

JESUS ON DIVORCE

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Date: 11 January 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Father, sometimes your word talks about things that we don't want to talk about and we don't want to think about. And sometimes your word says things that just about everything within us disagrees with.

And sometimes your word says things that we might agree with, but we don't think anybody around us that we know at work or in our neighborhood or maybe in our family would agree with. And Father, we confess before you that it's very easy for us in these situations to not want to hear your word at all, to skip over it, to think about something that pleases us or chooses, that pleases us.

But Father, you are God, the true and living God, the creator of all things, the sustainer of all things, and you are a God who speaks. And you have spoken to us and you speak to us.

We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would gently but deeply come into our minds and come into our hearts and come into our wills, come into our bodies, come into who we are, that your Holy Spirit would fall upon us with gentle power, that we might hear your word and receive your word, and that your word would enter into us to the end that we would bear much fruit in our daily lives for your glory.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. So, some sort of strong texts.

[1 : 3 7] Here's the first thing. So I'll, if you're a guest here, by the way, first of all, if you're a guest here this morning, we always have some Bibles at the front. If you forgot your Bible, you're welcome to come and borrow a Bible or actually take it as a gift.

You don't have to bring it back. You can take it home with you if you want. And we're going to look at those Bible texts. And what we do at this church is we preach through books of the Bible. So it wasn't as if, George, you know, that's my name's George if you're a guest.

It's not as if I thought one day, what could I do to really sort of just lay a big guilt bomb on a whole pile of people? So why do I pick this text? Because that will really, you know, thin the congregation, thin the herd or something like that.

No, we preach through the Bible. We preach through books of the Bible. And this was the next text. And so we're going to look at it. And here's the thing, which if you don't get anything else, and I apologize that event after event after event happened that I wasn't able to get my points to Andrew.

So if you go on the webpage tomorrow in the afternoon, hopefully, if you need help with the points, they'll be up there on the computer or webpage.

[2 : 4 1] But here's the thing that struck me as I'm trying to wrestle with these texts. And it's as if the Holy Spirit spoke to me about a fundamental heart issue that only maybe I'm not always aware of, but it's a fundamental heart issue in terms of how I approach the Bible.

And maybe I'm vastly more wicked than you, but I think it's a common heart problem. Maybe it's always been a common problem, but I think it's especially a problem in an affluent, well-educated city like Ottawa.

And here's the heart issue. The true God who truly speaks is not a puzzle to solve so that I can be safe and flourish.

I'll say that again. It's too bad I don't have it up on the screen unless Andrew sort of types it while I speak, which would be sort of funny. The true God who truly speaks is not a puzzle to solve so that I can be safe and flourish.

And you might say, George, why on earth would you say something like that? Like, that's not a very Christian thing to say. You know, we're just supposed to believe God at his word. We're just sort of to take it and all that.

[3 : 50] But, you know, if I think about it, when I was sort of wrestling with this text, studying different commentaries, not only commentaries that have been written relatively recently, but commentaries that have been written other centuries where there were other types of perspectives on it.

And, you know, it's very easy for us to try to turn these passages into something that will be safe for us. As if it's a type of puzzle.

And if we can just sort of solve the puzzle, then, okay, then we can live with the text. And we can be safe with the text. And we can be safe with God.

And we can flourish because we're safe. And, but you know what? That's not who God is. And it's not who we are. In fact, texts like this reveal how we have a God project at work in our own lives.

And that this God project that's at work in our own lives means that we sort of want to set the terms of what God will be like. And we want to set the terms for what he's going to speak.

[4 : 55] And the terms about what he can and cannot tell us. And we want to set the terms. We want to have a type of negotiation with God to set these terms up. And so that once we know the terms of the deal and the terms of the arrangement, then we can go and we can do the different things that we want to do.

And in fact, that's often what religion does. Even Christianity, which has been in a sense hijacked by religion. It creates, you know, like maybe in some churches, there's a whole pile of rituals and rules around Sunday morning, which means that you have virtually no rules for the rest of the week.

