

Lazarus - The Poor Man Becomes the Rich Man

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 September 2018

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Let us turn for a little to the chapter we read in Luke chapter 16. We've been looking at different characters within the Bible, different people, and we're going through it alphabetically.

Now we're at L, so here is where we have the story that Jesus tells us of the rich man and Lazarus. In verse 25, but Abraham said, child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things.

But now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. This is a story that Jesus has told that we're all very familiar with.

But while we inevitably have to look at the rich man, the main focus is upon the beggar, Lazarus. Jesus is often taught by way of contrasts, and as we know, it's often a very good way of teaching, because when you contrast things, it highlights what you're trying to show all the clearer.

[1 : 1 5] For instance, Jesus taught about the publican and the Pharisee in prayer. He taught about the prodigal and the elder brother. There were the five wise and five foolish virgins.

There was the house on the rock and the house on the sand. And so we often have these contrasts in Jesus' teaching, and here we have a real contrast again. And the context of this story that Jesus tells is in the form of rebuking the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and for their greed, for their covetousness.

And Jesus has been showing, if we have read right through it, that our attitude to wealth has huge significance for us. It even has a significance as far as our destiny and our eternity.

See, people very often try and compartmentalize their lives. And they say, well, here on Sunday, that's all right, we go to church, this is our religious bit, this is our bit, we do a wee bit of worship and so on, and we might read the Bible, or we might do this and that.

That's our religious thing, but the rest of the stuff, well, that's mine, that's through the week, that's other stuff. And so people try and separate the two. But you can't.

[2 : 3 5] Because everything ultimately belongs to God. God rules over everything. And our lives, and particularly for Christians, our life, our Christian life, is a Christian life everywhere.

It's a Christian life at home. It's a Christian life at work. It's a Christian life in our leisure. It is always a Christian life. Christ has to be at the center of our lives.

Now, of course, we're all aware that there are times we fail in that. And, of course, we have to go and confess our sin in respect to these things. But that's what Jesus is showing.

And this story that he tells, that's the background to the way that the Pharisees, their greed, their covetousness, and the way that they measured people's value and people's lives.

And Jesus is showing that if we don't have faith in the Lord, then nothing else really matters.

[3 : 3 6] And, of course, even as Jesus taught them, we read there in verse 14, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. So we've always got to remember this is in the background.

And so Jesus tells us the story of the rich man who was just like them. He was a rich man, a lover of money. And like the Pharisees, he had a choice of what he did with his wealth.

Everybody has a choice. We all have choices in life of what we do. And particularly if people are wealthy, they have a choice whether to live a life of complete self-centeredness and to spend everything they have upon themselves and to build up massive portfolios and empires or whatever, or are they prepared to spread that wealth.

And one of the great things that we see today that many of the world's richest people, men and women, have opened up their heart and their purse strings and they spread so much of that wealth for the good of people.

And that is always commendable to see. But Jesus, of course, is highlighting that if our focus in life is wrong, if our focus in life is on wealth, if that's where our focus is, then we're in the wrong place. [4 : 57] Now, while there are huge contrasts when we look at the rich man and Lazarus, there are also obviously points of comparison.

For instance, the rich man and Lazarus were both going to die. That is part and partial. It doesn't matter whether you're the richest person in the world or the poorest person in the world. Everybody's going to die. That's a point of, that's similar to all. God said to Adam, In the day that you eat of the fruit, you will surely die.

And death has come and death reigns. And so, it doesn't matter who we are or what we've achieved, death is the end. Beauty will fade, strength will weaken, speed will slacken, mental abilities will begin to fade, all these things.

And that's why so many people are so disillusioned in life. And they feel so empty in life. Because if all that you have is what this world gives, then it is empty.

[6 : 04] Both the rich man and Lazarus, they also had never dying souls. Death is not the end. Some people will say, that's it. When you're dead, you're dead. But that's not how it is.

And it's very obvious if you go through all the different, so many of the different cultures of this world. And into places where even Christianity has no impact. There are so many areas of this world are so convinced of an afterlife.

They might not have the understanding or the knowledge that comes through the word of God. But it is an inbuilt awareness within people. And so it is. Because when God created Adam, he breathed into him the breath of life.

And he became a living soul. And he has a soul that never dies. Body dies. The soul continues. So the rich man and Lazarus had that as well.

And the rich man and Lazarus, after death, both have to give an account of what they did in this world. You and I are going to have to do that. We have to give an account to God of what we did, good or bad.

