

# The Rich man and Lazarus

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Do please keep that passage open in front of you. We have, as we come to the end of this intermittent series in the parables, I We have another hard text in front of us.

We've had some more familiar parables, perhaps, earlier in the series. And here we have a parable about judgment. We saw in the parable of the sower, for those of you who are here, that all parables are, in fact, an act of judgment.

They all divide people. But this one happens to be about judgment as well. To briefly recap, for those of you who haven't been with us for the whole series, first we looked at the parable of the sower, which showed that the purpose of the parables was both to deafen and to reveal.

That parables separate the listeners in a way that's very similar to final judgment. And we saw that the way to hear was not to be clever enough, but to lean in.

To choose to listen to Jesus. To ask him what he means. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear. Jesus said. Where the parables are complicated or hard, we are to keep on listening.

[ 1 : 22 ] Remember that none of the disciples understood that first parable of the sower until they asked Jesus to explain. And then they listened. After that, we had the parable of the Good Samaritan, which was a worked example of that.

We saw how easy it is for us to hear God's teaching on how to inherit eternal life and come away with the understanding that it relates in some way to earning our justification rather than it being achieved for us.

Then last time, we saw a reminder that there's no one so far gone, whether that's in wild living or buried in the depths of religious self-righteousness and self-justification, there's no one so far gone that they can't inherit eternal life.

But today, we're going to see that although there's no limit to who can enter the kingdom, there is a limited time for that to happen.

Judgment does, in fact, await everyone after they die. We have a hard teaching in front of us today. Those with ears to hear must listen. And Luke's going to be repeating throughout this as we look at his themes of self-justification and speaking particularly of wealth and status, as he often does.

[ 2 : 42 ] And he does that because these things are often snares for the soul. And so our first point today, or question rather, I'll warn you ahead of time, this is the longest so that you get shorter.

But our first point is, will wealth save? And in every parable we've looked at so far, the immediate context has helped us to understand what's going on.

And here, it's probably worth us noting that Jesus has just told a parable about money. And he concludes that those who can't be trusted with worldly wealth won't be trusted with the treasure of the kingdom.

The Pharisees, who Luke tells us were lovers of money, scoffed when Jesus said this. So Jesus names them for what they are.

They are self-justifiers, who think that their wealth and their status will make them righteous before God. And this parable that Arjun just read for us is Jesus' response to their scoffing.

[ 3 : 48 ] Jesus says they are self-justifiers. They think they can be justified and made righteous by what they have in their pockets, by their status. And they ridicule him. How can this pauper carpenter teacher talk about being trusted with wealth?

Well, he surely hasn't been trusted with much. And their love of money, you must understand here, is a type. It's used to represent all idolatry because it's a very common idol, I suppose.

But others are not less serious. Every one of us must watch how we use our current blessings. But as we do that, let's dig into this parable of two men.

There was a rich man, Luke says, Jesus says, clothed in purple and fine linen. Now, purple cloth was incredibly fancy back then.

There are only two ways to achieve a purple dye. And it's just very expensive to do. So if you wanted to flaunt your wealth, you didn't do it with a fancy car or a watch or a holiday.

[ 4 : 55 ] You'd just wear a bunch of purple. And the word here translated as fine linens, by the way, is normally translated as undergarments. Jesus is humorously but pointedly saying, he was so rich, even his underclothes were fancy.

Even they were purple. Here's a man whose indulgence goes all the way down. Now, think about it. Purple's no comfier, is it, than other colors? Costs a great, great deal more in this context and isn't on display.

So there's no reason for this other than an absurd love of just being rich from this man. Paul Simon, some of you might know, sings the song about the woman who has diamonds on the soles of her shoes.

Just to show how silly and indulgent this lady is. Jesus is doing something very similar here. So we have this man who has purple all over, this wealthy man.

He feasts daily. That means, by the way, not just that he has a load of food, but he has guests. It's the celebrating, partying word we've seen throughout Luke's parables. He is feasting daily.

[ 6 : 05 ] And as he parties, Lazarus, the poor man, the beggar, is laid at his gate. And again, a bit of context, this is not a society in which the poor were looked after by the state.

So what was expected in that society was that those who are rich would make sure that food was sent to the poor who were in that area. This is how it operated in our country for a long time as well. It's just normal and expected. The social structure kind of relied upon it. And so Lazarus is laid at the gates of this rich man, but there is not a crumb of compassion to be found.

