

“A Final Word from Hell” (Luke 16:19-31)

If you’ve ever flown on an airplane you’ve probably noticed that in the seat pocket ahead of you is a little safety information card. It contains lots of pictures and useful information illustrating what you should do if, for example, the plane you’re entrusting your life with should have to ditch in the ocean. Not exactly the kind of information most people look forward to reading as they’re preparing for a long flight. The next time you’re on an airplane, look around and see how many people you can spot actually reading the safety cards. Nowadays, I suspect you’ll find more people talking or reading their newspaper instead. But suppose you had a reason to believe that there was a problem with the flight you were on. Suddenly, the information on that card would be of critical importance—what seemed so unimportant before takeoff could mean the difference between life and death.

In the same way, the information in the pages of God’s Word is critically important. The Bible contains a message that means the difference between *eternal* life and death. Yet, for many of us, our commitment to the Bible is more verbal than actual. We affirm that the Bible is God’s Word, yet we do not read it or study it as if God was directly communicating to us. If left with a choice, many of us would prefer to read the newspaper or watch TV. Why is this? Certainly one reason for this is that there is not a sense of urgency in our lives. We assume that life will continue to move forward and that we will be relatively problem free. However, if we were at war with North Korea or if you were diagnosed with terminal cancer, I can assure you that your interest in the Bible would increase. But regardless of future events, you and I need to be reminded of one sobering reality: ***It’s a heavy responsibility to own a Bible.***

In Luke 15-16, the Pharisees have been observing Jesus and listening to His parables. They are not at all pleased with what they have seen and heard from Jesus. In 15:2, they grumbled against Jesus for receiving sinners and even eating with them. In response to this, Jesus told three parables, all of which dealt with the finding of something lost. After hearing these parables, the Pharisees still could not rejoice in the return of a repentant sinner, even though all of heaven did so. In 16:1-13, Jesus told the parable of the shrewd manager to His disciples. He identified the shrewd manager as an unbeliever and contrasted him with believers. Furthermore, Jesus closed this parable by declaring, “You cannot serve God and wealth” (16:13). Upon hearing these words, the grumbling of the Pharisees turned to scoffing (16:14). They scoffed at Jesus, defending their love of money.¹ They had made God and money to be one, and they loved the union. The Pharisees had construed their accumulation of wealth as a sign of righteousness. What they forgot was that God looks on the heart, rather than the wallet.² The things people highly esteem (such as health, wealth, and position) mean nothing to God, and may be detestable (16:16).³ Finally, this brings us to Luke 16:19-31,⁴ where Jesus tells a parable that is directed toward the now hostile Pharisees.⁵

1. Our response to God’s Word matters in this life (16:19-21). Jesus begins His parable in 16:19. **“Now there was a rich man,⁶ and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.”** Jesus presents the rich man as living flamboyantly in luxury and rejoicing in his present earthly prosperity.⁷ Only the wealthy of Jesus’ day could afford to dress in the expensive purple garments that kings wore.⁸ The rich man also sported undergarments made of fine linen. (Some people have nothing while others can afford expensive underwear!) This rich man “had it made”; he was the envy of earth. He didn’t shop at a department store. A fashion designer created his clothes and a tailor came to his mansion to fit him. He was a sharp dressed man! In our day, he would be a guest on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Moreover, this rich man lived as affluently as he dressed. He indulged in “joyously living in splendor every day.” This phrase “joyously living in splendor” is used elsewhere in Luke of feasting (12:19; 15:23, 24, 29, 32). The rich man’s life was one big party...“every day!” This man would have made Donald Trump flinch! He celebrated his wealth to the hilt. He bought into the philosophy, “If you’ve got it...flaunt it!” He lived for pleasure—his own pleasure.

