

Who are the Pharisees and Saducees To understand the parable we must understand those that heard it, the Pharisees.

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

The Poem about Money Luke 16v10-14

If you're honest in small things, you'll be honest in big things;
If you're a crook in small things, you'll be a crook in big things. If you're not honest in small jobs, who will put you in charge of the store? No worker can serve two masters: He'll either hate the first and love the second or adore the first and despise the second.
You can't serve both God and Money

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man Luke 16v19-31 ¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.' ²⁵ "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. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' ²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ³⁰ "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹ "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.'"

Background: -

What had Jesus been saying to the Pharisees -

Jesus is well into his 3 year long teaching ministry.. This parable of Lazarus & the Rich man comes at the end of a number of parables and sayings that Jesus had been giving to the Pharisees. There were 4 parables, the Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and the Lost Son (the Prodigal) and the parable of the Shrewd Manger, there was also some teaching on money.

What did the parables of the lost sheep & coin mean to the Pharisees:- A shepherd loses 1 of his 100 sheep and goes all out to find it. A woman loses one of her 10 precious coins, and goes all out to find it. The sinners, and publicans and outcast all belong to God, and he will go overboard to find the lost one and bring them back to him. The Shepherd (a lowly profession) who lost the sheep is looked down on by the Pharisees but not by God. The Woman (who lost the coin) may be looked down on by the Pharisee, but not by God. Jesus attacks their prejudices. He follows this with the famous parable of the Prodigal Son. The farmer gives half of his land and wealth to the youngest of two sons who asked for his inheritance early then lost it all. The older brother stayed home to support his Father. The younger son, returns and repents, asking his Father for forgiveness. He is joyfully taken in. The older son, full of righteous anger at his brother, can not see that he also has done wrong in his life, and need the Fathers forgiveness love, but his heart is too hard to see this. He can only see his brothers faults not his own. Jesus is telling the Pharisees that they are the older brother. Then follows a similar themed parable of a dishonest steward who wastes his masters money, which also brings dishonour to the Master. He is discovered but thinks of a clever plan to bring honour back to the Master whilst saving himself, but it relies fully on the generosity of his Master. Through these parables there are the dual themes of God pursuing a relationship with each one of us, and the need for repentance to enter into that relationship. The Pharisees need to see how those that they look down on , belong to God and through turning the key of repentance (asking for forgiveness) will be united with God. They also need to recognise their own shortfalls, and repent to get into the kingdom of God, they are not already there.

Jesus is also teaching the Pharisees on the theme of money, and particularly the recognise the needs of the poor, and provide for them. Jesus points this out as being part of the Law, but the Pharisees scoff at him and his views on money. That's the build up to the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. It is in that context, that its true meaning come out.

Sermon: The Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus

Trilogies: What is your fave film trilogy? Lord of the Rings; Pirates of the Caribbean; the Matrix; Bourne Identity; Indiana Jones or perhaps the brilliant Toy Story.. Jesus told the religious leaders a trilogy of parables, and today we are going to look at the third in what I call the ‘Money & Repentance’ trilogy.

The three were:-

- Parable of the Prodigal Son - in which a Son wastes his Fathers money.
- Parable of the Shrewd Manager – in which a land-agent wastes his Masters money
- & The Parable of the rich Man & Lazarus – in which a wealthy man wasted his own money.

The parables are primarily about repentance and salvation, about us turning to our Father in Heaven recognising our own weakness, and relying on His favour and forgiveness, but there is also this theme of money, and more specifically what we do with money. If you like, they are about our Savings and Being Saved!

Imagine you are at one of those special days at your local cinema where they are screening all three films in a trilogy. You have watched the first two, topped up on home-made pop-corn, and before the third movie starts, you get a short animation like Pixar do; this short is all about money.

Looking around the auditorium, you notice that there are a lot of over-dressed cinema goers, film critics, the ones that think they know everything about movies, and write stinging reviews of films that don’t exactly match their mindset. When the short animation finishes, there is a chorus of derision and snorts coming from them. Clearly something upset them.

