

GOD-GLORIFYING GENEROSITY

Across Easter we're reminded, and we remember all that Christ did for us. But it's not, or never for, nostalgic purposes. What has this Easter done to *awaken us* to what Christ has done, to what I must do in response.

Hot on the heels of Easter we arrive at a sobering passage in Luke. A passage that asks of us, do I love him more, than material things, than money and does my love for him *shows itself in God-glorifying generosity*.

What this parable teaches us, is the choices we make and the way we live our lives – particularly with regards to money, generosity and meeting needs – has an effect on our eternity.

I recall the Sunday school teacher who told his class the story of the rich man and Lazarus and then asked, *"Now, which would you rather be, boys—the rich man or Lazarus?"* One boy replied, *"I'd like to be the rich man while I'm living and Lazarus when I die."*¹

Sadly, it's one, or the other!

This morning the encouragement is, to be on the right side, for our eternity. Genuine salvation and acceptance of what Christ has done, *shows itself in God-glorifying generosity*.

(READ) ¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.'

²⁵ "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. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

³⁰ "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹ "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

There is some historical debate about whether this is a parable, because it is unusual for people to be named in parables, and unlike other parables it isn't obvious what the one main teaching is. I believe it is a parable, and it comes with **a clear principle: Love for money keeps us out of heaven and ignores the needy. Love for Christ secures our place in heaven and shows itself in God-glorifying generosity.*

The story is about the contrasting life of an *unnamed* Rich man, with a *named* poor man - Lazarus. Following a hard life, the poor man dies, and is carried to heaven. The rich man then dies and finds himself in hell, thinking even at that point he can have Lazarus, serve him, then bargain with Abraham about his unsaved family. However, they've been given everything they need, in the word of God, to make an informed decision. Even sending a resurrected person, won't make an ounce of difference. *The problem was not the message; it's the hearer*

This parable is not a story about a Rich Man who is a follower of Jesus, and sins by ignoring the enormous needs of the man at his gate.²

No the story is about a Rich Man who is prevented from being a genuine follower of Jesus by his love for money and wealth, made worse by the fact he had the resources to help Lazarus, but ignored him. There is no repentance of that lifestyle and his ignorance, and therefore his eternity, is not with God.

In the story you'll notice Jesus has given us enough graphic detail to see the contrast is not minor, but – to use the language of the text – there is a *chasm* between the two men, *in their lives; in death, and finally the contrast of their eternity*

So firstly, let's take a closer look at the **CONTRASTING LIVES** of the two men...

CONTRAST IN LIFE (Vv. 19-21)

THE RICH MAN

Not named...dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. Meaning literally that he wore his wealth on his sleeve, and postured about his wealth. And he never went hungry, quite the opposite, had an abundance of food. And the richest of foods at that. ESV = (v.19) *"feasted sumptuously every day"*

Lazarus sat at the gate of **his house**. It was obvious he was there...main point of entry. Guests would have walked right past Lazarus as they visited the Rich Man. *He was ignored!*

² Because of this I'm not prepared to say – as far as this text is concerned – that a person can lose their salvation through acts of selfishness and ignorance of other's needs. I would remind us again however, that if we love money, we hate God. If we hate God, we are not saved.

LAZARUS

Lazarus is named, when the Rich Man isn't. This makes the story more personal for Lazarus.

And there he is at the Rich Man's gate, sitting right by the letterbox. His appearance would be clearly dishevelled. He would have smelled. I imagine he would have occasionally created a scene with his begging, with dogs, street animals – with all of the diseases and infections they would have carried – tended to Lazarus care. While the Rich Man probably had a cupboard full of bandages and Rawleighs!

There would be no mistaking Lazarus' condition. Sitting at the gate the butcher, greengrocer and baker all would have walked passed him. There's that lovely smell when you drive past Couplands...fresh bread...he would have smelt the huge amount of luxurious food – roast lamb, potatoes, pomegranates and fresh bread – being prepared, and all he wanted was to eat the crumbs that fell of the plates

Jesus' contrast of the men is deliberate: Lazarus was about as genuinely and absolutely poor, hungry and unwell as any person could be. And wanted and needed help.

The Rich Man was about as absolutely rich with material things, and housing and food as any person could be. But despite having enormous resources, he was completely caught up in his own world of wants and was totally ignorant of Lazarus.

