

# Luke 16:14-31 "The Poor Rich Man"

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- [ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Turn with me this morning to Luke 16, page 875 of the Bible in the pews in front of you. Last week we heard Jesus address the issue of money, of wealth, in order to get at our hearts, what we really value, what we really worship.
- And that same conversation continues in the rest of Luke 16 today. As Jesus enters through the door of money, rich and poor, to get at eternal matters of heaven and hell.
- Honestly, I've really struggled with this passage this week. If you have a bulletin, you can see where the outline was when it was time to print the bulletins. It's a little further along now.
- But I've decided that the best way for us to consider this text and its challenges to us is to walk through it together and to talk about it as we go.
- [ 1 : 20 ] So let's pray and ask God to help all of us in that. And then we'll read the passage as we walk through it. Pray with me. God, this is your word.
- God, and I'm so grateful for that. It reminds me that you want us to hear it. That you want us to be shaped by it.
- That your spirit will use it. And so, Father, keep teaching me this morning. And would you be so kind to us as to use the foolishness of what is preached to bring eternal light and hope and life to us because of your great mercy and grace.
- We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. So last week, we finished up with verse 13. You cannot serve God and money.
- What you value and love is of utmost importance. Is it the things of God or the things of this world? It can't be both. And as we turn to verse 14, we find some listening to Jesus who were told explicitly, love money.
- [ 2 : 43 ] The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things and they ridiculed Jesus. The Pharisees, the religious leaders, the ones who were teaching others, they ridiculed Jesus.
- They mock Him, which we'll find out in a minute is not really a good idea. But why? Why are they ridiculing Jesus? Well, they loved money, the text tells us.
- And they saw no problem with this. All of the teaching at the time was telling them that that was a reasonable thing to do. Financial prosperity and wealth was a sign of God's blessing.
- Poverty was viewed as a punishment from God. And here's Jesus saying, these two things don't go together. Well, you can't chase both of them at the same time.
- And they laugh. No way, Jesus. Now we know you've lost it. We're plenty holy here and God's keeping the money coming right in.
- [ 3 : 54 ] It's the poor guy you ought to be suspicious of. This guy's way off. I think this attitude is more true in our hearts than we would care to admit.

The health and wealth gospel is exploding here and around the world, becoming increasingly popular. And even though many of us would say we don't hold to some of its assertions, we're drawn to read a book by a slick-talking, good-looking, successful, well-marketed Christian leader, aren't we?

Certainly he must know something. Successful as he is. Try this for just a minute. Picture for me in your minds just an average Christian guy.

Just picture one. See if you can just picture a Christian in your head. I'm willing to bet that for most of us, the image we get in our heads is white, somewhat upper-middle class, well-mannered, well-spoken.

For most of us, that is what pops into our minds when I tell you to picture a Christian. But most Christians today are, and through history, far from affluent.

[ 5 : 16 ] And most suffer greatly. You probably think if you went to Chick-fil-A tomorrow, because you can't go today, but if you went tomorrow, you could hang out for about five minutes and pretty much kind of pick out who the Christians are.

You know, if you hang around people for just a little while, you can figure that out. Just watching, right? It's the ones who say, my pleasure. That's always the ones to be looking for.

But we need to caution ourselves when we think that way. Mere outward appearances are often misleading, aren't they? See, Jesus is going to upend these expectations and particularly challenge the Pharisees and us on our outward righteousness.

Verse 15. He said to them, to the Pharisees, Jesus says, 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. You like to look good, to appear religious, to have people think well of you, but you're not fooling God, Jesus says.

[ 6 : 37 ] Your external law-keeping righteousness without regard for your heart, for deeply loving God may be praised by others, but it's abominable to God.

And he continues. 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.

But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void. Yes, the Messiah has come, and that changes things, Jesus is saying.

But the law stays. In fact, elsewhere, what does Jesus say about the law? That he has come not to abolish it, but to fulfill it.

It's an unchanging picture of God's character, and it exposes our hearts, doesn't it? To call us back to his heart. It shows us God's heart, and it shows us ours, where ours doesn't look like God's, to call us back to that heart.

[ 7 : 48 ] Jesus' point here is that the Pharisees, who pride themselves on keeping the law, actually are neglecting it. The Pharisees, who think they are experts on God's heart, are actually missing it altogether.

Instead of listening to God's word and clearly letting it do what it's supposed to do, expose them and shape them, show them where their hearts are misguided, instead of doing that, they've lowered the bar to a place they can reach, so they can feel good about themselves, so they can look good to others.

Jesus says that's so dangerous. God hates it. And Jesus says that in the context of how they pursue money and neglect the poor.