The only blot on the rich man's horizon was a poor man lying at his gate.⁹ In 16:20-21, Jesus paints a pitiful picture. **“And a poor man named Lazarus was laid [lit. “flung”] at his gate, covered with sores and longing to be fed¹⁰ with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.”** The phrase “laid at his gate” suggests that this poor man was crippled so someone threw him down (see Acts 3:1-2).¹¹ Jesus also tells us that he was covered with sores, possibly due to malnutrition. In his hunger, this poor beggar craved even the crumbs that would fall from the rich man's table.¹² No doubt, he must have been just as hungry for human interaction, yet the only attention he received was from dogs, but they weren't dropping anything in his beggar's can. Far from it, “the dogs were coming and licking his sores.” When we hear the term “dogs,” it is natural to think of our own beautiful, well groomed, and affectionate pet. If you don't have a dog, you may imagine a dog that you have seen on a TV commercial for dog food. However, these are not the dogs that Jesus refers to. In Jesus' day, dogs were not pets; they were scavengers who fed on garbage and dead animals.¹³ Dogs were viewed as if they were rats or other unhealthy creatures.¹⁴ They were repulsive to the Jewish people. With this understanding, Jesus graphically states that dogs would come and continually lick this poor man's sores. He is infected from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. Every lick from these unclean animals severely stung the poor man's sores. As a result, the sores can't develop scabs over them so that they can heal, because the dogs keep the sores open allowing the puss to keep oozing so that there is continual infection. The poor man is incapacitated, begging, diseased, hungry, unclean, and despised. What a miserable existence!¹⁵

From the above description, it seems fairly clear that Lazarus was not capable of working or even helping himself. He was truly at the mercy of his fellow human beings. He was desperate for someone to show him mercy and grace in a very tangible way.¹⁶ Sadly, this never happened.¹⁷ Although it was within the means of the rich man to offer assistance he refused. The point is obvious: The rich man ignored the Old Testament Scriptures that commanded him to care for the needs of the poor.¹⁸

The only other thing we are told about this beggar is that his name is “Lazarus.”¹⁹ Nowhere else in Jesus' parables are any of the characters named, therefore, it is significant that Lazarus means “God helps.”²⁰ While the rich man did not help, God helped Lazarus because He loves the poor and knows their names.²¹ The question is: Do you and I? In what ways have we as individuals cared for those who are *legitimately* poor and downtrodden?²²

- Have you helped a needy single mom or a widow within our church (Gal 6:10)?
- Have you sent money overseas through mission relief agencies that are trying to meet people's physical needs?
- Have you ever adopted a child through *World Vision* or *Compassion International*?
- Have you given to the persecuted poor through *Voice of the Martyrs* or *Open Doors*? Have you ever purchased a meal for a person in need?
- Have you ever sought to shake the hand of someone that is dirty?
- Have you ever invested in a homeless person with the goal of teaching him or her a skill or trade?
- Have you and your family served at the soup kitchen at First Baptist or Union Gospel?
- Have you ever worked in our Clothes Closet on a Saturday morning?

[After introducing the two contrasting neighbors, the parable moves from this life to the next. Not only does our response to God's Word matter in this life, but Jesus informs us that...]

2. Our response to God's Word matters in the next life (16:22-23). In 16:22a, Jesus says, **“Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom.”** It is unlikely that the obituary of Lazarus was carried in the local newspaper. He was too unimportant for that. Neither is it likely that his passing occupied anything but the most superficial of conversations in the rich man's house. Maybe an offhanded comment like, “I wonder who will be rummaging through the garbage now?”

Or maybe someone said, “Perhaps all those dogs won’t be hanging around now.”²³ Yet, regardless of the lack of fanfare on earth, Lazarus was “carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.”²⁴ The figure of “Abraham’s bosom” describes being taken directly to heaven to be with other Old Testament saints.²⁵ Lazarus finally entered into his reward and his suffering ceased.

Interestingly, that very same day, the rich man died, but his destiny and experiences were quite different from that of Lazarus. In 16:22b-23, Jesus says, “**and the rich man also died and was buried.** [“and” Gk. *kai*] **In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.**”²⁶ The word “and” is critical. Jesus declares, “and the rich man also died and was buried.” The next words are “In Hades...” In the New Testament, the term Hades refers to hell.²⁷ Thus, the moment the rich man died, he opened his eyes in hell. There is no purgatory, no soul sleep, and no second chance. Death is not a period; it is a conjunction (“and”). The question is where does the conjunction take you? When you die and are buried...then what? Where will you go? This is important because life truly begins in eternity. This brief life on earth is the dress rehearsal for eternity. Are you prepared for the next life? Have you planned out your destination?

