

## The Impact of Moral Discretions on the Afterlife – A Theological Reflection on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31

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### Abstract

This study examines the Christian afterlife motif from the analysis of a New Testament parable that the writer considers to concisely convey the biblical afterlife view from the composite of a Jewish and Christian perspective. The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man recorded in Luke 16:19-31 is significant in outlining Jesus' teaching on what awaits the righteous and the unrighteous in the Christian afterlife based on their response to the religious creed on moral responsibility. The study outlines the roles of the parable characters in the portrayal of the afterlife theme under a sociocultural, historical, and contextual analysis of the passage and related texts of Scripture. It interacts with the structure, passage context, and theological implications of the moral lessons of the parable. The findings of the study are significant for theological application. While Lazarus' portrayal as a disadvantaged, sickly, and destitute man, the superfluity and avarice of the rich man cascade beyond the confines of social class distinctions. He is representative of the selfish, self-centred members of the nobility of his day whose trappings of privilege had numbed their moral senses. He never cared for the suffering in his community of context. His afterlife experience serves as a warning to all men that God values empathy and moral stewardship, irrespective of class distinctions. Lazarus is finally vindicated as a godly soul, being joined to Abraham, a venerated Jewish patriarch in the paradise of God. In the converse, the Rich Man is consigned to Hades, a place reserved for the wicked and the unrighteous in Jewish theology. The rich man suffers in Hades, not because of his social status but on account of his ungodly comportment. Hades and Hell can be avoided if an earthly soul lives by the dictates of the creed of God's word rather than by the exigencies of culture or class. God will punish men not based on their accumulation of earthly resources or the trappings of power and privilege but for what they failed to do so in easing the pain of the disadvantaged when they could.

**Keywords:** *Moral discretions, afterlife, theological reflection*

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### ***Introduction***

A parable can be understood as a story relayed by the author to teach some hidden truth. Parables have been understood as expressing truths that are already clearly expressed elsewhere in Scripture.<sup>1</sup> This study is dedicated to the examination of theological evidence on the portrayal of the afterlife that can be distilled from an exegetical study of the passage of Luke 16:19-31. The study on this passage centres on an examination of the narrative, characters, and theological theme in its cultural and historical contexts.

This passage portrays the afterlife phenomenon in the context of the two principal characters - the Rich Man and Lazarus. The writer considers this passage as encapsulating important biblical principles that outline the eternal destinies of the two primary characters in the parable – the Rich Man and Lazarus. The two destinies are significant for a theological portrayal of the afterlife in the context of this study.

### ***Structure of the Parable***

The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary assigns two distinct outlines to the parable. The first part develops the theme of judgement while the second part conveys the affirmation of "the law and the prophets".<sup>2</sup> The commentator considers the parable as a "capstone of Luke's prophetic critique on wealth"<sup>3</sup> This description projects the overarching theme that runs through the parable series conveyed in Luke 15-16. The New Interpreter's outline appears is fairly condensed. This writer proposes a broader scope on the passage structure that consolidates the introduction of the characters, their deaths, and their intermediate experiences in Hades, and a conclusion section.

In the first section of the parable, Jesus offers a brief description of the characters. This is followed by the judgment theme that commences with the portrayal of the lives of the two characters in their distinct settings. The first character is the Rich Man, here described in anonymity as "a certain rich man" (NKJV). The NIV is less specific in its description. It simply renders him "a rich man" (v.19).

The second character is Lazarus, a poor man who is here described as a beggar, full of sores (vv. 20-22). He lived on the mercies of others and more specifically the rich man at whose gates he was daily placed. The two characters share one geographical feature, a neighbourhood that happens to be defined by social class distinctions.

The deaths of the two men mark out the second part of the parable structure that is dedicated to the afterlife experiences. Both men eventually die and their experience in Hades is described in detail (vv. 23-28). A third character, Abraham, is introduced in the closing section.

Abraham's statement in vv. 29-31 profoundly outlines the final part of the narrative and encapsulates the moral of the parable passage.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Chevenex Trench, "Introductory Essay" in *Notes on the Parables of our Lord* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1981), 30-33. See also Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics, Second Edition – A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testament* (London: Wipf & Stock, Imprint, 2003), 188-213.