They're failing to take his word seriously, and when we do that, it's actually a rejection of God himself. This is what he will talk about at length in the parable that's coming up here.

But first, he gives another quick example, a one-verse example before he gives a ten-verse example. And it may seem out of place here, verse 18, everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

[ 9 : 19 ] What's Jesus saying? Where does that show up? Well, the Pharisees over time had written law codes, many of them lengthy codes, with reasons for divorce that basically meant that men could get a divorce, get out of their marriages, for just about any reason at all.

And Jesus is making the point that the law of God in his word still stands. This issue of divorce is a significant one and a sensitive one in our own context, right?

So I actually want us, after Easter, to come back to this verse and just talk a little bit more about what it means for us and how our hearts engage with God's law in that regard.

So we'll do that in a couple of weeks. But for the context of this passage, what Jesus is saying is that he's giving the Pharisees an example of how they're lowering the standard of God's law in order to keep it from exposing their hearts, exposing them as frauds, as sinners, as those who are needy.

Jesus is emphasizing the seriousness of God's word. And there are several things in this passage he's urging us to take seriously, and this is the first, it's God's word.

[ 10 : 46 ] It's call on our lives. So he said that briefly with regard to divorce. You need to take God's word seriously. But now he's going to tell a story to make the same point with regard to rich and poor.

Tracking with me? This is example two now for Jesus engaging their hearts. He's going to tell a story to expose the Pharisees' hearts and our hearts.

This parable we're about to read, the story of the rich man and Lazarus, is going to remind us primarily that our response to God and his word, in this case particularly with regard to money, has eternal consequences.

Remember, this is a story Jesus tells to engage our hearts with that particular point. He's not recounting historical events, historical details.

He's teaching our hearts important lessons through a story to engage our hearts, right? You do that with stories. Jesus is telling this story to engage our hearts and to teach us these important things.

[ 12 : 01 ] Listen to the first part of the parable. It starts at verse 19. There was 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 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.

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

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'm in anguish in this flame.

But Abraham said, Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things.

[ 13 : 07 ] 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.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of this story is the remarkable study and contrasts, right? These two men, very different.

This first one's not merely a man who is rich, but he is lavishly rich and he feels it. Enjoying fine food and clothes fit for a king all the time.

And right outside his front door where he would pass by all the time is not merely a man who is poor, but he is devastatingly poor.

And he feels it. The aching hunger that longs for any scraps. The bread they would use to scoop up the other food that they were eating.

[ 14 : 15 ] He just wants that or the crumbs from their table. He's so hungry. The sharp pain of wounds being licked by wild dogs that roam the streets of the city.

The humiliating reality of not being able to fend for himself. Two very different men, right? But they both die as we all do eventually.

And there's a great role reversal that happens there, isn't there? Jesus flips the script upside down when he gives us a glimpse into eternity. Things are very different.

First, Lazarus, the poor man, dies and perhaps no one cares. There's no mention even of a burial. We would expect here in Jesus' time to hear of public officials tossing his body in a cart, taking it outside the city to Gehenna, the waste dump to dispose of it.

But actually, instead, we get a window into God's heart for the poor whom he loves. Jesus says he was carried by angels to Abraham's side.

[ 15 : 36 ] Don't you love that? So far from being cursed or despised by God or even just ignored or overlooked by heaven, Lazarus is cherished and beloved by the hosts of heaven.

He went from a seat of dishonor to a place of high honor in heaven, close to the heart of Father Abraham.

He went from discomfort to comfort. He went from deep suffering to great glory. Don't you love God's heart for the poor and the suffering?

Is it any wonder that many slaves in this country years ago began to sing a song? I remember loving it as a child.

Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home. I looked over Jordan and what did I see? Coming for to carry me home.

[ 16 : 41 ] A band of angels coming after me. Coming for to carry me home. I love that. Because their hope and their home was in heaven.

Never home here. Never comfortable here. Never honored here. But Jesus says, don't miss God's heart and think that despised in this world means despised in heaven.

No, that's not what it's like. Angels come and carry him and place him against Abraham's chest so he can rest.

If you're poor, if you're suffering, if you're aching with emptiness here in this world, I've got good news.

If you trust Jesus, you're not home yet. And he will honor you and comfort you and fulfill you forever.

[ 17 : 53 ] And you'll be home. But then the rich man, too, dies, doesn't he? It's not quite such a warm story.

He, of course, is buried, likely as lavishly as he lived, but then the reversal of fortunes is equally stark. Tormented in hell, not heaven.

in great anguish, not comforted at all. Far off from Abraham, distant from the one he thought he was close to, not at his side.

