

The Parables of Jesus, Teacher's Guide

Week 7: Eternal Priorities

Luke 16:19–31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This parable carries unusual doctrinal weight, and parts of it call for real care. Three themes are at stake. First, the danger of wealth held in indifference: the rich man is condemned not for being rich but for stepping past Lazarus at his gate, day after day, untouched by his suffering. Second, the reality of life after death and the finality of eternal destiny: the parable affirms conscious existence beyond the grave, a great reversal, and a chasm fixed that none can cross. Third, and climactically, the sufficiency and authority of Scripture: Moses and the Prophets are enough, and those who will not hear them would not be won even by a resurrection. Each of these deserves to be taught clearly.

Be disciplined about the second theme in particular. This is a parable, and its vivid imagery of finger, tongue, and flame is meant to convey the reality of comfort and torment beyond death, not to hand us a detailed map of the unseen world. Teach confidently what the text affirms, that there is conscious existence after death, that destinies are reversed and then fixed, that this life determines our eternal future, and resist the urge to build elaborate speculation about the geography of the afterlife that goes beyond what Jesus says. Stay where the text stays. The point Jesus is making is not a tour of the next world but an urgent summons about this one.

Then drive toward formation, because the parable is relentlessly practical. Jesus pulls back the curtain on eternity precisely to change how His hearers live now: to open their eyes to the Lazarus at their gate, to reorder their priorities around what lasts, and above all to send them back to the Scriptures they already hold. The deepest application is to listen to God's word now, while the gate is open, rather than presuming on signs we do not need and time we may not have. Aim the hour at a heart that sees the needy, treasures the word, and lives ready.

Question 1

Student Question:

The rich man is never accused of fraud or cruelty; his sin is that Lazarus lay at his gate day after day and he did nothing (vv. 19–21). What does this teach us about how God evaluates a life of comfort and self-indulgence lived in indifference to the suffering of others, and about the kind of sin that consists not in what we do but in what we fail to do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by clarifying what the rich man's sin actually was, because students often assume it was simply being wealthy. Jesus levels no charge of fraud, theft, or cruelty. The man's condemnation

lies in what he did not do: Lazarus lay at his gate, visible and accessible, day after day, and the rich man felt nothing and did nothing. His was the sin of indifference, of comfortable self-indulgence beside unrelieved suffering.

Teach the seriousness of sins of omission. We tend to measure righteousness by the bad things we avoid, but Scripture is full of warnings about the good we fail to do (James 4:17). The rich man did not have to hate Lazarus to be guilty; he only had to ignore him. A life of daily luxury lived in blindness to the needy at his own door was enough to condemn him.

Note the detail that Lazarus is named while the rich man is not. In the world's eyes the rich man was somebody and Lazarus was nobody, but in God's account the beggar has a name and the rich man is anonymous. God's evaluation of a life runs exactly opposite to the world's scoreboard.

Apply it to comfortable believers. The danger this parable exposes is not dramatic wickedness but respectable numbness, enjoying our good things while the suffering near us fades into background scenery. Help students feel that indifference to obvious need is not neutral; it is the very sin for which this man was lost.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The rich man's sin as indifference, not wealth itself
- The seriousness of sins of omission, the good we fail to do (James 4:17)
- God's evaluation of a life running opposite to the world's scoreboard
- Comfortable numbness to nearby suffering as a real spiritual danger

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important to see that the rich man's sin was not simply being rich?
- How does Scripture treat the good we fail to do, not just the wrong we commit?
- What does it mean that Lazarus is named and the rich man is not?

Question 2

Student Question:

It is easy to grow numb to need, especially when it is constant and close. Where have you trained yourself not to see the people God has placed within your reach? Name one specific need you have been stepping past, and ask why it has become so easy to walk by.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question turns the gate toward the student. The rich man's tragedy was proximity without compassion; Lazarus was near enough to touch and yet invisible to him. The

question asks where we have trained ourselves not to see the needs God has placed within our reach.

Help students understand how numbness develops. Need that is constant and close tends to fade into the scenery; we grow used to it, we feel helpless before it, we tell ourselves someone else will handle it, and gradually we stop seeing it at all. The rich man almost certainly did not decide to despise Lazarus; he simply got used to him.