Now, we don't get the rich man's name. Only the important people get names and stories such as this. So Jesus is already hinting that things are not going to wind up so well for him after all.

He's not named, but poor old Lazarus is. And the rich man won't even send crumbs for him. The dogs lick his sores. They wouldn't have been pets, by the way.

[ 7 : 11 ] Pets weren't, dogs weren't kept as pets. So these were either utility animals, that is, guard dogs, or they were strays. So not domesticated pets, but either wild or trained attack dogs have more compassion on Lazarus than this rich man and tend to his helpless estate.

Lazarus deeply longed to be fed with just the crumbs that were brushed or fell from the rich man's table, which is where the dogs would eat, in fact.

But he got nothing. Then Jesus says, the beggar died. Now, we know his name, don't we? He's called Lazarus.

But Jesus refers to him as the beggar, presumably, so that his poverty is so obviously connected to his death. The poor man died first, as is so often the case.

He has no funeral, and he's carried personally by the angels to Abraham's bosom. And this means something very particular as well.

[ 8 : 13 ] Being taken to Abraham's bosom is a sign of closeness and affection, but it's also a cultural reference, once again, to feasting, to feasting at his side. When the Jewish people would feast, they wouldn't sit at a table, but rather lie down, leaning on one arm, facing a low table.

And everyone at the party would be assembled like that, just leaning towards the person next to them. And so if you wanted to talk to them, you'd simply drop your head back onto their chest and say, can you pass the salt or whatever it is?

We don't do that anymore. But John's referred to as the one who lays his head on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, because he is the one who's close with Jesus. He has that place of honor next to Jesus at the Last Supper.

And Jesus says, that is the place of honor that Lazarus has next to Abraham in heaven. Okay, so there's Lazarus in heaven. And then we see, sometime later, the rich man also dies.

And he has no such honor. On earth, yes, this guy gets a burial, but even while he's being honored on earth, he is in torment. Now, perhaps this is something that we'll look at on a later date, but please do understand that whatever we're being told about hell and judgment in this parable, we're not being told about the mechanics of it.

[ 9 : 39 ] Various aspects of this are formed to communicate to the Pharisees that this was, in fact, hell. And so we don't want to get carried away, I think, by inspecting the fiery heat or the flames, et

cetera, and certainly don't want to over-literalize this idea of a kind of conversation chasm between heaven and hell.

What we know is that the rich man's in torment. This is a very, very hard teaching, and we must watch how we hear.

The rich man looks up from hell and sees Abraham and Lazarus. Now they're feasting. And the rich man starts to cry out to Abraham, and they have these three exchanges.

The first we see is a demand to send Lazarus to bring him water. He asks to send Lazarus to bring him water.

Is that not extraordinary? If you think about how this story has gone, if you're the rich man in this situation, don't you think you'd be begging forgiveness or at least look a little shame-faced?

[10:52] He sees the man that he'd allowed to die on his doorstep, being honored in heaven, and he is utterly unashamed and utterly unrepentant.

Now, Bertrand Russell, he's a famous philosopher and atheist of the last century. He was once asked what he'd do or say if he died and then found himself face-to-face with God.

And he replied famously, I'd say, not enough evidence, God. Not enough evidence. Now, a bit later in the sermon, we'll examine the idea that more evidence was lacking.

But in one sense, Bertrand Russell was completely correct. That will indeed be his attitude. He shan't bow his head in humility and say, oh, I'm terribly sorry, I was wrong.

He will blame God even then. This parable shows us very clearly that there is no repentance in hell. Some of us, I think, might have an image of it being a place where people are begging forgiveness for their sin and wanting to worship the Lord and giving him right glory because now they've learned their lesson.

[12:15] But that is the opposite of what we see here. C.S. Lewis helpfully described it in this way. He said there are two kinds of people, those who say to God, thy will be done, and those to whom God eventually says, thy will be done then.

Hell is torment, not because people are tortured, but because it is complete separation from God and all the joy that comes from him.

We enjoy in this life what's called the common grace of friendship, of fun, of feasting, available to all. No matter what we do with our lives, we all have opportunities to experience joy and blessing in this life.

But after the final separation, when God removes himself, all the good things are gone. And yet there's no desire to repent, and we will see that emphasized in a minute.

So the torment of hell is understandable when we realize and think upon the fact that all goodness comes from God. Every good feeling, every good feeling, every enjoyable thought or activity.

