

THE PARABLE OF **RICH MAN & LAZARUS**



INTRODUCTION

The parables of Jesus are not just stories. They show us how the kingdom of God works. The values and ways of God's kingdom often go against what the world thinks is right. Many people, especially the religious leaders in Jesus' time, found these stories shocking and even threatening. The scribes and Pharisees were often upset by Jesus' teaching and actions about the kingdom. But for those who listen and learn, there is great joy in discovering the surprisingly different way of life under God's rule. God's kingdom may upset our expectations, but it shows us a deeper wisdom filled with grace, justice, and love.

Jesus used parables to change how we see God, ourselves, and the world. His parables are like mirrors and windows. They show us who we really are and how God's kingdom works.

One of the strongest and most challenging parables is the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (**Luke 16:19-31**). This story is not just about heaven and hell. It also challenges how we think about money, status, and God's Word. Jesus is not giving us a map of the afterlife. He is warning us to think about how we live right now.

The important question is not just, *"Where will I go after I die?"*
It is, *"What kind of person am I becoming today in God's kingdom?"*

How we live now affects how we will spend eternity. Salvation is not only about the soul. It also includes how we manage money, live our daily life, and treat others.

The Parables of Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.' ²⁵ "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. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' ²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ³⁰ "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹ "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.'"

The Heartbeat of the Parable

Before telling the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus issued a strong warning:

"No one can serve two masters. You will hate one and love the other, or you will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Luke 16:13)

Luke then shares an important detail about Jesus' listeners:

"The Pharisees—who loved money—heard all this and were sneering at Jesus." (Luke 16:14)

Though the Pharisees looked devout, their hearts were controlled by money. They mocked Jesus because His words challenged their confidence. Right in this moment of resistance and religious pride, Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. He isn't only addressing wealth—it's a warning about what happens when money becomes your master. The rich man isn't condemned for being rich. He's



condemned for ignoring the suffering in front of him and believing he was accepted by God.

Notice the difference: Jesus gave the poor man a name—Lazarus. But the rich man has no name. That is unusual and significant as most characters in Jesus' stories are unnamed. The man who was ignored and dismissed in life gets named and honoured in eternity. The one who was wealthy and powerful is left anonymous—forgotten. In God's kingdom, what matters is not status or success. What matters is having a heart shaped by heaven's values.

This parable calls us to ask ourselves: *What am I serving? Whom do I love? How am I living in light of eternity?*

A Tale of Two Lives that Echoes to Eternity

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus can be divided into three scenes:

- **Scene 1** – On earth – The Great Divide between the Rich and Poor
v19, *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day."*
v20, *"At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores."*
- **Scene 2** – The Afterlife – The Great Chasm between the Righteous and Unrighteous
v23, *"In Hades, where he (rich man) was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side."*

- **Scene 3 – Conversations – The Rich man's requests and Abraham's replies.** Three pleas from the rich man and three responses from Abraham, forming a powerful dialogue that highlights the essence of the parable.

Conversation One: Luke 16:24–26

The rich man, now in torment, calls out:

"Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I'm in agony in this fire."

Abraham responds:

"Son, remember—in your life, you had good things. Lazarus had only suffering. Now he is comforted, and you are in pain. And besides, a great chasm has been set between us—no one can cross from here to there, or from there to here."

This first request tells us a lot about the rich man's heart

Even though he's now in torment:

- He still treats Lazarus like a servant, asking for him to be sent to relieve his own pain.
- He shows no repentance for how he lived on earth.
- He never says sorry to Lazarus or acknowledges the suffering he ignored.
- He doesn't ask to be with God where Abraham is—he only wants comfort.

This shows that his heart hasn't changed. In life, he lived only for himself—ignoring God, ignoring the poor, and chasing luxury. Now, even in judgment, his disposition remains unchanged—self-centred and entitled.

Abraham's reply reveals something serious:

There is a **great chasm** between them—one that cannot be crossed. This chasm is not just physical—it's spiritual. It represents the final separation between those who lived for God and those who lived for themselves.

It shows the permanent consequences of rejecting God and loving wealth over people. This part of the parable is a warning:

There comes a point when the opportunity to change is gone.

Jesus and James in Harmony

The Book of James offer a haunting reminder: **to be rich without God is to be dangerously short-sighted.** It's to enjoy comfort now, and wake up in agony later. It's to win for a moment and lose for eternity.

