

# Upside Down Kingdom (9)- Now He Is Comforted

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(Luke 16:19-31)

## I. Introduction

- A. One of the great watershed moments of history was sealed with a handshake
  - 1. Church in Acts experienced amazing growth (3000 → 5000 men → multitude)
    - a. Of course, the apostles did perform many great signs and wonders (**5:12**)
    - b. Biggest miracle was “*the believers were one in heart and mind*” (**3:32**)
  - 2. All of this growth was limited to **one area** (*Jerusalem*) and **people** (*Jews*)
    - a. That all changed with Saul and persecution scattered believers (**Acts 8:3**)
    - b. Also changed when a Saul (Paul) went with Barnabas to Antioch (**11:26**)
      - 1) At Antioch, Gentiles were 1<sup>st</sup> baptized and integrated into church
      - 2) That raised question, “*Must Gentiles proselyte and keep the Law?*”
    - c. In **Acts 15**, the church decides Gentile believers must follow only Jesus
  - 3. That led to watershed moment, a handshake that changed world (**Gal 2:9**)
    - a. Paul would begin his great missionary effort to the Gentile world
    - b. There is an interesting tidbit that Paul throws in the next verse (**Gal 2:10**)
      - 1) Before preaching to world, Paul was told to remember the poor!
      - 2) From beginning, preaching gospel and helping the poor are linked
- B. And yet, there have been times in our history when this has not been the case
  - 1. At turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a sharp division in Protestant churches
    - a. Mainline churches, swayed by liberal theology, stressed “**social gospel**”
      - 1) Social Gospel focused on helping the hungry, destitute, orphans, etc.
      - 2) It wanted to make society better—labor unions, women’s rights, etc.
    - b. Fundamentalists condemned these liberal interpretations of the Bible
      - 1) The job of the church was to preach the gospel; that was only task
      - 2) Humanitarian efforts to help poor was dismissed as “**social gospel**”
  - 2. So there came to be a separation between preaching gospel & helping poor
    - a. Liberal churches helped the poor and didn’t focus on preaching gospel
    - b. Conservative churches preached gospel, but didn’t really focus on poor
  - 3. Paul preached gospel and helped the poor. *Can the church do both today?*

C. Our parable for today is that of the Rich Man and Lazarus (**Luke 16:19-31**)

1. We have most often used this story to learn the details of the afterlife
  - a. Hades is the realm of the dead that's a prelude to Judgment Day
  - b. Hades is a place of both Paradise (*reward*) & Torment (*punishment*)
  - c. Angels carry righteous souls to God (*tell dying people angels are coming*)
  - d. The dead know what happens on earth (*rich man knows of his brothers*)
  - e. The dead also know of the other realm? (*rich man talks with Abraham*)
2. The details here reflect popular Jewish traditions of afterlife in Jesus' day
  - a. Jesus may simply use these; story is no more literal than streets of gold!
  - b. Jesus real point in this parable has to do with how we live our life NOW
3. Remember, we've called series on Luke's parables *Upside-Down Kingdom*
  - a. Here Jesus view is clearly upside-down—rich and poor switch places
  - b. God sees people differently than we see them... we'd better take note!

**II. Now He Is Comforted: The Parable (Reading: **Luke 16:19-31**)**

- A. There is conspicuous contrast here between the two main characters
1. The rich man (traditionally “*Dives*,” Latin for “*rich man*”) is really rich
    - a. He is dressed in purple and fine linen, both status symbols of the day
    - b. Jesus says that he “*lived in luxury*” (NIV) or “*feasted sumptuously*” (ESV)
      - 1) “*Luxury*” implies something of “*conspicuous consumption*” (MES)
      - 2) So Jesus really does stress that this guy is living high on the hog
  2. Lazarus, who is only named character in Jesus' parables, is poorest of poor
    - a. He was covered with sores and “*laid*” at rich gate – both show illness
    - b. And though Lazarus there at Dives' gate, he was basically ignored
      - 1) He “*longed to eat*” rich crumbs, implying he didn't do so regularly
      - 2) Dogs (*pests, not pets*) licked his sores—no one else cared for him
  3. Point is the contrast between the wealth of Dives and the need of Lazarus
    - a. There a contrast between conspicuous consumption and crushing want
      - 1) One man was dressing in designer clothes and eating gourmet food
      - 2) The other man was suffering in rags, in hunger and in sickness
    - b. And every day without fail or pause, one man walked by the other!

