

# A Call to Love

Luke 16:19-31

## Introduction

This is one of the more familiar parables of Jesus. When I was in the high school choir, we sang the song “Poor Man Lazarus,” which had the refrain, “Dip your finger in the water, come and cool my tongue, ‘cause I’m tormented in the flame.” You know the story: a sick poor man, Lazarus, spends his life outside the gate of a rich man, longing to eat the crumbs from the rich man’s table. They both die; Lazarus goes to Abraham’s bosom and the rich man goes to hell. The rich man begs Father Abraham to send Lazarus to help alleviate his thirst. Abraham says he can’t because they were both getting what they deserved. Besides, there was a chasm fixed between them no one could cross. The rich man asks him to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers and the answer is, “No, they have Moses and the prophets. They can listen to them.” This simple, little story teaches us so much.

## The Sufficiency of the Word

In **verse 24**, the rich man asks for mercy and tells Abraham to send Lazarus to ease his suffering. When Abraham says Lazarus cannot come because the rich man is getting what he deserves and there is a great chasm between them, the rich man begs Him to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them to change their lifestyle. Abraham replies, “*They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them*” (**v. 29**). The Word of God is sufficient. That is where we find salvation. St. Paul says in **Romans 1:16**, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*. The Psalmist says, *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path* (**Psalm 119:105**). The Word of God is all we need.

## How the Privileged Think

The rich man’s next words give us insight as to how the privileged think: “*No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent*” (**v. 30**). The privileged expect special treatment. “Scripture might be enough for some people, but we deserve more. We deserve a sign or miracle to help us see.” This shows the rich man’s focus, too. From the very beginning, he is only focused on himself. He ignores poor Lazarus as he suffers outside his gate. Yet, he thinks he deserves special treatment in his suffering. And this is as wide as the scope of his vision gets, his family. In fact, even though he is begging (**v. 27**), he’s actually “telling” Abraham what to do. The verbs are all imperative. He is used to bossing people around.

## Unbelief in the Risen Jesus

In **verse 31**, Abraham says to the rich man, “*If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.*” Is Jesus saying this to point to His own resurrection and how many will not believe it? Paul says in **1 Corinthians 1:22**, *The Jews demand a sign*. Jesus gave them one, the sign of Jonah (Read **Matthew 12:39-40**). But they still didn’t believe.

## The Finality of Judgment

The fact that there is a chasm that no one can cross indicates the finality of judgment. Once this life is over, there are no mulligans, no do-overs. There is also no relief for suffering. As the tired and overused saying of today goes, “It is what it is.”

## Relationship Between Poverty and Righteousness

**Verse 25** seems to indicate a correlation between poverty and righteousness. Abraham said, *“Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.”* Is He saying all poor people go to heaven and all rich persons go to hell? (Read **Proverbs 14:31**) The problem is what the rich man did with his wealth. He did not show mercy; he ignored Lazarus. When God talks about the poor in the Old Testament, these are poor Israelites, His own chosen people. And because of their poverty, they rely on God more than others for their sustenance. The name, Lazarus means “God has helped.” Lazarus is in heaven because of his faith. The rich man is in hell because, by his actions or non-action, he showed he had no faith.

## A Call to Love: The Real Message

When we look at this, we see the main message of the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. It is a call to faith and a call to love our neighbor. Lazarus and the rich man were relatively close in life. Lazarus sat outside the rich man’s gate. The rich man passed by him every day. He could have shown love, brought Lazarus into his house, treated his sores, gave him some food and water. How can he love God and turn his back on Lazarus? (Read **1 John 4:19-21**).

## The Call to Us

This call to love is for us as well. We may not be rich, but there are always people worse off than we are. There is enough wealth in the world that if everyone showed this love of God and shared, there would be no need.

## Means of Grace

*We love because [God] first loved us* (**1 John 4:19**). The love He calls us to show is the love He has already given us. Like faith, the ability to love is a gift of grace. God has shown us His love on the cross where His Son died in our place. He gives us this love through the means of grace. He calls us in this parable to have faith in Him and to exercise that love He has placed within us.

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*And the peace of God,  
Which surpasses all understanding,  
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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