James doesn't sugarcoat it. He warns the wealthy not because they're rich, but because they've allowed riches to make their hearts small (*James 5:3, 5*).

And Jesus? He paints the picture of a man so wrapped in silk and silver that he couldn't see the poor soul just outside his gate. **To be rich without God is to settle for a kingdom made of dust**—a kingdom that will not stand. The rich man had short-term gain, but long-term misery. He lived high, but ended low.

James points to four warning signs of wealth gone wrong:

Hoarding – piling up treasure while others suffer lack. (*James 5:3*)

Cheating – withholding wages or exploiting others for profit. (*James 5:4*)

Indulgence – living in excess while turning away from need. (*James 5:5*)

Oppression – harming the innocent to protect your comfort. (*James 5:6*)

And none of it is hidden from God. Let's not miss the Lazarus at our gate. Let's be rich—with God. Rich in mercy. Rich in kindness. Rich in eternal things.

Conversation Two: Luke 16:27–29

The rich man said,

“Please, father, send Lazarus to my family. I have five brothers. Let him warn them so they won’t come to this place of suffering.”

Abraham answered,

“They already have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to those.”

Realizing that he cannot be helped, the rich man shifts his concern to his five brothers. At first glance, this seems like a compassionate and selfless request. However, it still shows that he misunderstands the real cause of his own fate.

He believes his five brothers need a supernatural sign—a return from the dead in the form of Lazarus—to warn his brothers. But Abraham gently corrects him:

“They have Moses and the Prophets,” referring to the Scriptures, God’s very Word.

The message is profound: **God’s Word is enough.** It is clear, powerful, and fully capable of leading people to repentance. The problem isn’t a lack of warning—it’s hardened hearts that refuse to listen.



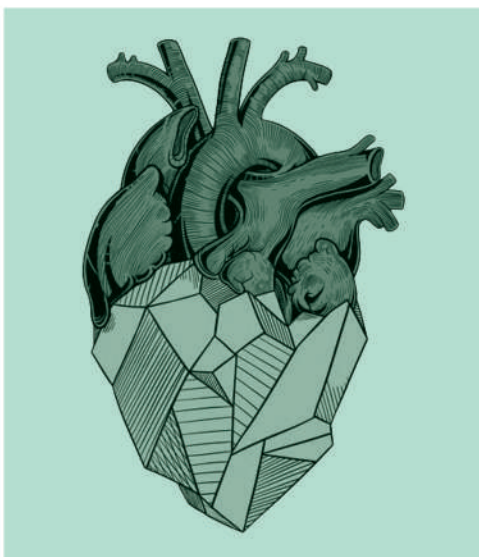
Conversation Three: Luke 16:30-31

The rich man said, *"No, Father Abraham, but if someone comes back from the dead to warn them, they will repent."*

Abraham replied, *"If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they won't believe even if someone rises from the dead."*

Jesus shows that people often think they need signs and miracles to believe. But the truth is, miracles don't usually change hard hearts.

The real problem is not that people don't understand or doubt the truth. It is that their hearts resist it. They don't want to accept the truth because it will lead them to change.



This is a problem of the heart, not the mind. That's why Jesus said, *"People love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil."* (John 3:19)

Many say things like:

- *"If I saw a miracle, I would believe."*
- *"If God really wanted me to follow Him, He would make it clearer."*

But the real issue is deeper:

- We don't want to be told what to do.
- We don't want anyone in authority including God controlling our lives or telling us to change.

Jesus did not spend His time trying to impress people with miracles. He knew what really changes a heart is humility—being willing to listen and accept the truth.

When Jesus said, *"They will not believe even if someone rises from the dead,"* He was also referring to Himself.

- **Jesus would soon rise from the dead, but many, especially religious leaders, still did not believe** (Matthew 28:17).
- **Jesus even raised Lazarus, his friend, from the dead** (John 11), but instead of believing, the religious leaders planned to kill Him (John 11:53).

This shows that pride, unbelief, and self-righteousness can be very strong.

If we ignore God's Word today, we might become like those who would not believe—even if they saw great miracles or a resurrection.

Deep Wisdom from the Parable

1. Counter-Culture in God's Kingdom

In Jesus' time, many people—especially religious Jews—believed something very specific:

- Being rich meant you had God's favour.
- Being poor or sick meant you were under God's curse.