The Poem about Money (Luke 16v10-13). The poem describes small things, which are the things of the world that you are entrusted with including your money and possessions. The big things are the things from God, particularly the truths. How can we be entrusted to move in Power with God in Kingdom matters, if we are dishonest and wasteful in the human things that we have to do. Money can feed us and can be used to serve God, but we must be careful not to let it become the focus, because then it becomes the Master, and calls the shots. If this happens we realign our lives to get more money, more holidays, more possessions etc etc.

Mocking: The Pharisees loved money, as did the Sadducees. They loved showing off how much they had. When the Pharisees heard this teaching they dismissed it by sneering at Jesus. The ‘sneer’ or ‘insult’ involved no words, it was a backwards tilt of their head to raise their noses whilst also raising their eye-brows. This signalled disdain; rejection of what Jesus was saying laced with condescension. The Pharisees mockery is evidence of their deafness and indicates that they disassociated themselves from him. To mock Jesus publicly (16v1) was a big insult in a culture where Honour held such a high value. To maintain honour individuals must respond appropriately to anything which challenged it. [This was true of the landowner in the parable of the Shrewd manager, who had been dishonoured]. Jesus responded with his third parable.

So get comfortable in your seats, popcorn at the ready, and we’ll look at the last in the ‘Money & Repentance’ trilogy ; Its ‘Lazarus & the Rich Man’.

Scene 1: The Rich Man. His house is marvellous, and rare in those days, it has a garden, all protected behind a large gate into the property. There are dogs in the garden, not Pom-Pom the Poodle House pets but Rocky the Rottweiler guard-dog, or whatever the first century middle eastern equivalent was. And there is the rich

man – wow – he’s wearing purple, the most expensive of all linens, and because of its cost is worn by few. But it’s not a special occasion, he always wears it, a sign of his great wealth. Then there’s a cheeky bedroom scene where we learn that under all those posh robes, is the most expensive silk underwear. His servants are working hard to prepare a great banquet for him, which they do every day. It’s the Sabbath, but they are still preparing food. Why – because the Rich man could not care less about Jewish laws, he is above all that. He’s got loads of money, wads of dosh, and he’s going to let everyone know, and lavish himself every day with everything he wants – He **is** the Rich Man.

Scene 2: The Beggar. Outside his complex, we now see two men, carrying a large bundle of rags toward the imposing Gate and laying it down outside. We pan in and close, a bit too close, and we can see that in the rags is a man, and he is covered in painful looking sores, that stop him walking or working. This is his patch. But its not a good patch for a beggar. All the left-overs from the Masters table go to his dogs. He hates beggars. The beggar is longing and dreaming for just a little of the food from the Rich Man’s table. When he passes he will repeat the age old cry ‘Have mercy on me’. Every day falls on deaf ears. The Rich man thinks that if he encourages this one by throwing him some money or some morsels, then it will just encourage others to laze around by his gate, and soon there will be a whole chorus of ‘Have mercy on me’ every time the Rich Man steps outside. But there is a gentleness about the face of the Beggar, a contentment with his lot, and despite the meanness of the Rich man, he is okay with his patch because he actually likes the dogs. Perhaps he shouldn’t because in Jewish eyes they are unclean animals not much better than pigs. They will bark at all his posh visitors but they seem to love him, and when they are let out they come over and he pats and makes fun of them when they are let out. Best of all they lick his sores. It sounds disgusting but there is something in their saliva, with antiseptic properties, which he find soothing. A little comfort in a very harsh life – He **is** the Beggar.

Scene 3: Death.

You have been sucked in by the first two scenes, and you are left wishing for yourself the opulence of the Rich man, and are so grateful that you are not the beggar. Then in an instant, the scenes dramatically change, as the spectre of death takes both the men. The Rich man’s is taken and cast into a torturous abyss called Hades where his purple robes and silk underwear are burning on him. Now you know why the film was rated 18! Then the camera pans across to a visible to heaven. You see the angel set down Lazarus, now clothed in a new pain free body being placed at the side of the great patriarch, the Founding Father of Israel and the Jewish nation, Abraham himself. The auditorium gasp at this sudden turnaround.

