

LUKE

Chapter 16

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. 2 And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ 3 And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ 5 So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ 6 He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ 7 Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ 8 The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. 9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. 10 “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

Lk 16:1–31 opens with one story unique to Luke (the steward of unrighteousness) and closes with another (the rich man and Lazarus). In each story the disciple’s attitude toward possessions is an important theme. While they are not labeled as parables, they are among many such illustrative stories that function in the same way as parables, and so they are commonly called parables (see textual notes on 4:23 and 8:4). Appended behind the first parable are words of application about serving God and mammon (16:9 [or 10] to 13). Inserted before the second parable are verses about the Pharisees’ self-declared righteousness and attitude toward the Law and the Prophets—and the kingdom (16:14–18, cf. 16:31).

In the sayings appended to 16:1–9, the key connecting word might be “mammon.” Lk 16:13 has a parallel at Mt 6:24. In the sayings inserted in front of 16:19–31, the key connecting phrase might be “the Law [Moses] and the Prophets.” Lk 16:16 has a parallel at Mt 11:12–13; Lk 16:17 at Mt 5:18; and Lk 16:18 at Mt 19:9 (cf. 5:32). (CC p. 612)

That the Pharisees were “lovers of money” makes for the transition from 16:13 to 16:14. There is an overall flow to the thought: “Sons of light” are prudent about the coming of the kingdom, and the Pharisees would be too, if they heeded the witness of Moses and the Prophets to the kingdom and the King. (CC p. 612)

This unit represents the continuation of the discourse that is set in the scene opened at 14:25 and belongs in the narrower context of the parables and teachings of 14:25–17:10. It is most easily treated in three sections: 16:1–13; 16:14–18 (where the Pharisees become the addressees); and the concluding parable, 16:19–31. (CC p. 612)

It would appear that the parable found in 16:1–8 is difficult, for it has spawned many different interpretations. The following exposition will not rehash and dispute all the various interpretations.

Rather, it aspires to offer one that is consistent with the surface meaning of the text and also provides a theological reading of the parable that places it within the flow of Jesus' catechetical teachings. (CC p. 612)

At 16:1 the discourse continues, but the audience shifts from the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes of Luke 15 to Jesus' disciples. This shift from opponents to disciples has been a recurring Lukan pattern throughout his journey narrative. Jesus' extended discourse began at 14:25 with great crowds journeying with him. It was interrupted by the Pharisees at 15:1–3, when they grumbled about the tax collectors and sinners drawing near to hear Jesus, and it will terminate at 17:10, after which Luke reports that Jesus is traveling between Samaria and Galilee. (CC p. 613)

Lk 16:1–31 is one of three major sections in the journey narrative discussing possessions. The others are 12:13–34 and 18:18–30. It serves to amplify Jesus' saying near the beginning of this discourse: "Every one of you who does not take leave of all his own possessions, he is not able to be my disciple" (14:33). This discourse begins with a parable about the proper use of possessions (16:1–8). Next, some sayings give practical application of the truth of that parable (16:9–13). (CC p. 613)

Interpreters differ over this difficult parable, unlike the clearer symbolism of parables in ch 15. It seems impossible that the rich man can be commended for integrity while at the same time the manager is praised for self-interest. Instead of viewing elements of this parable symbolically, it is best to stress Jesus' main point in v 9. (TLSB)

16:1 *said to his disciples* – ἔλεγεν δὲ καί—“The δὲ καί is a favorite transitional device of St. Luke. Here the καί goes with ἔλεγεν to show that the parabolic discourse continues from the previous chapter. Actually, as we shall see, this parable is a continuation of the theme started by [the parables of] the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son” (M. Scharlemann, *Proclaiming the Parables* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1963] 83). (CC pp. 610-611)

If this were a secular story, the interpretation would be self-evident. Faced with a crisis, the steward is clever though dishonest in solving his problems. The apparent dilemma is that this is a parable of Jesus in which he seems to be commending dishonesty to his followers. A similar dilemma occurs in the parable of 18:1–8, where the unrighteous judge is the God figure, and in 19:12, where the severe king is the Christ figure. But this is a false dilemma, a problem only if one dwells on the steward and his dishonesty. This parable and the appended sayings are addressed to Jesus' disciples. This is prime catechetical material. (Only later does the hearer find out [16:14] that the Pharisees are eavesdropping on this teaching.) This teaching will inform the disciples first and foremost about God, and only secondarily about their response to God. (CC p. 614)

If one considers the parable from the lord's perspective, then the focus of the parable is *not* on the *dishonesty* of the steward, but on the *mercy* of the lord. This assumes that the lord is an honorable man, which seems to be the pattern of the households in Jesus' parables. The rich lord's mercy to the steward who *squandered* the lord's estate (16:1; διασκορπίζων) is parallel to the father's mercy to the prodigal who *squandered* the father's inheritance (15:13; διεσκόρπισεν). The purpose of the parable, then, is to reveal the lord's mercy. (CC p. 614)

disciples. Perhaps more than just the Twelve (see 6:13; 10:1). (CSB)

a rich man – ἄνθρωπος τις ἦν πλούσιος—This opening phrase recurs at 16:19 and binds this parable to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The parable of the prodigal son also begins in a similar fashion (15:11—ἄνθρωπος τις εἶχεν). (CC p.611)

manager. A steward who handled all the business affairs of the owner. (CSB)

The owner's agent, entrusted with executive authority and independent in his stewardship. (TLSB)

οικονόμον—This is the same word that is used in 12:42 in the section on watchfulness at the coming of the Son of Man, where Jesus tells the parable of the faithful and wise steward. (CC p. 611)

The steward most likely is a salaried estate agent. The debtors in the parable probably rent property from the lord to grow crops, and the debt is a predetermined portion of the harvest, whether it be olive oil or wheat. When the report about wastefulness comes, the lord tells the steward he is fired, but he does *not* throw him into jail or punish him in any way. This would have been the lord's right, but he is a merciful man. *It is this mercy that the steward banks on in deciding upon the solution to his problem.* When one chooses to focus on the mercy of the lord, the question of the dishonesty of the steward in squandering the lord's possessions becomes a moot point. It also lessens the significance of the exact arrangements the steward made with the lord's debtors. K. Bailey is probably closest to reflecting the first-century context by describing the lord as an honorable man who shows his integrity and his concern for his estate. (CC p. 614)

wasting. He had squandered his master's possessions, just as the prodigal ("wasteful") son (15:13). (CSB)

διασκορπίζων—Luke provides a subtle link between this parable and the parable of the prodigal son (15:13) by means of this word. The steward wastes his lord's estate in a way that is similar to the prodigal's waste of his father's estate. Neither uses the possessions entrusted to him wisely. (CC p. 611)

16:2 *turn in an account* – Required either because the manager's employment is discontinued or for audit to see if the charges are true. (TLSB)

ἀπόδος τὸν λόγον τῆς οἰκονομίας σου—K. Bailey suggests that ἀπόδος should be translated "surrender" since the lord wants the steward to give him the books before he tampers with them further (*Poet and Peasant*, 97). M. Scharlemann notes that "λόγος is the official record or account kept by the manager for his master" (*Parables*, 84). (CC p. 611)

16:3 *What shall I do now?* The dishonest manager (v. 8) had no scruples against using his position for his own benefit, even if it meant cheating his master. Knowing he would lose his job, the manager planned for his future by discounting the debts owed to his master in order to obligate the debtors to himself. Interpreters disagree as to whether his procedure of discounting was in itself dishonest. Was he giving away what really belonged to his master, or was he forgoing interest payments his master did not have a right to charge? Originally the manager may have overcharged the debtors, a common way of circumventing the Mosaic law that prohibited taking interest from fellow Jews (Dt 23:19). So, to reduce the debts, he may have returned the figures to their initial amounts, which would both satisfy his master and gain the good favor of the debtors. In any event, the point remains the same: He was shrewd enough to use the means at his disposal to plan for his future well-being. (CSB)

Weakness and shame narrow his choices. (TLSB)

τί ποιήσω—See comments at 12:17, where a similar question is asked by the rich fool. (CC p. 611)

When the steward hears of his firing, he does not protest but deliberates over his future. (This is prudence.) His first reaction is to approach the crisis from a human point of view. What can *he* do, humanly speaking, to extricate himself from this mess he has caused? He is so overwhelmed that he even contemplates two alternatives (digging or begging) that are in reality impossibilities. Like the prodigal

son who desired to eat pig food, the unrighteous steward has hit the bottom and realizes that he can do nothing for himself. Humanly speaking, there is no escape from his crisis. (CC pp. 614-615)

my master – ὁ κύριος—Here and at 16:5, 8 “lord” refers to the rich man in the parable and not to Jesus, though the lord’s mercy does represent the grace of Jesus. (CC p. 611)

16:4 *I have decided what to do* – The steward had probably been over charging people. It was not uncommon at that time to do that. It was a way of getting around the Mosaic law the prohibited taking interest from fellow Jews. Now he would under charge them and win their favor.