Press for one specific person or need rather than a general resolve to care more. The aim is to reopen the eyes. Encourage students to name the Lazarus at their own gate, a neighbor, a coworker, a family member, a community need, and to ask God to let them truly see that person this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Proximity without compassion as the rich man's failure
- How constant, close need fades into background scenery
- Reopening our eyes to those God has placed within reach
- Naming one specific person rather than resolving in general

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you trained yourself not to see a need close to you?
- How does need that is constant and near become invisible to us?
- Who is the Lazarus at your gate right now?

Question 3

Student Question:

When both men die, the parable follows them beyond the grave, where Lazarus is comforted and the rich man is in anguish (vv. 22–25). Being careful to stay with what the text actually affirms and not to speculate beyond it, what does this passage teach us about the reality of conscious existence after death and the great reversal that awaits?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses the reality of life after death, and it is the place to model careful handling for your class. Begin with what the text plainly affirms: when the two men die, they continue to exist consciously; Lazarus is comforted and the rich man is in anguish; their earthly fortunes are dramatically reversed. Death is not the end of the person, and what follows is real.

Then teach restraint. This is a parable, and its imagery, a finger, a tongue, a flame, a conversation across a gulf, conveys the reality of comfort and torment beyond death without giving us a literal map of the unseen realm. Resist the temptation, common in popular teaching,

to construct elaborate theories about the geography and mechanics of the afterlife from these vivid details. We hold firmly what Scripture affirms and we decline to speculate beyond it (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Keep the emphasis where Jesus puts it: the great reversal. The one who had everything now has nothing, and the one who had nothing is comforted. This is not a promise that all poor people are saved and all rich people lost; it is a warning that the values of this age will be overturned, and that a life spent serving self at others' expense leads to ruin.

Apply it soberly and hopefully. The certainty of conscious existence beyond death gives enormous weight to how we live now, and for the faithful it holds real comfort, for to depart is to be with Christ, which is far better (Philippians 1:23). The parable is meant to make eternity vivid enough to change today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Conscious existence after death, affirmed by the text
- The great reversal of earthly fortunes beyond the grave
- Teaching what Scripture affirms without speculating beyond it (Deuteronomy 29:29)
- Reading parabolic imagery for its point, not as a literal map of the unseen
- The comfort of the faithful in death (Philippians 1:23)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the parable clearly affirm about existence after death?
- Why must we be careful not to build elaborate theories from its imagery?
- What is the great reversal warning us about, and what is it not saying?

Question 4

Student Question:

The rich man assumed his comfortable life would simply continue, and he was wrong. How would living with the unshakable certainty of life after death, and of accountability before God, actually reshape the priorities you set this week, this month, and this year?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes the certainty of the afterlife and presses it into present priorities. The rich man lived as though his comfortable life would simply roll on; the curtain pulled back to show how wrong he was. The question asks how genuinely believing in life after death and accountability before God would reshape the way we actually spend our days.

Help students move from abstract belief to concrete consequence. Almost every Christian affirms life after death in theory, yet many live as though this world were all there is. The test is

not what we say we believe but how our calendars, budgets, and ambitions are arranged. An eternity-shaped life looks different in its priorities.

Invite specific reordering. What would change this week, this month, this year, if eternity were vivid? Perhaps more investment in people and less in things, more generosity, more attention to the soul, a loosening of our grip on comforts. The goal is to let the reality of eternity exert real gravity on present decisions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving belief in the afterlife from theory into practice
- Calendars and budgets as the true test of what we believe
- Living with eternity vivid enough to reorder priorities
- Investing in what lasts rather than in what perishes

Discussion Prompts

- How would unshakable certainty of eternity change your priorities?
- Where do you live as though this world were all there is?
- What concrete reordering would an eternity-shaped life require of you?

Question 5

Student Question:

Abraham tells the rich man that “a great chasm has been fixed” that no one can cross (v. 26). What does this sobering image teach about the finality of our eternal destiny once this life is over, and why does it press such urgency onto the choices we make now, while the gate is still open?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question handles the sober image of the fixed chasm. Abraham tells the rich man that a great gulf has been set in place so that none may cross from one side to the other. Teach plainly what this means: once this life is over, our eternal destiny is settled. There is no second chance after death, no crossing over, no later repentance.

Explain why Jesus includes this. The rich man, even in torment, still treats Lazarus as an errand boy and assumes some arrangement can be made. Abraham’s answer closes the door: the time for choosing was during life, at a gate the rich man walked past daily. The chasm did not appear at death; it was the final form of a separation the man had created by a lifetime of indifference.

