



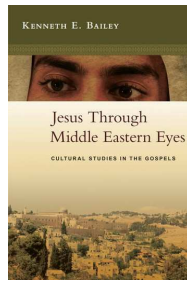
Lazarus & the Rich Man

Jesus' Parables

No. 5

Luke 16:19-31

Parable structure



The Story

1. There was a *rich man* who dressed himself in *purple and fine linen* and *feasted sumptuously* every day. RICH MAN (In Life: banquets)
2. At his gate a *poor man named Lazarus* was laid, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. *But [falla] the dogs* came and licked his sores. LAZARUS (In Life: pain)
3. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. LAZARUS (In Death: a banquet)
4. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. RICH MAN (In Death: pain)

The Dialogue

5. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy upon 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." RICH MAN (1)
6. And Abraham said, "My dear son [*teknon*], *remember* that in your lifetime you received good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; and now he is *comforted* here, and you are in *great pain*. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, that those who would pass from here to you *cannot* and none may cross from there to us." ABRAHAM (1)
7. And he said, "Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, to warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." RICH MAN (2)
8. But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." ABRAHAM (2)
9. And he said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." RICH MAN (3)
10. And he said to him, "If Moses and the Prophets they do not hear, nor if one rises from the dead will they be convinced."

- Is this a “pearly gate” story? (as in, “two men die, the first man meets St Peter at the pearly gates, and...”)
 - This sort of story was popular in Jesus time, and is still used for social commentary in the Middle East
 - It used to be popular in the West until very recently
- Note that some interpreters take this as an actual, historical story that Jesus can recount given his divine knowledge.
 - The idea that this is a pearly gate story would make it unnecessary for the details of heaven to be accurate, though all Jesus’s other parables gain their strength from their accurate relationship to real life
 - Thus the idea of this as a pearly gate story does not mean that the details are not real-to-life
- Parable consists of two parts: the story and the subsequent dialog
- Two overlapping structures in the story: speakers (in capitals) and content (in parentheses)
- In the dialog, the rich man never addresses Lazarus (he is below him), and twice asks that he serve his interests—it seems that the rich man foolishly thinks that the gifts God gave him in the world indicated his inherent superiority to Lazarus
- The structure of the parable’s story precisely matches the structure of Abraham’s

reply to the rich man's request in ABRAHAM (1)

- However, Abraham's reply makes clear through passive verbs (you received) that the rich man's wealth was given to him by God
- And the contrast with Lazarus's previous situation is not illness vs. healing but anguish (at being ignored and rejected) vs. comfort (at being in Abraham's bosom)
- The contrast with the rich man's previous situation, though is selfish extravagance vs. great suffering (both focused on his sensations – in contrast to Lazarus he is a hedonist focused on feelings not relationships)
- Does Abraham's mention of "those who would pass from here to you" refer to Lazarus's desire to help the suffering rich man?
- The rich man's family has six brothers – six is the symbol of evil – but if they had accepted Lazarus as a brother, they would have been seven, the symbol of perfection
- The rich man shows the stubbornness Abraham asserts (in section 10, v. 31) when he corrects Abraham (sect. 9, v. 30), even though he himself is dead and has not repented!
 - We see this parable lived out when the High Priest rejects the evidence of Jesus' nature in the resurrection of Jesus' friend Lazarus!
 - The rich man's (and his brothers') problem is not a lack of evidence, it is a hardness of heart that no evidence can soften

Parable's literary context

- The parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32)
- The parable of the Shrewd Steward (Lk 16:1-9)
- Faithfulness with worldly wealth (Lk 16:10-13)
- The primacy of character over worldly appearance (Lk 16:14-18)
- **The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man** (Lk 16:19-31)
- Teaching on forgiveness and faith (Lk 17:1-10)

Parable's characters



Lazarus



The rich man



Abraham

- The rich man's excesses
 - The rich man's clothes are the most expensive possible (purple), and Bailey suggests that the word used for "fine linen" refers to Egyptian cotton used for underwear—even his underwear was expensive!
 - Note that the rich man feasted extravagantly *every day*, which means his servants never got a Sabbath rest, violating the commandments!
 - When he is in hell, the rich man continues to think only of his own sensations, in this case his burning tongue
 - The rich man is therefore vain, sybaritic, and immoral
- Lazarus
 - The name "Lazarus" means "one whom God helps"
 - Lazarus cannot walk, and he is covered in sores
 - He is laid at the entrance to the rich man's garden (entered by a gate, not a door) in the (vain) hope of getting scraps from his table
 - The rich man's (probably vicious) guard dogs show him mercy (licking his sores) where the rich man does not (wild dogs would have probably been driven from the vicinity of the rich man's garden)
 - Throughout the parable Lazarus is silent in long-suffering (enduring his pain) and forbearance (refusing to rage at the arrogance of the rich man in

hell)

Lazarus's harmony with the dogs (animals held in contempt by Jewish culture) indicates his humility, like St Francis or even Jesus (see Mk 1:13 "And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.")

