

# The Poor Rich Man

## A Detailed Study of Luke 16:19-31

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I. A CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF LUKE 16:19-31 . . . . .	2
Remote Background: Luke 16:1-13	
Immediate Background: Luke 16:14-18	
Summary	
II. AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF LUKE 16:19-31 . . . . .	10
The Rich Man in Life: Luke 16:19-21	
The Rich Man in Death: Luke 16:22	
The Rich Man in Hades: Luke 16:23-31	
Summary	
III. A HERMENEUTICAL STUDY OF LUKE 16:19-31 . . . . .	42
Possible Hermeneutical Positions	
Terms Clarified	
Alternative Views Explained	
Literal Interpretation Defended	
Summary	
IV. A PRACTICAL STUDY OF LUKE 16:19-31 . . . . .	62
The Great Reversal	
How Men Can Be Warned	
Summary	
CONCLUSION . . . . .	68
A Contextual Study	
An Exegetical Study	
A Hermeneutical Study	
A Practical Study	
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	73

## INTRODUCTION

Luke 16:19-31, the account of the rich man and Lazarus, gives the Lord's clear teaching on life, death, and Hades--on life and riches, death and repentance, and Hades and torment.

This study deals with the meaning of Luke 16:19-31, especially as to the light it sheds on the rich man in life, the rich man in death, and the rich man in Hades. First, a contextual study explains Luke 16:1-18 as background for Christ giving the account of the rich man and Lazarus to the Pharisees.

Secondly, an exegetical study of Luke 16:19-31 considers in detail the words and verses of the passage--a needed basis for further study of interpretation and practical applications.

Thirdly, a hermeneutical study examines some approaches to interpreting this passage. Nearly two centuries of interpretive skills have been unable to conclusively solve the question of whether this passage is a parable. This writer, without attempting to settle the issue, holds the position that Luke 16:19-31 is not a parable. Rather, it is a description of events which actually occurred.

Fourthly, since the unavoidable result of studying God's living Word is practical application, the writer shares some lessons which became startling-clear to her. May God through His Word enrich and bless the heart of each reader as well.

## CHAPTER I

### A CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF LUKE 16:19-31

#### Remote Background: Luke 16:1-13

The key to understanding the fascinating account of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 is found in the contextual background. The Lord's discourse on the rich man and Lazarus can be understood only in light of His prior communication with the Pharisees, recorded in the first part of the chapter.

In the first thirteen verses of Luke 16, the Lord speaks primarily to His disciples (verse 1), telling them the Parable of the Unjust Steward. The Pharisees were listening (verse 14) and reacted adversely to His words. The Lord directs His attention to those Pharisees and uses the rich man and Lazarus account as a culmination of His message of warning to them. A brief look at the Parable of the Unjust Steward, which touched off the Pharisaic reaction, will provide helpful insight for understanding Luke 16:19-31.

In Luke 16:1-3 Christ tells of a man who was unfaithful in the discharge of his master's goods (verse 1). When he was appropriately fired (verse 2), he made friends so that when his master finally put him out he would have some place to go. He made friends by calling his master's debtors and reducing the bills they owed (verses 4-8). The debtors would naturally be delighted to have their bills reduced to an amount they could afford. The master commends this steward because at least he had been wise in preparing for the future (verse 8).

The Lord then explains that His hearers should make friends using the "mammon of unrighteousness" (literally "riches of unrighteousness"--i.e. their money, earthly goods) in order that when they fail ("cease"--i.e. die), those friends might receive them into their everlasting habitations (their heavenly dwelling places).

Furthermore, it is important to be faithful in that which is least (earthly things such as money, time, etc.) in order that one might be entrusted with "true" riches (heavenly responsibilities). Such riches can be called the "mammon of unrighteousness" because men most often use mammon in unrighteous ways. In fact, verse 13 indicates that mammon can easily become a god. While it is possible to serve God with mammon, it is impossible to serve both God and mammon. One can make friends for eternity only by using temporal and material things properly.