Receive me into their houses – Weakness and shame narrow his choices. (TLSB)

16:5 *debtors* – Tenants or traders with unpaid accounts. (TLSB)

16:6-7 The debtors are likely sharecroppers. The generous reduction of the bills clearly favor the debtors, perhaps by removing interest on loans or property agreements. (TLSB)

16:6 *A hundred measures of olive oil*. The yield of about 450 olive trees. (CSB)

ἑκατὸν βάτους ἐλαίου—The Hebrew liquid measurement “bath” is about eight to nine gallons, and so a hundred baths would be eight hundred to nine hundred gallons of olive oil, a significant debt. The cost of a reduction of half would amount to five hundred denarii, as would the cost of the reduction in wheat, so that the value of both reductions would be the same (cf. G. B. Caird, *Luke*, 188; K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 101). One denarius is typically a workman’s daily wage. (CC p. 611)

sit down quickly – καθίσας ταχέως γράψον—The participle καθίσας is subordinate to γράψον and so acts like an imperative. ταχέως, “quickly,” goes with both the sitting down and the writing, but the real focus is on “write,” the explicit imperative. (CC p. 611)

The steward’s great insight is to see that the solution must come from outside himself. His entire plan is based on his assumption that the lord is an honorable man who will respond in mercy, as he has done in the past. The steward trusts that the lord will allow a brief span of time, an opportunity to prepare for the imminent reckoning and reversal. The significance of the seemingly innocuous adverb “quickly” (ταχέως; 16:6) cannot be overemphasized. The steward must act in haste so that the lord’s debtors will think that the adjustments in the accounts stem from the lord’s mercy and not the steward’s desperation. The readiness of the debtors to accept the steward’s rewriting of their bills indicates that they believe this comes from the lord’s hand, perhaps under the gentle persuasion of the wise steward who is looking out for the renters. The community is dependent on the “generous and merciful” lord and has come to expect this sort of mercy from him, and the steward benefits in that he is an extension of the lord.

The Jewish *shaliach* was a subordinate who represented the one who sent him. In Jewish society it was common for such a representative to serve in many capacities. (CC p. 615)

The lord is a perfect example of Jesus’ exhortations in the Sermon on the Plain to be generous and merciful: “Do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return” (6:35) and “Become merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (6:36). (CC p. 615)

16:7 *hundred measures of wheat*. The approximate yield of about 100 acres. (CSB)

ἑκατὸν κόρους σίτου—The Hebrew dry measurement “kor” may be as large as ten bushels, so that a hundred kor of wheat would be one thousand bushels, another significant amount. (CC p. 611)

16:8 *master commended* – Praise for shrewdness but not necessarily approval. (TLSB)

The lord could have had him thrown in jail or to be punished in some other way. Instead he shows mercy like the father to the prodigal son. Since the focus on the lord's mercy, the dishonesty of the steward becomes a moot point.

When the lord discovers what the steward has done, he is in a bind with two options. He can reverse the steward's decisions to adjust the accounts, but in doing so, he will receive wrath from his renters and force them to reassess whether he really is a "generous and merciful" lord. If he lets the adjustments stand, he has further secured the goodwill of his renters. That, then, is the obvious choice for the lord, if he is to be consistent with his own character. He must commend the steward for shrewdly managing his personal crisis since *the steward trusted the character of his lord and staked everything on the lord's mercy*. The steward was not disappointed. (CC p. 615)

Clearly Jesus is still narrating the parable in 16:8a. ὁ κύριος, "the lord," is the lord in the parable who, Jesus says, commends the steward for his prudence. But he is commending him as a "steward of unrighteousness" (16:8). To fully understand the significance of this commendation, "prudently" (φρονίμως), "unrighteousness" (ἀδικία), and "praised" (ἐπήνεσεν) must be carefully studied. (CC pp. 615-616)

"Prudently" may be understood from Hebrew and Septuagintal sources as bearing eschatological connotations, "cleverness and skill deployed in self-preservation." "Unrighteousness" (ἀδικίας) and "unrighteous" (ἄδικος) are used throughout this section to describe mammon (16:9, 11) and a life of unrighteousness (16:10: "The one who is unrighteous in a very little is also unrighteous in much"). Various attempts have been made to nuance these words, e.g., to translate "dishonest" in 16:8a and 16:10 and "worldly" in 16:9 and 16:11. But both words mean essentially the same thing throughout the parable, namely, unrighteousness inherent in life in a wicked world. The word "praise" also opens the possibility of moving from the scene of the parable into the eschatological realm: (CC p. 616)

Thus the Greek word, on the level of the story itself, carries the meaning of simple approval of what the steward has done. At the same time, on a theological level this word provides additional evidence for interpreting the parable as being primarily concerned with eschatology. (CC p. 616)

These three words in the conclusion to the parable show the eschatological aspect and indicate that the steward is praised because when faced with a crisis of eschatological proportions (his very survival in the imminent day of reckoning), he cleverly uses resources available to him in a wicked world in the context of his trust that his lord will treat him with the same mercy that he had shown in the past. (CC p. 616)

Isaiah 40:1-2, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Not harshly, as rebels against the King of heaven and earth should expect, but in the tone of winsome pleading with which a lover seeks to touch the heart of a maiden he is courting (Gn 34:3; Jgs 19:3). Jerusalem did nothing to deserve tender words. Her redemption would be an act of divine mercy without any merit or worthiness on her part. (TLSB)

ESV has "warfare." Destruction of the nation and subsequent Babylonian captivity (Is 43:14). God promised to cut short the time of "hard service" (14:3) in exile, even though justice required that suffering for sin should never end. (TLSB)

Penalty of her iniquity was paid, even though she could do nothing to make amends for the debt she incurred. She received from the Lord's hand good things in double proportion to the punishment she deserved for her sins (61:7; Jb 11:6) (TLSB)

Double grace, that is, much grace, for God not only forgave her, but also exalted her. (CB)

sons of this world – People immersed in the ways of the world. (TLSB)

sons of the light. God's people (Jn 12:36; Eph 5:8; 1Th 5:5). (CSB)

But this is not the only conclusion. There is an addendum that comments on this in a Christian context: "because the sons of this present age are more prudent in their own generation than the sons of light" (16:8b). This saying would be acute to the disciples, who are the audience for this parable (although the Pharisees also overheard these words). Jesus encourages his listeners to imitate the steward, but not by being unrighteous. "The sons of this present age" are "more prudent" in worldly matters because they know how to be unrighteous—to bend the rules, play the game, or beat the system—in order to accomplish their goals. But Jesus wants his disciples to be ignorant or unlearned in the practice of such unrighteousness, because it is advantageous only in "this present age" and actually is harmful for those whose hope is in the age to come. "The sons of light" are to be prudent by recognizing the eschatological moment and focusing carefully on where God's mercy resides. (CC pp. 616-617)

For the disciples and the Pharisees, the inbreaking of God's merciful kingdom has been clearly announced to them by Jesus, particularly through His person, His teaching, and His miracles. The sayings of Jesus in Luke 12, where Jesus told another parable about a steward, but a faithful one (12:41-48), should be ringing in the hearers' ears. This is particularly true of Jesus' pointed exhortation about the present time of His visitation: "You hypocrites, the face of the earth and of heaven you know how to examine, but how is it you do not know to examine this critical time?" (12:56) (CC p. 617)

16:9-16 The sayings that follow the parable of the prudent steward are almost as challenging as the parable itself. They are connected to the parable—but how? (CC p. 617)

The link between these two sections is in the theme of this chapter: the proper use of possessions. How shall the children of the light be prudent in this world? The steward was commended for using "mammon" wisely; now the disciples are instructed by Jesus on how they might use "mammon" wisely for the sake of the kingdom. This is catechetical material. There are echoes from Luke 12, where possessions were shown to be a real stumbling block for Christians (along with persecution that elicits hypocrisy). Possessions may tempt Christians to become distracted from the main focus of their salvation. Instead of looking to a merciful God in whom they can put their trust, they see in their possessions a secure foundation that gives them certainty in an uncertain world. It becomes an alternate means of salvation. Note that possessions are not condemned, but the idolatrous use of them is. Already in Luke 12, Jesus has given clear instructions on how the Christian should view the possessions that God has given him: (CC pp. 617-618)

Seek his kingdom, and all these things will be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, because your Father graciously willed to give to you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give alms; make for yourselves purses that do not wear out, unailing treasure in the heavens, where thief does not come near nor moth destroy; for where your treasure is, there also your heart will be (12:31-34). (CC p. 618)

16:9 *means of unrighteous wealth.* God’s people should be alert to make use of what God has given them. (CSB)

Although the wealth belongs in a fallen world, the disciple’s stewardship can follow higher principles. Aug: “Some, by a bad understanding of this, plunder the goods of others, and bestow some of that upon the poor.... I would not that you should so understand it. Give alms of your righteous labors: give out of that which you possess rightfully” (*NPNF* 1 6:450). (TLSB)

With this background from Luke 12, these three sayings may be related to the parable of the prudent steward. In the first teaching (16:9), Jesus commands his disciples to “make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon” (16:9a). A loan word from Aramaic, “mammon” refers to money or possessions. Jesus is exhorting the disciples to follow in the footsteps of the prudent steward, who used mammon generously to make friends for himself. If the mammon was used wisely, that is, if it was used to make friends, then when it is exhausted those friends may receive (δέξωνται) you into the eternal tents. This also mirrors the account of the prudent steward, even in some verbal parallels. At the center of the story, his great insight is that when his stewardship (the source of his unrighteous mammon) runs out, his new friends that he made by doctoring the accounts may receive (δέξωνται) him into their homes (εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν). In 16:9 the unrighteous mammon is also described as failing—a clear reference to death, when possessions become meaningless. But because unrighteous mammon was used to make friends, they may receive those who thus made use of the mammon into their eternal tents (εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς), even as the steward was hoping to be received into the homes of his friends. (CC p. 618)

make friends. By helping those in need, who in the future will show their gratitude when they welcome their benefactors into heaven (“eternal dwellings”). In this way worldly wealth may be wisely used to gain eternal benefit. (CSB)

δέξωνται—This third person impersonal plural is used for God and may be understood as a passive: you will be received *by God* into the eternal tents. See also 12:20, in the parable of the rich fool: “they demand back your soul,” meaning that your soul is demanded back (ἀπαιτοῦσιν) from you *by God*. (CC p. 611)

Making friends by means of unrighteous mammon no doubt refers to almsgiving in fulfillment of Jesus’ exhortation to “sell your possessions and give alms” (12:33). Those who receive the alms become your friends because you are merciful to them in times of want, even as the Father in heaven is merciful to you (6:36). Just as the lord in the parable was known as a man of mercy, the steward imitated his lord’s mercy in the settling of his accounts. He used mammon mercifully, and that is why he was praised as prudent. The reward for those who make such friends by sharing possessions is an eschatological one: instead of only being received into the homes of the friends, as in 16:4, they will be received into the eternal tents of the merciful Father. Jesus is not teaching works-righteousness here when he says “make.” Rather, he is enjoining the display of merciful generosity by those who have been shown generous mercy by God. (CC pp. 618-619)

into eternal dwellings – Jesus is instructing them and us to use earthly gifts for the sake of the kingdom.

