

The Parables of Jesus: Lazarus & The Rich Man

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, August 8th. It's good to see some faces that I have not seen in a while. That's awesome. And fewer and fewer masked faces, which is good.

But we also recognize that everyone has their own comfort level, right? So we want to respect one another, obviously, and care for one another in that way.

Well, we're continuing in our sermon series on the parables of Jesus this morning. And throughout this series, we've looked at, as I've said every Sunday, well-known parables that may be familiar to us, as well as some that may be less familiar.

And we've explored these over the coming weeks. We've got two more. And then the past many weeks, we've looked at lots of these parables together. And so this morning, we're continuing in that final category that I introduced a few weeks ago.

This theme of parables that some scholars refer to as parables of judgment. Well, the parables of judgment tend to stress the theme of surprise at the process and outcome of God's judgment.

[1 : 12] They're intended to be a powerful influence on our thinking and on our behavior. Because, friends, for all of our study, for all of our preparation, the day Jesus returns will absolutely surprise us.

It will, in many ways, catch us off guard. And it will shake us, I believe, in ways that you might imagine a house or a tree being shaken, right to its roots, right to its foundation, when that day comes.

And so we're not to live our lives in a passive sort of way as Christians, saying, yeah, my passport is stamped. I'm ready to go. I'm just waiting for heaven. Right?

It's not, Christianity is not a passive life. And so in remembering that Jesus will, this is fact, will return one day and we'll all ultimately face God's judgment.

And this is not a fire and brimstone sermon this morning. But it's a reminder because we will, all of us, face God's judgment.

[2 : 24] It will be unlike any judgment we have known in our lives. It will be fair. It will be impartial. It will be administered with love, believe it or not.

But we're all going to stand one day. So we need to be appropriately humble. We need to recognize that our perception of many things may be shown to be mistaken, to be incorrect.

And that's important for us to know. Have you ever thought about the fact that you just might be surprised by who you meet in heaven? We don't get to pick.

I have a friend, I can share this story because he wouldn't mind. My cousin's husband is Catholic, very Catholic. His mom is even more Catholic-er.

Yes, that's a word that I've just coined. And he said to me, you know, Kent, you're a pastor. You're a good Christian guy. My mom, God bless her, would not say that you are going to heaven.

[3 : 37] And I said, really? And he said, nope, not a chance. And I said, I'm glad she doesn't get to choose.

And he laughed and he said, right? That's a good point. And I said, it's not her call. But that doesn't mean I shouldn't have a sense of conviction between me and God, because I absolutely should.

We all should. Perceptions or perspective. And we've talked about these things before. We've considered many times that our personal perspectives or perceptions of something may not always accurately reflect reality, right?

And in the case of God's plan or God's will, we've considered before that our perspectives can differ, should probably differ on that as well.

And sometimes significantly, right? Our parable this morning is found in Luke chapter 16, verses 19 to 31.

[4 : 47] And it's commonly found under the heading, the rich man and Lazarus. You may also have heard the variation, Jesus tells about the rich man and the beggar.

I have not heard that one, personally. Or simply, the rich man and the beggar. Well, for our purposes, I titled it Lazarus and the rich man, which is one of the familiar names.

So Luke 16, verses 19 to 31. If you want to turn to it in your Bibles, open your app on your phone, or you can just listen as I read as well. There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

[5 : 59] So he called to him, Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.

But Abraham replied, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things.

But now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.

He answered, Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them so that they will not come to this place of torment.

Abraham replied, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them. No, Father Abraham, he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.

[7 : 15] He said to him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, then they will not be convinced, even if someone rises from the dead.

The word of the Lord. Amen. So as I prepared the sermon for this morning, as I read and reread our parable for today, I'm going to be honest, it was slightly unfamiliar to me, which is weird, and I'll tell you why it was weird, because I don't recall reading it when I've read through the book of Luke many times.

I don't recall it. I don't recall ever being part of a Bible study where it was discussed. I don't ever recall hearing anyone, and I've heard a lot of sermons in my time, anyone preaching on it.

