

The Rich Man and Lazarus, Part 1

Luke 16:19-23

Today we come to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, so I want you to open your Bibles to Luke chapter 16, Luke 16. While you're turning there, just to sort of set this up, I'd like to read from what the Apostle Paul says at the end of 2 Corinthians chapter 4, so you turn to Luke 16, and I'll read from 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 where Paul says this, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient; the things that are unseen are eternal."

For those of you who know the Lord and those of you who are known by the Lord, those words from the Apostle Paul describe the life of faith. This is how we as Christians live our lives, as our outer self, self is wasting away, and for some of us it's more apparent than for others. For young people in our midst,

you're kind of like, What? What? What could that mean? I'm as strong and healthy as ever. And then they say, oh, that's right, he's old, of course he's dying, of course he's talking about all that. He's on the way down.

But listen, you, too, being young, enjoy it now. Enjoy it now because it does not last. And yet, promise you this, that as you mature in Christ, as we mature, though our outer self, our frame, the shell, it's wasting away, our inner self, our inner life is being renewed in Christ, and it's being renewed truly and powerfully in the mind as we are renewed, and we find an energy that is other-worldly, a spiritual energy. It's a life transformed by the invisible working of God.

We truly see the power of these words in Scripture changing the way we think, which changes the way we live. We are not what we were. We are not now what we shall be. And so we are those, as Paul describes in Romans 2:7, we are those who by patience in well-doing, we seek for glory and honor and immortality. And to those who practice that patient obedience in this life right now, doing good, God will graciously grant to us eternal life. And it's an eternal life that so powerfully works now, even in our mortal bodies that are dying.

And we realize that whatever affliction we face in this life, as Paul described it, it is light and it is momentary. We're looking not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen, invisible realities. "For the things that are seeing are transient." They're passing, they're fading. But the things that are unseen are eternal.

We realize that there will be a great day of reckoning. There will be a reversal when that which is really real and that which is truly true, things that are unseen and eternal, they will take center stage. They will become the daily, predominant, lived-in experience for everyone, believer and unbeliever. And for those of you who are genuine, born again, truly true Christians, that's really, really good news, isn't it? That captures the fulfillment of our hope in the Gospel.

For others, though, reckoning with the unseen, the eternal reality, is not such a comforting thought. It's rather a disturbing thought, a troubling thought. They'd rather stay with life as it is right now, as they can see and touch and feel and experience. So talking about unseen, eternal realities that they can't control and manipulate, that troubles them.

It's so troubling, in fact, that many ignore these spiritual realities, these realities that they've sensed in

their own hearts. They ignore the internal protests of the conscience and those silent and yet ever-present nagging accusations that come from the conscience. They ignore the conscience. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

But one day, death will come knocking. Reality will confront them in death, abruptly and brutally in the afterlife as they live in a state of torment until that day, as Paul describes in Romans 2:16, when, according to the Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Listen, folks, none of us needs to be surprised by our appointment with death, our appointment with unseen, eternal realities. None of us needs to be disturbed by the prospect of death by, we, none of us needs to be anxious about tomorrow. None of us needs to be worried about dying and facing God one day because Jesus gives a preview of what's coming after death. He shows us the difference from God's point of view between how things seem to be and then how things really are, how things really are.

And that's what we see in this parable in Luke chapter 16. If you found your way there, start at verse 19 and let's read the parable together once again. "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who feasted sumptuously

every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"Poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side, and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. And he called out, '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 an anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus, in like manner, bad things. And now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

"'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.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 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.'”

The point of this parable is to answer the scoffing Pharisees. Remember that earlier in the chapter, as Jesus taught his disciples, first part of the chapter, opening part, he told them a parable, there, to encourage them toward good stewardship, and he encouraged them in verse 9, “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth.” He's saying, Jesus saying, spend money with unseen eternal realities in mind. Don't squander your money on stuff. Don't squander your money on things you can feel and touch and see and enjoy. Don't squander your money like that, like a foolish steward. Invest the money that God has provided, so that when it fails, verse 9 again, “your friends may receive you into the eternal dwelling.”