<sup>2</sup> New Interpreter's Bible – *A Commentary in Two Volumes, Vol. X, Luke and John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 315.

<sup>3</sup> New Interpreter's Bible, *Ibid.*, 315.

### *Passage Context*

The passage context of Luke 16:19-31 can be distilled from an outline summary of the preceding and succeeding passages that are dedicated to moral instruction on kingdom values. In Luke 15, Jesus speaks to the Pharisees on several kingdom parables including the parables of the Lost Sheep (vv. 1-7), the Lost Coin (vv. 8-10) and the Lost Son (vv. 11-32). Jesus was apparently defending his choice of company when he mingled with tax collectors and people that the Pharisees classified as sinners. Jesus sought to reach out to this category of ostracized people in his effort to bring them to the kingdom of God under an act of divine inclusivity. For his noble effort, Jesus earned the rebuke of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees represented the status quo in the Jewish religious order. They blended their theology with the social class exigencies of the day where the religious class cut out their exclusive social circles. Jesus' religious principles were construed as an intrusion of sorts on their established order. Kendra A. Mohn identifies a contrast of sorts in the treatment of the poor in the parable where the poor in Lazarus' day were apparently neglected yet the wealthy could have reinforced their status with virtuous action.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus then shifts his attention to his disciples in Luke 16 where his exhortation on kingdom values continues. It is instructive that the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man is preceded by two parables that address the moral excesses related to wealth and materialism. The preceding parable of the Unjust Steward recorded in Luke 16:1-13 condemns unbridled greed while Luke 16:14-18 conveys the reaction of the Pharisees, an elite religious group that the writer describes as "lovers of money" (v.14). It is therefore plausible to suppose that the theme of godly moderation cascades into the passage of context of Luke 16:19-31. It was part of Jesus continuing tale on critical kingdom values.

Luke 17 continues with Jesus' outline of moral instructions that are consistent with God's purposes for his covenant people. He warns against those who obstruct others from the path of the kingdom life (Luke 17:1-5). This exhortation concludes the outline of the passage context.

Turning back to our passage of context, we notice that the rich man's avarice and moral imprudence appear to tie into the theme that Jesus developed in the parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1-13. In both instances, the insensibility, wastefulness, and godless demeanor portrayed by the lead characters profoundly stand out. In the latter case, the Rich Man lived in the social first lane of his society. Being clothed in purple was perhaps evidence that he ranked among the Jewish nobility; the *crème de la crème* of the society of his day. This class was overly oblivious to the pains and afflictions of the disadvantaged and downtrodden in their societies of context. Some have supposed that the rich man was a high-ranking official and part of the nobility that ruled the society in his day.<sup>5</sup>

In the preceding parable recorded in Luke 16:1-13, the unjust steward went out of his way to corrupt the debtors' book of his master, knowing that his stewardship was coming to an end. His ingenuity and shrewdness were perhaps unequalled in that he sought to make friends with the debtors at the expense of his faithful master. His divine destiny was sealed because his

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<sup>4</sup> Kendra A. Mohn, "Commentary on Luke 16:19-31" in *Working Preacher*, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revision-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-8> accessed 4 January 2024 at 1420 GMT.

<sup>5</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, 316.

devotion to his master that was a more precious moral asset in Jewish thought, was destroyed by his evil actions. He temporarily gained friends but lost out on eternity with God.

### ***Theological Validity of the Afterlife Portrayal in the Parable***

Some scholars have doubted the authority of the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man as an illustration of the biblical afterlife. They argue that the account tilts towards a fiction tale rather than a historical narrative. Klyne Snodgrass argues that “no formula exists for determining whether an element [of the parable] is theologically significant.”<sup>6</sup> Besides, the mention of actual identifiable people such as Abraham is instructive of its theological validity. Tertullian lends greater emphasis to the theological significance of Christian doctrine as a basis for the interpretation of parables rather than parables being understood as a source of doctrine.<sup>7</sup> He identifies a moral complementation in the construction of a parable.

