

"God's Love Story Sermon Outlines"

by Doug Hamilton

Section 29: Our "God's Love Story" Responsibilities

Luke 16:19-21 "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.²⁰ "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,²¹ and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

- Is this a parable or is it not? We don't know, for the text does not say indicate it one way or another. There are some who propose this is referring to Jesus' friend Lazarus from John 11, but that would be a stretch. Lazarus, whose name means "*God Helps*", was a common name in the first century. More importantly is the fact that the Lazarus Jesus knew was well-to-do and not a homeless beggar like this man. This is likely a parable in the mind of this writer since it has many of the elements of a parable and follows a string of parables. Certain things to understand about parables are the following:
 1. Parables were told by Jesus in the Bible for spiritual people to better understand a spiritual lesson. This is why worldly people would miss the meaning. Jesus stated this in *Matthew 13:13* "*Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*"
 2. Parables extrapolate a primary truth to be meditated upon by the hearer. Sometimes there might be a secondary point as well. We can do a disservice to the scriptures to read too much into the parable and go beyond that.
 3. Parables are based in the common perceptions of the culture. The parables which Jesus spoke on topics which the hearers would have been very familiar with such as agriculture, fishing, investing, etc. In other words, beyond finding the primary truth of the parable, we can learn much more about that society to whom Jesus was speaking.
- With that in mind we find truth about the culture which Jesus existed. There was a great gap in the personal economies of the day, a disparity between the rich and the poor. This certain man named Lazarus was a poor, homeless man with leprosy. This disease ravaged his health, his fellowship and his future. His healthcare consisted of dogs, the most unclean animal to a Jew, licking his infected sores on his body as he lie hungry and cold at the front gate of a nice home in an affluent neighborhood. This man had only one hope and it was in God. Behind that gate was a rich man. He had his health and wealth, eating the best of foods and dressing in the finest clothes. Lazarus would have given anything to have the crumbs which fell to the floor under the rich man's table, but it would not be. This is the reality of the culture of Jesus, the extremely rich and extremely poor.

Luke 16:22-24 "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.²³ "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.²⁴ "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' "

- There is one great equalizer in this realm that makes all people of every background the same; that equalizer is DEATH. Mortality does not care who we are, how much we make

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for a living, where we work or who we think we are. Death is an Equal Opportunity factor for all mankind. *Hebrews 9:27* "it is appointed unto men once to die, then comes judgment." Both Lazarus and rich man take their last breaths in this realm. Lazarus' body was likely deposited in the local burn pile at the dump called Gehenna, for that is what they did with the paupers of that day. In contrast, the rich man was very likely carefully embalmed, wrapped in fine linen, scented with perfume and placed in an impressive tomb. This is how things look through the eyes of the world.

- Through the eyes of heaven, reality set in. Lazarus was taken by angels to the bosom of Abraham for comfort. It was a blissful scene of relief for a man who was offered nothing from this world. For the rich man it was a completely different story. He was in torment with flames, desiring even to have one drop of water on his tongue from the fingertip of Lazarus. Their location was Hades, the place of disembodied souls.

Luke 16:25-26 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.' "

- The primary concept of Hades among the Jews in Jesus day is evident in this parable. They believed that Hades was divided into two parts, *paradiso* (paradise) and *tartarus* (torment). It was to Paradise which Jesus and the thief on the cross went to when dying at Calvary (Luke 23:43). It was *Tartarus* to which the angels were condemned until the Great Day of Judgment (2 Peter 2:4).
- They also believed that until that day of final reckoning from God all dying would depart to one of those two locations of Hades. They also believed there was a great chasm which separated the two, to which Jesus apparently also communicated. They believed upon the resurrection that all would be called out of Hades and receive either eternal life with God or eternal judgment from God. We know this is what Jesus believed and taught. *John 5:28-29* "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."
- Jesus clearly believed the way in which one lives in this life will affect which side of Hades they will end up for eternity. If they live a good life for God, then expect to be in Paradise and eventually in heaven. If we live a bad life, then expect to be in Tartarus and eventually in hell. *Revelation 20:12* And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Luke 16:27-31 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—²⁸ for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they