- B. But then the worm turns; both men die and there is a reversal of fortune.
1. Lazarus is carried by angels to paradise to “Abraham’s bosom” (KJV)
    - a. This was curious to me as kid; I imagined this as Abraham’s shirt pocket!
    - b. He reclines at banquet head table along with Abraham— a great honor
    - c. So now it is the beggar’s turn for a bit of conspicuous consumption!
  2. Dives on other hand, lifts up his eyes in hell, or literally in “Hades”
    - a. Greek “Hades” is “*realm of dead*,” roughly same as Hebrew “*Sheol*”
    - b. Generally, the word “Hades” is used of the place of the dead generically
      - 1) Peter says of Jesus, “*he was not abandoned to the grave*” ([Acts 2:31](#))
      - 2) If speaking of punishment, the word is usually “*Tartarus*” ([2 Pet 2:4](#))
      - 3) There’s an interesting statement on death, Hades & hell ([Rev 20:14](#))
  3. The point is this dramatic reversal of fortune—the last shall be first
    - a. Dives doesn’t get point; he sees Lazarus as a lackey to send on errand
      - 1) Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool his tongue ([16:24](#))
      - 2) Send Lazarus back to warn my brothers not to come here ([16:27](#))
    - b. Abraham says, “*now he is comforted here*” ([16:25](#)). *No lackey— Guest!*
- C. A major point here is the irreversibility of our final eternal destination
1. Lazarus’ position (and Dives) in eternity was is fixed—there is a great
    - a. Lazarus cannot come to the rich man to bring him relief from suffering
    - b. Lazarus cannot return from dead to warn brothers—they have scripture
  2. Whatever is done to change our destiny must be done this side of eternity!
    - a. There is no second chances after death—no purgatory, no court of appeal
      - 1) There was a big brouhaha in the news between Mormons and Jews
      - 2) Holocaust organization wanted Mormons to stop baptizing dead Jews
      - 3) Mormon practice of proxy baptism for the dead is ultimate 2<sup>nd</sup> chance
    - b. If you want to be baptized, must do it *this side* of eternity! ([2 Cor 6: 2](#))
  3. Parable says if we won’t hear scripture, won’t believe resurrection ([16:31](#))
    - a. Is that really true? Surely power of resurrection would convince anyone!
    - b. Remember the Pharisees’ response after Jesus did raise dead ([Jn 11:53](#))
    - c. And what was the name of that man Jesus raised from dead? *Lazarus!*

### III. Conclusion

- A. What is the point of the parable? Well, it's not Lazarus is saved for being poor.
1. Lazarus isn't the point of the story; he never speaks or does anything.
    - a. Lazarus in the story represents the poorest of the poor, weakest of weak.
    - b. The real point of the story is the reversal of fortune that takes place.
      - 1) Story begins with Lazarus suffering while the rich man is feasting.
      - 2) Story ends with Lazarus feasting and the rich man horribly suffers.
  2. **Question:** Which of these two would you want as a neighbor for eternity?
    - a. Where will our life of continued conspicuous consumption get us?
    - b. But we aren't the rich man, are we? Remember the stats from class?
      - 1) 92% of the people don't have a car... If you have a car, you're rich.
      - 2) 1 billion don't have clean water; we drink 400K cups of coffee a day.
      - 3) 800K people won't have anything eat today; 300K of them are kids.
    - c. Someone estimated it would take \$20 billion to for food and clean water.
    - d. We spend \$20 billion on ice cream and \$35 billion on weight loss.
- B. Are we the rich man stepping over the Lazarus who lays "At Our Gate"
1. **Last Week:** No sin to be rich; not spiritual to be poor. *Both have temptations*
    - a. Peter told Ananias "*Wasn't the money at your disposal*" (**Acts 5:4**)
    - b. God "*richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*" (**1 Tim 6:17**)
    - c. James says, "*Every good and perfect gift is from above*" (**Jam 1:17**)
  2. If we are rich, then God expects us to do MORE than just enjoy ourselves!
    - a. Paul tells the rich among us 3 important things in **1 Timothy 6:17-19**.
      - 1) Don't be arrogant because of wealth—you're no better than Lazarus.
      - 2) Don't to trust in your wealth—you could become like Lazarus.
      - 3) Don't forget to use your wealth—do something to help Lazarus.
    - b. It breaks God's heart if we enjoy our wealth and step over Lazarus.
  3. We called our program to help orphans in sub-Sahara Africa—**At My Gate**
    - a. If we are really are the rich man, then there is a Lazarus at our gate
    - b. As a church and as individuals, we need to be looking for Lazarus
    - c. Helping the poor is part of what it means to be faithful to the gospel