This approach is anchored on the validity of the moral edifice underpinning the parable. Where the veracity of a parable is open to doubt, its authority is radically diminished. The lessons that can be gleaned from the parable should inform its validity as an instrument of moral instruction for God’s people. Where the reader is primarily preoccupied with the logical structure of the narrative, they are likely to miss out on its primary theological purpose and fall for the fiction treatment. As Graig Blomberg notes, some critics consider the passage of Luke 16:19-31 as a ‘fictitious narrative’ by reason that Jesus was merely using it to illustrate deeper truths rather than to describe the afterlife.<sup>8</sup> This assertion is plausible except for its attempt at isolating the afterlife figment from its theological anchor.

In disputing the afterlife portrayal in the parable, Earle Ellis notes that the description of Hades in the parable is radically distinct from the conditions revealed in other passages of Scripture.<sup>9</sup> The parable conveys the intermediate state of life within the context of Jewish theological thought which is later modified within the revelation that can be distilled from a study of the broader eschatological context of the New Testament Scripture. The Jewish afterlife beyond the narrative of Sheol and Hades was considerably obscure but the afterlife projection in Christian eschatology is significantly distinct from the Jewish afterlife. Theologically, the New Testament Scripture unveils the revelation that was hitherto developed in the Old Testament Scripture.

This inference is perhaps more profoundly underscored by Eduard Schweizer who observes that *Hades*, as described in the parable, is not synonymous with hell but was simply a holding place of the dead as they awaited judgment.<sup>10</sup> It was an intermediate abode for the souls of the dead (cf. John 11:23-24).

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<sup>6</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed (Michigan: Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian: “Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity” in *Ancient Christian Writer*, (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ellis Earle, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Michigan Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 157.

<sup>10</sup> Schweizer Eduard, *The Good News According to Luke*, London: S.P.C.K., E.T. 1984), 261.

The afterlife projection therefore rests on the view that since the brothers of the rich man were still alive on earth, it was inconceivable that God's judgment could have taken place at this point. The afterlife phenomenon therefore cascades beyond the theological confines that the parable conveys. The moral of the parable should be distilled under a theological collation of other relevant teachings of New Testament Scripture.

It may be legitimate to classify the parable as a unique projection of the Jewish belief in the intermediate state rather than the afterlife in the Christian eschatological essence. However, given the irreversibility of the circumstances prevailing at this point, the parable can be construed as a microcosm of the final state of the soul. The intermediate state of the afterlife is merely a segment of the final apocalyptic frame that Scripture elsewhere conveys in greater detail (cf. Revelation 20-22).

Two reasons that stand out in the projection of the afterlife phenomenon are worthy of mention at this point.

First, no evidence in the parable suggests that the Rich Man was already in hell at this point, and neither were Abraham and Lazarus in heaven. Jewish mythology assigned Sheol (Gr. Hades) the picture of a compartmentalized abode where the righteous and the wicked were distinctly isolated from each other. It is however undeniable that the two parties were eternally separated from each other as they awaited the final judgment contemplated in Revelation 20:11-15. This parable can therefore be rightly construed as conveying an affirmation of the afterlife. Despite his privileged status in the earthly life, the Rich Man received what was divinely due to him because of his moral imprudence, haughtiness, and avarice. Lazarus was rewarded for his faithfulness and diligence in the fear of God, despite his social disadvantage.

Secondly, the reference to Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29) is evidence of the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures in the religious life of the two characters. The two Jewish characters were bound by the moral code contemplated in the Jewish Torah and cultural heritage that underscored the concern for the welfare of the poor in society.<sup>11</sup>

#### ***Notable Parallels between Lazarus and the Rich Man***

The parallels identified in the description of the two key characters in Luke 16:19-31 are compelling. Lazarus was poor, sickly, and disadvantaged even as the Rich Man was given to sumptuous living. William Barclay identifies the phrase "fared sumptuously" with gourmet feeding on exotic and costly dishes.<sup>12</sup> This scale of luxury was a marked distinction that contrasted with Lazarus' awful life. Lazarus was merely one of many moral cases captured in Scripture that aptly speaks to the rich-poor dichotomy. The godly deportment of the poor widow described in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4 is equally compelling and succinctly ties up with the parable of context.

