

A Good Shepherd Parable

Rich Man and Lazarus

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RICH MAN AND LAZARUS ... MA TERIALS

- parable box containing:

- yellow felt oval underlay
- laminated figure of a rich man
- laminated Lazarus figure
- laminated table

Lazarus



Rich Man



Table

ACTIONS

After speaking, walk slowly to the shelf and pick up the parable box with two hands. Return to your place in the circle.

After speaking, gently trace the outline of the box. Sit in silence as you concentrate on the box and gather your words for the story.

Rest your hands lightly on the box, touching it reverently.

Slowly shake your head and smile.

Nod your head confidently.

Raise your eyebrows and shake your head.

Remove the lid so you can reach inside.

Take out the yellow oval underlay and smooth it slowly as you talk.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story. Then, if you choose to make this your work today or another day, you will always know where to find it.

All of the words to this story are inside me because I have made this story my own. Will you make silence with me, please, so I can find all of the words to this story?

This is a parable box. I wonder if there is really a parable inside this box?

You see parables are very precious.

This box looks a bit like a gift.

Parables are like gifts. We can't go buy one, or even rent one, like we do a movie. Parables already belong to us.

And like gifts, we don't always know what's inside by looking at the box.

We have to take the lid off. If we take the lid off our box, maybe we will discover a parable.

Once there was a man who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that people began to follow him. Sometimes the people would say, "How can we be sure that you are the one we've waited for?"

And the man who said amazing things and did wonderful things told them this parable:

Place the rich man to the left side of the underlay. Put the table to his right.

Lay Lazarus down to the right of the table.

Place Lazarus upright in the center of the oval underlay.

Place the rich man near the right edge of the underlay.

Pretend to dip your finger in water and touch the tip of your tongue.

Shake your head slowly and sadly.

Hug yourself and smile as you say "he was close to God "

Move your hand back to the place where the table still sits.

Pretend to read a book.

Shake your head no as you say the rich man's words.

Shake your head sadly.

Once there was a very rich man. He wore fine clothes and ate a lot of good food every day.

At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was very sick. He only wanted to eat the food that fell from the rich man's table.

The poor man died and he was taken to a place close to God.

The rich man, who had not helped Lazarus, also died. He was taken to a place that was far from God.

The rich man was very thirsty and had nothing to drink. He called out for Lazarus to dip his finger in water and come to put it on his tongue.

But he was told that when he'd been alive he'd had good things. But he had not been kind.

Lazarus had suffered when he was alive but he was close to God and treated kindly now.

Then the rich man said, "Please send Lazarus back to the earth to tell my five brothers how to live. "

He was told that the brothers had the scriptures to read. They were to learn from those who taught how God wanted them to live.

Then the rich man said, "They will only believe if someone who was dead goes back to them."

And he was told that if the people of God did not hear the words from scripture, our Bible, then they would believe no one else either, dead or alive.

And the people who heard the man wondered if perhaps he was the one they had waited for.

WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder how it felt to be very sick and then all better?

I wonder if Lazarus laughed and danced when he was close to God?

I wonder if the rich man was sorry for how he treated Lazarus?

I wonder if we are close to God here?

One at a time, put the laminated pieces back into the parable box.

Beginning at either side, fold the underlay to the other side.

Repeat the side to side fold.

Carefully, place the top edge against the bottom edge and place it in the box.

After speaking, pick up the parable box with two hands and slowly carry it back to the shelf. Return to the circle.

Dismiss the children to their work ONLY after everyone has had a chance to choose what they will do.

Watch carefully how I put the materials back into the box. Then if you choose to work with this story, today or another day, you will know how to do this.

This piece can be folded by taking this edge and folding it to this edge.

Let's do that again.

Now, if we put this top part by the bottom part it should fit in the box.

Watch very carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

It's time to choose your work. Will you draw or paint something from this story? Or will you make a story your own today? Let's begin.

