

## The Parables of Jesus:

### The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on August 18, 2019

#### Introduction

- ❖ If you ever visit Cairo, you can go to the Egyptian National Museum and see the King Tut exhibit. As you might know, **Tutankhamen** was a boy king who died at the age of seventeen and was entombed with a vast hoard of treasures. Treasures that remained undisturbed for three thousand years until 1922 when Howard Carter discovered the burial chamber. What they found was unbelievable. King Tut was buried in a golden coffin within a golden tomb that was within another golden tomb and then another. And he was surrounded by thousands of golden artifacts like solid gold chariots and thrones. There was gold everywhere.
  - The Egyptians bury their kings this way because they believe in an afterlife, and they believed you could take it with you. They thought if you're buried with your earthly treasures, you could somehow maintain that wealthy status in the next life.
- ❖ Now contrast King Tut's burial chamber with another burial site also in Cairo. There's a graveyard there, off some dusty side street, where some American missionaries are buried. There you'll find a simple gravestone that marks the burial place of **William Borden**.
  - William Borden was the son of a wealthy Chicago family that made millions in silver mining. A life of wealthy comfort and ease was laid out for him, but upon graduating from Yale in 1909, he took a different path. He attended Princeton Seminary, graduated, joined China Inland Mission, and planned to be a missionary to the Uyghurs of northwestern China.
    - But first, he moved to Cairo to study Arabic and the Islamic faith. But after only four months of training, he contracted spinal meningitis and died in 1913. He was 25. He had already given away much of his wealth and bequeathed the rest to China Inland Mission. On his gravestone are etched these words:  
*"Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life."*
- ❖ That's well said. I think only Jesus could say it better. And he did – in last week's parable and again in today's. We've been in a summer series going through parables in the Gospel of Luke. **Last week, we started chapter 16, which begins with a parable about money and the importance of investing it for the future – for a forever future and not just a few decades when you finally retire.**
  - Today's parable, which concludes chapter 16, continues the same theme. Many assume that the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is all about hell and a theology of the afterlife. **But its focus is actually more on this present life and how you're stewarding the riches you've been entrusted with, especially in relation to the poor and needy around you.** How are you using money and resources?
- ❖ Both King Tut and William Borden were men of tremendous wealth. Both died at a relatively young age. **But they differed significantly in how they made use of their relatively short lives and the resources at their disposal.** King Tut made the tragic decision of hoarding his earthly riches, thinking he could take it with him. But all of that gold was stuck in that tomb – while he went on to experience a miserable, Christ-less existence for eternity.

- ❖ William Borden, on the other hand, did not despise his wealth, but neither did he depend on it. He willingly gave it away, investing in eternal things, planning for his forever future with Christ his King. **Borden knew that it's not bad to be rich. It's just bad to die rich, having neglected to care for those in need and to prepare for your own forever future.**
  - › As we study this morning's parable, we'll consider three principles that we can derive from the text. (1) The way we see and steward our earthly riches echoes in eternity. (2) There will be no mercy in the afterlife for those who deny it in this life. (3) Nothing will convince us to change until we are changed by the Word of God.

### **Our Stewardship in Life Echoes in Eternity**

- ❖ Let's look at our first principle – our stewardship in life echoes in eternity. **The way we see and steward our earthly riches ripples into our forever future.** We see this play out in the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus.
  - › **Now before we look at these two characters more closely, it's important to understand why Jesus is telling this parable and to whom it's directed.** Chapter 16 starts with Jesus telling his disciples the Parable of the Dishonest Manager (or the Shrewd Steward). Again, it's about the importance of stewarding your money shrewdly (wisely) to prepare for eternity instead of indulging yourself in this life.
- ❖ After telling this parable, we read in v14 that some Pharisees were present. Luke describes them intentionally as “*lovers of money*” who ridiculed Jesus’s teaching. Why? Because they were trying to justify themselves before men (v15). They believed they were right with God because of their outward devotion to the Scriptures – to the Law and the Prophets. And they saw their wealth as proof of God’s favor over them.
  - › **The Pharisees saw having money as a litmus test of your spiritual health. But Jesus saw how you use your money as the true test.** And if you’re willing to use your money to bless people and their eternal futures, then it indicates that you’re doing well. It shows you’re serving God and not money (v13).
    - So last week, we said the shrewdest use of your money is to invest in the work of the gospel – in the work of evangelism and global missions, making eternal friends who will be there, one day, to welcome you in glory. Chapter 16:9 says, “*Make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth* (money), so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”
- ❖ **This morning's parable is an illustration (a counterexample) of v9.** It illustrates what happens when you steward your wealth selfishly – when you don’t invest with eternity in mind. **Jesus is directing this parable to these Pharisees who love money – warning them not to be like this rich man who used his money to serve himself and not the needs of those around him.** Look at how his actions echo in eternity – to his shame and eternal regret. Be warned and be different.

