

# The Rich Man and Lazarus

by John Murray

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*The sermon emphasizes the irreversible states of the rich man and Lazarus, highlighting the contrast between their lives in this world and their eternal destinies.*

**Duration:** 51:10

**Scripture:** Luke 16:19

**Topics:** "Lazarus"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31. The preacher highlights the stark contrast between the luxurious life of the rich man and the extreme poverty and physical suffering of Lazarus. The sermon explores the concept of the intermediate state between death and resurrection, drawing insights from Jesus' portrayal of the afterlife in the parable. The preacher also discusses the rich man's attempt to justify himself and the questions that arise regarding the sensations experienced by disembodied spirits.

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## Transcript

Look, the sixteenth chapter, beginning at the nineteenth verse, there was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores. And so on to the end of the chapter, that particular account which our Lord gives of a rich man and Lazarus. We do not have a great deal of information in the scripture regarding what we call the intermediate state, that is to say, the state between death and the resurrection.

But in this particular account, our Lord draws the veil aside, and he gives us some insight into the beyond of irreversible death, the issue of everlasting bliss and irrevocable woe. There are a great many questions which arise in connection with what our Lord gives, and we may not be able to deal adequately with these difficulties, and we certainly need not presume that we should be able to solve all the difficulties of interpretation which arise in connection with this particular passage of scripture. But there is a great danger that we sometimes allow the difficulties which encompass the interpretation of certain passages of scripture to blind our vision to the perfectly apparent lessons which that particular passage of scripture conveys.

And that is the way in this particular passage. There are difficulties simply because we know so little about the intermediate state. But these difficulties that attach to the interpretation of this passage should not by

any means obscure the perfectly obvious lessons which this passage is intended to convey.

And there are three things particularly in this passage around which I shall try to gather a few of the pertinent thoughts and lessons. And these three subjects are the contrast, the irreversible states, and the rich man's alibi. And first of all then we have the contrast, or the contrasts intimated in this passage.

There is first of all the contrast between the luxurious splendor of the rich man and the poverty and physical misery of Lazarus in respect of life in this world. The rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen and cared sumptuously every day. This life was for that rich man the bed of luxury.

In this life he received his good things. And the destitution of Lazarus is apparent from the fact that he was laid at the rich man's gate, that he was full of sores, that he decided to be fed with the crumbs or morsels which fell from the rich man's table, and that the very dogs came and licked his sores. Now we are not to suppose that this poor man got none of the discarded portions of food which fell from the rich man's table.

We may well suppose that he received some. There would seem to be no purpose of his remaining at the gate of the rich man unless he received some of those morsels that were thrown out from the rich man's table. But whether he received of those morsels or not, we may well suppose that he did.

His poverty is emphasized by the fact that it was on such days that he decided it was in that way that he sought to satisfy his hunger. And you must remember how great must have been the destitution of that poor man when his ambition for protecting food was just the extent of being fed with the waste which was cast out. It was in that way.

And a man must be destitute in despised faith. It is difficult to be certain whether the licking of the sores by the dogs is to be regarded as an amelioration of his suffering or whether it is to be regarded as an incantation of that suffering. Whether we are to regard it as an act of kindness on the part of the dogs or as an indication that the man was so helpless that he could not even protect himself from that particular kind.

But in any case, we are not prevented from recognizing that the action emphasizes this poor man's extremities. His sores were exposed. They were not bound up.

He was not cared for by others who could alleviate his misery. And minister to his needs. It is all summed up with the recognition of the fact and it may even be that the dogs were at the rich man's gate for the very same purpose as the rich man was there.

Namely that they also might eat of the morsels which fell from the rich man's table and which were cast out at his gate. And if that is so, then this poor man had some competition when he decided to be fed with the morsels which fell from the rich man's table. And since he was apparently very ill and very much weakened, it would be hard for him indeed to compete with the agility of movement which characterizes hungry dogs.

Oh, you see how graphic is this description which our Lord gives in order to portray the extreme wretchedness and poverty of this poor man as far as life in this world is concerned. And that is the express purpose of Jesus portraying the total contrast between the sumptuous life of the rich man and the miserable and wretched physical condition of the poor man. That contrast, however, which our Lord so graphically portrays is only the period to another.

And that is the contrast of complete reversal. Now there are many details which notify that particular contrast. The reversal begins at the point of death.

Not that the event of death itself intimates any contrast. For we read that it came to pass that the poor man died and the rich man also died. You see there is a very striking similarity and that similarity is full of meaning.

