

The One God Helps

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 16:1-31

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Rich and Poor

This morning, we return to the Gospel of Luke. Luke is divided into three big parts. The first part deals with Jesus' time in Galilee, the second with his journey to Jerusalem, and the third with his time in Jerusalem. Over the next four weeks, we'll finish the second part of Luke before Advent. Then, we'll return to the third part after the first of the year.

One of Luke's main themes is Jesus' compassion for the social outcasts. We've seen his compassion for Samaritans and Gentiles, tax collectors and sinners, women, and the poor.¹ In our passage this morning we encounter the poor again.

Throughout Luke, we see the fulfillment of what Mary spoke of in the Magnificat:

*He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty (1:51-53).*

What does this mean? Does it mean the rich will be judged just because they're rich, and the poor will be saved just because they're poor? Or does this mean all rich people are evil, and the poor are all godly? Is it true that "if you live well you'll end up in hell and if you live with pain you'll experience eternal gain?" I don't think that's what the Bible teaches. There are godly people in the Bible who are rich. And there are sinners in the Bible who are poor.²

However, I do think there's some level of connection between those who are materially poor and spiritually poor in Luke. Generally speaking, those who are rich materially don't see their need for God's help spiritually. And those who are poor materially do see their need for God's help spiritually. At a minimum, Luke uses those who are materially poor to show us what we must be spiritually. We must humble ourselves before God and see that we are utterly dependent on him to lift us up. Also, if we see our spiritual poverty, it will affect the way we treat those who are materially poor. And it will affect the way that we use our material resources to take care of the needs of others who are spiritually poor. In other words, how we use our money reveals something about our heart. If we don't think we need any help in this life, it may show that we don't think we need any help getting into the next life.

You've heard it said, God helps those who help themselves. But the Bible teaches that God helps those who realize they *can't* help themselves. And those who realize they need God's help will be the type of people who are willing to help others.

These are the lessons that come out in our passage this morning.

¹ Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009.

² Carson, D.A. "Luke 16." Sermon, Transform 2017, EFCA Midwest District Conference, February 20-21, 2017.

Luke 16:1-31³

¹He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ²And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ ³And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ ⁵So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ ⁷Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ ⁸The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

¹⁰“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹²And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

¹⁴The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

¹⁶“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

¹⁸“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And 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.’ ²⁵But 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. ²⁶And 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.’ ²⁷And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

This is the Word of the Lord.

³ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

This passage is divided into three parts. There's the parable of the dishonest manager in verses 1-12, there's a rebuke of the Pharisees in verses 13-18, and there's the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in verses 19-31.

I'm only going to focus on the first and last parables, but I'll be drawing on the rebuke throughout. These two parables teach us two lessons about spiritual and material poverty and possessions.

THE DISHONEST MANAGER (1-12)

Let's begin with the parable of the dishonest manager in verses 1-12.

This parable is really basic at one level, but very confusing at another. The story is basic. There's a rich master who has put a manager in charge of his accounts (v. 1a). We don't know the specifics, but the manager was wasting his master's money and was fired (vv. 1b-2). But before he cleaned out his desk, the manager decided he would do something that would help him when he was thrown out on the street (vv. 3-4). He called all of the people who owed his master money into the office, and began reducing their bills drastically (vv. 5-7). As you can imagine, he made a lot of friends this way! His reasoning was simple: "I'll scratch your back and you scratch mine." He'd save them a bunch of money, so when he was kicked to the curb they'd give him a place to stay.

That part of the parable is easy to understand. The confusing part comes in verses 8a-9. "The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness." He commended him for being so smart, even though he was dishonest. And Jesus also seems to commend his actions. He says, "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." Why would his master commend him when he was dishonest? And why does Jesus use this parable as an example of what his disciples should do (cf. v. 1)?

It's important to realize that parables shouldn't be taken too far. Usually, they're only being used to make one point. And the same is true for this parable. This parable is not being used to praise dishonesty. It's being used to praise shrewdness. That's all. The dishonest manager is being praised for his foresight. He anticipated his future financial needs and took action to make friends now that would receive him later.⁴

The point is similar for us. We should use temporal possessions now for kingdom purposes, knowing we'll receive an eternal possession.⁵ The key to understanding this parable is found in verses 8-9. Jesus says that often times unbelievers ("sons of the world") show more foresight than believers ("sons of light"). Sometimes unbelievers are better stewards with their money for the sake of securing earthly possessions than believers are in securing heavenly possessions. We should learn from them.

We all have access to what Jesus calls unrighteous wealth, or mammon. Unrighteous wealth is not necessarily money that's received through dishonesty. And it's not necessarily evil. It's just money.⁶ The reason he calls it unrighteous wealth is simply to make a contrast between temporal possessions and eternal possessions.

⁴ Cf. Grudem, Wayne, and Thomas R. Schreiner. "Luke Study Notes." in *ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2008.