[13:29] So for those who must surely be wondering, is it unjust for hell to be such torment? Or perhaps they haven't quite thought through what it means.

What would it mean for it not to be? It would mean that it would be just to accept God's gifts, but to reject God.

Exactly like this rich man is doing, and trying to do even still. Think, for instance, if I were to just decide one day just to up and leave Susie and the kids.

For no other reason than I was just bored. I just didn't want the relationship anymore. Firstly, that would be a deeply wicked thing to do. And secondly, I would experience a certain taste of the torment of separation.

I would miss them terribly. What would you then say to me if I came up to you and complained that it wasn't fair? That I didn't want the relationship, but I still wanted Susie to turn up and do things for me every now and again.

[14:36] I didn't tidy the house. Not as a mutual sharing of chores in a relationship, but because that's not the part of the relationship I meant to give up. If I wanted her to cook me certain dinners, share my bed from time to time, but disappear when I want it.

That would surely emphasize the initial wickedness and would presumably wake you all up to what sort of person I was being. Well, why then should hell contain the blessings of God with his absence?

How, in fact, could it, if he is absent? If those who have rejected God have got what they wanted and be made absent from him, how could it contain his blessings?

Now, the Bible's used the analogy I've just used plenty of times. Many, many times. God says that he has played the part of the deserted spouse, patiently waiting for his bride to return to him. But how long? For how long do we expect him to wait? Now, there's been much discussion in the media this week, recent weeks, all weeks, it seems, about how one could properly dole out justice. [15:53] About what kind of sentencing is appropriate. How to make a punishment actually fit a crime. Well, the stark answer to the ultimate judgment is that the punishment is the crime.

If you ultimately choose to reject God, then the punishment is getting what you want. Separation from him and all the horror and sadness that entails, for all the discomfort it gives us, it is true justice.

We see this man does not beg forgiveness from Lazarus. He doesn't even address him, doesn't even talk to him. But rather begs Abraham to send him. Well, now he's begging.

But even then, he imagines Lazarus to still be beneath him in station. He finds himself in hell and still acts self-righteously, still clings to the idea that he himself is of merit and good standing and that his status will work.

Send Lazarus, he says. Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and bring it to me. And Abraham gives two reasons why that's not going to happen.

[17:08] We are, by the way, still on our first point, will wealth save. And we see that in Abraham's first reason. Firstly, Abraham says that this man has already had his good things.

He's chosen comfort in his life on earth and now is in discomfort. He, being a foolish self-justifier, thought that his comfort and security would kind of always protect him.

Sometimes the feeling of safety can be such a dangerous thing, can't it? I don't know if you've ever seen people in the news being given flood warnings, but they feel safest in their own homes, don't they?

And so many stay and then are washed away. And if you, you're the kind of person who everything you touch seems to turn to gold, everything always goes perfectly.

Well, then of course you're going to struggle to realize that you're in peril. Because you can't imagine what it's like to fail or to fall. There are so many comforts that can keep people from looking out to Jesus.

[18:17] And so those blessed with comforts, we must watch out. Secondly, Abraham says that the die's already been cast. There's no exchange between these two places.

There's no going between them. But of course, this chasm's hardly necessary in the story, is it? No one wants to cross it. I can't imagine there being any desire in heaven to cross over.

But see to, again, the crucial point that those in hell still don't want any place at God's side. They want to carry over their status and have glory in hell.

The rejection of God continues forever. He doesn't say, let me come over. Those who are deaf and blind to the gospel will never have eyes or ears for it. We saw again, didn't we? We saw that in the parable of the sower.

That deafness to Jesus is a foretaste of future judgment. But if you don't yet understand, don't give up.

[19:19] Lean in. Those are the ears to hear, listen. It is not too late now. Now, it's not just the old man's, the rich man's, sorry, old status and wealthy comfort that he uses as his appeal.

I don't know if you noticed how he addresses Abraham in this. This is our second point. Will religion save? The rich man calls out in verse 24, Father Abraham.

Father Abraham. In other words, this man's a Jew. And his Jewishness has not saved him. Earlier in the gospel, John the Baptist preached to the Jews.

He said this. He said, bear fruits that befit repentance. In other words, if you're saying sorry, act like it. And he says, do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father.

For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

[20:29] He who has two coats, John the Baptist went on, let him share with him who has none. And so the rich man in the parable, we understand, is one of those who presume to say, well, I'm solid, I'm secure, I'm a child of Abraham.

