May 11/12, 2024

The Time to Listen is Now

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom

Luke 16:19-31

Pastor Bryan Clark

If we were to compare life as a race, I think we would all understand that it matters little who's winning halfway through the race. What matters is who wins when you cross the finish line. Well, that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Luke, Chapter 16. This is another one of those passages where there's lots of discussion, lots of disagreement and challenges, and it starts with the question as to whether or not this is a parable. It's not identified as a parable, and one of the challenges is that some of the characters are named, and that would be very unique in a parable. Usually, it's this man, this woman. But some of these characters actually have names. So some people see it as an actual historical account. That seems highly unlikely to me. It seems best to just take it as a parable. And as always, the case with a parable is what matters is the context. There's no way to interpret a parable without an understanding of the context.

So if you were here two weeks ago, and we talked about counting the cost, I mentioned that Jesus was in what we refer to as the Perean time of His ministry. All the way north was the area of Galilee. That was typically homebase for Jesus. You go a little bit south, and it's an area called Perea. And then you get down into Judah and that's where Jerusalem is. Jesus is in His final journey from Galilee through Perea to Jerusalem where He will be arrested and crucified. So He's still on that same journey in this particular text. He's teaching His disciples on a very familiar subject. It's a subject He has taught on a number of times, and that is basically this idea that you cannot serve God and money. You cannot live for the kingdom of this world and for the kingdom of God. They're just not compatible. You have to understand what ultimately matters. Well, that's then where Luke picks it up in verse 14. And he tells us:

> **Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.** (*NASB, 1995, Luke 16:14)

So the Pharisees were the extremely righteous, religious leaders of Israel. Religion has always been about big money. It's just always been that way. And these religious leaders, the most righteous and zealous among them, had used their power and position to accumulate considerable wealth. So when Jesus says you can't serve God and money, they scoffed at that. They roll their eyes, because of course you can. It is entirely possible to have your cake and eat it too. If you don't believe that, just look at us. They would have considered themselves the most righteous of the righteous, and they were very wealthy. As a matter of fact, Luke adds the description "They were **lovers of money."** So Jesus responds,

> **And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men…** (In other words, that which impresses people, that which reflects the value system of this world actually) **is detestable** (It's disgusting; it's offensive.) **in the sight of God**." (Vs. 15)

So that then causes Jesus to launch into this parable in verse 19:

> **"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores."** (Vs. 19-21)

So we're introduced to the two primary characters. The first one is **a rich man**. He'll go through the entire story without ever having a name. He's just the rich man. When the text says he **habitually dressed**, it's a way of saying these weren't his Sunday go-to-church clothes. This is how he dressed every day. The purple dye that led to purple clothing was extremely rare, primarily reserved for royalty. So for him to have purple robes, would have been a sign of extreme wealth. The linen that it's talking about would have been his underwear, the undergarment that he wore, and this would have been fine Egyptian linen. So, he didn't just dress that way now and then. This was his habit every day, to make sure everybody was impressed with how wealthy he was. When it says **joyously living in splendor every day,** the English translation there kind of confuses this, but the Greek is clearly a reflection of having a banquet every day. This is language used to describe throwing a party, having a banquet, having all the finest food every single day. He would have been featured on *The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. He wore his robes, his garments, and he threw a feast every day to make sure everybody knew that he was something.

That, then, is contrasted with **a poor man by the name of Lazarus**. Now, perhaps he's named that because the name Lazarus means *God is my help*, and it's a way of driving home that message. Lazarus was so weak, or else he was so lame, that he had to be carried and laid at the gate every day. This is the first we also learn that the rich man also had a gate. In that community, this also would have been indicative of extreme wealth, to have a property that was gated. So Lazarus is ***laid at the gate and his body is covered with hideous sores***. He stays at the gate because he's hoping for a few scraps of food thrown out by the rich man. When the text says scraps that have fallen from the table, you have to appreciate the fact that he's not in the house getting the scraps as they fall on the floor. He's outside at the gate, which means, at the end of the day, they sweep all of the scraps that fell on the floor—this is the garbage—and they take it to the gate, and they throw it into the street. He's hoping to get some of that to stay alive one more day. But he has to compete with the dogs. In the ancient world, dogs were not household pets. Dogs were dirty, mangy, disease-filled street creatures, and most people hated them. So, he had to compete with the dogs for a little scrap of food. But when the text says **besides**—one more thing you need to know—is that when a dog licks its wound, it's trying to heal the wound. So what the text is saying is, even these dirty mangy street dogs showed more compassion to the poor man than the rich man. So that sets up the story, and halfway through the race it seems fairly obvious that the rich man is winning. But then we get to the finish line, verse 22:

> **"Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried."** (Vs. 22)

So the poor man dies. The text does not say he was buried. Likely his body was just removed and discarded somewhere. But there's this wonderful statement that, in that moment, the angels of God met him and carried him to a place of honor referred to as **Abraham's bosom.** Now you say,

"What does that mean?" It's not exactly language we use today. Typically, the bosom was like anything frontal between the shoulders. So even like a big hug would have been considered as being in someone's bosom. But this is actually referring to something much more specific. In that culture, the people did not eat at tables with chairs. They actually dined at very low tables, and they reclined. So, typically, they reclined on some sort of pillow, always on their left arm, and ate with their right arm, with their feet going away from the table. Imagine now the host leaning that way on his left elbow. So, whoever was immediately to the front, the next position to the right, was considered *in the bosom of the host*, because they were all but in his lap. And it would not have been unusual for that person to even just kind of lean back in the bosom of the host. That's the whole idea of that honored position. You have this in the Upper Room when Jesus was there with His disciples. And the text says that John was there in the seat of honor, as he leaned back on the bosom of Jesus. That's what it's talking about. So, the scene is setting up a banqueting table, and Abraham is the host, and Lazarus is seated in the position of honor at the table.

We're also told that **the rich man died, and he was buried**. He probably had a very expensive tomb. It would have been consistent for a man of his wealth to have hired many mourners, who would have mourned in the streets for days because of his passing. But all of a sudden, he's going to realize the race is over…and he's not the winner. Verse 23:

> **"In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and he saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'"** (Vs. 23-24)

So the rich man is in **Hades**. He's in hell, and he is in **torment**! He looks up, and he sees Lazarus. He knows him. He recognizes him. He knows him by name. Only now, all of a sudden there's been a great reversal. And the one who used to be at the gate in such misery is now at the banqueting table as Abraham's honored guest and the rich man is the one in misery. When he cries out, **Father Abraham**, this is a very respectful greeting, a very respectful way of addressing Abraham. It's good to remind ourselves, we're not talking about an atheist. We're not talking about an agnostic. We're talking about a highly religious Jew, who determined to live for the things of this world. It's interesting, he hasn't figured it out yet. He still sees Lazarus as beneath him, as his little servant boy: "Abraham, send Lazarus over here to serve me." He went from his banqueting table, to wanting nothing more than one drop of water, for he is in torment. It's a very dramatic picture! Verse 25:

> **"But Abraham said, 'Child,** (*probably better translated, Son,*) **remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; and now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.'"** (Vs. 25-26)

So here is the rich man, who in his lifetime showed no mercy to those in need. But now, suddenly, he's the one in need, and he's crying out to Abraham to please show mercy to him. But Abraham says, "Son," (It's a very tender response.) He's not yelling at him; he's not calling him names; it's actually very tender. "Son, you need to remember, you made your choice, and during life, you

had your good things, but that race is over…and you lost!" And Lazarus, just to say, "Man, he had a miserable time…but that's also over. Now he's the winner and he's seated with Abraham at the banqueting table." This is the great reversal! But he says, "You know, even if I wanted to send Lazarus over, I couldn't, because there is this chasm that separates us." It's interesting that Jesus says it's a **chasm** that is **fixed**…and nobody is going to change sides, from one direction or the other. It's a warning. "You better think about this and make your decisions now, because once the race is over, the winners and losers are set…and there is no changing that!