This idea came from a misunderstanding of Old Testament blessings (like Deuteronomy 28). Over time, people distorted it into a worldly belief that fostered pride among the wealthy and led people to judge the poor. People thought the wealthy were righteous and the poor deserved their suffering.

But Jesus shared a parable that completely turned this idea on its head. In His story, a poor man named **Lazarus** (which means "God helps") ends up in heaven. The rich man, who everyone assumed was blessed by God, ends up in torment. Jesus was making a bold statement: **Your position on earth doesn't reflect your position in eternity.**

Yes, God is a good Father. He delights in blessing His children. The Bible talks often about God's care and provision—both spiritual and material (Psalm 23, Matthew 6, 2 Corinthians 9). We believe in a generous God who provides more than enough.

But God is **not against wealth**—He is against **idolatry**. He blesses us so we can bless others (Genesis 12:2).

Real blessing isn't just about money or comfort. Some of the most blessed people in the Bible had very little, **but they had deep joy, peace, and closeness with God.**

Jesus also said: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

This means the blessed life isn't a pain-free life. *It's a life where suffering can't take away your peace, joy, or purpose.*

True blessing isn't about what's in your hands—it's about who rules your heart. To be blessed in God's kingdom means to live under His leadership, filled with His love, no matter what your situation looks like.

Mature believers learn to say:

- *"God will provide—He is my Father."*
- *"Even in pain, I will trust Him—He is still working."*
- *"My identity isn't in my success or struggle. It's in Christ."*

2. Kingdom Economics:

How you manage your money is not just a financial decision—it's a spiritual one. Jesus isn't saying it's difficult to serve both God and money; He's saying it's impossible. Why? Because love of money (mammon) isn't neutral (1 Timothy 6:10). It promises security, power, and identity. It competes for our loyalty in the very places only God should occupy: our heart, our trust, and our worship.

How to honour God with your finances?

- **Acknowledge that God is the owner** of your resources. We are just managers of what He gives us. Our job is to use our money and resources for His purposes—not just for our comfort, but to make a difference for eternity (Matthew 6:20–21).

- **Develop a lifestyle of giving**

-**Tithing** means giving 10% of your income. It started in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:20, Malachi 3:10) and continues in the New Testament—not as a rule, but as a way to show our love and gratitude. Tithing helps us to put God first in our finances. The tithe should go to the church where you grow spiritually.

Greed as Idolatry

In Scripture, greed is not just the love of money—it's the disordered desire for more than what is needed, often at the expense of trust in God, care for others, and contentment of heart. Colossians 3:5 even equates greed with idolatry, revealing that it's not just a financial issue, but a worship issue.

Greed once wore the label of sin. Today, it's repackaged as hustle. Masked as ambition. Dressed up as drive. Even disguised as self-care. Greed never satisfies. It leaves us wanting, striving, comparing.

But Jesus said: *"Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."* (Luke 12:15)

Greed has two faces – *Hoarding* and *Indulgence*. Hoarding is fuelled by fear and control. *'I need more to feel secure.'* *'What if I lose everything?'* *'I can't afford to be generous now.'* On the other hand, Indulgence or lavish spending is the pursuit of luxury, status, or constant upgrades. It's rooted in a hunger for identity, validation, or superiority.

The antidote to greed isn't guilt—it's grateful generosity and contentment. Greed whispers that more stuff will bring more joy. But the gospel reminds us: **we already have the greatest treasure—Christ Himself.**

- **Offerings** are extra gifts you give beyond the tithe. These should come from a heart of love and be led by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 9:7). God wants us to give freely and joyfully—not out of guilt or fear. Give to those in need, especially the poor and hurting (Proverbs 19:17).

- **Be Wise and Discerning in Giving:**

God calls us to be generous, but also wise. Jesus said to be “*wise as serpents and innocent as doves*” (Matthew 10:16). That means we should think carefully about where we give our money. Don’t let anyone manipulate you in the name of God. Always **pray before giving**. Let the Holy Spirit guide you, not emotions or pressure.

Be careful if:

- Someone says you will be blessed more if you give a bigger offering.
- You feel rushed, ashamed, or forced into giving.
- You are asked to give more than you can afford.

In short, tithing helps you put God first. Generosity is how you love others. And contentment helps you enjoy what God has already given you.



