

Listening to See

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[0 : 00] So, would you turn to a person sitting next to you, if you're comfortable with this, and just share either what leapt out at you from this parable, or what question you'd like to ask Luke or Jesus?

All right, just for a moment. What leapt out at you? What question do you have after hearing this? Okay. Thank you. Let us pray.

So, living God, we believe that you enabled Luke, the physician, to accurately write down these words of the Lord Jesus. And now we pray that you would teach us what they mean, that you would give us the mind of Christ as we work our way through this text.

For we pray it in his name and for his glory. Amen. Amen. Why does Jesus teach this particular parable?

Luke tells us in chapter 16, verse 15, that Jesus speaks the parable to Pharisees. Now, Pharisees are well-motivated people, for the most part.

[1 : 44] They're people who wanted to be holy and wanted to help other people be holy. They're people who wanted to know the holy God and to be in right relationship with the holy God.

So do I. So do you. But a number of factors kept the Pharisees from realizing this longing. One of them was their problematic relationship with their wealth.

Right before Luke records this parable, Luke says in chapter 16, verse 14, Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money.

Which tells us that in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus is going to, in some way, address how money is related to our desire to know God.

But something more is going on in this story. Something more fundamental. William Barclay says of this parable that it is constructed with such masterly skill that not one phrase is wasted.

[2 : 52] Constructed unto what end? We are learning that we get at the primary burden of any parable by paying attention to the unexpected turns in the story.

As I read The Rich Man and Lazarus, the unexpected turn comes when the rich man, having lived all of his life in this world totally for himself, in the afterlife, feels concerned for his five brothers.

He says to Abraham, verse 27, I beg you, Father, that you send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he warn them, lest they come to this place of torment.

Presumably, all of his life, on this side of the divide, this man has lived preoccupied with his own pleasure. He apparently has never expressed any compassion to anyone.

But on the other side, he has one great moment when he feels compassion for his brothers. The burden of the parable, therefore, is the well-being of those who are on this side of the divide.

[4 : 11] The burden of the story is not the rich man. His fate has been sealed. The burden is not the poor man. He's in a better place.

He's already experienced the great reversal of kingdom justice, although we should note he does not gloat over it. The burden of the story is the rich man's brothers who need to be warned.

So, here's what we'll do. Let us work through the parable line by line, constructed with masterly skill, not one phrase wasted.

And then let us go back and try to draw out that to which Jesus is seeking to convert us in this parable. I grew up being told that parables have only one point.

But scholars are now saying, I think rightly so, that parables can have many points. So, let's walk through the text, observing and commenting on the details of the story, and then we'll suggest the cluster of truths Jesus is opening up to Pharisees, disciples, and us.

[5 : 27] Okay? We're going to walk through the parable, and then we're going to suggest the truths. Walk through. Verse 19. A certain rich man. That's how the parable begins.

This is typical introduction of the parables in Luke. In Matthew, the typical introduction is, the kingdom of heaven is like. In Luke, it is a certain man, a certain woman, or even which of you.

It begins with a person. Verse 19. Habitually dressed in purple. In that day, purple cloth was extremely expensive.

Only the super rich could afford it. It was the color of royalty. Now, whether this man himself was of royalty, we do not know. But he sure liked to portray himself as royalty.

Every day, says Jesus, every day this man wears expensive purple. And fine linen. Verse 19. This word refers to this very fine Egyptian cloth used for the best underwear.

[6 : 30] White linen underwear. Underneath a purple robe. was the ultimate statement of opulence. Gaily living in splendor every day.

Verse 19. The words Jesus uses here mean living sumptuously. Making Mary brilliantly and magnificently. It's how it could be translated. The picture is of limitless wealth and indulgent, luxurious prosperity.

He has everything. Habitually. Habitually, verse 19. Every day, verse 19. Including the Sabbath. Sabbath. Which means that this particular man is so absorbed in his own pleasure that he ignores God's command about Sabbath.

And he makes his servants disobey this command by forcing them to work even on the Sabbath. Therefore, the picture we have thus far of this man is of a human being who pays no attention to the world around him.

He uncritically accepts a two-tiered society. Those who have and those who do not have. It's just the way it is. And he luxuriates in the fact that he is one of the haves. Verse 20.

[7 : 53] And a certain poor man named Lazarus. You might know this is the only time in Jesus' teaching where he actually gives a name to one of the characters of the parables. Lazarus is the Latinized form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, which means God is my help, or one whom God helps.

This Lazarus? One whom God helps? It appears to be exactly the opposite. It appears that Lazarus has been abandoned by God. It appears that Lazarus might even be punished by God.

But no. He is one whom God helps, as the story will make clear. The rich man does not help, but God does.