- ❖ In v19, Jesus describes this rich man as “*clothed in purple and fine linen*”, that’s the color and apparel fit for royalty, for the wealthy in ancient near eastern society. And he “*feasted sumptuously every day.*” Jesus is describing a life of self-indulgence. He has unlimited resources at his finger tips, and yet he won’t lift a finger to help a poor man at this gate.
  - In vv20-21, we’re introduced to this poor man. “<sup>20</sup>*And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.*” **So you have a rich man robed in purple, feasting sumptuously. And a poor man robed in sores, begging for scraps.** It says he was laid at the rich man’s gate, so in all likelihood he was an invalid. Every day, when he left his house, this rich man would walk past this invalid, at his gate, begging for scraps.
    - Now we know he saw him. According to v24, he recognizes the poor man. He even knows his name. **So he saw the man’s plight. He just chose to ignore it.** This poor man is so overlooked that the only ones paying him any attention and giving him any relief were street dogs who licked his sores.
- ❖ **Now the most notable feature in the way these two characters are introduced is the fact that this poor man is given a name, Lazarus.** Most parables have nameless characters because parables are fictional stories used to teach a lesson. So giving a character a name is significant. Now there’s no reason to associate him with the Lazarus that Jesus raises in John 11. Lazarus was a common name in those days. It’s related to the OT name Eleazar, which in Hebrew means “*God helps*” or “*The one whom God has helped*”.
  - That’s his name – his identity. He’s not defined by his poverty. His identity is not wrapped up in his meager circumstances. **His identity is found in finding his help in God.** He’s defined by his dependence upon God. He’s Lazarus. God is his Help.
- ❖ **But this rich man, on the other hand, goes nameless.** Do you see why? He’s nameless – he’s only known as “*the rich man*” – because his identity was in his riches. If you took away his riches, he would be nothing. They were his everything. They were his Help.
  - But for Lazarus, if you take away even his life, he would still have his treasure. He would still have God. God was his Treasure and his Help.
- ❖ **This point needs to be stressed because having money is not what sends someone to hell. It’s a way of viewing and using money that sends you.** It’s when money becomes more than money for you. It’s when it becomes your identity – your Help.
  - Being poor is not a virtue, and being rich is not a vice. **But if your riches – if your financial status or security – has become fundamental to your identity, then you’re no different than this rich man.** Even if you don’t consider yourself rich. It doesn’t matter how much money you have – if losing it all or giving it all away would make you feel empty – like you have nothing and are nothing – then money as become your Help. The name Lazarus wouldn’t fit you.

- ❖ And this principle is not limited to money. **We could easily put our help in a fulfilling career, in a happy family, in sports, in leisure.** You can treasure these things to the point that if they were taken away – take away your career, take away your family, take away your health and ability to enjoy your favorite activities – then you'd feel like there's little reason to live. **If that's true for you, it's a good indication that you've essentially become the very thing you treasure.** Your identity is wrapped up in it. It's become your Help.
- ❖ Friends, this parable is a call to examine your attitude towards the riches and resources that God has put in your life. **Don't ignore this issue and wait until your death to figure out who or what is your real Help and your true Treasure.**
  - Death revealed that the rich man's money was his Help. That his riches were his Treasure. The way he saw and stewarded his earthly riches echoed in eternity – to his shame. **Death is the great revealer.** You'll eventually learn the true state of your heart. But it's so much better to find out sooner. To figure it out now.
- ❖ So ask yourself: *How do I see my earthly riches, and how am I stewarding it? One way to reveal that answer is to examine your attitude and actions towards the poor and needy that God has placed around you.*
  - If last week's parable was a call to invest in the work of evangelism and missions, this week's would be a call to invest in the work of compassion and mercy ministries. If how we see and steward our earthly riches will echo in eternity, then **let's open our eyes to see the poor and needy that God has laid at our gates.** Like the rich man, I fear that many of us have been walking past Lazarus without a care in our hearts.
  - I feel as if, over the years, my own heart has grown cold towards the poor and needy on the side of the road, and my eyes have adapted to the constant visual of someone holding up a sign. I know they're there, but I can easily ignore it. What does that reveal about me? **If I am denying mercy in this life, then am I presuming too much when it comes to the afterlife – presuming that I'll be shown mercy?**

### No Mercy in the Afterlife if You Deny Mercy in This Life

- ❖ This leads to our second principle: **There will be no mercy in the afterlife for those who deny it in this life.** That's illustrated for us in v22. “<sup>22</sup>The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup>and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.”
  - Lazarus dies and is carried off to Abraham's side – likely the picture of a great end-times wedding feast that Jesus has already used as imagery in his parables (cf. 14:7-24). **Lazarus is shown mercy in the afterlife – not because he was poor and needy – but because he knew he was needy of God to be his Help.**
- ❖ The rich man, on the other hand, is shown no mercy. It says in v23 that he is being tormented in *Hades*. That's equivalent to the word *Sheol* in Hebrew, which is the realm of the dead as they await final judgment. In Greek, *Hades* is understood as the home of departed souls.