Pleading for a drop of water from one whose name he knows, Lazarus, send Lazarus, but whom he never apparently gave a crumb of bread to.

It's a heart-wrenching picture, isn't it? It should be. He's reminded by Abraham that he received his good things on earth. Lots of them, right?

[ 19 : 00 ] Lots of good things. That's where he invested his treasure. It reminds me of all those passages about doing things for the praise of men and being told that we've received our reward in full here.

Now, there's no relief. It's too late to change his station. He has neglected God's heart and he endures torment and anguish.

If we were watching a video of this scene, I think we would turn our eyes away. hell is hard to stomach for all of us, isn't it?

In fact, our grasp of God's utter holiness and our wretched sinfulness is so limited that for us, because of that, hell's hard to believe in.

while we would be misunderstanding a parable like this to suggest that Jesus is giving us a detailed map of heaven and hell and how all of this works, it's not at all going too far to see the clear reminder of the reality of both heaven and, in particular, hell.

[ 20 : 19 ] The torment of hell without which this story Jesus tells makes no sense. The permanence of hell in this great chasm that separates people who can't go back and forth.

Jesus affirms these teachings in many other places and we dare not ignore them. It's a warning, isn't it? That's why he's teaching this parable.

It's a warning for hearts that love money, for hearts that take God's law lightly, for hearts that have a hard time imagining a loving God punishing sin.

It's a warning that we must heed God's word. We should take God's word seriously and Jesus is urging us now to take eternity seriously.

Don't delay until it's too late to wrestle with matters of eternity like it was for the rich man. Is the seriousness of eternity grabbing your heart for yourself?

[ 21 : 30 ] What about for the sake of others? Do you speak of eternity with them and plead with them as though heaven and hell were real places? And once we die it's too late to change reservations and switch across the chasm.

I think for many of us it's hard to imagine ourselves or our friends and neighbors who are really decent people suffering torment in hell.

Can we acknowledge that? It's just not where we picture people who look and talk and act very much like us. It doesn't seem to fit.

We're decent people, upstanding citizens, better than many others, pretty accomplished and successful in general, and Jesus says that's what I'm warning you about.

It's tempting to be taken in by a pretty good outward appearance in this life and to connect that with decent results in the next. Don't make that mistake.

[ 22 : 40 ] If you're walking past the poor in this life and thinking you're pretty good, you may be missing God's heart and His presence forever.

And the end of the parable has one final interaction. Jesus brings us back to the subject of God's word and how we respond to it. Listen for that, verse 27.

The rich man said, then I beg you, Father, if Lazarus can't come over here to me to give me some water, 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.

But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, no, no, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

Abraham said to him, if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. The rich man says, well, it's too late for me, but at least go warn my brothers about these eternal realities I'm experiencing.

[ 23 : 59 ] And Abraham responds, they have the warnings of the Old Testament scriptures. They know them. The rich man responds like many of us, I think, yeah, yeah, that's nice, but I really didn't take those seriously.

I needed more evidence. If something else, if I had heard the voice of God, if I had seen something clearly supernatural take place right in front of me, then I would have believed, so how about try that with them?

Have you ever felt that? You ever said something like that? Abraham says, our unbelief, our lack of repentance, as it were, is not from lack of evidence, but rather from hearts that love and worship things that are not God, things other than God.

God's word is sufficient. His law exposes us and points those of us with hearts that don't match God's heart to our need for someone to live and die for us and to rise from the dead.

In Jesus' day, they had a different guy named Lazarus, who many had watched walk out of the tomb, and many Pharisees and others still did not believe in Jesus, right?

[ 25 : 32 ] In our day, we have now the testimony of the risen Jesus Himself, the eyewitness accounts of many who saw Him, and the evidence of His resurrection power in this world and through His church, and still many of us don't believe.

The rich man knows what's needed. Repentance. He identifies it really clearly. He sees it clearly on this side of eternity.

Verse 30 says it this way, No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

That's what they need. They need repentance. We need our hearts exposed by God's law so that we see we fall short of His glory.

We need then, when that happens, we need then not to lower or relax the standard so we can meet it. That's maybe what the Pharisees were suggesting, that they could measure up to God's law.

[ 26 : 40 ] What we need is for the standard to be kept high and us to be exposed as falling short so that we turn to God. Cry out for His rescue.

Ask Him to give us His heart to follow His word. And if we take eternity seriously, and we must, if we take God's word seriously, Moses and the prophets will tell us we must take repentance seriously.

The point here is much broader than rich and poor, isn't it? it's getting at our hearts. But that's the window, the primary one here, that Jesus is using into the Pharisees' hearts.