The second parallel can be identified in the aftermath of the two primary characters in the parable. The fact that Lazarus was escorted by angels to paradise is evidence of his devout religious standing and divine approval. His afterlife experience reveals that God is not a

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<sup>11</sup> See the moral implications in Ruth 2. Boaz instructs his workers to deliberately allow the grain to fall to the ground so that the Moabite woman could fetch them for her sustenance. This is consistent with the moral in James 1:27.

<sup>12</sup> William Barclay, "The Gospel of Luke" in *The New Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975).



respector of persons. Being joined to the bosom of Abraham was the highest bliss in Jewish thought.<sup>13</sup> God's grace is not tied to the exigencies of social class. The Rich Man's privileged status and possessions could not endear him closer to God.

Unlike Lazarus, the Rich Man was not celebrated in death, thanks to his ungodly living, notwithstanding the trappings of nobility at his disposal. Abraham's statement in Luke 16:25-26 is instructive of the rich man's avarice and superfluity. Abraham indicates that the rich man had received "the good things" in life even as Lazarus received the "evil things".

The third parallel relates to the two worlds that separated the two men. The fact that Lazarus was brought daily to the Rich Man's gate suggests that he was familiar with Lazarus' pitiful condition and that he was not moved with compassion by it. George H. Morrison identifies the irony of two men separated by no more than twenty yards between them, yet they appear to be divided by a sea!<sup>14</sup> Their separation under the sun was replicated in the afterlife in a reverse order. Barbara Rosing aptly captures the irony of the two men, saying that the Rich Man did not appear to take notice of the poor man who was daily dumped at his gate but finally saw him in the afterlife when it was too little too late!<sup>15</sup> She considers the parable as conveying a warning to the living that they should reconcile with God while opportunity beckons. Rosing also identifies a unique conception of the afterlife in the parable that the Reformation fathers picked out from their reading of the text. Martin Luther rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and taught that the souls of dead believers slept until the day of judgment.<sup>16</sup>

The fourth parallel can be identified in the interment and the afterlife of the two primary characters. Lazarus did not appear to access a decent burial, yet he received the honor of being escorted to paradise by the angels of God (Luke 16:22-24). In contrast, the Rich Man was buried, perhaps with pomp and pageantry, and that marked the final glory of his privileged earthly life. His soul was translocated to Hades, a place reserved for the souls of evil men. James H. Charlesworth observes that Hades was regarded as the place where the dead awaited judgment and was divided into various segments, according to people's moral state.<sup>17</sup> No angelic escort was available to the Rich Man because he was not ranked as a heavenly guest. His afterlife experience was captured with pain and disillusion. His life of fortune and privilege was suddenly lost in one stroke. His afterlife is identified with humiliation and punishment for his moral imprudence.

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<sup>13</sup> Rudolph Meyer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:835.

<sup>14</sup> George H Morrison, *Morrison on Mark* (Ridgefield, New Jersey: AMG Publishers, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Rosing, "Commentary on Luke 16:19-31" in *Working Preacher*, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-4> accessed 4 January 2024 at 10:55 GMT.

<sup>16</sup> James Kroemer, "Doctor Martin, Get up": Luther's View of Life After Death," in Deanna Thompson and Kirsi Stjerna, eds., *On the Apocalyptic and Human Agency: Conversations with Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2014), 40.

<sup>17</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Garden City, Doubleday, 1983), 1:24-25.

### *The Afterlife in Hades and Paradise*

The fact that Lazarus was received into Abraham's bosom in paradise speaks of the honor and comfort bestowed upon him in the afterlife because of his covenant faithfulness. Some consider Abraham as representative of the patriarchs in Paradise.<sup>18</sup> It was a place of blissful intermediate abode for the righteous. In contrasting Paradise with Hades, Donald G. Bloesch describes Paradise as "...not a state of vulnerability as is Hades. It is not the underworld but the preliminary realm of glory."<sup>19</sup> This description is consistent with the implication of Jesus' projection of paradise as the place of the righteous (cf. Luke 23:43). In Jesus' own words, Paradise is exclusive and inaccessible without divine approval. Elsewhere in Scripture, Paul speaks of having been caught up in Paradise where he heard inexpressible words that he was not permitted to divulge (2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7). His statement is perhaps evidence of the privileges associated with this heavenly destination which was only accessible to divine guests.

