

David Wittbrodt - Why Lazarus

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Maybe you're thinking, which Lazarus? After all, the name Lazarus appears in two different gospels. Well, I'll answer that question. Also, let's look at Luke 16, verse 19, where we have a parable that reads, there was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linens and fared sumptuously every day, and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.

You know this parable as the rich man and Lazarus. But if you've had an opportunity to witness to someone concerning these verses, some will say, this is not a parable. The scenario goes something like this. You're trying to show some wonderful truths of God, like the ransom for all or. Or the resurrection of all and the kingdom which oppose the doctrine of eternal torment in a burning hell.

Eventually, this parable comes up as proof that God will burn and torture people in hell forever. You object and say, no, it's a parable. It's symbolic. Pointing out the symbolism, showing Israel's period of favor and disfavor, then realizing that parables are in fact symbolic. They object and say, it's not a parable.

And then they say, it can't be a parable because proper names are never used in parables. Does using a proper name in a parable prove that this is not a parable? I don't think so. Nonetheless, we want to look at why Jesus used the name Lazarus, regardless of whether or not it's a parable, hence the title why Lazarus?

After all, it could have been the parable of the rich man and the poor man, without altering the meaning, showing Israel's period of favor followed by a period of disfavor. Or how about there was a certain rich man named Aaron, or perhaps Joseph, or perhaps some other name, and a beggar named Lazarus or some other name. Jesus could have used any name or no name for either the rich man or the beggar. So why Lazarus just for the beggar. Normally in the construction of a story, a name would be used for both characters, but here, just the beggar is given a name.

This is a bit unusual, this parable, the Rich man and Lazarus, is really the last parable in a series of five parables given by Jesus to the Pharisees, starting in Luke 15. Now, while these parables have real applications for us right now, I instead want to focus on how the Pharisees viewed what Jesus was saying. In other words, what did it mean in Jesus day? Now, before we get to the five parables, we want to look at a Couple of things to set the first, the relationship between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees and second, a fable by the rabbis. The relationship Jesus had with the scribes and Pharisees, chief priests and religious rulers were often contentious, sometimes even combative, like when he overthrew the tables of the money changers.

Look at a few examples. In Luke 6, 7:11, Jesus healed on the Sabbath and they were looking to accuse him. But Jesus knew what was in their hearts and they were filled with madness. When Jesus foiled their plan in John 5:18, they sought to kill him because he healed on the sabbath. In Matthew 22:15, they tried to entrap Jesus with questions about giving tribute to Caesar and the Resurrection.

On the other hand, Jesus was not afraid to criticize them publicly, calling them hypocrites. In Matthew 23 he pointed out their faults, their lack of faith, their error, their holier than thou attitude in very condemning language, directly to them, a supposedly uneducated person going directly to the

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highest level. It was unheard of in that day, and if that wasn't enough, they had to contend with Jesus rising popularity. Jesus was rightful in criticizing them and they were looking for faults in Jesus.

By understanding this relationship, we can better understand why Jesus told them these five parables so they could amend their ways and take corrective action. The second thing I'd like to touch on before we get to our series of five parables is a fable from the writings of the Pharisees. They had a book called the Babylonian Talmud of the Jews. In this book there's a particular fable that was written while the Jews were in Babylon, and their story is quite similar to the rich man and Lazarus.

In fact, it's obvious Jesus was drawing upon it. In this story there is a priest named Eliezer and a beggar named Lazarus, and when they die, Eliezer the priest goes to Abraham's bosom and Lazarus the beggar goes to Hades. Now first we notice the priest goes to Abraham's bosom. This is a book written by priests.

And they have themselves going to their father Abraham, a place of favor. This is how they viewed themselves. The beggar Lazarus they have going to Hades. In their story, those who were publicans, tax collectors, anyone they looked down upon or that didn't conform to their rules, they put in Hades. It was a way of controlling the people.

This is how they viewed others, sinners. But Jesus reversed these roles. Lazarus is the one who goes to Abraham's bosom and the rich man goes to Hades. Jesus also substitutes the rich man in place of the priest and omits the name Eliezer for a reason. He could have included it, but he doesn't.

