

In this chapter, Luke put together Jesus' teachings on the temptation of money becoming an idol - the reason for which we live. The chapter begins with the parable of the dishonest manager that ended with the warning that we cannot serve God and money (Luke 16:13<sup>i</sup>). The Pharisees scoffed at Jesus' teaching in the parable. That was followed by the warning to the Pharisees who loved money that what is highly esteemed by man is an abomination in God's eyes. In our passage today He tried one more time to open the eyes of the Pharisees to the abuse of wealth with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Luke has touched on the subject earlier in his gospel. Both John and James tell us that a follower of Jesus can't ignore the physical needs of others when we have the ability and resources to help (1 John 3:17<sup>ii</sup>; James 2:15,16<sup>iii</sup>)

*<sup>19</sup> "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.* Luke 16:19-21 Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus comes right after addressing the idolatry of wealth. In that day Jews believed that wealth showed God's blessing on the person. Poverty was seen as a curse for a sinful life (Deuteronomy 28:15<sup>iv</sup>, 38-40<sup>v</sup>). They would have thought the expensive royal purple robe with fine Egyptian linen, daily feasts of sumptuous food, and great wealth were all blessings from God for his righteous life. By contrast they would have thought the sores and poverty of Lazarus were God's judgment for sin in the poor man's life. Laid at the gate means he was so ill someone in mercy had dropped him off there.

Dogs were considered unclean scavengers. They may have consumed the table scraps tossed outside the gate. The fact they were licking his sores/ulcers was one more reason to think the man was under God's wrath. He desired or longed to eat the scraps, but apparently the dogs would first devour what was thrown out. The name Lazarus (Eleazar) means "God has helped," but at first glance his name seemed to be a mockery (Luke 6:20<sup>vi</sup>). The audience would have expected the rich man to have that name.

Jesus' description shows us the wasteful indulgence of the rich man and the desperation of the poor man at his gate, hoping just for crumbs that fell on the ground might be thrown to him. The previous preaching had challenged the listeners to use money in a way that was faithful to God's will instead of letting riches master our lives and living as a servant of those riches. Even the preceding word about faithfulness in marriage should remind us to be a bride who is faithful with our Master's resources. The rich man's only concern was his own pleasure. He didn't have an ounce of compassion for the starving sickly man at his gate.

Up to this point the setting would be familiar. They may have thought the rich man was ignoring Scriptural injunction to help the poor and be generous. But many would still have concluded the rich man was blessed and the poor man cursed for his own sins or that of his parents (John 9:2<sup>vii</sup>).

*<sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.* Luke 16:22,23 For godly people to be carried by angels to heaven was a common belief of the Jews. The passage does not say

he was buried, and therefore we might conclude that the dogs devoured his emaciated body. Some people wonder if this account was not taken from an actual event, for this is the only parable in which someone's actual name is given.

The rich man was buried and probably eulogized, but he ended up in torment. Hades in Jewish thought was a place for the wicked dead, while Abraham's bosom was the place that we call heaven. Lazarus found himself at Abraham's side, meaning they would have been having intimate fellowship. To be in the company of Abraham would have been considered a great reward for a righteous life. The contrast in death is as great as the contrast in life. Some Jewish stories of similar role reversals existed at the time, but Jesus will put a different focus on the ending.

Contrary to the thought at the time, Jesus taught that Jews didn't have the promise of heaven because of their heritage (John 8:39<sup>viii</sup>). ***11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*** Matthew 8:11-12 This is another example of the upside-down world of God's kingdom. Just the introduction of the parable's setting would have had everyone scratching their heads. Many of the listeners would have thought like Job's friends. They would have been sure that Lazarus committed some horrible sin for which God was judging him (Job 8:3-6<sup>ix</sup>).

Do we draw similar conclusions? Who would we least expect to see in heaven? Who do we see as most likely to be there? What if the story was told today and the rich man was an evangelical preacher, and the poor man was a vagrant who stood begging at street corners? Or maybe it could be told as the mayor of a city and a homeless man or woman. The soul is not visible to anyone but God. We can't even tell from a person's outward actions, for some who act the most religious are the greatest hypocrites (Luke 6:46<sup>x</sup>; Matthew 7:21<sup>xi</sup>).

