

IF THEY DO NOT HEAR MOSES AND THE PROPHETS

The Rich Man and Lazarus, the Trial of Jesus, and the Indictment of Unbelief

Luke 16:19-31 in light of the Trial, the Cross, and the Resurrection

Most readers approach the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as a teaching about wealth, poverty, and the reality of the afterlife. It is all of those things. But read in its immediate context, and read in light of what Jesus knew was about to happen, it is something far more specific and far more pointed. It is a mirror held up to a specific audience, at a specific moment in history, with a specific verdict already embedded in the story. And it is a prophecy whose fulfillment began within weeks of its telling and has continued without interruption for two thousand years.

Part One: The Parable as Prophecy

Who Was Listening

"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him."

Luke 16:14

Luke 16:14 tells us precisely who was present when Jesus told this parable. The Pharisees were standing in front of Him, ridiculing what He had just taught. Jesus looked at the men ridiculing Him and told them a story about a rich man who ended up in conscious torment, separated from Abraham by an unbridgeable gulf, fully aware of his condition, and fully without remedy.

The message was not subtle. The audience was not incidental. This parable was aimed at specific people who were already in the process of deciding what to do with the one speaking it.

The Parable -- Luke 16:19-31

A rich man lived in luxury every day. A poor man named Lazarus lay at his gate, covered in sores, longing for what fell from the rich man's table. Both died. Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man went to Hades, where he was in torment.

From his place of torment the rich man looked up and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. 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 anguish in this flame.

Abraham replied: Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things. But now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.

The rich man then said: I beg you, father, to send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham replied: They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them hear them.

The rich man said: No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

Abraham said: If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead.

THE PROPHETIC PRECISION

Jesus spoke those final words while He was still alive. Within weeks He would be dead and risen. Abraham's answer, spoken through Jesus' own lips, was the pre-announcement of the Pharisees' response to the resurrection before it even happened. Jesus told them what they would do before they did it.

A Note on the Name

This account is unusual among Jesus' parables in one significant detail: He gives the poor man a name. Lazarus. In Jesus' other parables the characters are unnamed, as we see here with the rich man, the prodigal son, the good Samaritan. The naming of Lazarus has led many scholars to question whether this is a constructed parable at all, or whether Jesus is describing a real account from the unseen realm. It is a distinction worth holding in mind as you read.

Personal Notes

Part Two: The Convergence of Prophecy at the Trial**They Could Not Kill Him Themselves**

By the time of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders of Israel had already lost the legal authority to carry out capital punishment. This detail, mentioned almost in passing in the gospel accounts, is one of the most prophetically significant facts in the entire narrative.

John 18:31 records the Sanhedrin's own admission to Pilate: It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death. They had the verdict. They had the condemnation. They could not carry out the sentence. And so they brought Him to Rome.

JACOB'S PROPHECY -- GENESIS 49:10

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him. The rabbinical tradition records that the Sanhedrin lost the authority to pronounce capital punishment approximately forty years before the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. The Jewish Talmud itself, in tractate Sanhedrin 41a, records the religious leaders lamenting: Woe to us, for the scepter has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come. They recognized the loss. They did not recognize the one standing before Pilate.

Why the Method of Execution Matters

If the Sanhedrin had retained capital authority, the prescribed Jewish method of execution for blasphemy was stoning. Jesus would have been stoned. The Messianic prophecies requiring a different death would have gone unfulfilled.

But they had no authority. So they handed Him to Rome. And Rome crucified. And crucifixion is hanging on a tree. And Deuteronomy 21:23 had already declared: Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

Galatians 3:13

The very people who rejected Him as the Messiah became, in their attempt to eliminate Him, the precise instruments through which the Messianic prophecy of the cursed death was fulfilled. In their attempt to end the story, they unknowingly completed it.

The Prophetic Convergence at the Cross

The crucifixion is the most prophetically dense event in human history. The following prophecies, written across centuries and multiple authors, converged at a single afternoon outside Jerusalem:

Prophecies Fulfilled at the Cross	
Psalms 22:1	My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. Quoted verbatim by Jesus from the cross, Matthew 27:46. Written by David approximately 1,000 years before crucifixion was invented as a method of execution.
Psalms 22:16	They have pierced my hands and feet. Crucifixion, described in precise physical detail, a millennium before the Roman practice existed.
Psalms 22:17	I can count all my bones. The stress of hanging produces joint dislocation. Described in prophetic detail.
Psalms 22:18	They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. John 19:23-24 records this happening in exact fulfillment, the soldiers casting lots for the seamless tunic.
Psalms 22:7-8	All who see me mock me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord, let him deliver him. Matthew 27:39-43 records the bystanders and religious leaders using almost verbatim language.
Zechariah 12:10	They will look on me, the one they have pierced. John 19:34-37 records the soldier piercing Jesus' side after death, and cites this prophecy directly.
Exodus 12:46/Psalms 34:20	Not one of his bones shall be broken. The Passover lamb requirement and the Davidic prophecy. The soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals. They came to Jesus and found He was already dead and broke none of His bones, John 19:33-36.

