

# Deeper Dive: Luke 16:19-31 A Tale of Two Lives

## 1) Literary setting in Luke

- We're still within Luke's **travel narrative** (9:51-19:27) where Jesus disciples followers "on the road."
- Just before this: warnings about **money and allegiance** (16:1-13); just after: the "**lovers of money**" Pharisees sneer (16:14-15) and then the **rich man & Lazarus** seals the point; later the **rich ruler** (18:18-30) and **Zacchaeus** (19:1-10) show two contrasting responses.
- Luke's throughline: God **reverses** human valuations and calls disciples to order life **now** in light of **then** (Luke 1:52-53; 6:20-26; 12:13-21). (Green; Bock; Wright)

## 2) Structure and rhetorical flow

1. **vv.19-21**: Two portraits at one gate (luxury vs. lack; anonymity vs. a name).
2. **vv.22-26**: Great reversal and fixed great chasm (post-mortem clarity on pre-mortem values).
3. **vv.27-31**: Sufficiency of Scripture; urgency of repentance (signs won't soften a heart that refuses the Word).  
Luke crafts a **contrast narrative** that becomes a **prophetic admonition**. (Johnson; Garland)

## 3) Key Greek terms & narrative details

- **Πλούσιος** (*plousios*, "rich man," v.19): no name given. In Luke, "rich" often marks spiritual peril **when** wealth insulates from mercy (6:24; 12:16-21).
- **Πορφύρα / βύσσος** (purple/fine linen, v.19): the language of elite luxury (outer garment purple-dyed, inner garment fine linen). Daily banqueting (**εὐφραϊνόμενος καθ' ἡμέραν λαμπρῶς**) signals habitual excess.
- **Λάζαρος** (v.20): from Hebrew *ʿEl'āzār*, "God helps." Heaven **names** the man the world ignores (Green).
- **ἐβέβλητο** ("had been laid," v.20): passive: he is placed/dumped at the gate, emphasizing helplessness.
- **πυλῶν** ("gate," v.20): a large estate entrance; the **threshold** where mercy could have crossed.
- **κόλπος Ἀβραάμ** ("Abraham's bosom," v.22): banquet intimacy/honor image (reclining at table; cf. John 13:23).

- ᾠδης (*Hades*, v.23): realm of the dead; here a place of **torment** revealing moral reality (Garland).
- χάσμα μέγα ἐστήρικται (“a great chasm has been fixed,” v.26): perfect tense underscores **permanent** fixity, no crossing.
- Ἀκούειν (“to listen,” v.29): Abraham insists **hearing** Moses and the Prophets is enough; refusal to hear is the core problem (Johnson).

#### 4) Socio-historical background

- **Honor-shame economy**: The rich man’s clothing and daily feasts telegraph status; failing to aid the needy **at one’s gate** was a moral failure in Jewish wisdom tradition (Prov 14:21, 31; 19:17). (Bailey; McKnight)
- **Dogs** (v.21): scavengers; their licking may intensify shame: either insult or an ironic “mercy” that the human neighbor would not give.
- **Banquet imagery**: “Abraham’s bosom” evokes **eschatological hospitality**: the great messianic feast (Isa 25:6-9). Lazarus moves from **excluded** to **honored guest**.
- **Jewish eschatological logic**: Post-mortem destinies **reveal** what choices have already **formed** (Gorman).

#### 5) Intertextual & intratextual echoes

- **Magnificat (Luke 1:52-53)**: God “has filled the hungry... sent the rich away empty.” Lazarus and the rich man incarnate Mary’s song. (Wright)
- **Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-26)**: blessings/woes anticipate the reversal on display here.
- **Isaiah 58:6-7**: true fasting: “share bread with the hungry... bring the homeless poor into your house.” The rich man’s daily feasting without mercy is Isaiah 58 inverted.
- **Amos 6:1-7**: ease and indulgence amid national ruin; judgment follows complacency.
- **Deut 15:7-11**: open your hand to the poor—precisely what he refuses at his gate.
- **Luke 12:13-21 (rich fool)**: security without generosity leads to sudden **loss**—another “today vs. eternity” warning.
- **John 11-12**: another Lazarus is raised; leaders still **do not believe**. Luke 16:31 proves prophetic: a **resurrection** won’t convince a hardened heart.

