

## Drawn to Jesus: The Parable of Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Rev. Todd Pridemore

First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, MO

September 25, 2022

WATCH/LISTEN: [www.fbcjc.org/sermon/drawn-of-jesus-the-parable-of-lazarus/](http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/drawn-of-jesus-the-parable-of-lazarus/)

*Before we move to the sermon, we're going to take a few minutes to pray for the pastor search process. The pastor search committee is entering a time when some very significant decisions will be made, and we ask for your faithful prayers now and in the coming weeks. Let's pray together...  
(Amen)*

When I was growing up in southern Missouri, I went to more old fashioned revivals than I can remember. And at those revivals I was encouraged to say the "sinner's prayer" more times than I can count. It felt like the entire focus was on the state of my soul; it was all about where I ended up when I died. And unfortunately, that often meant that the revival preachers would sometimes guilt or manipulate people to respond. Those experiences shaped my concept about what evangelism was supposed to be about and what the Good News of Jesus was all about. For many years I was convinced that God was only concerned about my soul and my eternal destination, and didn't care nearly as much about my life and well being in this world.

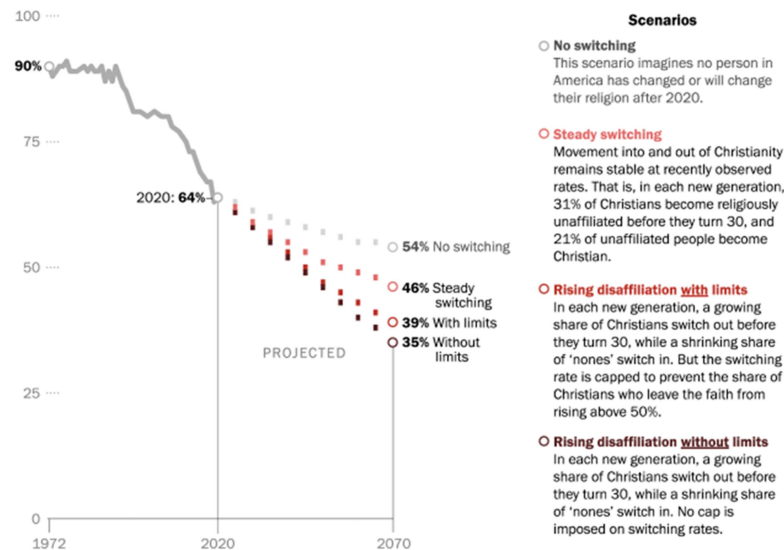
As I look back on that, I'm not proud of that part of our Christian and Baptist heritage. Choosing to follow Jesus should never be something that a person is manipulated into doing. I understand that revivals were important, and there are probably several of you who had positive experiences with them. But I also know – and we need to acknowledge – that manipulation tactics when it comes to religion in general and Christianity in particular have done more harm than good.

In a moment we're going to look at a story that Jesus told that ends with a warning. But first I'm going to provide a warning for us, as Christ's church. It is no secret that fewer and fewer Americans identify with the Christian faith. This graphic is from the year 2020 and was produced by the Pew Research Center. I know you can't read the fine print, but you can see the downward line on that graph. This is what it shows:

- 1970: 90% of American identified as being Christians
- 2020: 64%
- By 2070, if current trends continue, that percentage will drop to somewhere between 35% and 54%. At best, that's a 10% decline.

### U.S. Christians projected to fall below 50% of population if recent trends continue

% of Americans who are Christian



Note: Historical data describes trends among U.S. adults based on surveys of adults. The 2020 estimate and subsequent projections show Americans of all ages. In 2020, we estimate that the religious composition of people of all ages roughly matches the adult composition. Sources: General Social Survey (1972-2006); Pew Research Center surveys (2007-2021); Pew Research Center projections (2020-2070). "Modeling the Future of Religion in America"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

This sermon series is about being drawn to Jesus, but it's obvious that more and more people are avoiding or turning away from the Christian faith. Instead of drawing people, it seems that we're repelling people. The reasons why are many, diverse, and complex. But the bottom line is that it's happening. I'm convinced at least part of the reason why is that we – Christians in general – aren't doing a good job of caring what Jesus cared about. We haven't done a good job of being "godly" in ways that would truly honor who God is and what God is about.

