

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Part 19 - November 18, 2007

[VIDEO: RIVERSIDE HEALTH CLUB]

Q: Who doesn't love a hot-tub? Unless you're too hot ... then you want to get out! That's when the cool of the pool feels so good. A sauna is very relaxing ... unless you're locked in. Then it's no fun at all! It's just torment.

In the parable of "The Rich Man and Lazarus", Jesus reminds us (in everything we do), to keep an eye on eternity; 'cause when that day comes, and that door locks, it's locked.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 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." 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. 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." He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." 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." - *Luke 16:19-31 NIV*



There's a specific reason Jesus told this story.

In the parable of "The Shrewd Manager" Jesus warned that Heaven won't welcome those who refuse to use their worldly wealth to convey God's love to others. And he followed it up by saying that:

"No servant can serve two masters. ... You cannot serve both God and Money." The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. - *Luke 16:13-14 NIV*

When it says the Pharisees "loved money", it's talking about more than greed and selfishness. The Pharisees viewed the wealth of a religious Jew as God's endorsement - His *blessing of approval*. And so, they "sneered at Jesus" because they see Him as a threat.

Maybe they said: "Heaven will welcome us! We're Jews ... Abraham is our *father*, and wealth is the *proof* of God's favor!" Jesus tells our parable in direct response to their sneering. The rich man was wealthy and religious; just like the Pharisees. We know because he cries out to Abraham as father.

Father Abraham, have pity on me ... - *Luke 16:24 NIV*

Religion didn't save him and riches didn't indicate God's favor! John the Baptist had warned his fellow Jews of this very thing:

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "**We have Abraham as our father.**" For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ... **The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.** - *Luke 3:8-11 NIV*

The rich man thought he was secure because of religion; but, he failed to produce the fruit that befits repentance. He didn't share his tunics (clothes). He didn't share his food. And the ax fell, and he's in hell! He was "buried" but Lazarus was "carried".

... the beggar died and the angels **carried** him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was **buried.** - *Luke 16:22 NIV*

The term "Abraham's side" is a Jewish expression for the "presence of God". According to Pharisaic theology, beggars were poor because they were wicked and had no chance of going there. They also believed that Abraham sat at the gates of Hell to keep his "sons" from passing through. Notice how Abraham addresses the rich man:

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*



If during my life I pursue only luxuries for myself in place of love for others, this earth will be my extent of Heaven. But if during my life, I fear and love and pursue the Lord with my whole heart (in spite of poverty or misery), then this earth will be as close as I ever get to Hell. Will Earth be the extent of your Heaven or Hell?

Now, Lazarus may have been a beggar but he wasn't a bum.

At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus (16:20)

He was "laid" there. He's crippled; he can't walk on his own. Before refrigeration, who had the best garbage? The rich; they ate the finest and the freshest. The trash would've collected at the gate. So, this sore-covered man was laid where he wouldn't starve. That's why Jesus said:

[He longed] to eat what fell from the rich man's table (16:20)

Lazarus was never allowed past the rich man's gates; and because of that, the rich man wasn't allowed past the gates of Hell.

But now, the lesson is NOT that *riches* are wrong. According to Genesis (13:2), *Abraham* was very wealthy ... but he was also rich in faith, and rich in compassion toward others. The rich man represents believers who can pass by the needs of those in their own doorway without giving them a second thought.

Jesus inserts a little morbid humor into the story:

Even the dogs came and licked his sores. - *Luke 16:21 NIV*

Stray dogs showed more compassion and kindness to the poor cripple in the trash pile, than that religious lover-of-money!



The rich man wasn't deliberately cruel to Lazarus. He didn't kick him, or chase him away ... he just didn't ever do anything. He was impervious to the suffering of others. Compassion is "shared suffering". Until I've felt someone's pain to the degree that I want to alleviate it as though it were my own, I have not experienced compassion.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that there's just too much suffering for you to make a difference. Pick a person and act!



A young girl was running along the seashore, after a storm, throwing starfish back into the water. Her father called to her: "Time to go, honey, you can't save 'em all!" She quickly grabbed one more and whispered to it, "Nope. But I can sure save you!"

- I can't help everyone ... but I can sure help someone

There probably won't be a lot of sore-covered people lying by your trash cans; but people will come across your path, almost daily, who need simple acts of love and kindness and support.

Wouldn't it be cool to put on a pair of spiritual glasses, and all through the day people's needs would just kind of light up: "Prayer," "Sympathy," "Kindness," "Listen," "Love." Jesus wants us to train our eyes with the help of His Spirit.

It's ironic that the rich man, who refused to show any mercy to Lazarus, now begs for Lazarus to be his instrument of mercy. But now I want you to notice two things: The rich man still wants to be served! He doesn't say, "I'm sorry! Let me come over to where there is water!" No, He wants Lazarus to bring the water to him!

... send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue ... - *Luke 16:24 NIV*

- He's sitting in hell and still hasn't learned his lesson!

Lazarus is willing to serve! After Abraham tells the rich man that his days of being served are through, he adds something really strange.

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** ... - *Luke 16:26 NIV*

Q: Why would someone want to go from Heaven to Hell?

A: I think Jesus is saying that Lazarus would have done it!

This is the only parable that contains names; why is that? At the end of the story, the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus back to his brothers – to *warn* them.

Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”
“No, father Abraham,” ... - Luke 16:29-30a

“My brothers don’t listen to scripture! They go to temple, say a prayer, offer a sacrifice, but they don’t *abide* by God’s Word.”

... he said, “but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.”
[Abraham] 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.” - Luke 16:30b-31 NIV

Wow. Really?! ‘Cause it sure seems like that’d have an impact! “Hey, I’m Lazarus. I was dead. You should abide by God’s Word.” But then, maybe I underestimate the hardness and blindness of a self-seeking, self-focused, self-centered heart.

And this is why (*I think*) Jesus named this character, *Lazarus*. A couple weeks after Jesus told this parable, He raised a man from the dead; a guy who had been dead for *four* days (*John 11:39*). A man named ... Lazarus. He came out of the grave and said to everyone who would listen, “Hey, I’m Lazarus. I was dead. You should abide by God’s Word.”

It was a *huge* sensation!

Q: So, what did those Pharisees do when *that* happened?

Q: Surely they believed; right?

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was [at Bethany] and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him. - *John 12:9-11*

Lazarus came back from the dead and they tried to *re-kill* him! If God’s Word doesn’t move you, a miracle won’t either. A miracle can knock us out of our senses, but only God’s Spirit, through His Word, can knock us out of our sins and selfishness.

Let’s see how well you’ve been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we’ve learned that:

1. We should train our eyes to see the needs of others.
2. I should try not to get emotionally involved.
3. I can’t help everyone, but I can sure help someone.
4. Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham. And I am one of them, and so are you; but that ain’t gonna get us into Heaven!