Scene 4: The New Beggar’s call

The Rich Man is mean but not stupid, he realises that his sins have finally caught up with him. You then see flash backs to the first two films. You see the Prodigal who had spent his whole inheritance, and was feeding pigs. We see a flashback to the dishonest landowner being sacked and facing a life of ditch digging or begging. They all made their own plans, wasted money and had to pay the penalty. The Rich Man wasted his money on himself and now in death he is destitute.

But by now, you know what comes next. A realisation of their sin, and a repentance. The Prodigal entrusted his future to the love of his Father. The Shrewd manager trusted his future to the mercy and kindness of his Master. The prodigal did not get back his inheritance, and the land manager did not get back his job. However their call for forgiveness and mercy were heard, and their futures were saved.

Just as they repented, and turned to their Father or Master for forgiveness, and a second chance, the Rich Man makes his appeal to his founding father Abraham. He reminds Abraham of their connection, and calls him Father – Abraham. But Abraham was a man who stepped out in faith to follow Yahwehs leading. He left his

fathers house and gods, and his own country in costly obedience and personal sacrifice to do this. You would expect the Rich Man to be greatly embarrassed at seeing Abraham, but no.

It is now the Rich Man that repeats the age old beggars chant, the one that he despised hearing and he himself cries out 'Have Mercy on Me'. Of course, he will be saved, this is Abraham. The Prodigal and the Dishonest Land Manager were given a second chance, of course the wealthy Jew will be restored up into heaven. Won't he?

He can see Lazarus, he knew his name, but he chose to ignore this man all his life, the one he could have so easily helped, and now on seeing him, he gives no apology. Instead he turns to Abraham with a demand. I am in pain, and I can see that old beggar Lazarus is fit and healthy enough now to walk and do some work, so send him down here with some water to cool my tongue. The thought being, I am of high class, and he is of servant class, and I can expect him to do that for me.

His attitude is shocking. The Rich Man was like a bakery worker who can no longer smell the fresh bread. He is so used to causing pain to Lazarus, he can not see that these new words would be painful to Lazarus. He can not imagine a world without social divides, one where he would be an equal with a servant or a beggar. He can not clearly see that Lazarus, a guest at Abrahams table, is now the one in the position of power, not him – the tables are reversed.

You are expecting Lazarus at this latest insult to explode with rage. He never once did anything to alleviate the suffering of Lazarus, and now he wants a favour from him. Go fry in Hell! But there is no response from the gentle long-suffering Lazarus, no reservoir of anger to vent. He wishes no ill on his enemies. This is the exact response that Jesus is trying to teach us.

The silence that Lazarus maintains throughout the parable is impressive. He never complains against Gods distribution of wealth, or the Rich Mans abuse of it. In Heaven he never boasts about the change in circumstances over the Rich Man, or protests when the Rich Man is trying to boss him around from Hades.

The events in our own lives have meanings, and we either get or lose the meaning of those events, dependent upon how we respond to them. What we do with the good gifts and with the pain in life is what matters. The Rich man behaves badly with his wealth, and Lazarus behaves admirably in his poverty. These responses build their characters.

Scene 5: Abraham

Abraham does speak, across the chasm to the Rich Man. He addresses him affectionately with the word 'teknon', Son or 'Dear Boy', giving him the courtesy of being part of his extended family, despite the insult to his guest Lazarus, and hence to himself. There is another flashback to the first film, where the Father addresses his elder son, with the same affectionate word 'Teknon' when he refuses to join the banquet being held for his wayward brother.

So Abraham speaks kindly. First he reminds the Rich Man of all the good things that he had received. He did not earn them or them, all his possessions and presumed good health, were all free gifts from God. Then he reminds them that in contrast Lazarus only got bad things. If more is shared then there is less suffering.

He then says, that now Lazarus is being comforted. He didn't say, he was now wealthy, or was now healed, or was now well fed, though all may be true. The most important thing that has been addressed is that he is comforted, meaning that before it was the mental anguish of his situation that was his biggest issue, such as being in earshot of a banquet everyday, knowing that all the left-overs would go to the dogs, and he would get nothing. It was this neglect that hurt most. Those that could help him, ie the Rich Man, would not. Whilst God

passed on good things to the Rich man, in turn he only passed on evil to Lazarus, such that he lift in anguish.. He now has someone who cares for him, and Abraham points out that now the Rich man is the one in anguish.