⁵ Blomberg, Craig. *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*. New studies in biblical theology. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1999, p. 122.

⁶ Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, p. 122

Money in this life will eventually fail (v. 9). But we can use it now for things that won't fail! We can use money now to make friends who will receive us in eternal dwellings, in a similar way that the dishonest manager used money to make friends who would receive him into temporary housing!

How do we use money in such a way that we will make friends who will receive us into permanent housing? Well, we have to use money in such a way that other people will end up in heaven! For Jesus, what this means is that we should use money to help take care of the poor and needy and to help advance the kingdom of God. That's what faithfulness looks like. That's how to be a good manager of God's money!

Motivation

But why would we want to do that? Why would we want to use money to help others? It's because we realize that the riches in this life don't compare with the true riches of heaven. The riches of earthly dwellings don't compare with the eternal dwellings. If we come to understand "how rich a treasure we possess" in the kingdom of God, it will drive us to steward the money God has given us now in such a way that we'll help others to come to possess the riches of the kingdom too!

If we're not willing to steward money to help others, it may reveal that we don't realize how rich a treasure we possess. And that's why Jesus says in verse 11, "And if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"

When we realize how rich we are in heavenly blessings (cf. Eph. 1:3), we can become poorer here on earth to help others in need both physically and spiritually.⁷ That's what the first parable teaches us.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (19-31)

Let's now turn to the second parable—the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The first parable shows us a positive example of someone who used their money now to benefit them later. The second parable shows us a negative example of someone who used their money in this life in such a way that they suffered for it later.

This parable is divided into two parts. In the first part there's a contrast between the rich man and Lazarus. In the second part there's a conversation between the rich man and Abraham.

The Contrast

The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus is stark. The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen. This shows us just how rich this rich man was. In the ancient world, purple dye was really hard to come by. It came from a tiny gland in a snail. In order to get enough purple dye to make a robe, you would have to break open at least ten thousand snails. Only very rich people could afford the snails and the servants to do that labor. But that's not all. This man was also clothed in fine linen. This is referring to Egyptian cotton, the rarest cotton in the ancient world. And this linen would have been used to make this rich man's undergarments.⁸ Don Carson says that what Jesus wants us to know is that this man was so rich that even his underwear was posh!⁹

⁷ Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, p. 122

⁸ Ken Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, quoted in Schroeder, Joel. "[The Rich Man and Lazarus](#)." Sermon, Sunny Side Baptist Church.

⁹ Carson

Not only is the rich man dressed well. He also feasts sumptuously every day. The middle class would have feasted from time to time, but their normal diet was soup and bread. But this man has a feast every day. He's very wealthy!

This is a stark contrast to a poor man named Lazarus. Lazarus is lying at the gate of the rich man; this means that Lazarus was a beggar. How was Lazarus dressed? He's covered in sores. And what did Lazarus eat? We're not told. We're only told that he desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Any decent rich man would've taken care of the poor at their gate. But Lazarus' desires are not met. All we know is that this rich man's guard dogs took better care of Lazarus than the rich man; they came and licked his sores.

So we see a stark contrast between the earthly possessions of the rich man and Lazarus. But we also see an eternal contrast between them in verses 22-23. In fact, it's a great reversal. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried, but he ended up in Hades in torment. He was burning in hell. And to make matters worse he could see Lazarus in heaven.

The Conversation

And so, he engages in a conversation with Abraham. Again, remember that we mustn't press the details of a parable too far. It's a parable, not an account of a real event. This parable is not teaching us that people in hell can talk to people in heaven. The story provides a format for Jesus to teach us a different lesson.

In our day, we have many pearly gate jokes. They're a format to make fun of someone and they usually go something like this: (I'm telling this joke for Mike Andrus' sake.)

A lawyer and the Pope both died and both went to heaven. They were met at the Pearly Gate by St. Peter who conducted them to their rooms. The Pope's room was Spartan with bare floor, army cot for a bed, and a single bulb for light. They came to the Lawyer's room. It was huge with wall to wall carpeting, king sized water bed, indirect lighting, color TV, stereo, Jacuzzi and fully stocked bar. The lawyer said, "There must be a mistake. This must be the Pope's room!" St. Peter said, "There's no mistake. This is your room. We have lots of Pope's, but you're our very first lawyer."

You see, pearly gate stories don't depict reality, but they're a form of a story used to make fun of someone. There's something similar going on with this parable.¹⁰ There were a lot of "Abraham's-bosom" stories people told to make theological points. Jesus isn't saying that heaven is Abraham's bosom, any more than a person who uses a pearly gate story is saying that Peter guards the gate to heaven or that our rooms in heaven are furnished. He's using this format to make a point.

So what is the point of this parable? It comes out in the conversation between the rich man and Abraham. The conversation is divided into two parts, and it teaches us two things.