Connect to the broader teaching of Scripture that this life is decisive. It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Now is the favorable time; today is the

day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). The fixedness of eternity is exactly what gives urgency to the present.

Apply it without manipulation. The aim is not to frighten people into a panicked decision but to awaken them to the seriousness and the brevity of the opportunity we have. While the gate is open, while we still draw breath, the choices we make matter eternally.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The finality of eternal destiny once this life ends
- No second chance or crossing after death
- This life as the decisive time of opportunity (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 6:2)
- The fixed chasm as the final form of a separation chosen in life

Discussion Prompts

- What does the fixed chasm teach about the finality of eternity?
- Why does Jesus stress that the time for crossing was during life?
- How should the seriousness of this truth shape our urgency now?

Question 6

Student Question:

The rich man had a lifetime of chances to step across the small gap to Lazarus, and he let them pass. Are you living as though this life is the preparation ground for eternity, or as though death and judgment are safely far away? Where is that assumption showing up in how you spend your days?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to examine the assumption that quietly governs most lives: that death and judgment are safely far off. The rich man lived by that assumption and squandered a lifetime of chances. The question presses whether the student is living as though this life were preparation for eternity or as though eternity could be postponed indefinitely.

Help students locate the assumption in their habits. It shows up in endless delay, the intention to get serious about God, generosity, or reconciliation later; in treating spiritual things as someday matters; in a practical focus entirely on the here and now. None of us knows how much time we have, and the parable warns against presuming on tomorrow.

Encourage a present-tense response. The point is not morbid preoccupation with death but wise readiness, living each day in light of the destiny toward which it leads. Invite students to name where the assumption that there is plenty of time is shaping their choices, and to begin living today as people who are ready.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining the assumption that death and judgment are far off
- How endless delay reveals a heart presuming on tomorrow
- Wise readiness rather than morbid preoccupation
- Living today in light of the destiny it leads toward

Discussion Prompts

- Are you living as though this life is preparation for eternity?
- Where does the assumption that there is plenty of time show up in your days?
- What would it mean to live this week as someone who is ready?

Question 7

Student Question:

When the rich man begs that his brothers be warned, Abraham answers, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them” (v. 29). What is Jesus teaching here about the sufficiency and authority of God’s written word, that Scripture itself is enough to lead people to repentance and salvation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question opens the parable’s decisive theme: the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. When the rich man begs that his brothers be warned, Abraham does not promise a special revelation; he points them to what they already have: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” God’s written word is enough to lead people to repentance and salvation.

Teach the sufficiency of Scripture clearly. We are prone to think we need something more, some extra sign, voice, or experience, to be sure of God or to be moved to change. The parable says otherwise. The Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation and to equip us thoroughly for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15–17). They are not a starter kit awaiting supplementation; they are sufficient.

Connect Moses and the Prophets to the whole of God’s revelation, now completed in the New Testament. If the Old Testament Scriptures were enough to leave the rich man’s brothers without excuse, how much more the full revelation we possess in Christ. The authority is God’s; the word carries His voice.

Apply it to a generation hungry for signs and experiences. The most spiritual thing many of us could do is not to seek some new manifestation but to sit down and actually listen to the word God has already spoken. The brothers did not need a ghost; they needed to read.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sufficiency of Scripture to bring people to repentance and salvation
- Scripture able to make us wise for salvation and equip us fully (2 Timothy 3:15–17)
- The completed revelation in Christ as God’s authoritative word
- Listening to the word we have rather than craving signs we do not need

Discussion Prompts

- What does Abraham’s answer teach about the sufficiency of Scripture?
- Why are we so often tempted to think we need something more than God’s word?
- How does the full revelation in Christ deepen the point Abraham makes?

Question 8

Student Question:

The rich man assumed it would take a spectacular sign, someone risen from the dead, to move his brothers, when in fact they already had everything they needed in Scripture. Where are you tempted to want some dramatic experience or sign from God while neglecting the word He has already given? How fully are you actually listening to the Scripture you already hold?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question exposes a common and subtle error: craving a dramatic experience while neglecting the word already given. The rich man was certain that a visitor from the dead would succeed where Scripture had failed. He overvalued the spectacular and undervalued the word. Many believers do the same.

