

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Amos 6:1, 4-7; Psalm 146 (145); 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31

They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them

Luke 16:19 [Jesus said:]
“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his



sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24 He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ 27 He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house — 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ 29 Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’

30 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 listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This parable is the highpoint of the

teaching on wealth in chapters 15 and 16. The story is found only in Luke and shows signs of being edited by him so it seems to be pre-Lucan. Although, from the Latin, the rich man has a name (Dives), in reality Lazarus is the only character in such a story to receive a name (a name, moreover, which means “God helps”). Although the other Lazarus (John 11) also dies, there is really no connection at all, because of course that Lazarus comes back, unlike our man here! This type of story, contrasting the destinies of the rich and the poor, is known in Jewish and Egyptian literature of the period (see below).

KIND OF WRITING

The story is only apparently a parable, because it lacks the puzzle element of a real parable. Instead we have here an “example story”, an *exemplum* familiar from classical rhetoric. It has all the elements of an example story:

Exposition 19-22—two characters, two contexts (earth and heaven)

Argument 1 23ff—argument from reversal and finality of destiny

Argument 2 27ff—argument from sufficiency of the scriptures

Conclusion 31—both warning from the past and opening in the present

At one level, the story illustrates the Lucan Beatitudes. Notice that the attention has shifted at the end from the lives and

Thought for the day

Irony and sarcasm somewhat resemble each other, with some notable differences. Sarcasm, easily enough achieved, is often wounding. On the other hand, irony, using “cognitive dissonance”, prompts insight and triggers memories. There is a good example in today’s Gospel: “if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” Will they really? By the time of writing, Jesus himself had already risen—and still conversion was as remote as ever. With all our convictions and doctrines, what *is* holding us back?

Prayer

God of all life, you have given us the greatest assurance of your love in raising Jesus from death. Help us to live every day from your reassuring love.

destinies of the two characters to the steps that will lead to a happy outcome of your life. Jesus’ resurrection, of course, is in view, but as understood in the light of the Word of God. Luke 24 has much the same theme.

The theme of “reversal of fortune” was well-known in Egyptian and Greco-Roman stories. The story of Setme and Si-Osiris concludes thus: ‘*He who has been good on earth, will be blessed in the kingdom of the dead, and he who has been evil on earth, will suffer in the kingdom of the dead.*’

Curiously, there is a second parallel in a later second or third century work telling the story of two magicians who opposed Moses. One of the magicians, Jannes, dies and is summoned up by his surviving brother Jambres. The message from the dead to the living is stark: “*Make sure you do good in your life to your children and friends; for in the netherworld no good exists, only gloom and darkness.*” As the various comparisons make clear, the Lucan story in its richness is on an altogether higher, more complex level.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

I said: In the noontide of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of

Sheol for the rest of my years. (Isaiah 38:10)

For he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades in the lowest regions of the earth, and he brings up from the great abyss, and there is nothing that can escape his hand. (Tobit 13:2)

For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, “Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end, and no one has been known to return from Hades.” (Wisdom 2:1)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. (Luke 6:20–25)

‘For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ “Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.’ (Acts 2:27–31)

ST PAUL

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began

last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.

As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” (2 Corinthians 8:8–15)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 19 Purple suggests royalty; fine linen suggests Egyptian-style underwear, expensive and a special sign of wealth. J. Fitzmyer translates the last phrase thus: “splendidly making merry daily.”

Verse 20 The contrast could hardly be sharper. Lazarus is named and, as a result, is more personally real to the reader. In Luke, “poor” already means someone open to God.

Verse 21 Fell: i.e. not given! Dogs signify the outcast status of Lazarus. The Greek suggests “covered with sores.”

Verse 22 Both died, but one was “carried by angels” and the other “was buried”. A blunt contrast of destinies indeed! Cf. *Then people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and take their places at the banquet table in the kingdom of God.* (Luke 13:29 NET) *For if we so die, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us.* (4 Maccabees 13:17 NRSV)

Verse 23 Hades is used not to mean what we would call hell but rather the intermediately abode of the dead before final judgement. (cf. Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31).

Verse 24 The appeal is complex, moving from a general plea (mercy) through a specific request (water) to a motive (flames). For thirst, cf. *For just as the things that I have predicted await you, so the thirst and torment that are prepared await them.* (2Esdras 8:59 NRSV)

Verse 25 The response from Abraham comes in two parts. First there is the contrast between material blessings in this life and spiritual blessings in the life

to come. In the OT, the duty to care for the poor is clearly taught. Cf. the Beatitudes and Woes above.

Verse 26 The second response reflects the finality of destiny.