The poor man died. And the rich man also died. And when we are informed that the rich man was buried and no reference is made to the burial of the poor man we need not suppose that Lazarus had more.

That is not to be our assumption. Oh, it's just possible that he had more. We need not suppose that that was the only reference to his burial.

But the absence of reference to the poor man's burial when the burial of the rich man is graphically stated may have the very purpose of accepting the despised condition of Lazarus and the prompt that would have attended the rich man's death. There is still, as you might suppose, an intimation of contrast between the unauthentic way in which the corpse of the poor man was disposed of and the prompt and the parade that would have attended the burial of the rich man. Or it may be, as it has been proposed by many, that the burial of the rich man is set in very sharp contrast with what is stated respecting the poor man.

Namely, that he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Note the sequences in both cases. And it came to pass that the poor man died and was carried up the angels into Abraham's bosom and then you read, and the rich man also died and was buried.

And you can visualize the retinue in the case of the rich man. There was perhaps a great deal of parade in connection with the conveyance of his mortal remains to the tomb. And you can visualize the ceremony.

And then in contrast with that, remember that Lazarus was carried too. But he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man's body was carried, but Lazarus, as respects his spirit, was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

But in any case, whatever the intended contrasts were in this particular case, we cannot but note that at the event of death, though not necessarily in the event of death, but at the event of death, the total reversal begins to appear. And he, the poor man, was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And what corresponds to this in the case of the rich man? And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.

Now the reference in both cases is to the disembodied spirit of the person concerned. As to his body, Lazarus was no doubt buried or cast away from the tomb. As to his body, as to his spirit, the poor man went to Abraham's booth.

And as to his spirit, the rich man went. Now in that fact, Lazarus was carried. We are reminded of something.

It is that the angels, our ministering spirits, stand forth to minister for them, who are the heirs of God, not terminally at death. I suppose it would be very easy for us to think that this is simply a figurative expression. And was carried of the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Nothing would be more contrary to the total representation of Scripture. If angels, our ministering spirits, stand forth to minister for them who are the heirs of salvation, do you think that that ministry is going to terminate at the point of death? Oh, not at all. For we may be perfectly assured that the guardianship which the angels dispense to the people of God in this life does not terminate at the event of death, but ensures safe conduct of the disembodied spirit to its heavenly home.

What love, what tenderness, what care does he seek on the part of these angels who are the emissaries of God? But not only does he seek the love and the tenderness and the care on the part of angels, but the love and the tenderness and the care on the part of God himself. Because they are but the instruments of his love and the instruments of his loving. Now, of course, it is quite difficult.

We have very few references to such in the Scripture. In fact, I think this is the only explicit reference in the Scripture in terms of this particular expression. But the figure that is used here is used elsewhere by our Lord when he says that they shall come from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south and shall recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

The figure here is really that of reclining in the kingdom of heaven. And when it is said here that Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom, you must not try to visualize that in terms of the way in which a mother hung her child to her bosom, but something after the analogy of that which happened at the supper when John reclined upon the bosom of his Lord as they sat at the last supper. It is just a figurative expression of expressing the intimacy of relationship that there is, that there was, between Lazarus immediately upon the dissolution of this life.

Intimacy with the saints of God who had gone before. What had come between that and the rich man? He was in heaven, and because he was there, he was in town. It is rather remarkable that not only is it said that Lazarus was in a place that implied bliss, but he is represented as being in the fellowship, in the most intimate fellowship of the father of the faithful.

And there is nothing said about the company of the rich man. Nothing said. It is said about Lazarus that he was in the bosom of Abraham.

That is to say, in the bosom, in the most intimate fellowship in the kingdom of God was Abraham. And therefore with all the faithful, he was in hell, and because he was in hell, he was in torment. And behold, what is concentrated upon that particular consideration? Now there is no good reason for regarding the word which is used here to definite the place of his abode other than just what we call hell.

The place of woe, the place associated with torment. And if you read the text very carefully, you will find that that is the implication that in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment. That his being in torment is the very necessary result or consequence or concomitant of his being in hell.

And it was a place of unmitigated pain, and pain of the most agonizing character, because the plural is used, being in torment. And the extreme of torment is emphasized by the very request which he addressed to Abraham. You say, oh how foolish.

What a request. To send water, that he might dip the tip of his finger in water and place it upon his tongue, because he was tormented in this way. And you say, what a ridiculous request.

What comfort would it be to have the momentary and evanescent consolation of the dip of a cold finger, of the touch of a cold finger upon his tongue. Oh, how evanescent, how momentary. Then you say, what,

what sense could there be in addressing such a request.