The steward wants only hospitality now, but Jesus points to eternal welcome. (TLSB)

εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς—M. Scharlemann notes that “dwelling in tents was a feature of the eschatological consummation (cf. Acts 15:16 and Mark 9:5)” (*Parables*, 86). In 16:22, the eschatological resting place of Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham. (CC p. 611)

16:10-13 This teaching is related to the theme of vv 1–9 but has moved to a new emphasis. (TLSB)

16:10 *faithful in much.* Cf. 19:17; Mt 25:21. Faithfulness is not determined by the amount entrusted but by the character of the person who uses it. (CSB)

Dependable. (TLSB)

In the second saying (16:10–12), “unrighteous mammon” is compared with “the true thing” (16:11). The issue is faithfulness. The section begins by describing both “faithfulness” and unfaithfulness (“unrighteousness”) in two general principles that are paralleled: if you are faithful in little things you will be faithful in big ones; if you are unrighteous in little things you will be unrighteous in big things (16:10). The unrighteous steward is an example of one who is unrighteous in both little and big things. But he is also faithful in little and big things, as was evidenced by his unswerving faith in his lord’s mercy (the big thing) and his faith that the debtors would trust that his changing the accounts (a little thing) was a reflection of his lord’s mercy. On the other side of the center of this passage, unrighteous mammon is described as “that belonging to another,” reflecting the biblical idea that the things of this world come from God and are not ours, and “the true thing” is described as “what is yours” (16:12). The language of faithfulness is used here as well, but first as an indictment of Jesus’ listeners that they might not have been faithful in “that belonging to another,” i.e., unrighteous mammon, and then as a question by Jesus whether their unfaithfulness in unrighteous mammon will lead to unfaithfulness in “what is yours,” i.e., “the true thing.” (CC p. 619)

16:11 *true riches.* The things of highest value, ultimately those of the spirit, the eternal. (CSB)

The Gospel’s lasting and substantial value surpasses any earthly thing (cf Php 3:8). (TLSB)

What becomes evident in this structure is that the interpretation depends on what “the true thing” represents. It might well be translated “the true riches” instead of “the true thing,” reminding us again of “treasure in the heavens” (12:33). The interpretation in Luke 12 suggested that Christ is the heavenly treasure, and heavenly treasures are those things that incorporate us into Christ, that is, catechesis, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. So, to be rich toward God is to be a member of Christ’s kingdom through catechesis, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. To be a faithful steward of “the true thing” is to be a faithful steward of the mysteries, i.e., of catechesis that leads toward Baptism and then invites to the Supper. This interpretation corresponds with the interpretation of the parable of the faithful steward, where stewardship of the Lord’s gifts was the theme. Jesus tells his disciples in no uncertain terms that how one administers the things of this world is parallel to how one will administer the things of God’s kingdom. (CC pp. 619-620)

M. Scharlemann, *Parables*, 91, supports this interpretation by describing “a large matter,” “the true (riches),” and “your own” in this way:

The latter [“a large matter,” “the true (riches),” “your own”] certainly refer to the knowledge of the way of life [catechesis], which makes the followers of Christ the children of light. Then the meaning of the last verses would be: “If, therefore, you were not faithful in the use of money, which is really not your own and a very transitory thing, who will trust you with the real thing, the knowledge of life?” Of course the answer is, “No one!” (CC p. 620)

16:12 *faithful* – Jesus tells his disciples in no uncertain terms that how one administers the things of this world is parallel to how one will administer the things of God’s kingdom. (CC p. 620)

We are stewards only of that which God loans to us. (TLSB)

16:13 no servant – οἰκέτης—Twenty-seven of the twenty-eight Greek words in Lk 16:13 are the same as in Mt 6:24; only this one is unique to Lk 16:13. (CC P. 612)

two masters. See Mt 6:24; cf. Jas 4:4. (CSB)

A household servant can give undivided loyalty to one master only. *devoted.* Lit, “hold on to.” *You cannot serve God and money.* For the servant of God, money may in turn be a servant of godly purposes, but money cannot become a master without threatening loyalty to God. (TLSB)

Jesus includes one final teaching (16:13), in chiasmic form (see the following diagram), that concludes with a well-known and well-used saying: “You are not able to serve God and mammon.” This sums up this entire section. Both the basic definition of mammon, i.e., “that in which one puts one’s trust,” and its meaning in this section as money or possessions apply in this final saying. The other side of the frame of this verse describes the dilemma: “No domestic servant is able to serve two lords.” This puts this question to the disciples: “Are you trusting in money/possessions or in God? Are you trying to serve them both?” Recall that this section began with unrighteous mammon as a means toward making friends so that one may be received into eternal tents (16:9). Mammon is not evil in itself but becomes evil when it becomes the object of one’s service, i.e., when one worships mammon instead of God. To serve (worship) both is impossible.

When Jesus poses these two stark alternatives, he gives wonderful pastoral advice. Anyone who tries to have it both ways will either hate one and love the other or be attached to one and despise the other. Love/attachment and hatred/despising stand at the center of the chiasm. (CC p. 620)

The steward was commended because he chose to serve his lord, who he trusted would be merciful. He used unrighteous mammon to achieve his goal, though he trusted not in the mammon, but in his merciful lord. (CC pp. 620-621)

C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 155, puts it this way: “Christians need to answer the call to manifest a shrewdness in the use of wealth under their control. Affluence in the hands of disciples is to be used sacramentally as a means of expressing love, both to God and to other people who have needs. The church in Acts embodies a proper response to Jesus’ call.” (CC p. 620)

Luke 12 echoes again, “For where your treasure is, there also your heart will be” (12:34). Faithful disciples will be commended for seeing that Jesus is their treasure and for trusting in his mercy. (CC p. 620)

Cf. the conclusion of L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 248, whose doctoral thesis was on possessions in Luke: “The final saying shows the profound seriousness with which Luke regards this symbolic use of possessions. ‘Mammon’ in 16:13 is personified as an idol, the service of whom is the rejection of God. If giving away possessions in almsgiving secures a place with God, the worship of possessions and a clinging to them as ultimate means separation from God.” (CC p. 621)

The fact that Lk 16:14–18 does not immediately seem to fit into the flow of thought about possessions alerts one to the presence of a broader topic in the context of which the teaching about possessions takes place. This has to do with entry into the kingdom, the presence of the kingdom in Jesus, the hypocrisy (and “violence”) of self-justification, and the Christological character of the OT. (See the excursus “The OT Witness to Christ.”) One passing phrase calls the Pharisees “lovers of money” (16:14), but teachings about the Law and the Prophets and the kingdom predominate. Possessions are part of the temptation to hypocrisy, behavior not in accord with the true faith. (CC p. 623)

This view of the flow of thought, and the strong link of 16:14–18 to the following parable, is corroborated by the observation that the first part of the parable (16:19–26) is a commentary on the teachings about the kingdom and stewardship (avarice and self-righteousness; 16:14–15) and the second part of the parable (16:27–31) is an illustration of the teaching about the Law and the Prophets and the kingdom (the abiding validity of the OT as testimony to Jesus; 16:16–18). This helps make it clear that this section is not just teachings about the kingdom, but rather, teachings about the Torah [Law] since the testimony of the OT takes a prominent place in the final two sections. Jesus is announcing that, beginning with John the Baptist, the Good News of the preaching of the kingdom of God is now present. Jesus’ ministry is the fulfillment of the OT and the key to survival in the eschatological judgment. The Pharisees, in their hypocrisy, have opted for another way of reading the OT and trying to enter the kingdom (16:15). But the way of Jesus is the only way and is also the one way taught in the OT (16:18). (CC p. 623)

16:1–13 Guard against becoming enslaved to the pursuit of wealth. Instead, use money for godly and eternal purposes. God offers us lasting treasure in Christ, and so a true perspective on money and goods. • Deliver us, Father, from the love of money, but increase our love for you and for one another. Amen. (TLSB)

The Law and the Kingdom of God

14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. 15 And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. 16 “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. 17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

16:14 *ridiculed him* – They tried to deflect Jesus’ criticism by sneering at Him and pointing out what they regarded as His faults. (TLSB)

ἠκουον ... ἐξεμυκτήριζον—The imperfect emphasizes the connection to Jesus’ teaching. L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 250, notes that “the verb ‘mock’ (*ekmykterizo*) is used of the righteous one reviled by enemies in LXX 21:8; 34:16 [ET 35:16], and recalls the scornful ‘laughter’ (*gelon*) of [Lk] 6:25.” The religious leaders will mock (ἐκμυκτηρίζω) Jesus again on the cross (23:35). (CC p. 622)

Luke introduces this section by noticing the change in audience from the disciples (16:1) to the Pharisees (16:14), who had been eavesdropping all along. The last time the Pharisees appeared with Jesus, they were grumbling that he welcomed tax collectors and sinners and ate with them (15:2). Now they are scoffing. (CC p. 623-624)

C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 156, captures their reason for scoffing:

