

The Rich Man and Lazarus Part 2

Last time I looked at some advice given by Myles Coverdale about interpreting scripture and this is it. In short, we need to take scriptures in the context in which they are written and plucking out verses can sometimes lead to interpretations not intended by the writer.

I also looked broadly at the reasons why the four Gospel writers wrote what they did and we concluded that:-

Matthew intended his Gospel to be relevant primarily to Jewish Christians and that his Gospel is like a handbook on how to live the Christian life as disciples of the Lord Jesus – hence lengthy teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about the way individual believers should conduct themselves.

Mark, records in a short space much of what Jesus did and was probably fed information by Peter Mark. It's a good gospel to give unbelievers as it give an exciting journey through the life of Jesus beginning with John the Baptist and then speeding on.

John's gospel was written for believers. The reason John wrote it comes out in John 20 v 30 to 31.

John 20:30-31

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

31 But these are written that you may believe (and go on believing) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

(NIV)

It was written to show that Jesus is the Son of God and that Christians should go on believing that.

Luke was a doctor and travelling companion to Paul. Luke addresses his record of the life of Christ to Most Excellent Theophilus, a dignitary who seems to know something of the life of Christ but needs to know it more accurately and who probably needs to get to know the Lord as well.

Luke being a doctor was well able to record very accurately what he investigated and Luke includes in his gospel many things not found elsewhere. For example, he records the parables of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, the rich fool, the lost coin all appear in Luke and the rich man and Lazarus which I want to look at. He is very detailed and Luke is a good gospel for unbelievers. Luke highlights the Lord's teaching that those who are wealthy should help those who are less well off and Luke seems to feel for the needy and outcasts.

The parable of the Rich man and Lazarus forms a climax to a run of parables dealing with issues which would be of interest to a dignitary. Such as:-

Taking the right seat at a banquet,

Not starting a building before counting the cost and being certain that you have enough resource to complete it,

Negotiating a settlement if you can't win a coming confrontation,

Misuse of inheritance by a member of a family,

The way in which an estate manager can make a bad situation good for himself by making shrewd investments,

How God requires faithfulness in small things before he will trust a person with bigger things

And to finish, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus which shows that eternal destiny is not dependent on whether one is rich or poor in this life but that those who are or would be rich need to take particular care.

I finished last time by showing that although the rich was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day the Lord Jesus does not criticise the man for being well off, having fine clothes or eating good food. Nevertheless, there must have been something wrong in the rich man's life because when he died he went to hell.

This week, I want to pick up the parable again and begin by looking at Lazarus – the poor man of the story, or at least the poor man at the beginning of the story.

Luke 16:19-20

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores (NIV)

At one extreme we have the rich man who lives in sheer luxury and at the other we have Lazarus who lives in sheer poverty. We read that Lazarus was laid at the gate of the rich man. Now if it is possible to stand outside someone's gate all day you can move around, you can sit down if you want to and move on if you get tired of doing it. If you can sit outside it's not so good as being able to stand as freedom is limited but to have to lie down is a bad state to be in. A real state of weakness. It gets worse because the scripture implies that he was laid implying that he was put there by someone. A bit like the cripple who was at the gate Beautiful in Acts Chapter 3.

To make it worse, he was covered in sores. He was clearly in a dreadful state and he would probably smell. Not everyone was compassionate in those days to such people. Some would have felt that Lazarus must have sinned to be in such a state, or that his parents had sinned and it seemed that the poor were simply a sad fact of life. He must have looked a pitiful sight as he lay on the ground and begged to stay alive. As he lay there, he longed to eat just a crumb that would fall from the rich man's table at mealtime. Such crumbs were probably already being eaten.

Matt 15:27. The account of the Caananite woman whose daughter was demonised.

27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

(NIV)

Perhaps the rich man had dogs. I guess he could afford them. Perhaps they drooled as they watched him fare sumptuously on his fine food and scrambled for bits that became available. What came from the rich man's table would be very attractive to dogs. However, dogs drooled over Lazarus too. As dogs might well have licked up food from the table of rich man, so dogs licked up what they saw as food oozing from the sores of the poor man. What a dreadful sight.

There was a marked contrast in life between the rich man and Lazarus and now we shall see that there was a marked contrast in death.

They both died. The poor man first. Death is the great leveller and has no compassion. Death will take young and old, the healthy and sick and in this case rich and poor alike. They both experienced that one certain fact – that life on this earth will one day come to an end for all of us. – And when we take a look at what lies beyond, and we'll do that in more detail next week, that fact should make us mighty grateful that renouncing sin, turning to Christ in faith for forgiveness and continuing in the faith will save us from going to the place where the rich man went. Let's see what happened.

Luke 16:22-23

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

In short, the rich man goes to hell and Lazarus goes to paradise. Why did that happen? Why the distinction after death. What had each of them done to deserve their destination.