Paradise was a mystical and incomprehensible destination that remains the subject of theological speculation. John Wesley conceived of paradise as a place where "...the soul will not be encumbered with flesh and blood but probably will have some sort of ethereal vehicle, even before God clothes us with our nobler house of empyrean light."<sup>20</sup> Wesley's depiction underscores the incomprehensibility and obscurity associated with this divine realm.

Some have suggested that the saints whose souls are held in paradise shall not access heaven without the resurrected and glorified church and on this basis, their glorification is thus incomplete.<sup>21</sup> Pierre Yves Emery opines that "the departed saints will wait till the end of the world, for us, the believer still on earth, to fulfill their ministry, their works, their crown, their joy."<sup>22</sup>

### *A Theological Analysis of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)*

This parable is exclusive to the Gospel of Luke. An in-depth study of the passage reveals that the two characters are portrayed on two distinctive paradigms: a projection of their earthly experience and their afterlife. Lois Malcolm succinctly observes that the Lazarus mentioned in this passage is distinct from the character by the same name in John 11:1-44.<sup>23</sup> The social statuses of the two men do not correspond at all. Besides, at the time the parable was given, the

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<sup>18</sup> David Guzik, "The Story of Lazarus and the Rich Man" in *Blue Letter Bible*, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik\\_david/study-guide/luke/luke-16.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/luke/luke-16.cfm) accessed on 29 August 2023 at 1358 GMT.

<sup>19</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things – Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (Illinois: Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 139.

<sup>20</sup> John Wesley, *The Message of the Wesleys*, Philip S. Watson, ed. (New York: McMillan, 1964), 238.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Yves Emery, *The Communion of Saints* (London: Faith Press, 1966), 38

<sup>22</sup> Pierre Yves Emery, *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>23</sup> Malcolm, Lois, "Commentary on Luke 16:19-31" In *Working Preacher*, Luther Seminary, Minnesota, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2013, accessed at [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1784](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1784) on 08/09/2020.

Lazarus described in John 11 was possibly alive and his contemplation by Jesus was by any standards inconceivable in this context.

The afterlife experience is given a broader treatment in the parable (Luke 16:22-31) as contrasted with the earthly life (Luke 16:19-21). This suggests that the focus of the parable was founded on the afterlife being consequent upon the dynamics of earthly life. The afterlife was therefore the gist of this parable. The events described in the afterlife were meant to jolt the living to the certainty of the moral implications of the earthly life in the afterlife.

On the earthly side of life, the Rich Man is portrayed as a rich and privileged person. He ranked among the nobility of his day and was “clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.” (Luke 16:19, NKJV). John Nolland picks out one irony in this parable that defies common Jewish tradition. In Jewish culture, poverty is assigned anonymity even as wealth is acknowledged. Under the parable context, Lazarus, a disadvantaged man, carries a name even as the rich man is unidentified.<sup>24</sup> It is instructive that the name Lazarus is translated *El-azar* (Hebrew: God has helped).<sup>25</sup>

Lazarus is presented to the reader as a beggar who is sickly and full of sores. The fact that he was laid at the rich man’s gate could be evidence that he may have been disabled and homeless. Nothing in the passage suggests that the Rich Man acquired his wealth by ungodly means. He was oblivious to the afflictions of the disadvantaged in his society of context (Luke 16:21).

Warren Prestidge supposes that the parable was primarily anchored on warning the godless wealthy rather than an illustration of the afterlife.<sup>26</sup> The moral of the parable appears to contemplate the two spectrums underlying the theological continuum of this study. The godly poor will not miss heaven on account of their material disadvantage on earth. On the converse, those who turn a deaf ear to the moral exhortations of Scripture will miss out on the paradise of God no matter how privileged they were on earth. It is impossible to ignore either of the two without conflating the theological implications of the parable. There is an inextricable nexus between the Rich Man’s moral imprudence and the status of his afterlife experience. This is not to suggest that wealth is evil per se. There are several godly people in Scripture, including Job and Abraham, who were wealthy by the standards of their day but who stood out as faithful to God. Greg Carey’s caution against the temptation to conflate obscene luxury and abject poverty is profound.<sup>27</sup> The parable conveys the moral authority of the narrator while visualizing the implications of a person’s earthly prudence on the world to come. Some have argued that Jesus used the parable as a satirical slur against the Sadducees who rejected the

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<sup>24</sup> John Nolland, “Luke (Dallas: Word, 1993) 2:828; James L. Resseguie, *Spiritual Landscape*” In: *Images of the Spiritual Life in the Gospel of Luke*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 106.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Malcolm, Lois.