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will repent!' ³¹ "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.' "

- The rich man had no hope of ever changing his outcome, so he turned his attention to the living, particularly those of his own family. He had five brothers whom he wanted to warn about the dangers which awaited them. He begged Abraham to allow Lazarus to go back from the dead and warn the five brothers to change from their wicked ways.
- Abraham reminded him that Moses and the Prophets already gave them ample warning from the scripture, but that was not good enough for the rich man. "They need to see someone resurrect from the dead and go back to warn them of the calamity in the afterlife." Abraham clarified to him that if a man does not believe Moses and the Prophets, then someone coming back from the dead will not change their mind either."

What do we learn about God's Love Story and our responsibilities?

Like many parables, this one has a primary and a secondary point. Here they are in reverse order.

1. God's Love Story is about reaching out to the needy with our RESOURCES.

Right before this passage, Jesus addressed the Pharisees "*who were lovers of money...and were scoffing at Him*" (Luke 16:14). They heard what the Lord had spoken to His disciples about an unrighteous steward whom squandered his master's possessions. When the master was about to remove this man's authority, the steward moved to action to be of a service to the debtors. He reduced the debt of each to settle all the accounts, winning the favor of all those who owed. He was preparing for a future life of unemployment and homelessness by using what power he did have to make a difference for the poor and hurting (Luke 16:1-13). In the end the steward would be taken into the homes of the very needy he helped. That was what the master referred to as "*shrewd*".

This is the secondary lesser of the points of the parable. Jesus is reminding all in His presence that God gives us blessings in this world, not to heap treasure to ourselves, but to be a blessing to others. Is that true? What if we took all the money we spent on all those things we don't really need and put them to use helping hungry souls? What if we passed on that Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts for supporting a struggling missionary? What if we passed on the new car we wanted to help that fatherless child go to a Bible Camp? What if we forsook that 80 inch flat screen television to help that single-parent mother have her car repaired so she can keep her job?

It isn't that God does not want us to have things, for He does. What He does not want is for things to have us. We must learn from this parable that God's Love Story is about reaching out to the needy with our resources.

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2. God's Love Story is about reaching out to the needy with our GOSPEL.

To understand why this is the primary point of the parable, we must remember why Jesus even told His disciples about the unrighteous steward. To do so we must go to *Luke 15:1-2*. *Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.* ² *Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."* The tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and this drove the Pharisees and scribes to grumble. They could not understand why Jesus would even take the time to show attention to them. To this Jesus told three of the powerful evangelistic parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. He was informing all the crowd how much God loves the LOST. In the same way that a shepherd rejoices over a recovered lost lamb, in the same way that a woman rejoices over the recovery of a lost coin of great value, in the same way a father rejoices over the recovery a lost son, God REJOICES over the prospect of recovery of a LOST SINNER from the error of his way. GOD loves our souls!

After dealing with the materialistic ways of the Pharisees with the parable of the unrighteous steward, he addressed both groups in the last parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. By the end of the parable you have a condemned man in Hades, begging for an opportunity to evangelize five brothers. He was willing at all costs to encourage those five souls to receive a message that would change their eternal future. This is the same RICH MAN who was unwilling to walk to the end of the driveway to change the earthly future of Lazarus in his moment of despair! He is the most evangelistic and least effective person in biblical history.

Conclusion:

Are we really reaching out to others with the gospel of Jesus Christ like we should be? Do we really care about the souls of those who are around us to the point that we will take the time to tell them about Jesus and His plan of salvation?

Reaching out to the needy with our RESOURCES and our GOSPEL is the one-two punch of evangelism. If we will just live up to our true responsibility as Christians in this life, then we will make a difference in the eternal lives of all involved. Go and live God's Love Story and preach God's Love Story. That is our responsibility to God's Love Story!