

# Jesus Stories VI: The One About The Invisible Man

Reconnect – August 30, 2009

**Text:** Luke 16:19-31; I Timothy 6:17-19

**Key Thought:** God expects us to share all of His good gifts with others.

Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. "The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.' But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.' Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father's home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.' The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.' But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.'" Luke 16:19-31, NLT

## Pre-Intro: Eleanor Rigby [sung by Cam]

### Intro: Looking for a standard

- [article from Wednesday's Ottawa Citizen – looking for a standard of measurement for the kilogram, as opposed to the hunk of metal in Paris]
- We want a standard – something to measure ourselves against – rules, grades, expectations, achievements, medals, benchmarks, goals, targets – we even want them when we just want to break them or NOT achieve them, even as a statement, even in failing – but somehow, the certainty comforts many of us – we want those boundaries, even if they're limits

### The standard of religion: pleasing God

- How does a person please God? What is acceptable to Him? What is He looking for, and how do you know when he's happy with you?
- In Jesus' day, people figured they knew the answer – do what the Law said, and God will bless you – with money, especially – the rich lived a celebrity status to the common person, because they were someone that God had chosen to bless, in His wisdom - and of course, they would enjoy rewards again in the world to come
- But then Jesus turned that upside down with a story about a guy named after a friend of his...

### Read text: Luke 16:19-31

**Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham.**

- **Certain rich man** – a parable phrase – "what's coming is a story"
- **Clothed in purple and fine linen** – he lived like a king – royal robes on the outside (purple), and even fancy tighty-whities on the inside (linen) – "each day in luxury"

- **At his gate** – that’s palace talk – like it’s a palace, not just a house – everything about the rich man is showy and pretentious
- **Lazarus** – Hebrew “Eliezar” – “God is my help” – which is good, because no-one else is helping him in this story – Jesus’ use of irony starts off, tongue-in-cheek – because it sure doesn’t seem that God is helping at all
- **Covered with sores** – we don’t know why – boils? Bedsores? At any rate, painful and disgusting
- **Scraps from the rich man’s table** – he’s out by the garbage pile, hoping some good stuff is coming soon
- **Dogs come** – he’s competing with these animals (not pets – most places in the world outside North America dogs aren’t pets, but wild, starving and dangerous in the streets) for food – and they’re pretty much ready to make HIM the dinner
  - whether they’re helping his wounds or not (God’s small kindnesses?), the dogs doing this are making him ritually “unclean” – meaning, that people even MORE don’t want to get near him – when you’re unclean, not even God wants you – he is abandoned on all sides, without hope –
  - to the rich man, he’s nothing more than another animal at the gate
- **Carried by the angels** - there’s no-one else to help, or care, or mourn him – in fact, it’s likely a relief to the rich man and his household that this blight on his large lifestyle is gone
- **To be with Abraham** – in Jewish thought of the day, it was Abraham who met you – sort of like how we envision St. Peter today at heaven’s gate – this was “Father Abraham”, the founder of Judaism, the man who was God’s friend – he bargained with God for people’s lives

**The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.’**

- **Was buried** – he had others to bury him, unlike Lazarus – the nicest funeral his money could buy, but he wasn’t there to enjoy it – whereas Lazarus would have been just dumped in a pit somewhere
- **The place of the dead** – Greek *Hades* – the waiting room until the resurrection – to the Greeks, a dark and gloomy place, but Jesus builds on it from the Jewish side and makes it a place of “torment” for the rich man
- **Send Lazarus** – the rich man is still trying to be in charge and run things – barking orders, treating Lazarus like a thing or a servant, not a person, and even ordering Abraham around – has he even clued in yet what’s happening?

**But Abraham said to him, ‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.’**

- It’s the great reversal of fortune – payback is... well, it’s bad, that’s what it is
- Ironically, the rich man is speaking to another rich man – Abraham was one of the wealthiest men in the world during his lifetime – the difference is, he was generous with his money and cared for others with it

**Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father’s home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don’t end up in this place of torment.’**

- **Please, Father Abraham** – the rich man has moved from demanding and ordering to bargaining and pleading – it’s starting to sink in
- **Send him** – ironic again – before, he couldn’t get RID of Lazarus – he was always there, whether he cared or not, he was a fixture – now, he’s desperate for him to go BACK there for them – but again, Lazarus is still a thing to him – a piece on a chessboard, an object – not a person – he never once speaks to Lazarus directly in the whole story – in fact, Lazarus has no voice – he is just acted on, whether kindly or selfishly

