

Rich Man Poor Man - the Lesson to Everyone
A Series on the Reaction to Tax Collectors and Sinners: Part 4

Presented as a literary unit, Jesus tells Jewish religious authorities a series of parables: the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son and the Shrewd Manager. As Jesus sits with tax collectors and other social outcasts, Jewish religious authorities only see a poor itinerant Man talking about money with His parables, and fail to understand the meaning of these stories (similarly in Matt 13:10-17) and scoff at Him (Luke 16:14). Before Jesus presents the last parable in this narrative unit, the Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Man, He addresses the scoffing Jewish religious authorities:

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 is detestable in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)

Jesus confronts Jewish religious authorities with their motivation to publicly show themselves as righteous and be justified of their position before men; but, they fail to show themselves righteous before God and be justified by Him. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus explains how Jewish religious authorities do this:

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. (Matt 23:1-7)

Against this backdrop of scoffing Jewish religious authorities who were "lovers of money," Jesus begins the last parable. The Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Man. It is a parable that is about heaven and hell and is directed towards everyone listening.

"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. 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. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and 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.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but 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.' 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.' 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.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

The parable is principally about the perceptions of the Rich Man and the real existence of heaven and hell. As the Rich Man faces the stark reality of his eternal afterlife, he comes to several realizations.

1. One's wealth and outward appearance says nothing about one's faith in God.
2. After death, there is no second chance at salvation and mercy.
3. There is no testimony more powerful than the word of God.

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4. Faith is a matter of listening and obeying God's word (Ex 19:4-6).

Present among the social outcasts of Jewish society, Jesus narrates a series of parables as a single literary unit to address the attitudes of everyone listening in hopes of invoking a self-awareness of their prejudices and misunderstanding of faith, the agapē love of God the Father, and the task of building the kingdom of God.

Summary:

| Parable | Primary Audience | Conclusion | Point |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7)</p> <p>Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)</p> | <p>Jewish religious authorities (Luke 15:2-3)</p> | <p>I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)</p> <p>In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:10)</p> | <p>Jewish religious authorities are not taking care of God's people, and rather than bring others to faith, they are contemptuous of non-Believers.</p> |
| <p>Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24)</p> | <p>Jewish religious authorities (Luke 15:2-3)</p> | <p>But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found. (Luke 15:32)</p> | <p>Regardless of one's social position or how one came to faith, Believers should rejoice, rather than be jealous, of who God accepts.</p> |
| <p>Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13)</p> | <p>The disciples and indirectly the Jewish religious authorities (Luke 16:1)</p> | <p>And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other You cannot serve God and wealth. (Luke 16:12-13)</p> | <p>Manage God's money aggressively to extend the Kingdom of God including those not like themselves.</p> |
| <p>Rich Man, Poor Man (Luke 16:19-31)</p> | <p>Jewish religious authorities (Luke 16:14-15)</p> | <p>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." (Luke 16:31)</p> | <p>The conclusion to the entire narrative of these parables directed primarily to Jewish religious authorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One's wealth and outward appearance says nothing about one's faith in God. 2. After death, there is no second chance at salvation and mercy. 3. There is no testimony more powerful than the word of God. 4. Faith is a matter of listening and obeying God's word (Ex 19:4-6). |