

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

***Lazarus and the Six Brothers:  
Helping People in Need  
Luke 16:19-31***

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the “Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study”. That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session “Background” located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day’s study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

**Gathering Time Leader:**

**Bible Study Leader:**

**Worship Time Leader:**

Enlist children and/or youth, if possible, to read the Scripture reading at the beginning and ending of the Worship Time. Copies may be made from the material at the end of the session.

### **Music Sources:**

**How Deep is the Father's Love for Us**, *The Worship Hymnal* #101, CCLI #1558110

**How Great is Our God**, *The Worship Hymnal* #5, CCLI # 4348399

**Gathering Time:** (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Lazarus and the Six Brothers:  
Helping People in Need*****Focal Text**

Luke 16:19-31

**Background Text**

Luke 16:19-31

**Main Idea**

Failing to engage in actively helping people in need results in God's judgment.

**Question to Explore**

Is helping people in need unimportant, optional, or essential?

**Teaching Aim**

To lead the church to draw conclusions for their lives from comparing their actions to those of the rich man.

**Gathering together:**Sing **How Great is Our God**, *The Worship Hymnal* #5, CCLI # 4348399**First thoughts:**

Esther, who is Chinese, became a Christian in her university days. She is the only Christian in her family. Although she is an avid witness and church planter, she has not yet been able to win any of her family to Christ. This causes her great anguish and she asks her friends to join her in praying for her family.

Today we will study about a rich man who ignored God and his responsibility to his fellow man while he was alive. After death, he desired that his brothers be told of the consequences of ignoring God so that they might repent. This is one of the several teachings of this lesson.

Like Esther, many of us have loved ones who do not know Christ as Saviour. Like her, we should be concerned today for their salvation. The rich man could do nothing to help his brothers. We can.

### **Closing the Gathering Time:**

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

# 2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### ***Lazarus and the Six Brothers: Helping People in Need***

#### **Focal Text**

Luke 16:19-31

#### **Background Text**

Luke 16:19-31

#### **Main Idea**

Failing to engage in actively helping people in need results in God’s judgment.

#### **Question to Explore**

Is helping people in need unimportant, optional, or essential?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the church to draw conclusions for their lives from comparing their actions to those of the rich man.

### **Introduction to your personal study:**

Like many parables, this one contains several teachings. Since it is a familiar story to many, it needs to be read as if you had never read it before. Great themes of the Christian faith are contained in this story – the need for repentance, the imperative of caring for fellow human beings and the reality of an eternal existence in the presence of God or forever separated from him.

### **Background:**

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Jesus told stories to teach important lessons. His goal was not to entertain. But he did have to connect with his audience. Many of his stories relate to the common ordinary lives of the people. Today's story is similar to one that was popular in that day. It was an old Egyptian folktale of which there were variations in Palestine. The basic story line tells of the journey of the god Si-Osiris to the underworld where he observed the fate of a rich man and a commoner, portrayed as a reversal of fortunes, the rich man's funeral unattended and the commoner buried in great pomp.

This folk tale was brought to Israel by Alexandrian Jews, was altered, and became part of Jewish lore. In this altered story a rich tax collector by the name of Bar Ma'jan and a poor teacher of the law were buried. After death, the teacher of the law strolled along the broad streams of paradise while the tax collector standing next to the water was unable to reach it to quench his thirst (Kistemaker, S. J. *The Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980, p. 236).

## **Focusing on the Meaning:**

A rich man and Lazarus, the poor man, are described and events of their lives and their death are clear. But eventually the focus changes to the five brothers of the rich man and we are left asking ourselves if there is any hope that these five brothers will repent and avoid the fate of the rich man.

The story begins in the way that is peculiar to Luke, ***"There was a rich man...."*** Luke 16:19. In Luke 15:11, he said, ***"There was a man who had two sons..."*** and in 16:1, ***"There was a rich man who had a manager..."*** This story begins even more descriptively, ***"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day."***

Any writer on earth would like to write a sentence which tells so much. We have an immediate and complete picture of this man. He dresses in purple – the color of royalty. His underclothing was of fine linen – imported from Egypt and available to only the rich. Every day he lived in luxury. Apparently, he did not have to go off to work. His time was his to enjoy his riches. That is what he did with his life.

We will learn more about this man later in the story. He was a Jew for he called out ***"Father Abraham, have pity on me"*** (verse 24) which leads us to assume that he understood the Jewish teachings about caring for the poor and needy (Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 10:18-19; Deuteronomy 15: 7-8)) and about the destination of the wealthy who boast in their wealth (Psalm 49). He must have assumed that his Jewish heritage was sufficient for him to receive whatever benefits would be coming to the Jew in the afterlife.