That's very, very handy. You know, we've worked out some rules with God. And we agree with these rules with God. Okay, God, those are good rules. We agree with them. And now that we've agreed to these rules, I can go, whoa, okay, God is sort of, now we have God sort of settled.

You know, like an awkward guest who comes to a dinner party. We have him or her settled. This is the awkward guest, not God. We have God settled. And now we can get on with, and it's not going to be too disruptive to us having a good dinner party, us having a good life.

And often religion functions like that. And, in fact, people, and I don't mean to insult anybody. I'm Canadian, so I don't want to insult anybody. But often when we say that we're spiritual, not religious, that's often sort of what we mean.

[6 : 11] We have a different type of negotiation with God so that we can have God sort of be a certain type of way so that now that he, if we're spiritual, not religious, we might not know if God's a he or she or an it.

But I'm not saying that to make fun, but it's just a different type of language. And now he or she or it is sort of settled, and it's all part of our, in fact, now God is actually part of our adornment, how in our project to flourish and to be safe.

And texts like this that we just read a few moments ago that we're going to read again in a couple of seconds, it challenges our project at determining how we are safe and how we will flourish, how I will be safe, how I will flourish, and where I begin and where I end, and how God is going to fit in with who I am and the choices I want to make and the choices I have made.

And so I want to have God safe. And so when I come to a text like this, I approach it, you approach it like a puzzle.

And it's a puzzle that if we just click it and shape it the right way, God's safe. I can be safe. I can flourish. Now, I know some religious and spiritual people will use texts like this as a club to bang other people over the head with and to try to belittle people.

[7 : 41] And that's another, that's a separate problem. That's probably not as much of a problem with most of the people who are here. Most of us are probably not looking for a Bible text to run into a crowd, being able to whack people with to make them uncomfortable.

That's probably not our temptation. I don't know you all. Maybe some of you will hear that is your temptation. You need to repent. It's a different problem.

But for most of us, God is a puzzle. How did I put it? The true God who truly speaks is not a puzzle to solve so that I can be safe and flourish.

That's not what God is. God is, and we're going to see this in a moment, that God is the creator, he's the sustainer, he's the end of our longings, he's the end of our yearnings, because he's our helper, he's the one who redeems us through the death of Jesus upon the cross, that we can appropriate what he's done purely by faith, not weighing our merits.

That everything about God speaking and all of his words are all designed so that we will come to Jesus. And when we come to Jesus in faith to trust him as our savior, and we now receive him as our king, and we start to learn to live in his kingdom, that when we start to learn to do that, we reclaim the authentic humanity that God has intended for us for, whereby we can be free.

[9 : 03] No longer battered by idols and myths and demons, false gods, false utopias, everything in God's word is to funnel us to Jesus, to realize that we need to accept him as our savior and our Lord, and that once we give our lives to him as our savior, that once we start to follow him, even God's hardest teachings are for us to understand what it means to truly be human, to truly be a creature in the presence of the living God, who desires to live with us and be with us, so that we will go from one degree of glory to another for all eternity.

The God who speaks is the end of our longings and the end of our yearnings. He's not a puzzle to be solved so we can be safe and flourish. If you get nothing else out of the sermon, I hope you get that.

Let's look at the text. George had made some bold claims. Let's look at the text. So if you get your Bible out, it's Luke chapter 16, verses 16 to the end. We're going to read the whole bit that I read before.

We'll read that all before I'm finished. At different times, we'll stop and sort of look at the text and try to draw out from it what the Bible is saying. But remember, Luke 16, verses 16 to 31, remember throughout all of it is that in our heart, because this is one of the things about Jesus, religion and spirituality, we'll talk about all sorts of things, but Jesus always attacks the heart.

