

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 9-19-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Luke 16:19-31

<sup>19</sup>“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup>And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup>who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. <sup>22</sup>The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup>He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ <sup>25</sup>But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup>Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ <sup>27</sup>He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup>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 listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

**<sup>19</sup>“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup>And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup>who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.**

Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus is an explication of Luke 16:14-15—“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. So he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others, but God knows your hearts, for what is prized by humans is an abomination in the sight of God.” The rich man becomes a stand-in for those lovers of money Jesus was addressing in the previous verses. The rich man in the parable is unnamed, but is known based on his apparel and actions. His lavish clothing and decadent dining practices are the focus. In harsh contrast to this man’s extravagant lifestyle is Lazarus. This is not the Lazarus from the gospel of John, the brother of Mary and Martha. Rather, this is a hypothetical poor beggar. Interestingly, this man is the only character in one of Jesus’ parables who is given a name. Unlike the rich man, he is described in grotesque terms. He had oozing wounds, had to be cast, thrown, or laid at the rich man’s gate where he had some hope of being shown mercy. The gates of the wealthy were often constructed with waiting benches beside them so that the poor might find mercy and the rich might show forth their generosity and humanity. The rich man evidently ignored the poor ones who were laid by his gate. Lazarus longed to satiate his hunger with the scraps from the rich man’s table. The rich used bread to wipe grease from their hands. The soiled bread was then cast to the floor, presumably to be eaten by the dogs. To add insult to injury, not only did Lazarus not get this soiled bread he longed for, but the dogs who likely ate the bread came and licked his wounds afterwards.

**<sup>22</sup>The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.**

It is no surprise that the poor man died. He likely wasted away from hunger, disease, and/or infection. The surprise here is that he is carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. Such a fate of glory was reserved for the “best of

the best” in the Old Testament—Enoch (Gen 5:24), Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), and Moses, according to Jewish legend. Though Lazarus was useless and worthless to the rich man, he was evidently beloved of God to be assumed into heaven in this fashion. The death of Lazarus comes as no surprise given his circumstances. The death of the rich man, however, is a reminder that death is the “great equalizer.” Despite his lavish lifestyle, the rich man’s fate is the same as Lazarus’ in the end. Both died. The rich man, however, was buried.

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The real twist in the story comes not just with the rich man’s sudden death, but with his ultimate fate. He is tormented in Hades while the poor man he mistreated is now resting in paradise with Abraham. We can imagine how this story would have resonated with the Pharisees who prided themselves on being descendants of Abraham and strict observers of the law. Notice only in the afterlife does the rich man notice Lazarus. Even then, he only thinks of him as someone to be exploited. Lazarus is valuable to him only if he comes to serve him and ease his pain. The ironic twist of the plot is complete. It is important to note this is a parable, not an treatise on the mechanics of the afterlife. Any attempt to take this scheme Jesus describes and turn it into a model of what the afterlife will be like is flawed from the start. The point is that God’s ways of viewing people differs from the ways people view each other. The value of Lazarus is that he is beloved of God and Abraham. The rich man only sees Lazarus’ poverty and sees Lazarus as subservient. But here in the “afterlife,” Lazarus has the last laugh.

**<sup>27</sup>He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup>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 listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

Here, the rich man thinks of someone other than himself for the first time, hoping to warn his brothers to repent and not replicate the mistakes that have landed him in torment. Unfortunately, he still views Lazarus as his errand boy. He wants Lazarus to leave his bliss in order to save his brothers. Abraham’s response is sobering: just as the rich man did, his brothers already have everything they need to live righteously. They have the words of scripture—the Law and the prophets. Consider, for instance, Deuteronomy 15:7—“If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor.” Or consider Isaiah 58:6-7—

“is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
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 them  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

It’s not like God never told God’s people how to live toward one another. It is just that the rich man and his brothers have been living contrary to God’s commandments. Like Jesus’ stern warning in last week’s gospel lesson they have been serving wealth instead of God. And no one can serve two masters. The choices the rich man made in life have sealed his fate in death.

The final words of Abraham here are chilling: even bodily resurrection will not be enough for some to repent and believe. This, of course, foreshadows Jesus' own coming death and resurrection. Seen from the point of view of the early church, I am sure those first followers of Jesus wondered how some could ignore a risen Christ and still choose to remain selfish and isolated as the rich man did in life. And that is ultimately the position we as the readers and hearers are placed in. We are not yet Lazarus or the rich man. We are the five brothers—those left alive with time yet to repent and change our ways. Do we heed Moses and the prophets? Do we believe and repent because Jesus has been raised from the dead? Or will we continue to try to serve both God and wealth?

**Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. We hear that Lazarus has an outward disease (open sores). How would you describe the rich man's inward disease?**
- 2. Why do you think the rich man and Lazarus never address each other directly in this parable?**
- 3. Do you think the rich man's brothers still have hope despite Abraham's refusal to send Lazarus to them? Why or why not?**