

How Jesus Reached the Lost

Lesson 1: Jesus' Story about Life and Death, Heaven and Hell, Luke 16:19-31

A Summary of Luke 16:19-31: Is the story a true story or a parable?

- Many believe it is a parable.
- Some believe it is a true story because Jesus used a personal name (Lazarus) for the main character.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

^{ESV} **Luke 16:19** "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table.



Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham

far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- ²⁸ for I have five brothers--so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

1. Why was Abraham unable to send Lazarus to the rich man? (26)

2. When did the rich man begin to have compassion on his brothers? (27)

3. What are the two parts of repentance?

a. S _____ for sin.

b. F _____ in J _____ for the forgiveness of all s_____.

4. Would the resurrection of a dead man lead someone to repent? (30-31) Y N
5. What is the means through which God works to lead people to repent? (1 Peter 1:23) _____

Luke 16:31 Comment: Another Lazarus (John 11) did return from the dead. But not all witnesses were moved: ^{ESV} John 11:45 Many of the Jews... who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.... ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

Repentance and faith are wrought through the Word of God, not dramatic experiences. “The reason some are not saved is as follows: They do not listen to God’s Word at all, but willfully despise it, plug their ears, and harden their hearts. In this way they block the ordinary way [Luke 16:29] for the Holy Spirit so He cannot perform His work in them. Or, when they have heard God’s Word, they make light of it again and ignore it. But their wickedness is responsible for this ‹that they perish›, not God or His election” (FC Ep XI 12).

Luke 16:19-31 Comment about blessings now versus blessings later: Jesus challenges the belief that earthly blessings are a sign of God’s eternal favor. He teaches us to heed the Word of God now while faithful mercy can be shown...¹

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¹ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1751). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Luther on the Rich Man and Lazarus

The First Sunday after Trinity, [Luke 16:19-31](#)

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil, 1522-1523.

1. We have hitherto heard in our Gospel lessons of various examples of faith and of love; for as they all teach faith and love, I hope you are abundantly and sufficiently informed that no human being can be pleasing to God unless he believes and loves [*love never adds to faith – we are saved by faith alone, but love is the evidence of faith; James 2:25-26*]. Now in this Gospel text the Lord presents to us at the same time an example of faith and of unbelief..., in order that we also may abhor...the opposite of faith and love, and that we may cleave to faith and love more diligently.

For here we see the judgment [*verdict*] of God upon the believers and the unbelievers, which is both dreadful and comforting. Dreadful to the faithless and comforting to the faithful. But in order that we may the better grasp the meaning of this text we must picture to ourselves both the rich man and poor Lazarus. In the rich man we see the nature of unbelief and in Lazarus the nature of belief.

PART I – THE RICH MAN:

2. We must not view the rich man according to his outward conduct; for he is in sheep's clothing, his life glitters and shines beautifully, while he tactfully conceals the wolf. For this Gospel text does not accuse him of adultery, of murder, or robbery, of violence or of having done anything that the world or reason would censure.... For had he committed such glaring sins the Gospel would have mentioned them since it examines him so particularly that it describes even the purple robe he wore and the food he ate, which are only external matters and God does not judge according to

them. Therefore he must have led outwardly an exemplary, holy life; and according to his own opinion and that of others, he must have kept the whole law of Moses.

3. But we must look into his heart and judge his spirit. For the Gospel has penetrating eyes and sees deep into the secret recesses of the soul; reproves also the works which reason cannot reprove, and looks not at the sheep's clothing, but at the true fruit of the tree to learn whether it is good or not, as the Lord teaches in [Mat. 7:17](#). Hence if we judge this rich man according to the fruits of faith, we will find a heart and a tree of unbelief. For the Gospel chastises him that he fares sumptuously every day and clothes himself so richly, which reason never considers as especially great sins. Besides, the work-righteous people think it is right, and that they are worthy of it, and have merited it by virtue of their holy lives, and they do not see how they thus sin by their unbelief.

4. For this rich man is not punished because he indulged in sumptuous fare and fine clothes; since many saints, kings and queens in ancient times wore costly apparel, as Solomon, Esther, David, Daniel and others; but because his heart was attached to them [[Mt. 6:21](#)], sought them, trusted in and chose them, and because he found in them all his joy, delight and pleasure; and made them in fact his idols. This Christ indicates by the words "every day," that he lived thus sumptuously daily, continuously. From this is seen that he diligently sought and chose such a life, was not forced to it nor was he in it by accident, or because of his office or to serve his neighbor; but he only thereby gratified his own lust, and lived to himself and served only himself.

5. Here one traces the secret sins of his heart as the evil fruit. For where faith is, there is no anxiety for fine clothing and sumptuous feasting, yea, there is no longing for riches,

honor, pleasure, influence and all that is not God himself; but there is a seeking and a striving for and a cleaving to nothing except to God, the highest good alone; it is the same to him whether his food be dainty or plain, whether his clothing be fine or homespun. For although they even do wear costly clothes, possess great influence and honor, yet they esteem none of these things; but are forced to them, or come to them by accident, or they are compelled to use them in the service of others.