He always speaks into the heart, and the Bible understands the heart to be the center of who we are. Underneath all of our masks, all of our pretensions, all of our longings, all of our yearnings, all of our fears, the good, the bad, the ugly, everything in between, the very center of who we are, Jesus always goes right to the heart in the context of the living God, and that's what he's talking about here.

[10 : 57] So the text begins like this, verse 16 of chapter 16. Jesus says, The law and the prophets were until John. That's John the Baptist.

Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. A better translation would be, many of your versions would have sort of little notes underneath about it.

It might be better to say, and everyone is forcefully urged into it. In other words, we urge with the best of our reason, the best of our winsomeness, the best of our analogies, the best of our prayers, the best of what we can do, that we try to spare nothing at talking about the good news.

Every analogy we can think of. That's what Jesus is talking about. Then verse 17. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot, one stroke of the law.

And here he's referring to what we now call the Old Testament, to become void. So here's the first thing. With Jesus in his kingdom, I will learn to listen to the living God.

[12 : 10] That's what this text is. Underneath this text, we want to try to get a positive lesson from it. What does it mean? We're going to talk about this more in a few minutes. But what does it mean when we come to Jesus and accept him as our Savior and we desire to follow him as our Lord?

Well, one of the things it means is that we accept him as our Savior and we now just don't have a one-on-one relationship with him. We do have a personal relationship with Jesus, but it's a communal relationship as well.

It's communal because he calls us into his kingdom and he's the king. And what's one of the things that will happen to us in his kingdom? Well, as we draw closer to Jesus, we will learn, he will teach us, we will learn, the Holy Spirit will teach us to desire to listen to the living God and to learn to listen to the living God who actually speaks.

You know, one of the things in our culture, many people in our culture are very terrified with this idea that God speaks. They think, one of the persons I talk to regularly in coffee shops, he says, you know, George, George, George, George, you know, how on earth can you possibly think that something that was written 2,500 years ago or 2,000 years ago, that that can just continue to speak into our lives?

How on earth can you possibly believe that? You know, science continues, philosophy continues, literature, poetry, art continues, technology continues, everything continues and develops.

[13 : 40] Isn't it wiser to get the most recent thing? And isn't the most recent thing just going to have to be better? And it's one of the things he says to me.

And one of the things I try to say to him is, what if there is a God who really does exist who actually speaks to us? Like, what if it is that there is a God who's created all things and sustains all things, and this God actually speaks in words that can be translated into the heart language of every people group?

Because that's ultimately the claim of the Bible. See, why am I saying that? Look at the game. When Jesus says, verse 16, the law and the prophets were until John, but since then the good news of the kingdom is preached and everyone is talked about it.

And then he says, it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void. What Jesus is saying here is that God has spoken through the law and he's spoken through the prophets.

And because he is the one who ultimately speaks through the law and speaks through the prophets, then the words that have come out are the words that he wants to have there. And he stands behind these words as their guarantor, so to speak.

[14 : 54] And because they continue to always and perpetually be his words, that he chose to speak to our human race in a public manner that all who can read or all who can hear can come to hear and understand.

It's why it's because God is the ultimate author and the guarantor of these words, that these words have their potential power in our lives, that they can speak into our lives, that they can speak to our heart, the center of who we are.

They can speak to our heart and our heart's longing for things of the culture and things of our heart and things of the world and even maybe potentially things of the devil, as well as good things that we long and yearn for.

But that these words are words that speak into our heart about things that are true. And that's why Jesus says that the word void can also be translated as fail, that these words will continue on and on and on and on.

And we're going to see in a couple of weeks when we go to Luke chapter 21, that Jesus says his own words will have that type of power. And only if it's ultimately God who is the speaker behind and in the words can something like this be true.

[16 : 02] And that's what Jesus is teaching us. And so the words of God aren't words that are now going to limit our freedom, but in a sense unleash freedom and propel freedom.

They're words that will start to form our desires, our longings, our yearnings, our understandings, the categories by which we think as we think about everything else.

