

Using Money
February 16, 2014

You are going to hate the outcome of this sermon. I'm going to warn you of that right now. I don't want to build you up and then drop you flat. So let me say it up front. You are going to hate the outcome of this sermon.

You are not going to hate it because of what Jesus wants you to do. That is not why you are going to hate the outcome of this sermon. Most of you have a good heart. Most of you want to do what pleases Jesus. And so you are ready to do what He wants you to do. You will read the story and see His point and say, "Okay, Jesus, I'm ready to do that."

But then you are going to ask a question. And you are not going to like the answer. I'm just warning you now.

The story we're going to look at today is one that Jesus made up. It is a parable. Parables are intended to teach a point. Jesus has a point He wants to make to us today. The parable is in Luke 16. In this parable Jesus is going to contrast two men.

Luke 16:19-21 (NIV) "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.

Jesus tells us first about the rich man. This man was very rich. Purple was the most expensive dye of that day, making purple clothes the most expensive. Fine linen was the highest quality fabric available. And you know, he did not just have one purple outfit. He had a clean one for each day. This man dressed, everyday, as expensively as anyone could be dressed.

In addition, he feasted on the best food, not just on holidays or special occasions. He feasted on luxurious foods and drink every day. This guy had much more money than he needed. But he spent it on himself. That is the picture Jesus paints for us.

About a month before Christmas I saw a comic strip in the newspaper that expresses this attitude of spending on ourselves. The comic is Cathy. She is in a store and there are signs for suggested gifts. Some suggestions are things you might buy for others. And some suggestions are things you might buy for yourself. That's what the signs say.

To Give: The \$9 wallet

(Dec 12, 2013)

To Keep: The \$1,500 Home Gym

To Give: The \$15 Cologne

To Keep: The \$2,100 computer

To Give: The \$10 Slippers

To Keep: The \$3,200 sound system

Cathy says to the salesperson, "Giving may be down, but keeping seems to be doing a brisk business."

He returns, "How about a nice \$4,000 TV? You KNOW no one else is getting you one!"

Does that resemble how you have been using your extra money, those of you who have more than you need?

Now don't start with the excuses. Don't tell me you aren't rich. The point Jesus is making is that he had the ability to help others. His lifestyle showed that he had lots of money he could use to help others. You can make a million dollars a year, and still be living paycheck to paycheck because you are in so much debt. You can be rich and not have the ability to help others. Jesus has written the story to show that this man has lots of money that he is using for his own luxury rather than using it to help those in need. Here is a very in-need person right in front of him and he isn't doing anything to help. Instead of helping others he helped himself to much luxury.

If God blesses you financially, He expects you to enjoy the extra somewhat. But He also expects you to use the extra to help others. This is taught in both the Old and New Testament parts of the Bible.

I know that no one in this room is rich. I know some of you are just squeaking by. But most in this room have more than we need for our necessities. We have extra. Jesus is going to hold us accountable for how we use that extra. At least some of it, He expects us to use to help others. We have the ability, the resources, to help others. **We have been blessed by God so that we can help others who are worse off than we are.** And even those of you who are not now well off, may be in the future. You need to hear what Jesus says too.

In contrast with the rich man is the poor man. In Jesus' story, the rich man is richer than most rich people and the poor man is poorer than most poor people. He is extremely poor. He has no home. He lies at the gate of the rich man, begging. He lives there. He lives in this spot. He has no family or friends who provide for him. He isn't dropped off there each day and then taken home somewhere. He doesn't have people feeding him. He lives here. And he is starving. The only food he gets is when people take pity on him, feel sorry for him, and toss him some scraps or some money that he can use to buy from some passing farmer.

This man is handicapped, probably paralyzed. We know this because he is unable to drive away the half-wild feral dogs that roam the community. Dogs were unclean and here they are licking his sores. If he were paralyzed, they are likely bed sores. He is wishing for any and all scraps that anyone is willing to give him.

So you have tremendous contrast between a very rich man who ignores the very poor man at the gate to his own estate. One man has the ability to help. The other is need of that help. But the help is not given. God clearly commands in the Law of Moses that His people are to help the poor.

Let's go on with Jesus' story.

Luke 16:22-26 (NIV) "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. 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.'