The name Lazarus he keeps. Nonetheless, the comparisons are obvious and striking. The Pharisees were very familiar with this book of the Rabbis, and there is no doubt that they made the connection that Jesus intended. The rich man clothed in purple was themselves the Pharisees whom Jesus was addressing right then and there.

In John 8:39, the Pharisees proclaimed, Abraham is our Father. In Jesus parable, the rich man calls out across this great Gulf. In verse 24, Father Abraham, the connection is made to the Pharisees. Jesus, using elements from their writings, which includes a story with Lazarus, could answer the question, why Lazarus? But I think there's even more to it, and that would be a short talk.

And I think we have some more time, so let's dig a little deeper.

Let's look at these parables beginning in Luke 15. Keep in mind the contention between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees and this fable written by the rabbis. Remember, we want to look at them from the Pharisees viewpoint. That's who Jesus was speaking to, and his point was to show the scribes and Pharisees the errors of their ways.

And in these, as always, he picked the most opportunistic time to make his point. In verse 1 of Luke 15 we find the common people, the publicans and sinners, drawing near to Jesus to hear him, to listen. Notice that they were drawn to Jesus. They were those who did not find favor with the scribes and Pharisees, but still had an interest in seeking truth, interested in the things of God. But they didn't really have a place in the Jewish denominations of that time.

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We could almost say they were lost. In verse two we read, and the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. This murmuring and their attitude. It's this murmuring and their attitude that Jesus uses as a springboard into these next few parables, and so Jesus begins with this parable of the lost sheep.

In this parable there are 100 sheep and one is lost. The shepherd leaves the 99 saved sheep and looks for the one lost sheep, and when he finds it, there is great rejoicing. How is this a lesson to the Pharisees? They were shepherds over the flock of God.

Were they tending their flock?

Were they doing their duty as shepherds? Were they looking for the lost sheep? No. The lost sheep are those sinners referred to in verse 2 they said of Jesus, he welcomes sinners and eats with them. They had deep disgust for these ones.

The Pharisees should have been looking for these lost sheep, the sinners reaching out to them, to their own brethren that were lost. Instead, they were building walls between themselves and the sinners. They didn't even want to go near sinners. The parable ends with, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than the 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent. It is clear the sinner is that lost sheep, the same sinner?

In verse two, do you see how Jesus responds with the perfect parable for the situation? It's clear he's speaking to the Pharisees and he's telling them that they are lousy shepherds. There's a quick lesson here before we go on to the second parable. Just as the Pharisees were supposed to be shepherds to their flock, we also must be shepherds to each other, looking out for one another, not choosing who our brothers and sisters should be. Are we building walls, and when we see one go astray, steer them back.

And when one is lost, go find them. In verse 8, Jesus continues with the parable of the lost coin. A woman loses one of her 10 silver coins and lights a lamp, sweeps the house and searches for the coin. There is rejoicing when the coin is found. Women of that time sometimes wore a bracelet of 10 coins, which was actually a marriage gift, hence very valuable, something greatly cherished.

Well, if you lose one coin, it ruins the entire bracelet. It diminishes the value of the other coins. In fact, it would be an embarrassment to even wear the bracelet with nine coins, and so it is as if they are all lost because you can't wear it well. The coins here represent the truths of God doctrines.

To the Pharisees, Jesus was saying, you have lost the coin. You are not preaching the true doctrines of God. Instead, they were adding unnecessary laws and burdens on the people, and because the entire bracelet must be put away, when you lose just one of the coins, Jesus is saying, you don't have any truth in what you are preaching. It is as if they have lost all the coins, really truths.

He's also telling them that they are in the dark. They need to light a lamp in order to find the truth. Lighting the lamp shows a desire to find the truth which they were lacking, and sweeping the house means removing the dirt of human doctrines, traditions and burdens. How quickly can the truth be lost when just one coin is lost when one error is introduced.

Like the doctrine of the immortal soul or eternal torment. This quickly leads to more errors, error upon error. Soon there's a little truth left, and soon the bracelet is no longer worn. This is quite a

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condemnation of the Pharisees by Jesus for us. We want to remember how important important God's doctrines are to us and never lose them.

