

Luke 16:19-31 New Living Translation (NLT)

19 Jesus said, *“There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. **20** At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. **21** As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.*

***22** “Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, **23** and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side.*

***24** “The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.’*

***25** “But Abraham said to him, ‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. **26** And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.’*

***27** “Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father’s home. **28** For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don’t end up in this place of torment.’*

***29** “But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.’*

***30** “The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.’*

***31** “But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

The Word of God for the People of God.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Opening story

For the past few weeks, we have considered what it means to live as a Follower of Jesus. In these stories (gospel of Luke), we have been challenged to:

live in humility as we extend hospitality.

open our doors to ALL people.

count the cost of being a follower of Jesus

Celebrate when the lost are found

Be clever and creative with our resources in order to be kind and generous to others

This morning we come to another perplexing story.

We might call this story: "Rich Man, Poor Man"

There was a rich man and a poor man.

Everyday the rich man lived in the lap of luxury, wearing the finest clothing.

And the poor man was a diseased beggar. And everyday, he lay at the gate of the rich man, longing for scraps of food.

Eventually, both men died. The beggar went to Abraham's side, and the rich man went to Hades, a place of torment.

The rich man, in agony, saw the beggar by Abraham's side and asked if he could be comforted with a drop of water.

Abraham reminded him that in his life he had everything he wanted while the beggar had nothing.

Now, the beggar was being comforted and the rich man was in anguish.

In the end, there was a great reversal of fortune.

So what is Jesus trying to say through this story?

What is Jesus talking about? What is the meaning of this?

Is Jesus against the rich and famous who live in luxury?

Does Jesus show favoritism to the poor, the downtrodden?

Certainly He is NOT saying:

The rich go to Hades and the poor go to Heaven

It's a sin to be rich or to have nice things

It's wrong or bad to accumulate wealth and possessions? *We can have nice things, can't we?*

So, what is He saying?

Quite simply, Jesus seems to be pointing out that it is easy and tempting to fall into the trap of self-indulgence, self-reliance and self-satisfaction when you have wealth.

While having wealth and riches is not a sin, we are to be rich toward God and others. Because, we all know that, in the end, we can't take it with us!

The story is told by the chief accountant for one of the wealthiest men who ever lived - John D.

Rockefeller, Sr. Someone asked the accountant one day, *"How much did John D leave? We know he was an immensely wealthy man."*

Without a moment's hesitation, the accountant answered, *"Everything!"* (Illustrations Unlimited, James Hewett, Editor; © 1988 James Hewitt. Stories, quotations and humor. ch. 97 "Money" #27 "Taking It With Him" story)

There's an old saying: *"There are no pockets in a shroud."* In other words, In the end, *you take nothing with you.*

One man's response: *"If I can't take it with me, then I'm not going!"* (Communicator's Commentary, Bruce Larson; © 1983, Word, Inc; Luke, volume 3 NT, ch. 32 "Making Your Money Work for You" pp. 236 -238)]

As we learned last week, (in Luke's Gospel) references to the "Rich" are usually not very positive. (Rev Dr Sam Persons Parkes is the pastor of Cloverdale UMC in Dothan, Alabama)

So why does it seem that Jesus is coming down so hard on the rich man?

Peter Wong, an Episcopal rector, suggests that in this story, the rich man **never sees Lazarus** as a human subject, but only as an object, someone from a different class (not like him). He stepped over Lazarus at his gate every day.

And even in his torment in Hades, the rich man asks Abraham to “send Lazarus” to cool his tongue like a servant might do.

And, if that’s not enough, when Abraham eliminated that possibility, the Rich man asks that Lazarus be sent to warn his family!

So, even in hell, he cannot see Lazarus as fully human. (Dr Sam Persons Parkes, Pastor, Cloverdale UM, Dothan, AL)

Do we see the needs around us? Are we blind to those in need? Are we avoiding or ignoring certain individuals?

Sometimes we are BLIND to the needs around us because we cannot see past our sense of entitlement or privilege.

Sam Persons Parkes: “seeing past our privilege is tough to do.” (Rev Dr Sam Persons Parkes, Pastor, Cloverdale UMC in Dothan, Alabama)

As “a highly-educated white male living in North America, I’m at the top of our cultural hierarchy. Regardless of whether I FEEL privileged, I am. And I am blind to so many ways that I get the privilege of just not having to think about some things.

Because I am a man, I never have to worry about going on a date with a stranger and being unsafe. If I’m in a bad mood, nobody blames my gender for it.

Because I’m middle class, if I get into a legal situation, I can hire an attorney.

Because I’m Christian in America, a bumper sticker supporting my religion won’t get my car vandalized.

However, I am fat. And so I DO see a few things in the culture that my thin friends can’t always see. People often assume my general health must be bad because I’m about 100 pounds overweight. However, that’s not true! Thin people never have anyone look at them and assume they are lazy just because of their size.” (Rev Dr Sam Persons Parkes, Pastor, Cloverdale UMC in Dothan, Alabama.)

So the rich man in the story was sent to Hades, not because he was rich, but because he just didn’t care!

Do we really care about those around us? Do we even notice who we are walking over/around?

Interestingly enough, in the story, the rich man suggests that if Lazarus rises from the dead, it will lead his brothers to repentance, a change in their behavior and lives. However, Abraham says, “probably not! There’s a chasm no one can cross.”

Here’s the good news. Even when we don’t know it, God sees us, and hears our cries. God gave His all for us, when we were yet sinners. (Rom 5.8)

There is nothing God will not do for us to show His love. And it all began when God heard the cries of His people.

The message of the Gospel is that Christ sees our misery and hears our cries, and He continues to cross the great chasm in order to enter our humanity. Our response is Repentance (changed lives) and that begins when we listen for the cries, and when we see each other as God sees us.

Story of Lisbeth

Lisbeth is a UM Christian. In her story, Jesus continues to cross that great fixed chasm and the Word becomes flesh yet again. (Rev Dr Sam Persons Parkes is the pastor of Cloverdale UMC in Dothan, Alabama)

Do we hear the cries around us? Do we see who's at the gate?

Albert Schweitzer's life was forever changed by this parable. He saw Africa as the poor beggar at the gate of Europe. He decided to leave the academic world of Europe behind him (5 Ph.D degrees). He went to tend to the needs of his brothers and sisters in Africa. (Communicator's Commentary, Bruce Larson; © 1983, Word, Inc; Luke, volume 3 NT, ch. 32 "Making Your Money Work for You" pp. 236 -238)

IWW will you respond to the need?

Tedroy Jackson's story

Listen to his story and the opportunity he shares with us to open our eyes to the needs around us...

We are called to be Followers of Jesus Christ who
Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.. Let us open our eyes and ears,
and be attentive to the needs around us.