The rich man had all that this life has to offer, but ended up in hell. This would have shocked the Pharisees and the rest of Jesus’ audience (including the disciples). They all believed that wealth was next to godliness (18:26-27). Yet, as Prov 22:2 pronounces, “The rich man and the poor man meet together; the Lord is maker of them all.” Death is the great leveler that humbles all of us, rich or poor, healthy or sick. In the end, time has a way of killing off everybody. That’s why I need to remind you that you are going to die. It doesn’t matter how much you jog, how nutritionally minded you are, or who your doctor is. You’re going to die! We have this idea that someone else is going to die; it’s not going to be me. But the Bible teaches that you and I are going to die.²⁸ That’s why Eccl 7:2 says, “It is better to go to a funeral than a feast. For death is the destiny of every person, and the living should take this to heart” (NET). May we follow this sage wisdom and prepare for our death.

A Sunday school teacher told his class the story of the rich man and Lazarus and then asked, “Now, which would you rather be, boys—the rich man or Lazarus?” One boy replied, “I’d like to be the rich man while I’m living and Lazarus when I die.”

This little child put into words what many adults are thinking, but are too pious to express. However, we must make sure we understand that the rich man did not go to hell because he was rich. Nor did the poor man go to heaven because he was poor or because he suffered so much in this life. No, Lazarus (“God helps”) called out to God for mercy, and God had delivered him in an eternal sense. If you and I are going to see God’s heaven, we must call out to God for mercy and receive His promise of eternal life.

[Jesus is clear: Our response to God’s Word matters in this life and in the next life. But now Jesus explains that...]

3. Our response to God’s Word is what God will hold us responsible for (16:24-31). In 16:24, the rich man cries out, “**Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.**” The rich man addresses Abraham as “Father,” showing respect for his fellow Jew (cf. 3:8; John 8:39).²⁹ He then begs for “mercy.” What is “mercy?” It’s what you ask for when you have no bargaining power. When you are at rock bottom and there is no way to bargain, you pray for mercy. However, hell is the absence of mercy. In hell people will pray for mercy, but tragically it is too late. Those who ask for mercy in this life are the only ones who go to heaven. After that...it is too late.³⁰ The rich man who had given no mercy to Lazarus now begs for mercy but finds none (cf. Matt 5:7).

It is rather ironic that the rich man asks for a favor from Lazarus, yet on earth the rich man never showed any mercy to Lazarus despite his distress. The rich man still viewed Lazarus as a servant who could help him rather than as an equal. His judgment had not led him to repent of his selfishness, even in death. In fact, the rich man asks Lazarus to be his water boy! He desired Lazarus to simply dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off his tongue. The reason for this request was the rich man was “in agony³¹ in this flame.” What horrible imagery! This image is among the most tragic and serious warnings in the Bible. Our culture avoids such ideas by denying their truth. That is a fateful gamble to make, for if one is wrong, the consequences are devastating. Refusal to respond exacts a great price.

If we could only spend five seconds in hell, we’d be on fire to share our faith. There would be no need for evangelism training, books, tracts, or conferences. We would become zealous, fiery evangelists! We need to ask God today to give us a real vision of hell. Not a warped, humorous picture of hell. Sometimes cartoons picture hell as a place where the wicked party throughout eternity, while the righteous sit around on a cloud in heaven, bored. Some have said they would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven, but there is no ruling in hell—only misery—eternal misery, which only gets worse in the eventual destiny of the Lake of Fire. Mark Twain said, “I’ll take Heaven for the climate and Hell for society.” But there won’t be any society in hell! Jesus uses appalling word pictures to teach us that the suffering will be so severe that one single drop of water would make an eternal difference. God give us a vision of hell! And may it drive us to share our faith.

In 16:25-26, Abraham responded to the rich man’s plea with these sobering words: **“Child,³² remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm³³ fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.”** The rich man had lived for the “good things” of earth, and had experienced abundant, temporal blessings. He had his reward (Matt 6:2, 5, 16). He had determined his own destiny by leaving God out of his life, and now neither his character nor his destiny could be changed. Lazarus could not leave his place of comfort and make even a brief visit to the place of torment. The chasm was fixed. The rich man had determined his own destiny by leaving God out of life.

One of the most hideous things about hell is the ability to remember. Abraham says to the rich man, “Remember” your earthly life. The painful thing about this is for those who reject Christ; they will spend eternity in hell remembering the opportunities they had to trust in Him. On July 9th, 2006, you will remember that you had an opportunity to respond to Christ. But you said, “I will wait.” The tragedy is that you will remember forever and not be able to do anything about it.