[7 : 09] And that's quite a challenging thought. Something every so often you might have an awareness of that. The thought of standing at the judgment seat of Christ.

It's quite a thought. Sometimes it's the thoughts that you try and put away from yourself. And you say, oh, I'll think about that again. Don't want to really think about that. But again, if we believe the Bible, which we do, then that's what the Bible tells us.

And so these are Solomon challenging things. Who is our master? It's a great question that we have to ask. Now as we see, the Pharisees tended to measure people by their social standing. By their bank account. By their, they had a scale for people to measure them. And you know, it's a really sad reflection on society.

If that's the way people value others. And so often, even today, sometimes we feel that those in authority just look on the population.

[8 : 12] As numbers, as statistics. That you often feel the heart has gone out of communities. We're thankful for the community that we still enjoy here. But so many places, so many communities.

Even in the cities that used to be rich communities. The older people will lament and say, you know, I remember days they would say, when this was a community and so many places have broken down.

The heart has gone out of them. Because people, people in the eyes of so many are worth it. Every passion is important in this world. Every single passion.

And so, we might think that that's something that's only for today. But it's obvious it was the same back in Jesus' time. And again, Jesus here lifts the lid on what something of the afterlife is.

Because obviously in this world, we can't work that out of ourselves. We need, that's what the Bible does. The Bible opens up for us. The Bible teaches us. God reveals things to us that we couldn't work out ourselves.

[9 : 16] And so, this is one of the things in this story that God is revealing something of what happens afterwards. Well, here's this rich man. And he lived in a mansion.

And he was clothed with the very best. The purple was indicating either nobility or great luxury. And it's obvious that he just spent on himself.

He was the kind of person. It doesn't say that he was an immoral person. It doesn't say, although, to be really, really wealthy and never to spend and never to give any away or to help others is in itself immoral.

But it doesn't say that he was a bad man. No point does it say that. But he was a person who lived only for himself. His vision of life didn't really go beyond himself.

What he could get out of life. What he could achieve in life. And he, in fact, was oblivious to this poor man who sat at his gates.

[10:13] So we have in contrast we have Lazarus. And there couldn't be a greater contrast because this poor man didn't have anything. It would look like he couldn't even walk.

Because it tells us that this poor man was at his gate. He was laid. At his gate was laid a poor man which would indicate that Lazarus himself couldn't walk to the gate of the rich man.

But obviously some people who cared enough would carry him there and put him down. In the hope that he might get some scraps that were left over.

That the dogs, we see that there are dogs there. These would be just the scavenging dogs that would run around the street. And they would make their way to the gate of the rich man because they knew there would be scraps would be chucked out.

And so Lazarus was hoping to get some of the scraps that were thrown to the dogs. That is why those who carried him there carried him there.

[11:16] He was covered. He was in a mess. He was covered. His body was disintegrating. And he was covered in sores. He would have been in agony. And the only comfort he was getting was from the scavenging dogs who came around.

And they would lick the sores on his body. So you couldn't have a greater contrast. Here's the rich man living in splendor. And there's this beggar at his door.

The rich man doesn't even care about him. Not concerned. He doesn't get a plate and say to the servant, Hey, will you go and take this plate? Here's all this lovely plate out to that poor man Lazarus.

It's just what was being any scraps that might be thrown to the dogs. That's all he was going to get. But then, of course, a day comes when everything changes.

Because the rich man, although he was a rich man, as we said, was going to die. And so was Lazarus going to die. And, you know, the thing is, you think about it.

[12:21] Here's this rich man. And he knew he was going to die. And, you know, I would imagine, I don't have any riches, but I would imagine that if you had a lot of riches, one of the things that must be quite galling is that you get older and older and older.

And if money has been your goal, you're saying to yourself, Oh, what am I going to do? I've got all this wealth and I'm only going to have it for 60, 70, 80 years.

And then that's it. It's gone. I've got to leave every single cent, every penny, everything behind. And I can imagine that must chew away at people.

But the riches that Lazarus had were completely different riches. He actually had lasting riches that the rich man didn't have.

Because as we see, Lazarus went to heaven. And the only way he could go to heaven was because he had Jesus as his Lord. And having Jesus as his Lord meant that despite all the pain of his body, he had God's peace in his heart.

[13:30] The peace of God that passes knowledge. He also had the joy of the Holy Spirit. There would be times in Lazarus' life that he experienced that joy, not because he had nothing in his circumstances to make him rejoice, but because the Lord's Spirit was in his heart.