Well, the Pharisees, they're listening in to all this. These Pharisees, according to verse 14, they are lovers of money. And so they're hearing all these things, and they think he's an idiot. They believe that God has blessed them with their money, that their money, and their possessions, and their status is a sign of God's favor on their life. They think Jesus has lost his mind, and they ridicule him. So Jesus responded, not batting an eye, in verses 15-18, and he confronts their

hypocrisy, and he confronts their unbelief. He said, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Listen, this parable illustrates that. And Jesus warns these Pharisees, he warns all pretenders, all hypocrites, all unbelievers, religious unbelievers, he warns them to repent before it's too late because God sees it all. God has perfect judgment, perfect sight. He sees through the illusion. He's not fooled by anything on the exterior. He's not fooled by the body beautiful. He's not fooled by the car that you drive. He's not fooled by the house that you live in. He's not fooled by your bank account, your investment portfolio. He's not fooled by any of it. He sees to the heart. He sees to the, as Paul said in Romans 2:16, the "secrets of the heart." God sees all.

Whatever men exalt, whatever they highly esteem, God condemns it all as abominable. That's what we see in this parable, is a removal of the illusion of this life and a reversal of how things seem to be externally. That's what Jesus is doing here. He's providing clarity about death without, without our having to die. Isn't that good? He lets us see

what's on the other side of the veil without us having to pass through the veil. Isn't that gracious?

He shows us here two potential outcomes before we have to pass through the veil for ourselves: Will we wake up, or will we continue sleepwalking? Somnambulism, that's called sleepwalking. Death removes all illusion, folks. We can either learn about that from Jesus before we die, or we can learn on our own after we die. I recommend option number one. Let's learn from Jesus before we die.

So Jesus tells this little parable, verses 19-21. He starts out by telling us how things appear, how things appear. You can write that down as your first point, name, number one, how things seem to be. How things seem to be. Remember, God looks not, not, God sees not as man sees. God looks upon the heart of the matter. He sees the heart. But man looks on things with, by external appearance, right?

Is that an indictment of us? No, it's just talking about our limitation as human beings. We can't look to the heart of the matter, only God can. God sees not as man sees. God looks, man looks on the outward appearance, which is just our lot in life. We're flesh and blood. The spirit within us requires the body in order to perceive things from the outside world. It's



how we learn, it's how we perceive, it's how we come to understand. God looks into the invisible, hidden things, the secrets. He sees all things.

So here's how things seem to be, and Jesus paints quite a picture in verses 19-21. I'll read that again. He says, "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day, and at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores."

Could not be two more contrasting characters than these two: the rich man and the poor man. The rich man is unimaginably rich. He lives a charmed life. He lives the dream life, envied by all, enjoyed by none but himself. And his life is contrasted by the poor man's life, which is unimaginably poor and afflicted and suffering. Some like, someone like this would be pitied by all. And yet Jesus wants us to know that this is only how things seem to be. Wealth and poverty, they're nothing but a facade. Wealth and poverty are nothing but an, an illusion that distract us from reality. Jesus provides the true assessment of the situation in verse 15, that what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

That believing judgment, by the way, is echoed by James. James is the half-brother of our Lord, and he writes this in James 1:9 and following. He says, "On this basis let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation." Let the poor man, the afflicted man, the man with nothing, the man with nothing in his bank account, let him boast, let him brag in his exaltation.

Is that how you think? We need to listen a little bit more to James, don't we? And James goes on to say, "Let the rich in his humiliation, let him boast." Hmm. Why is that? "Because, like a flower of the grass, he'll pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass. Its flower falls, its beauty perishes. So also will a rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. So blessed is the man," speaking to all of us now, "blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial. Blessed are the poor, the afflicted, those who go through trials, those who face and, and have to endure suffering. For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."

James is writing, there, to encourage us to think rightly, to orient our mind around truth, around reality. Last week, Josh preached out of Philipians 4:8. "Whatever is," what, "true." At the end of the verse, "think about such things." Is it a

suggestion? No, it's a command, right? It's an imperative.

"Think about such things." Think about what is true. Focus your mind. Let your mind be shaped by what is true, by reality, not by how things seem to be, but how things are.

We're to make right judgments. We're to look beyond mere appearances. We're to look beyond how things seem to be so that we think, we assess, we live our lives according to how things really are. And he gets that thinking, James gets that thinking from his half-brother according to the flesh, Jesus. And he encourages us to embrace the same mindset.