In 16:27-31, the dialogue between the rich man and Abraham concludes. In 16:27-28, the rich man says, **“Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”** Apparently the rich man is still under the mistaken assumption that Lazarus is at his beck and call. He begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his father’s house.³⁴ He did not say, “I’m glad my brothers will also come here. We’ll party!” Occasionally you hear a lost person say, “Well, I don’t mind if I go to hell. I’ll have a lot of company!” But there is no friendship or “company” in hell! Hell is a place of torment and loneliness.³⁵ It is not a 4th of July barbeque or an eternal New Year’s Eve party at which sinners have a good time doing what they used to do on earth. It is a place of “torment.”

Abraham rejects the rich man’s logic and says, **“They [your brothers] have Moses and the Prophets [the Old Testament]; let them hear them”** (16:29).³⁶ Abraham firmly believes that the testimony of the Old Testament is more convincing than any testimony from a person who might return to the living with a message from Hades. The testimony of the Scriptures is powerful because that is what God has chosen to use to bring conviction of spiritual need (cf. Heb 4:12).

In this context, the word that is translated “hear” means much more than just hear with one’s ears. The word is often used of discipleship and can mean “listen to, pay attention to, obey” (see Luke 9:35). God’s Word has made clear what He desires. Our devotion to Him is seen in our care for others. Jesus calls this “the great commandment”—love God with your whole being and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-34).³⁷

In 16:30, the rich man responds, **“No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!”** The rich man is speaking from his own personal experience. The Old Testament did him no good. He lived complacently oblivious to any thought of future judgment. The rich man also knows that his family does not take seriously what the Scriptures say. Something more is needed.³⁸

Let’s look at little closer at what the rich man suggested. “If God would just send missionaries from the dead, most people would repent. Maybe all would repent, and there would be no need for Hades!” [Notice the cynicism.] “If God would just do it my way...If only God had an effective plan of salvation...What a pity that God didn’t think this thing through more carefully!”

The rich man’s response doubtless had further implications in defending himself: “If I myself had been warned by someone arising from the dead, I would not have come to this place of torment.”³⁹ He practically impugns God for his being in Hades, implying that the Almighty failed to properly alert him. In other words, God’s plan of salvation was faulty. In this light, the pretended penitence and evangelistic fervor of the rich man turns out to be more of a smoke screen to cover his deeply impenitent heart. Rather than repenting in Hades, this former rich man struck at the heart of God, accusing Him of hard-heartedness in failing to show mercy to sinners.⁴⁰

In most parables, the emphasis comes in the final comments.⁴¹ This is the case here. Jesus concludes His parable in 16:31 by giving Abraham the last word: **“But he [Abraham], said to him, ‘If they [the five brothers] do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”**⁴² Abraham’s answer is short and pointed. He does not accept that the problem of the rich man and his brothers is a lack of evidence.⁴³ Their problem lay in their unwillingness to hear God’s Word (see 24:25-27, 44).⁴⁴ He said that if the rich man’s brothers refused to listen to the Scriptures, they would not be “persuaded” or “convinced” by a spectacular appearance from the grave. There is a very significant principle underlying this answer. Man’s failure to believe is not due to any lack of evidence, but due to a closed heart, determined to disbelieve any amount of evidence (cf. Rom 3:10-12). The problem, to put it differently, was not a lack of external evidence (appearances), but a willful rebellion of the heart against God. Though miracles can attest to the authority of the preacher, they cannot produce either conviction or conversion in the hearts of the lost. Only God’s Word can do so.

Strange as it may seem, people are not moved to repentance by miraculous acts of sensationalism. It just doesn’t happen. Witness Pharaoh’s hardening his heart after the first Bible miracles performed by Moses; or Ahab’s non-response to the miracles executed by Elijah; or Israel’s non-response to the mighty miracles enacted by Jesus Himself.⁴⁵ To further drive home this truth, not long after this teaching Jesus did raise someone from the dead who bore witness to Jesus’ identity, another Lazarus. What was the reaction of the Pharisees? They refused to believe in Christ. Furthermore, the people who did not believe tried to kill both Jesus and Lazarus (John 11:45-53; 12:9-11). Perhaps this is the key to why Jesus gave the poor man in this parable the name Lazarus. Perhaps He wanted the Pharisees to remember the lesson of the Lazarus in this parable when He raised the other Lazarus from the dead. The Lord Jesus and the disciples raised several people from the dead. Indeed, Jesus Himself rose and appeared to 500 witnesses. Yet despite this, Israel was not persuaded about Jesus being the Messiah (John 1:11). The truth is, even a great sign like resurrection *did* not and *will* not persuade the hard of heart.