He would have had that joy. He would be able to speak to the Lord. When there was nobody else to speak to, you would sometimes, I'm sure you'd hear him whispering, Oh Lord, I'm in so much pain.

And I have nobody and I have nothing. Lord, help me. I know I've got you. And you'll hear me. You'll listen to me. And you know, it's a wonderful thing when we have the Lord, when nobody else is prepared to listen, or even can understand that we can go to the Lord and say, Well Lord, please, please help.

Well, Lazarus, the poor man, had these riches. And then, of course, we come to this point where the rich man and Lazarus die.

And we don't know what happened to Lazarus. It doesn't tell us about any burial or any funeral. He might have been just thrown in a rubbish heap.

[14 : 52] We don't know. But he was carried into heaven. This is what happened when he died. And what a change took place.

And you know, that's how it's going to be for the believer. There's going to be the most incredible change taking place. Nobody wants to die. We often don't want to think about death. But you know, as a believer, when you come to die, you might have a terribly hard, difficult death. You might have a lot of pain.

You might, there might, we don't know what's in front of us. But you are then going to be ushered. And I don't know how long or how short, because there's so much we can't speculate about. We can speculate, but we don't know. The transportation of our soul from the body into glory, we don't know how long that takes. But it's going to happen.

[15 : 53] And we're going to arrive in glory. And the transformation from where we've left to where we've arrived, of how we feel, how we felt, to how we feel, there's nothing, we've never had an experience to equal what's going to happen then.

From what we felt to what we feel, from where we've been to where we are, it's going to be beyond anything that we can even begin to imagine.

Well, that's what happened for this poor man. And if ever there was a role reversal, it was here. Because now the rich man dies, and it tells us that with regard to him, that the rich man also died and was buried, and he was in torment.

And he probably had a wonderful funeral. There were probably amazing eulogies. And he would be lauded. And while all this was going on, the rich man's in absolute misery.

This is the ultimate role reversal. And you know what is happening is, that the rich man in hell, is seeing, he's given a glimpse.

[17 : 12] Now I don't know, again, we don't know. But it's obvious from scripture, that there is sufficient, that something of the two destinies can be seen. And the rich man in hell, is able to see something of the glory, of what heaven is.

And he sees Lazarus there. Isn't that an incredible reversal? It wasn't so long before, that the rich man was looking out.

The rich man was in the mansion, and he was looking out. And he was seeing Lazarus. He wasn't bothering with him. But now the reversal. And now he is outside.

And he's looking in. And he's seeing Lazarus, in this heavenly mansion. And he's on the outside. And he can't get in. And you know what I find, one of the most awful things, about the whole thing, is that, well obviously, it's not the most awful thing, what I want to see.

But with regard to, memory, of all that we are, obviously stays with us. Because, that's what he's told. Remember, that you in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, bad things.

[18 : 34] But, it's obvious from here, he's, Father Abraham, have mercy on me. And look at what the mercy, he calls for. Just to send Lazarus, to dip the end of his finger, in water, and cool my tongue, for I'm in anguish.

He's crying out for mercy, and there is none. I can't think of anything, more awful. And if that is a picture, of hell, then for me, that is the most awful, picture imaginable.

No, mercy. Because, mercy is part of, what makes life, good here, in this world. God's goodness, and mercy, follow us, all the days, of our life.

Can you imagine, living, where God's mercy, is not to be found? Well, that apparently, is part of what hell is.

That's why, it's such a fearful, fearful place. And so, the rich man is told, sorry, nothing I can do.

[19 : 46] There is a huge divide, between where you are, and where I am. And no longer, we can't pass between two. And you know, there's a divide, between where we are, and heaven, in this world.

But only one is able, to bridge that, and that is Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus, came into this world. He came to bridge the gap, between ourselves, and heaven. We can't, bridge that gap, ourselves.

But Jesus, has bridged it for us. And that's why he says, I am the way. I'm the way to heaven.

There's no other way, but, but, by me. And so, it's in this life, while we still have our goodness, and mercy, that Jesus is saying, come on.

Take me. I'll take you there. Trust your life to me. It's the only way. And so, the voice is told that, Lazarus, is now being comforted.

And what does that mean, for Lazarus? Well, there are loads of things, in the Bible, but if we just pick out, one version, in Revelation, that we're told something, about the comforting, that goes on in heaven.

[20 : 58] We're told that, death, shall be, no more. Isn't that wonderful? We will never, ever, ever, in heaven, hear, that somebody has died.

In this world, we're hearing it all the time. Oh, did you hear that, so and so passed away? And there's always sadness. It will never be said, in heaven, that the place, which once knew him, will know him, no more.

