

## 048: Where are Lazarus and Dives? Part 1 (based on Ch. 6 in *The Savior of All Men*)

When I was a much younger preacher, back in the mid-1990s, I was asked to preach at the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago.

- I chose Luke 16 as my text, the account of the rich man and Lazarus.
- The title of my message was: “The Absolute Truth of Heaven and Hell.”
- Today I shudder to think that I was merely presenting the traditional view of the text without having done in-depth study of my own in the broader context of Scripture.
- I did what so many preachers do — I inadvertently took the text out of its context and preached it the way that I had been taught.
- While my message was homiletically precise, and would undoubtedly be well-received in most Bible-preaching churches today, I now realize my message was an exegetical disaster.

In the German National Museum in Nuremberg is an illuminated Gospel Book, containing the Latin Vulgate version of the four gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

- It is called Codex Aureus of Echternach, having been created at the Benedictine Abbey of Echternach in Luxembourg in the eleventh century.
- One of the folios is entitled “Lazarus and Dives” — an artist’s rendering of the account in Luke 16, in three panels.
- You can view it on the internet.
- The top panel depicts Lazarus at the rich man's door, seeking food.

- The middle panel shows Lazarus' soul being carried to Paradise by two angels, where he finds rest and comfort at “Abraham's bosom.”
- The bottom panel is a horrible portrayal of Dives' soul being carried by demons to Hell (Hades), where he is tormented.
- This is a Roman Catholic depiction of the Luke 16 story told by Jesus which, ironically, carried over into Protestantism, despite the Reformation, and is the dominant view of virtually all churches today, Catholic, Protestant, and even Baptist.

For those who may not be familiar, Dives comes from the Latin word dives (spelled the same, but pronounced dee'-vays), which means “rich.”

- It was the word chosen by Jerome when he translated this passage into Latin in the Vulgate.
- The rich man was dives (dee'-vays), but by the 14th century it had morphed through usage into a proper name for this rich man.
- Thus, the two men in Luke 16 are sometimes referred to as Lazarus and Dives.
- What does Luke 16 say about these men?
- Are they in Heaven and Hell, as commonly taught?
- In order to understand why the traditional view is incorrect, we need to first understand the traditional view.
- To that end, it is essential to read the text.

Luke 16:19-31 19 There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

- 20-21 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.
- 22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.
- 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.
- 24 Then he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." 25 But Abraham said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.
- 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us."
- 27-28 Then he said, "I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment."
- 29 Abraham said to him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."
- 30 And he said, "No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent."
- 31 But he said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

Jesus tells the story of two men who die.

- According to traditionalists, it is the actual account of what happens to them after death — and, for that matter, what happens to everyone.
- The rich man goes to Hell (according to the KJV), although the Greek word used is *Hades*.
- The beggar Lazarus goes to "Abraham's bosom," which most equate with "Paradise" or Heaven.
- Some specify that they both go to Hades, which has two compartments (or at least it did before the death of Jesus).
- From this interpretation of the text, many preachers and commentators assume Jesus was teaching that, upon death, the wicked instantly go to Hell, and the righteous go either to Paradise or Heaven.

The rich man awakens to the reality that he is burning in Hell, but he can see Abraham and Lazarus afar off, so he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue.

- Abraham responds that the rich man had the best in life and Lazarus the worst, so now the roles are reversed.
- Not to mention, there is a great gulf keeping them from passing back-and-forth between the compartments of Hades.
- The rich man, therefore, resorts to "Plan B" — he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his (the rich man's) brothers so they don't have to go to the awful place of torment.
- Abraham replies, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."
- The rich man objects: "No, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."
- The passage ends with Abraham giving the final word to the rich man: "If your brothers do not listen to Moses

and the prophets, they won't be persuaded by one who rises from the dead."

The big debate amongst commentators is whether this is a parable or a historical account.

- If it is a parable, then it is to be interpreted in a metaphorical or allegorical sense, but if it is a historical account, then it must be interpreted literally.
- Thus, this question needs to be resolved if there is to be correct interpretation of the text.
- Scofield muddied the waters by commenting, "vs. 19-31 (of Luke 16) are not said to be a parable ... in no parable is an individual named."
- Scofield essentially invented a new rule—stories that use names are not parables.
- Unfortunately, that note shaped the interpretation of Luke 16 for generations of Bible readers.
- Ironically, Scofield breaks his own "rule" in Ezek. 23.
- He describes the first section of that chapter: The Parable of Aholah and Aholibah.
- The passage goes on to name two women, but clearly, the passage is parabolic.
- Why not apply your "rule" regarding parables here also, Mr. Scofield?