I could make a long list of essential doctrines pictured in the 10 coins, but I'll mention just one coin in particular, the ransom for all and the kingdom of blessings for all that Jesus ransom sacrifice provides. We don't want to lose any coins, but for sure lose that one. Keep your coins close to your heart. Let them guide you. Parable 3 In this sequence is the parable of the Prodigal Son, Starting in verse 11, Luke 15:11 this parable in this parable a man had two sons.

The youngest asks for his inheritance and goes off and squanders it, and when his situation becomes so dire, he decides to return to his father with a repentant attitude and just become like one of his servants. But his father prepares a big feast and restores his sonship. The older son is angry at his father and complains, but the father says of the younger brother, he was dead and is alive again. What was Jesus telling the Pharisees?

The Father represents God, always willing to accept a repentant heart despite their sinful ways. Here represented by the younger son, the older son represents the Pharisees. The oldest son always gets a larger inheritance. The Pharisees had the richest benefits from God. They were in a position of higher understanding than the sinners.

But what did they do with their greater blessings? Well, they did remain with the Father, but really only outwardly. They are quick to proclaim, father, I am with you, working for you, claiming to do the Father's will. But their true character was revealed in their attitude. When the youngest son returns, the Pharisees are quick to point out the sins in others while making sure everyone was aware of their good deeds.

This reminds me of Jesus words in Luke 18:30 where he says, there is more righteousness in those who repent. Jesus was telling the Pharisees, this is what it's what's on the inside that counts, not the outward show, and that the sinners who repented the younger son will get the fatted calf at the feast and deserves it more than the Pharisees. The older son also the older son should have been looking for the younger and should have been the one to welcome him back. After all, it was his brother. But the Pharisees were not even willing to reach out to their own brethren.

They were put in a position to minister to the whole Jewish nation, but they were more interested in their own inheritance. Well, this message must have warmed the hearts of the sinners and publicans who were also there listening to Jesus to know that even if the Pharisees were unwilling to minister to them, that God was willing to bypass the Pharisees and receive them back. Now a lesson for us. Remember how the Father was rejoicing greatly when his Son returned. Shouldn't we also rejoice when one of our brethren returns to us with a repentant heart?

Aren't they our own brothers and sisters? Brethren, don't be slow to welcome them back. Are we rejoicing or are we judging them like the Pharisees and rejecting them like the Pharisees? Rejoice when you see a repentant heart. This excitement shows a proper attitude of our heart.

The next parable, the fourth one in Luke 16:1, is the parable of the unjust slave. In this parable, the steward had charge over his master's good, and he was doing a poor job and was about to be fired, and in order to save himself, he decided to give a good deal to all his debtors. That way he would have some friends after he was let go. So he's kind of smart.

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He was willing to use whatever means were at his disposal to plan for his own future. Well being. Like the unjust steward, the Pharisees piled heavy burdens or debts on others while pretending to be devoutly religious. But the Master God in this case, knows what the steward is doing. You can't fool your master when your master is God.

And this is what the Pharisees were trying to do. To the Pharisees, Jesus was saying, there are going to be consequences to your actions, and because of their failures, they were about to lose their position. They won't be stewards over God's goods for much longer. The lesson we'd like to point out for this fourth parable is we have consecrated to do God's will and follow Jesus.

And we are stewards over what God gives us. We have to be good stewards as well. We can't fool God. He's watching our consecration. So we need to be diligent in all that we do.

This principle is clearly stated in verse 11, reading from the NIV. It says, if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches? You must Prove yourself with your earthly affairs in order to be entrusted with heavenly riches.

Well, what do you think the Pharisees did with all this information that Jesus gave them in these parables? They should have realized that they were in trouble, as sure by the progression in these parables. They were lousy shepherds over their flocks, as shown by the lost sheep. They did not have the truths of God shown by the lost coin. They didn't care about the recovery of their lost brethren shown by the younger Son.

And then, as a result of their actions, they were about to lose their stewardship shown by the unjust steward, and so did the Pharisees repent from their ways after hearing this? Did they attempt to reverse their course? Did they humble themselves? I could just say no, but the answer is in Luke 16:14 it says, they heard all these things.