However, the succinct statement ***"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day"*** paints a clear picture of a man who lived only for himself.

Another clear picture is drawn of the second important character in this parable. ***“At his gate was laid a beggar names Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.”***

Even though this was an “invisible man” as far as the rich man was concerned, he is given a name in the Biblical account. His name is Lazarus, the abbreviated form of Eleazar which means “God helps”. Eleazar was one of the sons of Moses’ brother, Aaron, and was the chief leader of the Levites. He was appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the sanctuary (Numbers 3:32; 4:16).

Lazarus was a beggar living in abject poverty. His body was covered with sores which the stray dogs of the city would come and lick. These dogs were not pets and their intention was not to bring relief. It was an ultimate form of helplessness to lie where the dogs could lick his sores and be unable to ward them off.

He was hungry all of the time. He would have eaten the scraps of food which were swept from the dining room floor and were distributed to the dogs and beggars outside, but was unable to reach the scraps before they were eaten by others. The bread here was bread used to wipe the fingers of the people eating the food inside. Cutlery and napkins were not in use – people used bread and fingers to get the food they wanted. This bread was thrown under the table and eventually swept away. Lazarus would have been glad to eat even this bread.

Death came and put an end to Lazarus’ suffering. Although no fancy funeral occurred, God’s angels came and carried him to Abraham’s side. ***“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side”*** (verse 22). The term holpos (bosom) may be understood as an oriental expression for reclining at a feast or supper (John 13:23). It may also describe intimate fellowship (John 1:18) (Kistemaker, p. 238). The picture is clear that Lazarus was given a place of highest honour next to the father of believers.

This passage remind us of words of Psalm 91 ***“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone”*** (verses 1-2, 11-12).

***“The rich man also died and was buried”*** (verse 22). The same verse tells us of Lazarus’ death and of the rich man’s death. Though one would assume that an elaborate funeral took place, there is no mention of it. Instead the scripture text leads immediately into the commentary of his condition after death. ***“In hell (Greek, Hades) where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire”*** (verse 24).



The rich man knows Abraham and hopes that Abraham will help him. He mentions Lazarus by name. All of the days when Lazarus laid by his front gate needing help, he took no notice of him. Yet Lazarus was well enough known to him that now he calls him by name. This adds another layer to the unconcern that we had seen exhibited before. This beggar was not living in a faraway country. He did not speak a foreign language or worship another God. This was a man who was a fellow Jew and he had a name, Lazarus, which was known to the rich man.

But it is Abraham, not Lazarus, who responds. ***“Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us”.***

Abraham acknowledges the rich man’s Jewish heritage, by addressing him as Son. He also addresses a common Jewish understanding which expresses itself in modern day thinking as well. Jesus’ audience, or at least a significant portion of it, would have been steeped in the belief that riches were a blessing for obedience, with suffering a punishment for sin. Even though much human suffering is a result of poor choices made; there is sufficient evidence all around us that human suffering often results from causes beyond an individual’s control.

Abraham also states that between the place where he and Lazarus were abiding and the place where the rich man was there was ***“A great chasm fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”***

At this point, the rich man seems to accept the reality and finality of his condition. Now he asks another favour. Again, he wants Lazarus to do something for him. How blind he continues to be. He never did anything for Lazarus although to do so would have cost him very little. But he expects Lazarus to be the instrument of his wishes now. Perhaps this is a clear example of how poorly prepared such a person would have been to live in God’s presence throughout eternity. His mind was so inward-focused; his life so self-centered, that he would have had little capacity to enjoy fellowship with Abraham, Lazarus and with God himself. Whatever else we may understand about hell, we understand the reality that God is not there. Those who spend an eternity in hell will be left with their own selfish thoughts and desires which never satisfied on earth will certainly not be satisfied in hell.

However, to the rich man’s credit, he does think of his brothers on earth. ***“Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.***

***Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them’***

***‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent’***

***He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’”*** (verses 27-31).

The key word here is “repent”. Jesus has been preaching repentance all throughout his ministry and on this trip to Jerusalem, he emphasizes it once again. The brothers need to repent. Perhaps they lived the same selfish life as did the rich man. Whatever their life was like, the man in torment realized that they needed to repent. He now realizes that he failed to repent.

He is sure that they would listen to someone returning from the dead. How easily he has forgotten that he had no eyes or ears for Lazarus who daily gave him the opportunity to express the teachings of the Lord. Why would his brothers be impressed or even believe that Lazarus had returned from the dead? They would most likely continue their happy, carefree life.

