 25 – Everything is gone except never ending regrets

Verse 26 – A gulf forever fixed between him and God

Verse 27 – No contact with his loved ones

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Dante said it well on his sign above the door to Hades:

"ABANDON ALL HOPE, ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE!"

The Beggar Lives On

He also leaves all his stuff but he becomes a prince with God.

Luke 16:22--"*Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; . . .*"

He gained everything he lacked in his earthly life including fellowship, comfort, and joy. Heaven was everything he ever thought it could be . . . AND MORE!

Everything good, no memory of the bad, eternal fellowship with God and the saints from all time including his spiritual father Abraham. **THE CURTAIN FALL**

THE LESSONS

STEWARDSHIP BRINGS RESPONSIBILITY

We are our brother's keeper

And our brother is anyone God brings into our sphere of influence. How many times does Jesus have to drive this lesson home? MANY TIMES!

I John 4:20-21--*If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.*

God owns everything

Since God truly owns everything we need to use it the way He prefers. He wants us truly religious.

James 1:27 – *"This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of {our} God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, {and} to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

Since it all belong to God we should want to do service to him. And how do we serve Him?

Matt. 25:34-40--"*Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me {something} to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'*"

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"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked and clothe You? 'And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, {even} the least {of them,} you did it to Me.'

A VIEW OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

This parable is unique in that most use familiar objects or events to effect our life and behavior but this one gives us a view of another world.

Heaven and Hell exist

We don't need psychics or people returned from the dead to enlighten us on what heaven and hell are like. The concepts of heaven and hell are clearly taught in a number of passages of Scripture, and this one tells us quite a lot.

The choice to accept Jesus' substitute sacrifice for our sins happens only in this life. There is no purgatory and there are no second chances.

Our eternal destiny does not depend on wealth or power, or even service, but on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as proclaimed in Scripture.

Other Information

Death does not destroy consciousness – we will be truly alive

Death does not destroy identity--we are who we are eternally

Death does not destroy memory – we will see even painful memories as part of the plan

GOD IS ULIMATELY NOT ONLY JUST, BUT FAIR

He doesn't favor the rich or the poor

It is not a sin to be rich but it is a sin to be selfish and, of course, poor people are often very selfish.

We are held responsible for our stewardship whether we are rich or poor (Parable of the Talents).

Openhandedness is an indication of our heart attitude toward stewardship. If the stuff isn't ours it's not so hard to give it away.

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There is more than adequate warning

When the rich man indicates that his brothers need a better warning he is implying that his was inadequate as well. Verse 31 makes it plain that no one needs a special, supernatural sign from God and those signs don't work anyway.

We have God revealed in creation, in the Scriptures, in conscience, and through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is enough.

Sign miracles can be a hindrance rather than a help.

In Matthew 16:4 Jesus said, *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah."*

Miracles bring demand for more miracles and become nothing but a sensational trick. Herod asked Jesus to do a trick to prove he was God, but Jesus knew it was all nonsense. And His response this time is in verse 3 *"But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Since we have the complete Canon of Scripture there will be no more signs.

So again the choice is ours. Live a life of self-indulgent pride or be humble stewards of God's Kingdom.

The results are eternal!