It felt, in many ways, brand new to me, which I thought was a little bit odd. Well, is that the same for you as well? Perhaps it is.

Is this maybe one of Jesus' many parables that you have not heard before, or you're not really that familiar with? Or perhaps this is a familiar parable to you that you've heard many times.

[8 : 30] Donna and I talked about it last Sunday after the service. I told her, well, tune in next week, and she said, oh, yes, I know that one well. So perhaps you've heard it many times, as I said.

Does the narrative and some of the descriptive language that Jesus uses in this parable, does it make you uncomfortable? It's, as far as I can tell, the only parable that very clearly talks about hell. Some of the descriptive language Jesus uses, a dog licking Lazarus soars, yuck. It's graphic, right? In agony.

In hell. And it's very definitely a story that clarifies for us that there are eternal consequences, eternal destinations for us.

I don't know if you look at this story and think of it as allegory. Somehow Jesus is speaking in a metaphor, heaven and hell. See, that seems to be a trend in Christianity in a lot of ways.

[9 : 44] Heaven and hell are not real places. Jesus didn't really mean that. Is that just because you feel uncomfortable? There's a tendency in a lot of Christian circles to be watering things down.

My next sermon series, everybody's, there's some people who are really excited about it, is gonna be on sin. And it's not gonna be to go week after week after week to make you feel guilty.

I used to say to my mom, my mom was really good at guilt trips, and I used to say to her that she was the travel agent for guilt trips in my life. She booked them for me all the time.

She wasn't even Jewish. I have friends who have Jewish moms who say, oh, my mom is a guilt master. So that won't be the plan. That won't be the point.

It's gonna be to help us recognize some of these things that we're doing that we tend to discount, that we tend to gloss over. It's gonna challenge us, I hope, and encourage us.

[10:51] And we're gonna go right from sin into Advent, which I think is perfect. Perfect. So, yeah, I'm still working on it, but we'll see how that works out.

I think it's gonna work beautifully. So let's, it's a story, as I've said, that shows consequence, right? It shows, to me, heaven and hell are not theoretical places.

They're actual destinations. There's nothing in Scripture that says, yeah, this part, I don't really mean it. It means something else. Not at all. And I've been to seminary, and I've had lots of people say, well, I don't really think, you know, loving God, you know, there's the loving God argument, right?

Loving God, hell, really? Well, seems pretty clear to me. But anyway, let's work through this parable together.

So one side note right away. While this parable identifies identifies that the beggar's name is Lazarus, there's nothing here to suggest that this is the Lazarus, right?

[12:04] So when I say Lazarus, you often think of, as I do, the friend of Jesus. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. So there's nothing to suggest that this is the Lazarus.

Just as you may, have you ever met somebody who said, oh, you're from Edmonton? Oh, you might know my cousin. Or worse yet, I have heard people say, oh, you're from Edmonton? My sister lives in Toronto. Perhaps you know her. Well, no, not that close. So I might know a Bob. You might know a Bob. Probably not the same Bob, right?

Bob is my uncle, literally. I'm not kidding. Bob's my uncle. Bob's not your uncle, though, perhaps, right? So this is a Lazarus, probably not the Lazarus.

So let's think about it that way. Now let's remember, as we dig deeper, that this is a parable about perspective. It's about things somehow being different than what we might expect them to be.

[13:07] Things are different, will play out in a different way than we might have anticipated. And it's also about judgment. Jesus paints this vivid picture of a man dressed in fine clothes.

Did you catch that there's purple in there? Which is my favorite color. But purple is a symbol of what? Loyalty. Perfect. And clearly, this man is living a life of privilege and luxury.

He has gates. Do you have a gate? I mean, I have a gate that you latch and it's made of wood. But this is not that kind of gate. So we have a man, a rich man of privilege, who lives in probably a mansion of some kind with a gate.

And this is a stark contrast with the man outside his gate who's a beggar who clearly has to live on scraps, right? He's got some serious health issues.

You don't have open sores without something that needs to be addressed. Talk about a stark contrast. We've got the top of the social rung on the one hand and on the other, a man so low in status, he probably wouldn't have likely been able to even reach the bottom rung of the social ladder on his tippy toes.

