



Special Music: “One Drop”

Plumb

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d17zoQX-iLs>

**Luke 16:19-31**

**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**

**21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.**

**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 Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.**

**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 set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

**27** "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family,

**28** for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

**29** "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

**30** " 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

**31** "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

**REFLECTIONS OF A RICH MAN**

Father Abraham  
I hear the drums  
I should have tossed  
The lapdog crumbs  
When I had the chance.  
But I saw no need  
To let him feed  
At my feet.  
The stench of his sores  
To my upturned snout  
Made my gut a roundabout  
And I could barely retain my caviar.  
The Poor pernicious pauper  
Had no proper  
Place amidst the finery  
Of my repast.

And even upon our passing  
He remains a lapdog  
And I remain his better  
Unfettered by my resolve  
To keep him from my presence.  
Still,  
Even a lapdog has a purpose.  
Though I have lost my purse  
To the ravages of Hell,  
Send him forth to bring me drink,  
Lest I should shrink  
Into the fires that surround  
And confound me.  
Eventually,  
Justice will prevail  
And my soul will be freed  
From this ungracious Hell.  
'Til then  
Allow the malodorous miscreant  
To quench my thirst  
Among the cursed,  
And bring relief  
To my parch'ed tongue  
Stung by flames  
Repugnant to my soul.

**When God doth realize  
A mistake's been made  
This charade  
Will end  
As we trade places,  
Pathetic Pauper for Prosperous Prince,  
Hell for Heaven  
And Heaven for Hell,  
I will once again  
Disallow that hooligan  
To make fool again  
Of me  
But instead  
Give grace to his place  
Beneath my table.  
To lick my boots  
And eat my crumbs.  
God grant me grace  
To take my place  
In heaven's land  
Restored to my magnificence,  
The world at my command.**

**Until that time  
Allow said pauper  
To cool my tongue  
It's only proper  
Since he holds my place.  
Then send him on  
To warn my friends  
To self-reflect  
And make amends  
Lest they join me here  
Within the flames  
With Unquench thirst  
Forever cursed  
Chained in place  
Without a trace  
Of former stature,  
Begging for a hint of grace  
From those they scorned,  
Disgraced, displaced,  
Waiting for a rapture  
That may never come.**

**“Poor man Lazarus, sick and disabled.**

**Put your finger in the water come and cool my tongue, ‘cause I’m  
tormented in the flame.”**

**We all grew up hearing this song. It’s a spiritual, usually performed by a choir, and there are many different versions. However, like many song versions of stories from the Bible, it seems to miss the point that Jesus was trying to make. It isn’t just the song that does this. There have been so many takeaways from this story and so many things that can be read into it that it is difficult to focus in on the story and find where the truth sits. How much of this story is allegory, and how much of it is fact?**

**But before we dig into all that, we need to understand why Jesus is telling this story to the disciples and the pharisees. In the other stories that we have examined so far in this series, we can go back to a previous point in the scripture where Jesus is teaching and then feels that everyone will better understand what He is talking about if He tells them a story. But that is what makes this particular story somewhat different.**

**We should note, however, that Jesus has just been talking to the Pharisees about money. He tells them this in verse 13:**

**“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”**

He then spends a few verses talking about the Law and divorce. When He has finished, He suddenly tells “The Parable of Lazarus.” So, we really don’t have much to hang our hats on here other than his earlier discussion about money and how you cannot serve both God and money. But this isn’t really the point of “The parable of Lazarus,” either.

When you do a search on Lazarus and the Rich Man, you will often see a reference to Dives. Dives is Latin for “the rich man” and several European countries use the Latin term Dives as a sir name for the rich man in the story. But most western references just call him “the rich man.”

Luke is the only gospel to relate this story. We don’t get a chorus of validation from the other gospels. That does not mean the parable is insignificant. Luke finds it worthy to share and we should pay attention. The story appears to resonate oppression, so it often becomes a theme for oppressed people. But is it really a story of oppression? Does the story tell us that the rich man oppresses Lazarus, or is this just what we think because we have been told that all of our lives?

Let’s start at the beginning and see what we can discover in this story and what Jesus is trying to tell us.

**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**

**21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.**

To start with, Jesus doesn't just tell us that the rich man is rich. He shows us that the rich man is very wealthy. He wears purple. Purple dye was very hard to come by in Jesus' time and clothes that were dyed purple were beyond expensive. Anything clothing dyed purple would have been considered top fashion clothes today. Being able to afford purple clothes put you near the top when people talked about wealth. The rich man lived in luxury every day. Not just occasionally or when he was on vacation, but every day.

Lazarus, on the other hand was a beggar, covered in sores. He probably had leprosy. It was not uncommon for beggars to position themselves by the side of the road because that was the best place to be seen. He was probably unable to walk since he was "laid" there. If you are going to be a beggar, make sure you choose a good spot. Location is everything. It just so happens that Lazarus is placed outside of the rich man's gate next to the road. This would be a wealthier area of town since the rich man lived here. I don't read that the rich man was a mark, or a target. This was just a choice spot to collect alms. Lazarus was covered in sores, and he longed to eat crumbs from the rich man's table, probably anyone's table. But please note, we never hear Lazarus asking for those crumbs or to be invited in to the table. The rich man would not have allowed him to come in anyway because of his sores. The local dogs would come by Lazarus' spot near the street and lick his sores. He didn't try to fight them off

because it was probably the only relief he had from the pain and itching of the sores.