The Pharisees scoff at Jesus’ statement, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (vs. 13). Given their assumptions, this was predictable. For them tragedy is a sign of God’s displeasure; success (e.g., financial prosperity) is evidence of one’s righteousness and of God’s pleasure. It is no wonder they scoffed at Jesus’ “either God or money” stance. ... Money for them was a sign, a sure sign, of God’s favor and of their place in the kingdom. Their position had roots in their scriptures (e.g., Deut 28:12–13 where wealth and plenty are a sign of God’s blessings). Jesus’ response to their scoffing was to contrast their outer-public appearance with their inner-private reality (cf. 11:39–41; 18:9–14). (CC p. 624)

Scoffing is much more serious than grumbling. Their reaction indicates that they perceive that the parables of Luke 15 were directed against them (see 20:19). The Pharisees, who represent the Jewish religious establishment while Jesus is outside Jerusalem, reject Jesus. (CC pp. 623-624)

16:15 *justify yourselves* – *ικαιοῶντες*—The word has a forensic sense, “declare yourselves righteous.” The Pharisees trumpet their righteousness before the world. Jesus has already warned the disciples, “Beware for yourselves of the leaven, which is hypocrisy, of the Pharisees” (12:1). (CC p. 622)

At Luke 12 Jesus warned the disciples about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Here this hypocrisy is manifested when the Pharisees “declare [themselves] righteous before men” (16:15). *Outwardly* they appear righteous, but *inwardly* their hearts are known by God. Their outward appearance of righteousness is earned by the use of their possessions, as the unrighteous steward appeared before his friends when he used the lord’s wealth for his own advantage. But unlike the unrighteous steward, whose heart was dependent on the mercy of his master, the Pharisees’ hearts are dedicated toward money. Jesus said it best when he told them, “You Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, but the inside of you is full of rapaciousness and wickedness” (11:39). The hypocrisy of the Pharisees comes from fear—fear that Jesus is deposing their fabricated kingdom and fear that making an unpopular confession before the world—that the kingdom comes in Jesus—would lead to persecution. So they present a pious front *on the outside* (which they achieve by their use of possessions), while in their hearts they are corrupt. (CC p. 624)

Taken together, hypocrisy and the misuse of possessions represent for the Pharisees an alternate way into the kingdom. It is the way of self-righteousness; it stands outside of God’s way of righteousness, which is taught in the OT and culminates in Jesus, and is the only way into God’s kingdom. There are two ways, the way of life and the way of death, and the Pharisees have chosen the way of death (cf. Deut 30:15–20; Prov 14:12). To the world this way looks quite grand and would be considered “high among men” (Lk 16:15), especially if their possessions are used as a means of establishing this “kingdom.” This is why the Pharisees scoff at Jesus. He is not in touch with what they would call the “reality of the world.” (CC p. 624)

Some of Jesus’ strongest criticisms in the gospel are directed at the Pharisees, and it is also so here. Loving money and using it to justify themselves may seem a lofty activity *in the eyes of people*, but it is a detestable thing *before God* (βδέλυγμα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ). (CC pp. 624-625)

It is in the word βδέλυγμα, “detestable thing,” that L. T. Johnson sees a unifying theme for these sayings about the kingdom (*The Gospel of Luke*, 250):

The contrast between what is “exalted” (*hypselos*) and “low” is typical of Luke, but in this case, the language is stronger: the “abomination” (*bdelygma*) occurs in Gen 43:32; Exod 8:26; Lev 5:2; 7:21; 11:10–42; Deut 17:1 as something utterly reprehensible or “unclean” in thing or act. In Deuteronomy, it is mainly associated, however, with *idolatry* (see Deut 7:25; 12:31; 18:12; 27:15; 29:17; 32:16), and that association is continued in Isaiah (2:8, 20; 17:8; 41:24; 44:19). In Dan 9:27; 11:31 and 12:11, the “abomination of desolation” is the supreme representation of idolatry (cf. also Mark 13:14 and Matt 24:15). The word choice by Luke, in short, corresponds to the portrayal of Mammon in L as an idol competing for human allegiance against God, which portrayal the Pharisees mock. In light of the sayings which follow, it is instructive to note that the term *bdelygma* is also used to designate sham outward worship (Isa 1:13 and 66:3), immoral financial dealings (Deut 25:16), and the remarrying of a divorced wife (Deut 24:4)! (Emphasis Johnson.) (CC p. 625)

For the love of money and self-justification are the way of death; they stink of death. Hypocrisy and possessions work hand in hand to create a form of idolatry that is detestable to God. This idolatry is

completely opposed to the kingdom Jesus preaches. The Pharisees are fiercely opposed to the gifts that Jesus and his preaching bring, and so they have opted for mammon and unbelief. Theirs is a kingdom of unrighteousness. (CC p. 625)

Establish their righteousness among themselves. (TLSB)

exalted ... abomination. His ways are not our ways (Is 55:8–9), and so people value the very things that God despises. (TLSB)

Jesus' next saying gives the Pharisees a lesson in salvation history and places them squarely within that history. Standing at the center of these three logia, 16:16–17 is the climax. Jesus announces here that in the ministry of John the Baptist and his own preaching of the Good News of the kingdom of God, a radical shift is taking place in the world. Everyone who depends on possessions and hypocrisy as a way into the kingdom is now being called to make a violent break from those means and enter into Jesus' kingdom through faith in his mercy. (CC p. 625)

In step-parallel fashion, John the Baptist and Jesus have been compared within the economy of God's plan of salvation (see Luke 1–2; 3:1–22; 7:18–35). The relationship between John and Jesus could be discerned in comparing their respective baptisms. John's baptism was purificatory and preparatory for the coming of Jesus, cleansing people to make them ready to meet the Messiah when he came. John called people to repentance, and those who submitted to his baptism declared to the world that God's plan of salvation was coming to pass in John and in his Successor (7:29). John preached the Good News (3:18) even though he himself didn't bring the kingdom of God. In this way John's ministry was catechetical and preparatory, that is, it was part of the Torah and the Prophets. (CC p. 625)

16:16 *until John.* The ministry of John the Baptist, which prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah, was the dividing line between the old covenant and the new. (CSB)

μέχρι/ἀπὸ τότε—These two expressions serve to include John the Baptist in the new era of salvation; he inaugurates the preaching of the Good News (3:18). (CC p. 622)

However, John baptized Jesus! Luke does not mention John's presence at Jesus' baptism, for John's work had come to an end. But John did baptize Jesus, and by doing so, he was a fundamental part of the shift from the time of the testimony beforehand in the Torah and the Prophets to the time of the preaching of the Good News of the kingdom of God. Here John is part of the time of the preaching of the kingdom. John is the transition between old and new, between the Law and the Prophets and the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets in Jesus. Thus, “the Law and the Prophets were until John” *and also included John*; “from then the kingdom of God is being preached as Good News” *which also included John*. (CC pp. 625-626)

kingdom of God was being preached – ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται—The verb εὐαγγελίζεται is a theological passive: the Good News of “the kingdom of God is being preached” by God (through his agents). The present tense used in conjunction with the adverbial expression ἀπὸ τότε indicates that this is ongoing since the appearance of John the Baptist and so requires the perfect tense in English (E. Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, § 17). Only Luke describes the preaching of the Good News of the kingdom with εὐαγγελίζω and βασιλεία in combination. (See Lk 4:43; 8:1; Acts 8:12; 14:21–22; cf. Mk 1:14–15) (CC p. 622)

forcing his way. The meaning is disputed, but it probably speaks of the fierce earnestness with which people were responding to the gospel of the kingdom. Multitudes were coming to hear Jesus and to receive his message (see Mt 11:12). (CSB)

Jesus seems to complain about the violent reaction people have to God's Word. The Pharisees abuse the proclamation of the Gospel (v 14), just as they abused the Law and the Prophets. They even rejected John, who prepared the way for God's rule in Christ. (TLSB)

The difficulty in the next line revolves around the word βιάζεται, whether it should be translated as a middle, "everyone is forcing his way," or a passive, "everyone is being forced." Most commentators take this as a middle, "everyone tries to enter it with violence." (CC p. 626)

This translation is supported by BAGD, 2 d, which notes that the word with εἰς should be translated at 16:16 as "everyone enters (or tries to enter) the kingdom w[ith] violence." J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1117, argues it is a passive, "everyone is pressed to enter it," to balance the previous passive εὐαγγελίζεται, "the kingdom of God is being preached." RSV (CC p. 626)

The question, however, is, What does this mean? Matthew's parallel, while not entirely clear, seems to suggest a particular interpretation: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence [βιάζεται], and men of violence [βιασταί] take it by force" (ἀρπάζουσιν; Mt 11:12 RSV) In Luke, the violence is associated with one entering into the kingdom, and this involves everyone (πᾶς). (CC p. 626)

This might well be the violence involved in the radical break with the past through repentance and the faithful expectation that God's kingdom has now come in Jesus. One must renounce hypocrisy and love of money as a way into the kingdom and confess before the world that there is only one way into the kingdom, and that is through Jesus. Jesus himself suffered a violent death in bringing in the kingdom. His person and work—his life, his teaching, and his miracles—confront the world with a radical message of release (4:18–19) that will culminate at the cross and resurrection. Throughout the gospel, the hearer has observed how all kinds of people have reacted to the crisis that Jesus' person, preaching, and miracles brought to them. Consistently, it has been tax collectors and sinners who entered the kingdom through the "violence" of repentance—dying to sin—and faith in Jesus. This was manifest in their submission to John's baptism (7:29). (CC p. 626)

At the same time, the hearer has also seen how consistently the Jewish religious establishment, particularly the Pharisees and lawyers, have "rejected the plan of God for themselves, not being baptized by him [John]" (7:30). Once again, Simeon's prophecy to Mary about Jesus is recalled: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign to be spoken against" (2:34). These people try to enter the kingdom by violence but fail. They imagine that their violence against Jesus is in the service of God's kingdom. (CC pp. 626-627)

16:17 The ministry of Jesus (introducing the new covenant era) was a fulfillment of the law (defining the old covenant era) in the most minute detail (cf. 21:33). (CSB)

