

Two Masters

Lk. 16:19-31

Introduction:

1. The account of the rich man and Lazarus has been variously interpreted.
2. Some regard it as a literal account; others regard it as a parable. I think it is probably a parable since it is set in a context with other parables. But for our purposes it makes little difference.
3. Some have probably over interpreted the “parable” creating a theory of an intermediary state between death and the judgment, similar to the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. But neither of these issues concern us in this study.
4. Our concern is, “What is it that Jesus is trying to say to His first century hearers? And what is the message that we need to hear?”

Discussion:

- I. The rich man and Lazarus serve different masters (Lk. 16:13, 19-21).
 - A. Luke sets this account in the context of a series of parables that involve a choice between wealth and God.
 1. Jesus reaches a conclusion in 16:13: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”
 2. Luke remarks: “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.”
 3. Jesus had told the parable of the prodigal son that involved a choice between spending recklessly and serving in the Father’s house (15:11ff).
 4. He had told a parable about a manager/steward who had squandered his master’s possessions (16:1ff). It was after this parable that Jesus had drawn his conclusion: “No servant can serve two masters.” But there was another conclusion He had drawn: “That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (16:15c).
 5. This is the context of the story about the rich man and Lazarus.
 - B. Jesus is using the rich man to illustrate what serving wealth looks like.
 1. In our vernacular we would call it “consumptive materialism.” Jesus calls it “joyously living in splendor every day.”
 2. It was evident in what the man wore.
 - a. He habitually dressed in purple and fine linen.
 - b. Now it was not the clothing itself that was the problem, but what these clothes meant. In our society dressing in purple does not mean the same as it did in the first century.
 - c. And notice that it is not the style of the clothing that is under consideration but what the clothes represented.
 - d. It is a little hard to translate this into our society. Because clothes mean different things. We cannot say, “wearing a suit means a person loves money.” In our society a person may wear jeans and a T-shirt and be a lover of money and those jeans and T-shirt may be representative of that love.
 3. The rich man’s love of money is evident in the way he treated Lazarus.

- a. Lazarus was laid at his gate.
- b. Obviously hungry, sick, and unable to do for himself. (We would call him disabled.)
- c. The dogs care more about him than the rich man. They were licking his sores.
Sometimes dogs evidence more compassion than people. The rich man loved his wealth so much that he did not even have the compassion common to dogs.
- d. Now this lesson is not designed to make compassionate people go out and give their money away to free-loaders! That would be just as wrong as what Jesus is describing here. This poor man's need is obvious! The rich man did not need to go out and search for the poor man. He was right there, but ignored. This served to illustrate that the rich man's master was wealth.

II. They both died (16:22-26). (Isn't that the way it is? Death levels the field. Poor or wealthy, both die. Whether you serve wealth or God, death takes both.) But the text says, "Lazarus was comforted and the rich man tormented."

A. Lazarus, the poor man.

- 1. Was carried away by the angels.
 - a. Isn't that a marvelously comforting idea? To be carried away by the angels?
 - b. This man had been ignored by the rich man, but God has not forgotten him. When he dies God sends His angels for him. I hope God sends His angels for me when I die! I hope God sends His angels for you when you die.
- 2. God's angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom.
 - a. This represented a special place for Jews.
 - b. Abraham was the patriarch of the nation. A faithful man, that all knew was in the presence of God.
 - c. To be in Abraham's bosom was the right place to be. To recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob represented the culmination of all that was desirable.
 - d. Lazarus had truly achieved success!

B. The rich man.

- 1. Remains nameless. Had he tried to make a name for himself? If so, he had failed.
- 2. He died and was buried. No angels to accompany him to Abraham's bosom.
- 3. Instead he opens his eyes in torment. He is separated from Abraham and Lazarus. He saw them "far away."
- 4. He appealed to Abraham for mercy. He knew what mercy was, even though he had not extended it to Lazarus. He knew Lazarus and recognized him and asked that he be sent to relieve him of his agony in the flame. Just a drop of water was his request. Such a severe agony!
- 5. But there would be no relief. Only a reminder to those who serve wealth (16:25-26, 16:14).
 - a. Focus on wealth receive good things in this life only and in the life after? Agony.
 - b. Focus on the Lord in this life and in the life after? Comfort.
 - c. One more reminder. There is no crossing over!

III. The rich man realized his error and sought to evangelize his brothers (16:27-28).

A. He knows something about compassion.

1. He does not wish for his five brothers to be in his condition.
 2. He remembers that they are serving wealth as their master.
 3. He would like to warn them so they will not come to the same place of torment that he is in.
 4. One must appreciate his compassion for his brothers, but in life he had exemplified before them his devotion for wealth and his despising of God (16:13).
- B. We need to think about how we are leading others.
1. Are we leading them to serve God or wealth?
 2. Are we leading them to be devoted to God and despise wealth OR to be devoted to wealth and despise God?
 3. Jesus evangelized while He was alive. Read Matt. 6:19-33.
 - a. Who/What we serve directs our whole course (22-23).
 - b. It is a matter of love and hate, devotion or despising, light or darkness.
 - c. You cannot serve God and wealth.
 4. It is not a matter of how much you have. Abraham was wealthy! Gen. 13:2 says he was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. It is the love of money that is the problem. "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim. 6:9-10).
 5. We can evangelize people by talking with them about the direction of their life. "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Tim. 6:17-19). We need to commend those who are doing this. Sometimes our message is all negative and those who are doing well feel guilty. They need to hear they are doing right when they are fixing their hope on the Lord.

IV. The rich man's five brothers needed to listen to Moses and the Prophets (16:29-31).

- A. Interesting that Abraham recognizes Moses and the Prophets.
 1. That God has sent Moses and the Prophets is indication of His compassion on people.
 2. God is trying to help people not only avoid torment, but to be comforted with good things.
 3. God's revelation orients one for the long term, not just this life.
- B. The rich man recognized that repentance was in order for his five brothers.
 1. Note that this repentance was not necessarily for a specific sin, but for a course of direction.
 2. He thought someone going to them from the dead would shock them into repentance.
- C. Abraham indicated that if they would not listen to Moses and the Prophets they would not be persuaded even if someone arose from the dead.
 1. Indeed Jesus did rise from the dead and people are still not listening.
 2. How can we forget Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol of Scrooge (You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XT0Rzy5Op2Q>) who repented after

he encountered the “spirits” that sobered him to the reality of his love for money? That story suggests that people will repent if someone goes to them from the dead.

3. Abraham says, “They need to hear the prophets!” “They will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

Conclusion:

1. Who is your master? There can be other masters than money. Often our masters stem from some deficient feeling we have about ourselves. We try to fill our emptiness with “things.”
 - a. The rich man was trying to fill his with wealth.
 - b. The woman in John 4, who had had five husbands, was trying to fill hers with a man.
 - c. The disciples in Matt. 20:20ff were trying to fill theirs with “being the greatest” among the disciples.
 - d. Some in Matt. 6 were trying to fill their emptiness with the praise of other people.
2. All such constitute “treasures on the earth.” Whether it is drugs, alcohol, sex, wealth, power, position or whatever, serving these things only results in disappointment.
3. Serving the Lord, being compassionate and generous to others, listening to the revelation of the Lord lays up treasure in heaven. In these we find fulfillment and take hold of “life indeed” (1 Tim. 6:19).