Isaiah 53:9	They made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death. Jesus was crucified between two criminals and buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, Matthew 27:57-60.
Micah 5:2	From you, Bethlehem, shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Born in Bethlehem, identified as eternal in origin.

A Note on Psalm 22 and the Cry from the Cross

It is sometimes suggested that Jesus was simply reciting scripture when He cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," as though He were quoting a familiar psalm in a moment of spiritual anguish. This misunderstands the nature of prophecy entirely. Jesus was not reciting Psalm 22. He was fulfilling it. David wrote those words approximately one thousand years before the crucifixion, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, describing an event he himself never experienced. The psalm is not a record of David's suffering on a cross. It is a prophetic account of a specific future moment, written in the first person, describing the physical and emotional reality of crucifixion in precise detail, including the piercing of hands and feet, the dislocation of bones, the extreme thirst, the mockery of bystanders, and the casting of lots for clothing.

The Roman soldiers who cast lots for Jesus' garments were not reading Psalm 22 and acting it out. They were doing what soldiers routinely did with a condemned man's possessions. They had no knowledge of a Hebrew psalm. They had no prophetic intent. They were simply dividing what was left behind, exactly as soldiers always did. The fact that their routine action matched a prophecy written ten centuries earlier is not coincidence, it is the fingerprint of a God who stands outside of time. Our God who sees the end from the beginning, and who inspired David to describe in accurate detail an event neither David nor any reader for a thousand years could have understood.

This is the nature of biblical prophecy. It is not a script handed to the participants. It is the advance testimony of a sovereign God who ordains the end from the beginning. The soldiers were not cooperating with Psalm 22. Psalm 22 was describing them, a thousand years before they were born.

Part Three: The Final Indictment

The Sign That Was Asked For

The closing exchange in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is one of the most devastating passages in all of scripture, not because of its theological content in isolation, but because of the event Jesus knew would follow it. He was speaking these words knowing He would be dead and risen within weeks. The resurrection He was pre-announcing as the sign that would still not be enough was His own.

The rich man in torment asks Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers. He is asking for a resurrection as the evidence that would produce belief. Abraham's answer is the pre-announcement of the Pharisees' response to the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ, spoken by Jesus before it happened:

"If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead."

Luke 16:31

Within weeks, that someone who rose from the dead was Jesus. The very sign the rich man said would be sufficient. The very event Abraham said would not be enough for those who had already rejected the testimony of scripture.

Matthew 28:12-13 records the response of the chief priests and elders. They did not investigate the resurrection of Jesus. They assembled with the elders, took counsel, and gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them: Tell people his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep. They suppressed it. Exactly as the parable said they would. Abraham had declared that neither would they be convinced if someone rose from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead. The verdict was confirmed.

The Nature of Unbelief

This is the point that Jesus was making to the Pharisees standing before Him, and it is the point that has reverberated through every generation since. The problem they had was not insufficient evidence. It was a heart already oriented away from the truth that the evidence pointed to.

The rich man in torment is not unaware of what he missed. He is in full possession of his faculties, his memory, and his understanding. He knows Abraham. He knows Lazarus. He understands the covenant. He is not an ignorant man in torment. He is a fully informed man in torment. He had Moses and the Prophets. He had everything he needed. And he chose the well-watered plain instead.

The Pharisees had more than Moses and the Prophets. They had Moses and the Prophets and the living Word standing in front of them performing miracles, fulfilling prophecies, and telling them exactly who He was. They had more light than any generation before them. And they used that light to construct a legal case for His execution.

"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin."

Romans 11:1

"Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved."

Romans 11:25-26

The blindness is partial, not total. The hardening is temporary, not permanent. God has not cast away His people. He has set aside a remnant in every generation who do receive their Messiah. But the national condition of Israel, the persistent rejection of Jesus as the Son of God, continues as Paul describes it, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. It is a condition with a defined end. But until that end, it is a condition that has lasted two thousand years and counting.

THE CORE PRINCIPLE

Unbelief is not primarily an intellectual problem that better evidence would solve. It is a condition of the heart that determines how evidence is processed. Give a hardened heart more evidence and it does not soften. It constructs better arguments for the same conclusion it already holds. Jesus understood this completely. He told the Pharisees, through the parable, that their problem was not insufficient evidence. It was a heart already set against the truth.