- ❖ And you could argue that the NT distinguishes *Hades* from *Gehenna*, which is typically translated as hell – a place of fiery judgment (cf. Lk 12:5; Mt 5:22). **One way to look at it is to see *Hades* as the place where those who aren't saved – who have not trusted in Jesus as their Help and Salvation – it's where they go in the afterlife.**
  - There they await final judgment where according to Revelation 20:13-15, “*Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*”
- ❖ So this rich man is in *Hades* awaiting Final Judgment where he will be thrown into hell, into *Gehenna*, the lake of fire. It says he looks and sees "*Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.*" **Now don't press the details and build some sort of theology concerning the afterlife and for some sort of inter-dimensional communication between the saved and the unsaved.** This parable is not trying to describe the afterlife. It's trying to teach a lesson about how to live your life now with a deep concern for the afterlife.
- ❖ So if you look at v24, it says the rich man pleads for mercy. Asking for some relief. "*Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.* <sup>25</sup>*But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'*"
- There's great irony here. **There's a great reversal of fortune.** Lazarus is now feasting sumptuously at the Lord's Table reclining at Abraham's side. And the rich man is now the one outside the gate, begging for the slightest touch of relief.
- ❖ But Abraham says it's not possible. Look at v26, "*And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.*" Again, without pressing details, we can say the main thing v26 is teaching is that our fates are sealed at death. God's final judgment is final.
  - It's pretty sobering to basically hear Abraham say no. The rich man asked for mercy and he said no. **There is no mercy in the afterlife for those who failed to show it in this life.** If you deny mercy to those in need in this life, then why would you expect mercy when you're in need in the next? That's the logic of this parable.
- ❖ This principle is reinforced in a number of places in Scripture. Jesus said earlier in **Luke 6:37-38**, "<sup>37</sup>*Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;* <sup>38</sup>*give, and it will be given to you. . . . For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*" The opposite is also true. Judge and you will be judged. Don't forgive and you won't be forgiven. Don't show mercy and mercy won't be shown.

- ❖ Listen to **James 2:13**, "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy." And then in **vv14-17**, James addresses the very scenario of walking past someone like Lazarus.  
*"<sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup>So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* **James is not denying that faith and faith alone is what saves. But true saving faith expresses itself in works – including works of compassion for the poor.** So to callously walk by someone in need is a possible indicator that you only have false dead faith.
- ❖ John makes a similar point in **1 John 3:17**, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" And then listen to **Proverbs 21:13**, "*Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.*"
  - Do you see how this proverb is being illustrated in this parable? The rich man closed his ear to the cry of Lazarus – he closed his heart against him – and so in the afterlife, when he called out for mercy, there was no answer.
- ❖ Now I know these passages can be confusing. Let me clarify. They're not teaching that *your* acts of mercy will turn God's hand to show you mercy. **No, as 1 John 3 put it, your acts of mercy are the evidence proving that God's love abides in you.** They demonstrate that you were an object of his saving mercy; that you were changed by that mercy; and that it now resides in you and flows out of you.
  - It's like when Jesus says in **Matthew 6:15**, that "*if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" He's not suggesting that the forgiveness of your sins is contingent upon your ability to forgive the sins of others. No, in that passage, Jesus is just saying that forgiven people are, by new nature, forgiving people. **In the same way, people who have experienced divine mercy are, by new nature, merciful people.**
- ❖ **You see, we are saved by grace alone, but not by a grace that leaves us alone.** It doesn't leave us the way we are. It changes us. **The grace of God's mercy and forgiveness transforms us into merciful, forgiving people.**
  - So by implication, if I discover that I have a callous attitude toward the poor (or if I harbor a unforgiving spirit towards others), then I could be fooling myself to presume I've experienced God's mercy and forgiveness. I know that's a disconcerting thought. **But wouldn't you rather have Scripture reveal that to you now – than to have death reveal it to you later?** When it's too late.
- ❖ **Robert McCheyne** was a 19th-century pastor who told his congregation that – yes, he was concerned for the poor – but he was more concerned for them and for their seemingly cold heart towards the poor. **Because he knew that converted people had new hearts filled with new mercies – having experienced the mercy of Christ their Savior.**

