

CONVERSATION GUIDE

1. Take 5-10 minutes to discuss last week's sermon.
2. Compare and contrast the ideas of worldly vs. spiritual riches and worldly vs. spiritual poverty. Does spiritual and/or worldly poverty in others concern you? What is your response to it?

In this passage, Jesus has just finished expounding on the idea that man cannot serve two masters - both God and money. Knowing that the Pharisees in his audience loved money and were not pleased with His preaching on this topic, He says in verse 15, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight." Since the Pharisees considered wealth to be a sign of God's approval, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus serves to expose and chastise their shallow views on worldly vs. spiritual riches.

READ Luke 16:19-31

DISCUSS and REFLECT

Jesus once again turns the world's logic upside down with this vivid and unusual parable involving three characters and two vastly different scenes. Unusual, because this is the only parable where a subject receives a name - in this case, Lazarus. Vivid, because Jesus paints a picture of suffering in this world and the next that is almost palpable.

- Identify the two main characters and describe their conditions in each setting, mortal and eternal.
- Look up 'hedonist' and discuss how it relates to the rich man's approach to life.

The nameless rich man is often referred to as Dives, which simply means "rich" in Latin. Lazarus (Eleazar) literally translates as "the help of God," a likely name for a man who, receiving no human help, is utterly dependent on God's grace for his survival. (It is important to note that this Lazarus is not the same friend that Jesus raises from the dead in John 11.)

The rich man was "dressed in purple and fine linen

and lived in luxury every day." The King James' translation says "he fared sumptuously every day." In a culture where commoners could only afford to eat meat once a week, the rich man's daily feasting was an exorbitant display of self-indulgence and blatant disregard for his less fortunate neighbors. Purple and fine linen were typically reserved for royalty, so we can also deduce by his wardrobe that his wealth was excessive and his image was important.

In contrast, Lazarus was "clothed" in sores which the dogs licked, and he longed to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs showed more compassion on Lazarus than the rich man. This detail enhances our pity for Lazarus and highlights the fact that Dives' indifference to his fellow man's suffering makes him more brute and savage than the dogs.

The time came for both men to die, but a proper burial is only an option for the rich man. His funeral was likely full of pomp and circumstance, but Lazarus, though not publicly mourned, was escorted to Abraham's side by angels. Meanwhile, Dives is tormented not only by the flames of hell, but also by the sight of Lazarus receiving comfort. Although we are not told that the rich man deliberately mistreated Lazarus, God knew his heart. His sin was not that he was wealthy, it was that he did nothing to help the neighbor at his feet and chose a life of self-gratification instead. Likewise, we cannot assume Lazarus is saved only by his earthly poverty, but he must have put his faith in God - a wise spiritual investment for all eternity.

- What first request does Dives make to Abraham? What is the irony of this request, and why does Abraham deny it?
- Dives specifically asked for relief from the torment of his tongue. Based on what you know about how he lived his life, what is the symbolism here? Does the punishment fit the crime?
- Thinking back to 16:15, how does each man's life measure up in the world's eyes? In God's eyes?

The rich man is nothing if not persistent, perhaps a by-product of his entitled approach to life before he died. Having his first request denied, he makes a second request. He begs Abraham to send Lazarus

to his five brothers to warn them, and insists they would be more likely to listen to a messenger from the dead than Moses and the Prophets. Here we see evidence that Dives finally shows some concern for someone other than himself, but it is too little, too late. Again, Abraham denies his request and this cautionary tale ends with a strong warning in verse 31: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

- Read John 3:16-21. How do these words of Jesus offer further support that Dives’ brothers would not have been swayed by Lazarus’ resurrection?
- What is Jesus implicating about the Pharisees in verse 31? How will this eventually play out in their treatment toward the early church? For more insight, read the account of Stephen’s stoning in Acts 7:51-58.

APPLY

1. Read Matthew 25:35-40. How does this verse relate to the Luke passage and how does it apply to your life?
2. Identify the “Lazaruses” in your world. In what ways do you seek to remedy the physical or spiritual poverty of those around you? Or, how can you get involved?
3. Why is it important to address the physical needs of others before you can minister to them about spiritual things?
4. Do you find yourself hardening your heart against people in need as Dives did? Do we justify away their situations by our own judgments as the Pharisees were inclined to do? How can we maintain healthy boundaries and still lovingly minister to the homeless, panhandlers, addicts, inmates, etc?

MEMORIZE

Luke 19:31 - “He [Abraham] 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.’”

Meditate on Matthew 25:35-40 this week. Ask God to show you ways to love your neighbor well. Find

ways to act as Christ to those around you, knowing that when you extend kindness to others you are actually serving Christ himself and pleasing God. Is there someone in your life already that could benefit from how God has blessed you? If not, prayerfully consider finding a local ministry and getting involved. Journal your volunteering experiences and see how God uses service to soften and change you.

Suggestions for further study: Religion has long inspired the arts. Listen to Ralph Vaughan Williams symphonic work for harp and string orchestra entitled *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* inspired by the 16th c. English folk ballad *Dives & Lazarus*. The words of the ballad are very interesting as well, though the story departs slightly from the account in scripture. Note how the vivid imagery of the story is captured and portrayed in these musical settings. (i.e. the haunting melody of the folk tune, the instrumentation chosen by Vaughan Williams, etc.)

References: Life Application Study Bible (NIV), Zondervan; Study Guide for Luke 14, David Guzik, blueletterbible.com; Matthew Henry’s Commentary; Daily Bible Study Series: The Gospel of Luke, William Barclay