Part One

First, we will receive our eternal due after we die. In verse 24, the rich man asks Abraham to have mercy on him and to send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water to cool his tongue because he's in anguish in the flame. It's an ironic statement. The rich man showed no mercy to Lazarus during his lifetime, and now he wants Lazarus to show him mercy. But he hasn't fundamentally

¹⁰Schroeder

changed. Sure, he wants to be relieved of his anguish; but don't confuse his request for mercy with repentance. He still sees himself as a person with power. And he still sees Lazarus as a peon. He doesn't even tell Lazarus he's sorry. He says to send Lazarus to relieve his torment. He's treating Lazarus like a slave.

There was no repentance during the rich man's life. And even if it were possible, there's still no repentance from him in hell. In verse 15, Jesus says, "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." The rich man is still exalting himself above Lazarus. And God will bring down the mighty (1:52).

So in verse 25, Abraham says, "You received good things in your lifetime and Lazarus bad things. Now he's comforted and you're in anguish." It's as if he's saying, "What did you expect? If you would've made friends with Lazarus with your earthly wealth, you'd be received by Lazarus into heavenly dwellings. But you didn't. You took care of yourself, and only yourself, during your lifetime. You showed that you didn't need anybody's help. And now, you'll get nobody's help. You're getting the very thing you wanted."

And not only that. Abraham goes on in verse 26 to say that there's a great chasm that's been fixed. Nobody in heaven is going to hell and nobody in hell is going to heaven. Once you die, that's it. It is appointed for man to die once and then come judgment. Your chances to repent of your sins and turn to God are over after you die!

It's interesting. Lazarus is the only character in a parable to receive a name. It shows how significant he is to Jesus. And his name means, "The one God helps." That's the title of my sermon. God lifts up and helps those who see their need for him. And he brings down those who don't think they need God. The rich man was like the Pharisees. In verse 15, Jesus says the Pharisees justify themselves. They don't look to God for help; they try to help themselves. They don't love God; they love money (v. 14). They don't serve God. They serve money (v. 13). And that's proven in the fact that they don't love others and they don't serve others. It's proven in the fact that they don't take care of the needs of others. Clearly the rich man was like the Pharisees. He didn't see his own need. And he didn't take care of the needs of others. So he received his due.

If that's where you find yourself today, what should you do? If you are depending on your own resources, if you aren't looking for God's help, if you aren't showing your own spiritual poverty by taking care of the needs of others, what should you do? The answer to that question comes out in the second part of the conversation.

Part Two

It teaches us that we must repent and believe the gospel now before it's too late. After Abraham tells the rich man it's too late for him, the rich man turns his attention to his family. In verses 27-28, he thinks, "If Lazarus can't help me in hell, maybe he can keep my brothers out of hell." So he says to Abraham, "Send Lazarus to warn my brothers, lest they also come to this place of torment." Notice that he's still treating Lazarus like a slave!

In verse 29, Abraham responds, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." But that answer wasn't good enough for the rich man. He says in verse 30, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." Finally, the rich man sees what's needed. He needed to repent and his brothers need to repent. But he thinks they need more than the Law and

the Prophets in order to repent. But Abraham says, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”

What’s going on in these verses? In order to explain that, let me try to explain what’s going on in the passage as a whole. The reason the rich man didn’t show mercy to Lazarus, who was in need, was because he didn’t see his own need for mercy. He was self-sufficient. And that really lies at the heart of this whole chapter. We’ll only be able to be generous and merciful to others if we give out of hearts that have experienced God’s generosity and mercy.

So how do we come to see our need for mercy? There are really two things that this passage draws out. First, we see our need in the Law and Prophets. Now on the one hand the Law and the Prophets show us how to take care of the needs of others. And they show us that if we love God we’ll love our neighbor. But they also show us how far we fall short. They show us that we don’t love God and we don’t love our neighbor. In other words, they show us our need for God’s mercy. But that’s not all. They also point to Christ. Later in Luke 24, Jesus tells the disciples on the road to Emmaus that all of the Law and the Prophets point to him. They point to the fact that God sent a Savior into the world to die for our sins and to be raised from the dead. They point to the way we can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

So the Law and the Prophets show us how far we fall short of God’s call on our lives. But they also show us that God has provided salvation in Christ. They show us our need to repent of our sins and to turn to Jesus in faith. In other words, we have all we need to see our need in God’s Word. But the rich man and his brothers thought they needed more. And the Pharisees thought they needed more. Jesus is saying, “You don’t need anything more.” You have all you need to see your need in God’s Word. And you have all you need in God’s Son.

This wasn’t enough for them. In fact, even after Jesus was raised from the dead, it wasn’t enough for them. But is it enough for you? We have all we need for life and salvation in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now is the time to turn from our self-sufficiency and to place our trust in Christ. It’s a matter of heaven and hell. Now is the time to respond. Once we die, there won’t be another opportunity. And the only way that we can live a life of mercy and generosity toward those who are in need is by first seeing our own need for mercy and trusting in God to help us.