

Are You Listening?

[Read Luke 16:19-31 NRSV]

¹⁹There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should **listen** to them.' ³⁰He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not **listen** to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Opening Image

A Catholic priest was told that the wealthiest man in town did not contribute to charity. The priest was concerned about the man's soul and went to confront him.

The priest asked if the rich man would like to contribute to a local charity. The rich man replied, "Did you know that my older brother is a disabled veteran and lives on government support?" The priest did not respond.

The rich man went on, "Did you know that my sister is raising 3 children on her own because her husband left her?" The priest began to feel ashamed and began to apologize.

Then the rich man said, "Did you know that my mother is in a nursing home on government assistance?" The priest again apologized and said he did not know.

Finally, the rich man said, "Since I do not give any money to my family why should I give my money to charity?"

The love of money and all the things that money brings has separated people from God and their neighbors throughout history. What does the Bible say about the love of money?

Narrative Intro

Our story today in Luke is about the love of money and the walls it can place between you, your neighbor, and God. Money in and of itself is not evil. The Bible tells us that it is the *love of money* that is the root of evil.

Paul tells Timothy, "But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the *love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many

pains” (1 Tim 6:9-10). The love of money can bring disaster on you and your family.

Pharisees loved money

Jesus knew that the Pharisees loved money and wanted to warn them and his disciples about the love of money. Jesus told the Pharisees, “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Luke 16:13). The Pharisees loved money and rolled their eyes (Luke 16:14). Jesus responded by telling them a parable about a rich man and a poor man.

Rich Man

The parable opens with the picture of a wealthy man who lives a life of conspicuous consumption. If you are living a life of conspicuous consumption, then you are attracting attention to yourself.

We know that the man is wealthy because: (1) he is dressed in expensive clothing, (2) he is dining at his own dining table heaped with food while scraps fall off the table, and (3) he has a gate at the entrance to his home.

We know that the rich man does not care about God or his neighbor because a poor man has been laid at his gate, but the rich man does nothing. The rich man’s wealth and gate insulate him from

God and his neighbor to the point where he cannot see God or his neighbor. The rich man is spiritually blind to injustice.

Mirror Story

A rabbi took a student to a window and asked the student to look outside. The rabbi asked the student, "What do you see?" The student replied, "I see lots of children playing together." Then the rabbi took the student to his office. The rabbi stood the student in front of a mirror and asked, "What do you see?" The student replied that he saw himself in the mirror. The rabbi then made an astute observation.

The rabbi told the student that the window and the mirror had one thing in common in that they were both made of glass. The difference was what you saw when you added a little bit of silver to the glass. The silver blocks our view of others and causes us to focus on ourselves.

If the rich man loved God and his neighbor, then he would see the poor man and have compassion. If the rich man loved God and his neighbor, then he would love the things that God loves like justice and mercy. You might ask, "Where is God's justice and where is God's mercy?" Only the dogs take notice of Lazarus.

The Poor Man

We know that Lazarus is a poor man because there is no mention of clothing, food, or a home. The poor man is dressed in sores and longs for the scraps that fall from the rich man's table. The poor man lays outside the rich man's home barred from entering the home by a gate. The dogs are the poor man's only friends.

Death

Jesus gives us several hints that things are about to change. In life the rich are known by name while the poor go nameless. We all know the names of wealthy people like Bill Gates and Warren Buffett. We do not know the names of street beggars. Jesus says the poor man was named Lazarus while the rich man goes nameless. Life in heaven will be different from life on earth.

Time passes and both men die. Death is the great equalizer. Paul tells Timothy, "For we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it" (1 Tim 6:7). There are no U-Haul trailers hitched to hearses. Neither man takes anything into the afterlife except their attitude, faith, and deeds.

In death the tables are turned, and God's justice and mercy prevails. The poor man is given comfort while the rich man is tormented. We may not see justice in this life, but we are assured that God's justice and mercy will prevail in death.

Rich Man's torment

Even in death the rich man does not realize that his status has changed, and he continues to order around the poor man, Lazarus, but does not address him. "He called out, 'Father Abraham, mercy! Have mercy! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue. I'm in agony in this fire'" (Luke 16:24).

The rich man knows the name of the poor man which indicates that the rich man was aware of Lazarus but did nothing to help him. The rich man asks Abraham, someone he considers of equal status, for relief but does not ask for a new address.

Separation from God

It is interesting to note that the rich man does not ask to go to heaven. The rich man's heart has been hardened by the love of wealth to the point that his separation from God is complete.

God is the source of all that is good and the source of all love. The rich man did not love God or his neighbor on earth which was shown by his lack of compassion for the poor man. Lazarus was kept out by a gate which can be opened and closed. The rich man could have shared his wealth with the poor man.

A great and permanent chasm now separates the rich man from the poor man. Because of his callousness, the rich man will now

spend eternity separated from God just as he let the love of money separate him from God and his neighbor.

Rich man's final appeal

Finally, the rich man appeals to Abraham on behalf of his brothers. Abraham tells the rich man that they have the scriptures and have the free choice to respond. The rich man laments that his brothers will not listen but that they would listen to someone resurrected from the dead. Abraham has the final word. Abraham tells the rich man that even someone from the dead will not convince his brothers.

End of Story

That is the end of the story. The poor man, Lazarus, lives with God in comfort for eternity while the rich man is separated from God and tormented for eternity. Lazarus finally received justice and mercy. Jesus uses this parable to tell us a different story than the one the world teaches.

The world tells us that only the strong will survive and that the weak will perish. God promises something different. Mary's song predicted what Jesus would do. Mary sang, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53). Our God is a God of mercy and justice. This is the Good News.

Good News

The Good News of this passage is that God is a God of mercy and justice. God gives us the Law and the Prophets through our Bibles. Just as the rich man had access to God's word, we have access to God's word. We can read, hear, and respond to God's word.

God's word tells us hundreds of times to help the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the aliens (Ex 22:21, Lev 19:9-10, Deut 10:17-19, 14:28-29, 15:1-11, 16:9-15, 24:17-18, Jer 5:25-29, Amos 2:6-8, and Mal 3:5). The rich man and the Pharisees did not listen to the Law and the Prophets. We have been given a fair warning of how our lives will be judged. How will we respond?

Our Response

Our response is to listen and change our ways. Paul tells Timothy, "As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Listen and change your ways

Have you been listening? We do good works in response to God's gift of grace. We do good deeds in the name of Jesus because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for us. When your neighbor is in need be rich in good works. ***Listen to God and change your ways.***

When you are asked to serve at Hands Together, Kairos prison ministry, Bethany Café, or the numerous other ministries offered at the church be generous with your time and talents. ***Listen to God and change your ways.***

Finally, when the church asks you to remember your baptismal vows of faithfully participating in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service be ready to share. ***Listen to God and change your ways.***

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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