It's worth noting that Jesus is abundantly clear that, over time, the people in torment don't change their minds and eventually all make their way across the divide. He's very clear; it doesn't work that way. It is incredibly reckless to suggest otherwise. There's a chasm and it's fixed! And this is the way it is. Verse 27:

> **"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'"** (Vs. 27-29)

So the rich man says, "If that's the deal, then can you send Lazarus, the errand boy, back to my father's house? I've got five brothers, and you need to warn them, so they don't end up in this place of torment." What he's implying by that is, if someone would have warned him, he would have made different decisions. Nobody told him…if only somebody would have warned him. The irony of this is that's exactly what Jesus is doing in telling the story. He is warning the Pharisees, that while they still have a chance to change their minds, "You better listen!" But Abraham says, "No, they don't need Lazarus. **They have Moses and the Prophets**." He's talking about the Old Testament Scriptures. This is not something new. Moses and the Prophets warned of this over and over and over again. The Pharisees were supposed to be experts in Moses and the Law. They should have understood this warning, again and again and again. They had plenty of warnings. The problem is they're not interested. They don't want to hear it. "I don't want to know." They love their money, and that's what they live for. Verse 30:

> **"But he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"** (Vs. 30-31)

No, if they're not going to listen to Moses and the Prophets, they're not going to listen to Lazarus, just because he came back from the dead. The first readers of Luke's Gospel would have been very familiar with the fact that shortly after this moment, Jesus, enroute to Jerusalem, would stop in Bethany, where he would raise his friend named Lazarus from the dead. He had been dead three days; he was already starting to stink. When Jesus miraculously raises another Lazarus from the dead, did they all believe? No! As a matter of fact, John tells us it was at that moment that the Pharisees determined that both Jesus and Lazarus must die. And of course, the ultimate fulfillment was that Jesus Himself would rise from the dead and would demonstrate that He had conquered sin and death, once for all time! Would they believe? Not very many. "Even if someone comes back from the dead, I'm not going to believe." "Why?" "Because I don't want to! I don't want to hear it; I'm not interested!" as Jesus warns them.

So what is the relevance of this parable to us today? First of all, we have to be careful we don't misunderstand. The point of the parable is not that all rich people are bad and going to hell, and all poor people are good and going to heaven. The Bible certainly does not teach that. Think about the parable Jeff explained last week of the Good Samaritan. The point of the parable is not that all priests and Levites are bad, and all Samaritans are good. That's not the point. Abraham himself was very wealthy. There's a very specific context. The Pharisees are scoffing at the message of Jesus, so He's telling them this story, because they're lovers of money. You can have rich people who love Jesus and live for the kingdom of God. And you can have poor people that live for the things of this world, and love money. It has nothing to do with how much money you have. It does have to do with the issue of the heart. Whether you're going to live for the things of this world, or whether you're going to live for the kingdom of God—whether you understand the difference between what matters and what doesn't matter—it's just helpful to make a note. Many of us in the room, when we read this, we would identify with the poor person. But it's helpful to understand, based on how the rest of the world lives and how we live, almost everyone in the room would be considered one of the rich people. But the point is, "Do we understand the difference between what matters and what doesn't matter? What difference it makes is if you're winning halfway through the race, if, in the end, you lose…you lose forever?"

It's also important to remember Jesus was not doing a seminar on life after death, but there are some things worth noting. We just want to note them carefully. Typically, in these parables, Jesus is identifying things that people would have known and understood. So, again, think last week of the Good Samaritan. There is actually a city of Jericho. There is a city of Jerusalem. There is a road, and it is a dangerous road. There are priests; there are Levites; there are Samaritans. That's what makes the parable work, taking actual things people knew and understood. So with that in mind, we move cautiously. For example, the idea that Abraham and the rich man could converse back and forth is not meant to say that's the way it's going to be. How could comfort and paradise be a place where you see and converse with people you know, who are in torment? It's just necessary to try to make a point. But there are other parts of this worth noting. I love the picture, that when Lazarus dies, immediately God has a couple of angels there…and they immediately escort Lazarus to the place of honor at the banqueting table. That's a beautiful picture!

I think it's also worth noting that Abraham, the rich man, and Lazarus all had bodies. The reason that matters is because this is part of what we refer to as the intermediate heaven. What we mean by that is, eventually Jesus comes back. Our bodies are resurrected, transformed. He ushers in the new heaven and new earth, and that is our final destination. For sure, we will have bodies forever in the new heaven and earth. There's more mystery to this intermediate time right now, but this text at least seems to hint that we will have bodies. It's interesting that the rich man knew Lazarus by name and recognized him. He seemed to be aware of his life back home, his father and his brothers. He seemed to be aware of their situation. And we certainly want to notice that Jesus is quite firm about the idea that there is a chasm, and it is fixed! And after death, no one crosses back and forth between the two.