Because God made human beings to think and to write poetry and to compose music and to develop laws and to speak to children and to speak to wives and husbands and mothers and fathers and neighbors.

And he designed us to be curious and ask questions. And so God reveals this true truth, not that we will then somehow only read the words of this book and completely ignore science and completely ignore poetry and art and creativity, but to help us to understand that we are creatures, fallen creatures in a fallen world, that God still exists.

And his words come into our life to start to help us to orient ourselves and ground ourselves so that we can think in a more completely fully human way and think and be curious.

[17 : 21] And, you know, maybe your thing isn't poetry, maybe it's physics, or maybe it's engineering, or maybe it's math, but to pursue that and always day by day coming back to the God who speaks and speaks preeminently through his word, but will speak into our lives.

And that's what's behind this teaching of Jesus, that with Jesus in his kingdom, I will learn to listen to the living God.

And as I learn to listen, as you learn to listen, as we learn to listen together to the living God, that he can form and reform our minds and our hearts and our wills and our souls.

And as our minds and hearts and wills are reformed, it doesn't mean that our mind stops thinking and our will stops willing and our heart stops longing, but our mind can start to think in a less fallen way.

And our hearts can long for beauty in a less fallen way. And our wills can will goodness in our lives and in the lives of our culture in a less fallen way.

[18 : 31] But we are redeemed to be creatures created by our creator, who we were meant to know and to love and to serve.

And we were meant to do that not just by ourselves, but with others. And this text, just one other thing about it before I sort of go on, it's a profound refutation of Islam as well.

And it's very important to catch this because many Christians think about the Bible the way Muslims think about the Koran. And if Christians think about the Bible the way Muslims think about the Koran, then Christians aren't thinking about the Bible truly.

You see, in the Koran, the Islamic belief, and I hope I'm getting this accurate, if you're a Muslim who's come here this morning, my understanding is that God, Allah, speaks to Gabriel the angel.

And Gabriel the angel remembers what God says, and then Gabriel speaks to Muhammad. And Muhammad remembers what the angel says, and Muhammad speaks.

[19 : 37] And other people, because Muhammad was illiterate, other people write down what Muhammad spoke. But it's all dictation. Gabriel takes dictation from God, Muhammad takes dictation from Gabriel, and the other writers take dictation from Muhammad.

And it's like water through a pipe. It's just a conduit. And you'll notice here, and it's going to come up all the way through this text, that Jesus keeps referring to the law and the prophets.

And he refers to Moses. And so he refers to the fact that there are many books in the Bible, that there are many human authors, that the books have different literary genres.

And that the key of all the scriptures focusing on Jesus. But you see, it's very, very radically different for him to, for Jesus to say, you know, I know the fact that, you know, in his case, that there would be 39 books.

He knew that there would be more books, as we'll see in a few weeks when we look at Luke chapter 21. And that there, and he even calls them different genres, prophetic literature, and laws, instruction.

[20 : 40] So he recognizes different genres, that God chose, and God, the Bible, Jesus doesn't say this is the psychology that was going on in these different people.

All he says is that Moses wrote and prophets wrote and they wrote in different genres and they wrote in different times and they wrote in different contexts and they wrote the way they were going to write. But at the end of the day, what stands behind the words is God who ultimately gets the words that he wanted to be written in the different genres, in the different times, by the different authors, with different agendas, and different senses of literary technique and form.

And God uses all of these human things, respecting the freedom of the human authors, and without at all transgressing the freedom of the human authors, by the time the process is finished, the result is what God desired to have there.

And so we, reading the Bible, now we read law like law, we read prophecy like prophecy, we read poetry like poetry, we read historical narrative like historical narrative, and we read it all within the context of Jesus who marks the change of an age.

A few weeks ago, if you go back and listen to the sermons I did on John chapter 1, you'll see that in the final sermon I did just, I think, two weeks ago, is that the Bible teaches that Jesus is the exegesis of God.