But he bore no fruit of repentance. He shared no food. He shared no clothes. The axe fell. And now he's been judged. And this is no doubt the very mockery that the Pharisees threw back at Jesus in

verse 14.

We're children of Abraham. Don't threaten us that the use of our money might change our eternal destiny. So, will my wealth save me?

No. Will my faith save me? Will my religion save me? Jesus has just told, if you look to the beginning of the chapter, he's just told this parable called the parable of the untrustworthy servant. In which he says that those who can't use their wealth to good ends now will never be trusted with true riches. The Pharisees scoffed and mocked. Well, what's our equivalent of that then?

[ 21 : 44 ] Of hearing that story and responding in that way? Surely it's the voice within us that says, what? Me? No, I am an eternally secure child of God.

I'm justified by faith alone. Don't tell me that the way that I use my money or live my life or treat other people could jeopardize my eternal destiny.

Now, bear with me here. The answer to this contemporary form of what we sometimes call cheap grace is this. That faith which justifies, purifies.

That if we have been saved through faith, then we will be purified. It purifies us from love of money, love of self. As we saw in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the message is, you've been justified, now be just.

Or as Galatians 5 says, when it comes to justification before God, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of avail, but faith working through love.

[ 22 : 45 ] In other words, be a Christian with Jewish heritage or just be a Christian, that's not what God's going to be checking. But the point of this parable is that the rich man is in hell because he delighted more in luxuries for himself and in his status than in love for Lazarus.

It didn't make any difference that he thought he had a secure standing as a son of Abraham. Now, this does not mean, by the way, that by using your money for the good of others in the cause of Christ, that you can buy a spot in heaven or earn your way somehow into paradise.

No, not at all. No, what it means is that the way we use our money or the way we treat other people, the way we use our blessings, shows whether our heart has been changed.

So that love for others and not luxury for ourselves is no longer what we long for and delight in. It's not justification by our works to say that those who wish to go into eternal life with Christ must prefer the things and people of Christ to that of hell.

There's just sense, isn't it? Those who want to be with Christ will love Christ and love the things of Christ. And so now the rich man will press on.

[ 24 : 12 ] The rich man carries on with his dialogue and he asks Abraham, still to treat Lazarus as a slave, and now asks for Lazarus to be sent to preach to his five brothers.

Quite clearly, he knows that his brothers are living life in the same way he was. And with the same ignorance and selfishness, he thinks, maybe if Lazarus goes back to warn them, then they'll listen and they can avoid this torment.

But Abraham puts him right. He says, Let them listen to Moses and the prophets. These things have been talked about plenty.

That there's so much in the scriptures that tells us not to invest in the wealth of the present age, but rather to store up treasure with the father. But the rich man knows that his brothers do not listen to the scriptures.

They hear it, of course. They're respectable Jewish men like him. They go to the synagogue. They go to the church. But they do not listen. So he knows that it's no good just to tell them to read their Torah. Their Bible quiet time is just for show and it won't save them.

[ 25 : 20 ] And so here we see the ultimate self-justified nature of this man. From the depths of hell, he deigns to correct the theology of heaven.

He says, No, Father Abraham. No, you're wrong. If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. If there could just be a resurrection from the dead, something really startling, some miracle, then surely they would wake up and repent.

They would forsake their selfish luxury and start to live for others to the glory of God. And then comes Abraham's final, utterly stunning statement in verse 31.

If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. Isn't that incredible?

That a person might be so in love with money or other blessings of this age that he's deaf to the commands and warnings and promises of Moses and the prophets that even a resurrection from

the dead wouldn't bring about repentance?

[ 26 : 34 ] Well, all of that is, of course, deeply sobering, incredibly hard. But we have some things to consider here.

The rich man relied on his current level of comfort and wealth and security and religion to save him. When his comfort didn't work, he tried the religion angle.

But what's the one thing that could save? This is our final point. Will the word save me? There's a negative here, which we've heard. But we can flip it on the head and find it's extraordinary positive. People won't believe even if someone rises from the dead if they have already disbelieved the scriptures. Well, therefore, all that is needed for someone to believe are the scriptures.

So if you don't know whether all this Christian stuff is true or not, don't pine for a miracle. Don't beg for God to open the skies and send thunderbolts or signs.