Listen, we see, all of us see, Asaph in Psalm 73, he sees the rich prosper. They live in nice houses, they drive in nice cars, they take nice vacations, they meet interesting people, they eat at expensive restaurants, and they have a personal trainer to take off all the weight after they take on all the calories. They enjoy unique experiences all over the world, and we see the rich man just like anybody else, as Jesus says, "clothed in purple and fine linen, feasting sumptuously every single day." No worries, no troubles, wouldn't you like to be one of them?

This is the realization Jesus describes in Luke 16. It's the realization of the rich man's dream, what he only dreamed

of. But his dream was cut short by the reality of death. Remember that back in Luke 12, and turn back to Luke 12 and verse 16. Jesus is called in to settle a dispute about money between two brothers, and he responds by telling them a parable, guarding them, verse 15, "Take care. Be on your guard against all covetousness because one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Let me tell you a story, Jesus says. Told them a parable, Verse 16, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops.' He said, 'I'll do this, I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and all my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry."'"

That man's biggest concern? What am I going to do with all this stuff? What am I going to do with this surplus of goods? My investments have come back percentage over percentage. Look at the dividends! I don't know what to do with all this money. His daily occupation then turns into how to satisfy his soul with whatever pleasure it desires. So what that man in that parable in Luke 12 is dreaming about, Jesus now tells a man who, of a

man who actually attained it. This is actually come upon him. He lives it, he enjoys it, he has got it all. He starts with the man's clothing, what we can see on the outside, and that is the point, is to look at the external appearance, purple on the outside, fine linen on the inside. It's clear this guy is not shopping at TJ Maxx or whatever. This man is extravagant in the extreme, and it's prohibitively expensive stuff.

I realize as I look around here, I see a purple shirt right over there, vibrant purple. I can tell you that whatever it cost to make that shirt, no offense, it's nothing compared to the purple that's described here in Jesus' day. This is extravagance in the extreme. This kind of purple, it was prohibitively expensive. The word for purple, here, is *porphyra* and refers to a, a purple dye that was extracted from a species of predatory sea snail called a murex.

Murex, maybe you've read about these before. The snail, little murex snail is housed in a little murex snail shell. It's kind of like a smaller, thinner, spinier version of a conch shell. And those murex were gathered to extract the dye from them from inside that shell. It's no small feat. Pliny, the elder, describes the process in detail in his work, *the Natural History*. He says each shell had to be broken open to expose a,

this isn't his word, but the, the modern word is the hypobronchial gland, and it's about the size of the tip of a child's little pinky finger.

And inside that tiny little gland is a clear liquid, a liquid that's toxic to the sea snail's prey. But when that liquid is exposed to the air, combined with enzymes that are contained in the gland, the clear-colored precursors of that dye turn into a deep purple or a purplish blue, right on the spot. You can watch it changing in front of your eyes.

The final product of this dye had three shades of purple, a deep, deep violet, a deep scarlet or crimson, or a, a very deep blue. Beautiful colors. The amount of clear, wic, liquid that is extracted from just one of these snails was only a few little drops, so that's hardly encouraging when you consider that it takes six pounds of this liquid to dye one pound of wool. In more concrete terms, takes 10,000 snails to produce enough dye for a single robe.

Now since this dye is so hard to get, but at the same time it's what's called colorfast. Don't know if you know about that, but its, means it doesn't fade over time, it retains its original hue. In fact, over time, this particular dye becomes even more vibrant the longer it's exposed to the sun and the

elements, and this made it highly valued but still prohibitively expensive for the common person.

It's a highly exclusive dye. It was known as, Tyrian purple, in Jesus' area. Tyrian refers to the city of Tyre, where the ancient Phoenicians first discovered this and started producing this dye in the Near East. Pliny mentions other places, as well, where the dye was produced, on the coast of Algeria and Tunisia, also in Laconia, the southernmost tip of Greece down, down south of Corinth.

But this, this production, the distribution, the use of Tyrian purple, the use of Tyrian purple by consumers who had enough money to pay for it, that's all controlled by the royal courts. Dye producers are regulated about how much they can make, how much dye they could introduce into the market at one time, who they could sell to. Wealthy buyers are restricted from wearing dyed garments since no royal official wants to show up to court in his purple or blue or Tyrian dye and see some Elon Musk kind of a guy show up and upstage him. So they have to restrict this. They have to control it so that only they can wear the coveted color. No one without rank, title, status. They're restricted.