

An Unnamed Rich Man and a Poor Man Named Lazarus

By Jim Myers

BHC Guidelines & Models This parable of Yeshua is found in Luke 16:19-31.

#1 Explorer's Pledge

My belief system will be large enough to include all facts, open enough to be questioned and examined, and flexible enough to change if errors or new facts are discovered.

#2 Words

A word consists of symbols or sounds with an attached bundle of associations. Those associations are a product of the source's culture, time period, locations and personal experiences.

#3 Communicating

A communications experience consists of a Source (writer or speaker) and Receptor (reader or hearer). Our goal is to identify the Source's meanings of words.

#4 The Bible

"The Bible" is a name many books share, but they are not all the same. Some have different books, while others have different words in the books they share.

#5 Biblical Heritages

Biblical Heritages are the histories of institutions that created biblical canons or make claims of divine authority linked to Bibles.

#6 The Brain

The brain continually rewrites its circuitry as it processes information to reflect the world around it and optimize its efficacy within it. It generates the individual realities humans experience as life. Beliefs are meme-models created by the brain.

"A certain man was rich, he was dressed in purple and fine linen, feasting splendidly every day. A certain poor man, named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, covered with sores, who desired to be satisfied from things falling from the rich man's table."

Notice that the rich man is unnamed rich and covered with the most expensive garments a person can buy. The poor man at his gates is named Lazarus and he is covered in sores. He needed the help of others to just get to the gate. Why would they lay Lazarus there? The answer is **TZEDAQAH**.

- Every person has an **obligation to give TZEDAQAH** to help the poor and needy.
- Every poor and needy person has **a right to receive TZEDAQAH**.
- The **poor do more for the giver than the giver does for the poor**.

Both the rich man and Lazarus are Jews. They knew about **TZEDAQAH**, as would their Jewish friends. Placing a poor man at the gates of a rich man should have been the best way for **both of them to get what they needed!**

In addition, this rich man was known to have large feasts every day, so they expected Lazarus to be invited in as soon as the rich man saw him. But all Lazarus hoped for was that someone would carry him in and lay him beside the dogs, so he could grab pieces of food that fell to the floor.

"Behold! Even the dogs coming, licked his sores."

Why did Yeshua include those words in the parable? Usually, statements like this have more than one meaning. Below are two options.

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- *Instead of Lazarus eating with the dogs, the dogs went to him and licked his sores.*
- *Unlike the rich man, his dogs did not ignore Lazarus. Dogs were not viewed as sources of uncleanness. The dogs provided comfort to Lazarus.*

“And it came to pass, that the poor man died, and the angels carried him away into the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.”

We aren't told when or where they died. The focus is on who carried them to their final destinations. **Angels** carried Lazarus to **Abraham's bosom** -- *the abode of bliss in the other world.*¹ **Unknown men** dug **a grave**, carried the rich man to it, and buried him!

*“In Sheol, lifting up his eyes, being in torment, the **rich man saw Abraham** from afar, **and Lazarus** in his bosom. He called and said, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me! Send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am suffering in this flame.’”*

The notion that, in the afterlife, **the saved and the damned could see each** other also appears in various texts. Fourth Ezra (2 Esdras) 7:36-37 predicts:

“The pit of torment shall appear, and opposite shall be the place of rest; and the furnace of hell shall be disclosed, and opposite the paradise of delight.”²

The Jewish audience was not surprised that the rich man recognized Abraham, even though he had died about 1,800 years before. According to 4 Maccabees 7:1; 13:17:

“Our ancestors Abraham and Isaac and Jacob do not die to God, but live to God . . . For if we so die, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us.”³

Abraham's **hospitality** was one of his dominant characteristics. The rich man probably expected Abraham to show that hospitality to him, but he didn't simply rely on Abraham's hospitality -- he made sure Abraham understood that he was suffering. He seems oblivious to how Abraham might view his request in light of how he failed to be a child of Abraham during his lifetime. And, even now, after death, he continues to think of Lazarus as nothing more than a servant, who is to fetch him what he desires.

*“Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you received good things in your life, and Lazarus likewise the bad. But now, here, he is comforted, and you are suffering. Between **us** and **you**, a great chasm has been firmly fixed, so that the ones wishing to pass from here to you cannot, neither may the ones from there cross over to us.’”*

Only a gate had separated the rich man from Lazarus in life. He could have passed through it so easily. **But what was easy to remedy in life became an impenetrable barrier after death.**

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Rich Man: *“I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house! I have five brothers; please let Lazarus witness to them so they won’t come to this place of torment.”*

Abraham: *“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”*

Rich Man: *“No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead should go to them, they will do **TESHUVAH** (repentance).”*

Abraham: *“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone from the dead should rise again.”*

Yeshua taught the same message in this parable as he taught in the parable of the Great Day of Judgment:

*Pay attention to the words of Moses and the Prophets!
Do acts of **TZEDAQAH** now while you are still alive!*

¹ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/362-abraham-s-bosom>

² *Short Stories By Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* By Amy-Jill Levine © 2014; HarperCollins Publishers, Broadway, NY; p. 265.

³ *Short Stories By Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* By Amy-Jill Levine; p. 262.