Despite great opposition, God's Word will not fail. Jesus has come to fulfill "the Law or the Prophets" that others have abused (Mt 5:17). (TLSB)

least stroke of a pen. κεραίαν—This "hook of a letter" refers to a serif portion of a letter in the Hebrew script. Jesus' hyperbole accents that even the tiniest part of the Law matters because of its permanence. (CC p. 623)

the law – Jesus adds a statement about the validity of the Law as a caveat lest some think that with the coming of the kingdom of God, the Law no longer obtains. In strong comparative language, Jesus

says that not even God’s creation of heaven and earth is as permanent as the eternal Law of God in his Word, even down to the tiniest part of a Hebrew letter. Interpretations vary on the meaning of “Law” here. It is best to understand it as “Torah,” that is, God’s revelation, particularly the Pentateuch, but sometimes standing for the entire OT, especially since it stands alone here in 16:17 without “the Prophets.” The true meaning of “Torah” is most succinctly defined by H. Hummel: (CC p. 627)

The conventional translation of “Torah” with “Law” is most lamentable. ... If it were possible to turn back the clock and expunge fateful and misleading renditions from our Bibles, this would surely be the place to start. It indisputably is one of the major culprits in reenforcing the stubborn prejudice that somehow the Old Testament is more “legalistic” than the New, or at least contains proportionately far more “Law” than “Gospel.” (CC p. 627)

If it were possible, it might be better not to translate, but simply to transliterate “Torah,” as is the common Jewish practice. Short of that, it must be shouted from the housetops that, to the extent that we must settle for a single-word translation, “Gospel” would be far more accurate than “Law.” But that must be immediately qualified: Torah means “Gospel,” not in its narrow sense of the obverse of “Law,” but in its broad sense of *both* Law and Gospel. ... (CC p. 627)

Alternatively, “Word of God” would often be a superb “dynamic equivalent” of Torah, because God’s Word always confronts us in both Law and Gospel. (CC p. 627)

With this understanding of “Law,” then, Jesus’ words about not “one little hook of a letter of the Law” falling away are directly linked to his announcement that the kingdom is now being preached in the ministries of John and Jesus. *The content* of the kingdom, that is “Gospel,” certainly was testified to beforehand also in the Law and the Prophets (cf. Rom 1:2; 3:21). But now the Gospel is enfolded in Jesus and everything in the OT is established—interpreted through him! (CC p. 627)

16:14–17 It is tempting to lay aside the inconvenient portions of God’s Law. Yet, every Word of God is precious and for our edification. Praise God, we do not need to justify ourselves. The good news of His kingdom releases us from sin and gives new life. • Lord, teach us to treasure the Law and the Gospel as Your good gifts, fulfilled for us in Christ Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)

Divorce and Remarriage

18 “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

16:18–17:10 This section points to the power of the Word and the blessings of faithful service. The particular topics likely flowed from Jesus’ conflict with the Pharisees (16:14). (TLSB)

16:18 God intends marriage to be a permanent union (Mt 19:3–9) between one man and one woman (Gn 2:18–25). (TLSB)

divorces his wife. See Mt 5:31–32; 19:9; Mk 10:11–12; 1Co 7:10–11. Jesus affirms the continuing authority of the law: For example, adultery was still adultery, still unlawful and still sinful. Matthew’s treatment is fuller in that (1) it shows that the law was given because of man’s hardened heart in regard to divorce, and (2) it includes one exception as permissible grounds for divorce—marital unfaithfulness (Mt 19:9). (CSB)

The last saying of the section shows how this works. Perhaps the most perplexing verse, 16:18, appears to be totally unrelated, a non sequitur in the flow of Jesus’ teaching. What do divorce and adultery have to

do with possessions and Jesus' teaching about the kingdom? Jesus' statement here on divorce and adultery seems to be unparalleled in the OT; he includes no exceptions (cf. Mt 5:32). (CC p. 628)

Most commentators also note that the rabbis took two different views on divorce. L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 251, puts it most succinctly: "As the Mishnah tractate *Gittin* shows, a large amount of legislation was devoted in rabbinic Judaism to divorce, some of it quite liberal. Thus, although the School of Shammai would allow divorce only on grounds of fornication, the School of Hillel would allow it simply because the husband found another woman more attractive (*m. Git.* 9:10). Like Jesus, the Qumran sect had a far stricter view of marriage (*CD* 4:20–5:1)." (CC p. 628)

In a piece of casuistic law, Moses himself appears to have reckoned with "divorce" and "adultery" (Deut 24:1–4), although the real prohibition ("detestable thing ... before the Lord your God," βδέλυγμα ... ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου) is for the first husband to remarry the woman he divorced if she should be again "sent away" with a "bill of relinquishment" or widowed (24:3–4), for this defiles the land. (CC p. 628)

In the Torah, divorce and adultery are never mentioned together, even though both are roundly condemned in the OT. The command against adultery is part of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18) and was considered an offense worthy of death (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22). It is Jesus who brings divorce and adultery together, and here in Luke his condemnation of divorce and adultery is so thorough that a man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and a man who marries a woman who is divorced also commits adultery. (CC p. 628)

In the light of our understanding of the "Law" as "Torah" or "Gospel," Jesus' words about marriage and divorce and adultery must be understood in the context of the OT metaphor of God's relationship to Israel as a Bridegroom to his bride. Israel, as bride, commits adultery when she chases after false gods. This is a poignant way in which the OT describes Israel's idolatry: (CC p. 628)

Hosea compares the apostasy of Israel against God to adultery (2:4ff.; 3:1–2; 4:12ff.). Jeremiah uses the same comparison in [3]:1; 5:7; 9:1 [ET 9:2]. Israel breaks the marriage bond, and Jerusalem will bear the punishment of an adulteress (13:22). Ezekiel interprets Israel's history as a story of constant adultery (16:32; 23:37ff.). (CC p. 628)

Against that backdrop, Jesus' words here suggest that *also in the time of the preaching of the Good News of the kingdom of God* human marriage still provides a model for God's relationship with his church, but now that the Bridegroom has come, there are no exceptions. What one is to see in the fidelity of human marriage is parallel to God's fidelity to the new Israel that is formed and sustained through the preaching of the Good News of the kingdom of God. (CC pp. 628-629)

Paul subsequently takes the words of Jesus and shows how Christian marriage is to be an icon of the Gospel in that it incarnates the relationship between Christ and his church (e.g., Eph 5:21–33). (CC p. 629)

The connection between possessions and the kingdom should now be clear. As lovers of money, the Pharisees had made possessions an idol; they had apostatized by committing adultery in serving mammon instead of God. In John's preaching and baptism and in Jesus' preaching of the Good News of the kingdom of God, they had an opportunity "to examine this critical time" (Lk 12:56), to grasp in faith the way of life. But instead, they have scoffed at the King of the kingdom and clung even more tightly to their mammon. (CC p. 629)

But the fulfillment marches on, nonetheless. The Bridegroom comes to establish the perfect communion with his bride. No adultery/idolatry here. Things are as they were “from the beginning” (cf. Mt 19:4). Torah revealed/fulfilled in Jesus incarnate puts divorce/remarriage into this perspective. As ever, the problem is with remarriage, which is the parallel to becoming one who *belongs to* another God. Hence the connection of adultery to divorce is made in order to serve the teaching against *idolatry*. (CC p. 629)

Even though the Pharisees found the notion something at which to scoff, Jesus is the τέλος (“goal, fulfillment, end”) of the Torah (Rom 10:4)! (CC p. 629)

16:18 Marital fidelity is to be preserved, for marriage is the blessing of a lifelong partnership. Pray for your spouse in the love of the heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus. His faithfulness avails for our forgiveness and salvation. • Sanctify our marriages, O blessed Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

19 “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. **20** And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, **21** who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. **22** The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, **23** and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. **24** And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ **25** But Abraham said, ‘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. **26** 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.’ **27** And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— **28** for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ **29** But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ **30** And 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 hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

The story of the rich man and Lazarus provides a fitting conclusion to this chapter on the attitude toward possessions in view of the life of the age to come and the Gospel preaching to prepare people for it. The account has two parts, but there is no doubt as to its unity and its intent. The first part (16:19–26) describes love of worldly wealth and failure to heed the witnesses (cf. 16:14–15), and the second part (16:27–31) presents the importance of the testimony of the Law and the Prophets (cf. 16:16–18). (CC p. 632)

The following outline details the chiasmic structure within the first part:

- I. The Life and Death of the Rich Man and Lazarus**
 - 16:19 **A** A certain rich man (πλούσιος) dressed in fine clothes and feasted lavishly every day.
 - 16:20 **B** A poor man (πτωχός) called Lazarus was cast down at his gate, full of sores.
 - 16:21 **C** Lazarus longed to be satisfied with crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table.
 - C’** But instead, the dogs came and licked his sores.
 - 16:22 **B’** The poor man (τὸν πτωχόν) died and was carried to heaven by angels to the bosom of Abraham.

A' The rich man (πλούσιος) died and was buried.

II. The Conversation between the Rich Man and Abraham

- A. The heavenly life of Lazarus and the eternal torment of the rich man (16:23–26).
- B. On hearing Moses and the Prophets, or even one raised from the dead (16:27–31).

The story sets up a contrast between two men: a rich man and a poor man. This is accomplished by four verses in a simple chiasm that briefly and succinctly describes the life and death of these two men. The hearer should not have difficulty seeing that the rich man represents the Pharisees who were earlier described as “lovers of money” (16:14), and the poor man stands for all the outcasts of Jewish society whom Jesus has made the special focus of his ministry and addressees/hearers of his preaching. (e.g., Lk 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21) The portrayal of these two men fits these two groups perfectly. (CC p. 633)

Though some interpreters have regarded this story of Lazarus as a parable (perhaps because of dislike for v 23), the fact that Jesus used a personal name for a main character indicates a realistic situation. (TLSB)

What Happens When We Die?