[14:31] Such a contrast there. And if we've learned one thing about the parables of Jesus over the course of our series, it's that Jesus told parables to what?

Challenge expectations and assumptions. He told them to challenge, to demonstrate that the reality of, the parables of, the kingdom of God are often upside down, literally upside down in contrast to our expectations, to the realities and priorities we might identify as being priorities of the world.

And this parable is certainly no different in that way. In the perspective of the day Jesus told this story, and certainly from the perspective of the religious leaders at that time, the expectation would have been that wealth alone, status alone, would have been proof of righteousness.

Isn't that mind-blowing? So imagine what it would have been like for the audience who had that expectation to learn, spoilers, that at the end, it's this diseased beggar, this horrible, by their standards, human being, this rejected, despised person, who is rewarded.

And it's actually the rich man who's punished. This would have blown their minds. It would have made no sense. And yet Jesus would have told this story over and over.

[16:16] Do you remember that a few weeks ago we considered the idea of our neighbor, right, when we looked at the Good Samaritan? And we considered identifying who that might be.

Not according to our definition, but according to Jesus' definition. So as we dig a bit deeper, the rich man in this parable, let's be clear, he was not punished because of his wealth.

He was not punished because of his status. That's not what Jesus is saying. He was punished because of his selfishness. This man, if he walked out this gate, he would have done that multiple times a day quite likely.

And if this beggar, Lazarus, lived, air quotes, outside his gate on the street, he would have passed him many times. and yet he never loved him.

He never took him in. He never fed him or had someone treat his health concerns. We get the sense, at least from this parable, that he pretty much ignored him.

[17 : 30] He didn't even acknowledge him as another human being. We saw this from some of the characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan as well, that they just, what?

They passed by on the other side, scripture says. They ignored the opportunity to care for the person that God had placed in their path.

We talked about that, right? We also have to wonder that did this rich man see his wealth, see the many blessings in his life as being of his own making?

Perhaps, even quite likely, did he see them as coming from God? We don't really see evidence of that.

So as we continue on in this passage, we learn that both the rich man and Lazarus die. Right? And I think we can agree the chance of any of us dying is what?

[18 : 33] 100%. Guaranteed. Best thing you can bet on. 100%. So it's interesting how quickly the rich man's perspective changes, right?

Notice that as I read the passage? He instantly comes to recognize that there were consequences. Wait, what?

There were consequences to the decisions that he made in his life. my friends, there are very real consequences to the decisions that we make as well.

I don't know if when you were young, as a teenager, when you went to leave your house, did your parents ever say to you, have fun, make good choices? Does that sound familiar at all?

we need to make good choices. And hindsight seems to be pretty much 20-20 for the rich man here, right?

[19 : 37] He receives immediate clarity. He immediately regrets the choices he's made, the decision he's made, and the destination it landed him in.

But it's kind of too late. his reaction may be all too familiar to us as well, right? Have you ever done that? Have you made a decision in your life that you've thought at the time might not be the best one for you or someone else, might have consequences, but you made it anyway?

Have you done that? I have. Or have you made a decision, perhaps the consequences of which took a long time to become clear, took a long time to play out in your life?

As you reflect on some of those less than ideal choices that you've made in your life, perhaps you can recognize that maybe there was selfish motivation behind them.

Right? As I said, I'm going to make this choice recognizing that it's not going to be ideal for so-and-so or this person or their circumstances, but it's best for me, so too bad.

[20 : 55] That expression, too bad, so sad, right? We used to go to family meals, extended family meals, and my sister-in-law would tell her kids that they had to have a no-thank-you portion of something that they hated.

So is that like a no-thank-you portion? Well, you know, there's a little bit of bad here, but I'll take it anyway. It's not that bad. This is where the sin series is going to come in, I think.

So this is what's best for me. This is really what I deserve. We may not even recognize that there's sinfulness, there's selfishness in that decision or direction.

As I said, well, on the scale of not-so-bad to really-bad, this is a five out of ten, perhaps, God, will forgive me.

