



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 16:19-31

To understand more about the certainty of God's law coming to pass.

If Only I Had Known Better

As I think back on my life, there are several moments of regret: choices I made, the way I treated people, and the general direction in which those things took me. I have occasionally thought to myself as I recount those moments, "If only I had known better, maybe I would have done things differently." If I had known how those choices were going to pan out, perhaps I would have chosen something else. If I had only known how my treatment of people would have affected those relationships, perhaps I would have tried another way. As it turns out, however, knowing better really wouldn't have made much of a difference because when I made those (rather bad) choices, I didn't have those people in mind at all; I had myself in mind. In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells yet another parable (although it is not expressly identified as such) concerning a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus, and this parable, we discover that no amount of warnings will deter a person from making the choices they make because they already have enough information to do so rightly: "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Lk. 16:31).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

As mentioned above, this parable is never actually called a parable, but that doesn't mean it isn't one, nor is it unique. Recall another previous parable in Luke's Gospel, "The Parable of the Dishonest Manager" (Lk. 16:1-9); it is never called a parable either, and yet it is clearly a parable in form and function. What *does* make

this parable unique is that it is the only one with a character who actually is named, although he is not the main character. Below is a breakdown of some of the major themes and concepts in this parable.

A TALE OF TWO MEN

The parable introduces two men, “a rich man” (Lk. 16:19) and “a poor man named Lazarus” (Lk. 16:20). Both of them are described as living very different lives with very different experiences. The rich man has all of the pleasures that life affords. He was “clothed in purple and fine linen,” and he “feasted sumptuously every day” (Lk. 16:19). That he wore “purple” signifies he was perhaps royalty, as the color purple is often associated with kingship (Mark 15:17, 20; Rev 18:12). That his clothing was “fine linen” suggests perhaps it came from Egypt, whose wares were known to be extremely valuable and comfortable. Another supporting detail for royalty is the amount of food available to him. It’s difficult to understand the weight of this detail in our western context given the amount of food available to us on a day-to-day basis.

This is further highlighted by the condition of Lazarus: “And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores” (Lk. 16:20-21). Lazarus was in such a dire situation that he eventually died from it: “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side” (Lk. 16:22a). There is no amount of time given to specify how much time passed after the death of Lazarus before the rich man died as well, but ultimately he suffered the same final fate: “The rich man also died and was buried” (Lk. 16:22b). While it isn’t a major feature of this parable, this does illustrate something the rest of Scripture teaches which is the reality that no matter how good or bad one’s life might be, death awaits us all (Heb. 9:27).

A TALE OF TWO DESTINATIONS

For as different as their lives were, their destinations were equally different. Even in death, there is a detail given to the poor man that is not given to the rich man; he was “carried off by angels” (Lk. 16:22a), indicating a blessed departure from the earth. Beyond that, the poor man ends up at “Abraham’s side” (Lk. 16:22a). Abraham, being the great patriarch of the faith, represents blessing. The rest of the details of Lazarus’ fate are only recorded from the perspective of the rich man, who becomes the central focus of the parable.

The rich man ends up in “Hades,” a word that is transliterated from the Greek ᾗδης (hadēs), and much debate has been had to determine what is meant by this term. It’s used in the Septuagint (LXX) to translate the Hebrew for Sheol, a word which can mean either a more natural abode of the dead or a more negative place where the unrighteous go. It is often contrasted with heaven (Ps. 139:8; Am. 9:2). While it is true that Sheol does have some neutrality in the Jewish, Old Testament understanding of the word, one need not assume that understanding carries unchanged into the New Testament age, and for more reason than one. For one, the Greek understanding of ᾗδης (hadēs) is emphatically different than the Jewish understanding of the afterlife, and it is likely that the New Testament authors (who spoke Greek) employed this term for that reason. It would make no sense to use this term only to strip it of its meaning and reassign it new value. That would create a lot of confusion.

Further, the scope of revelation increased in the New Testament with the advent of Christ, the living and breathing revelation of God. Jesus clearly speaks of this place as a place where bad people go, as opposed to where the rich man ended up: “In Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has

been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us” (Lk. 16:23-26). It is clear in Jesus’ parable that this not simply a neutral abode of the dead, but a place of judgment for the wicked and comfort for the righteous.

RESURRECTION

The rich man then asks for only one thing: “And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers— so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment’” (Lk. 16:27-28). The rich man, like so many others, reason that if they could only warn others still living so that they do not end up suffering the same horrible fate, perhaps those loved ones would change and act differently. However, Abraham answers: “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them’” (Lk. 16:29). In other words, there is sufficient information contained within the Old Testament to warn others of the dire consequences of living foolish, sinful lives. The rich man responds: “And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’” (Lk. 16:30-31). It becomes ultimately clear why Jesus tells this parable; He is preparing them for the reality that not even His own impending death, burial, and resurrection will suffice as evidence strong enough to turn a wicked heart. People have what they need through God’s revelation in Scripture and if they are not willing to hear it, they will not listen to resurrection either.

What About Now?

There is an obvious takeaway in that Jesus’ resurrection will not be enough for some to believe. God has revealed clearly and plainly who He is and what He requires of us as His creation. If a person is unwilling to listen to truth, they will not be swayed by miracles or even resurrection, and this is further evidenced by Luke’s Gospel account. Many people will see Jesus do extraordinary things and yet many will walk away from Him when the demands are too high. Ultimately, people will do bad things because it’s what they want, and when they come to regret it, they will have to reckon with the fact that no amount of knowledge would have swayed them from it because they were thinking only of themselves to begin with.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 16:19-20. Who are the two main characters of this parable? What are the differences between the two?

2. Read Luke 16:21. What did the poor man desire? What are some of his other conditions?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 16:22-23. What are the differences between the deaths of each of them? Where did the rich man end up? Where did Lazarus end up? What does *Hades* mean? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read Luke 16:24. What did the rich man ask of Abraham?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 16:25-26. In your own words, summarize Abraham's response.

2. Read Luke 16:27-28. In your own words, summarize the rich man's response.

Day Four

1. Read Luke 16:29. What did Abraham say the rich man's family had?

2. Read Luke 16:30-31. What did the rich man think would make them change? What did Abraham say to this?

Week 60 Discussion: The Sufficiency of Scripture

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and a poor man named Lazarus, and how different their lives and deaths were. At the center of this parable is the importance of the Word; if the Scripture won't convict and convince someone, nothing will. Talk as a group about the sufficiency of Scripture, that is, the ability of Scripture to do all that is necessary to bring someone to faith.

1. Icebreaker: Define the Gospel, and use Scripture to do so.
2. Why is knowing the Word of God important to your salvation?
3. Why is knowing the Word of God important to your sanctification?
4. How often do you tell someone to read something other than Scripture to help them with a problem? What does this communicate?
5. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What does this say the Scripture is capable of?
6. How can the church better elevate the sufficiency of Scripture through the different individual ministries?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.
2. This parable indicates that if people will not be swayed by Scripture, they will not be swayed by supernatural miracles, including resurrection.