A human is made up of body and soul (Mt 10:28; cf 2Pt 1:13–15). When a human dies, his soul is separated from his body. His body decays, but his soul—and thus he himself, his *ego*, or personality—lives on. If a person trusts in Jesus for salvation, his soul will live in joy with God, awaiting the resurrection, the last judgment, and eternal life. If a person is wicked and unbelieving, his soul will live in torment, awaiting the resurrection, the last judgment, and eternal condemnation. (TLSB)

In 2Co 5:4–8, St Paul describes the body as a “tent” in which he—that is, his mind, personality, soul, spirit, or however one might describe the center of one’s person—dwells. He says that when he and believing Christians die, they will be “away from the body” (literally, “out of the house of the body”) and yet still “at home with [present with] the Lord.” These passages show clearly that the center of one’s personhood, which other passages call “the soul,” can exist separately from the body, and that at death the soul is separated from the body. Cf Lk 8:55; 23:46; 1Pt 3:18–19; Php 1:23–24; Rv 6:9. (TLSB)

What about “Soul Sleep”?

In Jn 11:11–14, our Lord Jesus describes the death of His friend Lazarus as “sleep.” But note: the wicked who die have “no rest” (Is 57:20–21; Rv 14:11). Death is a “rest” or “sleep” for the godly (Rv 14:13, drawing from Ps 95). Thus, the Church calls the places where the godly are buried “cemeteries,” that is, “dormitories” or places of sleep, and the Church believes that the godly do indeed “rest in peace.” (TLSB)

But while the body sleeps, the soul is awake. For example, in Lk 16:19–31, the soul of the rich man in Hades prays (to no avail) that the beggar Lazarus would relieve his suffering or return to earth to warn his family. The soul of Lazarus, on the other hand, is “comforted” (v 25). Both the rich man and faithful Abraham are awake, conscious, and speaking. Scripture sometimes indicates that the departed souls are unaware of what takes place on earth (e.g., 2Ki 22:20; Jb 14:21; Is 57:1–2; 63:16). Yet it should not be concluded from this that they are unconscious. The soul of the rich man was not unconscious, nor was the soul of Abraham (Mt 22:32). (TLSB)

In considering “soul sleep,” however, we must distinguish between those people who affirm that the souls of the righteous are comforted and experience God’s presence and those who think that the souls of the righteous experience nothing, or worse, are obliterated. As long as the comfort of the righteous souls is affirmed, expressions about the dead being asleep are not dangerous. But the view that the souls of the

righteous experience nothing, or that they are dissipated or annihilated, however, are false, unscriptural views. (TLSB)

Glory and Condemnation on Judgment Day

What is the last judgment all about? Scripture teaches that in heaven there are varying degrees of glory and in hell there are varying degrees of condemnation, or judgment (Mt 10:15; 20:23; Lk 14; Jn 19:11; 1Co 15:40–42). We should not think about Judgment Day as though it is the first time that the godly will be distinguished from the wicked (2Pt 2:3–4, 9; Jude 6), or as though it is the first time that the godly will experience the blessed presence of God. But it will be the first time the godly fully experience God’s presence in their glorified bodies (Lk 16:19–31; Jn 5:24). (TLSB)

Instead of thinking about Judgment Day as the first time a distinction is made between the righteous and the wicked, we should see it as the *final and full* awarding of rewards and penalties (2Co 5:10). Judgment Day is about the fact that we, in our bodies, will receive the things done in the body. Those who have done evil in the body will receive condemnation. Those who, in the body, have believed in Christ, have been forgiven of their sins, and have new life by God’s Spirit, will receive rewards. Judgment Day is the full and final awarding of rewards and penalties, not the beginning of that awarding. (TLSB)

Everlasting Life with Christ

As we have begun to live with Christ here on earth in the Church through His Word and Sacraments, so we will continue to live with Him after we die. Death is not an interruption of this fellowship with our Lord. Our life with Christ continues, even after death, even before the resurrection. Our departed friends and family members who lived with Christ here below by faith in His cross for their forgiveness even now live with Him and are comforted. Because our life with Christ is not interrupted by death, death for the Christian may be sweet and joyful, even in the midst of tears. (TLSB)

16:19 *a rich man*. Sometimes given the name Dives (from the Latin for “rich man”). (CSB)

ἄνθρωπος δέ τις ἦν πλούσιος—This account begins like that of the prudent steward (16:1) and shows how these two stories frame Luke 16. The indefiniteness of τις suggests that this may be interpreted as an illustrative story rather than a historical narrative (cf. 10:30; 14:16; 15:11). Neither Jesus nor Luke calls it a parable, but it may be treated as such. See textual note at 8:4. Regarding the extent to which the details should be understood as literal and didactic, see the commentary below. (CC p. 630)

The rich man occupies the frame of the chiasm (A—16:19; A’—16:22b). The first part of the frame introduces his life: he is rich, dresses in fine clothes, and feasts sumptuously every day. This seems innocent enough, but the hearer would recognize that this rich man has taken merry-making to excess (λαμπρῶς, “sumptuously” [16:19]). Feasting is reserved for special occasions such as weddings or the visit of an honored person. This was the case when the fatted calf was brought out for the extraordinary occasion of the prodigal son’s return to life. To feast every day is a hyperbolic illustration of the improper use of possessions. This rich man is out of control, and his use of his possessions stands in contrast even to that of the rich fool (12:16–21). The other side of the frame introduces his death. The stark simplicity of Jesus’ words stands in contrast to the lavish opulence of the man’s life: “the rich man also died and was buried” (16:22). One assumes, however, that he received a grand funeral in keeping with the extravagance of his life. But the finality of this statement rings in the ears of the hearers. That he “was buried” suggests that his destination is eternal death. (CC p. 633)

This is the second parable or story in Luke 16 that deals with rich people who misused their wealth. Luke 1:53 states “He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” This suggests that the rich often depend on their wealth to take care of all things including their salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

purple and fine linen. Characteristic of costly garments. (CSB)

A rich, royal woolen cloak worn over a delicate undergarment. (TLSB)

ἐνεδιδύσκετο—The imperfect suggests that it was his custom to dress this way. People clad in soft, costly, luxurious clothing are in the palaces of kings, unlike John the Baptist (Lk 7:25). (CC)

The imperfect suggests that it was his custom to dress this way. This is the way he lived. People who lived like this were generally found in palaces. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

feasted sumptuously – εὐφραίνόμενος καθ' ἡμέραν—This is one of the many verbal links with the parable of the prodigal son, in which εὐφραίνω is used four times. The contrast is that in Luke 15 feasting was for the great event of the younger son's repentance; here feasting is an everyday occurrence. In the passive, the verb (“be gladdened”) is also associated especially with the joys of eating. (CC p. 631)

lampros – This word suggests gluttony and feeding on exotic and expensive dishes. He is an example of excess and self-indulgence. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

16:20 *at his gate* – pulona – This suggests a high, ornamented gate indicating luxury. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

The feasting of the rich man and his friends made the gate a promising site for a beggar. (TLSB)

Lazarus. Not the Lazarus Jesus raised from the dead (Jn 11:43–44). If this is a parable, it is the only one in which Jesus gave a name to one of the characters. (CSB)

Means “one whom God helps.” (TLSB)

Λάζαρος— This is the only time a personal name appears in any parable or parable-like story in the gospels. Lazarus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Eleazar/Eliezer, which means “the one whom God helps.” The rich man has sometimes been called “Dives,” which is simply a transliteration of the word translated “rich” in the Latin Vulgate. The fact that Lazarus has a *name* but the rich man is nameless is an important feature; he whom God helps lives forever! (CC p. 631)

Lazarus, the poor man, occupies the center of the chiasm. In contrast to that of the rich man, his life is pathetic and pitiable. Yet Jesus names this poor man, suggesting his importance in God's sight and that his name is written in heaven (cf. 10:20), while the rich man's name is not recorded in Scripture or in heaven. Jesus spends more time describing Lazarus' life and death than he did with the rich man. Although Lazarus is not a leper (otherwise he would not have been able to get near the rich man's house), he is full of sores (B—16:20). The picture is of a beggar who must rely on others' help for survival. Perhaps he is crippled. He is cast at the gate of the rich man's house, where people come and go, in the hope that the rich man and his feasting friends will have pity on him and give him something from their table. Like the prodigal, he longs to be satisfied with the humblest of food, crumbs from the rich man's table. But the rich man totally ignores him, even though later on we learn that the rich man knew Lazarus' name (16:24). The situation is so pathetic that the household dogs, who would have received the crumbs from the table for which Lazarus longed (cf. Mt 15:27), add (ἀλλὰ καί, “but even”) to Lazarus' humiliation by licking his sores. He is so helpless that he is not able to keep these dogs away from him. (CC pp. 633-634)

covered with sores. The Greek for this phrase is a common medical term found only here in the NT. (CSB)

16:21 In the center of the chiasm (16:21), there is the great contrast between Lazarus' need and the response it evokes. Lazarus is a perfect recipient for almsgiving, through which the rich man may demonstrate how mercy may be expressed through the proper use of possessions. In keeping with his excessive lifestyle, the rich man's obsession with the pleasures of possessions causes him to ignore Lazarus. Instead, the dogs lick his wounds! (CC p. 634)