Lazarus is the only character in any of his parables that he gives a name to. The prodigal son, the Good Samaritan, the Sower, and many more are unnamed. So the name Lazarus is chosen for a reason. Why because the name means 'the one that God helps', and when he is a beggar it would be easy to imagine that this is one man, that God does not help, that he does not care for. But here in the presence of Abraham we see a man much loved, helped and cared for.

Scene 6: The offer & the chasm

The camera changes angle, and for the first time you can see that the splendour of heaven and the pit of Hades is separated via a vast chasm. At this point I will say we are watching a film, the Pharisees are hearing a story, a parable, the details in which are not descriptions of an identical reality, but are designed to deliver real truths and signposts on how to live. So despite impressive depictions of this scene in our historical art, I do not personally believe there is a fiery pit of Hades in which people are looking across a great chasm, visibly seeing Abraham reclining in Heaven. The bible has other pictures of heaven. But the seriousness of the Rich Man's actions, his attitude to money, his attitude to the poor, his lack of repentance, and the serious consequences of his action are not lost on me. Despite the imagery here, this is not fundamentally a parable about Heaven and Hell.

Abraham then says," so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us"

But who are those who actually want to go from Heaven to Hades? The implication here is that there has been an offer to do just that. The only other person in the story is Lazarus. The former beggar, is actually taking pity on his former neighbour and whispering in Abrahams ear the offer to take some of there plentiful water over to the Rich man to soothe his anguish. He is showing compassion for his former oppressor. The Rich Man would also like to cross the chasm as he would love to join Abraham at the banquet. But there is nothing that can be done. It is too late. So here is the twist in the trilogy. The Prodigal son, and the shrewd manager in the first two films, messed up, but put saw their predicament and responded in time to have their futures secured. The Rich man did not, he was too late, and now nothing can be done.

Scene 7: The Brothers

Abraham had told him to remember the good gifts he received, spend some time dwelling on this. But the Rich man having failed with one request is off again with another demand on the Patriarch. This time, he wants to send the former Beggar on another errand. If he can't be his waiter then perhaps he can be his errand boy, and warn his Brothers about Hades, and not to make the same mistake as him.

In this final scene, we have visions of the Rich Mans brothers happily going about their own selfish lives, and we see Abraham delivering his final words to the Rich Man.

If the former beggar appeared to them, they would surely listen and put their lives right. It sounds a commendable gesture, The film focuses in on the Brothers and we see they are have the same social standing as the Rich Man, and are similarly mean of spirit. The fires of hell have not even changed the opinion of the Rich Man with regards Lazarus who is enjoying a banquet with Abraham. He is still looking down on him as someone only fit to be his servant. If this doesn't change Lazarus, then what hope has a visit from the dead to his Brothers, in changing their attitudes.

Abraham says no to the request for help. This time it is possible, there is no great chasm between heaven and earth, but the answer is NO. Only 30% could read, but all could hear. The 5 brothers can hear from Moses and

the prophets by going to the synagogue. They can learn from them how to turn from their evil ways, how to reshape their lives and live the right way.

But the Rich Man is not used to anyone saying No to him, and he persists. They will listen, if a dead man comes back from the grave and tells them. But Abraham knows this is not true. Even if he did send Lazarus they would not listen. People can see miracles but it is not enough for many to change their ways from their current pleasures for a better future.

Lazarus was rock-bottom, and has been raised up by God. How would the brothers of the Rich Man feel about the old beggar being at the banquet and not their rich brother. Would they be pleased with this? Would they still want to change their ways on earth so they could go to a banquet at some later date in heaven with beggars whilst their brother burns? Abraham knows the answer. No. Why because we usually prefer positive benefits that are Immediate, and Certain, even if its dis-benefits are huge. Those dis-benefits are harder to imagine because they are in the future and uncertain, no matter how strong the evidence. So smokers know they will get some immediate pleasure and stress relief from another cigarette, even though the facts strongly suggest they might get addicted and die of lung cancer. They can be bombarded with warnings and even have relatives die from smoking, but they will still have that next cigarette. For the brothers, the positive certain benefits of enjoying their money and banquets, will outweigh the future uncertain consequences of eternal punishment, no matter who brings the warning, a live man or dead man.