[22 : 08] He's the interpreter of God. And all of God's word points to Jesus and is interpreted by Jesus. And not just Jesus in general, but in particular, the reason and the purpose that Jesus came, which is to help us by dying upon the cross to redeem us.

And that's what scripture teaches us. I never turned on my stopwatch. I can press it now and I can speak for another 40 minutes. No, just joking.

So that's what's happening in these words. So you say, okay, George, that's all very, very, very interesting. It's very, very interesting that you've stopped and you've spent a long time now on verses 16 and 17, you clever fellow, leaving you no time to talk about divorce.

Just keep in mind the first thing, right? The first thing is that as we read the Bible, we have to realize about a heart issue. And the heart issue is that we treat God like a puzzle to be managed or solved.

And once it's managed or solved, I can continue on in my life safe and flourishing. And that's the God who really speaks and really exists isn't like that at all.

[23 : 22] Right? The God, the true God who truly speaks is not a puzzle to solve so that I can be safe and flourish. So let's listen to this next text which sort of jumps out at us.

Probably if we were reading, if we went back in a time machine and read this text in 1954, people would just say, oh, the really interesting thing is the next text. In fact, actually, for most of us, the next text should be more important.

Last time I checked, so I'm using 2012 data, less than 20% of Canadians, less than 20% of Canadians give enough money to charity to ask for an income tax, like to be able to ask, to put a line item that they've given money to charity.

I think it's only \$100, \$150. Less than 20% of Canadians give even that amount of money to charity. The next text should be far more shocking to us than the divorce text.

Let's look at the divorce text. Let's listen to it again. Verse 18. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

[24 : 36] I'm married to Louise for 33 years. Neither of us are divorced.

My hope and my prayer is that if Jesus tarries that I'll have another 33 years with Louise and that we'll only grow closer as the years go on.

That's my hope. That's what I pray. That God will give us a long life together. That he will regularly incline my heart towards her and incline her heart to me. And that Jesus will be the savior of my marriage.

The Lord of my marriage. And that's what I pray. And that's what I hope will happen. So can I just say well, it sucks to be other people. I'm fine with this text.

No, there's, here's the thing behind this text. Um, with Jesus in his kingdom, I will learn to be sexually whole and free.

[25 : 41] With Jesus in his kingdom, I will learn to be sexually whole and free. Um, if we don't sort of understand that behind and overall and underneath and at the end of all of the different scriptural texts around sexuality and around marriage, if we don't understand that, then all of these texts will become very, very complicated and hard for us.

And if we're honest, texts like this are very hard in our culture because on one hand we agree with this text but on another hand we don't agree with it. On one hand we agree with this text because, um, we, we, um, those of us who enter into marriage don't want to have the marriage end in divorce.

And, um, if anything, um, for those of us who are in a marriage and, and we want to have the marriage continue to, to have our hearts inclined to our spouse and to grow into it and all, um, we don't want our spouse to think that for frivolous reasons they can break up the marriage because, uh, you know, frankly now I'm 33 years older and, and Louise is, uh, very attractive and she could find a younger model and a more attractive model or a richer model or a more handy model, uh, or a whole pile of other types of things and, and, and so on one hand our culture agrees and understands that marriages shouldn't just break up that, um, we might want to say that in our understanding of our culture we should be able to have a variety of sexual relationships and then at some point in time we decide to marry but when we marry on one hand we go into the marriage in our culture worried that our marriage will end in a divorce and the other hand hoping that it doesn't end on a divorce and, and partially because of, of what's going on in our culture we have a lot of ambivalence and longings and yearnings around marriage and so in the midst of all of that the Bible teaches that God's intent is that, um,