They derided him. The NLT puts it this way. The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all of this and scoffed at him. So they understood that these parables were directed at themselves and their reaction was to scoff at Jesus. Remember, they were trying to rid themselves of Jesus any way they could.

In Mark 12:12 it says they sought to lay hold on him because he spoke a parable against them. A parable. They knew that these parables were against them. In John 8:40, Jesus says, But now you seek to kill me, a man which has told you the truth, and so, after deriding Jesus following these four parables, perhaps thinking that Jesus was finished, Jesus gives them one more parable to cap it off.

The parable of the Rich man and Lazarus.

After introducing us to the rich man clothed in purple living sumptuous continuously, and the beggar Lazarus, desiring crumbs from the table, and dogs licking his sores, both die, and Lazarus goes to Abraham's bosom, and the rich man goes to Hades in torments, where he asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus with a drop of water to cool his tongue. Abraham, calling him son, replies that he can't do that, and that there is this great gulf between them. So the rich man asks to send him, referring to Lazarus, to his five brethren in order to avoid this place of torment, and Abraham replies, they have Moses and the prophets to hear.

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Then in verse 30, the rich man responds, no, if you send someone from the dead, again referring to Lazarus, they will repent, and then finally, Abraham tells the rich man, if they don't hear Moses and the prophets, they won't be persuaded, even if one rose from the dead. Remember, they knew that Jesus used Parables against them. They called Abraham their father. In this parable, the rich man calls out Father Abraham.

They knew that they were the rich man in Jesus parable. But Jesus puts them as the rich man in Hades, in torments, and Lazarus a beggar in Abraham's bosom. This. This was appalling to them.

And he closes the parable with they will not believe even if one rose from the dead. What did the Pharisees think of that? Jesus was implying that their faith was so weak that even if someone was risen from the dead, they wouldn't believe. Well, did the Pharisees themselves actually ask for someone to be raised from the dead? No, they wouldn't ask this of Jesus.

It was Jesus who in a way put these words in their mouths in the parable to demonstrate the Pharisees lack of faith. In other words, using the rich man, Jesus puts these words in the Pharisee's mouth. Send him Lazarus from the dead. Well, how could someone in that position. Priests have so little faith.

It seems impossible. Can you prove it? In this case it was true. Jesus said it. Could he prove it?

I think Jesus did prove it. In this parable. He put these words in their mouths. Send Lazarus from the dead. Then just several weeks to a month later, what did Jesus do?

Jesus actually raised Lazarus from the dead. He raised the real Lazarus, Mary and Martha's brother, as recorded in John 11. Did the Pharisees believe? No. Well, I think they had several weeks to a month to ponder and discuss Jesus words in these five parables, most likely looking for something to catch him on.

But perhaps most disturbing was the parable of the rich man and Lazarus with themselves going to Hades, and that they wouldn't believe even if someone arose from the dead. So let's look at John 11:42, 44, where Jesus raises Lazarus. First Jesus prays to his Father and then says at the end of verse 42 that they may believe that Thou hast sent me, and when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth.

And he that was dead came forth. Imagine seeing a miracle like that. Surely everyone who witnessed that would believe in him. But not so. In verse 45 it says then many of the Jews which came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.

But some of them went their ways to to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done. These were spies sent by the Pharisees. Try to picture this. The spies returning to the Pharisees, telling them that Jesus raised someone from the dead. What would be their reaction?

They must have been stunned. How many people saw this? That saying? Many. Did it really happen?

Yes. Was it real? Yes. But the real shock must have been when they heard who was raised from the dead. Lazarus.

Jesus, within the context of this parable about Lazarus to the Pharisees not only foretold the raising of a dead person, but predicted who it would be. Lazarus. The Pharisees didn't know it when they

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heard the parable. Only after Jesus was raised did they realize that Jesus foretold this event. But Jesus knew what he was going to do when he told them the parable.

He knew that he would soon raise someone, and he knew it would be Lazarus. You know, it was a big enough problem for the chief priest, priests and Pharisees with the stir this would have caused of raising Lazarus from the dead. But to predict it ahead of time, to them, it was almost as if Jesus was trying to humiliate them and embarrass them. But no, actually Jesus was trying to wake them up, to rattle them so that they could change their course.