He was laid at the gate, verse 20, at the rich man's gate. The rich man has insulated himself in a gated community to protect himself from the Lazarus-type people.

He was laid, verse 20, implying that Lazarus was an invalid. He had to be carried to this place each day to be placed in front of the house of the only man in the city who had the resources to help him.

[9 : 05] Lazarus. The word translated laid actually is thrown there. He was thrown there, almost with a note of contempt, by his family who could not care, or by his neighbors who could not care, or by his family and neighbors who did not care.

We're not told. But what all this suggests is that the suffering of Lazarus is deeper than physical. It's relational, and therefore psychic.

No one cares, except God. Lazarus, one whom God helps, and the reality of this apparently is what sustains him through his misery.

Covered with sores, verse 20, suggesting a disease like leprosy, which would explain why people threw him there. Get him there as quickly as possible so you don't get the disease.

Verse 21, Longing to be fed by the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table. Now in that day, people, rich or poor, did not eat their meals with forks and knives or napkins.

[10 : 15] The food was served in a big common bowl. Loaves of bread were passed around. You break off a chunk of bread. You dip it in the bowl, and then you eat the food and the bread all at once.

And given no napkins, they also broke off chunks of bread to clean their hands. As the loaf went around, you break a piece of bread, you wipe your hands with the bread, and then throw it away.

And that is what Lazarus wants to eat. The unbitten into breadcrumbs that were napkins. But even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

Verse 21, a disgusting picture. People in the first century did not have dogs as pets, so I suppose some did. But dogs were the vacuum cleaners. They came around and ate up all the food that fell from the table to the floor.

So these dogs are getting to eat what a human being longs to eat. But in that disgusting picture, there is compassion. Indeed, in this part of the story, there is great compassion.

[11 : 23] There is? Yes. The text should be rendered, but the dogs. Not even the dogs. It should be rendered, but the dogs.

Allah. But the dogs were coming and licking his sores. This but sets up a contrast. The rich man could care less, but the dogs.

Kenneth Bailey argues that in this story, the dogs are not, therefore, abusing Lazarus. They're caring for Lazarus.

Dogs will lick their own wounds, and dogs will lick those who they love with, they have affection for. Recent medical studies have shown that the saliva of dogs has antibiotics which can actually facilitate healing.

The rich man ignores Lazarus, but not the dogs. They care. Saying something about the character of Lazarus, that he's a gentle human being who does not frighten the dogs, and the dogs sense in him a great need.

[12 : 32] I'm sure some of you have had such a pet. We did. A dog named Tovey. It's amazing how he could sense what was going on in our daughter's life. Keep working through the story.

Verse 22. The poor man died. This time he's not named. The implication being he does not have a public funeral. A discarded, forgotten human being.

And he was carried away by the angels. Verse 22. This is the beginning of a great reversal in the story. The rich man and the community may have forgotten Lazarus, but not God.

God sends the angels to bring Lazarus home. God sends the heavenly entourage to escort his chosen one into heaven. I think here, we are to be reminded of how God came for Enoch.

He came and took him. Reminded of how God came for Elijah. Whirlwind. Picks him up. Carried by the angels. It suggests great honor.

[13 : 31] And it suggests ascending into heaven. Carried into Abraham's bosom. Verse 22. Abraham is the father of faith. And he's the father of the many nations who are brought to faith.

Abraham is the one in whom all of the nations of the world are to be blessed. So, Abraham's bosom would be a picture of the fulfillment of God's promise to bring people from all nations of the world into the banquet of the kingdom of God.

I think it's also a picture of the intimacy of heaven. The word bosom makes me think of what the apostle John says in the prologue to his gospel. No one has seen God at any time but the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the father, referring to Jesus.

And then I think of John himself who is resting in the bosom of Jesus at the Lord's Supper. A very intimate picture. Lazarus is carried away and as he once laid in the ground outside the rich man's house, now he is laid into the bosom of the great patriarch.

Verse 22. And the rich man also died and was buried. The was buried, I think, is suggesting that this man does get a public funeral, likely with all the pomp and ceremony possible, laid in the tomb, likely with precious jewels.

[14 : 54] Verse 23. And in Hades, he lift up his eyes. In the Bible, Hades is the place of the departed but it is not a permanent place.

It is the place where we await the ultimate destiny. It was thought that both heaven and hell were very close to Hades. Technically, the terms are Gehenna and paradise.

Gehenna, the place of burning fire like the town garbage heap and paradise, the place of comfort and joy. Both the rich man and Lazarus are in Hades but the rich man is already moving toward Gehenna and the poor man is already moving towards paradise.

