

"The Great Reversal" Luke 16:19–31

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[0 : 00] So one of my favorite books or movies to watch at Christmas time is the famous Victorian author Charles Dickens book or movie, it's been turned into many movies since then, The Christmas Carol.

! He's been told by him about what waits for him in the afterlife if he continues being a stingy or cruel broker, because he was a broker or a moneylender who would tax the poor heavily.

Marley is fated, it's described, to chase these boxes full of money that are chained to him and they're always out of reach and he's fated to chase them, to drag them with him.

And it's the same thing because he chased these boxes to fill them in his life as he walked the earth. And now he's destined all eternity to chase them. So through the story, Scrooge is visited by three ghosts.

And these three ghosts warn him that if he does not have a change of heart, they show him in different ways of his past, present and future, that if he doesn't change, his heart doesn't change, that he has the same destiny as Marley.

[1 : 26] He actually has worse destiny because he has time to fill the links of the chains even more. The story has a nice happy ending. Scrooge's heart is changed.

And the thing that's interesting about this story, that when it was written in the era of the Victorians, givings from the rich drastically went up after this story for a couple of years.

See, we come to a parable that Daniel just read, that Jesus is talking to his disciples and those around him. And the thing about this, Jesus is telling a parable to his disciples and those around him of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus.

No ghosts visit the rich man to give him warnings. And the fate is played out for him. There's no warnings for this man. Jesus, in a sense, tells a biblical Christmas carol story.

And we're going to look at it. And we're going to look at it in three ways. And it's the unworthiness of the rich man, the arrogance of the rich man, and the great reversal. And we see through this parable that it is only the gospel that can cure the heart of greed, that can cure a heart of false justice, that can cure a heart of pride, and can cure a heart of giving a disregard to those who suffer around us.

[2 : 48] So if you haven't already, please turn with me to Luke chapter 16, verses 19 to 31. If you don't have a Bible, there's some on the tables just outside the doors.

Anytime, go and grab one, because it's very helpful to be able to follow along with the text in front of you, or flip to it on your phone. See, we're landing in Luke's gospel, and where we're landing is very significant.

From chapter 15 to chapter 17, Jesus has been giving parable after parable on certain topics. And these topics are on the rich and the poor. And a parable is a short, simple story designed to illustrate a moral lesson.

It's designed to teach a spiritual practice. It's designed to teach a philosophical truth. And Jesus does this over and over again in his gospels, as most of us are familiar with.

See, the thing here is that these have been about the rich and the poor, and the fates that will play out if the heart does not change of the rich people. And then the one we come to is the most dramatic one of all in these chapters.

[3 : 56] There's no other parable or story like it in the Bible. So we're going to look at it. So point one, the unworthiness of the rich man. Look with me at verses 19 to 21.

There is a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, who covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table.

Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. See, Jesus immediately introduces two characters here. The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen.

In ancient times, this signified immense wealth and social status. Before Jesus is crucified, as you read later on in the gospels, the people, the Roman soldiers put on him a purple robe.

And they do this to mock him, because he claimed to be the son of God. And they mocked him in this. And they thought that he just assumed that he was the king of the Jews. So they put on a purple robe on him and mock him and hit him.

[5 : 05] The poor man, Lazarus, is described as being covered in sores. No description is given to his clothing, because he most likely would have been in rags or naked at the gate.

In a sense, he is clothed in sores. Which, in his culture of the time, the people would have just assumed that he is unclean. He is a societal reject.

He is experiencing divine punishment. The people around him would have just assumed this of him. See, the rich man feasted. We come to the next point. The rich man feasted every day. Think of the biggest meals you can think of.

Like a turkey dinner at Christmas, every day. But Lazarus starved. He desired the crumbs that fell from the table. And this normally would have been left for the dogs. But the dogs are too busy harassing Lazarus by licking his sores.

And then lastly, notice here in the text, in the section we just read, how Lazarus is laid at the gate. Which most likely would signify that he was a cripple.

[6 : 07] Because it says he was placed at the gate. This is another thing signifying how rich this rich man is. He lives in a gated complex. Which is meant to keep the scavenger animals out. The dogs that are too busy harassing Lazarus.

And to keep the poor people out. But it also shows even more how great the divide between the rich man and Lazarus is socially. The poor man cannot come into the rich man's house.

The complex. He has not been invited. He's at the gate. See, this is how they lived out their days. One in luxury and one in luxury and being self-sufficient.

The other in utter wretchedness and dependent on the mercy of others. Both die as everyone who walks this earth is destined. And we come now to the next verses.

Look with me at verses 22 and 23. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

[7 : 09] And Hades being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. Jesus continues in describing and contrasting the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus.

Lazarus is given no burial. In ancient times, this would signify that he is experiencing divine punishment. So, in society around him, it would just be doubling down on how much this guy deserved what was happening to him.