Well, you see how graphic it is. With that respect, how extreme was the torment of this man, when such a momentary and evanescent touch of comfort would be in complete conflict with that which was his condition of unalloyed, unmitigated pain and torment in the place of war. Now there are questions which arise in connection with this particular passage.

It was of respect their disembodied spirits, that they were in the respective abode. It was the disembodied spirit of the rich man that was in hell, and it was the disembodied spirit of the poor man that was in Abraham's bosom. And then how could there be the physical sensation of which the rich man speaks.

Did he have a chance? How could he have a chance when it was in his disembodied state that he was then in the place of war? And how could it be conceived of as having a finger that he might put in water and which he might place upon the tongue of the tormented rich man? You see how many questions we will naturally raise in connection with this particular account. Well, what I will say to that is this, that it is not well for us to presume. We know so little about the disembodied state.

What do we know? That in the disembodied state there is that which causes. The spirit indeed is disembodied. It is separated from the body.

But what do we know about the way in which pain and torment will affect that disembodied spirit? We know nothing about it, because we have no experience of disembodied spirits. And it is just an example of the foolish way in which we are so liable to raise objections when it would be well for us to bow in humility and acknowledge our ignorance. Our Lord was speaking not in ignorance.

He was the person who himself had created heaven and earth. And what are we? In the puny compass of our knowledge, to call in question the reality or the veracity or the meaning of that which he has stated on this particular account. We must not allow such details to interfere with the obvious truth being conveyed and portrayed by our Lord, namely, the unrelieved anguish of the rich man, and his abode in the place of woe.

It is a place where he is aware of his own identity, where he is in the experience of unalleviated torment. That is hell, a place of consciousness, of intense consciousness, a place of self-consciousness, where all comfort is at rest, and where anguish is manifold and unalloyed. And what serves to aggravate all of this is the contrast between the opulence of the rich man and his opulence of the abject.

Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise loathest evil things. But now hear, hear comfort, that thou art taught. And that is the final con, and oh, how eloquent, in that it means a complete reversal, a complete reversal in the case of the poor man from abject misery to unalloyed consolation, in paradise, in fellowship with the saints of God, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

And in the case of the rich man, from all the opulence and wealth and consolation that he enjoyed in this life to the abject, unalloyed misery and anguish in a place of woe. That, which we can't escape, which is the apparent and obvious truth, which our Lord means to convey to us by this. Now, secondly, we have the irreversible statement.

It is Abraham who is still speaking, and he says, And in all these things between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, in order that those who would pass from us to you may not be able, neither may they pass from hence to us. Now it is quite natural for us to, in connection with that, if a great gulf is fixed between

the two of us, how could there be any between them? Can we speak to one another at a great distance? And it just shows the folly of this supercilious and superficial objection. What experience have we of spatial conditions? Or of conditions of communication in the unseen, in the indisciplined world? We know so little about the unseen world of spirits, that our present conceptions of faith may help us very little, and there may be a great distance.

And yet, if there is communication, can we not ourselves speak to one another at great distances? How can it be in the unseen world? What do we know as to conditions in that particular state? So let us cease our superstition. Another question might be raised about the immutability of these states. What Abraham says is this, that there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who would pass from us to you may not be able, and the way that Abraham speaks would seem to indicate that there were others to go from hell to heaven.

And you raise the question, when? Would any people want to go from Abraham's bosom to the place of war? Well, again, we know very little about the unseen world. But in any case, that way may be simply a rhetorical way of expressing the great truth that there is absolutely no commutation after death. It is noteworthy that Abraham makes a general statement.

He does not simply say to the rich man, you may not come hence, and he does not say simply, the law that is may not go hence to Hades or to hell. That is implied. But Abraham makes a general statement to the incessant.

The lifetime of opportunity, and there is no commutation after death, is one of the most conclusive evidence that there is no such thing as future probation. We are not able to understand a great many of the details of this passage, but we cannot miss the plain importance that there is no passing over from the place of bliss to the place of war. There is no passing over from the place of war.

These are the words of the keys of death. Now, finally, we have the rich man's answer. It has been said that the rich man in hell was not totally wrecked, because he still had some, he had still some concern for the welfare of his child.

He did not wish them to come, and so it will be said, he was not completely depraved. And therefore, the place of war that is spoken of here cannot mean the place of total reprobation, of the total abandonment. And there must be some indication in this particular place, in this particular incident, that after all this is only a parable, that there was some redeeming feature about that rich man after all.