Why did the rich man go to hell?

Let's look at the rich man. The fact that he was rich, had fine clothes, lived in a gated house and lived on good food was not criticised in the parable. So why did he go to hell? Remember the Myles Coverdale approach. We need to look at what goes before and the clue comes earlier in the chapter and in some of the teaching of Jesus leading up to that. Go back a few verses and see who the Lord Jesus was talking to here. He was talking to wealthy Pharisees and Luke records a good deal of teaching from Jesus on the use of money Like:-

The parable of the rich fool Luke 12:19-21 NIV who said to himself

19 "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God." A person who is not rich towards God has

no inheritance in the kingdom of God-- no riches laid up in heaven. His affections are all fixed on this world, and he has none for God. (Barnes)

Earlier in the chapter Jesus talks about the dishonest manager who cheated his employer and Jesus is not suggesting we should do that. However, the manager was shrewd in his dealings with his employer's debtors so that when he finally came to leave his job, they would be kind to him and the manager commended that way of thinking. Jesus is implying that people need to use their money in a way which will have some eternal worth to them when they finally die and leave this world.

However, in response to that parable we read this in Luke 16:14-15

14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

(NIV)

Here's the problem. The rich man was satisfied with his home, his good clothes and good food and was happy with his lot. He acknowledged as all Jews did that he was a son of Abraham and yet unlike Abraham he had no heart towards God, and God knew his heart. He had what Abraham called his "good things" and his wealth fully satisfied him on the earth where he lived without God - though he probably didn't think he was without God.

He would no doubt go to the temple, as religious Jews did, and he would have been brought up to respect God's law and to know passages in it but IT WAS ALL OUTWARD SHOW. IT DIDN'T TOUCH HIS HEART

AND HE HAD NO MORE CONCERN FOR HIS ETERNAL PROSPECTS THAN HE HAD FOR LAZARUS. LIKE SO MANY OTHER JEWS HE WOULD SAY “ABRAHAM IS MY FATHER” AND BECAUSE OF THAT HE WOULD BELIEVE THAT ALL WAS TAKEN CARE OF, HE HAD HIS TICKET TO HEAVEN AND THERE WAS NO NEED TO DO ANYTHING MORE. HE COULD NOW TAKE THE ATTITUDE OF THE RICH FOOL AND EAT DRINK AND BE MERRY AND JUST BE HAPPY IN HIS LIFESTYLE.

That was his problem, he had no concern for a personal relationship with God and no concern about a daily walk with Him and if the Lord had suggested that his riches were getting in the way he would no doubt have walked away like the rich young ruler, and like Mr By Ends in Pilgrims Progress (John Bunyan) who only wanted religion when it walked in silver slippers, when the sun shines and when people applaud it.

In short, the rich man worshipped God with his lips but his heart was far from God. He had no ticket to heaven and so, when he died, he opened up his eyes in hell.

So why did Lazarus go to paradise?

Was it because he was poor in this life? Was it because Lazarus received what Abraham called “Bad things”, and was probably despised and rejected? Does this parable mean that if we experience poverty in this life God makes it up to us in the next? Does it mean that the rich can expect to go to hell and the poor can expect to go to heaven simply of the basis of that social distinction? Actually, being poor is not sinful and being rich is not sinful and those conditions alone have no bearing whatsoever on where

a person spends eternity. However, a clue to the reason why Lazarus went to paradise but the rich man didn't lies in the name Lazarus itself which means "God is helper".

It must be that the poverty experienced by Lazarus caused him to look beyond the things of this life to give him any kind of hope. Then in his poverty he put his trust in the blood of the atonement and in doing so he put his trust in Christ and was saved. That's how all people in the OT were saved, through an active faith in atoning blood, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, although Lazarus was outwardly in poverty, he was inwardly the owner of great treasure (Brownlowe North) and it made a difference to him as a person. In fact there's a clue to the life of God within Lazarus in verse 26

Luke 16:24-26 The former rich man is speaking:-

24 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.'

25 "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.

26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' (NIV)

Now who would "want to go" from paradise to comfort someone in hell? I believe Lazarus would have done if give the chance, even for someone

who had continuously ignored him in his poverty – it was God’s character shining through.

The light of God had shone in his heart and while on earth he had Treasure in his sore-infested jar of clay (2 Cor 4:6-7) and whilst all the treasure the rich man owned remained behind when he died, Lazarus took his treasure with him and we will too if we put our trust in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

So, let’s look at what happened when beggar died.

Luke 16:22 NIV

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side".