3. The Self-Righteousness and Entitlement of the Rich Man

What makes this parable even more powerful is what happens after death.

Even while suffering in hell, the rich man doesn't ask to get out. Instead, he tries to give orders—telling Abraham to send Lazarus to serve him:

- *"Father Abraham, send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger..."* (Luke 16:24)
- *"Send Lazarus to my brothers..."* (Luke 16:27)

This shows something shocking: **his heart hasn't changed.**

He still thinks Lazarus is inferior to him.

He still expects others to do his work.

He still speaks with pride and entitlement.

The Silence of Lazarus

Lazarus never speaks. He doesn't complain. He doesn't ask for help. He doesn't retaliate. In fact, he is *spoken about* but never *given a voice*. This reflects the reality of so many marginalized people in the world. And yet, Jesus gives Lazarus a name, something the rich man is never given. The silence of Lazarus contrasts with the noise of the world around him and shows that God sees and honours the silent, suffering ones.

Lazarus represents the meek who inherit the kingdom (Matthew 5:5). He lies at the gate, covered in sores, receiving no earthly comfort—and yet he does not lash out. He suffers in silence. And when he dies, he is carried by angels to Abraham's side—a picture of divine vindication.

His silence isn't weakness. It's his testimony. He is a living parable of those who wait for justice and entrust themselves to God (1 Peter 2:23).

Lazarus' silence may also mirror the silence of Jesus before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7; Mark 15:5). He is a Christlike figure: poor, afflicted, rejected, yet ultimately exalted. His silence is not emptiness—it is foreshadowing. The one who suffers silently is the one whom God exalts.

Lazarus never says a word, but his life and destiny speak volumes. In the kingdom of God, even the silent are heard.

So, this story is not just about wealth—it's about **spiritual arrogance, self-righteousness, and pride.**

The rich man calls Abraham *"Father,"* reminding us he was part of God's chosen people. But that connection wasn't enough. Being from Abraham's family didn't give him a place in God's kingdom.

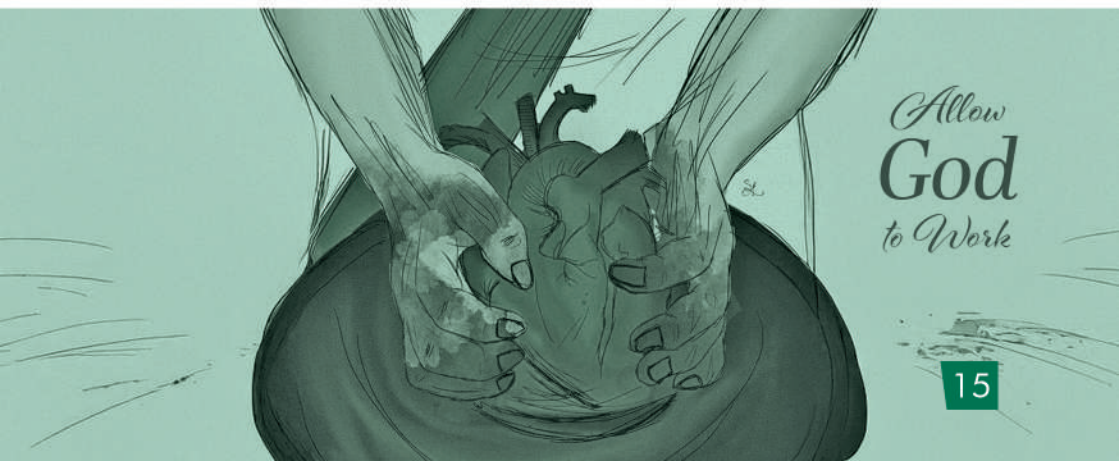
This reveals a quiet kind of pride: thinking your family, race, or tradition automatically makes you right with God.

John the Baptist warned about this too: *"Don't say, 'We have Abraham as our father.' God can raise up children of Abraham from stones"* (Luke 3:8).

The message is clear:

No background, culture, or religion can guarantee God's favour. What matters is your heart—and if your life is truly surrendered to God.

In God's kingdom, **privilege without heart change means nothing.** The rich man had years on earth to let God change him—but he never did. And even in eternity, his old attitudes remained.



*Allow
God
to Work*

4. The Tragedy of the Rich Man's Scriptural Ignorance

The final twist in the parable is Abraham's reply to the rich man:

"They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."

