

# THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Jordan McKinley



## Luke 16:19–31 ESV

### Author and Date:

Luke the Evangelist around AD 55-60. This section is part of a larger teaching discourse, which mostly takes the form of parables. Interestingly, this lesson is not specifically called a parable. This teaching takes place during the period of Jesus' travel toward Jerusalem and the cross (see Luke 9:51).

<sup>19</sup> [Jesus said:] **“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.**

- Traditionally, the rich man has been named “Dives,” which is the Latin translation of “rich man.” It may be significant, however, that Jesus doesn't name him. Perhaps the rich man is unknown to Jesus because his name isn't written in the Book of Life (see John 10:14).
- Jesus specifically mentions the rich man's clothing and eating habits not to condemn wealth and fine clothing specifically, but as symptoms of the rich man's diseased heart. After all, Abraham and David were both very wealthy men, and we can be certain that they are at Abraham's side. The rich man saw his great wealth and possessions as his god, rather than fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things and could not bear to part with even a little comfort to feed and clothe Lazarus.

<sup>20</sup> **And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,** <sup>21</sup> **who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.**

- Lazarus is specifically named by Jesus—perhaps an indication of his status before God. The name Lazarus even means “God is my help.” I suggest that Lazarus' name indicates that the poor man commended all his troubles and care into God's hands, seeking every good thing from Him alone.
- Similar to the rich man, being destitute is not necessarily an indication of God's favor upon a person. Temptation to covetousness (which St. Paul calls idolatry in Colossians 3:5) and despair (a lack of trust in God) can certainly accompany poverty. What is striking is the similarity in language with Jesus' dialogue with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15, who wants to be fed with “the crumbs that fall from their masters' table” (Matthew 15:27), perhaps indicating further trust in the Lord's provision.

<sup>22</sup> **The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried,** <sup>23</sup> **and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.** <sup>24</sup> **And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’**

- This might be an indication that this story is a parable, because it seems to move directly from death, which is the separation of body and soul, directly to a corporeal reality in heaven and hell, where both men have their bodies again. As the Scriptures teach in Revelation 20:11-15, the resurrection of the dead (rejoining body and soul) will take place before a person is sent corporally to paradise or torment. Also, since Revelation 7:17

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teaches that there will be no sorrow in eternity, the “geography” of being able to see between heaven and hell doesn’t quite match up with the clearer passages of Scripture.

- Although this is parabolic language, it is quite graphic. Jesus’ depiction of hell tells us that it is a place of torment, anguish, and flame. This is in clear opposition to the modern notion that Jesus didn’t teach about a literal hell (see also Matthew 25:41-46). The rich man is not annihilated or put into some sort of sleep, as some suppose happen to the wicked, but is aware of the constant torment of hell. This is a stark warning not to regard sin lightly!

<sup>25</sup> But 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.’ <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’

- As was said earlier, the rich man’s wealth is not what condemned him, but how he uses that wealth is a symptom of his condition and standing before God. The entire second table of the law directs us to love our neighbors as ourselves. James 2:14-17 precisely describes the man’s condition here. Though he is likely a Jew (as we see in his recognition of Abraham), his is a dead faith. Had the rich man trusted in God as the provider of all things, being of service to Lazarus would have flowed as a natural fruit of faith. Instead, the rich man trusted in his wealth, which was unable to save him. Each act of love for the neighbor, done in faith, is an echo of God’s mercy toward us and an expression of God’s work of providing daily bread for those around us through our various vocations.
- There is no relief or aid for those in hell. There are no second chances. As Dante portrays the lowest level of hell in *Infemo* as a cold place, hell is truly a place lacking in God’s divine love and care. Those who rejected God in this life will not be required to spend eternity with Him. The sad reality is that God does not force Himself on us. He loves us enough to let us go down into destruction, if that is truly our desire.

<sup>27</sup> And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house — <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers —

so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ <sup>30</sup> And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup> He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

- Finally, we see in the rich man’s plea and response to Abraham the true condition of his heart. Just as the rich man failed to listen to Moses and the Prophets and heed their warning against failure to love his neighbor, he also did not believe that the Scriptures contained everything we needed to know in order to be saved. The rich man believed that a miracle would need to take place in order for his brothers to believe. But as we see from the Scriptures, miracles aren’t what convert an unbelieving heart. Even after witnessing all the events surrounding the Exodus, including seeing the presence of God in the pillar of cloud and fire, many in Israel disbelieved God’s Word and thus failed to obey Him. Likewise, Jesus’ miracles in John often hardened the hearts of His opponents. After Jesus fed the 5,000 in John 6, nearly all who followed Him turned back.
- Jesus points us to Moses and the Prophets (and now, we also have the Apostolic writings of the New Testament), because the Word alone has the miraculous power to convert the unbelieving heart. “Faith comes by hearing,” says St. Paul (Romans 10:17; see also Isaiah 55:10-11). The Word is powerful enough to bring salvation to us (Romans 1:16), because it points us to the greatest miracle of all—that a Man truly did rise from the dead to bring life and immortality to light. Jesus is the greater Jonah (Matthew 12:38-42) who, though He was rich, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped and emptied Himself (Philippians 2:6-8) of all His riches to give us the wealth of His holy and precious blood, which redeems us from all sin and death (2 Corinthians 8:9).



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