I've been convicted this week, it's one we don't look through enough at our own hearts. We're used to it. We're comfortable. We need to have our own hearts exposed by God's law so that we turn to Him in repentance.

So as we close, just a chance for us to take all three of these things seriously this morning. I'm just going to give you a sampling. A lot more verses we could read.

[ 27 : 59 ] But starting with Moses and the prophets, I'm going to include Proverbs, a book of wisdom for living in relationship with God. These are things the Pharisees had been told that we have as well.

Leviticus 19, you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. I am the Lord your God.

In Deuteronomy, if among you one of your brothers should become poor, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

You shall give to him freely and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him. Because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and all you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land.

Therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land. The prophets are constantly calling God's people back to God's heart and his law, aren't they?

[ 29 : 01 ] Just a couple of them. Isaiah 58, Is not this the fast which I choose to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house?

When you see the naked to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Amos chapter 5, Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them.

You've planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Zechariah 7, Thus has the Lord of hosts said, Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother, and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor.

Do not devise evil in your heart against one another. Proverbs says it shorter and clearer perhaps for some of us. Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.

[ 30 : 13 ] Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him. Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

We could keep reading all day. I think you understand what God's word is saying. Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who's generous to the poor.

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. The rich man experienced that the hard way, didn't he? Jesus affirms all of these laws.

Not one will pass away, right? And he adds to them, Luke 14, when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. James chapter 2, we get a good look at our hearts.

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Imagine this, if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you stand over there or sit down at my feet, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

[ 31 : 36 ] Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom? He could have said, hasn't God decided to bring the poor to Abraham's side in heaven?

But you've dishonored the poor man. So he challenges us later in that chapter, if a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 1 John 3, if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Does the law of God convict your heart? Do our lives indicate that we embrace God's law and share his heart for the poor, or would we just like to think we do?

Do we really believe that Jesus is good news of great joy for all people, even those who look different from us? By the way, don't just tell yourself, I don't know any poor people, there aren't any right outside my front door like the rich man had.

[ 33 : 07 ] You know, the closest elementary school to this church has 72% of its students below the poverty line for free lunch. There's been a homeless camp within walking distance of this church property for several years.

South Huntsville alone has three separate Section 8 housing complexes. Madison County alone currently needs an additional 50 foster families to care for kids they need to place.

There are people working in each of our offices, on our streets, and just about every place we go to eat or shop, who know material need deeply.

If you want help engaging there with God's heart, if you don't really know where to start but your heart wants to, talk with Robert Blevins.

He's sitting over here. He's here on staff, not because he's got all the answers, but he's here to help equip us to love as God has called us to.

[ 34 : 14 ] He would love to sit down and have coffee, I mean tea, he doesn't drink coffee. He'd love to have tea with you, to meet with your small group, to talk with you about what this could look like in your life.

But this is really important. Don't leave here thinking that that is repentance. That may be fruit of repentance in your life.

Repentance, remember repentance turns first where? From bad deeds and failures to good deeds and successes? Repentance turns first to God.

Turns back to Him and seeks His forgiveness first. And then His heart. Do you know there's only one character in all of Jesus' parables who gets a name?

Lazarus. Lazarus. Lazarus. Lazarus. The poor homeless beggar. You know what Lazarus means? God helps.

[ 35 : 22 ] Don't leave here today with your hope in doing better. That's not what will save you. You'll need a new heart for that and you can't do that for yourself.

Our hope is that God helps. That God sends a Savior. And we get to celebrate that in a special way this week. A Savior who lives for us, who dies to offer us forgiveness of our sins for all of our failures so they can be forgiven forever.

And then He rises from the dead to give us new life and the hope of having new hearts that love like God's. that's what His resurrection power does in those who trust Him.

Today if you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts but have your heart broken and turn to Him and have it healed forever.

Let's pray. Father, we confess together our great sin, our failures.

[ 36 : 34 ] Your law, one verse is enough to expose our hearts. To show us that we don't live and love as you have called us to.

And so Father, first we ask for your forgiveness. We need the blood of Jesus to cover us, not our own efforts. And then Father, as it does, as we continue to drink deeply of His grace, might you make us a community that loves the way you love, that reflects your heart rather than just the way we feel or the world around us.



Might we love so that others know of a God who loves like this so richly, so deeply, so eternally. Thank you for your word.

Would you use it in our hearts for the sake of your glory in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](http://southwood.org).

for more information, we'll find out in Jesus' name. Thank you. For more information, we'll find out in Jesus' name. In Jesus' name, in Jesus' name.■■■. earth. giveaway there. You know, and the yes, when you put them there, and I'll be living there..

[ 38 : 02 ] You know, I'll be there too. in Jesus' name. In Jesus' name. I love it.  
How is it?