God calls, we are, some men and women are called to, uh, to marriage uh, of a man to a woman or a woman to a man and, um, and that when God calls us to a marriage of a man to a woman it's to be the intent of a lifelong union and that outside of that uh, we are called to abstain from sexual knowing and that, and that in fact while it's counterintuitive to our culture it wouldn't have been counterintuitive to our culture in 1954 or other times but in our culture right now that's a very counterintuitive statement that it's human flourishing happens within the context of either a lifelong marriage of a man to a woman where sexual knowing uh, where sexual knowing takes place and is part of it where sexual abstinence sexual knowing being abstaining from that in singleness and that human flourishing can be accomplished in both and that's the consistent overarching teaching of the Bible so what's this thing about divorce uh, you'll notice in the bulletin uh, now that the

Christmas holidays are over every week I put in something called going deeper and uh, going deeper I also have something called growing in grace and going in deeper I usually have some extra Bible verses that people can look at by themselves or with others to go deeper into the topic and I've placed in there the six other primary texts about divorce and remarriage in the Old and New Testament here's what I'm going to say about the text remember I said to you that um one of the things that Jesus teaches is he says that uh that ultimately God is the one responsible for the law the prophets and when we see in a few weeks Luke chapter 21 that God is the one responsible ultimately for the writing of the New Testament he stands behind the word he gives it its power so if Luke chapter 16 verse 18 was the absolutely only text in all of the Bible that talked about divorce and remarriage then we would have to take that as having no other type of context and it would mean exactly what it says but given that God is the author of all of scripture a very fundamental principle of interpreting the Bible is that we read the Bible every particular verse of the Bible within the context of the larger Bible that that's one of the things that you can pray for me it's one of the things for our ministry interns is that as they have experience preaching different parts of the Bible that they are also trying to learn the whole sweep of the Bible and so that and part of my mentoring with them is that they don't interpret one part of the Bible in such a way that it makes other parts of the Bible be contradicted or look foolish or look ridiculous and that's part of the task of everything so in this particular case there's no other case in Luke's gospel where Jesus talks about this we're going to talk about the context in a moment but if you it's very puzzling on one hand that Jesus says this immediately after he said that nothing in the law will ever go away and Deuteronomy 24 when you look at it later on in going deeper you'll see that

[30 : 54] Deuteronomy chapter 24 allows remarriage after divorce and when you look at some of the other texts you'll see that in Matthew chapter 5 and Matthew 19 a different book but Jesus allows remarriage after divorce when there has been pornea in the marriage pornea to the extent that it causes a break in the marriage and the wronged party does not believe the marriage can be healed and pornea it's a Greek word is any type of sexual knowing or sexual stimulation outside of the marriage of a man to a woman or the woman to the man and Jesus says that pornea can cause a break in a marriage in such a way that the wronged person can desire to remarry and in 1 Corinthians 7 there is a second case where in the case of basically desertion or abandonment or a massive rejection by the non-Christian of the Christian the marriage is broken and by implication a person can remarry so what is Jesus saying here

I would take it that we have to interpret these words in a way that doesn't contradict those other words and so I think it's referring to two particular types of things and remember how I said that what we often do in our understanding of the Bible is that we want to try to solve the riddle of God and the riddle of his word in such a way that it allows us on our terms to flourish and on our terms to be safe I meet somebody different than Louise and I decide that I want to spend time with that person who's different than Louise and I don't want to violate the biblical command against adultery so I divorce Louise so that I can marry this new person and God cuts right through that Jesus cuts right through that and says what you've just done is adultery don't play fast and loose with the Bible and don't play fast and loose with religious rules and being able to manipulate religious rules don't claim that you didn't fully intend everything in your marriage and a full sense of it and therefore there's some type of an exemption from it what you've just done is adultery in fact obviously in our culture with prenuptial agreements and other things like that there is a great fear of many people in our culture that people will enter into a marriage with the intention of divorce not most people most people especially those who are victims of desertion abandonment violence which is a particular heinous form of rejection of the other person people who enter into extramarital affairs but the wronged person in these things who really did desire to love and cherish and draw close to the other person then all that's happened is a great violation and a great wounding but some people use laws and exceptions and wealth and personal interest and personal desires for projects to cast away their promises and their commitments so they can move on to the next stage of their project in life and if some of you are here feeling wronged and picked on because I've said that all I'm trying to explain is what the Bible teaches and your quarrel is ultimately with Jesus not with me and I'm not trying to bang you over the head in Islam although I think in most cultures it's not really practiced very much but in Islam in there are