The rich man isn't refusing to give the beggar Lazarus food, he just doesn't go out of his way to offer him any. His biggest sin here was probably the sin of indifference. The need was obvious, but he chooses to remain oblivious. We shouldn't pick on him too hard though, because this attitude was common in the days of Jesus. For the most part, people did not associate with lepers, and they certainly did not go out of the way to take care of them. The Sadducees and the Pharisees avoided them as well. The "church" did not have a problem with this any more than they had a problem with someone being rich. After all, being rich was a blessing and showed everyone that God was on their side. Being poor and a leper were curses that showed everyone that God had it in for you.

**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.**

We may struggle a bit with this verse because as Christians we don't really think about Abraham in this respect. For us, Abraham is more of an Old Testament character, father of nations, willing to sacrifice his son on God's instructions. When we think about heaven, we think about St. Peter as the gatekeeper. But the Jews saw Abraham as heaven's gatekeeper. So, the disciples and the Pharisees would not have had a problem with this passage. It would have been perfectly logical for them to hear about God sending angels to collect Lazarus who was then delivered to Abraham's side.



The rich man died and was buried. No one was sent to collect him. Now remember, the rich man was considered blessed simply because he was rich, so he must have been pretty surprised to find himself in Hades.

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

I think it is important to note here, the influence of Greek Mythology. Greek mythology in the Bible? Come on, preacher, that doesn't make any sense. But we can't ignore the fact that Luke chooses to use the Greek word Hades in this passage. Hades was both the name of the Greek God of the underworld and also the underworld itself in Greek mythology. This goes to show how the Christianity of the Gentiles was actually beginning to influence the nature of our core belief system. Jesus would not have used the Greek word "Hades" because Jesus spoke Aramaic, so this reference occurred in translation.

However we look at it, the rich man is in hell and can see Abraham in heaven, up above him and far away. And guess who is by his side? Lazarus. He must have thought, "how can this be? God blessed me. We know that because I was rich. Lazarus was poor and covered with sores so, God had obviously cursed him. Why is he in heaven and I am in hell?"

**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.'**

As confounded as the rich man must be, he doesn't appear to be arguing his fate. Part of that is because he still hasn't changed his reference point. His mindset is still one of superiority. He is expecting Lazarus to attend him even though he ignored Lazarus in life. He doesn't even ask Lazarus directly, but expects for Abraham to send Lazarus to fetch water for him. Even in death he chooses to ignore Lazarus as a person of value. He firmly believes, as he was taught by the religious leaders, that the purpose of the poor is to serve the rich.

**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.**

Abraham is telling the rich man that the tables are turned. Your life was so very good and blessed on earth so that was your reward. Lazarus suffered and now is gets the comfort while you get the agony. Here is another truth that we have been taught that doesn't really exist; something that affects our core beliefs but shouldn't even be a part of our personal theology. It's not what this verse says but what this verse doesn't say. No where does Abraham accuse the rich man of abusing or even being unkind to Lazarus. But ever since we were children, we have been told that the rich man was cruel to Lazarus. The only truth we really find here is that the rich man had an extremely good life and Lazarus has an extremely bad one. Not once does it intimate that it is the rich man's fault.

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

Abraham is telling the rich man that even if he wanted to help him out and could convince Lazarus to get him some water, it's just not possible. God himself has created an environment where heaven and hell are so far apart, no one can go from one to the other. The die has been cast. The path is set. This is the way it is.

The rich man ponders this and accepts his fate. But then he starts thinking about his family that he left behind.

**27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family,  
28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'**

Don't you start thinking about Marley's ghost appearing to Scrooge and telling him that if he doesn't change his ways that he will wind up just like him, tethered in chains, forever in torment. But the problem that we see hidden here is that, although the rich man is concerned about his family, his five brothers, he still expects for Lazarus to be the one to do his bidding. He doesn't ask Abraham to deliver the message. He doesn't ask Abraham to send an angel. He doesn't even ask Abraham to let him return briefly to warn them himself. He is still thinking that poor man Lazarus should be his messenger; that the purpose of the poor is to serve the rich.

**29 “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’**

In other words, there are plenty of scriptures that talk about how to live one’s life. If we would just pay attention, this wouldn’t even be an issue. But the rich man had embraced the wealth afforded him and ignored those around him that weren’t quite so fortunate.

**30 “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’**

**31 “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

Everything is right there in the scriptures. If a person won’t even acknowledge what the scriptures make very clear, some beggar coming back from the dead isn’t going to convince them either. People choose to be blind when it comes to wealth and compassion.

What are we supposed to learn from this parable preacher? What is the Jesus trying to tell us if it isn’t what we have always been told? Why are we even bothering? It almost sounds like this story shouldn’t even be in the Bible!

There are two important takeaways from this story. The first is the blessings that God provides for us are blessings to be shared. We are responsible for those around us even if we have closed our eyes to their issues. We can always help someone. If someone breaks their shovel, we can loan them ours. If someone is hungry, we can have them join us for a meal. If someone

does not have anything to wear, surely, we have something in our closet that they can give them. It should not take us tripping over them in order for us to notice them. “But they might take advantage of us, preacher!” And? I promise you, if we choose this path of noticing, acknowledging, and helping those in need, someone is going to take advantage of us. But that’s on them. That’s not us. Our purpose is to provide care to our God’s children.

The second lesson is just as important. We need to spend time in self-reflection. I have said this before. Do not assume that something some preacher, elder, or Sunday School teacher told us twenty years ago is correct. God expects for us to do our due diligence.

**‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’**

Does scripture support what is being said? Are we writing scripture on our heart? Are we hearing and embracing the words of our Lord Jesus Christ? When Jesus is telling us: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Or are we still trying to work our way into heaven by completing a list of tasks and following a book of rules?

Jesus loved and died for each one of us. Can’t we figure out a way to live for Him?

God bless you all!

AMEN

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