

## **International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes**

**Lesson Text: Luke 16:19-31**

**Lesson Title: Instruction on True Wealth**

### **Introduction**

It is difficult in this materialistic and biblically ignorant age to get the facts concerning money and wealth. The media is filled with false prophets and false teachers exhorting you to send them your money, promising in return a great financial harvest. They call it "sowing your seed." If your harvest doesn't come in and produce as they promised, your lack of faith is too blame! The secular world encourages you to gamble your money by purchasing lottery tickets and investing in get rich quick schemes. The fact is, no one has ever "won" in a lottery and those get rich quick schemes are mirages in a desert.

Then there are those who think money and wealth is a private matter. Some people think preachers talk too much about money. Those who do should carefully read their Bibles. Three of the Ten Commandments deal with possessions, sixteen of the thirty-eight parables Jesus told deal either with money or with stewardship and one verse out of every six in the Gospel's is money related. The Bible is a book of instruction on true wealth.

Luke 16 records two significant stories related to wealth and money. Both of these stories give us some much needed insights about how we use wealth and money and how that relates to our present life and our future. In Luke 16:1-13, Jesus taught the parable of the unjust steward. He spoke about a rich man who had a manager who was accused of wasting his employer's possessions. When the employer demanded to see the books, the manager knew it was just a matter of time, and he would be without a job. In an attempt to secure his future, the manager called in his employer's debtors and lowered their debts. He hoped that by doing this these debtors would be grateful enough to help him out in return. What the manager forgot was that he was not in charge of the finances. That was a foolish mistake.

While Jesus was teaching His disciples, the Pharisees were listening and "*derided*" Jesus concerning His teaching (Luke 16:14). "*Derided*" means "turned up their nose, sneered." They gave that look as if Jesus had no clue what He was teaching. The reason they responded that way is the same reason men ignore the truth today about money and wealth. The Pharisees

were "*covetous*" (Luke 16:14). They loved money and wealth. It was their love for money and their self-righteous reaction to Jesus' teaching that led him to teach a second lesson about a beggar named Lazarus and a rich man. Like the first parable in Luke 16, this second story also looks to the future, not to show the wise use of money but to show the consequences of the misuse of money.

## **Wealth and Life (Luke 16:19-21)**

### Verse 19-21

"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 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores."

Jesus' story begins as a study in contrast between the two main characters, a "rich man" and "a certain beggar named Lazarus." This "Lazarus" is not the Lazarus raised from the dead in John 11.

"Lazarus" had nothing. As a "beggar" he was destitute of money, influence, position, and honor. The name "Lazarus" means "whom God helps" and makes this entire scenario ironic. A man named "Whom God helps" is lying helpless at the gate of a rich man. The word "laid" suggests he had been thrown down there, abandoned. He was dumped on the doorstep of a "rich man." The way Jesus frames this story suggests that "Lazarus" had become the "rich man's" responsibility. In ancient cultures, disabled people were often taken by family or friends to beg at the entrance of places where the rich dwelt or passed by. Sometimes the situations were so bad they would leave their disabled family member or friend hoping someone would provide.

The "rich man" enjoyed great material wealth and could have helped Lazarus if he so desired. He "fared sumptuously" or "radiantly" every day. Financially, things were great for the "rich man." In contrast, "Lazarus" had nothing. The rich man's clothing was the best of the day and his table was obviously satisfying and sufficient. While the "rich man" had everything he wanted, "Lazarus" was malnourished, hungry, covered with painful "sores," and the "dogs came and licked his sores." Jewish society thought of "dogs" the same way we would think of infected rats today.

Why does Jesus spend so much time with this contrast and detail? In the mind of the Pharisees, the "rich man's" wealth was proof positive of God's favor, which he

evidently earned at some point. Pharisees believed in a just God. Therefore, they reasoned if a man is poor and sick and in the condition of "Lazarus," God had not rewarded him. There must be some sin or lack of faith on his part. The "sores" in their way of thinking indicated God's displeasure. After all, a just God would not allow a righteous person to suffer unjustly, would He?

The thinking of the Pharisees is still alive today in the health and wealth gospel. The popular, yet unbiblical message of the day is that if you are right with God you will be healthy and wealthy. And, if for some reason you are not healthy and wealthy, you must have sin in your life or at least a weak faith. After all, a just God would not allow a righteous person to suffer unjustly, be sick, or poor, would He?

### **Wealth and Death (Luke 16:22)**

#### Verse 22

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried"

Proverbs 22:2 says, *"The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all."* While the "rich man" and "Lazarus" were worlds apart in how they lived, they both "died." Notice the emphasis Jesus places on "Lazarus" soul as opposed to the "rich man's" body. The soul of Lazarus "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom while the body of the "rich man" was "buried." Those listening to Jesus knew that Lazarus's body would have been carried away to the Valley of Hinnom" and buried with the rest of Jerusalem's refuse and trash. Jesus wanted them to focus on "Lazarus's" soul and the fact that it "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."