But, perhaps, the sudden death of their brother caused them to pause. Maybe they did begin to consider the brevity of life and their responsibility to others and to God. Maybe they could repent.

Abraham says that with the witness of Moses and the prophets they can be called to repentance. A miraculous sign would have little impact if they were not sensitive to the message already available to them.

Actually, Jesus raised another man named Lazarus from the dead (John 11: 1-43) and immediately after the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. ***“What are we accomplishing?” they asked. ‘Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”***

***So from that day on they plotted to take his life*** (John 11:47-50; 53).

Jesus’ own death, burial and resurrection was rejected by the religious leaders of the Jewish people and continues to be rejected by many people in the world today. Abraham knew that it would take more than someone returning from the dead to convince the rich man’s brothers to repent.

## **Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:**

There are significant teachings in this parable. Here are some of them. You may cover most of them as you discuss the passage. Your sensitivity to the needs of your group will lead you to decide if some need to be reemphasized.

1. There is a great gulf fixed between the saved and lost and this condition is unchangeable. Our destiny is fixed by our choices in this life, and there is no chance to reverse this choice after death.

2. Earthly choices determine eternal destiny, and earthly inequalities are adjusted in the next life. This truth does not give Christians liberty to fail to try to alleviate the inequalities in this life. Lazarus' suffering was real and horrible here on earth and it did not have to be. Simple, human kindness could have alleviated some of his pain even if his illness could not be cured.

3. God has given ample light and ample warning to every man on earth to seek eternal things. The rich man's request that Lazarus go to his brothers was in reality a complaint against God that there was not sufficient warning about eternity. Paul makes clear in Romans that the heathen, who do not have the written revelation, nevertheless are without excuse, because God has given them the light of nature, and they are sinning against this light in not seeking God (Romans 1:20-21). These wealthy Jewish men had access to the words of Moses and the prophets and to the teachings of the rabbis and other religious leaders. They chose to ignore God's teachings.

4. The rich man was not condemned to an eternity without God because of his wealth. He had chosen to ignore God and his commands on earth and his condemnation was a result of that choice. Lazarus was not resting with Abraham because he was poor and needy. Although the Biblical account does not specify his relationship with God, it leaves no doubt that it was real – so real that the angels carried him to heaven at his death.

5. Like the rich man, most of us have people close to us and we know of people far away whose suffering we could help to alleviate. We probably are not living a rich and luxurious life style, but we do let the tasks and cares of daily life make us blind to those who God has placed in our path to help. We cannot let people become 'invisible' to us.

### **For Personal Reflection:**

**What have I learned from this study?**

**What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

**What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***Lazarus and the Six Brothers: Helping People in Need***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

#### **Focal Text**

Luke 16:19-31

#### **Background Text**

Luke 16:19-31

#### **Main Idea**

Failing to engage in actively helping people in need results in God's judgment.

#### **Question to Explore**

Is helping people in need unimportant, optional, or essential?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the church to draw conclusions for their lives from comparing their actions to those of the rich man.

#### **Connect with Life:**

Tell the group: This story is as current as today's newspaper. We are aware today of the needs of people all around the world. We hear daily of earthquakes, tornados and hurricanes. Only last weekend in the city where this writer lives, 50 adults gathered for training in Disaster Response. They are ready and willing to help in time of crisis. Their commitment is admirable. Sometimes because of the constant awareness of need, we can become deaf to its demands on our lives. We cannot do everything so we may do nothing.

Hopefully, our attitude never becomes like that of the rich man in today's parable. There were undoubtedly many poor people in the city where he lived and he ignored their needs. He even ignored the desperately ill and hungry man who daily sat near his door begging for the crumbs from his table.

## **Guide the Study:**

Introduce the study by discussing the fact that Jesus is using a story already known to his listeners to teach important lessons. Emphasize that although much of the story takes place focusing on the afterlife, the teaching needs to be seen in light of our present life.

Ask someone to read Luke 15:11, 16:1 and Luke 16:19.

Encourage participation with this question: What is similar in these three stories? (Luke begins with "There was a man...")

Have someone reread Luke 16:19.

Ask: What kind of description would you give of this man based on this verse?

Have someone read Luke 16:20-21.

Now ask: What kind of description would you give of Lazarus from this verse?

Comment on the fact that the dogs which licked his sores were stray dogs, often vicious. Lazarus would have been helpless to avoid their licking his sores. This was an ultimate degradation. Dogs had no favoured position in Jewish society.

Discuss the meaning of the name Lazarus. (God helps.)

Ask: When Lazarus died, what happened?

Say: See Luke 16:22.

