

**Overall Goal:** The overall goal for all the lessons by Fig Tree Ministries is to help people deepen their understanding of the biblical text.

**Class Learning Objectives:** Understanding Jesus’ warning to the Priests/Levites through the Rich Man and Lazarus parable.

**Cultural Background:** The first century in Israel was a tumultuous time. With Rome's help, the Priests/Levites held political power and wealth at the expense of the “people of the land.” Jesus is extremely critical of the priesthood and the corruptions that had permeated the Temple's worship operations. So much of Jesus’ ire is directed at the priests who were supposed to reflect God to the people of Israel (see our video of Mark 12:1-12 – The Parable of the Wicked Tenants).

**1. Review:**

- Jesus uses the framework of common stories that his audience would be familiar with.
- **Role reversal:** the rich vs. the poor.
- **Message from beyond the grave:** a message of changing your ways (repent) or pay the consequences.

**2. Review of the Characteristics of a Parable:**

1. <b>Story</b> – stories captivate, inspire, and can transform us.
2. <b>Fiction</b> – not intended to relate a set of historical events
3. <b>Carry Truth</b> – the story itself carries the truth inside of it – even though it is fictional
4. <b>Jesus adds twist/shock</b> – Jesus often shocks his listeners by adding a twist for emphasis

Parables are an effective way to communicate a “Truth” that your opponent would rather not hear.  
 - the story provides a means for **self-discovery** of the truth principle.

5. Old Testament – Jesus relies heavily upon them. We must look for details from OT
6. Cultural Beliefs – Jesus speaks in cultural terms that may not be familiar to us.

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### 3. Main emphasis of this parable:

- Directed at the **Priests** (and **Levites**)
- An element of God's Justice
- An emphasis on the responsibility of those with wealth and power to the community.
- Rich v. Poor and how people use their wealth is a common theme throughout Luke.

### 4. Priests and Levites

- Purple and Fine Linen – Exodus 28:5
- The Priests were wealthy—held political power as well as religious authority.
- Priests and Levites of the **Sadducee** sects of Judaism
  - No Resurrection
  - All justice in this life.
  - Only believed Torah (Genesis – Deuteronomy) as God's words – not Prophets.

### 5. Lazarus

- Lazarus is a first-century Greek variant of the name **Eliezer**.<sup>1</sup>
- Eliezer = Abraham's servant (a gentile) who would have inherited Abraham's blessings
  - Genesis 15:2
  - Eliezer of Damascus

### 6. "Abraham's bosom?"

- Isaiah 25:6-8 – a banquet will be served at the end of times.
- Abraham – as the father of the faith, will sit at the seat of honor (oldest guest)
- Matthew 8:11-12 (after a gentile demonstrates faith in God)
- Luke 13:-28-30
- 4 Maccabees 13:17 (written in the latter half of 1<sup>st</sup>-century or beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup>) – regarding enduring suffering in this life

If we die this way, **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** will give us a warm welcome, and all the ancestors will praise us.

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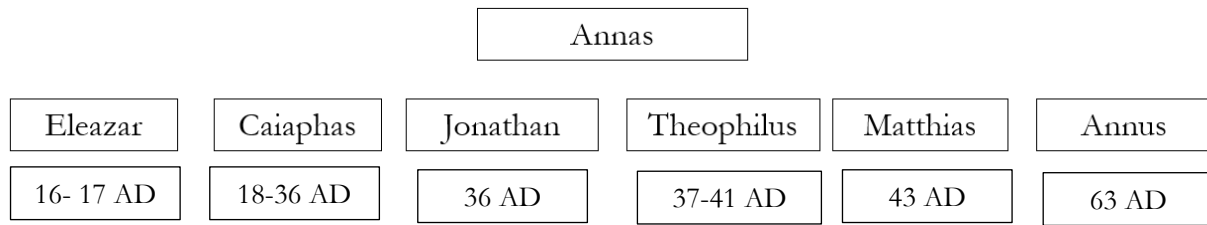
<sup>1</sup> Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity: Palestine 330 Bce - 200 Ce*

7. **Lazarus = 2<sup>nd</sup> guest of honor**

- Banquets celebrated on a triclinium – a reclining table. Recline on your left arm.
- John 13:23 (NASB) – John reclined in Jesus’ bosom.
- Instead of the Priests – Lazarus, a gentile, is given the most honored seat.

8. **“Five Brothers” – Luke 16:27-28 (two different approaches)**

- Levi – how many brothers did Levi have from his mother, Leah?
  - Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.
- Genesis 35:23
- In Jesus’ day, the High Priest was **Caiaphas**
- Caiaphas father-in-law was **Annas** (Luke 3:2)



- Caiaphas – had “five brothers” who would all be High Priest.
- Annas remained highly influential politically by using his sons/son-in-law as “puppet” High Priests.
- If there is one individual we can identify as the “Rich Man,” it would be Caiaphas.

**Faith Principle:** The kingdom of God is manifested here on earth when those who have power or wealth *choose* to use it to alleviate the suffering of those who are not in power. Part of God’s standard of judgment towards us is how we used the resources (power or monetary wealth) that were given to us (Luke 16: 10-15).

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