

Today's Decision – Tomorrow's Destiny

Luke 16: 19-31

Preached September 28, 2025

Lazarus, which means either “God has helped” or “God is my help” is the poor man who died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. Do you notice the differences? First the poor man is named – Lazarus. In all of Jesus’ parables it is only in this one that a person is given a name. This Lazarus is not the brother of Mary and Martha who was raised from the dead. Second, notice the vast difference between what happens to Lazarus and the rich man at their death. Lazarus is carried by the angels to Abraham; the rich man is buried. In today’s reading we are to assume that he is buried in Hades, a Greek term for the place of the dead.

Hades is not usually equated with hell which is defined as a place of eternal torment and which are understood to be separate places. However, in Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus the concepts of Hades and hell seem to merge. The rich man does enter Hades prior to any final judgement or final resurrection to occur in the last days. In this parable he is tormented, an image associated with hell

Lazarus goes straight to Abraham.

The rich man looks up from his place of torment to see Lazarus with Abraham. He calls out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue.

Did you notice that the rich man used Lazarus’ name? He was aware of who the poor man was – by name – and must have been aware of his suffering and who he was all along and yet just ignored him when he walked past him at his gate.

Abraham’s response is direct and condemning. He refers to the rich man’s good life and to Lazarus’ difficult life. Abraham also refers to the great chasm that is between them; a chasm that cannot be crossed. If you have stood at the South rim of the Grand Canyon and looked across to the other side you might have an idea of just what a great chasm looks like. Abraham is clear that there is no way for Lazarus to get to the rich man to quench his thirst.

There we have it. The end of the story. The rich man had it all in life; Lazarus had little!

But, wait, there is so much more. The second part of today’s reading from Luke continues as we now see that in death the lives of Lazarus and the rich man are reversed and the rich man is reminded of a lesson which he should have known throughout his life.

Today’s reading goes on...,” The rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his father’s house to warn his five brothers so that the same ending will not happen to them.

Abraham reminds the rich man that he and his brothers have had Moses and the prophets all their lives and should have listened to them. What law of Moses did the rich man violate by his refusal of charity to the poor. What should he have heard, studied, and known.

In Deuteronomy 15: 4-11 from **The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation** we read:

There shall be no needy among you—since the Lord your God will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion – if only you heed the Lord your God and take care to keep all this instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. For the Lord your God will bless you as He has promised you; you will extend loans to many nations, but require none yourself; you will dominate many nations, but they will not dominate you.

It, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. Beware lest you harbor the base thought, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,” so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing. He will cry out to the Lord against you, and you will incur guilt. Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Lord your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you; open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

Now we know the teaching that the rich man and his family should have known and lived all along.

Abraham continues, “If they (the brothers) do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead.” How prophetic is this statement? Although Jesus will be raised from the dead many will reject his message.

Just what should we understand from this telling of the story of the rich man and Lazarus?

James Merritt shares a story.

In a children’s Bible class there was a teacher telling a story about the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus. He pointed out how one man was rich and one man was poor while they were on this earth. After they died, he pointed out how one man went to be with God and one man went to live without God. After he got through with the lesson he said, “Now who would you rather be; the rich man or Lazarus?” One quick thinking kid raised his hand and said, “I’d like to be the rich man while I am alive and Lazarus when I am dead.”

I wonder. It seems that just because someone is rich or poor is not a reason to go to heaven or to hell; it is whether, or not, that we believe and follow God’s word that we earn real salvation or damnation. The rich man and his brothers had the word of God. So do we. They could have listened to the words of Moses and the prophets. We can listen to those words and to the words of our Savior, Jesus.

Let us live for God, look to God, and listen to God for the only life that will really matter, for I believe that today’s decisions will determine tomorrow’s destiny.

Amen

William S. Bray