Explain that Abraham's side would signify God's presence. He was in a place of comfort and ease.

Search out an answer to: What happened when the rich man died?

Comment: There is no indication of a lavish funeral though that must have occurred. All that is important is that he was buried and, in hell, he asks for help.

Ask: What kind of help did the rich man ask for? Read verse 24. How does this compare to the help that Lazarus needed, but did not receive from the rich man on earth?

Encourage an answer to this: Why does Abraham say it is impossible for Lazarus to help? (A great chasm has been fixed between heaven and hell.)

Add: Was the rich man in hell because of his riches? (No, he was there because he had ignored his relationship with God which included caring for his fellow man. He was a Jew in heritage only.)

Then ask: Why do you think Lazarus was with Abraham?

Depending on their response, you might say: It was not because he was poor and needy in life, but because of his relationship to God. Jesus does not tell us about that relationship. We assume it because at his death the “**angels carried him to Abraham’s side**” (verse 22).

Comment that Jewish people often thought that riches were a blessing for obedience and suffering a punishment for sin.

Encourage thinking on this: In what ways does that belief express itself today?

Ask: What does the rich man ask in verse 27? (To send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his five brothers to repent.)

Look for an answer to this: Why does Abraham not grant that request? Have someone read verses 29-31.

Comment that the resurrection of another Lazarus recorded in John 11:1-43 only served to make the Jewish religious leaders more anxious to get rid of Jesus. Have someone read John 11: 47-50; 53.

Ask: How have people through the ages reacted to the news of the resurrection of Jesus?

Then encourage a brief discussion on this: How do they react today?

## Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

There are significant teachings in this parable. Here are some of them. Summarize and discuss as time allows:

1. There is a great gulf fixed between the saved and lost and this condition is unchangeable. Our destiny is fixed by our choices in this life, and there is no chance to reverse this choice after death.
2. Earthly choices determine eternal destiny, and earthly inequalities are adjusted in the next life. This truth does not give Christians liberty to fail to try to alleviate the inequalities in this life. Lazarus' suffering was real and horrible here on earth and it did not have to be. Simple, human kindness could have alleviated some of his pain even if his illness could not be cured.
3. God has given ample light and ample warning to every man on earth to seek eternal things. The rich man's request that Lazarus go to his brothers was in reality a complaint against God that there was not sufficient warning about eternity. Paul makes clear in Romans that the heathen, who do not have the written revelation, nevertheless are without excuse, because God has given them the light of nature, and they are sinning against this light in not seeking God (Romans 1:20-21). These wealthy Jewish men had access to the words of Moses and the prophets and to the teachings of the rabbis and other religious leaders. They chose to ignore God's teachings.
4. The rich man was not condemned to an eternity without God because of his wealth. He had chosen to ignore God and his commands on earth and his condemnation was a result of that choice. Lazarus was not resting with Abraham because he was poor and needy. Although the Biblical account does not specify his relationship with God, it leaves no doubt that it was real – so real that the angels carried him to heaven at his death.
5. Like the rich man, most of us have people close to us and we know of people far away whose suffering we could help to alleviate. We probably are not living a rich and luxurious life style, but we do let the tasks and cares of daily life make us blind to those who God has placed in our path to help. We cannot let people become "invisible" to us.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.



# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### ***Lazarus and the Six Brothers: Helping People in Need*** Luke 16:19-31

**A youth will lead the following activity and comments.** No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

#### **Making a Difference**

Fifty years ago, a young woman helped to start a church in Anchorage, Alaska. She spent a fun few weeks helping clean and paint the building which had been purchased for the church. She and another young woman knocked on doors to invite people to the new church. It was difficult to tell people the exact location of the building and she jokingly said to the pastor, "We need something that would make the church easy to identify. We need a pink steeple!" Imagine her amazement the following day when she returned from visiting in the community to find that the church had a pink steeple. From then on it was easy to invite people to 'the church with the pink steeple'. The church grew and outgrew the pink steeple. This summer, that woman and her husband hope to drive to Alaska to see many beautiful things and to enjoy a visit to that church which still ministers in that community.

What are you doing this summer that you might want to remember fifty years from now as having made a difference in peoples' lives?



**Worship Time** (Suggested time: 30 minutes)

***Lazarus and the Six Brothers:  
Helping People in Need  
Luke 16:19-31***

**Beginning the Service:**

Sing **How Deep is the Father's Love for Us**, *The Worship Hymnal* #101, CCLI #1558110

**Scripture reading from Psalm 91: 1, 2, 11, 12, 15 KJV**

***First Reader:***

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

***Second Reader:***

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God; in him will I trust.