I sometimes hear this conclusion from Christians relating illness to sin. "If you had more faith, you would be healed. There must be something from which you need to repent." The New Testament doesn't exclude that possibility. James tell us to confess our sins that we might be healed (James 5:15,16<sup>xii</sup>), but sin is not always the reason for illness. Remember that the disciples asked, *"Who sinned that a man was born blind, him or his parents."* Jesus answer was very clear. *"Neither, this man or his parents. It was that the glory of God might be seen."* John 9:3<sup>xiii</sup>

Jesus tells us there are two places for the dead: Hell (Hades; Gehenna) or Heaven (Paradise, see Luke 23:43<sup>xiv</sup>; see verse 23; Amos 9:2<sup>xv</sup>). Heaven is not complete until the last soul comes into the kingdom. Hades is not the lake of fire. Hades will be cast into the lake of fire at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:14,15<sup>xvi</sup>). The eternal destiny of each soul is decided upon their death, but there is a final judgment at the end of the Millennium. Jesus does not give a name to the rich man, but He calls Lazarus by name because the good shepherd calls his sheep by name (John 10:3<sup>xvii</sup>).

***24 And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'*** Luke 16:24 One of the worst things of this holding place of torment in Hades is to see Paradise and know you have chosen to reject it. I wonder if that isn't part of the torment. But also, there is the anguish of the flame. Whether the flame and the drop of water are

symbolic I can't say, but I can say it is a misery from which all who experience it seek any kind of relief. Jesus said it's a place where the worm never dies, and fire is never quenched.

We should note that this man still called Abraham his father. He still looked on Lazarus as someone who should serve him. Jesus use of terms here was another way of addressing the misconception that all descendants of Abraham were destined for Paradise. We have the same problem in our culture. People believe that God is love and therefore everyone will be in heaven, at least those who are somewhat decent and kind. They forget that God is also just, and that man has the free will to rebel against God. We share God's heart in desiring that none perish (2 Peter 3:9<sup>xviii</sup>), but we know that man is free to choose. It seems impossible to choose hell over heaven, but that is not the obvious choice. **The choice we all face is to accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord or trusting in our goodness and going our own way.** The result of that choice is heaven or hell. The choice is eternity with Jesus or without Him. The rich man was not in hell because of his wealth, but because he never heeded God's Word by repenting, which results in caring for others.

This historical Jesus is not a product of our imagination. We can't redefine who He is. He is who Scripture declares Him to be. He is holy and righteous as well as loving and gracious. We can't divide up His attributes and only accept the ones we prefer. He is the Jesus who invites us to believe in Him and receive eternal life (John 6:40<sup>xix</sup>) or let the things that tempt us control our lives and be cast into hell (Mark 9:43<sup>xx</sup>). Those are Jesus' words recorded by the disciples whom He chose to convey His message.

We also see the hardness of the rich man's heart in that he knows Lazarus by name. He saw him at his gate. But the man's selfishness wouldn't allow him to do anything for him. He watched him slowly starve. Even now he wants him to serve him.

*<sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, '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 Though the rich man is a child of Abraham in the flesh, he was not a child of Abraham the father of faith (Romans 4:16<sup>xxi</sup>). Abraham is telling the rich man that he received what He lived for (Psalm 17:14<sup>xxii</sup>). His present condition was the result of that choice of refusing to hear the Word of God. He enjoyed pleasure while ignoring the needy in life, and now he is reaping the deserved justice for how he lived. This goes with Luke's account of the blessings and woes. Luke 6:24 *<sup>24</sup> But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.* Lazarus, on the other hand, suffered and is now comforted in the kingdom. That lines up with Luke's beatitudes. Luke 6:20b *<sup>20b</sup> Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*

There is a correlation with suffering and reward. In fact, Paul wrote that all who live a godly life will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12<sup>xxiii</sup>). In his letter to the Romans he said that suffering for Christ means we are children of God and heirs of the kingdom (Romans 8:17<sup>xxiv</sup>). The result is sharing in Jesus' glory. We are also told that if we endure with Him, we will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12<sup>xxv</sup>).