Have you ever done that? I know this is sin. I'm going to do it anyway because God will forgive me. Oh, that's an ugly perspective and super dangerous.

[22 : 05] This is sin, but I'm going to do it anyway. It doesn't make God super happy. It actually hurts him, I think.

it makes him sad because it's not his plan for you. He knows how it will play out for you. He doesn't want us to make bad decisions.

He doesn't want judgment to come upon us, for us to feel pain and result in consequence to a bad choice we've made. But just like children, it's how we learn.

so I hope we're learning. Honestly, I can recognize that myself in my own life.

When I've made a decision and I've justified it or I've thought, hmm, cost-benefit analysis. But hopefully that you recognize that what can often be the negative consequences of a selfish or sinful

choice.

[23 : 10] Perhaps you could recognize, take a little more time and think about what those could be. My friends, I firmly, firmly believe that a guilty conscience, that expression, that we may experience from within ourselves, it's not really within ourselves at all.

I believe that's actually a sense of conviction. conviction. And I believe it comes from the Holy Spirit. When we make a decision and then regret it and don't really know why we regret it, I mean, aside from obviously consequences, if you feel guilty about something, it may be coming from somewhere other than within yourself.

Because I believe that that guilty conscience feeling that we have is a strong sense that we've drifted somehow, that we've come off of God's path for us.

We've diverted from his plan for us. So when we put our own interests ahead of the interests of others, that sense of emptiness that we might feel afterwards, I believe it comes from having sought to fill a need that only God and leaning into him can actually fill.

have you ever done something that you thought would make you happy and you just felt unsatisfied after? It's because you tried to make yourself happy rather than seeking the true source of joy, leaning into God for that.

[24 : 57] So as we continue in the story, we recognize that not only has the rich man seen that he made bad choices, he gets it suddenly, but he begins to try and change the outcome, try to change his fate, try to ease his pain.

So remember, we see in this rich man a pattern, a perpetual pattern. It's not something who's made one bad choice.

This is not a person who's made one bad choice, one sinful choice, and could have sought God's forgiveness. This seems to be a man who may have had many opportunities to change the course of his life and turn to God, but who stubbornly over and over chose his own way.

So the judgment he received is truly well earned. But even in this judgment, his perspective is still selfish. can you recognize that?

He's not repentant, not even remotely. He's looking to reduce his penalty. He's looking to soothe his sentence. He's looking to gain personal relief.

[26 : 14] He is in bargaining mode. Right? Do you recognize that? When it becomes clear that, well, the sentence is the sentence, he switches gears to something that, like I said, I call bargaining mode.

Have you ever done that with God? Probably all of us have. Lord, if you do such and such for me, then I'll do this for you.

Have you ever done that? Who exactly do we think we are when we do that? Give that some thought.

Bargaining with God. Okay, Lord, I'll make you a deal. You saved me, and yet I'm going to try and bargain my way through something.

So, just as the rich man begins to bargain, he turns not to faith, but to proof, doesn't he? He begs for his brothers to be given a clear sign of the consequences.

[27 : 26] He wants them to see what lies ahead if they don't change their course. You almost have to wonder if in asking for his brothers to receive this warning, the rich man recognizes already, they're on the wrong path.

Right? He recognizes probably in them patterns of behavior that landed him where he finds himself. Do you know anyone who you would call a show me Christian?

I don't know if I created that definition, but here it comes. Someone who declares their belief in God seems quite willing to believe and to have faith, but if you push to the issue just a little bit, they'd likely admit that just a little concrete proof would help.

Do you know anybody like that? Are you like that sometimes yourself? So, either at various points in your journey with God or even right now, are there times when you say, Lord, I just need something more.

I just need, show me more. And that's fine. You want God to step into your life and reveal himself to you in new ways. Totally legitimate.

[28 : 51] it. But where's your faith at? If you're asking for proof, where's the balance between proof and faith in your life? Friends, the Christian life is not about proof beyond a shadow of a doubt, which is a legal expression, right?