This parable is closely associated with the account of the rich man and Lazarus in at least four ways:

1. Riches are a major consideration in both. The words "There was a certain rich man" begin both verses 1 and 19.
2. Time and eternity are the underlying realities in both situations. What a person does now will affect his eternity (verses 9 and 25).
3. Death is an unchangeable fact which must be faced. "When ye fail" (verse 9) leaves no room for an "if." In verse 22 it is the natural expectation that as "the beggar died" so "the rich man also died."
4. The Lord's words "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (verse 13) bothered the Pharisees (verse 14), and opened the way for the Lord to deal with their problems further in verses 14-31.

The Parable of the Unjust Steward, then, talks about a man who did use his limited time to prepare for the future. The Lord explains

from the parable that believers should prepare for death and eternity by using wisely the temporal things they now possess. His concluding words about the parable upset the Pharisees (verse 14) and provided a link for His next words to them.

Immediate Background: Luke 16:14-18

The immediate background shows why the Lord told about the rich man and Lazarus. He was speaking to the Pharisees (verse 15), addressing Himself to three problems which they had: love of money, love of self, and a disregard for God's Word.

Since Christ answers these three problems in the account of the rich man and Lazarus, these problems need to be carefully considered.

Pharisaic Covetousness

The first thing noted about the Pharisees was that they were covetous (verse 14). The verb *ὑπάρχοντες*<sup>1</sup> reflects their present continuing state of covetousness. The word for covetous, *φιλάργυροι*, literally means "lovers of silver" and contains the idea of miserliness.<sup>2</sup> The Pharisees, instead of loving spiritual things, valued earthly wealth and were examples of selfish greed.

---

<sup>1</sup>The verb *ὑπάρχοντες* (present active participle: "existing, being") is used in Luke 11:13, "If ye then, being evil . . ." and in verse 23 of this chapter, "being in torments."

<sup>2</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (hereinafter referred to as A Greek-English Lexicon; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 845. This word is a compound of *φίλος* (love) and *ἀργύρος* (silver). The only other usage is 2 Timothy 3:2: "lovers of their own selves, covetous." *Ἀφιλάργυροι* is used in Hebrews 13:5, "without covetousness" and 1 Timothy 3:3:

In the account which was to follow, the rich man allowed wealth ("good things," verse 25) to crowd out eternal considerations. As a result of neglecting true spiritual needs, he suffers torments after death. The Pharisees, who loved "good things," could not help but get the bitter personal application.

### Pharisaic Self-Righteousness

The self-righteousness of the Pharisees is evident in their attitude towards Christ and in His appraisal of them. The Pharisees were deriding ( ἔξεμυκτήριζον : imperfect tense implies continuing action) Christ (verse 14). The word used implies deriding by turning up the nose, sneering, scoffing.<sup>1</sup> The only other New Testament usage of ἔξεμυκτήριζον is Luke 23:35 where the Lord was ridiculed as He hung on the cross. The Pharisees saw themselves as superior and self-sufficient and did not hesitate to deride Christ "out and out."<sup>2</sup>

Pharisaic self-righteousness is also clearly evident in the Lord's accusation: "Ye are they which justify (οἱ δικαιοῦντες : to judge as righteous and therefore as acceptable<sup>3</sup> yourselves before

---

"not coveting." The usual word for covetousness is πλεονεξία and is used in the more general sense of the desire to have more. A word meaning "longing, passion, or desire" is ἐπιθυμία (cf. verse 21).

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (hereinafter referred to as Greek-English Lexicon; Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., n.d.), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>W.E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (hereinafter referred to as Expository Dictionary; Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), p. 296.

<sup>3</sup>Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 150.

(ἐνώπιον: "in the sight of") men. The Pharisees were doing what they had no authority or power to do--declaring themselves righteous. Men were important to them, not God, who knows the hearts (cf. Hebrews 13:21: "working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight"). The Pharisees were puffed up with their own importance and standing in men's eyes. Their pride and desire to be men pleasers are obvious.