Verses 27-28 The rich man shows himself concerned for his family (as in similar stories from Egyptian and Jewish sources). He wishes Lazarus to be sent to make an impression on them.

Verse 29 Moses and the prophets, i.e., the Bible (cf. Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 26:22; 28:23).

Verse 30 So striking a proof would have to have an effect, the rich man thinks. The allusion here must be to Jesus’ resurrection and, therefore, this “application” reflects Christian tradition rather than the original story.

Verse 31 Because openness to the one leads to the other. In Luke 24, the risen Jesus uses precisely Moses and the prophets to teach the resurrection of the Messiah.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The first of the faults attributed to the rich man is his insensitivity to the abject poverty of those around him. When have you discovered that it is when you are aware of the needs of those around you and seek to make some response that you bring out the best in yourself?
2. The second fault attributed to the rich man is the way he ignored the word of God coming through Moses and the prophets. How have the gospels, the scriptures or your faith opened you up to a deeper and more satisfying perspective on life?
3. Some people look to the spectacular for a sign of God’s presence and action. For Jesus, the lessons we need are not to be sought in the spectacular, but in the ordinary things of everyday life. Where have you found sacraments of God’s presence in the world around you?

PRAYER

O God of justice, hear our cry and save us.

Make us heed your word to the prophets; rouse us to the demand of the gospel and impel us to carry it out.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Instead pursue righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness.

1 Tim 6:11 But you, as a person dedicated to God, keep away from all that. Instead pursue righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness. 12 Compete well for the faith and lay hold of that eternal life you were called for and made your good confession for in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you before God who gives life to all things and Christ Jesus who made his good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 to obey this command without fault or failure until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ 15 –whose appearing the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will reveal at the right time. 16 He alone possesses immortality and lives in unapproachable light, whom no human has ever seen or is able to see. To him be honour and eternal power! Amen.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In our third excerpt from 1 Timothy, the focus shifts to community issues and to leadership in particular. The qualities we hope for in those who lead us are always of interest.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

The advice given does not fit what the historical Paul might have said to historical Timothy. The impression given is that Paul is writing at the end of his life and he is advising a neophyte in leadership.

KIND OF WRITING

Vv.	1 TIMOTHY
1:1-2	Greeting
1:3-20	Introduction
2:1-6:19	Body of the letter
6:20-21	Conclusion

Subsections with the body of the letter:

- 2:1-15 Proper worship
- 3:1-13 Leadership
- 3:14-16 A creed
- 4:1-5 Later times predicted
- 4:6-6:2 Instructions for leaders
- 6:3-10 The opponents
- 6:11-19 Final exhortation

As is apparent, considerable space is given to leadership issues. Under the auspices of the name “Timothy”, the pastor addresses ordinary members of the congregation, the ordained ministers and the overall leadership. The focus in our short excerpt is firmly on the personal qualities and spiritual engagement of the “ordained” ministers.

RELATED PASSAGES

The verses immediately before give the context:

Those who long to be rich, however, stumble into temptation and a trap and many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils. Some people in reaching for it have strayed from the faith and stabbed themselves with many pains. (1 Tim 6:9–10)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 11 Note the very direct address: “you.” The preceding verses 9-10 illustrate what is meant. As well as that, the opponents have been characterised as money-grabbers, seeking personal financial improvement. To be a “man of God” is OT usage (e.g. Deut 33:1; 1 Sam 2:27; 9:6–7; 1 Kgs 13:1; 17:18 etc.). The qualities listed come up in the Pastorals as follows (with the exception of gentleness, unique to here in this form)

Righteousness (*dikaïosunē*): 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:16; 4:8; Titus 3:5
 Godliness (*eusebeia*): 1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6, 11; 2 Tim 3:5; Titus 1:1
 Faithfulness (lit. *pistis*, faith): 1 Tim 1:2, 4-5, 14, 19; 2:7, 15; 3:9, 13; 4:1, 6, 12; 5:8, 12; 6:10-12, 21; 2 Tim 1:5, 13; 2:18, 22; 3:8, 10, 15; 4:7; Titus 1:1, 4, 13; 2:2, 10; 3:15
 Love (*agapē*): 1 Tim 1:5, 14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim 1:7, 13; 2:22; 3:10; Titus 2:2
 Endurance (*hupomonē*): 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 3:10; Titus 2:2
 Gentleness: 1 Tim 6:11 (*praupathia*); 1 Tim 2:25 (*prautēs*).