The beggar died first. Someone found him dead. “Look” said someone “The beggar’s dead”. It was true. His body covered with sores dressed in rags with the dogs sniffing around was dead but the person who had lived in that body was a soul who was very much alive. He wasn’t just a body. In fact, Angels came for him. More than one. Whilst he used to be carried by people and placed outside the rich man’s home each day, now he was carried by Angels to another home. God sent Angels to escort him. There is something special about friends who say, “I’ll come and pick you up and afterwards I’ll take you home” That’s what a friend did for me when I landed at Heathrow in May. It was very special. Whereas the rich man didn’t feel that Lazarus was even worth the time of day, Lazarus was special to God and he sent Angels to pick him up and take him home. The dogs might have nosed and sniffed around his body, his body might have

been put unceremoniously in a paupers grave whatever that might have been but Lazarus wasn't there. His suffering had ended and he was no longer a beggar. He was now a person in ecstasy.

This is reality. These are not just Bible stories to entertain congregations and children in Sunday School. The reality is that part of us lives on beyond this life on earth and how we regard Jesus Christ in this life will determine where we spend the next.

Let's look at what happened when the rich man died

" The rich man also died and was buried." Luke 16:22 (NIV)

Someone found him dead – probably on an ornate bed. “Look” said someone “The rich man’s died”. It was true. With great respect, someone probably pulled a clean sheet over the body, pulled some curtains and put a flag at half mast while his servants and five brothers looked on the with respect. The news soon leaked out. “The rich man’s dead”. But, in reality, he – the man himself who was more than just a body was very much alive. (Brownlowe North The Rich Man and Lazarus). Back home, they held a funeral, no doubt said good things about him and how things will never be the same without him but he wasn't there. In fact, he was greatly surprised “What’s happening? Am I dead or what? Where am I? I’m supposed to be dead” He opened up his eyes in Hell. He just landed there. No angels for him, no loving God to take him home just the increasing heat of hell as he opened his eyes and saw flames.

Eyes? His eyes were in his body and that was left behind. Yet he opened them in hell. He could see with eyes that weren't there! He saw Lazarus and could recognize him and he saw Abraham. How did he know it was Abraham. Did Abraham have a name badge? No way, the spirit of the former rich man just knew. But, his brain was back on earth and so how could he know? He just could know, the spirit takes with it the memory of life on earth and the ability to recognize and his spirit could feel things too. He felt flames and heat and was in agony and is still in agony now with no prospect of that ever coming to an end. Oh God, what a mess.

His agony increased when he saw Lazarus, the one time beggar with pus running from his sores, in ecstasy next to Abraham.

The rich man now prays in earnest. Maybe for the very first time. Let's look at his prayer.

Luke 16:24 (NIV)

24 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.'

He called him Father because Jews believe that they were Abraham's children and prided themselves on it. That was supposed to be the rich man's ticket to heaven but it wasn't enough. Abraham knew he was "a child of Abraham" by descent and calls him "Son" but that human relationship can do nothing for him. It's almost like mockery. This is hell.

This is where people experience God outside the mercy found in Jesus Christ.

He prays for mercy from the wrong place. He should have done it while he fared sumptuously and was dressed in purple and fine linen. He might have said his prayers but now he prays. (Brownlowe North) But not only does he pray from the wrong place, he prays to the wrong person. Dead saints can't help us in this life; even less in the next.

All the things he had thought so little of in his life now become so real. Within minutes, or is it seconds or is it weeks, who can tell, he does what he had probably never done in his lifetime – he cries for water. Just a drip, just a little bit just a drip off the end of a beggar's finger. In his lifetime water was his for the asking but he never asked God for the water of life and now he thirsts like he never thirsted before.

"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.” Luke 16:25 (NIV)

The rich man's misery is made even worse by the fact that he can remember his past life and that he had not made serious preparation for eternity, preferring to be content with his purple and fine linen as if somehow it would never come to an end and relying on his relationship with Abraham as his ticket to eternity in heaven. But he could see that the “Good things” he lived for on earth were worthless now. He would be a

beggar for a hundred years if he could get of this dreadful place - and he had only just arrived. (Brownlowe North)

People like Abraham, Joseph and David when he was king (and Solomon too when he was walking with God) knew great riches in their lives but also knew that they were useless to save the soul and of no worth compared to knowing God. However they realized that in this life and put their trust in God. The rich man knew of these people and their riches but did not do what they did. He did not put his faith in God.

Abraham continues:

Luke 16:26

26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

(NIV)

The rich man would never, never, never, never escape. If he could just spend some time here and then leave, if he could just know that a day would come when he would be released – even in a hundred years, it might be bearable but he would never escape.

Who was it who related this parable? It was the Lord Jesus – Love embodied in a man – the one who said that God loves the world. It's from his lips that much of the teaching about Hell comes from in the Bible. Jesus refers to the place loads of times and came to save us from going there should we choose to follow Him. It's amazing that people convince

themselves that God is too good to send people hell when people go of their own free will to Hell when they choose life outside Christ rather than within his forgiveness which saves us.

We'll continue with this next week and look in more detail at the two places separated by the chasm Abraham described.