That is troublesome to those of us who grew up in a Christian culture, for we are blessed with abundance and have up until now suffered few consequences other than some rejection. That is unusual in church history, but I believe that will soon change. We are starting to see people lose their jobs or be blacklisted in the entertainment and political realms because of their faith. While areas such as sports still honor faith, other

areas such as academics will find they are handicapped when being honest about their faith. This is just the beginning. The history of cultures has shown that as time passes people with morals are expected to be quiet. But we cannot be silent (Jeremiah 20:9<sup>xxvi</sup>).

<sup>26</sup> *And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.* Luke 16:26 There is no bridge between heaven and hell. The chasm is fixed. Our eternal destiny is determined upon our death (Hebrews 9:27<sup>xxvii</sup>). I believe that all people will have been given every opportunity to turn to Jesus as Lord in this life. If they did not repent, they would never do so even in the eternity of hell. Others believe people will eventually repent and be in heaven. This is one type of what is called universalism. That can come from a heart that desires what God desires, that all would be saved. I can relate to that hope, but I don't believe that is what Scripture teaches. There is no bridge between the two realms for anyone to pass, not now, not ever. We must be careful not to harden our hearts to God's conviction and constant urging for us to come to Him. We all choose to accept or reject the Word of God, and that Word became flesh and lived among us show us the love of God and making a way to the Father (John 1:14<sup>xxviii</sup>).

<sup>27</sup> *And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'* Luke 16:27,28 The rich man pleaded for Lazarus to return from the dead to warn his brothers and sisters. He still wants Lazarus to do his bidding. Even the wicked care about their family. He is not in Hades simply because he was selfish and stingy. He is there because he rejected the Word of God, which we will see in a moment.

I find it interesting that what the man requested is exactly what Jesus did. Was Jesus warning them that even when *He* rose from death they would refuse to believe? The resurrection is that warning to all that there is life after death and that Jesus is the Lord. His resurrection is a warning that we better heed all that He said. Timothy Keller wrote: *"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said?"*

Abraham's response is something we must heed, for it is Jesus who is relaying it to us as warning not to justify our sins by saying, "If we only knew." We do know. I believe everyone knows in their heart of hearts. In addition to our conscience, God has seen fit to have the Scriptures translated and distributed to the entire world.

The far distant second in number of translations is Pinocchio. Think about the message of Pinocchio. God has given us a conscience. We ignore it and up an enslaved jackass laboring for a hard taskmaster- sin. I don't think the writer chose the whale randomly. Jesus used the account of Jonah as a foreshadow of how he would be in the grave three days and rise again. And when we turn to him, we become new creations, rising from spiritual death to new life in Him. We return to our Creator who was searching for us and are embraced by Him, the one who longs to have us as His son.

<sup>29</sup> *But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'* <sup>30</sup> *And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'* <sup>31</sup> *He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'* Luke 16:29-31 Abraham's response was that the brothers had the Law and the Prophets. Abraham didn't have the Law and the Prophets. They were written long after his life. If He could follow God simply by the

voice of God to his heart, then the brothers who have both the Torah and the Prophets have way more than he had. If those Scriptures they honor as the very words of God did not cause them to see their need to repent of their sins and turn to God for mercy, then why would a ghost be able to turn them? In John 5:46 Jesus said, <sup>46</sup> *For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.* <sup>47</sup> *But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"*

But the rich man did not agree with Abraham. He hadn't agreed with him in life, so why would he agree with him in death? The rich man was saying that God didn't do enough to cause him to repent. He was declaring the clear warnings in the Word of God were not enough (Isaiah 58:7<sup>xxxix</sup>), and that he needed an additional sign to prove the words were true. He really thought that if someone came back from death he would have believed. He had deceived himself and now is trying to justify himself.

Isn't that what our culture says today? The Bible isn't enough. The resurrection isn't enough. Fulfilled prophecy isn't enough. If Jesus would just appear and explain why things happen as they do, we would believe. But Abraham is telling us that isn't the case. **Jesus is using the parable to say the Word is enough!** He is emphasizing why He just said not one dot of the Law will be voided (Luke 16:17<sup>xxx</sup>). Maybe that is part of the reason Jesus said this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14<sup>xxxi</sup>).