RICH MAN AND LAZARUS TEACHER HELPS

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus needs to be taught very carefully. Otherwise, we will teach the children that salvation lies in works, i.e. if I do good things, I will go to heaven; if I do bad things, I will suffer in hell. This parable is based on a very old Egyptian tradition that those who are righteous will be rewarded in an afterlife and those who do evil will be punished in an afterlife.

The emphasis on this parable should be twofold. One, all of the people of God have responsibilities to care for each other. And two, it should not be necessary for a miracle or a sign to convince God's people of the message of salvation. We have been given the greatest miracle of all time in the person of Jesus Christ. The scriptures have attested to God's actions in the lives of God's people. Those who will believe, will; and those who won't, will never accept the truth of any sign or miracle.

Since Lazarus was both a cripple and had a skin disease, he would have been considered a sinner by the people of Jesus' day. In that time any illness was an outward sign that a particular person had sinned. Notice that Lazarus is the only one called by name in this parable. So Lazarus, whose name means "God helps", lay each day outside the gate of the rich man's home. (The Parables of Jesus, Joachim Jeremias, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1972, p. 184-185) Jeremias also points out that what fell from the rich man's table was not crumbs, but rather bread that the men dipped in bowls, wiped their hands on and then threw under the table. Lazarus could have lived on that food.

The fact that Jesus was basing this parable on an old Egyptian folk tale meant that it was a very familiar story to the people who heard the words. It also repeated the words of Micah, Amos and Isaiah. These prophets' words constantly reminded the people of God that they were to live righteously, practicing justice. Their words were that God expected justice. God would reward justice and righteousness and God would punish injustice. That message continues in this parable, reminding the people of God that those who have been blessed have a responsibility to share their blessings with others.

In the canon (the Bible) this parable follows very closely on the heels of the dishonest steward (Luke 16: 1-13). The Pharisees are once again the listeners and Jesus teaches lessons here about the responsibilities of those with wealth. Notice that Jesus never said it was wrong to have money; to be wealthy. But each of the stories leads us to the understanding that a special responsibility comes with having wealth.

Please note that we don't make reference to Father Abraham or Hades. I believe that the reference to Abraham would simply confuse the children at this point. Older children who may read the story in the Bible can be dealt with one on one, by explaining to them that all the Jews of Jesus' time considered themselves to be descendants of Abraham. We talk rather about being in a place that was very close to God or a place that was very far from God. We do not refer to either place as heaven or hell. In fact, if anything is necessary to remain true to the

text, we need to refer to being close to the people of God who had died before. However, I prefer the theology of eternity spent close to God.

The wondering questions are as concrete as I could make them for this parable. Most children can recall being sick and then feeling well, so that will be a concrete question they can deal with. Begin there. But share the others. There is always the possibility that a child will say to you, "Is heaven the place that's close to God?" or "Is hell the place that is far from God?" Your response should be along these lines: The names of places are not as important as the people of God that we are with. We all hope that one day we will be in a place that is as close to God as possible. Sometimes people call that "paradise" or "heaven". In this room we understand that as a place that is very close to God.

We do need to say something about works righteousness at this point. We do not want the children to believe that they can "earn" their salvation by being good or doing good things. We constantly need to keep in front of us an understanding that we are to help the children in our room come to a relationship with Jesus where they will understand Christ as God's son and Savior of the world. That is the basis for their salvation. We act righteously (or rightly) because God loves us. We respond to love by loving others and caring. When we are told that we are loved our response is usually a loving response back. That is part of our sanctification, part of moving on to perfection.

This may be one of the more difficult parables to teach and yet it also has lots of fertile ground for young minds and hearts to take root in and grow.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

In this story when the rich man died he did not go to a place that was close to God, as Lazarus had done. Do you think that was because he didn't believe in God or because he didn't help other people around him like Lazarus? What are the reasons for your answer?

It may be that the rich man didn't even realize Lazarus was there and was hungry. How aware are you of people around you that are in pain? Rank yourself from 1 to 10 with a one rating being very unaware and a ten rating being very aware.

What kind of people would be very happy when they read this story? What kind of people would be very uncomfortable when they read this story? What does this story say about God?