## Lazarus and the Rich Man

*There was once a rich man who wore expensive clothes and every day ate the best food. But a poor beggar named Lazarus was brought to the gate of the rich man's house. He was happy just to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. His body was covered with sores, and dogs kept coming up to lick them.*

*The poor man died, and angels took him to the place of honor next to Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. He went to hell and was suffering terribly. When he looked up and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side, he said to Abraham, "Have pity on me! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and touch my tongue. I'm suffering terribly in this fire." Abraham answered, "My friend, remember that while you lived, you had everything good, and Lazarus had everything bad. Now he is happy, and you are in pain. And besides, there is a deep ditch between us, and no one from either side can cross over."*

*But the rich man said, "Abraham, then please send Lazarus to my father's home. Let him warn my five brothers, so they won't come to this horrible place."*

*Abraham answered, "Your brothers can read what Moses and the prophets wrote. They should pay attention to that." Then the rich man said, "No, that's not enough! If only someone from the dead would go to them, they would listen and turn to God." So Abraham said, "If they won't pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even to someone who comes back from the dead."*

Luke 16: 19-31

## Background (*dramatically described*)

# **Act One** (not a word is spoken but the scene is set and characters identified)

### ***There Once Was A Rich Man…***

* The parable never really tells us his name. Tradition indicates his name was “Dives,” but that’s just the Latin word for “rich,” “opulent” or “wealthy.”
* The man’s wealth is great. His purple clothes indicate he was rich or royalty. The cost of just one robe exceeded the average man’s annual wage.
* He feasted in luxury all day, every day. He enjoyed expensive exotic dishes. In doing so he broke the commandment to work six days and rest on the Sabbath.
* He had a gate (for privacy or security) that separated him from everyone else, particularly the needy of the city.
* He’s not described as evil. He simply never noticed anyone with needs at his doorstep. This rich man is described as "an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).
* The rich man could have saved Lazarus. He did nothing.
1. ***There Was a Poor Man Named Lazarus…***
* He was a crippled beggar lying in the street at the gate of the rich man.
* His body was covered with open sores. He was so weak that dogs tormented him by licking his wounds (same dogs abundantly fed at the master’s table).
* He was starving. Jesus said, “When you give a feast, do not invite your friends and rich neighbors. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" (Luke 14:13-23).
* This is the only time a person is given a name in any of Jesus’ parables.
* The name “Lazarus” means, “God is my help.”

## Act Two

Lazarus dies of starvation. The rich man unexpectedly dies. The two men never spoke in life and lived separated by a table and a gate. The separation is even greater in death.

## Act Three

* This is the parable’s focal point (longest and most developed part of the story).
* In this scene the poor are rich and the rich are poor. Lazarus finds himself at the honored side of Father Abraham. The rich man finds himself in a place of torment.
* There are **three** complete exchanges between the rich man and father Abraham; Lazarus never says a word.
* The rich man begs for a drop of water. Abraham responds that the roles on earth are now reversed and that it’s too late to cross the heavenly divide. There’s no indication that the rich man has had a change of heart.
* The rich man accepts his fate and begs to warn his five brothers. Abraham refuses and states they can always learn the same lesson from Moses and the prophets.
* The rich man argues his brothers will only pay attention to the miracle of someone returning from the dead. Abraham disagrees and declares anyone who ignores Moses and the prophets will not listen to “someone who rises from the dead” (a hidden reference to Jesus). The story ends (or does it?).

##### Reflections

1. We are initially inclined to identify with Lazarus (or the rich man). This parable is much more subtle. In the end, many of us identify with the five remaining brothers. Will we listen to the message of Moses and the prophets that was fulfilled by Jesus Christ?
2. Dr Albert Schweitzer’s life was changed by this story. He concluded that the poor of Africa were people lying in need at Europe’s doorstep. He dedicated his life to service and founded the Lambaréné Hospital. This brought health and salvation to tens of thousands.
3. The Beatitudes have an emphasis on poverty and oppression. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled,” and " ‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry." (Luke 6).
4. Jesus spoke five times more about money, stewardship, and property than prayer. We cannot serve two masters. We serve God or mammon (possessions), not both.
5. Before the birth of Jesus, Mary praised God by proclaiming *“*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever”(Luke 1: 52-55).
6. The gospel of Luke does not say it is wrong to have wealth or possessions. It warns; “to whom much has been given, much will be required!” (Luke 12:48).