Scene 8: Identity revealed

We get another flash back to the first film. The loving Father has thrown a party for the Prodigal son, but is now out in the yard trying to persuade the older brother to join the banquet. Come and party. But he is too full of self-righteousness to give in. He can only see goodness in himself and not any of the times he has wronged his father, and even though he still has all his inheritance he is aggrieved at the love that the Father is showing the son, who had fallen rock-bottom, but had repented and come back to the Father.

The truth of the trilogy starts to hit home, and the film critics don't like it, they are sneering, then audibly jeering at the film. The Pharisees, don't want to welcome in the wretched lost into the Kingdom of God when they have repented, but they are too proud to realise their own shortfalls and repent themselves. They are the elder brother.

Then you see the five brothers again of the Rich Man, and see that one of them has the same face as the Prodigal's elder brother. They are all Pharisees too. Unlike the rich Man they might observe the Sabbath and follow details of the law, but like the Rich Man they were equally lost. They may delight in the minutiae of the law, but they have no time to spend with the poor, they have no generous spirit to offer to them. They are not going to admit their shortfalls to God, turn the key of repentance, and unlock the door of forgiveness that Jesus is offering.

There was another Lazarus, one who was allowed to come back from the dead, with a message. His testimony, his resurrection showed that Jesus was King, Lord and God. There were Pharisees that saw this. The truth of this resurrection reached the ears of the High Priest. Were they convinced by some-one coming back from the dead. No. Did they repent and turn to Jesus. No – not a bit of it – were they looking for a future in heaven with Jesus - no they immediately started plotting to kill Jesus

It would have made no difference to the rich Man's brothers, to send some-one back from the dead. They would not change their ways.

All around you the film critics in their 3 piece suits and rolex watches walk out the auditorium in disgust before the final credits. The knives will be out for the writers of this trilogy.

9. The poor

In his poem, Jesus tells the Pharisees that if they can not be trusted with small things like money and possessions, then they can't be trusted with the truths of the Kingdom. But they think they know it all. They are full of self-righteousness like the prodigals older brother, like the Rich Mans brothers who won't hear the saving words from the scriptures. Who won't hear and respond to the Good News. They will leave it too late. We don't have long to respond to God, just our whole lives, but when that's over the chance is gone. For some is gone, before our lives our over because we are so engrained in our life-style pattern, we can't stomach changing it for greater rewards, some unseen, that we might get in the future. We stick to what we know and love, but time is running out. Don't let it.

God is in the detail of our lives, and he is generous to us, he knows we like the small things, i.e. our money and our possession, but he doesn't want them to our focus, or a distraction from the big things, his truths, his promises, leading a Kingdome life, blessing the unfortunate, comforting the needy.

Look around you, find Lazarus. Notice the poor, find ways to help, be generous but above all be a 'conforter' – help someone who is in anguish. Don't pass by some-one in need, on the other side of the road, like the Priest and Levite in the parable, but be the Good Samaritan your, because when you serve the poor, you serve Jesus; when you deny the poor, you deny Jesus. It's there in our Bibles, we don't need some-one to come back from the dead to tell us this!

10. The meaning of the trilogy

This trio of parables is about a loving God, who will forgive us and take us back in, give us a second chance and a third, and another. He will give us a great future, but it is dependent on us turning away from our old sinful lives, and asking for forgiveness. If we don't and we die then it is too late.

We need to focus our lives on the big things of Gods wisdom, and not chase after wealth and possessions, not wasting Gods provisions, the generosity of others, or the things we have been entrusted with. In this we need to look afte for the poor, the sad and the lost.

If we do things then whether we are rich or poor I this life, we will have everything in the next. But how we respond to the good things and the bad things in our life is important, it is that which will build our character both for this life and the next.