Verse 12 The NET translation is not so good here. The NRSV reflects the Greek more accurately: Fight the good fight of the faith (1 Timothy 6:12 NRSV) The verb used is taken from the stadium and it means to struggle as in a contest. The athletic metaphor goes back to Paul

himself (1 Cor 9:24-27). Confession here means the confession of faith (*homologia*). The references seems to be to a “creed” used when he was appointed (see 1 Tim 1:18-19; 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:14). The “many witnesses” are, in fact, the whole community of believers. Eternal life is gift of God (2 Tim 1:9; cf. Rom 4:17; 9:11, 24; 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 5:24).

Verse 13 The very example of Jesus is invoked. The context of opposition is very much in mind here. The opening phrase “I charge you” would seem to come from a commissioning liturgy. In the pastorals, this very is found only in 1 Timothy, but its import is very clear (1 Tim 1:3; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17). God is the giver of life: Neh 9:6; Wis 16:13; Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; 1 Pet 3:18–19.

Verse 14 The church lives in the in-between time. Even though by this time the tension of the Second Coming must have significantly relaxed, the appearing (*epiphaneia*) is not forgotten in the Pastorals (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). Until the appearing probably does not mean that Second Coming was expected in the lifetimes of the recipient. “To obey” is literally “to keep”; in this context it connotes preservation and devotion to a tradition. It is likely that the “command” means the charge given upon public appointment as a minister.

Verse 15 The style “king of kings” is a biblical was of saying the highest king or lord. Cf. the Song of Songs.

Verse 16 The immortality of God in contrast with the opponents, who seemingly claimed that human souls were, of themselves, immortal. (Bearing in mind that immortality is not the same a resurrection.) For God’s immortality and invisibility see Exod 33:20 and Isa 6:1–5.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Do I live and carry through the commission given, in the community, to me?
2. Faith and ministry are always a struggle—what is it that keeps me going?

PRAYER

God, although immortal and invisible, you have disclosed yourself in Jesus and given us all, in him, victory over death. Help us to lay hold of your gifts that we may fight the good fight and invite others to the Gospel. Amen .

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory

Amos 6:1 Alas for those who are at ease in Zion,
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria,
the notables of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel resorts!

2 *Cross over to Calneh, and see;
from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are you better than these kingdoms?
Or is your territory greater than their territory,*

3 *O you that put far away the evil day,
and bring near a reign of violence?*

4 Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
5 who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
6 who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
7 Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Quite appropriately our reading comes from Amos, who was used last Sunday as well. If it is read well, the reading could have immense power.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

1:1-2 Context of ministry
1:3-2:16 Oracle against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah, and finally Israel
3:1-6:14 Invectives against specific groups of people.
7-9 Vision reports: locusts, fire, plumb line, summer fruit and YHWH at the altar.
8:4-14; 9:7-10 Oracles
9:11-15 Restoration of the house of David.

In 3:1-6:14, the prophet attacks specific groups.

KIND OF WRITING

The prophetic invective is presented as poetry, enriched by specific examples and illustrations. Vv. 1-7 constitute a unit on their own, with vv. 2-3 restored for completeness' sake. The full section is in three parts:

- I. Summons to mourning (v. 1)
- II. Call to react (v. 2)
- III. Tragedy described (vv. 3-7)

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan

who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, "Bring something to drink!" (Amos 4:1)

They do not know how to do right, says the Lord, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds. (Amos 3:10)

Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed. (Amos 3:12)

Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. (Amos 5:23)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verses 1 Amos is speaking to both Judah (Zion) and Israel (Samaria). Both had monarchies, which naturally attracted ambitious people. Once in power, such people could control taxation and influence the distribution of investment and the spread of wealth. The expression "at ease in Zion" sounds just decadent. Such people are called to a lament, to sing a funeral song.

Verses 2-3 Comparisons are made to show that they are no better than surrounding or subjugated states. The effect of the comparisons is to puncture Israelite pretensions to be different, to be the first and best. V. 3 may sound a bit

obscure to us. The context is divination and its use to avoid work on so-called unlucky days. The occult at the service of laziness is the double sin of Samaria.

Verse 4 We are meant to imagine wooden-frame bed, with ivory inlay. The eating of meat was infrequent in antiquity—the poor would have access only at major feasts, but the rich had meat every day. Thus gluttony was facilitated by ill-gotten wealth.

Verse 5 Having time on your hands is also a measure of disposable income. These people are living like royalty and waste their time indulging in their musical talents. David too was of that class, even before his becoming king.

Verse 6 Here Amos lampoons the debauchery of the nobility. They don't drink from cups but straight from the storage vessels. Anointing was common as it promoted hygiene. The best oils are not strictly needed for this purpose.

