

Sermon Luke 16:1-15, 19-31 - *The rich man and Lazarus (and the shrewd manager)*

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(Picture – warning – cliff)

We're often confronted with choices in life.

- Maybe a simple choice like what we're having for dinner.
- Maybe a serious choice like the choice of career.

A lot of beliefs hinge on these moments of choice – for example: Abortion and Euthanasia. With a lot of these choices, you have to choose. You can't go in BOTH directions. And you can't always ***change your mind*** after you've made the choice.

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16 is about the choices we make when it comes to using our wealth. Jesus is showing us what is beyond death. He's showing us that the choices we make in this world cannot be changed after we die.

And this story comes in the middle of lots of 2 directional stories.

Chapter 15 has the stories of the lost and found sheep, the lost and found coin, and the lost and found son.

Chapter 17 is the story of the healing of the 10 lepers. 9 lepers ignore Jesus after he heals them. Only 1 leper responds by praising God.

Chapter 18 is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying. One went home right with God, one didn't.

These are all stories of people going ONE WAY or THE OTHER.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is another story about 2 people going in 2 directions because of the choices they make in this life.

The rich man had very expensive clothes. He lived in luxury every day.

Lazarus was a beggar. He lived on the ground every day.

Every day he lay at the gate of the rich man. He longed to eat scraps from the rich man's table. He had sores all over him and the dogs would come and lick his sores.

This is the only parable where Jesus gives a name for one of the people involved. He names the beggar "Lazarus", which means: "God helps him". This man had nothing, but **God** was his helper. This is significant because of what happens next:

Both men died.

The angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's side in heaven.

The rich man was tormented in hell.

Jesus tells us two important things:

1. **This life on earth is temporary.**
2. **Judgment is eternal.** And it is **heaven or hell.**

The rich man is in hell and he sees Lazarus with Abraham in heaven.

He cries out for help. He says to them: *“Have pity on me! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony!!”*

And Abraham says “No”

1. First he says to the rich man – “You had everything in your earthly life. Lazarus had nothing. Now HE is comforted and YOU are in agony.”

Your positions have been switched around. Your wealth in this world was temporary. Lazarus’ pain in this world was temporary. But now your new positions are eternal.

2. Second, Abraham says “There is a **huge chasm** between you and him. No one can ever cross over. There is no changing directions **after** you leave this world.

This life on earth is temporary. But judgment is eternal. And it is heaven or hell.

But do you know what is REALLY sad about this situation?

The rich man RECOGNISES Lazarus. And he **should** recognise Lazarus. Lazarus laid at his gate every day. The rich man saw him every day. The rich man ignored him every day.

But maybe we feel sorry for this rich man. Maybe we want God to give him a second chance. This is why Jesus tells this story. He wants US to understand very clearly:

1. **This life is temporary,** and
2. **Judgment is eternal: Heaven or hell**

But the rich man cries out again to Abraham:

“At least send Lazarus back to warn my 5 brothers about hell!”

And Abraham says **“No more warnings”.**

1. First, They have Moses and the prophets.

They already have God’s message. They already know what God expects of them.

But the rich man says – *“They’re not listening to Moses and the prophets, but they’ll listen if someone comes back from the dead!”*

2. Abraham says: No they won’t.

Even if someone rises from the dead, they won’t listen.

THIS is the heart of the parable.

Jesus is about to die and rise again. Abraham is saying that even a man rising from the dead will not **convince** people to repent of their sin. Even miracles will not change our **heart**. Jesus says the same thing back in Luke 11:29 –

- ***“This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.”***

What is the sign of Jonah? God sent Jonah to tell the Ninevites to repent. This was the sign of Jonah. Repentance. This is the sign that people need. We need to say sorry to God and repent of our sin.

And what Abraham is saying to the rich man is that his brothers wouldn't listen to a man coming back from the dead. They need to repent. And no miracle is going to change their heart.

- **Miracles**

I once knew a man many years ago who had an inoperable brain tumour. He had only months to live. He came to our church for help. And he ended up putting his trust in Jesus. He was converted. Praise God. But then he happened to be miraculously healed as the church was praying for him - his brain tumour disappeared! There was no medical explanation. He only had a few months to live, but now he was completely healed.

Two months later, he gave up his faith. And he walked away from Jesus. Even his miracle healing did not change his heart.

Miracles can change our minds about things. But they won't change our heart. A heart change happens when we truly repent of all our sin and fully trust in Jesus for our forgiveness. And that happens **not** when we see God do an amazing thing over there or over here... but when God does an amazing thing in **here**, in our heart.

- **The rich man and us**

This parable is about a particular sin of the rich man that we are all in danger of. A particular sin of his heart. Why was the rich man condemned? Not because he was rich. Not because he had an easy life.

He was condemned because he stepped over Lazarus every day and did nothing. He had great wealth, and he used it only for himself.

The rich man faced the eternal judgement of hell because his heart belonged to the **world**, and not God. He put his money where his heart was. With himself. He helped himself. He lived for himself. He looked after himself. He trusted himself.

And we can be like the rich man - when we put our trust in our self and in our worldly wealth instead of trusting God.

- **Our spiritual name needs to be “Lazarus” – “God helps me”.**

We need to depend on God. Every thing that we have comes from him and belongs to him, and we are looking after it for him. And therefore... we should always be thinking about how we can use it for him. Not just for ourselves.

God was Lazarus' helper. But you might think that God didn't look after him much. He was a poor beggar with a horrible life! But it's not about THIS life. It's about eternity. Lazarus depended on God for **eternity**. And eternity is what matters.

Use the wealth that God has given you in a way that matters for eternity. This is what the rich man didn't do. He only lived for this life. For himself.

You see this is what the previous parable is about too. The parable of the shrewd manager is not really that difficult. **It's about a guy who used his wealth with the future in mind.** He thought about the future rather than just the here and now. And this is why he was commended.

What is our future? Eternity. Heaven. It pleases God when we think about that future as we use our wealth.

Let me ask you - how important do you think money is to God?

Illustration – people lined up – Order of height. Blessing? Order of wealth- blessing?

Do we think wealth equates to blessing?

Of course not. It's silly to think the richer you are, the happier God is with you!

Some people have wealth. Some don't. Some have more than others. Mostly in our world it's because of **sinfulness** that some people live in poverty and some live in luxury. It's obscene. To equate "**more money**" with blessing is just plain silly. Does that mean God approves of Australia more than Tanzania?!

No. The **AMOUNT** of money someone has is not important. Let's try to put that idea out of our mind. What does God **really** care about?

He doesn't care how **MUCH** you have. He cares about **HOW YOU USE IT!**

No matter **how much** you have, God cares **how you use it!**

He doesn't want to pour the blessing of MONEY on you. He wants to pour the blessing of stewardship on you. If you have more money, use it well! Because the amount of money isn't important to God. Wealth isn't important. It's how you use what God has given you that's important to him.

The warning is that we only live this life once. Remember that our greatest need is to repent and be forgiven. Think about **your** future. Think about the future of **those around you**. Are you using your wealth, however much that is, for THAT future?

This is your decision. You have one life to live. And there is no second chance. How will you use what God has given you? (*Prayer*)