I've been told there are some places where you can a man can sleep with a prostitute and to get around the problem of adultery within Islam they marry the prostitute sleep with a prostitute and then divorce the prostitute and therefore they have not committed adultery texts like this would speak in a very powerful sense of rejection that would be an extreme case of using religion to avoid the clear intent of God that God intends marriage and he intends it as something that will last forever until Jesus comes or until death of one or both of the partners and that's his intention but the Bible recognizing that it's sinful human beings who enter into the holy estate of matrimony provides some cases whereby due to sin the marriage comes to an end and the wronged person can enter into a new marriage marriage and I think there's great wisdom in the

Bible a wisdom that our culture needs and a wisdom for which we should not be ashamed because the Bible is wise I only have a few minutes to talk about the last text George what about the rich man I'm going to say two things maybe I'll say three things relatively quick because I'm very conscious of the time the first thing is that with Jesus in his kingdom I will learn to open my eyes and be generous okay as we're going to read through this parable because the time consists I'm going to sort of give you the two points I'll be online if you want to write them down okay one of the things about this parable that we come to that's very shocking is that the rich man in the parable he's not said that he did a single thing wrong in terms of doing something wrong it's not wrong to have a party it's not wrong to have a feast it's not wrong to have somebody take you to an expensive restaurant and because they just want to honor you and love you they buy you a really expensive meal that's not a sin if we think those things are sins it's not because of the

Bible but because of a type of religion or spirituality which emphasizes asceticism and denigrates and puts aside the body it's not a sin to sit down and enjoy a big steak with sorry Baptists with a nice glass of red wine and mashed potatoes with lots and lots and lots of gravy it is not a sin to do that and for vegetarians it's not a sin to have a really nice big piece of tofu deep fried with a cheesy sauce and quinoa okay and I also know I'm married to a vegetarian those of us who had the steak we're going to be in heaven to see Jesus quicker than the people who had the tofu and the quinoa okay so you have to temper it but it's not a sin okay and here's the terrible thing the shocking thing about this parable what damns the man is not a sin of commission but a sin of omission it's not that he had lots of great food it is that he knew

[39 : 10] Lazarus by name and he knew Lazarus his poverty and he didn't do anything it is the sin of omission that damns him not a sin of commission and so part of the positive lesson of the text is that with Jesus in his kingdom I will learn to open my eyes and be generous and the other thing that we'll see is with Jesus in his kingdom I will learn good helplessness in the context of the helper this is a very very frightening idea for those of us who want to see God as a problem to be solved a riddle to be solved that we manage and solve it so that we can be safe and flourish on our own terms but the

Bible is constantly trying to undercut our sense of self dependence to say there's a type of helplessness which is good for us and the type of helplessness is always in the context of the presentation of help it's like going to some of these leadership and management things where they do things like ask you to fall backwards and trust that your co-workers will catch you that one of the things that drives people into the ground is the sense that they have to be in control all of the time and not trust that people will help them the Bible is wise let's listen to the parable 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 this is verse now we're up to verse 21 where over even the dogs came and licked his sores just pause there do not think Walt

Disney do not think Cinderella singing a song while the birds come and help with the dishes I think it was Cinderella where that happened or was it the seven dwarves I can't remember anyway don't think Disney the original the word for dogs here is wild dog not pet but wild and it's portraying Lazarus as being so helpless that he can't stop a wild dog from violating his person giving him even more infection while they lick his sores that's the image massive helplessness and unclean massively helpless verse 22 the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side the rich man also died and was buried and in Hades being in torment he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off with Lazarus at his side they called out father