Does this remind you of someone? Pharaoh. When his heart was hardened after the plagues, Moses told Pharaoh in advance what was going to happen, and was he persuaded after the plagues? No.

Were the Pharisees persuaded after Lazarus was raised? No. Their hearts were hardened just as like Pharaoh, and in verse 53 it says they plotted to take his life. Why Lazarus?

This is why the name Lazarus in these two Gospels is not a coincidence. Now, I think that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, when Jesus predicts to the Pharisees that he would raise Lazarus from the Dead in Luke 16, occurs several weeks to a month before he actually raises Lazarus from the dead as recorded in John 11. Let's look at that. Did they both occur close in time near the end of Jesus ministry? First, prior to the five parables in Luke 15 and 16, in Luke 13:6 through 9, we have the parable of the barren fig tree, where Jesus says, behold, these three years I come seeking fruit thereon and found none.

This corresponds to the first three years of Jesus ministry looking for fruits from the nation of Israel. This parable only could have been given at the three year time of his ministry, placing the parables of Luke 15 and 16, including the rich man and Lazarus, in the last six months or less of his ministry. Second, I think we'd all agree that the raising of Lazarus in John 11 happens shortly before Jesus was crucified. Nonetheless, prior to this, in John 10:22, Jesus attended His last Feast of dedication in December, about four months before his death. So this places both the parable with Lazarus and the raising of Lazarus very late in Jesus ministry, prior to his crucifixion.

Also, the rich man and Lazarus parable had to occur before the raising of Lazarus because Jesus was active publicly with the Jews when he told them the parable. But after he raised Lazarus from the dead, we are told that he no longer moved among the Jews. So the parable came first, I think several weeks to a month before he actually raised Lazarus from the dead. Let's look at one additional point. Why the rich man Jesus replaces the priest Eliezer from the Pharisees fable with the rich man in his own parable.

Why? Calling them rich was not a compliment, but it was the truth. They were rich, clothed in purple and eating well. To the Pharisees, to be called rich, especially by Jesus, was dishonoring. They expected respect.

They were the class of privilege, remember? They really thought of themselves as priests. They thought their fable was accurate and that their description of themselves as priests was a proper description and they liked it. But it was a description of how they saw themselves, and Jesus was telling them, that's not how God sees you.

Isn't that what really matters? It wasn't by accident that Jesus used this title the rich man. He could have used the proper name or another title, or kept the word priest, but he didn't, and the title rich

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man fits them so well, and omitting the name Eliezer puts the focus on the name Lazarus, which was Jesus intent.

So let's summarize why Lazarus. This study for me began when I was challenged by by some individuals when witnessing on this parable of the rich man and Lazarus to show that this parable is not about a burning hell, but rather correctly showing a dispensational change where the Jewish nation enters a period of disfavor and the Gentiles are favored, and I had the opportunity to present this detailed explanation to show how Jesus speaking to the Pharisees used these four parables to set up the rich man and Lazarus to show this dispensational change, and it has been very helpful. So I hope that these thoughts help you as well.

Within these parables he gave us many lessons to help us on our walk, perhaps more than anything else, to simply not be like the Pharisees, and within these parables he showed the Pharisees their gross errors and the consequences that were about to take place, and within these parables he not only predicted the raising of someone from the dead and who it would be, but also that they wouldn't believe. There is only one parable in which Jesus uses a proper name, and it's not by some random chance that he used the name Lazarus.

He raised Lazarus from the dead just after giving them the parable where the rich man who Jesus clearly intended to represent, the Pharisees asked for Lazarus to be sent from them, to them from the dead. What more evidence could they have asked for? You know, there's a huge irony to all this. They wanted to kill Jesus in order to save the nation, and by killing Jesus, their nation was left desolate and they were scattered.

Pride. The Pharisees had plenty of it. Even a little is not good. Let us be diligent in avoiding the pride of the Pharisees as we seek to follow our pattern. Jesus, one more thing.

The raising of Jesus. The raising of Lazarus pictures the good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, which is the resurrection of the whole world of mankind in that kingdom which we look forward to and earnestly pray for. Always be kind and humble, and may the Lord add his blessing.