But he's carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. In the Greek, it can be read as Abraham's bosom, which kind of sounds very odd. But the best way to describe this is that he's being carried away to heaven.

He's being carried away to a place of great intimacy with the Father. Great honor. A place of paradisaal bliss. Care that has been unknown to him through his lifetime.

The rich man, in complete contrast, receives a burial. And because he was so rich and high in social status, it would have been a big affair.

[8 : 15] There would have been more feasting, more thinking about his life. There would have been people who were there to grieve him. And then he's buried. See, everyone would have expected him to receive favor and be in heaven.

But he enters into Hades, a place of torment, hell. I read this recent CBC article that's quoting a Canadian press journalist, Ian Bickus.

I think that's how you say his last name. And this article talked about how in the last year, the gap between the richest and the poorest Canadians has widened again. It goes on to describe how the upper earners are able to invest in better stocks that pay out better.

And are able to land better paying jobs. While the lower earners can only invest in stocks or things that don't pay well. And then they can only land jobs that do not have good pays.

So they suffer at the rising food costs and the housing and the inflation. It also talked about, it kind of hinted at it, that the upper earners have lobbied the government to make this way, to benefit them, but not to benefit the lower earners.

[9 : 26] Now, if we come back to this story and we put this context on it, most of us, if we are truly honest with ourselves, would be thinking the rich man got what he deserved. If he's been doing this. We might be wanting to sing that famous song a couple years ago of Oliver Anthony, the rich man north of Richmond. Jesus is very wise here. Because he's critiquing his culture with a gripping story.

One that would have been very gripping for people. And this, if we critique, we can use it to critique our own culture, our own hearts. Now we need to remember the context.

Jesus is speaking directly against those who abuse places of power. Those who abuse their wealth. By all standards of his day, the rich man by all appearances should have went to heaven.

And likewise, Lazarus, the poor man, who everyone would have assumed was clearly under divine punishment, should have went to hell. But there's a complete opposite thing that happens.

[10 : 26] So we come now to the arrogance of the rich man. Look with me. What does Jesus do here? He keeps on going in his parable. Because he really wants to get this point across. We now get a conversation between the rich man and Abraham.

Abraham is considered the father of the people of Israel. He is the one that God called first into the promised land. He is the one God made covenant with.

He is the one God instituted the covenant of circumcision, which marks the people of Israel as his own people. So we come to this conversation with this in mind.

Look at verses 24 to 28. And he called out. This is the rich man. 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. But Abraham said, Child, remember that in your lifetime, in your lifetime received your goodness.

[11 : 31] And Lazarus, in like manner, bad things. But now he is comforted here. And you are in anguish. 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. And he said, Then I beg you, Father, to send him to my father's house.

For I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Three things to notice in this section.

The first thing to notice is that the rich man calls Abraham father. Even though he is in a place of torment, in the place of death, He still calls him father.

And assumes he is one of the true Israelites. The rich man still has a false notion of himself. He still views himself with a sense of self-importance. He thinks he has been circumcised.

[12 : 33] He is good. Even though he didn't follow God's commands at all. As we can see in this story. It is interesting though that Abraham still calls him child. Even though it is clearly marked out that he is not one of Abraham's true child.

The second thing to notice is that the rich man gives commands to Lazarus to serve him. To be his messenger. The rich man is only thinking about himself and his standing.

He knows Lazarus name. And yet he did nothing for him during his life on earth. And now he commands him to serve him. To go and be his messenger. Even though the rich man has become the beggar.

He still asks for what he wants. Then the third thing to notice is that the rich man is not associated with Abraham in this. In verse 26 Abraham responds to this first request and says.

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 from there to us.

[13 : 36] Notice the words between us and you. Those four words are terrifying. Abraham and Lazarus have been separated from the rich man. And there's this great divide between them.

J.C. Ryle who is an old Anglican bishop from England. Is commenting on this. Is that hell is nothing more than truth known too late. Even after suffering.

The rich man is not humbled by his state. And Jesus describes. And Jesus. And Jesus. Sorry my notes are wrong here. Jesus. Shows this.

That by the separation of the gate. They are now separated by a great chasm. So in life. The poor man and the rich man are separated by a gate. And now. Jesus shows that the.

Abraham and the poor man. Are separated by a great chasm. Between the rich man. Look what Abraham says in response. Verses 27 to 31.

[14 : 33] And he said. Then I beg you father. To send him to my. Father's house. For I have. Brothers.

So they may warrant. So that he may warn them. Lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham said. They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said. No father Abraham.

But if someone goes to them from the dead. They will repent. 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. Here we see.

That the rich man came to be where he is. And it's the same place. Where his brothers are destined to go. And he's. Abraham quotes. Moses and the prophets. What does he mean by that? What he means.

Is that the law. Moses gives the law. And the prophets. Give warning to the people of Israel. Later in the. In the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 15. Verse 11. It says.