All the time, ruin is approaching as predicted in Leviticus: I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odours. I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheath the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste. (Leviticus 26:31-33)

Verse 7 "Therefore" introduces the judgment of YHWH on the fat aristocrats. Those who thought themselves "first" will indeed be the first to go into exile. The very last line is alliterative (a mnemonic device): *sar mizrah seruhim* lit. "the sprawlers' revelry is over" (NJB).

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Where have I experienced ostentatious excess—and it is not limited at all to the super-rich? What is my own practice of evangelical simplicity.

2. Inability or unwillingness to seeing how transient everything is also not confined to the very wealthy. Reading the signs of the times of the task of every believer.

PRAYER

God, you love the poor and call us in a special way to protect the oppressed.

Give us the simplicity and courage to live according to the values of the Kingdom and so draw other into your vision of renewed humanity. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Amos 6:1, 4-7; Psalm 146 (145); 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31

READINGS 1 AND 3

The culpable carelessness of the rich in Amos anticipates the chill indifference of Dives in the Gospel.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The psalm makes a good match: *It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind, who raises up those who are bowed down, the Lord, who protects the stranger and upholds the widow and orphan.* YHWH's traditional concern for the poor come to the fore.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Amos 6:1, 4-7

Social justice is an intimate part of our faith. Amos lampoons the rich for their ill-gotten wealth and their ostentatious excess.

Second reading

1 Timothy 6:1-11

What qualities do we look for in a leader and, in particular, in a pastor?

Gospel

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus tells a dramatic tale of reversal of fortune. It had, perhaps, even greater shock value in the past when material prosperity was regarded as a distinctive mark of God's blessing.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 30 September

St Jerome, priest and biblical scholar

Zechariah 8:1-8

In the time after the Exile, people needed encouragement. Zechariah's idyllic portrait may have kept them going. We today need such encouragement: If this seems a miracle to the remnant of this people (in those days), will it seem one to me?

Matthew 18:1-5, 10

The reading is special for the feast, chosen because it mentions the guardian angels, symbols of God's protecting providence

Tuesday 1 October

St Thérèse of Lisieux, virgin and doctor

Zechariah 8:20-23

Zechariah offers us a delightful portrait of faithful Jews attracting others to God. This is our calling as well today.

Luke 9:51-56

As Luke presents the story of Jesus, today's reading represents a turning point in the story. Begins here in 9:51 and reaches a climax fully nine chapters later in 19:41. Luke uses this journey to bring together extensive and profound teaching on discipleship.

Wednesday 2 October

The Holy Guardian Angels

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Continuing the theme of reconstruction, Nehemiah requests permission to return and to be involved. The attachment to the faith is very moving.

Matthew 18:1-5, 10

The Gospel is special for the feast and shows Jesus sharing the common Jewish teaching about guardian angels. In this culture, a child illustrates powerlessness rather than innocence.

Thursday 3 October

Bl Columba Marmion, abbot

Nehemiah 8:1-12

This scene is a very famous moment of reconsecration and renewal. Notice that Ezra gives the sense in Aramaic, evidently because the ordinary people no longer understood Hebrew.

Luke 10:1-12

The sending of the seventy(-two) is nowhere else reported in the Gospels, being unique to Luke. It is often thought to be an anticipation of the sending to the Gentiles, the second mission, in the Acts of the Apostles. In any case, it is not too different from the sending of the Twelve, also empowered to do *exactly what Jesus himself did*.

Friday 4 October

St Francis of Assisi

Baruch 1:15-22

(Baruch purports to be written at the

time of the Exile by Jeremiah's secretary. However, most scholars believe it was written in the second century BC.) Our reading today reflects back on the catastrophe of the Exile in Babylon. Consistent with other prophets, the people must take part the blame, even if outside forces—such as the mighty Babylonian Empire—were decisive. Something similar might be said about the church's reaction to recent crises: there are indeed outside forces but also internal culpability.

Luke 10:13-16

Jesus—in full prophetic mode—utters a sharp condemnation to some towns, because the failed to recognise the time of salvation. Rather than leave it safely in the past, we could ask, what would Jesus say today to us?



Saturday 7 October

Baruch 4:5-12, 27-29

There are two voices in this reading. At the start and at the finish, God speaks encouragingly to Israel. In the middle, Jerusalem addresses her neighbours. Again, a degree of responsibility is openly accepted.

Luke 10:17-24

The Seventy-two return rejoicing. More important is the prayer of Jesus, an exclamation of praise, which sounds like it might come from John's Gospel. The relationship may be the other way around: this "Johannine" moment may have given rise to the distinctive vocabulary of the Fourth Gospel.