

Lent

CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

stories where heaven and earth meet

Adult Small Group/Study Guide
The Rich Man and Lazarus | Week of March 14

KEY POINT

God calls us to care for those others do not. People of all times and places find ways to put importance in riches, prestige and power. Jesus shows us that God works differently. We are called to see things from God's perspective.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 16:19-31
(Psalm 41:1-3)

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, open the eyes of our hearts so that we may see things through the eyes of your Son, Jesus. Help us to concentrate on your message for us in this lesson so that it can change the way we think and live. In Jesus' name. Amen.

READ

Luke 16:19-31

ABOUT THE STORY

Our lesson today is a perfect example of the emphasis on Jesus' ministry to the poor and other outsiders in the Gospel of Luke. Before our lesson begins, a group of Pharisees have heard Jesus say "you cannot serve God and wealth" (Luke 16:13), and begin to ridicule him.

In response Jesus tells the story of "a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day" (Luke 16:19) and a "poor man named Lazarus covered with sores" (Luke 16:20) that lay at his gate while being licked by dogs.

While these two men might have had different situations in life, they both die. In a stark reversal of fortune, hungry and rejected Lazarus is taken by the angels to be with Abraham while the rich man finds himself in Hades. The rich man realizes, too late, that what really matters is a life lived in response to the teachings of Moses and the prophets, not eating sumptuously. Jesus finishes his story by alluding to his upcoming death and resurrection: even the words of someone who rises from the dead will not convince someone who does not listen to Moses and the prophets.

Jesus' parable fleshes out a recurring theme in Luke's Gospel: the great reversal that is coming with the arrival of the kingdom of God. When God's kingdom arrives, the high and mighty will be lowered and those who are poor and rejected will be lifted up. Mary sings of this by saying, "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:51-52). Later, Jesus proclaims, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" and also "woe to you who are rich...Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry" (Luke 6:20, 24-25). Today's lesson takes these abstract statements and makes them very personal.



This parable is meant to make a point about the effect of money on a person's relationship with God by painting a vivid picture through Jesus' words. It is not meant to be a specific description of the afterlife or an account of life after death. We should not use it to speculate on the exact details of heaven, hell or what happens after we die. Instead, Jesus' words show us that the way we use our gifts in this life matters greatly.

Note: In our lesson for today, the rich man finds himself in "Hades." This one word creates a translation issue. In the ancient world, "Hades" was the place of the dead and translating the word as "hell" is inaccurate. Still, the term "Hades" is widely known or used today and translators must balance accuracy with accessibility. For this reason, study Bibles and other resources are helpful.

- **SHARE**

- As a group, think of different ways that people judge whether someone is important. What are the things that give people status or standing in others' eyes? What are some of the ways people judge that someone is unimportant? Are these methods accurate, or ethical? How might God judge importance and standing?
- Jesus tells this parable in response to ridicule he receives from the Pharisees, "who were lovers of money" (Luke 16:14). How does this color the way you hear this story, especially the ending?
- Update the characters in this parable to your own context: what would the rich man look like today? How about Lazarus?

PRAY

Gracious God, thank you for opening our eyes today. Help us to see beyond the gates in our lives and place our attention on those who need our help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

BLESS

Mark one another with the sign of the cross on your hand and say, "God bless you as you turn toward Jesus this week. Amen."

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Take time to volunteer at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen, helping those in need.
- The rich man feasted sumptuously every day. Consider foregoing the purchase of a cup of coffee or dinner out. Donate the saved money.