At this moment, Jesus introduces the Great Reversal. Lazarus dies and is carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham. This is an extraordinary event, especially for someone as apparently insignificant as Lazarus. Lazarus may not have feasted at the rich man's table (feasting that came to an end when the rich man died), but now he feasts forever in the bosom of Abraham. (CC p. 634)

desired to be fed – ἐπιθυμῶν χορτασθῆναι—This same expression is used of the prodigal son when he hit the bottom and was longing to be satisfied with pig food (15:16). χορτάζω occurs also in the beatitudes, “Blessed [you] hungering now, for you will be satisfied” (χορτασθήσεσθε; 6:21), and in the feeding of the five thousand (9:17). (CC p. 631)

what fell from rich man's table – Ancient people generally ate with their hands. When they wanted to clean their hands they wiped them on bread and threw the bread away (under the table for dogs or other scavengers). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

dogs...licked sores – ἐπέλειχον—In contrast to the rich man, who was accustomed to dressing in fine clothes, Lazarus was covered with sores, and it was customary (imperfect) for the dogs to lick his sores. (CC p. 631)

He is helpless to keep the dogs from his undressed wounds. (TLSB)

This made the sores even worse. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

16:22 *the time came – ἐγένετο δέ*—Luke often uses this construction to signal an abrupt shift in the narrative as he does here to describe the deaths of Lazarus and the rich man. (CC p. 631)

angels carried him – Instantly, divine help appears where human aid had been lacking. (TLSB)

Abraham's side. The Talmud mentions both paradise (see 23:43) and Abraham's side (traditionally “bosom”) as the home of the righteous. Abraham's side refers to the place of blessedness to which the righteous dead go to await future vindication. Its bliss is the quality of blessedness reserved for people like Abraham. (CSB)

Lit, “Abraham's bosom.” Perhaps the place of honor at the heavenly banquet (cf Mt 8:11; Jn 21:20). (TLSB)

εἰς τὸν κόλπον—Although this phrase *can* mean “closest communion” apart from a meal context, it also refers to one who reclines at table at a festive meal in close proximity to one of the guests, perhaps even the host (cf. Jn 13:23–25, which also uses κόλπος, “bosom,” when John reclines with Jesus at the Last Supper; J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 829; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 636). This is consistent with the picture of the messianic banquet, where the righteous will recline at table in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets (Lk 13:28–29). The plural form (κόλποις; 16:23) is classical]. (CC)

This means “into the bosom or breast which is the place of honor at the great feast to come” (John 13:23; Luke 13:28-29). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

Luke 1:52 “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”

16:23-31 There is a break here. The chiasm comes to an end. The scene now shifts from earth to heaven and hell. The main focus is on the rich man and his conversation with Abraham. This dialog has two parts: (A) a description of the heavenly life of Lazarus in contrast to the eternal torment of the rich man (16:23–26), which sets the stage for (B) a discussion of how to be prepared for the life of the age to come (16:27–31). (CC p. 634)

16:23 *Hades* – Hades is the place to which the wicked dead go to await the final judgment. That torment begins in Hades is evident from the plight of the rich man. The location of Abraham’s side is not specified, but it is separated from Hades by an impassable chasm. Hades includes the torment that characterizes hell (fire, Rev 20:10; agony, Rev 14:11; separation, Mt 8:12). Some understand Jesus’ description of Abraham’s side and Hades in a less literal way. (CSB)

The rich man has completed his life and is tormented for his heartlessness. Though the story provides a glimpse of the afterlife, other passages of Scripture are needed to gain a clear and comprehensive teaching of that doctrine. (TLSB)

This was the place where the unbelieving people went after death and still is true today. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

saw Abraham – The man is isolated from God and His servants. (TLSB)

Looking up from his place of torment in Hades, the rich man sees Abraham from afar and Lazarus reclining at his bosom at the heavenly table (16:23). (CC p. 634)

A question pertinent to this story is the extent to which Jesus would have the hearer understand the details as literal descriptions of life in heaven and hell. Specifically, the hearer may wonder whether those in glory can view those in hell and whether communication between the two is possible. On one hand, the story may be similar to a parable, even though it is not called a parable (see textual note on 16:19). In that case, the hearer would not want to press the meaning of every detail. On the other hand, some other passages (e.g., Is 66:24; Rev 14:9–11) do seem to suggest that the saints in glory will see those in hell, in accord with a literal understanding of our story. The hearer might also trust that Jesus would not describe the kingdom or the age to come in a way that would be misleading or contrary to fact. The surest route of interpretation, however, is to emphasize the main points of the story that relate to Jesus’ teaching in the context of the chapter: the proper use of possessions in view of the coming age and the OT testimony, including resurrection, that prepares people for the Gospel and the life to come. (CC p. 634)

Lazarus and Abraham are clearly in heaven. The image is striking. These two places are separated (16:26), but (for the purposes of this story) they are close enough that a conversation may take place between inhabitants of these two completely different realms. It is clear that hell is a place of torment, and heaven a place for the messianic feast. (CC p. 634)

16:24 *called out* – The rich man begins the conversation by asking “father Abraham” to have mercy on him. This title for Abraham tells us something about the rich man that we did not know before. He is a Jew and claims that Abraham is his father. This recalls the Jews who came to John the Baptist claiming

“we have Abraham for our father” and yet refusing to show fruits of repentance and to submit themselves to John’s baptism (3:7–9). At the end of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, Jesus will call Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, “a son of Abraham” (19:9). (The rich man in the story is like the Jews who refused to show fruits of repentance and also like Zacchaeus, who was rich; Zacchaeus, however, repented and welcomed Jesus into his home.) To be a “son of Abraham” does not protect one from eternal condemnation. (CC p. 635)

send...water – Formerly neglected, he is now seen as a potential minister in need. (TLSB)

Curiously, the rich man does not speak words of repentance, for he seems to realize that his condition of torment is permanent. His cry for mercy is *not* a cry of repentance, but a plea for help that results from a desperate situation. In fact, his status does not seem to affect his arrogance, for he views Lazarus, whom he knows by name, as a servant whom Abraham can send into his place of flames and cool his tongue with a drop of water (πέμψον, “send” [16:24], is an imperative). (CC p. 635)

J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 830, asks: “Notably, the rich man asks only for an amelioration of his suffering, not for release from them: does he recognize that his sufferings are deserved, or is his modest request an understated bid for release from his miserable situation?” (CC p. 635)

The rich man still thinks of himself and his needs before those of Lazarus. (CC p. 635)

cool my tongue – The thought of such minimal relief moves him to beg, so great is the torment. (TLSB)

this flame – As in Ps 106:18, flame burns up the wicked. Augustine: “Proud in the world, in hell a beggar! For that poor man did attain to his crumbs; but the other attained not to the drop of water” (*NPNF* 1 6:426). (TLSB)

16:25 *but...child* – Father Abraham does not disown him as his descendant. (TLSB)

ῶν—The use of this word recalls the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Plain: “Blessed [you] hungering now [ῶν], for you will be satisfied” (6:21). Lazarus, who was hungry in life, *now* is comforted in afterlife. (CC p. 631)

Abraham addresses the rich man as “child” (16:25), an expression of intimacy and genuine concern. But Abraham’s words betray the hopelessness of the rich man’s condition. He calls the rich man to “remember” what happened to him and to Lazarus during their lifetime (μνήσθητι, “remember,” is an imperative). (CC p. 635)

God’s remembrance (μνησθῆναι) of his mercy (1:54—which follows closely on Mary’s statement of reversal at 1:52–53) and of his covenant (1:72) figured prominently in the Magnificat and the Benedictus, respectively. To remember is part of the hermeneutic of Luke’s gospel in his final chapter when the women are instructed by the angels to remember Jesus’ words in Galilee about his suffering, death, and resurrection (24:6, 8). (CC p. 635)

To remember is to read back and interpret the events that had taken place. Father Abraham exhorts not only the rich man to do this, *but also the hearer of the gospel*. The rich man is to remember how in his life he received good things (his consolation) and Lazarus received bad things (his hunger for the rich man’s crumbs), but *now* the Great Reversal has taken place. *Now* Lazarus is comforted (παρακαλεῖται) by God, and the rich man is in torment. The hearer cannot help but remember that Jesus’ beatitude and woe in the Sermon on the Plain is coming to fulfillment in this parable: “Blessed [you] hungering now, for you will

be satisfied [χορτασθήσεσθε]. ... But woe to you, the rich ones, for you have already now received in full your consolation” (παράκλησιν; 6:21, 24). There could hardly be a clearer illustration of the nature of the kingdom. And with the Great Reversal there is a great divide (cf 2:34–35)—the chasm between heaven and hell is such that there is no crossing over from one to another. (CC pp. 635-636)

Both the Pharisees and the disciples could see that these words of father Abraham apply to the Pharisees who were “lovers of money” as they illustrate the first part of the previous discourse (16:14–15). There are two themes: “(1) The first is that wealth is not necessarily a sign of righteousness. ... (2) ... God who looks on the heart regards anyone who is proud-exalted as an abomination.” The rich man did not use his wealth to give alms mercifully to poor Lazarus at his gate. The rich man’s wealth was a curse that led to eternal torment. His outward behavior of excessive feasting indicated that inwardly in his heart he was not a generous and merciful man but a proud and arrogant one. The only conclusion for the Pharisees is this: if they don’t stop scoffing at Jesus’ teaching about hypocrisy and the proper use of possessions, they will find themselves with the rich man in eternal torment.

D. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, 163–64, makes these comparisons with the Pharisees:

The house of the Pharisees is like the rich man’s, where repentance has become impossible through enslavement to “master mammon” (cf. 16:14–15). Whereas the “elder brother” epitomizes the proud Pharisee who begrudges Jesus’ “bad company” (15:1–2), the rich man is the symbol of those Pharisees who are exalted among “men” through their manipulation of wealth (16:1–9, 14–15). Jesus’ house or stewardship is thus aligned with the “poor,” just as in 14:1–24 and 15:1–32. (CC p. 636)

The hearer would also see how this account illuminates the story of the unrighteous steward. He showed mercy to his lord’s debtors because he trusted in the mercy of the lord, and thus he used his riches wisely in giving alms and gaining for himself a place among friends. Jesus exhorted his disciples to do likewise so they might be received into the eternal tents (16:9). Lazarus is one of those “friends” whom a disciple could make for himself by means of unrighteous mammon, and Lazarus would be one of those friends who would receive the disciple as a fellow guest at the messianic table. The Pharisees need to become like the unrighteous steward by seeing that their Lord is Jesus, and, relying on his mercy, to give alms to people like Lazarus. (CC p. 636)

remember – μνήσθητι—See comments at the Magnificat (1:54) and the Benedictus (1:72). (CC p. 631)

comforted here – Contrasts between this life and eternal life, and how we perceive them, are the essence of the account. (TLSB)

παρακαλεῖται—This is a theological passive: “now he is comforted here” *by God*. (CC p. 631))

16:26 *besides all this* – καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις—The antecedent here includes the circumstances of the life of the rich man and Lazarus, as well as the status they now have inherited after death. (CC p. 631)

chasm...fixed – Nothing can bridge the gap after death (cf Heb 9:27). (TLSB)

ἐστήρικται—The perfect tense suggests a permanent condition; the passive voice is theological: “has been fixed” *by God*. In the LXX of Gen 1:6–8, 14–15, 17, a noun from the same root is used of the “firmament” of heaven fixed or established by God. (CC p. 631)

16:27 *send* – Again, the rich man needs the humble beggar from his gate. (TLSB)

16:28 *I have five brothers.* For the first time the rich man showed concern for others. (CSB)

may warn them – Their repentance would be to merely try to avoid the brother’s fate. (TLSB)

διαμαρτύρηται—Not “warn” (RSV) but “he might bear witness to them,” since this is its normal meaning in Acts. (Cf. Acts 2:40; 8:25; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21, 23, 24; 23:11; 28:23). R. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity I*, 186, notes: “Furthermore, 16:28 uses the word διαμαρτύρομαι (‘warn,’ ‘bear witness’), which is repeatedly used in Acts of Christian preaching and is a characteristically Lukan word, and the concluding comment about the inability of one who has risen from the dead to bring some to repentance fits neatly with the actual resistance which the preaching of the risen Christ will encounter in Acts.” (CC p. 631)

16:29 *Moses and the Prophets.* A way of designating the whole OT. The rich man had failed to pay attention to Scripture and its teaching, and feared his brothers would do the same. (CSB)

Repentance has already been demanded by the living God, a far higher authority than the brother who has died. (TLSB)

Μωϋσέα καὶ τοὺς προφήτας—Moses replaces “Law” from 16:16 and is the equivalent of “Torah.” On this expression in Luke, see Lk 24:27, 44; Acts 28:23. (CC p. 632)

let them hear – ἀκουσάτωσαν—On ἀκούω as a technical term for catechumens, see comments at Lk 5:1; the Sermon on the Plain (6:27, 47, 49); the parable of the sower (8:8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18); and Jesus’ discussion of the new kinship (8:21). (CC p. 632)

Abraham’s word about the great chasm could easily bring the story to an end. But the rich man continues the conversation and moves it in a different direction. He seems to have a change of heart. He finally thinks of someone else: his brothers in his father’s house. He wants Abraham to send Lazarus to “bear witness” to his family so they don’t end up where he is (16:27–28). The implication is that a miraculous appearance of someone from the dead will alert his brothers that they need to change their outlook and their behavior toward people like Lazarus so that they are not sent to eternal torment. Could the rich man’s brothers be his fellow Pharisees? Abraham’s reply is curt and pointed: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them” (16:29; ἀκουσάτωσαν is an imperative: “they must hear ...”). An intriguing suggestion is that the brothers need to hear Moses and the Prophets *as they are read in the synagogue*, i.e., they must heed what is regularly read in their own worship services and take it to heart! This is catechetical language in which Abraham is telling the rich man that if his brothers are to avoid torment in Hades, then they must become hearers of the Word, that is, hearers of Moses and the Prophets, for in them they will find all they need to know about the kingdom of grace, characterized by mercy and almsgiving to people like Lazarus. (E.g., Ex 22:21–24; Lev 19:9–10, 33; 23:22; Deut 10:17–19; 14:28–29; 15:1–11; 16:9–15; 24:10–18; Is 5:7–10; 30:12; 58:3, 7; Jer 5:25–29; 9:4–6; Amos 2:6–8; 6:1–7; Hos 12:7–9; Micah 3:1–3; Zeph 3:1–3; Mal 3:5) The command to “hear Moses and the Prophets” also recalls the Father’s words on the mount of transfiguration when he called the disciples to hear Jesus as the new Moses (Lk 9:35, citing Deut 18:15). So to hear “Moses and the Prophets” is to hear Torah, or Gospel (see comments at 16:16 on “Law”) through the new Moses, Jesus. The Pharisees are being called by Jesus to listen to Moses and the Prophets as they testify to Jesus and as they are being interpreted by Jesus and fulfilled in him. The abiding validity of the OT as testimony to the promise fulfilled in Christ Jesus is maintained (16:16–18). (CC pp. 636-637)

R. Stein, *Luke*, 427:

Another theme found in the second part of the parable involves the continued validity of the OT (Luke 16:29–31). Luke prepared his readers for this by what he already had said about the OT Scriptures in 1:1f., but in the immediate context he prepared them for this in 16:17. From the first chapter of the Gospel (cf. 1:6, 45) to the last (cf. 24:25–27, 32, 44–48), from the first chapter of Acts (cf. 1:16–18) to the last (28:23, 25–27), the eternal validity of the OT Scriptures is taught both explicitly and implicitly.

16:30 *someone...from the dead*. The story may suggest that Lazarus was intended, but Luke’s account seems to imply that Jesus was speaking also of his own resurrection (cf. v. 31; 9:22). If a person’s mind is closed and Scripture is rejected, no evidence—not even a resurrection—will change him. (CSB)

The rich man is hopeful but misjudges the stubbornness of human nature. Cf Dt 18:11; 1Sm 28:7. (TLSB)

πορευθῆ—This hints that Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem was when the “new Moses” taught about the kingdom, even as the first Moses taught Israel during the wilderness wanderings. Now the rich man expects another journey to take place, an extraordinary one “from the dead” back to those who are living. (CC p. 632)

The story could also have ended after 16:29, but the rich man speaks again. He beseeches Abraham to let someone from the dead journey to his brothers so that they might repent (16:30). The rich man shows that he now sees that repentance is crucial. But he does not consider the Word of God sufficient to produce repentance, so he desires a miraculous sign. Jesus’ teaching had already condemned such desire for a sign, and he had exhorted his audience instead to hear the Word of God and keep it (11:14–23, 28–30). Abraham does not change his response with respect to Moses and the Prophets but does add an intriguing final twist: “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, not even if someone were to rise out of the dead will they be persuaded” (16:31). The OT already contained accounts of resurrection (2 Ki 4:8–37; 13:20–21). If they did not believe the OT Scriptures, with their testimony to eternal life, hell, and resurrection, why would they believe another person’s testimony to those things? (CC p. 637)

goes to them – πορευθῆ—This hints that Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem was when the “new Moses” taught about the kingdom, even as the first Moses taught Israel during the wilderness wanderings. Now the rich man expects another journey to take place, an extraordinary one “from the dead” back to those who are living. (CC)

16:31 Another Lazarus (Jn 11) did return from the dead. But not all witnesses were moved (Jn 11:45–53). Repentance and faith are wrought through the Word of God, not dramatic experiences. “The reason some are not saved is as follows: They do not listen to God’s Word at all, but willfully despise it, plug their ears, and harden their hearts. In this way they block the ordinary way [Luke 16:29–31] for the Holy Spirit so He cannot perform His work in them. Or, when they have heard God’s Word, they make light of it again and ignore it. But their wickedness is responsible for this <that they perish>, not God or His election” (FC Ep XI 12). (TLSB)

do not hear...be convinced – ἰ ... οὐκ ἀκούουσιν, οὐδ’ ἐάν ... πεισθήσονται—This saying asserts refusal to hear in two circumstances, a “double condition, expressive of present fact (they do not listen to the law and the prophets) and future possibility (if someone rises from the dead)” (CC p. 632)

someone from the dead – ἀναστῆ—This verb is used of the resurrection of Jesus. (See Lk 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:26; 10:41; 13:33–34; cf. also Lk 9:8, 19; Acts 9:40; 14:20) Could this one who rises from the dead be a reference to Jesus? (CC p. 632)

Moreover, Jesus is clearly alluding to his own resurrection from the dead, and the hearer cannot help but think of the Emmaus story. Those two disciples knew about the empty tomb and the angels' words but were still downcast. But then they become enrolled into catechesis *on the road* when Jesus journeys from the dead to them and opens up "Moses and ... all the prophets" by interpreting them Christologically (Lk 24:27). This Jesus causes their hearts to burn (24:32), but their eyes are not opened to see the crucified and *risen* Christ before them. Only after he breaks bread—portending the eschatological banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are they able to see Jesus. At that moment, the Emmaus disciples enter into the ongoing feast; they receive a foretaste of the messianic banquet with Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. Their participation begins when they become hearers of the Word and comes to fulfillment in the breaking of the bread. The Pharisees need to become hearers of the Word and repentant guests at Jesus' Table. And to be hearers of the Word is to be drawn into God's Great Reversal in Jesus Christ. Through radical repentance and a violent break with the past, one enters the kingdom where one shows mercy as the Father in heaven has shown mercy. (CC pp. 637-638)

16:19–31 Jesus challenges the belief that earthly blessings are a sign of God's eternal favor. He teaches us to heed the Word of God now while faithful mercy can be shown, for this is God's good and gracious will. • Lord, teach me to read and trust in Your gift of Moses, the Prophets, and all faithful witnesses to the Gospel. May my tongue speak now of Your grace for all who have ears to hear. Amen. (TLSB)