Thus queen Esther says, that she bore the royal crown against her will, and that she had to wear it for the sake of the King. David also would rather have lived a private life; but for the sake of God and of his people he had to become king. In like manner all the saints considered that they were constrained to fill their stations of influence, honor and glory; and their hearts were never entangled by them, and labored in these external things to be helpful to their neighbor...

6. But where unbelief reigns man is absorbed by these vanities, he cleaves to them, seeks them and has no rest until he has acquired them, and after he possesses them, he feeds and fattens himself with them as the swine wallow in the mire, and finds at the same time his happiness and felicity [[contentment](#)] there. He never inquires how his heart stands with his God and what he possesses in God and may expect from him; but his belly is his God; and if he cannot get what he wants, he imagines things are going wrong. And lo, these dreadful and wicked fruits of unbelief the rich man does not see, he covers them over, and blinds his own eyes by the good works of his pharisaical life, and hardens himself until no teaching, exhortation, threatening nor promise can help him. Behold, this [[what I have just described](#)] is the secret sin which today's Gospel punishes and condemns.

7. From this now follows the other sin, that he forgets to exercise love toward his neighbor; for there he lets poor Lazarus lie at his door, and offers him not the least assistance. And if he had not wished to help him personally, he should have commanded his servants to take him in and care for him. It may have been, he knew nothing of God and had never experienced his goodness. For whoever feels the goodness of God, feels also for the misfortune of his neighbor; but whoever is not conscious of the goodness of God, sympathizes not in the misfortune of his neighbor. Therefore as he has no pleasure in God, he has no heart for his neighbor.

8. For the nature of faith is that it expects all good from God, and relies only on God. For from this faith man knows God, how he is good and gracious, that by reason of such knowledge his heart becomes so tender and merciful, that he wishes cheerfully to do to everyone, as he experiences God has done to him. Therefore he breaks forth with love and serves his neighbor out of his whole heart, with his body and life, with his means and honor, with his soul and spirit, and makes him partaker of all he has, just like God did to him. Therefore he does not look after the healthy, the high, the strong, the rich, the noble, the holy persons, who do not need his care; but he looks after the sick, the weak, the poor, the despised, the sinful people, to whom he can be of benefit, and among whom he can exercise his tender heart, and do to them as God has done to him.

9. But the nature of unbelief is that it does not expect any good from God. By which unbelief the heart is blinded so that it neither feels nor knows how good and gracious God is; but as [Psalm 14:2](#) says: he cares not for God, seeks not after him. Out of this blindness follows further that his heart becomes so hard, obdurate [*stubborn*] and unmerciful that he has

no desire to do a kindness to his fellow man; yea, he would rather harm and offend everybody. For as he is insensible to the goodness of God, so he takes no pleasure in doing good to his neighbor. Consequently it follows that he does not look after the sick, poor and despised people, to whom he could and should be helpful and profitable; but he casts his eyes upward and sees only the high, rich and influential, from whom he himself may receive advantage, gain, pleasure and honor.

10. So we see now in the example of the rich man that it is impossible to love, where no faith exists, and impossible to believe, where there is no love; for both will and must be together, so that a believer loves everybody and serves everybody; but an unbeliever at heart is an enemy of everybody and wishes to be served by every person and yet he covers all such horrible, perverted sins with the little show of his hypocritical works as with a sheep's skin; just as that large bird, the ostrich, which is so stupid that when it sticks its head into a bush, it thinks its entire body is concealed. Yea, here you see that there is nothing blinder and more unmerciful than unbelief. For here the dogs, the most irascible [*irritable*] animals, are more merciful to poor Lazarus than this rich man, and they recognize the need of the poor man and lick his sores; while the obdurate, blinded hypocrite is so hard hearted that he does not wish him to have the crumbs that fell from his table.

11. Now all unbelieving people are like this rich hypocrite.... They are not moved in the least by the poverty of others.... These are the rich man.

PART II – POOR LAZARUS:

12. Likewise we must not judge poor Lazarus in his sores, poverty and anxiety, according to his outward appearance. For many persons suffer

from affliction and want, and yet they gain nothing by it; for example King Herod suffered a great affliction, as is related in [Acts 12:23](#); but afterwards he did not have it better before God on account of it. Poverty and suffering make no one acceptable to God; but, whoever is first acceptable to God, his poverty and suffering are precious in the eyes of God, as [Ps. 116:15](#) says: "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints."

13. Thus we must look into the heart of Lazarus also, and seek the treasure which made his sores so precious. That was surely his faith and love; for without faith it is impossible to please God, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, 11:6. Therefore his heart also must have confessed that he even in the midst of such poverty and misery expected all good from God, and comfortably relied upon him; with whose blessings and grace he was so richly satisfied, and had such pleasure in them, that he would have heartily and willingly suffered even more misery, if the will of his gracious God had so determined. See, that is a true, living faith, which softened his heart by the knowledge of the divine goodness; so that nothing was too heavy or too much to suffer and to do....