Ultimately, the point of the parable is to give thought to what we live for, give thought to what matters, and to be sure that we're clear that the things of this life, end at death. We need to make sure we're not confused and end up giving our lives to the kingdom of *this* world…and miss the kingdom of God!

I also find that there's a great comfort in this. There is a reminder that for the unbeliever, the only good they're ever going to know is whatever they can accumulate in this life. But when they die, that is over…and it's over forever…and the rest is torment! But for us who believe, the only pain, the only suffering, the only struggle, the only despair we will ever know, is in this life. And when we die, it's over! It's over, and it's over forever! And what lies ahead is more comfortable, more glorious than words could possibly describe. No one can change that. No one can take that away from you. So it seems to be that no matter how hard life gets, no matter how much we struggle, no matter how painful it gets—and it can get very painful—that that does come to an end, and the future is absolutely glorious! It seems to me that no matter what it is you're going through, there's every reason for hope.

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You warn us. You tell us the truth again and again and again. Lord, in our culture, there's just a lot of people that don't want to hear it. They want to have their good now, with a devastating future to come. God, we don't rejoice in that. It's heartbreaking. But we're also thankful that through Jesus, no matter what we go through in this life, no matter the pain, or the struggle, or the despair, that comes to an end, and the future for those of us who believe is glorious. And we have every reason for hope. Lord, for that we give You thanks. In Jesus' name, Amen.

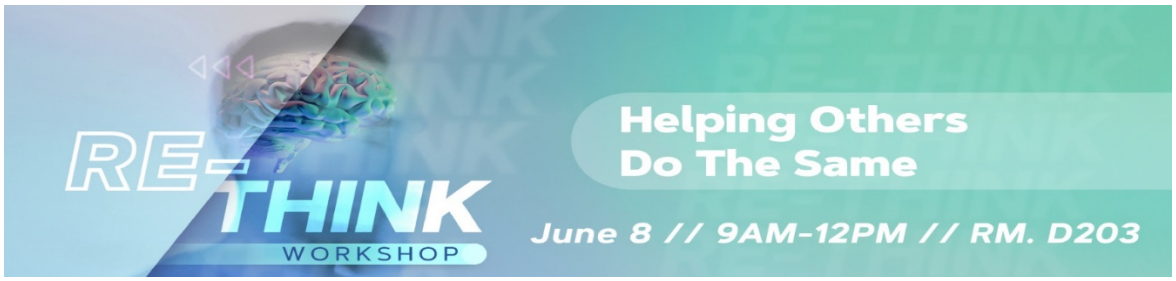
Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, 1995
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2024 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

SPRING 2024 // WEEK 6

Life Group Questions

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom // May 11-12, 2024

The Time to Listen is Now // Luke 16:19-31



Several of the weeks in our Kingdom Stories Series have been connected to loving others and sharing Jesus with them. As you heard Jacob announce this past weekend, this summer our Outreach Team will be offering a Re-Think Workshop on the "Helping Others Do the Same" portion of our vision statement.

We want to help others know Jesus and become more like him. It can seem intimidating at times, but it doesn't need to be! During this workshop, you'll have the opportunity to re-think what it is to share Jesus with others, not as one more thing to add to your to-do list, but as a natural part of your life.

This would be a great workshop for your Life Group (or several from your group) to attend together. Here is a Registration Link: https://www.lincolnberean.org/eventfinder/eventdetails/?id=31534. Each person will need to register on their own.

Introduction

We step into a parable referred to as "The Rich Man and Lazarus." Through vivid storytelling, Jesus paints a detailed contrast between a wealthy, self-righteous man and a poor, afflicted beggar named Lazarus. Their fates, both in life and beyond, serve as a lens through which we examine the values of this world next to God's value system. As we delve into this passage, we are compelled to confront challenging questions about righteousness, mercy, and our eternal dwelling.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) If you could determine your last meal that you would ever eat and enjoy, what would be on the menu? Be specific!

2) How did the Personal Spiritual Exercises go for you last week? Share your insights with the group.