#### 6) What is (and isn’t) the sin?

- **Not** that the rich man possessed wealth; Luke praises **generous** stewards elsewhere (8:1-3; 19:1-10).
- **Yes**: willful blindness and **failure of neighbor-love** at arm’s length. He did not need to found a charity; he needed to **cross his gate**. Wealth became a **buffer** against seeing. (Green; McKnight)

## 7) The logic of the “great chasm”

- Judgment here exposes already-fixed orientations. The chasm is the **final disclosure** of a life lived widening the moral distance between self and neighbor. (Gorman)
- Abraham’s “**Remember**” (v.25) makes memory part of judgment; choices **follow us**. (Garland)

## 8) “Moses and the Prophets” are enough

- Abraham’s reply (vv.29–31) asserts **Scripture’s sufficiency** to produce repentance. The issue is not **information** but **inclination**.
- A heart closed to the Word won’t open for wonders. As Johnson notes, Luke habitually ties faith to **hearing** and **doing** the Word (8:21; 11:28).
- Christopher J. H. Wright emphasizes Scripture as God’s **appointed means** to shape a people for justice and mercy; demanding extra “signs” can be pious procrastination.

## 9) Theological synthesis (in Luke’s key)

1. **Reversal as revelation:** God’s kingdom unmask the truth: who we honored, whom we ignored, what we loved. (Wright)
2. **Wealth as a test of vision:** Money is never neutral in Luke; it either enlarges love or insulates from it. (Green; Bock)
3. **Compassion as proximity:** Holiness is measured not by distance from sinners but by **nearness to the needy**. (Bailey)
4. **Scripture → repentance → practice:** The Word is sufficient; obedience is urgent; habits must embody mercy. (Johnson; C. J. H. Wright)
5. **Eschatological urgency:** The time to cross the gate is **now**; tomorrow’s chasm warns today’s conscience. (Gorman)

## 10) Pastoral implications (for study, prayer, and practice)

- **Examine the gate:** Where are the “Lazaruses” near my literal routines: street corner, classroom, hallway, inbox?
- **Practice proximity:** Choose one recurring habit (weekly meal, visit, ride, advocacy) that places you **within reach** of need.
- **Budget mercy:** Add a **mercy line**, however small. Let generosity be **pre-decided**, not occasional. (Barclay on grace/gift disrupting payback economies)
- **Scripture first:** Read Luke 14:12-14 or Isaiah 58 this week. Ask, “What simple obedience is the Spirit pressing now?”
- **Name and remember:** Learn one name at your gate; prayerfully “remember” the person before God each day this week.

## Select bibliography

- **Joel B. Green**, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT) narrative theology; wealth/discipleship in Luke.
- **Darrell L. Bock**, *Luke* (BECNT) lexical/structural analysis; reversal themes.
- **Luke Timothy Johnson**, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina) hearing/doing the Word; moral thrust.
- **N. T. Wright**, *Luke for Everyone* pastoral framing of reversal and kingdom economics.
- **David E. Garland**, *Luke* (ZECNT) “Hades,” “great chasm,” judgment as disclosure.
- **Kenneth E. Bailey**, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* social setting; gate/proximity; honor-shame.
- **Michael J. Gorman**, *Cruciformity* judgment revealing cruciform/non-cruciform lives (helpful for vv.25-26).
- **Scot McKnight**, *Sermon resources/Kingdom ethics* neighbor-love and economic discipleship.
- **John M. G. Barclay**, *Paul and the Gift* gift/grace logic as alternative economy.
- **Christopher J. H. Wright**, *The Mission of God / Old Testament Ethics* Scripture forming a people of mercy and justice.

**The parable doesn’t demonize wealth, it unmasks blindness; Scripture is enough to call us to cross our gates now, before the chasm our habits carve becomes permanent.**