Help students recognize the pattern in themselves. We may postpone obedience while waiting for a feeling, a sign, or an unmistakable nudge; we may chase spiritual highs while leaving the Bible unopened; we may treat ordinary Scripture as insufficient and extraordinary experience as the real thing. The parable gently reverses the values.

Then ask the practical question: how fully are you actually listening to the Scripture you already hold? Owning a Bible is not the same as hearing it. Encourage students to measure their craving for signs against their attention to the word, and to commit to a concrete practice of genuinely listening to what God has already said.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to crave signs while neglecting the word
- Overvaluing the spectacular and undervaluing Scripture
- Owning a Bible versus actually hearing it
- Committing to genuine attention to the word God has given

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to want a sign rather than listen to Scripture?
- How fully are you actually hearing the word you already hold?
- What practice would help you truly listen to God's word this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Abraham's final word is stunning: "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (v. 31). What does this teach about the authority and sufficiency of God's word, about the true cause of unbelief, and about why a heart that will not submit to Scripture would not be won even by a miracle? And how does this land with even greater weight for us, who know that One truly has risen from the dead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinally weightiest question, and it lands on Abraham's stunning final word: "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." Several great truths converge here, and they deserve careful unfolding.

First, the authority and sufficiency of God's word. Jesus places Scripture above even the most dramatic miracle as the means God uses to bring people to repentance. This does not despise miracles; it ranks the word rightly. The Scriptures carry the authority of God Himself, and they are sufficient for the saving of souls. A person who has the word has what is needed.

Second, the true cause of unbelief. Notice that the problem is not a lack of evidence but a hardness of heart. The rich man assumed his brothers needed more proof; Abraham diagnoses that they need a different heart. Those who will not submit to the word they have would explain away even a resurrection. Unbelief is finally a matter of the will, not of insufficient data. This is why the universal gospel call is genuine and why people are truly accountable; the issue is whether they will hear, not whether God has spoken clearly enough.

Third, the dramatic irony that we, unlike the five brothers, live on the other side of an actual resurrection. One has risen from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ, and Abraham's words become a prophecy. Many still did not believe, exactly as he foretold, proving that the resurrection confirms the word for the willing but compels no one whose heart is closed. For us this lands with double weight: we have both the completed Scriptures and the risen Christ they proclaim, and we are therefore without excuse.

Tie this back to the finality the parable has already taught. Because destiny is fixed at death and because God has spoken sufficiently in His word, the urgent question for every hearer is simply this: will I hear and obey now? The parable refuses to let us wait for a sign that would not help us anyway. It sends us, today, to the word of the risen Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority and sufficiency of Scripture above even miraculous signs
- Unbelief as hardness of heart, not lack of evidence
- The genuine gospel call and real human accountability to hear and respond
- The dramatic irony of the actual resurrection of Christ confirming Abraham's words
- Our heightened accountability, possessing both the Scriptures and the risen Lord
- The urgency of hearing and obeying now, since destiny is fixed at death

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus rank the word above even a resurrection for convincing people?
- What does this teach about the real cause of unbelief?
- How does the fact that Christ truly has risen make this word land even harder on us?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the parable. Jesus pulled back the curtain on eternity, not to satisfy our curiosity, but to change how we live today. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this story. What is the one priority you most need to reorder this week in light of the gate at your door and the word of God in your hands?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers up the parable and presses it toward one concrete reordering of priorities. Jesus did not pull back the curtain on eternity to satisfy curiosity but to change how we live today. Keep the class on the practical and personal.

Help students choose the step that fits them. For some it is opening their eyes to the Lazarus at their gate and taking a real action of mercy. For others it is loosening their grip on comfort and reordering life around what lasts. For others it is sitting down at last to truly hear and obey the Scripture they already hold. Each is a definite step.

Close by reminding students that the goal of this study is formation, not information. The gate is still open and the word is still in our hands. Invite each person to name one priority to reorder this week, and let the group pray for eyes that see the needy, hearts that treasure the word, and lives lived ready for eternity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at reordered living, not satisfied curiosity
- Choosing one step: seeing the needy, loosening our grip, or hearing the word
- Living today in light of an open gate and a fixed eternity
- Treasuring and obeying the word we already hold

Discussion Prompts

- What one priority do you most need to reorder this week?
- Is your step toward the needy, toward simplicity, or toward the word?
- How can this group encourage you to live ready for eternity?