***First Reader:***

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

***Second Reader:***

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him.

**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

Uzbekistan has sentenced a Baptist arrested in January, 2010 to 10 years in prison on drug charges that fellow Baptists insist are fabricated. Fellow church members described Tohar Haydarov, 27, as “a man with a pure conscience and an honest Christian” and claimed he was set up for arrest because of his religious convictions.

Uzbekistan’s 1998 religion law allows only registered religious organizations to worship. Haydarov belongs to the Baptist Council of Churches, a group that refuses to register its congregations within the former Soviet Union and advocates strict separation of church and state.

Uzbekistan’s constitution officially guarantees religious freedom, but minority religious groups say the law has increasingly been used to suppress human rights and religious freedom in a country that is 84 percent Muslim, 15 percent non-religious and 1 percent Christian.

## Sharing Guide:

**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God’s call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.**

## The First and Greatest Commandment and the Second Which is Like It

Matthew 22:37-40

***Jesus replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” RSV***

***Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence’. This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself’. These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and Prophets hangs from them.” (The Message)***

In this passage in Matthew the Pharisees had tried to trap Jesus by asking him about whether one should pay taxes to Cesar or not. Later, the Sadducees approached him.

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***Lazarus and the Six Brothers: Helping People in Need – 10-30-10-en***

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The Sadducees did not believe in the possibility of resurrection, but they asked Jesus a question about what life would be like at the resurrection. They thought the question would help trap Jesus.

All of this fits with what had been recorded earlier in Matthew 21:45-46, “ ***When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.***”

Finally, one of the Pharisees, an expert in the law, tested him with the question, “***Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?***”

This seemed to be a safe way to get Jesus in trouble. Of the many commandments in the Law, which would he choose? How could he possibly satisfy all of the educated Jews who had spent a lifetime studying the law and the prophets.

But Jesus was not to be trapped. The first commandment, he said, was to love God and the second was to love one’s neighbour. Only when we fulfill these commandments will the many regulations of the Jewish faith have any importance.

Jesus’ statement about the first and second commandments speaks to our study today about the rich man and Lazarus.

That the rich man had failed to keep the second commandment to love his neighbour as himself is obvious by the gross neglect of a very needy man who daily lay by his doorstep. He ignored him when to have given him food, shelter and care for his wounds would have cost him so very little. Jesus emphasizes that the second commandment is like the first.

The second commandment mirrors the first in the passion involved. We are to love God with heart, soul and mind. That is, loving God involves our whole being—everything we are. It involves feelings and emotions, spirituality and intellect. John Peterson states in *The Message* that we are to love the Lord with all our passion and prayer and intellect.

The radical message of Christ—which has never been fully understood or lived by those of us who follow him—teaches that loving God is what we do and what we are. It involves our thoughts, time and energy every day all day. How unlike our scheduling efforts to find time to get to church or to pray or to visit a sick friend or invite a lost person to have a meal in our home.

And in the second commandment Jesus demands the same kind of passion and commitment. Out of our love for God comes our love for our neighbour—our concern for others. In fact it is only our love for God that makes that love possible, for we are in our very nature selfish and self-centered. Even at our best we find it hard to care for very many people. We do a pretty good job of watching out for our families and a few close friends, but beyond that we haven’t the time, energy, or inclination.

We are very much like the rich man dressed in purple who lived luxuriously every day. We find it easy to ignore the needy around us.

The reason the rich man was alienated from God in eternity was that he alienated himself from God in his earthly life. He did not love and care for Lazarus because he did not love and care for God.

And it was that for which he needed to have repented. It was that failure to love God that he wished his brothers to acknowledge and to repent.

### **Call to Commitment:**

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is not just an interesting story. It is a mirror in which we can and must examine our own commitment and love for God and how that love for God leads us to care for others. For each one of us that examination will have different implications. For some, it will mean true repentance for failing to commit our lives to Christ and to the Father. For others, it will mean a radical restructuring of our commitments and priorities so that there is time to get to know God better and to serve his people more. For some it will be a call to seek out those who need to hear the message of repentance—our five brothers who do not yet believe.

### **Concluding the Service:**

**You may want to repeat the Scripture reading used at the beginning of the Worship Time.**

If possible, use children or youth to read the Scripture. Give copies of the reading to them ahead of time so they can practice and so they realize the importance of the reading to the worship experience.

**Scripture reading from Psalm 91: 1, 2, 11, 12, 15 KJV**

***First Reader:***

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

***Second Reader:***

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God; in him will I trust.

***First Reader:***

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

***Second Reader:***

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him.