**Strength Finders talent: Empathy**

[**https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252236/empathy-theme.aspx**](https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252236/empathy-theme.aspx)

People with empathy can imagine themselves in other people’s lives or situations. There is obviously a difference between sympathy and empathy but in this case, Dives has neither. He was only concerned about himself and his friends and family.

Dives is banished to Hades in this parable. Hades has also been translated as the pit, the place of the dead, or as a dark and dismal place. This name has also been associated in scriptures with Gehenna which was also a pit and place of the dead. It was a narrow valley outside the walls of Jerusalem where garbage was thrown and burned. It was the place where Jesus was crucified.

Christ called for us to care for others. We should all have a degree of empathy for those in need. Jesus said we encounter him when we help others in need.

**Enneagram connections: Five**

[**https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-five**](https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-five)

A low level five would seek to avoid uncomfortable emotions and the where with all it would take to feel them. They can have a particular difficulty in dealing with painful feelings.

The low level five is known for avarice or greed. Fives fear giving things away or they fear they will not have enough for themselves. They fear impoverishment. Ironically, Dives’ selfishness denied basic human compassion for someone else who was truly impoverished.

The Great Commandment teaches us to love God and love ourselves as we love others. Dives had an abundance of self-love and avoided taking care of others. In the end he showed some concern for his family, but it was not enough. We are called to care for all of humanity. DNA studies indicate we all had a common parent 100,000 years ago in Africa. Many of our different colors and races only developed in the past 5 to 10 thousand years. We are all children of God. We all stand equal before God. Jesus called for us to love one another.

## Questions

1. Author Frances Havergal was known for her kind acts of charity. She practiced what she sang. What do we encourage God to “take” from us? What is your real treasure?

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee. (1874)

2. Is there someone in need near your home? Around the world? What can we do? Now!

3. Why do some people spend more time talking about ministry than actually doing it? Is Jesus calling us into action? How? When? Where? Why?

As it fell out upon one day, Rich Divès made a feast,

And he invited all his friends, And gentry of the best.

Then Lazarus laid him down and down, And down at Divès’ door:

“Some meat and drink, brother, Diverus, Bestow upon the poor.”

“Thou’rt none of my brothers, Lazarus, That liest begging at my door;

No meat, nor drink will I give thee, Nor bestow upon the poor.”

Then Lazarus laid him down and down, All under Divès’ wall:

“Some meat, some drink, brother Diverus, For hunger starve I shall.”

“Thou’rt none of my brothers, Lazarus, That liest begging at my gate;

No meat, no drink will I give thee, For Jesus Christ His sake.”

Then Divès sent out his hungry dogs, To bite him as he lay;

They hadn’t the power to bite one bite, But licked his sores away.

Then Divès sent to his merry men, To worry poor Lazarus away;

They’d not the power to strike one stroke, But flung their whips away.

As it fell out upon one day, Poor Lazarus sickened and died;

There came two angels out of heaven, His soul therein to guide.

“Rise up! rise up! brother Lazarus, And go along with me;

For you’ve a place prepared in heaven, To sit on an angel’s knee.”

As it fell out upon one day, Rich Divès sickened and died;

There came two serpents out of hell, His soul therein to guide.

“Rise up! rise up! brother Diverus, And come along with me;

There is a place provided in hell, For wicked men like thee.”

Then Divès looked up with his eyes, And saw poor Lazarus blest;

“Give me one drop of water, brother Lazarus, To quench my flaming thirst.”

“O, was I now but alive again, The space of one half hour!

O, that I had my peace again, Then the devil should have no power.”

*Traditional 18th Century English Carol*

Prayer: Dear Lord, empower me to serve you by loving my neighbor.