In this episode and the next, I intend to give four problems with the traditional view of Lazarus and the rich man.

- Furthermore, I will make the case that the story is a parable, not an actual account.
- The traditional view ignores the context.
- When interpreting Scripture passages, context is king.
- Nevertheless, the traditional view ignores it.

- Most Christians are quite confident that Lazarus went to Paradise or Heaven and the rich man went to Hell, yet they have no knowledge of the context.
- To put this passage (Luke 16:19-31) in its proper context, it is essential to explore the chapters leading up to it.

In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus tells the story of a man who is focused on living for the here and now, making money and accumulating possessions.

- Because he has so much "stuff," he has to tear down his barns (or storage units) and build larger ones.
- His attitude is like many believers today who essentially live to "eat, drink, and be merry."
- God calls him a "fool" and rebukes the man for not laying up treasure in heaven.
- He has obviously not focused on spiritual matters and the age to come.
- In so doing, he has forfeited millennial inheritance.
- God announces that his soul will be required that night.
- In other words, it is time to give an account of his life to God.
- In the verses following the parable, Jesus takes the opportunity to teach about the importance of not worrying (vs. 22-30), but rather, laying up treasure in the heavens (v. 33) and seeking the kingdom of God (v. 31).
- The scribes and Pharisees are listening to Jesus, trying to trap Him by His own words (11:53-54).

In Luke 12:35-48 Jesus shares the parable of the servants who are ready for the master's return vs. those who are not ready.

- The ones who are faithful during the master's absence are eagerly awaiting His return and living righteously.
- They are rewarded.

- In contrast, the unfaithful servants become lawless, abusive, and indulgent.
- Consequently, the master's return is a surprise for this group, and depending on the degree of their unfaithfulness, are either appointed a portion with the faithless or beaten with many stripes.
- Either way, these consequences speak to loss of millennial inheritance.

In Luke 13:1-9 Jesus uses two historical incidents to proclaim the importance of repentance — the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices and the eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell.

- In both cases, Jesus asks the audience if the deceased were worse sinners than everyone else.
- The implied answer is “no.”
- Then Jesus reminds the audience that unless they repent, they will all likewise perish.
- In fact, He uses this warning as the segue for a parable in Luke 13:6-9 about a fig tree that needs to be cut down for not bearing fruit.
- The fig tree represents Israel.
- The tree being cut down is symbolic of national Israel being judged for rejecting Christ's offer.
- From our historical vantage point, we know that particular judgment comes upon Israel in AD 70 at the hand of the Romans.

In Luke 14:7-14 Jesus shares a parable with the chief Pharisee's guests, to illustrate the importance of not seeking the high and lofty position at the table, but rather having a humble spirit and choosing the lowly seat.

- Better to have the host promote you to a higher seat, than demote you to a lower one.
- Jesus was teaching about the qualifications for kingdom inheritance.
- In Luke 14:15-24 Jesus shares a parable about a great supper.
- Guests are invited, but turn down the invitation, making silly excuses for why they cannot come.
- The master is angry and, instead, invites those out in the highways and hedges, demonstrating that the offer of kingdom inheritance will be taken from Israel and given to Gentile nations (i.e, the church — see Matt. 21:43).

In Luke 15 Jesus shares three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

- In every case, the owner loses something that belongs to him or her.
- But the owner aggressively goes out to seek for that which has been lost until it is found.
- The point of these parables is that Jesus came, in part, to seek out the wandering sheep of Israel in order to point them to repentance.
- He wants them to inherit a place in the kingdom of the heavens, the New Jerusalem, the city of reward.
- This has nothing to do with salvation but rather sanctification unto reward.

Think of the prodigal son in 15:11-32.

- He never ceases to be the son of the father, but he wanders away in sin, breaking fellowship with his father.
- He represents the tax collectors and sinners.
- But when he gets right with his father, he is welcomed back home with loving arms, and given the inheritance of the firstborn.

- The stay-at-home son represents the Pharisees.
- He loses the inheritance of the firstborn.
- It is given, instead, to the younger son because he repents.

In Luke 16:1-13, a steward has been squandering his master's resources, so he is called to give an account.

- He shrewdly goes out and discounts balances owing to the master, by cutting out his commissions, so he can collect the debts quickly.
- His plan works — the master is impressed by the man's shrewdness, and the customers have become friends that he can do business with after his stewardship ends.
- The point Jesus makes is that, just as unbelievers are driven in their use of money for temporal causes, so Christians should be driven in their use of money for eternal causes — making eternal "friends" by using money for evangelism, discipleship, helping needy people, etc. etc.
- That was the exact opposite of what the Pharisees were doing.