These verses should warn us against putting too much hope in signs and wonders as what will persuade people to believe in Jesus (cf. John 10:41-42). The Word of God is a more convincing witness to Him than any miracle. This does not mean that miracles are valueless. God used them to corroborate the testimony of Scripture in the past, and He may do so occasionally today, but Scripture is the Holy Spirit's primary tool in bringing people to repentance (cf. John 16:7-15).

So what is repentance? Repentance is a persuasion of the soul, a change of mind that is akin to faith.⁴⁶ Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other (Acts 20:21). Repentance is a change of mind that should naturally result in a turning of the whole person from sin to God. The real basis for salvation or condemnation is whether or not one believes what the Bible says about Jesus. It is not riches or poverty that determines one's destiny, but belief or unbelief. Do not wait until it is too late! Believe in the Lord Jesus as your Savior today!

On the evening of April 25, 1999, British Airways flight 286 left San Francisco bound for London, England. The Boeing 747 was carrying 391 passengers on its long, ten-hour flight to London. A few hours into the flight, many of the passengers were asleep. Suddenly, everyone was jolted awake by an announcement blaring over the plane's loudspeakers. Passengers were horrified to hear: "This is an emergency announcement. We are being forced to make a landing in the sea. Please put on your lifejackets, which can be found under your seat..." People immediately began to panic, grasping for lifejackets as they tried to comprehend what was happening. As it turned out, nothing had happened—it was a false alarm. What the passengers had heard was a pre-recorded message that was supposed to be used only in an emergency. Flight attendants and crew tried to calm the passengers, but I doubt there was a whole lot of sleeping that went on for the rest of the flight. One thing is for sure—by the time the plane landed safely in London, you can bet that everyone on board was a lot more familiar with the contents of the safety information card than they were when the plane took off.⁴⁷

Today, will you read and study what the Bible says about the afterlife? Will you heed the warnings of Jesus and the writers of Scripture? ***It's a heavy responsibility to own a Bible.*** To ignore the Bible is to invite disaster.

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Scripture Reading

Luke 16:19-31

Luke 12:13-21

Matthew 10:28

John 3:16-18

Matthew 25:31-46

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Revelation 20:11-15

Study Questions

1. The Pharisees loved money and sought to please people (16:14-15). How have you used money to impress others? The New Testament, like the old, has plenty to say about pleasing men (cf. Romans 2:29; 12:17; 14:18; 1 Corinthians 10:33; Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 6:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:4). How do these verses challenge me? In what specific way do I need to overcome my people-pleasing tendency?
2. The rich man had no care or compassion for Lazarus (16:19-21). In what ways do I exude a self-indulgent lifestyle that has little care and compassion for those in need? How can I use my wealth to be generous with the poor? Read the following passages: Deuteronomy 15:4, 7-11; Proverbs 11:23-25; 14:21; 17:5; 19:17; 21:13, 26; 28:27; 29:7; Luke 1:52-53; 1 Timothy 6:7-18; James 1:9-11; 5:1-6; and 1 John 3:17.
3. Lazarus and the rich man both die (16:22), reminding us of the imminent reality of death. Am I prepared to die? Have I placed my faith in Jesus Christ alone to rescue me from my sins? If I have believed in Christ, am I ready to meet Him in death or in the air when He comes? Are the temporal things of this world (e.g., money, hobbies, relationships) keeping me from growing in my relationship with Christ? Read Luke 16:13 (cf. Matthew 6:24). How do the discipleship demands of Jesus motivate me to hold the things of this world loosely? Luke 9:23-27; 14:25-28 (cf. Matthew 10:34-42; Mark 8:34-38; John 12:24-26).
4. The rich man experienced “torment” in hell (16:23-26). He also expressed concern for his five brothers and did not want them to join him (16:27-28). What does this tell me about the stereotypical views of hell? Does the reality of an eternal hell shake me to my core (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; Acts 24:15)? Do I truly believe that those people in my life (e.g., parents, children, siblings, coworkers, neighbors) who fail to trust in Christ will spend eternity in hell? Read John 3:16-18, 36; 5:24, 28-29; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; and Revelation 20:11-15. How does my view of hell differ from the one presented by Scripture?
5. Abraham explained that the only way a person can escape hell is by hearing the Word of God and responding to it by faith (16:29-31). How does this affect my evangelism style and methods? To what degree do I rely upon God’s Word? Do I honestly believe it is sufficient? Why or why not? What would I say to a believer who claims that there can be no effective evangelism without “signs and wonders?” Read John 10:41-42; 11:43-57; and 12:10.

