

Jesus used a parable to contradict the widely held belief among the Jews that wealth represented the blessings of God. In the parable, a rich man's wealth did not keep him out of hell and a beggar with nothing was given a place of honor in heaven. The message that Jesus was sending is clear: whether you are rich or poor, the amount of wealth you have says nothing about your relationship with God.

**Verses 1-18:** Jesus was teaching on the dangers of loving money and material wealth. The Pharisees, who were lovers of money themselves, criticized Jesus for what He was saying. Jesus responded to them by stating that the things valued by men are an abomination to God (**vs. 15** “*And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God*”). It was a popular belief of the day that wealth represented the blessings of God. In Matt. 19:24-26, Jesus stated that it was easier for camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples were surprised at that statement, thinking that if a rich man would not be allowed to enter the kingdom of God then what chance did other people have? In amazement they asked “Who then can be saved?” Jesus answered by saying that entering the kingdom of God is only possible through God.

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**19** There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

Jesus spoke a parable to illustrate of the dangers of loving or putting your trust in money. We are first introduced to the rich man who could afford the best of everything. Purple was the color of royalty and the Greek word for “fine linen” refers to “byssus linen,” a soft and expensive linen from Egypt. This rich man was wealthy enough to literally dress like a king. He also could eat magnificent meals every day and likely every meal. He did not have to “eat sandwiches.” Jesus is emphasizing that this man was wealthy in the extreme. The Jews may have considered this man to be very blessed by God.

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**20** And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, **21** And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

**“And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus”** – Next we are introduced to a beggar named Lazarus. He is on the opposite extreme from the rich man. Where the rich man had everything, Lazarus had nothing.

**“which was laid at his gate, full of sores [ulcers]”** – Apparently Lazarus was not healthy. Jesus said that he had to be “laid at his gate,” indicating that Lazarus was not able to go there under his own power. His body was also “full of sores,” implying some serious health issues. The fact that Lazarus was laid at “his” gate indicates that people carried him to the gate of the rich man's house every day so that he could beg. It seems that Lazarus' poverty came from the fact that his health didn't allow him to work to support himself.

**“And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table”** – Lazarus was so destitute that he would have been grateful to have been given the leftover pieces that would normally be tossed in the garbage or fed to the dogs. We have no indication that the rich man had any sympathy or compassion for Lazarus to give him his scraps.

**“moreover the dogs came and licked his sores”** – Commentators speculate that Lazarus' sores were the kind that oozed blood and/or pus. Rather than eating what might have been given to the dogs (the crumbs from the rich man's table), Lazarus became a source of nourishment for the dogs. At this point the Pharisees who were listening may have decided that Lazarus was suffering for some sin he had committed, in contrast to the rich man who was enjoying the “blessings of God.”

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**22** And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; **23** And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

**“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom”** – Eventually Lazarus succumbed to the malnutrition and health issues that he had and died. However, he was carried by the angels of God into “Abraham's bosom,” a Jewish expression that referred to heaven. Abraham was the patriarch of the Jewish race and was obviously someone that was blessed and accepted by God. Abraham's bosom also represented a place of honor, sitting next to Abraham in heaven.

**“the rich man also died, and was buried”** – Jesus did not say that Lazarus was buried, but no doubt the rich man had an elaborate funeral attended by many and was buried in an expensive grave.

**“And in hell [hades: abode of the dead] he lift up his eyes, being in torments [acute pain]”** – Eternity was quite different from life on earth. The rich man closed his eyes in death and opened them in hell, suffering more than he ever had in life.

**“and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom”** – Jesus uses the common rabbinical belief that hades was divided into two parts, one for the righteous and the other for the wicked, separated by an impassable gulf. The rich man is obviously on the wicked side of hades but he could see Lazarus on the other side with Abraham.

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**24** And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

**“And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me”** – Never having seen Abraham, the rich man is able to recognize him in the afterlife. He appeals to the patriarch of the Jewish race to show him mercy in the midst of his suffering.

**“and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame”** – The rich man's suffering is so extreme that he believes that even Lazarus' wet finger would give him some measure of relief. The man's selfishness is apparent because he's asking that Lazarus expose himself to the torments of hell in order to give him an insignificant amount of relief.

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25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

**“But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things”** – Abraham reminds the rich man that he enjoyed good things during his lifetime. It’s interesting that Abraham said the rich man “received” good things. He may have meant it in the general sense of the way life works – life seems to benefit some people more than others. However, there could be an implied idea that God allowed/enabled the man to have “good things.”

**“and likewise Lazarus evil things [bad; negative; troublesome]”** – The same is true for Lazarus, except that circumstances seemed to go against him in life. It could be that God arranged Lazarus’ misfortunes as well, which would not be unusual. In John 9:1-3, Jesus and His disciples saw a man who had been blind since birth. The common belief of the day was that such problems were the result of sin, and so the disciples asked Him if this man’s blindness was the result of the parents’ sin or his own. Jesus replied that neither was the case, but that the purpose of his blindness was so that the works of God could be done in him. God may have had a similar purpose in the cases of Lazarus and the rich man.

**“but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented”** – The conditions they experienced during their lifetimes were temporary. Now their situations were eternally reversed. The point that Jesus wants us to understand is that we should be more concerned about eternity than the temporary things of this life. Lazarus may not have had much in this world but he trusted in God, while the rich man had everything in this world but lost it all in eternity. Abraham also seems to be saying that it was too late to alter their eternal destiny.

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26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence.

Not only was there no relief for the rich man, but what he was asking for Lazarus to do was impossible. The “great gulf” allowed both sides to see each other and talk but prevented anyone from crossing over in either direction. God had apparently established the gulf to enforce the eternal destinies of both the wicked and the righteous.

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27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Giving up on himself, the rich man’s thoughts turn to his family. If Lazarus could not come to him with even a small amount of water, then perhaps Lazarus could visit the rich man’s brothers to warn them not to make the same mistake that the rich man had made.

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29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

Abraham’s reply was that the five brothers had the benefit of the writings of Moses and the prophets to warn them to repent of their sins and seek God’s forgiveness. The OT scriptures were the word of God and should be enough for the brothers to heed and obey, just as it was for countless saints. Today, the Bible is God’s word to us to show us the way of salvation and to warn us of the judgment to come.

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30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

The scriptures had been available to him during his lifetime and the rich man knew that his brothers would ignore them just as he had. He believed that the dramatic appearance of someone who had died would make the impact needed to convince them to repent of their sins.

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31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

The words written by Moses and the prophets came from God. If these five brothers were unwilling to believe and obey God speaking through the writings of Moses and the prophets, then they would also be unconvinced by someone being resurrected from the dead. This is true even today. Jesus Christ rose from the dead and yet most of humanity either does not believe it or else it doesn’t influence their life choices. This statement shows the premium that God puts on faith even without evidence. Hebrews 11:3 does not say “Through understanding we have faith” but “Through faith we understand...” Abraham’s statement shows us that the Bible is enough for us to base our faith upon for salvation. We do not need a dramatic experience or a “new revelation” to convince us of the truth and of our need to repent of our sins. The Bible testifies to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection and teaches us that faith in Him is our only means of salvation. Those who dismiss the message of the Bible do so at their own peril.