Notice how the parable begins in v. 1:

- "There was a certain rich man ..."
- No one questions that this is a parable.
- In fact, the heading in the Bible is "the parable of the unjust steward."
- In the same immediate context, look at 16:19.
- How does it begin?
- "There was a certain rich man ..." — the exact same wording as in v. 1.
- Yet most traditionalists claim that Luke 16:19-31 is not a parable!
- How can they make this claim?

As I have demonstrated, the rich man and Lazarus text follows a series of parables about matters of discipleship and inheritance.

- The repeated theme is laying up heavenly treasures instead of earthly, having a humble spirit, not focusing on wealth and possessions, serving the Lord faithfully, etc.
- Why is Luke 16:1 considered a parable while 16:19 is not?
- It's the same wording and the same context.
- Have Bible readers been misled by Scofield's notes?
- Not one of these parables in Luke, chapters 12-16 — or, for that matter, the texts between the parables — has anything to do with salvation in the sense of regeneration.
- Each of the passages and parables is about the urgent need for these Old Testament Jewish believers to repent of sin, get right with Jehovah God, sanctify themselves, and thereby qualify for inheritance in the kingdom.

In other words, both the immediate context and the broader context of the synoptic gospels are about sanctification unto reward.

- Not one of these texts has an evangelistic focus; they are all discipleship-oriented.
- That is why understanding the kingdom paradigm is so critical.
- Would it not be more accurate, seeing that it's contextual, to interpret the rich man and Lazarus text as *misthological* — that is, relating to matters of reward — rather than *soteriological* that is, relating to matters of salvation (in the sense of regeneration)?
- Jesus isn't talking about Heaven and Hell in Luke 16.

- He is rebuking the Pharisees for their focus on money and possessions and their sins of greed and covetousness and selfishness and neglecting the poor and needy.
- He is blasting their prideful, legalistic, tradition-focused lifestyle by pointing them to the consequences of their behavior in parabolic form.

Putting the account of the rich man and Lazarus in its context should alone be sufficient to interpret the text as a parable.

- But there is a second problem with the traditional view of Lazarus and the rich man.
- The traditional view misses the target of the text.
- The rich man and Lazarus text is about the scribes and Pharisees, their focus on wealth and possessions, and their mistreatment of the poor.
- As we shall see, in a spiritual sense, it is also about their resistance to proclaiming God's truth to the nations.
- Let's take another look at the context, but this time from a different angle, noticing Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees' sinfulness.

Luke 11:39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness."

- Following this indictment, Jesus makes several exclamatory statements to rebuke the Pharisees:
- Luke 11:40-44 "Foolish ones! ... Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like

graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them."

Starting in v. 46, Jesus includes the lawyers in His condemnation.

- Lawyers were experts in the law, closely connected with the Pharisees.
- Luke 11:46-47 "Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them."
- v. 52 "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."
- To see the expanded version of Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees, study Matt. 23.

The Pharisees have a big problem!

- They are first century traditionalists and fundamentalists, similar to their twenty-first century counterparts — legalistic, outwardly pious, but inwardly corrupt.
- They keep lists of things they must do, assuming that doing those things makes them spiritual, yet they ignore the important matters of spirituality.
- By their resistance to Christ's message of repentance, and their arrogant thinking that they are above it ("we have Abraham as our father"), they shut up the kingdom of heaven to others (Matt. 23:13).
- In other words, they cause good people to stumble by their teaching, keeping them from embracing Christ's message of repentance.
- Historically, it is important to understand that the Pharisees were the spiritual teachers of Israel.

- As a result, the people revered these religious leaders. In fact, Jesus said they sat in Moses' seat (Matt. 23:2) and, to the extent they were teaching the Mosaic law, the people should listen to their teaching, but not do what they do (Matt. 23:3).
- Knowing this, Jesus held their feet to the fire, but the Pharisees did not like it.

In fact, in the broader context of our Luke 16 passage, we find the Pharisees continually tussling with Christ.

- Luke 11:53-54 As He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.
- In Luke 13-14, after Jesus heals a hunchback woman and a man with dropsy on the Sabbath, the Pharisees protest vehemently.
- The ruler of the synagogue, undoubtedly a Pharisee, responds to Jesus in indignation (13:14).
- He is furious at Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

In Luke 15:1 the tax collectors and the sinners come near to hear His teaching.

