PARABLE OR TRUE STORY?

Is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus a true-to-life story? The answer is no. We know it’s a parable because, according to the gospel of Luke, Jesus used the same opening formula (“There was a certain . . .”) for all His parables (see Luke 7:41; 14:16; 15:11; 16:1; 19:12; 20:9).

Jesus occasionally used parables of situations that existed in His day. The Pharisees told a story similar to this one, and Jesus used it and gave it a surprising twist to teach a deep spiritual truth. Ellen White wrote, “In this parable Christ was meeting the people on their own ground. The doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection was held by many of those who were listening to Christ’s words. The Savior knew of their ideas, and He framed His parable so as to inculcate important truths through these preconceived opinions.” (Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1900), 263.)

Certain Bible expositors claim that this story cannot be a parable because Jesus used the proper name Lazarus, and He never used proper names in any of His other parables. The parables of Jesus have multi-dimensional applications. They can apply to individuals and also to groups. For example, Ellen White applies the parable of the unjust steward to the publicans, the disciples, the Pharisees, Israel, and us. (White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 366–375.)

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus has a central lesson: The way people or groups use or abuse God’s blessings in this life will determine their eternal destiny.
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Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/ phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw Arrows to connect words/ phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?


What spiritual applications are found in both the resurrection of Lazarus and the parable of Lazarus?

What does this section reveal about the nature of belief?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/dead07-3
After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

Though we would identify with Lazarus, how are we more like the rich man?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/dead07-4
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Acts 23:8  
Matthew 25:31–34, 41, 46  
Matthew 15:21–28  
John 11:43–50  
John 1:18  
John 8:39

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Luke 16:19–31?


Where are ideas that Christ moves you to do good in?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?

Read more at
www.inversebible.org/dead07-6
Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the chapter, what changes must take place in your personal life?

What changes can be implemented in your social and public life?

Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/dead07-7
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

To whom did Jesus address the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:14)? Why?

What biblical evidence do we have that the parable is fictitious and not real to life?

What central lesson does the parable teach individuals, institutions, and churches?

What other stories and parables of Jesus teach the same central lesson of the parable?

How can we avoid being identified as the rich man?

If we are saved by grace through faith, why does our eternal destiny depend on how we treated others?

How do people associate socio-economic status and amount of wealth with righteousness and salvation? Why?

How does this lesson reveal the multi-dimensional depth of Christ’s teachings?

The Rich Man and Lazarus