The Lord continues by making a sharp contrast: "but, God knoweth your hearts." God is the Highest Authority, One the Pharisees should have recognized and revered. Had they believed God and His Word, the Pharisees would have been more interested in their standing before God than their standing before men. They were too carnal and self-righteous to recognize who Christ was.

The Pharisees' self-righteousness is further condemned by the Lord: "for that which is highly esteemed (ὑψηλὸν: "exalted, haughty, proud"<sup>1</sup>) among men is abomination in the sight of God" (verse 15). An abomination, βδέλυγμα, is a detestable thing, "anything that must not be brought before God because it arouses His wrath."<sup>2</sup> The cognate verb βδελύσσομαι means "to feel a nausea or loathing for food."<sup>3</sup>

The high things which the Pharisees valued--i.e. money (verse 14) and themselves (verse 15)--were seen as nauseous, detestable things

---

<sup>1</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 857.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>M.R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (hereinafter referred to as Word Studies; Wilmington, Delaware: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1972), p. 74.

in God's sight. This problem of abominable self-righteousness is clearly dealt with in the portrayal of the rich man. His clothing (verse 19) and other details of his life reveal the rich man's inflated self-concept.

#### Pharisaic Disregard For God's Word

The third problem of the Pharisees was their disregard for God's Word (verses 17-18). In verse 16 the Lord notes the clear dispensational change which had come about with John's ministry: "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached and every man presseth into it." John was the first one to say anything about the kingdom of God being imminent. This kingdom, which is still to be realized in the future, was "at hand," for "where the King is, there is the kingdom."<sup>1</sup> People eagerly desired to be involved in this coming kingdom. They were pressing, crowding, exerting themselves to enter. They have something more than Moses and the prophets (cf. verse 31). They have the glorious proclamation of God's kingdom. They liked the wonderful benefits of the kingdom. They disliked, however, the command to "repent."

The new dispensation fulfills but in no way abrogates the law and prophets (Old Testament Scriptures). These Old Testament Scriptures were the sole basis for belief until John went beyond them with a message of fulfillment. The Old Testament still stands, whatever God's dispensational program, and it cannot be disregarded.

The Pharisees were known to be picky about minute details of

---

<sup>1</sup>Vine, Expository Dictionary, p. 294.

the law, and Christ indeed affirms the correctness of taking every part of it seriously (verse 17): "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail."

Tittle, *κεράτιον*, "a little horn, extremity, apex, point," is used of the little projections which make Hebrew letters different from each other:  $\aleph, \beth$   $\daleth, \tau$ .<sup>1</sup> According to Jewish tradition, the guilt of changing these distinguishing marks "is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed."<sup>2</sup>

The Lord, then, was affirming the absolute validity of the law (verse 17). However, He then points out an obvious inconsistency in the Pharisaic claim to strictly obey God's Word (verse 18). The Pharisees, who would fuss over the tiniest bit of the law, would disobey an obvious command. They were especially known to be lax concerning divorce.<sup>3</sup> The rabbinical school of Hillel (with which many Pharisees were sympathetic) supposedly taught that a man could divorce his wife for spoiling his dinner!<sup>4</sup> If every tittle of the law is to stand, then certainly God's teaching on divorce would stand. The importance of taking God's Word seriously is a major point in the account of the rich man and Lazarus (verses 29-31).

---

<sup>1</sup>Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup>Vincent, Word Studies, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett Harrison, eds., The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 1055.

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, 10th ed., in the International Critical Commentary, ed. by C.A. Briggs, et al. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 390.

### Summary

This has been a brief study of Luke 16:1-18, the contextual background. The Lord has been telling His disciples a parable dealing with riches, time and eternity, and death--the same basic concepts to be considered in verses 19-31. The Pharisees had been listening and were upset because the parable was so applicable to them. Christ then directs His remarks to them and their three main problems--love of money, love of self, and disregard for God's Word. In light of the context, one would expect Christ to answer these three problems in the graphic portrayal of the rich man and Lazarus.

With this as background, the following chapter will focus in upon the account itself. The study will attempt to examine the details given concerning the poor rich man in life, in death and in Hades.