14. From this faith follows now another virtue, namely, love to one's neighbor, so that he is willing and ready to serve everybody; but since Lazarus is poor and in misery himself, he had nothing with which he could serve others; therefore his good will is taken for the deed.

15. But this lack of service in temporal things he abundantly makes good by his services in things spiritual. For even now, long after his death, he serves the whole world with his sores, hunger and misery. His bodily hunger feeds our spiritual hunger; his bodily nakedness clothes (or feeds, as some editions read) our spiritual nakedness; his bodily sores heal our spiritual

sores; in this way he teaches and comforts us by his example, how God is pleased with us, when we are not prosperous here upon the earth, if we believe; and warns us how God is angry with us, even if we are prosperous in our unbelief; just as God had pleasure in Lazarus in his misery, and was displeased with the rich man.

16. Tell me, what king could have rendered a service to the whole world with his possessions, like poor Lazarus has done with his sores, hunger and poverty? Oh, the wonderful works and judgments of God! In what a masterly manner he puts to shame the cunning goddess and fool of this world, namely, reason and worldly wisdom! She stalks abroad and fixes her eyes rather upon the beautiful purple of the rich man, than upon the wounds of poor Lazarus; she would rather center her eyes upon a healthy, handsome person, as this rich man was, than upon a revolting and naked person like Lazarus; yea, she holds her nose before the stench of his wounds and turns her eyes from his nakedness. Thus the great goddess and fool of this world overlooks God in the very presence of such a noble treasure, and always quietly passes her own judgment, and at the same time makes this poor person so precious and dear, that all the kings hence are not worthy to serve him or to dress his sores. For what king, do you think, would not now with his whole heart exchange his health, purple and crown for the sores, poverty and misery of poor Lazarus, if it were possible for him to do so? And what person is there who would now give a snuff for the purple and all the riches of this rich man?

17. Do you not think that this rich man himself, had he not been so blind and had known that such a treasure, a man so precious in the eyes of God, was dying at his gate, would have run out, and dressed and kissed his sores, and laid

him in his best bed; and made all his purple and riches to serve him? But at the time God's judgment went forth, he did not see that he could do it. Then God thought, truly, you are not worthy to serve him. When later the judgment and work of God were accomplished, the wise fool begins to come to himself; and since he suffers now in hell he will gladly give his house and land, to whom before he would not give a crumb of bread; and wishes now that Lazarus might cool his tongue with the tips of his fingers, whom before he would not touch.

18. Behold, even at the present day God is filling the world with such judgments and works, but no one sees it; yea, everybody despises it. There are continually before our eyes poor and needy persons, whom God lays before us as the greatest treasures; but we close our eyes to them, and see not what God does there; later, when God has done his work, and we have neglected the treasure, then we hasten and wish to serve, but we waited too long. Then we begin and make sacred relics of their garments, shoes and furniture, and make pilgrimages to and erect churches over their graves, are occupied with many like foolish deeds and thus ridicule ourselves in that we permit the living saints to be trodden under our feet and to perish, and we worship their garments, which is neither necessary nor of any use...

19. All believers are like poor Lazarus; and every believer is a true Lazarus, for he is of the same faith, mind and will, as Lazarus. And whoever will not be a Lazarus, will surely have his portion with the rich glutton in the flames of hell. For we all must like Lazarus trust in God, surrender ourselves to him to work in us according to his own good pleasure, and be ready to serve all men. And although we all do not suffer from such sores and poverty, yet the same mind and will must be in us, that were in

Lazarus, cheerfully to bear such things, wherever God wills it.

20. For such poverty of spirit may exist in those who have very great possessions; as Job, David, Abraham were poor and rich. For David in [Ps. 39:12](#) says: "I am a stranger with thee, a sojourner, as all my fathers were." How could that be, since he was a king and possessed extensive lands and large cities? Thus it came about; although he indeed possessed these, yet his heart did not cleave to them, and they were as nothing compared with the riches he had with God. Likewise he had said of the health of his body that it was as nothing compared to the health of his soul before God, and he would indeed not have murmured, had God afflicted him with bodily sores and sickness. So Abraham also, although he had not the poverty and affliction of Lazarus, yet he had the mind and will to bear what Lazarus did, if God had visited him thus. For the saints should have one and the same inner mind and spirit, but they cannot have the same outward work and suffering. Therefore Abraham also recognized Lazarus as one of his own and received him into his bosom; which he would not have done, were he not of the same mind and had he not taken pleasure in the poverty and maladies [\[sicknesses\]](#) of Lazarus. Thus is set forth the sum and meaning of the Gospel, that we may see, how faith everywhere saves and unbelief condemns.