



LC STUDY GUIDE
On the Road Series
 The Passage: Luke 16:19-31
 Week 4 (Mar 13-19)

Intro: It's our final week of LC Lenten study in the "On the Road" series. Glad to be on this journey with you, heading towards Holy Week and Easter.

Before we get there, we pause to reflect on the sobering and grace-filled parable often called "The Rich Man & Lazarus." Let's do our best to look as deeply as we can into this parable, in hopes that we might find the critique fitting for our lives and a gospel-infused wisdom for growth.

Luke 16:19-31

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. **20** At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores **21** and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. **23** In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. **24** So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. **26** And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, **28** for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He 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.'"

Context: Jesus begins this story similarly to the way he begins the other parables, "There was a man who ..." (15:11, 16:1, 16:19). However, unlike most of Jesus' parables, this story is not about a repeatable situation. It's a specific story with specific characters and even a name (Lazarus is the only character in a parable ever named). In fairness, some prefer to see this not as a parable but as an actual account between a rich man and a man named Lazarus. However, most Bible scholars do not believe Jesus is describing actual details of the afterlife such as the rich man's ability to talk to Abraham and to see Lazarus at his side, so they categorize this story as a parable.

Further, many theologians and commentators see this as a story that includes rhetorical, parabolic, and symbolic characters and features, which are designed to show the compassion of God and accountability before God. Like all the parables, there is a "reversal" that leads to a profound announcement of grace. Lazarus did not deserve this grace, but it was given to him.

Jesus tells this parable not merely as a way to get to heaven. As N.T. Wright states, this is more about "what was happening to the rich and poor in the present time. Jesus' welcome of the poor and outcast was a sign that the real return from exile, the new age, the 'resurrection,' is coming into being; and if the new age is dawning, those who want to belong to it will have to repent." (*Jesus and the Victory of God* by N.T. Wright. p. 255)

O – How does Luke describe the wealth of the rich man and the poverty of Lazarus? If Luke was telling this story today, what details would he use? (and what details might stay the same?)

I – We should not miss the significance of Jesus choosing to name the poor, ignored, and nearly invisible man Lazarus. However, he does not give a name to the rich man. Why might that be?

(It's part of the reversal included in Jesus' parables. Instead of the well-known, highly-regarded, nearly-enviable rich man being identified and remembered, his name is forgotten and irrelevant. Instead, it's the poor man, largely ignored and nearly invisible throughout his life that is identified, remembered, and saved. Jesus is telling a story about how it's not our material and societal status that God regards but that His economy runs on grace and compassion.)

I – Both characters in this story die. Lazarus goes to "Abraham's side" and the rich man goes to Hades. If we can suspend our current understandings of heaven and hell, what is Luke trying to communicate to his original audience?

(First, he is making a clear point that what you do in this life matters. Second, our status does not transfer to the afterlife. There can be the possibility of great status-reversal, "the last shall be first." And third, he's framing "Abraham's side" to the Jewish reader as the "place where you want to go, too." On the other hand, "Hades" is understood in the first century as the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem that is constantly on fire to make more space for more debris. Luke's point is that it's the worst place imaginable.)

O – What do you find interesting in the exchange between Abraham and the rich man?

I – We see death as the great equalizer. Luke makes the point that the rich man not only dies without his possessions but also is now in great anguish and suffering. As we see throughout the teachings of Jesus, the rich man is not suffering because of his wealth, but because of his greed and lack of compassion towards others. And Lazarus is saved not because of his righteousness or his poverty, but because of God's grace. What insights and warnings can we learn from the cautionary tale of the rich man? What can we learn from God's treatment of Lazarus?

I – This passage ends with the peculiar verse 31. While it foreshadows the death and resurrection of Jesus, what else does it do?

(It's an ominous foreshadowing of the rejection of faith in the risen Jesus. And it's also the continuation of doubt and God's recognition of the personal choice not to believe.)

A – At first reading, it's difficult to find ourselves in the story. Few of us are living in that sort of material luxury or poverty. (Are we one of the five brothers?) Jesus is confronting the scale of society that says, "The wealthier you are, the more valuable you are and the more highly you are regarded." In this parable, God chooses to remember and save Lazarus, because His Kingdom operates by a different scale. And so we ask, what is that scale like and how are we all like Lazarus in this story?

A – The application of this parable calls us to explore three questions

- 1) How can we be generous with our resources and relationships?
- 2) How do we treat the "Lazarus figures" in our lives?
- 3) How does a repentant heart live faithfully in today's world?

(In the second question, please also consider the physically disabled along with the impoverished.)

Central Point – God has an extraordinary heart for the marginalized, forgotten and the unseen... and so should we. Further, we all have a bit of Lazarus in us, so we should seek and be thankful for God's grace.

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?)
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching" rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.