

September 28, 2025

The Great Chasm and the Gate: The Poverty of Abundance

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Introduction

Jesus often taught in parables not to confuse us but to awaken us. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is one of the most sobering stories in all of Scripture. It confronts us with the image of a gate where a poor man lay, invisible to the rich man who feasted daily. When both die, a great chasm opens between them—an unbridgeable distance. The parable isn't just about the afterlife; it shows how our lives today create gates and chasms that shape our eternal destiny.

This parable of the rich man and Lazarus is often interpreted in moral terms. It is generally understood as teaching that we should help the poor, avoid greed, and similar virtues. However, it also reveals deeper insights into what thrownness means in life. Jesus shows how the norms of this world create two contrasting lifestyles that society designs and approves. The gap between them is so vast that one suffers while the other lives in luxury. The invisible gate that separates these two groups was never meant to be removed, and the specific positions of these figures are usually accepted as given. Let us explore how the symbolism of the gate, chasm, and places of residence strongly support the ideas of indulgence and suffering. Jesus invites us to

consider concepts such as place, territory, and hospitality as markers of identity—shaping how physical, social, and moral spaces determine who belongs, who is excluded, and how boundaries influence life before and after death.

This parable features various places: the rich man’s house, Lazarus’ spot at the gate, Abraham’s bosom, and the chasm. These are not just settings but active theological symbols: they represent relationships, power, inclusion, exclusion, and the consequences of how we treat “those outside our gate.”

Our theme, “The Great Chasm and the Gate: The Poverty of Abundance,” ties into these ideas: There are gates or thresholds we keep closed, there are places we stay comfortable in, and chasms that deepen when hospitality is refused.

1. How can we understand “Place” and Territoriality as exclusionary identity markers?

A “place” in Luke 16:19–31 is more than geography. It carries symbolic weight:

First, a Place is viewed as an identity: The wealthy man lives in luxury, in a house that represents separation and exclusivity. He ignored Lazarus's suffering. Lazarus lies at the gate, outside the privileged “place” of the rich man. He was a starving beggar, and dogs licked his sores. The wealthy man never bothered to attend to Lazarus’s needs.

Second, it acts as a territorial boundary that never allows Lazarus to cross: The rich man's house symbolizes an enclosed, controlled space. Any gate functions both as a boundary, keeping others out, and as a threshold, letting someone inside. However, the rich man's attitude makes it just a boundary, preventing Lazarus from entering.

Third, a place is either a space for hospitality or a refusal of it: Lazarus is denied entry, the gate is closed, and he is left uncared for. The palace of the rich man is not a welcoming place for Lazarus, the beggar. By refusing Lazarus' entry, it becomes an inhospitable location.

When we live in abundance and in privileged places, we may unintentionally participate in territorial systems that isolate, exclude, and ignore those "outside." The place that is safe for one person might be a place of exclusion for others.

2. How to reconstruct the Gate as the Threshold of Possibility

The gate (in the parable) symbolizes an opening. It functions as a possible entryway to compassion, sharing, and crossing the boundaries of rejection and exclusion. It marks a boundary between the inside and the outside.

The gate could have been a place of hospitality, caring, and presence by serving as a threshold. However, the wealthy man does not look beyond his comfort, and Lazarus was outside his view. The chance to welcome Lazarus, who was within the wealthy man's sight yet ignored, highlights the concept of thrownness.

Many gates are closed before us, and we have never bothered to open them. These gates can be social, economic, or cultural. Let's consider who our Lazaruses are outside our gates. Often, our gate is guarded by comfort, fear, prejudice, or indifference. These behaviors create a chasm.

3. What causes the great chasm?

The chasm results from self-centered abundance. The soul delights in this abundance, ignoring others' suffering. The illusion of enough causes this—believing “I have enough, so I need no one else.” It stems from the refusal to see the image of God in the poor.

However, the temporary divide we create in this world leads to an everlasting split in the life after death. The parties involved switch sides. Once death occurs, the places each person occupies become permanent, but their experiences are reversed: Lazarus is carried to Abraham's side, while the rich man is taken to “the place of torment.” Again, another divide, a huge chasm, impossible to cross. This chasm results from territoriality and a refusal of hospitality that the rich man practiced on earth. Lazarus did not take any initiative this time either; it was given to him as divine providence. It appears when boundaries are hardened. It serves as a reminder that how we treat “those outside” has eternal consequences.

4. Who was responsible for The Poverty of Abundance?

The wealthy man has plenty of food, clothing, comfort, and social status. However, he is lacking in compassion, awareness, and responsibility. He is morally and spiritually impoverished. Lazarus' poverty disappeared in comparison to the moral and spiritual poverty of the rich man.

In Luke's Gospel, "Wealth" is often seen not just as neutral possession but as something that carries responsibility and obligation. Jesus urges the rich to be more accountable, emphasizing that they should make their homes welcoming to everyone. That is, affluence is not meant for indulgence or as an object of display. Money corrupts the soul and becomes an object of worship. In the Lord's prayer, we are reminded of our daily bread, not the granaries filled to the brim. During the jubilee year, we are asked to redistribute our abundance and share our gifts with those waiting at the gate. Having no more than our daily bread symbolizes the Kingdom's ethics of hospitality and equality. It points toward a shared space of inclusion. Jesus warns us that money cannot build bridges but only erect dividing walls. An abundance of material wealth can give way to a poor heart to live with.

6. Today, we are called to open the gate before the chasm

The homeless, the excluded, and the discarded may passively accept their fate. They might even become accustomed to their suffering. However, that does not mean the wealthy can stay silent. The responsibility of opening the gate falls on those with

wealth. What are the gates in our lives that we value protecting? Gates that are not ready to open—like economic inequality, racial or cultural divides, and religious differences—can only be opened by those who hold power, position, status, and wealth. Kingdom hospitality can be practiced when money gives way to a responsible life driven by the passion to enable, share, accommodate, care for, and be just to those waiting to have the gate opened, seeing them as equals.

The urgency is to understand that once death happens — not necessarily physical death, but the death of opportunity, conscience, or relationships — some chasms will be closed. We can't cross them after that. The kingdom of God is where gates are torn down, chasms are connected, and the poor in spirit inherit the abundance of God's creation.

May we choose to see Lazarus at our gate. May we remove the gates of indulgence, the fear of losing our wealth when we want to share, and the pride of our abundance. And may we discover, in God's abundance, the wealth of generosity, gratitude, and love that never runs out. May God help us to see the suffering of Lazarus that we encounter in our lives, and enable us to let them in by opening the doors to life.

Amen.