Notes

¹ Deffinbaugh writes, “Given the Lord’s words in response to their scoffing, we might conjecture what they would be scoffing about. They judged on appearances. Jesus was talking a great deal about money, and how to use it. They could well have said to themselves and others, ‘Who is this expert on money, anyway? Who does He think He is? How much money does He possess? He is so poor that He has to have women of means accompany Him, to provide for His needs!’ They may very well have mocked Jesus’ teaching, based upon His poverty. But you see, Jesus’ poverty was that which proved His qualification to teach on money. Jesus did not have money because He did not take money. He had no vested interest. He had no desire to get rich and to live luxuriously. Thus, Jesus could speak as one who was disinterested, rather than as one who was preoccupied with money and material things.” Bob Deffinbaugh, “The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:14-31)”: http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1120

² Earlier in Luke 11:42 Jesus said, “But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

³ Stanley A. Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 191.

⁴ This parable is unique to Luke likely because he was a medical doctor who had an interest in poor people.

⁵ Bock writes, “The unity of the entire chapter is evident in many ways. The thread that unifies the chapter is money. The unjust steward used his master’s money to serve his own interests, rather than to serve his master. The rich man will also use his money for his own interests, ignoring the needs of Lazarus, who lay at his gate. Verses 14-18 enable us to understand the evil of these two rich men, which was descriptive of the wickedness of the Pharisees, by showing the source of their sin. The account comes in three parts: the situation before death (16:19-21), the situation in the afterlife (16:22-23), and comments about that situation (16:24-31).” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 432.

⁶ It is worth noting that both of Jesus’ parables in Luke 16 begin with virtually the same expression: “There was a rich man...” (16:1, 19)

⁷ Tradition has given the rich man the Latin name *Dives* meaning “rich,” but there is no basis for this in the text. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: CGT* (Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 634-35.

⁸ Purple cloth and linen fabric were signs of royalty and wealth (see Mark 15:17, 20; Rev 18:12; 19:8, 14). This helps explain why the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus by putting a purple robe on him in the Praetorium before the Crucifixion (Mark 15:17, 20).

⁹ It is a mystery why the rich man allowed Lazarus to camp at his front door. Most wealthy people would not put up with this. Why did this rich man? Perhaps he thought that providing a place for a beggar was ministry enough, and it may be that some of his wealthy guests occasionally gave Lazarus alms. This may have been how he justified his refusal to help Lazarus. Maybe he couldn’t get rid of Lazarus. We’ll never know.

¹⁰ The same expression “longed to be fed” is used of the prodigal son in Luke 15:16.

¹¹ The word “laid” is a past perfect passive of the common verb *ballo*. He had been flung there and was still there.

¹² Cf. the Canaanite woman’s reply to Jesus, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” (Matt 15:27).

¹³ A *kunon* is a wild, undomesticated dog (either “street” dogs or watchdogs), not house pets. See Louw & Nida 4.34 and BDAG 461.

¹⁴ E.g., 1 Kgs 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; and 22:38. These dogs also made Lazarus ceremonially unclean.

¹⁵ See the negative image of Rev 22:15 that draws on this picture.

¹⁶ The background for this parable almost certainly is Isa 58:7: “Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” In this decisive text Isaiah accurately describes behavior that is pleasing to God. See Warren Heard, “Luke’s Attitude toward the Rich and the Poor,” *Trinity Journal* 9:1 (Spring 1988): 64. Deffinbaugh sees this parable as a playing out of Luke 6:20-26 in the Sermon on the Mount. The rich man of the parable personifies the one on whom Jesus pronounced woes. The poor man, Lazarus, portrays the blessedness of those whom Jesus called blessed in the sermon.