The exact meaning of "Abraham's bosom" is hard to know. In the Old Testament, when David died, he was said to be *"laid unto his fathers"* (Acts 13:36). *"Laid unto his fathers"* pictured a person being laid to rest on a shelf in the family tomb. Jesus' expression "into Abraham's bosom" pictures eternal rest in Heaven. Jesus is saying that "Lazarus" went where Abraham, the father of the Hebrew faith, now lives. When "Lazarus" died, he went to the place where the saved of all ages abide, Heaven. It's a glorious picture!

In comparison, the rich man "was buried." That's all Jesus says. It must have startled the listening Pharisees. They knew the funeral of the rich man would have consisted of family members, friends, associates, city officials, professional mourners and beautiful accessories such as colorful clothing, spices, and an

expensive burial cave. His "five brothers" (Luke 16:28) would have no doubt been a part of the funeral service and as they say today, "his celebration of life." Although Jesus didn't elaborate on these particular things, they were no doubt in the minds of His audience.

The Bible says, *"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible also says, *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). Because of sin death comes to all men. Rich or poor, everyone must eventually face their Creator, Jehovah God. Although people live today with no fear of death, every tombstone and graveyard in the world is a silent witness to the reality of death. If you are reading this you will, like the "rich man" and "Lazarus," die someday. As Doctor Vance Havner often said, "Tis only one life, twill soon be past, and only what's done for Christ will last" (Matthew 27:22).

### **Wealth and Eternity (Luke 16:23-31)**

#### Verse 23

"And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."

"He" in this verse is a reference to the "rich man." The "rich man" who "was buried" is now in "hell." "Hell" is the Greek word *hades*. *Hades* is a word used to describe the place of departed souls. It is the opposite of Heaven (Psalm 139:8; Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15). *Hades* is synonymous with *Gahanna*, a word referring to the Valley of Gahanna or Hinnom, the city dump of Jerusalem which constantly burned with fire. The "rich man" died and opened "his eyes" in hell, a place of "torment" and unquenchable fire and eternal consciousness.

The "rich man" was "in torments." The word "torments, torment and tormented" is mentioned four times in this story (Luke 16:23, 24, 25, 28). "Torment" comes from a Greek word which means "severe pain caused by torture." "Hell" is no party. It is a real place where those who have rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ and lived for self will be "tormented" forever. While some challenge the existence and reality of such a place, Jesus teaches that it exists. If there is a Heaven for all who have been redeemed by God's saving grace there is a hell for those who have rejected Christ.

"Hell" is a conscious place. The "rich man" while being "tormented" was able to "lift up his eyes...and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." How this was possible in light of the existence of the "great gulf" between the two places is

difficult to explain. However, the Bible says, "and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom," so that settles it. Somehow the "rich man" was able to "perceive," either *literally* or *mentally* the difference in where he was and "tormented" and where the "beggar" was, in "Abraham's bosom" resting and secure.

*Note: Jesus' teaching here in Luke 16 was not designed to give us an exhaustive description of hell or the "torments" associated with it. The truth concerning hell and eternal torment is described in greater detail throughout God's Word.*

#### Verse 24

"And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

The rich man "cried" pleading, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." His cry asserted his kinship with "Father Abraham." In fact, he calls him "father" three times in the text (Luke 16:27, 30). The rich man, so insensitive in this life, may even have thought he was in good standing with "Father Abraham" since he was a Jew and so he seems to dictate what should happen next. Perhaps his wealth had allowed him to call the shots while he lived but that has all changed now that death has come and hell is his home.

"Send Lazarus," that he may "cool my tongue." The "tongue" represents that part of him that had tasted life's best. The rich man didn't need Lazarus while he was living in his wealth and self-righteousness but he wants him to come now and "cool" his tongue. While "Lazarus" had longed for "crumbs which fell from the rich man's table" (Luke 16:21), the rich man is now begging for a drop of water. The temporal suffering of "Lazarus" while on earth is nothing compared to the eternal suffering the "rich man" will experience forever.

#### Verse 25

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

In Jesus' story, the response of "Abraham" to the rich man was a rebuke for his apathy during life. "Abraham's" response was to the point, yet tender as he

addressed the rich man as "Son." He said, "Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." On a previous occasion Jesus had spoken to the Pharisees and the multitudes and said, "*But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation*" (Luke 6:24). The "rich man" in this story had obviously already received his comfort and now he is eternally "tormented" while "Lazarus" is "comforted."