Thus, verse 23. Being in torment, the rich man is experiencing what Lazarus had experienced all those years outside the rich man's gate.

Now, a chasm lies between the place where Lazarus is and where the rich man is. I'm going to say it the other way around because I'm going to point it this way. There's a chasm between where the rich man lies and where Lazarus is.

[16 : 04] And the rich man looks across that chasm and he sees Lazarus. Finally, he sees Lazarus.

For years, Lazarus has been laying at the gate of his house and he has not seen him. He finally sees and he calls him by name.

Send Lazarus. For the first time, maybe. For the first time, this man calls a poor man by name. And then we enter into a passionate dialogue between the rich man and Abraham.

Verse 24. Father Abraham, he's appealing here to family connections. He, as a Hebrew, would biologically be part of Abraham's family. But by his life choices, he's demonstrated that he is not part of Abraham's family.

Yet he appeals on this basis anyway. Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Verse 24. For the first time in his life, maybe.

[17 : 10] For the first time, does he cry out in need? Have mercy on me. What's interesting, in the other parts of Luke, this is usually found on the mouths of beggars.

This rich man now knows what it means to beg. Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his tongue, or finger, sorry, in the water and cool off my tongue.

Verse 24. Now this suggests to me that the rich man doesn't get it yet. He still thinks that he is the most important person in his world.

He's still treating Lazarus as an errand boy, as a means to his end. The audacity to ask Lazarus now to do for him what he never bothered doing for Lazarus.

He's not repented. Even in the flames, he doesn't get it. He's still the center of his own world. Abraham responds, verse 25, child, it's a tender term.

[18 : 10] Abraham's not pleased where this rich man is. He speaks gently to a man who is going to suffer judgment. Remember, says Abraham, verse 25, that during your life you received good things and likewise Lazarus bad things, but now he's being comforted here and you are in agony.

You received passive, implying that the good things the rich man had were gifts. They were gifts from God, gifts to bless others, given to bless others just as Abraham was.

Abraham understood God's blessing as being unto blessing others. You missed the point is the implication. Your whole life you missed the point of having been so richly blessed.

Besides, says Abraham, verse 25, between us and you there's a chasm fixed. There's no way to travel between these parts of Hades. So the rich man cries out in verse 24, then I beg you.

He accepts the reality of the chasm. Then I beg you, send Lazarus to my father's house. I have five brothers. Send Lazarus to warn them. To warn them of what?

[19 : 22] To warn them of missing the point. I beg you. Send Lazarus so my brothers don't miss the point. Abraham responds, verse 29, they have Moses and the prophets.

Let them hear them. Let them listen to Moses and the prophets and they will not miss the point. Deuteronomy 15, Moses says, if there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of the towns in the land which the Lord God is giving to you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand freely to him and generously lend him sufficient for his need and whatever he lacks.

Isaiah 58, God says to the prophet, is this not the feast which I choose? To loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?

Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house and when you see the naked to cover them, on and on it goes, page after page, God revealing his compassion for orphans and widows, for the poor, the marginalized, the disenfranchised.

They have Moses and they have the prophets. Listen to them. Let them listen to them. Then the rich man, out of desperation, argues with Abraham. No, Father Abraham, verse 30.

[20 : 51] Imagine that. You're going to argue with the great patriarch. No, you're wrong, Abraham. But if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent.

Now, I can understand the rich man's reasoning here. Can you not? Surely. Surely. If Lazarus, who had been dead, is sent back to these brothers, surely the brothers will be startled and they will repent and they will change their mind and they will think in new ways and they will care for the poor of their city.

Surely. But Abraham disagrees. Verse 31. If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.

And you know, Abraham is right. Another Lazarus was raised from the dead. Remember that story? John 11. Another Lazarus is brought back from the dead.

Jesus calls his good friend Lazarus out of the grave and the high priest witnesses this miracle.

[22 : 11] And the high priest not only does not repent, the high priest orders that Lazarus and Jesus ought to be killed. the rich man himself sees this poor man alive but he doesn't repent.

Yes, he does express concern for his brothers but his cry have mercy on me is not a cry for forgiveness. And then like many of Jesus' other stories it ends.

No wrap up. No resolution. Leaving us to choose to finish the story.

So, let's gather up then the cluster of truths Jesus is revealing in this carefully crafted story. One, we live in a multi-dimensional universe.

Reality is not just what we can see and touch and feel and smell. There is more that meets the eye. There are more beings than humans, angels and there is another world beyond this world.

[23 : 28] Thus, too, there is an afterlife. When we die it is not the end. There is more to come. This is probably where Jesus is speaking to the Sadducees.

You know the little ditty. The Sadducees did not believe in angels nor the resurrection and afterlife and that's why they're Sadducee. there is an afterlife. There is an afterlife.