Like a certain old rich man with a miserable disposition who visited a Rabbi. He took the rich man to a window and said *"look out there"*. And the rich man looked into the street. *"What do you see?"* asked the Rabbi. *"I see men, women and children"* answered the rich man. Then the Rabbi took him by the hand and led him to a mirror, *"now what do you see?"* *"I see myself"* the rich man replied. Then the Rabbi said, *"in the window there is glass, and in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, and see only yourself"*

The Rich Man, could only see himself.

CONTRAST IN DEATH

Jesus next notes in the story (v.22) Lazarus died. The implication being that Lazarus was at the Rich Man's gate for a long time, meaning, the Rich Man's ignorance of Lazarus' need was longstanding.

Lazarus is carried by the angels to Abrahams side, in paradise. By contrast Jesus simply says of the Rich Man, that he *"...also died and was buried"* That's it! The brevity of Jesus' remark is deliberate so as to assign no value to what he achieved.

Jesus has given us very specific detail of their lives, that both men have died, and now in Vv. 23-31 we arrive at the most sobering part of the parable describing the *contrast of their eternity*.

CONTRAST IN ETERNITY (Vv. 23-31)

Even though Lazarus is mentioned in eternity, at Abrahams side – enjoying all of the amazing eternal benefits of God and heaven – all of the attention, really, is on the Rich Man.

Lazarus is at Abrahams side in paradise, but note v.23 in our passage. Jesus doesn't hold back on the graphic nature of where the Rich Man is and what he's feeling and experiencing, his regrets and his desire for others to not make the same decisions he has

The first thing Jesus says is the Rich Man is *"In Hades..."* "Hades" = Hell, is not a fun place. It is not the place where the party will go on for all eternity.

Jesus describes hell in Matt. 25:30 as a place of *"darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* And in Mark 9:43 *"where the fire never goes out...the worms that eat them do not die..."*

From hell, the Rich Man calls out to Abraham

²⁴ ...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.'

Notice the Rich Man calls out Lazarus' name, meaning he knew his name...despite his ongoing ignorance of Lazarus' need, in life. Furthermore, the Rich Man asks for the thing to be done for him, that every day, Lazarus wanted from the Rich Man.

Meaning even in Hades, in torment – so he's feeling something – the Rich Man is still entitled and continues to treat Lazarus as beneath him.

Remember it was the tongues of the dogs that licked the sores of Lazarus. It is now the Rich Man's tongue that needs relief from Lazarus...

What the Rich Man was experiencing was the result of his love for money, the accumulation of enormous financial resources, that came, not with a spirit of generosity, but a self-justifying negligence of other's needs. He had (v.25) *"...received (his) good things, while Lazarus received bad things..."*

Ultimately the result of that lifestyle was rejection of Christ, and no mercy from God³.

Prov. 21:13 *Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.*

The Rich Man finds himself in the torment of hell, while Lazarus enjoyed the wonders of heaven.

³ Because he had not being merciful

You all know I enjoy the ocean. Little else helps me to appreciate maybe what the wonders of heaven are, like a sunrise at Waihi Beach, or Matarangi. Many times I've had tears running down my cheeks as I've worshipped God and wondered about the beauty of heaven. Even though we don't have any real comprehension of what heaven will be like.

Rev. 21:3b, 4 ...*God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

I believe, that we know God is there, and there's where he wants us, is enough. We know we will be free from all sin and the consequences of sin, free from the sins of others against us.

It is for those who know Jesus Christ, our home. And it is infinitely more than we can imagine. But the sobering truth also is there is a "*chasm*" (v.26), that is uncrossable, note this, after death.

Now it's vitally important we note this uncrossable chasm – between heaven and hell – is not fixed in place because somehow we think God has a cosmic grudge. There is a "*chasm*" because of the love and the justice of God. Remember we've just studied 3 parables (lost sheep, coin and son) where Jesus teaches God wants people to be found, to everlasting life. But heaven is for those who willingly leave everything behind to follow the person of Jesus, who turn from a life of sin, to a life of glorifying him; a life of mercy, grace and generosity toward others.

Rom. 2:7, 8 *To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*

Hell is for those who reject Jesus Christ, who say "*I don't need him, I want to live my life my way*"

Even though the Rich Man was all too aware of his own suffering, what he could not see was that he, was the cause of it. In life he'd made his choices, which had eternal consequences. It didn't matter that the Rich Man thought because he was a son of Abraham his salvation was secure

He was complacent. As professing Christians, we must be careful of complacency. That is being complacent with our eternal security, then doing the equivalent of things we see the Rich Man doing.