"If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:29, 31)

This response is powerful. The rich man now shows concern for his five brothers. But it's not because he has truly changed—it's because he feels guilt and anxious. He knows they live just like he did—rich, selfish, and spiritually blind. Even in this moment, he tries to get **Lazarus** to work for him as a servant would.

The rich man, as a Jew, had full access to God's Word. He would have heard what the Bible teaches: Fear God. Show mercy. Care for the poor. Love your neighbour.

But he ignored it. Jesus is making a clear point:

You don't need more miracles—you need to listen to what God has already said. God's Word is enough.

In Hebrew, *"to hear"* means *"to obey."* The rich man may have heard the Scripture in the synagogue, but he didn't really listen. His problem wasn't ignorance—it was **willful neglect**. He chose comfort over obedience.

This parable isn't just about people back then—it's also about us today:

- *We can hear sermons every Sunday and still not change.*
- *We can own Bibles, listen to Christian podcasts, and read devotionals—but still not obey.*
- *We can feel spiritually safe because we go to church or come from a Christian family—yet miss what really matters: a heart that follows Jesus.*

5. The Reality of Heaven and Hell

In the parable, Lazarus is carried by angels to “Abraham’s side.”

This was a Jewish way of saying he was welcomed into God’s rest—a picture of heaven.

The Bible describes **heaven** as:

- A place prepared for those who love Jesus (John 14:2)
- A kingdom we receive by God’s grace (Matthew 25:34)
- A new world where God lives with His people (Revelation 21:1–3)

But most importantly, **heaven is where Jesus is**. He is the greatest reward.

The rich man, on the other hand, is in torment. He is fully aware, he can speak, and he remembers everything.

This shows us some important truths about **hell**:

- Hell is not a place where people stop existing. It is a real, conscious separation from God (Luke 16:24; Matthew 25:46).
- Jesus spoke more about judgment and hell than He did about heaven—not to scare us, but to lovingly warn us and call us to turn to God.
- Jesus described hell as a place of:
 - **Unquenchable fire** (Mark 9:43)
 - **Outer darkness** (Matthew 8:12)
 - **Eternal punishment** (Matthew 25:46)
 - **A place prepared for the devil and his angels** (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10)

Hell – “A Place No One Has to Go”

You won't find hell on a travel brochure. There is no discount flight or scenic photo. It is not a place people talk about over coffee. But Jesus talked about it. More than anyone else. Why? Because He wanted to warn us. Because He loves us.

Jesus didn't describe hell to scare us, but to save us. Jesus described hell with strong language:

“The worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” — Mark 9:48

“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” — Matthew 13:42

“A great chasm has been fixed.” — Luke 16:26

Hell is not a myth. It is not just a symbol. It is not just for “*really bad people*.” It's the natural consequence of saying to God: “*Leave me alone.*”

Hell is the result of a thousand small choices to reject God's presence.

God is holy. That means He's good—and good can't coexist with evil. So, either we surrender to grace, or we face separation. Not because He wants it. But because we choose it.

But here's the good news:
No one has to go there.

“God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish...” — John 3:16

But the most painful part of this parable is not the fire. It's the **unchanged heart** of the rich man. Even in torment, his attitude didn't change.

So when Jesus talks about comfort, torment, the great divide, and *"Abraham's side,"* He's not giving us a map of the afterlife.

Instead, He is teaching us that:

- There is life after death.
- There is a real and permanent separation between those who belong to God and those who don't.
- Our eternal future is decided by how we respond to God in this life—right now.



Conclusion

Jesus didn't narrate this parable to scare us—but to stir us.

Because sometimes we can have so much on earth that we forget there's more beyond it. The rich man had everything the world could offer, but nothing that could last. Lazarus had nothing but trusted God—and was carried to glory.

Jesus is showing us that money isn't the problem—the heart is. You can be rich and righteous. You can be poor and proud. But when wealth becomes your master, when comfort silences compassion, and when pride replaces repentance, something eternal is at stake.

Let's develop a heart that lives in the light of eternity. A heart that listens when God speaks. A heart that sees the hurting. Don't wait to reach the other side to open your heart. It will be too late!

Because in the end, the only riches that matter are the ones that last forever in eternity. And when your story is over, may heaven be your home—not because you earned it, but because Jesus carried you there.

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