For someone's guilt to be determined, a lawyer will determine, I believe it's in Canada, I was on a law path at one point in my life. I believe it's in Canada, the wording is beyond a reasonable doubt to prove guilt, and in the U.S.

it's beyond the shadow of a doubt. That's the legal terminology for proving guilt over innocence. But the Christian life is about faith, right?

It's about trusting that God's promises to us, Jesus' sacrifice for us are true, right?

As we read in Hebrews 11, verse 1, faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

[30 : 12] Did you catch that? Faith is, faith should be the foundation of our life as Christians. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and being certain of what we do not see.

It's a contrast, right? When Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, their faith is confirmed with concrete evidence.

Jesus appears to them in person in the flesh. Resurrection would have been pretty hard to disbelieve for them, right? Jesus was standing with them.

He ate with them. They touched him. He talked to them in the flesh. But we also read in John chapter 20, verse 29, that Jesus says to them, because you have seen me, you have believed.

Catch this. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. That's us, my friends.

[31 : 28] Jesus is here among us in spirit. Jesus is not here, I don't see him, in the flesh. So our faith, you might argue, is challenging.

But, we don't know, we can't know exactly how God's plan will play out in our lives, or how God's plan will play out in all of creation.

But we can trust, through faith, that his plan will work out according to his will for us. The rich man in the parable craved tangible proof, particularly for his brothers.

He craved that, over allowing them to trust and have faith. As Abraham said, they've got the prophets.

They have the witness of scripture. scripture. But is that good enough? Friends, if we say we believe in God, this is the convicting part.

[32 : 43] If we say we believe in God, that we trust what the Bible tells us, then we have all the proof we need. faith. And it may just come down to the fact that we need to ask God to grow our faith.

Is that true for you? Can you have faith in God alone, in Christ alone, in the word of God alone? These are all the solas of the church.

Sola scriptura, the word of God alone, scripture alone. And actually, I want to do that as a series sometimes, so I'll stop there.

But these are the five solas of the church. They are the foundational beliefs that we have as Christians. And we sing in Christ alone. I put my trust, right?

Have faith in God's plan for your life, my friends, and trust that his plan is the best for you.

[34 : 00] Through the parable we've studied this morning, Jesus was telling his audience, unbelief is not actually an intellectual problem.

Does that seem like a strange statement to you? God's belief in God's belief in God's belief in God. It's not an intellectual problem to not believe in God because there is more than enough evidence. There's more than enough evidence for the character of God, his goodness in creation and in scripture. So we have no excuse for not worshiping him.

Friends, Jesus made it clear to us that choosing to believe in God is actually a moral problem, not an intellectual one.

Christian. You may have heard of R.C. Spruill. He's a theologian, well-known theologian. He says, and I'm quoting, unbelievers don't worship because they don't want to worship.

[35 : 11] They don't listen because they don't want to listen. They don't have ears to hear because they don't want to have ears to hear.

My friends, we've been reminded this morning that there are real consequences to the choices we make in our lives, just as we've read in this parable.

And there is no time to waste. As I said a moment ago, as you seek God's wisdom in making choices in your life, you can have faith in God's plan.

Trust that his plan is what's best for you. The warning that Jesus gives in this parable is a very serious one.

In fact, it's the most serious warning that Jesus will ever give me, will ever give you, will ever give anyone.

[36 : 15] My friends, be sure of your eternal destiny now. because once you're dead, it's too late. As we close our time together this morning, I want to lead us in a prayer of commitment or recommitment to God in our lives.

Pray this prayer with me and place your eternal destiny securely in the hands of Jesus. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things that I have done wrong in my life.

And we'll take a few moments to ask for forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience. Father, thank you for the prompting of your spirit in our hearts and our minds, the things that we brought before you in that moment.

Lord, please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong. Help me to turn from these things and back to you every day.

Father, thank you that through Jesus dying on the cross for me, I can be forgiven and set free.

Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your spirit.

[37 : 40] I now receive that gift. Please come into my life. Lord, refresh your presence in our lives by your Holy Spirit to be with us forever.

Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.