Jesus has both men die in the parable. They went to the place of the dead. This translation uses the word Hell, a word that comes from northern Europe about 700 years later than the New Testament. The original Greek text of the Bible has "Hades," which was the name both Greeks and Romans used for the place of the dead. Their concept, popular in first century Israel, had Hades divided into two places. The first place, of torment, was for unrighteous people. The other place was sometimes referred to as paradise and was for righteous people.

Jesus uses this common conception of the afterlife for the telling of His story. Don't make the mistake of assuming that these details describe what happens to someone who dies. That is NOT the point of this parable.

The rich man, who everyone thought was righteous because he was rich, ends up in the place of the unrighteous. The poor man, who everyone thought was unrighteous because he was poor, ends up in the place for the righteous. Jesus stands on its head, the popular theology of that day. **How much money you have has nothing to do with your relationship to God.** How much money you have is not evidence that you are right before God. Nor is being poor evidence of you being not right before God.

Your checkbook, your health, your education and job opportunities, and how long you live on earth do not indicate your relationship to God. There are plenty of people in our day who believe they are. I've had people tell me that God must be pleased with them because they've had such a good life. They've had good marriages, nice kids, good incomes, jobs, own their own home, and more. But how much you have is not an indication of whether God is pleased with you. Such people will be shocked on the day of Judgment to find themselves being sent to hell.

Let's finish the story.

Luke 16:27-31 (NIV) "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 also 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.'

"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.'"

The rich man was raised to know the Law of Moses, the commandments of God. He knew his responsibility to the poor. He had the ability to help the poor. He had one of the worst cases of poor right at his gate. And he did not help. He ends up in torment in the afterlife, not complaining about where he is. He knows why he is there. He lived in disobedience to God. He ignored his responsibility to help the poor with the resources God gave to him.

But note that he does care about someone. He is concerned about his family at home. So he wants to warn them. He doesn't ask to go himself. He asks that the poor man be sent, as if Lazarus is still beneath him, a servant to do his bidding.

And then Jesus makes His point, the key point of the whole story. He says, through the character of Abraham, that if the rich man's brothers ignore God's command to help the poor, nothing anyone says will change their mind, not even if someone rises from the dead. They know what to do. It isn't that they forgot. It isn't that they've become distracted. They know what to do. They just won't do it. And nothing anyone says or does will change their mind.

You who have more than you need, are you using it in ways that please God? As God has blessed you with more than you need, He expects you to use some of the extra to help others. Those who know God's command to help others will be judged on the basis of doing so or not doing so.

It is not a sin to be rich. You won't find that anywhere in the Bible. Nor is it a sin to enjoy some luxuries if you can afford them. The Bible says God expects us to enjoy the benefits of having more than we need.

But the Bible is also clear, as Jesus points out here, that God expects us to help others with what we have. **We are not to spend all our extra resources on ourselves.** Our primary responsibility is to provide for our own families, especially our immediate family. Beyond that we also have responsibility to care for others in our church family, and then beyond them to help the poor around us. We are not to spend all the extra on ourselves. If God has blessed you financially to where you are making more than your needs He expects that you use it for helping others.

I know that many of you recognize this and are ready to do so. But maybe you have a question. Because our lives are different, we are in different life situations. We have different amounts of money and different amounts of necessities. There is no way to compare one to another. So here is the question I think many of us would ask of Jesus today.

How much should I give to help others? And the answer is.

The more money you get, the more you must give.

God expects us to share what He blesses us with. God blesses us, not to spoil us with luxuries, but to test our hearts and test our obedience. If you had to give an accounting today for the money God has blessed you with, would you pass? The more money you get, the more you must give.

Invitation

Jesus is telling this story. He knows something about giving. He gave His life for us. He left the comforts of home to travel around the countryside announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

And then He gave the ultimate. He gave His life on the cross. He died for us.

Today, I urge you to believe. I urge you to humble yourself and admit before God that you are a sinner deserving of hell. Admit you need a Savior.

Believe that Jesus is the Savior God sent you. Receive Jesus as your Savior. Turn your life over to Him as your Lord. Be baptized in His name and start living in obedience to Him.

Now is the time of prayer. Pray yourself into His hands this morning.

Christian, for the riches we will inherit when Jesus returns, let us give up more of what He gives us now. Let us pass the test of financial blessings. What do you need to say to Jesus this morning?