Three, there are two destinies in this afterlife. One, intimacy with God pictured by the bosom of Abraham and two, exclusion from God pictured by these flames.

Four, our destiny is determined by our life choices. Not that we earn our destiny. It's just that our life choices reveal the fundamental orientation of our souls.

And either it is toward God in trust and obedience or it is away from God in indifference to people and disobedience. Five, all wrongs will be righted.

[24 : 40] In the afterlife, God will right all wrongs. not that every rich person is sent to the flames and not that every poor person ends up in the bosom of Abraham.

That's because not all rich are selfishly rich and not all poor are humbly poor. It's just that God is going to work justice where justice needed to be worked. Six, grace is given in this life as we wait for that justice to be done.

Lazarus, God is my help, is given grace to endure. He's given the grace of patience and long-suffering.

He's given the grace to be gracious in his suffering. Oh, to be so graced. Seven, our wealth can blind us.

The rich man did not see Lazarus right there by the gate every day. Oh, he probably noticed him, but he didn't see him.

[25 : 47] You see, his sin is not being wealthy. His sin is allowing his wealth to blind him to the plight of others. In the Gospel of Luke, the first sign that someone is actually being saved is that they repent of having ignored others.

Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector, encounters Jesus. You remember that story? He meets Jesus and then right away says, half of my possessions I give to the poor and if I've defrauded anyone, I'll pay back fourfold.

Now, what made Zacchaeus say that? Who told Zacchaeus to do that? The answer is no one. It's just what happens when you see Jesus.

When you encounter Jesus, you finally see and it changes the relationship with the wealth. When we see Jesus and in Jesus, the embodiment of the will of God, it just changes us.

That's why then Jesus said, today salvation has come to this house. Thus eight. what unblinds us?

[27 : 03] They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. When we listen, we see. When we listen to Moses and the prophets, we see.

We really see the person right in front of us. We see. And we see in the person right in front of us, Jesus.

The one to whom Moses and the prophets are pointing. So, what are we to do then in light of Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus?

We are to keep listening to the voice of God in Scripture. We're to keep seeking, soaking in the word so that we see, and here's the key line, so that we see, but so that we see as Jesus sees.

That we see the people in our lives the way Jesus sees them, beyond the presenting need to the deeper need. That we see the people who sit or lie in our streets.

[28 : 13] That we really see the waitress or waiter at dinner afterwards. That we really see the teller at the bank. That we really see the bus driver. That we really see the person at the market.

That we really see. And then when we see, we attend like Jesus attends to the people at the gates of our homes.

And to Lazarus as he presents himself in his many forms. We see and see. And we do not walk away. We ask the person, what is your name?

Because to Jesus there are no nameless persons. I'm sure you've discovered one of the most powerful things you can say to a person is what is your name? And then say the name.

And then we ask Jesus, how are you helping this person right now? And we ask, how do you want me to join you in your helping this person?

[29 : 22] One of the challenges of course of living and working and worshipping downtown is that we encounter our friends who are on the street. And what we've done is we put together for you, and you can get this afterwards, a card listing all the resources for people who might be on the street.

Bob Swan, who works in this whole realm, tells me that there is no reason for anyone to go hungry in our city, because our city has in fact provided resources to eat.

No one has to go hungry. And, Bob tells me, no one has to sleep on the street, because there are enough beds now provided in our city.

So, we want to make this card available to you that you can use as you interact with people. And also, you can get meal tickets for the Evelyn Soller Center at our church office, and I carry these around.

It's a very safe way to give someone a meal, short of going into the market and getting it yourself. Malcolm Gweet is a pastor in England who had the privilege of speaking at the dedication of the C.S.

[30 : 41] Lewis Memorial last Friday at Westminster Abbey. And Malcolm Gweet tries to write a sonnet for each of the Sundays of the Christian year. Monica Westerholm passed on to me Malcolm Gweet's sonnet for Christ the King Sunday, and with this I conclude.

You can't see it. I'll read it. Our king is calling from the hungry furrows, whilst we are cruising through the aisles of plenty.

Our hoardings screen us from the man of sorrows. Our soundtracks drown out his murmur, I am thirsty. He stands in line to sign in as a stranger and seek a welcome from the world he made.

We see him only as a threat, a danger. He asks for clothes, we strip search him instead. And if he should fall sick, then we take care that he does not infect our private health.

We lock him in the prisons of our fear, lest he unlock the prisons of our wealth. But still, on Sunday, we shall stand and sing the praises of our hidden Lord and King.

[32 : 04] I hope you'll be able to see the words. Let's give it a try. Such a problem, the light broke through. Thank you.