Blessed are . . .	Woe to . . .
The poor	The rich
The hungry	The well-fed
The mourners	The happy
Those persecuted as evil	Those respected as “good”

See Deffinbaugh, “The Rich Man and Lazarus.”

¹⁷ It has been said, “He who has no money is poor; he who has nothing but money is even poorer.” This statement was certainly true of the rich man in Jesus’ parable.

¹⁸ This is a clear refusal to obey the OT Scriptures (e.g., Deut 15:4, 7-11; Prov 11:23-25; 14:21; 17:5; 19:17; 21:13, 26; 28:27; and 29:7).

¹⁹ This is the only time that a character is given a name in any of Jesus’ parables. As a result, some scholars assume that this is a true story and not merely a parable. Yet, it would seem that this is a parable for two reasons. First, as we noted above, the introductory phraseology is the same (cf. 16:1, 19). Second, there is an interlude between the two stories (16:14-18) in which Jesus dialogues with the Pharisees. In 16:15, Jesus addresses them specifically and continues through 16:31. In 17:1, He then addresses His disciples again in 16:1. This all suggests that Jesus’ words in 16:19-31 are indeed parabolic. This should caution us from reading too much into this account. Regardless, it seems quite evident that this story could be a true-to-life experience.

²⁰ Lazarus is the equivalent of the Hebrew *Eleazar*. Abraham, also mentioned in this parable, had a servant named Eleazar who was evidently a Gentile (Gen 15:1). This fact has led some students of this passage to seek an interpretation that comes from Abraham’s experience. However, the connections with Abraham’s history seem so obscure that Jesus’ hearers would have missed them.

²¹ The fact that Jesus named the beggar and not the rich man hints at the ultimate greater importance of Lazarus. Bock writes, “The naming of the poor man as Lazarus and the failure to name the rich man personalizes the level of concern for the poor man, while making clear that the rich man is a representative figure. God cares for each poor person and is fully aware of his or her plight. The rich man could be any rich individual.” Bock, *Luke*, 431.

²² There are many people in the United States who are *illegitimately* poor. These are people who are capable of working yet refuse to do so. Instead, they milk the welfare system. This is in violation of Paul’s words in 2 Thess 3:10, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (ESV).

²³ R.T. Kendall, *The Complete Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2004), 285.

²⁴ Angels assist God in caring for humans (Heb 1:14).

²⁵ See Gen 15:15; 47:30; Deut 31:16 for examples of being gathered to one’s fathers. Some scholars have argued that “Abraham’s bosom” (only used here in the NT) can be best understood as sitting at the place of honor at the messianic banquet (see Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28-29; John 13:23). It is suggested that because Lazarus was consigned to the temporal status of being a beggar at the rich man’s table, in the afterlife his fate was reversed such that now he was seated at a place of honor in the messianic banquet. However, as Bock points out “there is no explicit reference to banquet imagery anywhere in the parable.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*: ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1368.

²⁶ Are people still conscious following the moment of death? The evidence that the soul (or spirit) is conscious following the moment of death is very strong:

1. Enoch was taken to be with God (Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5).
2. Elijah was taken up into heaven (2 Kgs 2:1).
3. David spoke of bliss in God’s presence after death (Ps 16:10-11).
4. Moses and Elijah were conscious on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:3).
5. Jesus, in speaking about the OT saints Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, said that God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Luke 20:38). In effect, Jesus is saying, “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though they died many years ago, are actually living today. For God, who calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is not the God of the dead but of the living.”
6. Jesus promised that the repentant thief would be with Him in paradise the very day he died (Luke 23:43).
7. Jesus’ spirit went to the Father the day He died (Luke 23:46).
8. Stephen, just prior to dying as a result of being stoned, said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (Acts 7:59).
9. Paul affirmed that when we are “absent from the body” then “we are present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).
10. Paul said it was far better to die and be with Christ (Phil 1:23).
11. The writer of Hebrews refers to heaven as a place where “the spirits of just men [are] made perfect” (Heb 12:23).
12. The “souls” of those martyred during the Tribulation are portrayed as conscious in heaven, singing and praying to God (Rev 6:9).

²⁷ There are ten references to *Hades* in the NT: Matt 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14. Hades always refers to the abode of the unsaved dead before their resurrection and condemnation at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). In the OT, *Sheol* is the grave—the place of both the righteous and wicked dead (e.g., Ps 16:10; 86:13). It does not have negative connotations.

²⁸ Hebrews 9:27 declares, “And just as people are appointed to die once, and then to face judgment” (NET).

²⁹ This fact should have told the listening Pharisees not to count on their Jewish heritage to admit them into the kingdom.

³⁰ Kendall, *The Complete Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 288.

³¹ Luke is the only writer in the NT who uses this word that is here translated “agony” (*odunao*). The word can be used in one of two ways: (1) “to undergo physical torment, suffer pain” (Luke 16:24-25) (2) “to experience mental and spiritual pain, be pained/ distressed” (Luke 2:38; Acts 20:38). In this passage, it obviously takes the former meaning. See BDAG s.v. *odunao* 1-2.

³² The title “child” (*teknon*) is a tender one that expressed compassion for the rich man in his misery (cf. Luke 15:31). It conveys something of the compassion God Himself shows even to those who spurn Him.

³³ The “great chasm” separating “Abraham’s bosom” and “Hades” is probably a reference to the heavens themselves.

³⁴ The rich man longed for his brothers to be warned of their eventual destination. The root word that is translated “warn” (*diamarturomai*) is used 18 times in the NT (11 times by Luke). It means (1) to solemnly witness, bear witness to, testify about (Acts 20:24); (2) as giving a solemn warning, admonish, earnestly ask, strongly tell (1 Thess 5:21); and (3) strongly urge, insist (Acts 2:40).

³⁵ It would seem that the rich man’s “hell” is something like solitary confinement in a prison. There may be others there with you, but you are hardly aware of them, nor is there any real fellowship. What you are aware of is the bliss of the righteous. It is as though hell has a one-way picture window, and each resident of hell is given a pair of binoculars. The wicked are thus enabled to see the joy and bliss of the righteous, but it appears that the righteous are unaware of the suffering of the wicked. The wicked can see out, but the righteous cannot see in, so to speak. See Deffinbaugh, “The Rich Man and Lazarus.”

³⁶ This statement condemned the Pharisees who were listening to Jesus but had explained away the OT revelation about Messiah and had asked Jesus for more signs (Luke 11:16). It also implied that they would not believe on Jesus even though Jesus would rise from the dead (cf. 9:22; 11:29-30; 13:32).

³⁷ Bock, *Luke*, 434.

³⁸ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 639.

³⁹ David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 146.

⁴⁰ Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm*, 195.

⁴¹ “In parabolic interpretation this technique is called, ‘the rule of end stress’: at the end of a parable the main stress or emphasis should be sought.” See Robert H. Stein, *Interpreting Puzzling Texts in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 98.

⁴² Luke’s allusion to those who failed to be convinced by the truth of Jesus’ resurrection is unmistakable (11:29-32; 13:32; cf. 18:34).

⁴³ In this parable the rich man and his brothers who did not listen to Moses and the prophets represent the Pharisees (Luke 16:16-17). The Pharisees believed in a future life and a coming judgment, but they, as the rich man, did not allow those beliefs to deter them from the pursuit of present wealth (16:14). Jesus announced that even His resurrection would not change them. This parable also affirmed Jesus’ teaching on a future reversal of fortunes (1:53; 6:20-26; 12:16-21; 13:30; 14:11) and the fact that present decisions affect future destiny for the saved and the unsaved.

⁴⁴ See also Matt 12:38-40. John’s gospel also expounds the same theme: Jesus does many signs, but the Jews characteristically do not believe. Their refusal to believe is part and parcel of their failure to believe in Moses and the Scriptures (John 5:39-40, 45-47; 10:38).

⁴⁵ Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm*, 195-196.

⁴⁶ The preaching of Jesus recounted in the Gospels normally uses repentance in reference to eternal salvation (e.g., Matt 4:17/Mark 1:15; Matt 11:20-21/Luke 10:13; Matt 9:13/Mark 2:17/Luke 5:32; Matt 12:41/Luke 11:32; Luke 13:3, 5; Luke 15:7, 10; and 24:47).

⁴⁷ Annie Flury, “British Airways tape gave false sea crash alert,” *The Times* (London): April 26 1999.