

Luke 16:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

Analysis

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. Lazarus' degradation continues its vivid description. He 'desired to be fed' (ἐπιθυμῶν χορτασθῆναι, epithymōn chortasthēnai, 'longing to be satisfied') with mere 'crumbs' (ψιχίων, psichion)—bread pieces used by diners to wipe their hands, then discarded. The rich man feasted sumptuously (v. 19) while Lazarus starved at his gate, hoping for garbage. The verb chortasthēnai (χορτασθῆναι) means 'to be filled, to be satisfied'—even discarded scraps would have satisfied his desperate hunger.

The final indignity: 'the dogs came and licked his sores' (καὶ οἱ κύνες ἐρχόμενοι ἐπέλειχον τὰ ἔλκη αὐτοῦ, kai hoi kynes erchomenoi epeleichon ta helkē autou). Dogs in Jewish culture were unclean scavengers, not beloved pets. That dogs had access to Lazarus while the rich man ignored him underscores complete abandonment. Some interpreters suggest the dogs' licking provided minor relief (saliva has mild antibacterial properties), but more likely it pictures degradation—Lazarus was too weak to drive them away. He lay helpless, ignored by the wealthy, attended only by unclean animals.

This description sets up the great reversal in eternity. The rich man who refused Lazarus earthly bread would beg unsuccessfully for a drop of water (v. 24). Lazarus who received only dogs' attention on earth would receive angels' escort to Abraham's bosom (v. 22). Earthly status means nothing; divine justice rectifies all.

Historical Context

In ancient Mediterranean culture, beggars depended entirely on others' charity. Lazarus positioned at the rich man's gate hoped for scraps from feasts. The 'crumbs' (ψίχια, psichia) were likely pieces of bread used as napkins to wipe hands during meals, then thrown to the floor or discarded. That Lazarus desired even these reflects extreme poverty and hunger. Dogs roaming streets were wild scavengers, unlike modern domesticated pets—they were despised and ceremonially unclean. Jewish writings often used 'dogs' as an insult (Philippians 3:2, Revelation 22:15). The image of dogs having more compassion (even inadvertently through licking sores) than the rich man who passed daily indicts religious pretension that ignores suffering neighbors.

This parable confronts prosperity theology that views wealth as divine blessing and poverty as divine curse. Lazarus represents the godly poor who suffer unjustly in this world but will be vindicated in eternity. The rich man represents those who live only for this world, ignoring both God and neighbor, and will face eternal consequences.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Lazarus' longing for mere 'crumbs' while the rich man feasted expose the sin of indifference to others' suffering?
2. What does the dogs' presence—providing more 'care' than the rich man—reveal about religious pretension divorced from compassion?
3. Who are the 'Lazarus' figures in your life longing for crumbs while you feast, and how should this parable change your response?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἐπιθυμῶν χορτασθῆναι ἀπὸ τὰ ψιχίων τὰ
And desiring to be fed from which the crumbs which
G2532 G1937 G5526 G575 G3588 G5589 G3588

πιπτόντων ἀπὸ τὰ τραπέζης τὰ πλουσίου· ἀλλὰ
fell from which table which the rich man's moreover
G4098 G575 G3588 G5132 G3588 G4145 G235

καὶ τὰ κύνες ἐρχόμενοι ἀπέλειχον τὰ ἔλκη αὐτοῦ
And which the dogs came and licked which sores his
G2532 G3588 G2965 G2064 G621 G3588 G1668 G846

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 15:27 (Parallel theme): And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org