

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the rich show-off and the beggar** in Luke 16:19-31. This is a parable concerning MATERIALISM IN GOD'S KINGDOM. Please read Luke 16:19-31 by yourself, or take turns in the group to read a few verses each.

(S) Luke 16:19-31 says, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

(T)      **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable. The life of the rich man and the beggar before death is true to life in the present. Their life after death is Jesus' figurative description of life in the hereafter.

First. The rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus before death. This man was very rich, because he could afford to be dressed in purple and fine linen. The purple dye was obtained from the shellfish and was a very expensive process. Often such purple robes were only worn by the royalty. He wore such expensive clothes and lived such an extravagant life of luxury every day, because he wanted everybody to know that he was rich! This rich man was a show-off. He was also insensitive and selfish. At the gate of this rich man was a beggar. He was laid there every day, because he evidently could not walk. His name Lazarus was derived from the Hebrew name Eleazar and means "God has helped". Jesus probably gave him this name in the story, because he wanted to indicate that this beggar, in all his distress, had put his trust in God. This beggar was totally unable to provide for his own needs. He was not only hungry, he was also covered in sores, which the street dogs came and licked. This could hurt and be very irritating. The rich man must have seen the beggar every day, because he was lying at his gate! He had an excellent opportunity to show pity and offer some help. Nevertheless, he did not even give the beggar the leftovers of his food. The rich man only lived for himself!

(S)      Second. The beggar and the rich man after death. The beggar died. Nothing is said about his burial. If there was a burial, it must have been so obscure and dismal that it was passed by in silence. However, what happened to his soul was all-important! His soul was immediately carried by angels to Abraham's bosom (Heb 1:14). Abraham's bosom is a Hebrew expression, which is derived from their practice to recline on couches at dinners and festivals. Reclining at someone's bosom indicated special favour (Lk 14:7; Jn 1:18). The beggar's soul was brought to heaven where he reclined at heaven's feast-table in a place of great honour!

The rich man also died and was buried. He was probably given a splendid funeral. A lot of care was given to his dead body, but nothing is said about his soul! What his family and friends on earth did not know was what happened to him after death! The rich man opened his eyes in 'Hades', a term which denotes either the disembodied state of death, the grave as the place of the body of the departed person, or hell as the place of eternal punishment. The context of this expression decides its meaning. Here, the rich man was conscious that he was in *hell*, because he was suffering agony and torment in its fire.

(T)      Third. The irreversible destiny of every human being after death. Although the rich man *saw* Abraham and Lazarus in the distance, and although *the conversation* between the rich man and Abraham was respectful (they addressed one another as "father" and "son"), it did not bring any relief to his suffering. The rich man showed that his character after death had not changed: he still viewed Lazarus as his servant, who should do him a favour even though the rich man never showed any favour to the beggar. The rich man pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus over to his side to relief his suffering!

Abraham denied his request as improper and impossible! Abraham said that it would be improper, contrary to the requirements of justice, to bring relief to the rich man's suffering, because the rich man was now receiving what he deserved! While he lived on earth, he had the wrong priorities: He had not helped Lazarus, that is, he had not lived a life useful for his fellow men and to the glory of God. Abraham also said that it would be impossible. Crossing over from heaven to hell or from hell to heaven was forever absolutely impossible. In Israel there are deep ravines between valleys. Jesus used this picture of a ravine as a graphic and unforgettable symbolical representation of the irreversibility of a person's lot after death! This chasm between hell and heaven intended to render the crossing from one side to the other impossible.

(S) Fourth. The only message of warning for people before they die. The rich man pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus from heaven to his brothers, who were still living on earth in order to warn them of what would happen after death. The rich man was probably afraid that his brothers would later blame him for the bad example he had given to them while he still lived on earth. The rich man was still selfish after death: he did not care about people in general - he only cared about his own family and his own reputation!

Abraham replied that the people still living on earth have Moses and the Prophets, that is, the Old Testament, to warn them. In the Old Testament the life that is the exact opposite of that which the rich man had lived is commended. The Bible exhorts all living people to trust in the God of the Bible, to love other people and to especially care for the underprivileged and despised people in the world.

The rich man argued that the people living on earth would be converted if someone from the dead would go to them to warn them. He was wrong, because when Jesus raised other people from the dead, many people were not converted. When Jesus raised another Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, the Jewish religious leaders and teachers plotted to kill him, because they did not want people to be converted to Jesus Christ (Jn 12:10). These Jewish religious leaders and teachers were more determined than ever before to kill Jesus Christ (Jn 11:47-50). And after Jesus Christ himself was resurrected from the dead, many Jews and non-Jews still refused to believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:2; 17:18). Abraham said to the rich man, that if the living people on earth refused to listen to the warnings in the Bible, they would certainly not listen to anybody who came from beyond the dead to warn them!

(T) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

What is the context of this parable?

The setting of the parable is contained in Luke chapters 15 and 16. In Luke chapter 15, Jesus told three parables about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, in which he taught God's attitude towards the lost people in the world. This was in response to the bad attitude of the Jewish religious leaders and teachers towards the tax collectors and sinners. In these three parables, Jesus exposed *the wrong attitude of the religious leaders and teachers of the law towards the common people!* In Luke chapter 16, Jesus told two parables. In the parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus exposed *the sinful use of material possessions.* In the parable of the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus, he exposed *the wicked handling of both people and money!* The rich show-off completely neglected to make friends for himself by using his worldly wealth (Lk 16:9). He was the kind of person who was highly valued and praised among men, but detestable in God's sight (Lk 16:15). This rich man was the exact opposite of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37).

The story of the parable is contained in Luke 16:19-31.