The 2000 Year Indictment of Israel

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is not only a prophecy about the first century Pharisees. It is the description of a condition that specifically and persistently characterizes Israel through every generation since. This is not a general statement about human unbelief. It is the particular condition of the Jewish people in relation to their own Messiah.

Moses and the Prophets are still available. The resurrection testimony is still available. The fulfilled prophecies, the empty tomb, the testimony of thousands of eyewitnesses recorded and preserved across two millennia, are still available. The sign the rich man requested has been given, documented, and proclaimed for two thousand years.

And the indictment Abraham pronounced remains active for Israel: if they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead.

Israel to this day, two thousand years after the resurrection of Jesus, still does not recognize Him as the Son of God. The very charge for which the Sanhedrin condemned Him, that He claimed to be the Son of God, Mark 14:61-64, remains the confession that is refused. The sign was given. It was rejected then. The rejection continues.

Paul addresses this condition directly and with great care in Romans 11. He makes two things clear simultaneously: the blindness is real, and it is not permanent.

"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

John 1:11-12

Personal Notes

Part Four: The Connection to the End Times

The Same Pattern at Ultimate Scale

Everything in this study connects directly to the prophetic framework of the Fig Tree Trilogy and the Toward the Ruin study. The spirit of antichrist, the 2% poison of false doctrine, the Final Judaizing, the Counterfeit Validation Cycle at Gog/Magog, and the strong delusion of 2 Thessalonians 2 all come back to the same principle established in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

The issue is never the evidence. The issue is always the orientation of the heart.

The Same Pattern Across History	
The Pharisees	Had Moses and the Prophets, the living Word performing miracles before them, and the resurrection itself. Rejected all of it. Constructed a suppression narrative instead.
Israel across 2000 years	Has had the completed New Testament, the testimony of the church, the apologetic case for the resurrection, and the continued fulfillment of prophetic scripture. The rejection continues.
The end-times world	Will witness the Gog/Magog event, which scripture identifies as God's final sovereign witness to all the nations of the earth, Ezekiel 39:21. God will set His glory among the nations so that all shall see His judgment. And still, Revelation 16:9 records the response of the world under the bowl judgments: they did not repent and give him glory.
The strong delusion	2 Thessalonians 2:11: God sends them a strong delusion so that they may believe what is false. The judicial confirmation of a heart already set. Not an arbitrary divine act but the final seal on a choice already made.

Israel's Final Recognition -- After the Long Refusal

But the story does not end with the indictment. Scripture also records the final turning of Israel toward the one they pierced. This is the other side of the parable that the 2000 year rejection makes all the more astonishing when it comes.

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

Zechariah 12:10

"And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."

Romans 11:26

The rejection that has lasted two thousand years will end. The mourning will be national, genuine, and overwhelming. The people who could not be convinced by Moses and the Prophets, who could not be convinced by the resurrection of Jesus, will be brought to recognition by the return of the one they condemned. That day is coming. The prophets saw it clearly.

Personal Notes

Summary -- The Key Connections

Key Points Summary	
The parable's audience	The Pharisees, Luke 16:14. Jesus told this story to the specific men who were about to condemn Him to death. It was a mirror, not a general illustration.
The final indictment	If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead. Luke 16:31. Spoken before the resurrection as a prophecy of the response to it.
The fulfillment	Matthew 28:12-13. The chief priests suppressed the resurrection rather than investigate it. The parable's verdict, confirmed within weeks.
Jacob's prophecy	Genesis 49:10. The scepter departed from Judah before the Messiah came. The Sanhedrin lost capital authority. The Talmud itself records their lament. They did not connect it to the one before Pilate.
The method of death	Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13. A Jewish execution would have been stoning. Roman crucifixion is hanging on a tree. The loss of Jewish authority produced the exact method the curse prophecy required.
Psalm 22	Written 1,000 years before crucifixion existed as a practice. Describes pierced hands and feet, dislocation, extreme thirst, mockery with near-verbatim language, and the casting of lots for clothing.
No broken bones	Exodus 12:46, Psalm 34:20, John 19:33-36. The Passover lamb requirement and the Davidic prophecy, both fulfilled by a Roman soldier's practical decision not to break the legs of a man already dead.
The nature of unbelief	Not an intellectual problem requiring better evidence. A condition of the heart that determines how evidence is processed. The Pharisees' problem was not insufficient light. It was a heart already turned away from it.
The 2000 year continuation	Israel still does not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. The charge for which He was condemned remains the confession that is refused. The sign was given. The rejection continues.
The coming recognition	Zechariah 12:10, Romans 11:26. The rejection that has lasted two millennia will end. National mourning will come. The remnant of Israel will be saved