He was still altruistic. When you examine the passage very carefully, you will find that we are not told that the motive of his request for expecting the sending of messengers to his five brothers was the desire to do his brethren good. What the motivation of that particular request was, we are not able to determine precisely.

But we are not told that it sprang from some illegitimate, some love in his bosom for his five brothers. We simply do not know. But we do know this, that the whole attitude of mind which underlay that particular request was one that was an assault upon the justice, wisdom, and goodness of God.

Because he was in effect dictating the method which was in direct opposition to the way in which God had prescribed for escape from the wages of sin and the attainment of eternal life. In the very plea that one should go from the dead to warn his brethren, there is the insinuation that if he had had some such

opportunity, if he had received a message from the beyond, or messengers from the dead, then he would have done it. There was the insinuation that he had not received sufficient warning, that he had not received sufficient warning.

His repeated insistence that a voice from the dead would be true, the persistent perversity of his thought, because he is insinuating that that is the way whereby man may escape, and therefore he is in direct contradiction to the wisdom and the grace. And there is not the slightest indication that the truth as expressed by Abraham, their Moses, and the Prophets had any effect in bringing about a change of concept. Reprobate mind.

You see that even in the place of woe, there was the subtle change upon the very integrity of God. When you go back to the beginning, what was the spear point of Satan's temptation? It was an attack upon the integrity of God. And he said, God doth know that in the dead shall surely die.

And you find that same malignity, that same subtlety, in this very attitude of mind on the part of the rich man, in a subtle, apparently plausible, misleading thought, which was a direct attack. No role of God. The great truth expressed, and again, is to hear not Moses.

Oh, what an elegance. The rich man, he made his request at the wrong time. He made his request in the wrong place, and he made his request with wrong God-disposing, God-conflicting.

The rich man made his request to the wrong person. Abraham, and the great truth which he... And we express that in terms of... In this, which corresponds exactly to that. Abraham appealed.

That is just as much as to say they have the Old Testament. Let them hear it. And our situation... And that is the word of God.

It is living and powerful. It is the power of God unto salvation. And that is the word.

It is the veil of the path and the way of life. A complete misconception, it is, of the way which infinite wisdom and grace desire or imagine any other way. It is wickedness and presumption of the deeper dark to demand another word as the basis or as the means of repentance and faith.

That is which the rich man's plea discloses. And that is the wickedness which this account on the part of our Lord reveals. And surely that is the great lesson for our responsibility, for our repentance, and for our faith.

That is the message which this particular passage entails, as I said at the beginning. The issues of life and death. The issues of irreversible death.

The issues of everlasting bliss and of irrevocable love, which our Lord unveils to us on this particular occasion. And in connection with that, He is enforcing this great message that we don't need emissaries from heaven or hell. We have God's own word to inform us and warn us.

If we reject, if we reject God's testimony, emissaries from heaven or from hell will not bring us to repentance. The only basis of faith and repentance is the word of God, and that word we now have. And if it's not counted, the law unto the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no God.

There is no light of day that will dawn upon the blackness of darkness of heaven that is the only outcome of that scripture. Oh, it is very easy for people no one has ever, and it is very easy for us to read, whether it be simply fraud, or whether there be in it something of the sinister agency of the demonic world, and the latter I verily believe. But whether it be simply the ministry of fraud, or whether it be the ministry of the demonic world, that holds by the marks of, they are voices from the prophets, let them hear them.

If they hear not voices from the prophets, neither would they be persuaded that one goes from the dead. Yes, visitors from heaven or hell would not bring us a message, would not bring us information which would have the validity, or the authority, or the power of the word of God. And particularly would it have nothing of the validity, or the authority, or the power of the Lord himself, who is the word of God incarnate, who is himself the way, the truth, and the life.

My friends, we have unveiled to us in this particular passage something of the great mystery. We have in this particular passage and also in other passages to give us the necessary warning and the necessary consolation. What we are faced with in the teaching of our Lord here at Calvary is the alternative of the irreversible death of everlasting bliss, of irrevocable woe, and the way of escape from the wages of sin, which is that place of woe and of torment, is none other than that of obedience to the revealed will of God.

All scripture is driven by inspiration of God and is trusted for reproof, for correction, for instruction, which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished. My friends, in conclusion, may I say this, let us avoid the subtleties which are the marks, those subtleties which are that gospel, which is the power of God. Let us learn it from all.

If they speak not according to this word, there is no warning. O Lord, our God, we pray, lay it up in our hearts, that we are comforted, O brethren, who are in this poor and afflicted, and oftentimes the inheritance incorruptible, O Father, Son,

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