The story we're going to read from Luke 16 today gets at that. It's one of those stories that makes me uncomfortable.

I've talked before about how important it is to understand the context when we read a Bible passage, and that's of course true with today's passage. Throughout this entire chapter of Luke 16, Jesus is dealing with the topic of money and how loving money above everything else leads to problems. And this message upsets the Pharisees and their anger toward Jesus grows stronger. These two verses from Luke 16 sum everything up:

- *13 No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."*
- *14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him.*

You see, the Pharisees version of "being godly" was tied closely to how blessed they were with material things. The finer their robes, the finer their food, the finer anything was for them – the more blessed they thought they were. But Jesus points out that that wasn't the case at all. Let's begin with Luke 16: 19...

#### **Luke 16:19-31**

*19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.*

*22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24 He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." 25 But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." 27 He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." 29 Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." 30 He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." 31 He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." "*

To quickly summarize what took place:

- There was a man who had everything – at least when it came to material wealth and possessions. This man had no name, but – other than being nameless – he had it all, materially speaking.
- And there was a man named Lazarus who had nothing but sores on his skin and wandering dogs as his friends. This is the only time Jesus told a parable and gave a character in the story a name. Lazarus means "God has helped," which makes it clear that Lazarus is someone that God cares for. (There appears to be no connection between this Lazarus and the resuscitated man in John 11:1-44.)
- Both men die and their circumstances for eternity are flipped upside down: The dead rich man is tormented and in agony. Lazarus is at peace with Abraham, the father of the faith in Jewish life.
- The rich man does two things –
  - First, he looks to Lazarus - who he has disregarded and ignored every day that he saw him lying in the street outside of his house – and finally acknowledges him and asks for a drip of water from his finger.
  - Second, once he realizes there is no relief from his torment, he suddenly becomes very evangelistic minded... he begs that someone warn his five brothers, so that they can avoid his same fate.

So this parable leads me to ask a few questions:

1. First, why did the rich man end up in Hades, while Lazarus ended up in paradise? Was it because one was rich and one was poor? I don't think that's the point. I think the point is that the rich man did NOTHING with his resources to help someone who was obviously in need, and that's what led to his fate. And on the other hand, Lazarus realized he was in need. And that's the first step toward God... realizing that I'm in need and that I need God in my life.
2. Second, if every parable has one primary point, one main lesson to learn, what's the lesson that Jesus wants us to take from this story? This is what one preacher, Chris Ritter, had to say related to that...

"I hope we see the love of Jesus in this passage. Jesus did not tell this story because he hates Pharisees. He told them this story because he loves them. With whom did Jesus want his listeners to relate? They probably could not relate much with Lazarus. They would not want to relate to the rich man in hell. I think the Pharisees (and us) are supposed to find ourselves in the five brothers who still have an opportunity to repent."

We are being warned. And there are two ways we can take this warning:

First, as an individual, what is God saying to you through this story? You may be like me, and relate to the rich man... we can get up in the morning and go to bed at night, and in between we can make it through the day without even acknowledging or realizing that we need God. Most Americans are like this. We can take care of ourselves and have no need to rely on others, so God easily gets pushed out or forgotten in our lives. In that case, we must heed this warning before it's too late. We must open our eyes to our own need for God each and every day, as well as when God places others in need in front of us, so that we might respond and provide them the help they need.

Or perhaps you relate more to Lazarus, you realize that you do need help. If that's the case know that God is with you and that God is for you. And God's people, like people in this church, are here to help you.

Second, as a church – as God's family here in Jefferson City, MO – what are we doing reverse the downward trend on that graph that I showed earlier? What are we doing so that people might be drawn to Jesus and the church, instead of being pushed away?

I don't have all the answers to this challenge, but I do know this: a church that cares about people is a church that people want to be a part of. Let us be the kind of church more and more as we follow Jesus together now and in the future.

As harsh as this sermon has been, there is Good News in it. God is warning us, which means it's not too late.