<sup>26</sup> Warren Prestidge, “The Rich Man and Lazarus and Hell”. In: *Afterlife*. 13<sup>th</sup> July 2009. <https://www.afterlife.co.nz/2009/07/the-rich-man-and-lazarus/> accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Greg Carey, “Commentary on Luke 16:19-31” in *Walking Preacher*, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-2>. Accessed 5 January 2024 at 1510 GMT.



prophetic books and denied the resurrection of the dead.<sup>28</sup> Steven Cox observes that the Sadducees were associated with the adornment of expensive priestly garments that closely resembled the dressing of the rich man.<sup>29</sup> This suggests that they identified with the trappings of the rich man's privileged world.

Both men eventually die. Death is a neutralizing agent that does not distinguish between social class. This is a natural phenomenon awaiting men under the sun (Hebrews 9:27).

In his moment of unbearable torment, the rich man calls on Abraham to send Lazarus to bring relief to him. Some have supposed that the Rich Man was used to ordering the poor around. His disdainful attitude was confronted in the afterlife! Simon Perry aptly posits that the rich man supposed that Lazarus was now Abraham's servant.<sup>30</sup> He was mistaken! It is further ironical that the Rich Man sought the help that he had denied the needy under his privileged earthly life! The rich man's mention of Lazarus strongly suggests that he may have been familiar with him in the previous life notwithstanding that their separate social worlds hardly intersected. The social separation in their earthly lives was now reinforced by a divine chasm that separated their afterlife experiences.

A second theological paradox emerges in Luke 16:25. The rich man is reduced to a beggar who was at the mercy of the very person that he had shunned on earth. Lazarus gains access to privilege and comfort in his new world. The conflicting afterlife experiences of the two men are not by sheer coincidence. This parable serves as an intuitive warning to the living to prepare for the afterlife with utmost prudence while opportunity beckons.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the afterlife theme in the context of the passage of Luke 16:19-31. It has established that a person's earthly life has a theological bearing on their afterlife experience. The contrasting experiences of Lazarus and the Rich Man on Earth are ironically reversed in the afterlife, not based on a predetermined plan but as a consequence of clear moral choices. It has further been observed that God is not a respecter of persons. Neither riches nor poverty have a bearing on the afterlife. A person's moral prudence should be informed by the exhortation of Scripture rather than the dictates of social class distinctions. Lazarus, a poor man, is assigned a name even as the Rich Man remains anonymous despite his privileged life. The afterlife presents an irreversible state for people. God's word remains the solid constant throughout the earthly experience, speaking to the rich and the poor alike. Riches are not evil per se but where it is handled with imprudence, they ultimately blind the hearts and minds of men and draw them away from God. The opportunity for making amends will however be lost in one stroke for those who resign to obstinacy and defiance. Death is not the end of life. It

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<sup>28</sup> Steven Cox, "The Rich Man, Lazarus and Abraham", in *The Christadelphian Tidings of the Kingdom of God*, <https://tidings.org/articles/the-rich-man-lazarus-and-abraham-part-3/> accessed 5 January 2024 at 1605 GMT.

<sup>29</sup> H. A. Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels, Second Edition*, (Staffordshire: Biblia, 1989), 495.

<sup>30</sup> Perry Simon. *Resurrecting Interpretation: Technology, Hermeneutics and the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rich\\_man\\_and\\_Lazarus#cite\\_note-23](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rich_man_and_Lazarus#cite_note-23) accessed 31 August 2020.

marks the beginning of the new existential experience that awaits men. Choices have clear consequences.

### **Recommendations**

This study has attempted to explore the moral implications of a person's actions on the afterlife in biblical context based on the parable of the Lazarus and the Rich Man. The study is useful for developing exhortations on moral Christian living. It may also serve as a valuable input for research in social justice interventions for disadvantaged people in capitalistic societies.

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