[ 27 : 44 ] Just read one of the Gospels. Honestly, just read one of them. It would obviously be ridiculous to believe in a powerful God and say that miracles don't happen, that miracles can't happen.

But what Jesus, who performed many, many miracles, is saying is that they cannot save. But the word saves.

Because that is what this is, that you have in your hands and your seats in front of you. The word of God. When the Bible is read, the spirit of God speaks.

And he speaks saving truth. So do you feel ill-equipped to tell your friends and your family of the gospel? Are you really?

Are you ill-equipped? Jesus says that even he himself, appearing post-crucifixion, is not as good at all for evangelism as the word that you hold in your hands right now.

[ 28 : 46 ] Now that is quite incredible. What's being said isn't that the resurrection isn't a necessary part of our evangelism. Quite the contrary. The Holy Spirit has inspired the Gospels to be written.

Where the resurrection is declared. It's just that sending someone from heaven won't trump having the very messenger of heaven speaking. The spirit of God speaks when you open the Bible with someone.

That is why Jesus said in John's Gospel, we'll get to in Jonathan's series later on as we go down the line. But he says in John's Gospel to the disciples, it is better for them that he departs.

Better that he leaves because then the spirit will come upon them. Jesus' work is complete. He now reigns at the Father's side, interceding on our behalf, and the Spirit of God lives within us.

Speaks directly to us and never more clearly than through the pages of this book. Brothers and sisters, the Gospel isn't just good news, it's urgent news.

[ 29 : 56 ] But it's not just urgent, it really is good. Have you reflected lately, properly, on what the promise of heaven is?

Whether you're a Christian or not, what do you think of when heaven is mentioned? We have pictures aplenty from Jesus and elsewhere in the Bible.

Are you weary? Heaven is rest. True, energy-given rest. Are you downhearted?

There's a feast. Are you isolated and lonely? This isn't as intimate an occasion as a wedding. In fact, it is a wedding. And we are invited to play the part of the bride.

Perhaps we think too much of the current age and not enough of eternity simply because we have such a boring view of it. I've got a friend I used to work with who plays the harp stunningly, beautifully.

[ 31 : 00 ] Her name's Sian, and I'm sure she'll continue to play her harp long into eternity. But it's not just going to be her stuck up there on a cloud somewhere doing it forever while we sit and watch.

That's not what heaven is. As we go away today, we must know that we've been given everything we need to bring the promise of heaven to others. And everyone here, whether you feel far from God or near, know this.

The promise of heaven is a good one. Because if separation from God is a complete absence of all his blessings, then being near to him is a complete presence of all that he gives, of all of who he is.

The promise of heaven is a good one. Real intimacy, real rest, real satisfaction found in work. Real everlasting love. So let's fix our eyes upon what is to come.

We've been given all that we need. But perhaps now we need to recommit ourselves to being serious about what's at stake. This doesn't mean we have to be very serious looking people from

now on.

[ 32 : 08 ] But those who fix our eyes on Jesus, on glory, on heaven. For that is where Jesus Christ awaits us. And ultimately, for all the warnings, that is what will bring salvation, humanly speaking, to the hearts of our friends and family.

It's not the heat of hell, but the warmth of Christ that will draw people in as we show him to them. At the end of all things lies a great city.

And if hell is a place with none of God's gifts, heaven is full of them. Full of friendship and feasting. And work, yes, but not toil. A place of joy, humor, creativity.

And amongst all of that, central to every aspect of it, a place of worship. A place where every good gift, every good feeling, every good thing that we do, causes us to focus our praise and joy upon Jesus.

And to prepare, one of the things we must do is listen to Moses and the prophets and the scriptures written since, like Luke's gospel, which we've heard read today. What do these scriptures say?

[ 33 : 25 ] They say, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself. And they say that Jesus Christ has lived. That he's died for your sins.

That he's been raised from the dead as a sure sign that you too may experience true bodily resurrection with which you will feast. God's judgment on all humanity is this.

You are valuable, yet you are wretched. You have wounded. You are wounded. And into that, the Christian message comes that the eternally beloved son becomes a curse so that those who deserve justice might receive love instead.

So that God might look at the cross and then look at you and say, you are mine. Accept that forgiveness, and the final verdict over your life is simply this.

God will say, my justice is satisfied. What remains is for you to experience eternally my extravagant, everlasting love. Those with ears to hear, let them hear.

[ 34 : 42 ] Let's pray. Let's pray. I'll see you next time.