Abraham have mercy on me and send Lazarus see I'm going to tell you in a moment but this is very the only parable of all of Jesus's parables where anybody has a name is this parable only parable everybody else says man was going down to Jerusalem there was a father with two sons there was a woman who lost a coin it's always just something this is the only parable where somebody's named and it has several reasons for it and one of them is here that now it reveals the rich man doesn't say Abraham you have a whole pile of former street people up there could you pick one of those street people and just you know help me out here a bit okay all those days he was feasting he knew who the guy was did nothing his omission is revealed his omission is revealed verse 25 but

Abraham said child remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus and like man are bad things but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish and besides all this between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who had passed from here to you may not be able and none may cross from there to us and the rich man the formerly rich man 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 into this place of torment just as a second here how do you think it would actually work if the rich guy had five brothers and somebody came to him and said I've just come and your brothers in hell I don't think that conversation would actually be highly successful but Abraham said they have Moses and the prophets let them hear them in other words Moses and the prophets are all we need to know about our need for Jesus and to learn to follow him and live in his kingdom and the rich man said no father

[44 : 23] Abraham but if someone goes to them from the dead they will repent and Abraham said if they do not hear Moses and the prophets neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead and those of you who have been here other weeks know that at a literary level how Luke's gospel is written is that in Luke chapter 9 Jesus announces to his disciples that he's going to Jerusalem to die and he will rise again again that he's going to Jerusalem to die and when he dies he will rise again it's a reminder to us as a reader by the time we get to the end of Luke's gospel and Jesus is risen from the dead that if we don't listen to Moses and the prophets we won't listen to one who rises from the dead here's the final significance about the text the name Lazarus the name Lazarus is but the main thing about it is that its name means and the name has to mean something because it's the only time anybody's named in a parable and it means

God helps God helps that's what it means Lazarus is completely and utterly helpless in every sense of the word physically he can't move physically he is completely and utterly having his space violated he has no financial resources he is completely and utterly helpless and the only thing that gets him into heaven is that God helps so here's the final thing about this text and we're going to stand in a moment and close in prayer conversion happens when we say to the father all my life I have thought of myself as a rich man and I have never realized I am Lazarus if we approach the Bible thinking that we are the rich man we will never understand the Bible if we approach religion and spirituality and Jesus himself as the rich man we will never understand

Jesus we will never understand the Bible we will never understand God Jesus is inviting me and you to understand I spend my days as the rich man but I am Lazarus who needs God's help and not only is conversion when we go and say God I never realized how much all I wanted to do was control and manage you and I am Lazarus change me from the rich man to Lazarus that is going to require humility of you and me change me from the rich man project I am Lazarus help me and not only is that how we get converted it's how we grow as followers of Jesus that day by day by day

I say to him father I've spent my entire week wishing that I was the rich man and I have not realized that I am Lazarus and that I am helpless and you reveal my helplessness in the context of the great helper the great deliverer who loved me so much he died upon the cross for me I am Lazarus Jesus is the helper help me please stand bow our heads in prayer father ask that your holy spirit would move and work deeply in our hearts and our minds that you would reveal to us father gently but persistently reveal to us how much of our lives are lived in terms of being the rich man and refusing to acknowledge that we are Lazarus and that you have provided that great help that fits us to know

Jesus and to live in his kingdom both on this side of the grave and for all eternity we ask father that your holy spirit would convict us that convict me convict each one to turn from the rich man project and accept and embrace that I am Lazarus and that Jesus is my great helper father help me to live my life conscious of this make me a disciple gripped by the gospel who now lives for your glory and all this I ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen please take a posture of prayer as we enter into a time of intercession as we enter this time of prayer please feel free to take whatever posture helps you to communicate with God our father heavenly father as we enter this new year help us both individually and corporately to seek your will both for ourselves and