Commenting on this passage, R. Kent Hughes writes, "Jesus was not teaching that there will be an automatic reversal of roles in Heaven, but rather that his judgment will be equitable." This story is not just about rich people going to hell and poor people going to Heaven. This story is about being in a right relationship with the Lord. And how one uses their wealth or poverty says a lot about the reality of that relationship.

The rich man bought his comfort and easy life with his riches and that's what his money could give him. But wealth and money has no buying power in hell. "Lazarus," spent his life with "evil things" or things no one would desire because that was all he could do. "Lazarus" is now comforted in Heaven and the rich man is "tormented."

#### Verse 26

"And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

The "great gulf fixed" is a distance between Heaven and hell that God has created. While here in this world the rich man could have reached out to "Lazarus" if he had so desired but now that is not possible. Once death has come there is no bridge or hand of mercy that can reach from one place to the other. No one in hell will ever go to Heaven and no one in Heaven will ever go to hell. There is no such thing as purgatory or an escape from hell. There is no truth to the teaching that someone can pay penitence for a sinner to be released from hell or that you can be baptized for someone who is in hell and they will be set free and go to heaven. That is unscriptural.

#### Verse 27-28

"Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

The rich man is convinced that he is in hell forever because he now becomes concerned for his "five brethren" who are at his "father's house." Evidently, the rich man's brothers are living the same way the rich man was before he died and he doesn't want them to continue living that way and end up in hell. Throughout his life, the rich man cared only for himself. With all the money and wealth he had he never saw a need to help anyone, even the beggar that lay at his gate. But now, with the flames of hell leaping around his soul, he finally recognized truth he had ignored in life.

By placing these "five brethren" in the story, Jesus seems to be introducing an element of hope in a rather hopeless situation. Jesus is reminding the Pharisees and us that where there is life there is hope. In spite of the fact that we live in a materialistic and self-righteous culture, sinners don't have to continue to live selfish and the certainly don't have to die that way. Christ is the answer!

*Question: What will it take to cause you to take an interest in the eternal destination of others? Do you know anyone who needs to be warned about eternity?*

#### Verse 29

"Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."

While the rich man thought that if someone came out of hell and testified to his brothers about the torment of hell, that it would produce a change of heart. But "Father Abraham" thought otherwise. He said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." Those still alive on earth had the Word of God, and that is all they needed! Sinful man cannot be talked into eternal life or talked out of going to hell. The only power that can change the sinners heart is the word of God (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23).

#### Verse 30-31

"And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

The rich man disagreed with "Abraham" and suggested that if someone were to rise from the dead, his brothers would "repent." "A man named Lazarus in John 11 *did* come back from the dead and some of the people wanted to kill him! (John 11:43-57: 12:10). Those who claim that there can be no effective evangelism without "signs and wonders" need to ponder this passage and also John 10:41-42." (*Bible Exposition Commentary, BE Series-New Testament-The Bible Exposition Commentary—New Testament, Volume 1.*)

Of course, "one" rising "from the dead" foreshadows the Lord's own resurrection, but no other human phenomenon would convince anyone to "repent." There is not a testimony more compelling and powerful than the message of the gospel as recorded in God's infallible Word! God's Word is more convincing and convicting than any supernatural event such as "one" rising "from the dead." Jesus wanted the Pharisees to hear His teaching and believe the truth and turn from their self-righteous life and be saved. Sadly, few ever did.

## **Conclusion**

This unique story of the rich man and Lazarus was declared by our Lord for several reasons. First, the way the Pharisees looked at what they had and their attitude toward others didn't square with God's demands. In their minds, wealth and success was a sign of God's favor. Therefore, they must be right with God. The Pharisees didn't mind helping the poor a little but even when they did they wanted the poor to know they were superior. Second, the "rich man" was the only one in this story to use the word "repent." Jesus wants everyone to know that God is not pleased by your poverty or your riches. Everyone must "repent" to be right with God. The rich man realized that truth too late. Third, God's Word is the only effective agent to change a man's heart. You can talk and argue about wealth and poverty all day long but only the word of God has the power to change a man's heart (1 Corinthians 1:21). Fourth, there is a Heaven to gain and a hell to shun. Many listening to Jesus tell this story was headed to hell. What about you?

Whether it's possessions or actual money in hand, wealth is an important topic in the teachings of Jesus. The proper use of money, or the improper use of money, can make an eternal difference for all of us. If you play by the rules of this present world you will play for self, and, therefore, the only rule is to win. The rule of Christ's kingdom is grace. Being a part of His kingdom is about humility and compassion. You must choose which kingdom you will serve (Luke 16:13).

Amen.