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:

a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

Read the full passage together with your group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) **Prior to this week, how familiar were you with this parable? What was a detail, thought or moment that stood out to you from the sermon or individual study?**

2) Read Luke 16:14-15 for the context of the parable**. Why does Jesus tell the story of "The Rich Man and Lazarus"? How does this detail form the way you read the parable?**

3) Jesus seasons his parable teaching with images of contrast. They provide a vivid explanation of the differences between multiple kingdoms: earthly kingdom, Hades and God's Kingdom. Sharp distinctions between joy and sorrow, hope and torment, or success and failure heighten this reality that the choice to surrender your life to Christ is a matter of the heart. **Make a list of all the contrast images you find in the passage. Share this list with your group.**

As we look closer at these contrasts, we begin to see that Jesus' teaching has many layers to it. His Word is rich with meaning! The take-home message of this particular Kingdom Story is <u>not</u> about the poor being more righteous than the wealthy. **From your list of contrasts what do you notice Jesus saying about the value system of God's Kingdom?**

How is this different from the value system we find and experience in the kingdoms of this world? In light of this realization, how might you live different in loving God with your life, and loving others?

4) The dialogue between the rich man and Father Abraham in Luke 16:23-31 serves as a sobering reflection on the permanent, eternal consequences of sin. Did you wonder why the rich man, in his time of need, called upon Father Abraham rather than the true Heavenly Father? Perhaps it was another indication of his heart status. **At the start of this dialogue, what is the rich man's request of Abraham, and what is Abaraham's response?**

As Jesus helps us understand the way of God's kingdom in this parable, it reminds us that people will respond to the good news of the Gospel message differently. **Thinking back to the parable of the soils (Matthew 13), which soil do you think the rich man represents, and which soil does Lazarus represent?** Soil types are path, rocky, thorns and good/yielding soil.

A side-by-side look at both parables can help us see the consistency of Jesus' teachings and the Truth found in them. With each parable, Jesus adds another aspect to the complete picture of salvation. **How do you continue to process your own personal story of receiving Christ as we study the various parables? Share any personal insights or discoveries you have made with your group.**

Think of a specific person in your life that might represent the rich man. **How does the meaning and message of the parable change the way you share the gospel and pray for this person?**

5) The parable of the rich man and Lazarus *is* about the value system in God's Kingdom. It is *also* a glimpse of the realities in life after death. The irony of this parable is that Jesus was doing for the Pharisees what the rich man asked Abraham to do for his brothers still on Earth. Jesus was warning the Pharisees. **What observations about life after death do you make from this specific passage? What details does He reveal about Hades and Heaven?**
(For more detail on these ideas, you can check out Pastor Bryan's book *Life After Death* at the Publication Center, or visit our website and check out the Life After Death Sermon Series at this link: https://www.lincolnberean.org/sermon-serie/life-after-death.)

Knowing that Christ endured the cross, conquering sin and death, should compel us to heart and life change now. **How do these details about Hades and Heaven change the way you live your life now?**

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Prayer Focus: This week, remind yourself daily of Christ's finished work on the cross for you. Commit to praise-filled conversations with God. Perhaps start with the meaningful lyric of Phil Wickham's song, "Living Hope".

How great the chasm that lay between us. How high the mountain I could not climb. In desperation, I turned to heaven and spoke your name into the night. Then through the darkness Your loving kindness tore through the shadows of my soul. The work is finished, the end is written. Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Who could imagine so great a mercy? What heart could fathom such boundless grace? The God of ages stepped down from glory to wear my sin and bear my shame. The cross has spoken, I am forgiven. The king of kings calls me His own. Beautiful savior, I'm yours forever. Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free. Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me. You have broken every chain. There's salvation in your name. Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Scripture Focus: The name Lazarus was a common name in the Jesus' day, that means "whom God helps". The use of this name in the ministry of Jesus, and its connection to the theme of resurrection is undeniable. Although the Lazarus in this parable is not the same Lazarus that Jesus befriends in the book of John, we can connect the dots on our thoughts about resurrection with these two Bible passages. Read and reflect on John 11 and 12 to develop a bigger picture of God as our Helper. You will see how His reversal from death to life is the ultimate source of help for those who believe.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?