- ❖ Let me read to you from one of his sermons on **Acts 20:35** where it quotes Jesus as saying, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” It’s a Christ-centered sermon in the way it undercuts our excuses to justify a lack of mercy and refusal to give to the undeserving poor.
  - He’s exhorting his people, whom he knows regularly pray to be more like Christ, and he calls them to be more like Christ in their giving. He quotes an even older preacher who once said, “***What would have become of us if Christ had been as saving of his blood as some men are of their money?***”
- ❖ And then he walks through three objections likely in the mind of his hearers (and in yours!). “*Objection 1: My money is my own. Answer: Christ might have said, My blood is my own, my life is my own; no man forces it from me: then where should we have been?*”
  - *Objection 2: The poor are undeserving. Answer: Christ might have said the same thing. They are wicked rebels against my Father's law: shall I lay down my life for these? I will give to the good angels. But no, he left the ninety-nine, and came after the lost. He gave his blood for the undeserving.*
  - *Objection 3: The poor may abuse it. Answer: Christ might have said the same; yea, with far greater truth. Christ knew that thousands would trample his blood under their feet; that most would despise it; that many would make it an excuse for sinning more; yet he gave his own blood.*
    - *Oh, my dear Christians! If you would be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely, to the vile and the poor, the thankless and the undeserving. Christ is glorious and happy, and so will you be. It is not your money I want, but your happiness. Remember his own word: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*”
- ❖ **Church, we need to reorient our attitude towards giving. Especially when it comes to the poor – who have done nothing to deserve our compassion.** But that’s the point of mercy – it’s undeserved.
  - It was for the joy set before him that Jesus gave his blood for us. **Is it for the same joy that you give to care for the needs of others?** Giving out of a sense of duty and obligation is not enough. **We need to give out of faith and joy, believing that it truly is more blessed to give than to receive.**
- ❖ I want to throw out an invitation – a way to respond. I look at the area around our church building. It’s an urban setting. Just think of the intersection of South Main and 610 and how many of the poor and homeless congregate there. Now I know over the years, we’ve organized events and initiatives to minister to them, but it was usually just one and done.
  - **I'd like to form a task force of members who want to pray together and seek together God's direction for how we, as a church, might be able to better serve the poor immediately around our location** – in responsible, sustainable, Christ-centered ways, and in partnership with likeminded churches and ministries. If that interests you, contact me, and let’s rally a team to dream up a ministry of mercy.

## We Won't Change Until We are Changed by the Word

- ❖ If you're feeling convicted right now, that's good. That's right where this parable wants you. In v27, the rich man is also convicted, and he realizes it's too late for him. But he hopes it's not too late for his brothers – for them to make a change and *not* join him in his fate. It's here in vv27-31 that we learn our third principle: **Nothing will convince us to change until we are changed by the Word of God.**
  - › The rich man says if Lazarus is sent to his father's house to warn his five brothers of his fate, then maybe they won't join him in this place of eternal torment. This suggests that his brothers shared his attitude towards money and the poor.
- ❖ Notice how, in v29, Abraham says, "Your brothers don't need Lazarus to warn them of all that. They have Scripture. They can listen to Moses and the Prophets." But the rich man objects. "*No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.*"
  - › He knows repentance is what he lacked. **He's not in Hades because he didn't give away all his money. He's in Hades because he never repented of his sins.** He never repented of his love of money. And now he's hoping that his brothers will. But listen to Abraham's response, "*He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'*"
- ❖ **What this suggests is that a lack of evidence or arguments is not fundamentally what keeps people from believing the gospel, or from repenting of their sins, or from changing their attitude towards the poor.** What keeps people from naturally doing these things is a sinful heart.
- ❖ So what we need is *not* more evidence, more arguments, more signs from heaven or even the testimony of the dead. **What we need is a new heart** – with new eyes of the heart – that can see Jesus as our True Treasure; that can see the needs of those around us; that can believe it is more blessed to give than to receive.
  - › And the point of v31 is that Scripture is sufficient to give you that new heart. **The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to grant you new life and a new heart.** Nothing is going to convince you to change your ways, until you're changed by the Spirit through Scripture.
- ❖ The irony is that the very testimony that the rich man was asking to be sent to his brother – the testimony of the dead – was denied the brothers but made available to us. Unlike the brothers, we've received the warning. **We know what awaits us in the afterlife if we deny mercy to the poor in this life.**
  - › What are we going to do with this privilege? What are we going to do with the testimony of the dead? **Are we going to listen and repent and make changes to our spending habits and giving patterns?** Are we going to show mercy as we have been shown mercy by Christ?