- The Pharisees do not like it and complain, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them" (15:2).
- The Pharisees are upset that Jesus spends time with people they consider wicked sinners.
- However, the tax collectors and sinners had come in droves to repent and submit to baptism at the preaching of John and Jesus.
- They put the proud Pharisees to shame.

- In light of this broader context, to whom is Jesus speaking in Luke 16:19-31, the account of the rich man and Lazarus?
- He is addressing the Pharisees, whose focus on wealth and possessions, and their mistreatment of the poor, is accurately represented by the rich man in the parable.
- That is corroborated in the verses immediately preceding the main text.
- Luke 16:14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

The Pharisees love money, and they are constantly badgering Jesus.

- Some of the detail has been spelled out earlier in this episode, but I would encourage you to read Luke 12-16 for yourself to see the flow of the narrative.
- When I read this, up through 16:18, my mind wonders what Jesus is going to say next to put them in their places.
- Then comes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.
- But first, notice the immediately preceding verses.
- Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."
- Commentator Thomas Constable says: "Probably they reasoned that any wealth that they could accumulate was a sign of God's blessing on them. This was a common misinterpretation of the law in Jesus' day, as it is in ours ... but God was their real Judge, and He knew their greedy hearts."

Verse 15 is followed by a seemingly out-of-place remark:

- Luke 16:16 The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.
- A new dispensation has arrived, or is transitioning in, following the dispensation of law.
- John the Baptist has arrived on the scene and preached the need for repentance lest the nation be judged.
- Their repentance is to be sealed by water baptism.
- Many believe John's message, repent of sin, and turn back to Jehovah, submitting to the baptism of repentance.
- They are getting on the pathway of kingdom inheritance.
- In other words, multitudes are pressing into the kingdom of God.

Why does Jesus use this unusual terminology? — “everyone is pressing into the kingdom of God”?

- This term is only used one other place in the Greek:
- Matt. 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.
- Some commentators think this is referring to the struggle and power grab by the Pharisees to commandeer the kingdom message and thereby keep people from inheriting the kingdom.
- Thus, the common man has to resist the teaching of the Pharisees and ignore the peer pressure if they are to believe John and Jesus.
- That would explain one of the reasons why Jesus pronounces judgment on the Pharisees:
- Matt. 23:13 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Which message will ultimately win the day — the kingdom message of John and Jesus, or the kingdom condemnation of the Pharisees?

- Luke 16:17 It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.
- Regardless of what the Pharisees might think, the kingdom is coming, and the necessity of repentance and righteous living for kingdom inheritance — as taught and preached by John and Jesus — will endure, for they are the words of God.
- That is understandable, but then Jesus makes another comment in the following verse that seems odd:
- Luke 16:18 Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Is this verse out of place?

- No, Jesus simply makes this comment as an illustration of how the Word of God endures despite the Pharisees' rejection of it.
- By way of historic context, the Pharisees were quite permissive in their application of the Mosaic divorce laws.
- They would allow divorce even if there had been no fornication (what is commonly referred to as the “exception clause” in Matt. 19:9).
- In some cases, they would let a man divorce and remarry but not the woman.
- These are blatant inconsistencies and reflect their disobedience to the law.

Why does Jesus bring this up?



- Constable says: “For the Pharisees to disregard His teaching about money was equivalent to rejecting other divine revelation.”
- Aha! The five verses preceding the passage about the rich man and Lazarus demonstrate that Jesus is strongly rebuking the Pharisees for their wicked attitudes about money and possessions and the poor.

There are two aspects of Pharisaical behavior to which Christians could easily fall prey, and which we must avoid at all costs, by the grace of God.

- First, conservative legalism — thinking that outward conformity to certain standards makes one spiritual.
- Is that not a big problem for many Christians?
- Many tend to think, “If I keep a list (go to church, read my Bible, pray) and live in a conservative manner — conservative clothing, music, entertainment, and other practices, then I will be spiritual.
- That is a huge error in thinking.
- God doesn’t equate keeping religious lists or living conservatively with spirituality!
- Spiritual people are those who have surrendered to the Holy Spirit, by faith, so that the life of Jesus is seen in their life.
- Does that characterize you?

The second Pharisaical behavior that could characterize twenty-first century believers is having a focus on the here and now, money and possessions.

- This is particularly a problem for believers in the Western Hemisphere, most of whom have so much in the way of material goods.
- Do you live for today or for the coming kingdom age?
- Are you temporally focused or eternally focused?

- Are you a modern Pharisee or a modern disciple of Jesus?
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS!