

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

(Luke 16:19-31)

"There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' He said in reply, 'You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' He replied to him, 'You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.'

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise, a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, "Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back." Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?' He answered, 'The one who treated him with mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

The Message

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus serves as a stark reminder of the moral responsibility to care for others, particularly the poor and suffering. It teaches that wealth is not inherently evil, but it comes with a great responsibility to use it justly and compassionately. The parable also warns against complacency and the dangers of ignoring the needs of others, as well as the consequences of such neglect in the afterlife. Finally, it calls for attentiveness to God's Word and living a life in accordance with His teachings, as the path to eternal life.

Understanding the Parable

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus carries profound lessons about life, wealth, and the afterlife:

1. **The Rich Man and Lazarus:** The rich man is unnamed, representing those who live in luxury and self-indulgence without concern for others. Lazarus, whose name means "God helps," is a poor man who suffers greatly in life but is rewarded in the afterlife. The contrast between their lives highlights the disparity between the wealthy and the poor, and the moral obligation to help those in need.
2. **The Reversal of Fortunes:** The parable emphasizes the reversal of fortunes that occurs after death. Lazarus, who suffered in life, is comforted in the afterlife, while the rich man, who lived in luxury, finds himself in torment. This underscores the idea that earthly wealth and comfort are fleeting, and that eternal reward is based on one's actions and compassion toward others.
3. **The Great Chasm:** The "great chasm" between Lazarus and the rich man symbolizes the irreversible separation between the righteous and the wicked in the afterlife. It indicates that decisions made in life have lasting consequences, and that there is no second chance after death.
4. **The Importance of Heeding God's Word:** The rich man's plea to send Lazarus to warn his brothers is denied by Abraham, who points out that they have "Moses and the prophets" to guide them. This signifies the sufficiency of God's revelation through the Scriptures, and the futility of expecting miraculous signs to inspire repentance. It also alludes to the rejection of Jesus, even after His resurrection from the dead.