That will never, ever, be said. Because the citizens, of that eternal city, will be there, forever, and ever, and ever. Death, you see, in this world, death, swallows up life.

But it's a reversal there, because, that is what Jesus has done, is that life, swallows up death. Death is swallowed up, never, to be seen again.

Neither, shall there be, any more sorrow. Isn't that amazing? No more sorrow. So often, we have sighed, and we've groaned.

[22 : 04] So often, our hearts, have been broken. There's always something, isn't there, that causes a bit of sorrow. In heaven, never, never, ever, ever, ever again.

We'll never groan, or sigh, or moan again. We're also told, that there'll be no more pain. Isn't that amazing?

Pain in our bodies, pain in our mind, pain in our soul. Gone, forever. And we're also told, there'll be no more crying, because God himself, shall wipe away all tears.

One of the first things we do, or the first thing you do, when you, when a baby is born, into this world, it cries. It's one of the last things, that happens, when death occurs.

Those round, they cry, can't help it. This world, is full of tears. Every one of us, knows the tears, of this world, in one way or another.

[23 : 09] Wouldn't it be wonderful, to be in an environment, where there is nothing, that will ever, cause tears. And even our memory, however painful things are, and remember, memory continues, God will wipe away, all tears.

So that however bad, the experience may have been, in this world, God will see to it, in such a way, that you will see, that God was actually, working for your good.

And that what looked, terrible, and what was terrible, in your experience, that somehow, in the great hand of God, there was good, that you couldn't see, and you never saw, in this world.

Because he's going to wipe away, all tears. No wonder, what a contrast. And that is, what is available, for each and every one of us.

And that is, in Jesus Christ. As we said, there are only two destinies, the Bible shows us. And we have a choice. Either heaven or hell.

[24 : 17] And the Bible, makes it very clear, that it is by, accepting Jesus, as our Lord, as our Savior, as our King, that we get to heaven.

Or we can simply, reject him. And if we do, then we don't get, to heaven. I pray that, every single one of us today, will look to, this Jesus.

And that we will seek, this Jesus, as our very own. Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us. And we give thanks, for your word. It's a solemn word.

Sometimes your word, hits us hard. It challenges us. It breaks in upon us. Sometimes we say, oh I don't like this. But that doesn't alter, the fact that it is your word.

It is your truth. And so we pray, that we may be wise, to salvation. That we may hear, what you're saying to us. And that you will bless us. Take us to our home safely.

[25 : 19] Do us good. Take away our sin, in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. We conclude singing, from Psalm number 17, and sing Psalms.

Psalm number 17, and sing Psalms. Psalm number 17, and we're going to sing, and we're going to sing, well I put down, four, two, eight, one, two, three, four.

It's from the middle of verse four. We're going to sing these four verses, and then the last verse, verse 15 as well. So from the middle of verse four, which is on page 18.

Psalm number 18, from every evil path, by your word, I'm preserved. My feet have held to all your ways, from them I have not swerved. I call on you, O God, for you will answer me.

O turn your ear toward my prayer, and hear my earnest plea. Display your steadfast love, and save with your right hand all those who flee for help to you, when foes against them stand.

[26 : 24] In shadow of your wings, hide me in times of strife, and as the apple of your eye, preserve and guard my life. And then verse 15. This is talking about death.

See like in verse 14 beforehand, Save me by your right hand from all such people, Lord, from mortal men who in this life will have their sole reward. You fill them with good things. Their sons are satisfied. They leave their children all the wealth which they have set aside. But now the contrast. But I, in righteousness, your face will surely see. And with your likeness, when I wake, I satisfied shall be. What a beautiful picture of arriving into heaven from the sleep of death. When I wake, I satisfied will be, because we see the face of Christ. So from the middle of verse 4, 4 stanzas, and then verse 15, From Every Evil Path. From every evil path, by your word I'm preserved.

[27 : 44] My feet have held to walk your way, From them I have not swerved.

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me.

O turn your arms, my prayer, And hear my earnest glee.

Display your strength, my God, And save with you my hand, While I look to flee, What else do you, When foes are in sin's hand?

In shadow of your wings, Hide me in times of strife, And as the apple of good eye, Reserve and guide my life, But I in righteousness, Your face will surely see, And with your likeness, When I wake, I satisfy, My life, My life, I am me.

[29 : 54] Now may the grace, Mercy, And peace of God the Father, Son, And Holy Spirit, Rest and abide upon each one of you, Now and forevermore. Amen.