

The Character of Jesus 57
Parables about the Lost
Luke 16:19 – 31

- Characteristic: Those who listen are the right audience
 - Jesus is still responding to the objection from the Pharisees and scribes concerning the company Jesus kept (15:1 – 2)
 - First He talked about the importance we place on lost things, including the risks we take to find them.
 - Then He told the parable of the shrewd steward to illustrate that the Jewish leaders were not good stewards of the things of God, whereas the tax gatherers and sinners were shrewd about recognizing the opportunities of the Kingdom of God.
 - In this parable, the Jewish leaders are the rich man who do not listen to Moses and the prophets, whereas the tax gatherers and sinners are represented by Lazarus.
 - (20) This is not the brother of Mary and Martha. They were not beggars.
 - (19 – 21) The relative faithfulness of the two main characters is not given.
 - (22 – 23) The assumption may be made that the destinations of the two characters are real (spiritual) locations. For Jesus to tell a parable with false information in the setting seems out of character.
 - Apparently, the beggar had faith, implied not only by the good place he ended up, but also by the reference to Abraham, the model of faithfulness.
 - A side point (not the point of the parable) is that deceased faithful folks wait in a nice place which later gets better (the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21:1), whereas deceased unfaithful folks wait in a bad place which later gets worse (Revelation 20:15).
 - (24) The rich man still sees Lazarus as someone who should rightly serve him.
 - (25) Faith is not mentioned. However, Jesus used the thinking of the time to be able to skip to the real point without a treatise on justification by faith. The assumption should be made that the rich man ignored the things of faith in favor of earthly comforts, whereas Lazarus endured the discomforts of his life with a confident expectation (hope).
 - (26) The destination at death is irrevocable, which has something to say about the Catholic doctrine of the Treasury of Merit and the Mormon doctrine of baptism on behalf of the dead.
 - (27 – 28) Repentance after death does not seem to change the outcome.
 - (29 – 31) Listen to the evidence you have; you can't demand the evidence you want.
- Application: Those who listen are the right audience.
 - Do various congregations still see earthly (and, of course, ethical) success as a mark of acceptance by God? Are those at the bottom considered cursed? Islamic nations are poor (despite having resources). "Christian" nations are prosperous. Why?
 - Are congregations concerned about cost-benefit analysis of members?
 - Would Moses and the prophets have been enough for us to come to faith or would we have gotten stuck on performance and earthly success?
 - Do we move on to those who will discuss, or expend our efforts on the satisfied?