**But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.’ The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.’ But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

- **Moses and the prophets** – our Old Testament part of the Bible – Abraham says that this is a generally accepted authority in this society – people should get it – they’re supposed to live life in every way by these teachings – but somehow the rich man got around the Law with his money – otherwise, he would have been obligated to help Lazarus – to “love his neighbour as himself”
- Deuteronomy 15: <sup>7</sup> If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. <sup>8</sup> Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup> Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. <sup>10</sup> Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. <sup>11</sup> There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

- **If someone rises from the dead** – irony again – Jesus is going to die and rise again for his hearers - including the wealthy in his audience – and yet so many of them will never listen to him or heed his message

### Missing the point:

- Is this parable about...
  - The afterlife? – no –
    - but then again, why would Jesus intentionally mislead people on the details? Elsewhere in his teaching he makes clear that there are consequences to the life we live every day – and if we continually reject God, then we find ourselves rejected at the very end, by our own choosing – this is urgent, very important stuff
    - Bock, Luke: “These images are among the most tragic and serious warning sin in the Bible. Our culture avoids such ideas by denying their truth. That is a fateful gamble to make, for if one is wrong, the consequences are devastating. Refusal to respond exacts a great price” (435)
    - But let’s back up in the story some more
  - How to treat poor people? – no –
    - but then again, we are called to love others and give to them
    - Who is our Lazarus? Is it the people in our TV set, starving in far away places?
    - Kenya – a million people are facing famine – and it’s generally regarded as one of the African success stories
    - And yet, we are inured to famine (look at that word inured) in Africa – but if people were starving in Toronto, we’d put bags of groceries in our cars and drive them down – well, we would, but we would wait a couple of days until they got good and hungry, because after all, it IS Toronto – but we would go, surely, wouldn’t we?
    - Or then again, would we figure that someone else would do it?
    - I was too busy living my life closer to Lake Ontario during the ice storm to do much for anyone – and my family was living through it! Selfish.
- No, it’s deeper than that – it’s about what a life looks like with God in it – sharing every good thing
- Remember: who is the original audience that Jesus is telling this parable to? Luke 16:14 – it’s the Pharisees – the spiritual snobs of the day
- Jesus isn’t randomly poking at materially rich people – no, he’s purposely poking at *spiritually* rich people – the Pharisees, who figure they have a lock on God, yet live in their spiritual “palaces” and ignore the spiritual “beggars” – the common people – who think that they can never live up to their example or their spirituality – and all they wish they had is a little bit of what the God squad had
- That idea of generosity vs. Selfishness – that cuts through every good thing that you and I have – whether a relationship with God, whether money, or a nice house, or a vehicle, or anything that we’re just really, really fond of
- What do we DO with that thing? Clutch it tight? Hide it when the neighbours come over? Or freely share what we have freely received?

## **It's All About Attitude:**

- A lot of times we might think that selfishness comes from pride – too self-absorbed to help, too wrapped up in onself
- Perhaps that's true some of the time – but I think it much more often comes from FEAR
- “If I share what I have then I won't have it anymore” – if I lend that out, if I give that away, if I make that available – it'll get broken, or lost, or wasted, or squandered – and God wants me to take good care of my things – so I just won't share with anyone and I'll keep it all for myself
- That's where trusting God comes in – because if He gave it to us in the first place, then how can we NOT pass that kind of gift along?
- You might argue, “But isn't that just an excuse to be dumb with things like money? What if someone gives everything away and then has nothing left to live on? Is THAT what God wants?”
- Maybe for some people – but no, he's not asking for stupidity – he's asking for trust (which I find an easier word to grab onto than faith)
- How big do we think He is? Big enough to share? Big enough to depend on?

## **Key Thought:**

**God expects us to share all of His good gifts with others.**

“Tell those who are rich in this world... to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of real life. - I Timothy 6:17-19, NLT

## **Conclusion: Exercises in selfishness?**

- Church and growth? Sharing your faith?
- Sharing what we have – our causes – CCM, Nadine, Barrhaven Food Cupboard
- Eternal consequences

## **Response: Albertine – Brooke Fraser (video)**