The explanation or application of the parable is not given. It must be deduced from the story and the setting.

(S) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

Jesus Christ did not intend every detail in the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the message of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the parable.

Today I want to give an example of the wrong interpretation of the parable of the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus. One interpreter, called Gregory the Great, who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., treated this parable as an allegory. An *allegory* gives specific meanings to the various details in a story that cannot be deduced from the context or the story. Consequently, we must reject his interpretation of this parable. Gregory said that *the rich man* represented the Jews, who made a cult of exterior things and misused the law for their own vain motives. *Lazarus* covered with sores represented the Gentiles, who were ashamed to confess their sins. The proud Jews refused to admit the Gentiles to the knowledge of the law. And the *dogs* represented the preachers who cure wounds of the soul by preaching God's Word and listening to the confessions of sinners. While Gregory's allegorical interpretation cannot be accepted, there is much more in favour with his moral interpretation of this parable: Gregory warned against outward show of possessions and

exalted the virtue of poverty. He admonished his hearers to lose no opportunity for doing works of mercy. He said, "Learn to despise all the things of earth; scorn all transient honours and seek the glory which endures. Respect all the poor you meet, and when you see them ignored by the world, treat them as friends of God. Share your riches with them ... Why are you slow to give, when everything you give to the poor man on earth, you give to him who is in heaven?"

(T) Jesus does not give any particular meaning to the following details and thus they are not essential or relevant for the understanding of the parable: The condition of people after death and the communication between them is presented in literal earthly terms in order to create a vivid impression. But all these details may not be interpreted literally. For example, "the lifting up of eyes and seeing", "the dipping of a finger" and "the touching of a tongue" are not literal and only enhance the story of the parable. One may also not conclude that "the persons in hell and the persons in heaven are able to talk to one another", because any further teaching on this subject is lacking in the Bible. All such details in the story of the parable only serve to enhance the story and do not teach specific truths.

(S) The parable nevertheless conveys certain relevant truths concerning the life hereafter because these truths are also taught in other passages of the Bible. The fact that people who have died are not asleep, but fully conscious, is relevant. The fact that some people are definitely saved and in heaven with God, while others are suffering in hell, is relevant. The fact that God does not allow any spirit of the dead to communicate with people on earth, is relevant. The fact that God desires all living people on earth to listen to his Word as revealed in the Bible, is relevant!

(T) Being a rich man living in luxury is a relevant detail. Being rich is by itself not sinful, but being selfish and not using one's riches for the benefit of others is sinful. The rich man was not condemned because he did something evil. He was condemned because he neglected to do good to his neighbour!

(S) Lazarus, being carried to Abraham's bosom is a relevant detail. Abraham represents the father of all believers (Rom 4:11)! The fact that the beggar was carried to Abraham's bosom, represents him as being welcomed in heaven. In heaven the spirits of the saved people are together in God's presence (Heb 12:23). The fact that Jesus gave the beggar the name Lazarus, which means "God has helped", shows that the beggar, in spite of his earthly sufferings, trusted in God.

(T) Being in hell where the rich man was in torment is a relevant detail. In harmony with the teaching of other passages in the Bible, *hell* really exists and represents the place of the eternal destiny of the unbelievers and the wicked.

(S) A great chasm that no one can cross is a relevant detail. The Bible teaches that every person's eternal destiny is determined by whom he trusted and by how he lived his life while he was still living on earth. This eternal destiny is absolutely irreversible! After death, there is no second chance for people to choose for Jesus Christ!

(T) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

The parable of the rich show-off and the beggar Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 teaches about *materialism in God's kingdom*.

The main message of the parable is the following: "The consequences of a person's life-style before death in this present world are irreversible after death! Every person's eternal destiny is either heaven or hell and is determined by whom he trusted and served in this world before he died! God holds every person responsible for how he relates to especially the underprivileged people in the world and how he uses his material possessions."

*Sharing one's material possessions with the underprivileged* is a fundamental characteristic of God's kingdom. The people of God's kingdom live a life-style worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1): With respect to material possessions, they share and give, and they are merciful and caring.

(S) **POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE.**

One. The underworld theory is not biblical. This theory believes that the underworld is a place somewhere under the earth and that it is a dreary place of shades, a land of forgetfulness, where all the dead are doomed to an existence that is only a dreamy reflection of life on earth. In the underworld there is no moral consciousness, activity or joy.

Two. Instead the Bible uses the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word Hades to describe *three different aspects of death*: It *figuratively* describes *the state of death* or it *literally* describes *the place of death*, which could be either *the grave* in some Bible passages or *the hell* in other Bible passages. In Luke 16:19-31 it refers to hell.

(T) All the wicked and all the righteous people do not go to the same place at death. Not a single passage in the Bible teaches that *the souls* of all people actually go to the same place after death! All people, both the righteous and the

wicked, descend to *the grave* as to their bodies only, but as to their souls, they definitely go to different places! The souls of believers go to heaven, while the souls of unbelievers go to hell.

(S) **POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or messages of the parable.

All people must know what God is like. God will hold every person responsible for how he relates to especially the underprivileged people in the world and how he uses his material possessions in the world. *The consequences of his life-style before death in this present world are irreversible after death!* Every person's eternal destiny, which is either heaven or hell, is determined by whom they trusted and served before death in this world (Mt 6:24; 25:34-46).

(T) Christians must know what they should be like. God wants people not to live for themselves, but to live their lives thoroughly conscious of their dependence on God, especially in the matter of money and material possessions. He wants people to be sensitive to the needs of people and to show pity to the underprivileged people in the world.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parable of the shrewd manager. As preparation, please read Luke 16:1-13.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".