[15 : 28] For there will never cease to be. The poor in the land. Therefore. This is God talking. I command you. You shall open wide your heart. To your brother. To the needy. And to the poor. In your land.

And in Jeremiah 9. Verses 23 to 24. It says this. Thus says the Lord.

To them. To them. In any way they can. If they neglect this. It shows that they are not God's people. In verse 31. It's very interesting. It says. If they do not hear. Neither.

Will they be convinced. If someone should rise from the dead. It's like. You always get these stories. Every couple of years. In the news. Of someone who has died. And then it's come back from the. From back. From basically being clinically. Declared dead. And they say. They've seen some things. In the afterlife. And then they write a book. About it. The news covers them. But then no one. Heeds the words.

[16 : 48] And they are forgotten. Here. Jesus is speaking directly. To the Pharisees. And how. They don't listen. To the words. Of Moses. And the prophets. And they won't listen. Even when he rises.

From the dead. Jesus ends. The parable here. There's no happy ending. For the rich man. It's not the Christmas carol. Where there's the happy ending. For Scrooge. The rich man.

Is destined. To eternal torment. And Lazarus. To eternal paradise. But you might be thinking. Well this has been. A very good commentary. On this text. What does this have to do. With me?

What does this story. That Jesus said. So long ago. Have to do. With my state. Of where I am right now. I am nowhere near rich. I have no money. If you look at my bank account. I have no money. You might be thinking this. The thing to notice. About this text. Is that. The rich man. Is never given a name.

[17 : 44] In this text. This is very intentional. There's an obvious. Surface meaning. To this story. That Jesus is getting at. And that's.

Don't become. Consumed by money. And take care of the poor. But there's also. A secondary level to it. See. We may not have any money. We may not have any money. But we have things. That make us. Feel rich. Instead of money. Insert blank. It could be. Fitness. It could be. Your job. It could be. Your family.

It's all these things. Have to think about. And insert. The blank. What makes us. Feel rich. Because there's things. We hold on to. That we hold on to. Because they make us. Feel rich.

They make us. Feel secure. Feel powerful. See. Jesus left. The rich man. Name. Nameless. Because we are all. The rich man. In this story.

[18 : 39] There's something. That makes you feel rich. That you feast on. Sumptuously. And blinds you from God. It blinds you from things. Jesus named the poor man. So no one can put their name on him.

He has a name. But here's the thing. This is what makes the gospel. So profound. That when we read the gospel. Counts. And then when we come to the end. Of the gospels.

And we see. The work of the cross. This is what makes the gospel. So profound. Paul. The apostle Paul. In 2nd Corinthians. In chapter 8. 9. Says this.

For you know. The grace of our Lord. Jesus Christ. That though he was rich. Yet for your sake. He became poor. So that by his poverty. You might become rich.

Paul. Speaking. Speaking. About Jesus. In Philippians. Chapter 3. 6. Verses 6 to 8. Says this. Who. Though he is in the form of God.

[19 : 38] Did not count equality with God. A thing to be grasped. But emptied himself. By taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form.

Humbled himself. By becoming obedient to the point of death. Even death on the cross. Through Jesus making himself the poor man. The one considered unclean. Rejected by society.

Abused and murdered. Took on our divine punishment through the cross. So we can be eternally rich. Truly rich. Not the things that we hold on to. The insert in that blank.

But the thing. About being eternally rich. Is that it is in a place where rust will never get to it. Where moth will never get to it. Where moth will never get to it. It's the hope. Of that.

Of the cross. The hope of Jesus' return. The hope. Of the marriage supper. Of the lamb. See only through the gospel. True justice happens. The care for the poor happens.

[20 : 36] Only through the gospel. Where the poor be considered with no ulterior motives. Only through the gospel. Where our neighbors notice Christ. Working through us. As we follow Christ.

Only through the gospel. Where we feast on Christ's finished work. Instead of our own self-sufficient riches. This is the story that Jesus is saying here. Is as he describes this rich man.

As he describes Lazarus the poor man. Is that we need to see ourselves in the place of the rich man. We may not have money as I said. But there's things that make us feel rich.

There's things that we need to lay down at the cross. And ask Jesus to apply the gospel deeply into our lives. This parable also shows us death is final.

Judgment is final. And those who live their lives through the gospel. Heeding God's word will immediately be of Christ. And those who don't will end up as the rich man is in the story.

[21 : 36] See we're all the rich man. But we are rich in. Are we rich in Christ? Or are we rich in our own material lives? This story. This parable.

That's so profound. Because there's nothing like it in the Bible. This is the only one. We need to heed it. We need to reflect on it. And it's something that critiques Jesus' culture.

And it's something that critiques our own culture. That critiques our own lives. Friends, let's heed the words of Christ. Let's apply the gospel to our life. And if you are here and you do not know Christ, now is the time to reflect on the gospel.

To see Christ's glorious, God's love for you and for me. And to ask Jesus into your life.