Before I go on there are a couple of questions the text asks us to answer, namely: Was it because Lazarus was Poor he got to go to heaven? Do all poor people go to heaven? Was it because the Rich Man was Rich he was sent to hell? Do all Rich people go to hell? The answer of course to these questions is, **NO!**

We might think the Parable teaches that the poor go to heaven and the rich to hell. St Augustine's commentary on this verse helps us, if we carry that view. He says the problem is that *poor* Lazarus is carried to the side of *wealthy* Abraham. If wealth alone determines our fate, then Abraham should be in Hades right along with the rich man.⁴

Our bank account, on its own, is not what determines our eternity. *Love for money – rich or poor - keeps us out of heaven, and ignores the needy. Love for Christ – rich or poor - secures our place in heaven, but shows itself in God-glorifying generosity.*

Look with me at Vv.27-30. The Rich man now realises there is no crossing over, and much like he asked for relief when he was not prepared to give relief, he asks for mercy for his family where he was not prepared to be merciful. And ironically, he asks that Lazarus be the one to go to his family and *"warn them"*

Even though they had their daily time with God, were part of a Home Group, attended church regularly, the Rich Man knew his brother's lives were based around the love of money. Not Jesus. Not the word of God. The Rich Man knew his brothers didn't listen.

"Listen" btw, is not 'just' hearing. *"Oh that's interesting"* To listen is for God's word to birth faith within us. And so because they didn't listen no amount of reading what God has said in the OT will make any difference. *The problem is not the message; it's the hearer*

Note what happens next in Vv.30 & 31. The Rich Man – from Hell – is giving Abraham advice on how the situation should be managed. *"They're not prepared to listen Abraham so can you go to a bit more effort to reach them. Send someone from the dead, maybe then they'll repent?!"*

(v.31) 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

What do you think Luke is wanting his readers to think about here? It has to do with what happened for us last weekend, and for them a few weeks' time from this point. If the 'brothers' see a resurrected Jesus, what do they do? Will they repent? *"No"* Abraham says. Why? Love of money and material things!

The teaching here is really about the stranglehold, and the depths the love of money can have, and the only solution *is repentance*, to be freed from that love, for genuine love for Christ *that shows itself in God-glorifying generosity.*

Remember this parable is not about a Rich Man who was a follower of Jesus, and sins by ignoring the enormous needs of Lazarus. He is prevented from being a genuine follower of Jesus by his love for money and wealth, showing no mercy to Lazarus. There is no repentance of that lifestyle and therefore his eternity, is not with God.

⁴ [Is the Rich Man and Lazarus a Parable? \(thegospelcoalition.org\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org)

The Rich Man is in hell because he didn't see his own desperate need before God, (*Prod. Son*) he didn't come to his "senses"

Ultimately we'll only help others and show others mercy and generosity out of a sense of our own desperate need before God.

We've seen this morning that a contrast in life, leads to a contrast in death and ultimately carries through to eternity. We've learnt that on the other side of death, there is no crossing over. Meaning we must choose this side of death and eternity *who we love, money or Jesus Christ*. There is no decision in life where the stakes are higher. Eternity is, eternity, where we will all meet with the Lord, this is 100% guaranteed. Are we ready for that?

Be encouraged this morning to see others needs in the way Gods wants us to. Who is it – because there will be someone – that God needs you to be his mercy for?

Matt. 25:40, *'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*⁵

Who are the Lazarus's, "at our gate"? In your village? At our workplaces? At the mall?

We've heard this text a few times, but it's worth noting again: 1 Tim. 6:10 *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, **eager** (stretching out) for money, have wandered⁶ from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this (anything that draws your love away from Christ) ...and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.*

These are the values of the Kingdom of God, the values of those who don't ignore other's needs, but anticipate needs. The values of those who follow a resurrected Lord, the values of those who hear the word of God, the values of those who love Christ.

Genuine love for God, secures our place in heaven and shows itself in God-glorifying generosity.

⁵ 1 John 3:17 *If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?*

⁶ Strong's Greek: 575. ἀπό (apo) -- from, away from (biblehub.com) -- seduced away from...