Ibn al-Tayyib says of Lazarus, "I understand that the licking of Lazarus's sores gave him relief and eased his pain. This reminds us that the silent, unspeaking animals felt compassion for him and they helped him and cared for him more than the humans. He was naked *without medical attention other than what he received from the dogs. This demonstrates that the rich man did not notice him or give him any attention at all. Thus when we compare the rich man's condition to that of Lazarus, we see that the first was clothed with purple and linen. The second was naked and covered with sores. The first luxuriated every day with a banquet while the second longed for scraps of bread. The first had many servants ready to satisfy all of his needs and the other had no servants other than the dogs.*" - Kenneth E. Bailey, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 386.

- Abraham
 - The patriarch of Israel, and the ancestor of both other men
 - In this parable Abraham plays the role of a judge in many ways, which is an appropriate role for the patriarch
 - However, it is clear that Abraham is under the authority of God (he refers to God's provision of good and bad things, and the provision of the chasm between heaven and hell)

Parable's social context



- Abraham's relationship to the rich man
 - Rich man calls Abraham "my father Abraham"
 - Patriarch of a clan is honour-bound to help his descendants/clan, but Abraham doesn't help the rich man when he asks
 - "Have mercy on me!" (rich man's request of Abraham) is the traditional cry of the beggar
- In Middle Eastern society, it is the responsibility of those blessed with riches to help the poor, thus beggars gather at synagogues and mosques, and in this case at the rich man's gate (recall the beggar Peter heals at the temple gate)
 - In Judaism this responsibility is explicit, "For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'" - Dt 15:11
- Middle Eastern villages and cities were very dense (picture is Jerusalem's old city), so it was impossible to be unaware of the poverty or wealth of others, as we can contrive to do in our society. We can see this in the rich man recognising Lazarus from hell, he even knows his name!

Parable's surprises



- NOT a surprise: Lazarus goes to heaven and rich man goes to hell
- Why not?
 - Surprise: Lazarus's long-suffering
 - Surprise: Lazarus's name (but it is because God gave Lazarus his good character—patience and forgiveness)
 - Surprise: rich man's stubborn refusal to repent
 - Surprise: Abraham's statement on rich man's brothers' character
- Surprise: God's gracious division between the good and evil after death (the chasm)
 - Reason: to protect the good from ongoing abuse by the evil
- Surprise: God gives both good and bad physical gifts (see v. 25, and also Lk 21:12, Mk 10:30, etc.)
- Surprise (perhaps): God's gifts do not make us better or worse—it is how we use them that matters
 - Lazarus used the gift of suffering to become pure of heart
 - Rich man used gift of wealth to become gluttonous and hard-hearted

Parable's theology

- God gives different physical gifts, good and bad, but they do not define us
- What we do with God's gifts matters
- God's ultimate gift (and desire) is good character (thus Lazarus's name)
- Only chance to repent is in this life (death introduces uncrossable chasm)
- Wealth ≠ righteousness; suffering ≠ wickedness
- Wealth can corrupt
- Love of neighbour begins at doorstep
- All are judged
- More evidence ≠ more belief

So the parable's point is?

- Look beyond physical pleasure and wealth to character
- Character is eternal, bad character as a torment, good as a comfort
- God's physical gifts are meant to be shared → good character

Break time!

DIY Parable

Take the theology and build your own using a contemporary context

Parable context?

Context must:

- Communicate the importance of character (and what is good and bad character)
- Communicate the corrupting influence of material wealth
- Communicate the eternal consequence of bad character

Context should:

- Point out need for repentance
- Illustrate reality that more evidence doesn't equal more belief

Parable's story

Should have:

- Surprise
- Symmetry & simplicity
- Shared metaphors
- Setup for judgement

Must communicate:

- God's focus on character
- Character's eternal impact
- True position of material wealth