Another Lazarus did return from the dead, and the reaction of the religious leaders was to try to kill him before his resurrection caused more people to believe in Jesus (John 12:10,11<sup>xxxii</sup>). Perhaps that is why Jesus at the leading of the Holy Spirit chose that name for the poor man in the story.

The book *Christmas Carol* is based on this idea. Ebenezer lived for financial gain. He couldn't care less about the needs of his employees or anyone else. He was the rich man of this parable. Three spirits visited him to wake him up to his future condition if he would not change his ways. The happy ending is that he did have a heart change. But that is not what Jesus' parable says will happen if someone has the Word of God and rejects what it is telling us. Jesus is saying a ghost would not be able to change their behavior.

This tells us that the Word is the power unto salvation for all who will receive it. 1Peter 1:23<sup>xxxiii</sup> tells us we are born again through the living and abiding Word. James 1:18<sup>xxxiv</sup> says God brought us forth through the Word of truth. James 1:21<sup>xxxv</sup> tells us to humbly accept the Word which can save us. The Apostle Paul told Timothy to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2<sup>xxxvi</sup>). That is why we preach through the Scriptures in this church. The Word of God is the power that God uses to save souls and transform lives. It is the Spirit's proclamation of the love of God and a warning to the lost of their future if they will not turn to the Savior and receive His gift of forgiveness. Proclaiming the whole counsel of God is more powerful and convincing than a spirit returned from the dead.

This is Jesus warning to the wealthy Pharisees who loved money (Luke 16:14<sup>xxxvii</sup>). They lived for the praises of men and were great at justifying their compromises (John 12:43<sup>xxxviii</sup>). This is such a temptation in our culture that we must be careful to let the Word of God speak to our hearts this morning to be sure that we are hearing and accepting the whole counsel of God without compromising or justifying our actions. Is Jesus first? Is He Lord? None of us want to awake from death in the rich man's condition.

## Questions

- 1 What would the culture of the time conclude at the beginning of the story?
- 2 Contrast the physical condition of the two men.
- 3 What misconception was Jesus addressing?
- 4 Can we have similar misconceptions?
- 5 Contrast their eternal state?
- 6 Why couldn't his request for a drop of water be answered?
- 7 What was his only thought for others?
- 8 What was Abraham's answer?
- 9 Why was the rich man in Hades?
- 10 What is the warning to the Pharisees and to us?

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<sup>i</sup> **Luke 16:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

<sup>ii</sup> **1 John 3:17 (ESV)**

<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>iii</sup> **James 2:15-16 (ESV)**

<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>iv</sup> **Deuteronomy 28:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

<sup>v</sup> **Deuteronomy 28:38-40 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. <sup>39</sup> You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. <sup>40</sup> You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off.

<sup>vi</sup> **Luke 6:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>vii</sup> **John 9:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

<sup>viii</sup> **John 8:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,

<sup>ix</sup> **Job 8:3-6 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?

<sup>4</sup> If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression. <sup>5</sup> If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, <sup>6</sup> if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation.

<sup>x</sup> **Luke 6:46 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?

<sup>xi</sup> **Matthew 7:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

<sup>xii</sup> **James 5:15-16 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed

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sins, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

<sup>xiii</sup> **John 9:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Luke 23:43 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

<sup>xv</sup> **Amos 9:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> "If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Revelation 20:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

<sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

<sup>xvii</sup> **John 10:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

<sup>xviii</sup> **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

<sup>xix</sup> **John 6:40 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

<sup>xx</sup> **Mark 9:43 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Romans 4:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

<sup>xxii</sup> **Psalms 17:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> from men by your hand, O LORD, from men of the world whose portion is in this life. You fill their womb with treasure; they are satisfied with children, and they leave their abundance to their infants.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Romans 8:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>xxv</sup> **2 Timothy 2:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Jeremiah 20:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,

<sup>xxviii</sup> **John 1:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Isaiah 58:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

<sup>xxx</sup> **Luke 16:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Matthew 24:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

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<sup>xxxii</sup> **John 12:10-11 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **James 1:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

<sup>xxxv</sup> **James 1:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> **2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> **Luke 16:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> **John 12:43 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.