

“Hidden in Plain Sight”

Luke 16:19-31

Sermon Series: Kingdom Come. Week 6

Scott Burgess

The Woodside Church

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The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16:19-31

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.’”

When I found out I was going to be discussing The Rich Man and Lazarus, I quickly realized it wasn’t ringing too many bells. I have read the book of Luke multiple times and have studied the parables in my growth groups. But for some reason... As I began my studying, I realized two important things. Perhaps the reason I was not familiar with it, was because it made me uncomfortable. But even more important was the follow up thought: If something Jesus is saying is making me uncomfortable; then maybe I had better pay more attention to it. So why did it make me uncomfortable?

Let’s start by looking at the cast of The Rich Man and Lazarus. First there is the rich man. Jesus says the man was, “dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.” In the days of Jesus, dressing in purple was considered a sign of royalty. Remember how the Romans clothed Jesus, in Mark 15:16-18

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

¹⁶The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!”

Fine linen, probably referred to undergarments. But fine linen would only be used as undergarments by those with wealth. The average to poor person would typically wear woolen undergarments. The poorer the individual, the coarser the wool. Living in luxury probably meant a big house, plenty of servants and all of the fancy things of the day.

I looked at the rich man, and how he was described, and compared him to myself. Despite owning a couple of purple shirts, I know I’m not royalty. I do wear undergarments, but I don’t think Fruit of the Loom would be considered “fine linen”. As to living in luxury, I don’t generally describe my life that way.

Then there is Lazarus. We know that he was a beggar, and that he was, “covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.” With the sores he had, he probably was considered unclean by the Jewish people, so wouldn’t have been able to work. He wasn’t greedy. He dreamed of getting what fell from the rich man’s table. They probably didn’t have the 5 second rule back then when food landed on the floor. I’m sure it was considered unclean and thrown in the trash. Lazarus would be happy with that. And in ancient Jewish culture, dogs were not kept as pets. They were considered dirty, and scavengers. Their licking of Lazarus’s sores was probably considered just another reason to stay clear of him.

Now I’ve got to be honest with myself. If I must pick which one of these two men is more represented by my life, I have to say the rich man. I’ve never had to beg for food or money. I don’t need to eat other people’s scraps. And I’m not covered in sores, and so weak I can’t hold off dogs from licking those sores. Among other places, I’ve been to the Dominican Republic and to Mexico, and I’ve seen real poverty. I have driven and walked through the streets of Frankford and Kensington and seen hopelessness in the addicted. I’ve walked into prisons and been allowed to walk out again. I have had struggles. My life hasn’t been perfect. But compared with others I have seen; I have it rather good. Just living in the USA provides me with luxuries that much of the world is without.

And then comes the surprise. With no other details given, Jesus then shares that when the two men died, Lazarus went to be by Father Abraham’s side – Heaven, and the rich man was buried and went to Hades – or Hell. But it can’t be something as simple as rich people go the hell and poor people go to heaven. It isn’t what we have, or don’t have; what we do, or don’t do, that determine our eternity. He makes it clear it is what is in our hearts, not our wallets, that is more important. In Jesus’s time, people with wealth were looked at as being blessed by God. But Jesus paints a different picture. 11 of the 39 parables focus on money, and the rich. And it is made clear wealth is a challenge, not a blessing in our faith walk. What is important is what is in our hearts.

Matthew 6:24 ²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

So what determines the rich man's fate here? The first clue that Jesus gives is in verse 23. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. The earlier description of the two doesn't give much detail. All it says is that Lazarus was at his gate. It doesn't say how often, or how obvious he was. Was the rich man aware of Lazarus? Did he understand his needs?

But verse 23 made it clear that the rich man must have been aware of Lazarus; it wasn't a one-time blindness to somebody that he saw. How do we know? Because he knows Lazarus's name. It is an indication that he wasn't blind to Lazarus. He probably passed by him regularly. Maybe his servants told him who he was.

The second clue comes in the next verse. 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.' Anybody else see the arrogance in the rich man here? I mean, here he is, in Hell, suffering because of the life that he led. Yet he wants Abraham to send Lazarus from Heaven to serve him.

But Abraham reminds him why he is where he is. 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. The rich man had good things in life, while Lazarus received bad things. Notice how Abraham tells the rich man that in his lifetime he received good things. He doesn't say he earned them, he received them. And Lazarus received bad things. Some of those things can be attributed directly to the rich man. He had good food and he could have shared his good food with him. But instead, he gave Lazarus table scraps – bad food. The rich man had fine clothes. We can assume that Lazarus didn't. Possibly he took the rags the rich man threw away.

This is an obvious warning. It is made even clearer when Abraham describes the great chasm. '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.' There is no "do-over" after we leave here. We can't fix the way we lived our lives when we had the chance.

At this point the rich man is at a loss. He realizes that his eternity is fixed. In a few minutes we will be invited to the Lord's table to share a feast with Him. The rich man will not have that opportunity because of the way he lived. But he now sees that his brothers are in danger of the same sentence that he is under. Despite this realization, he hasn't learned the right lesson. Rather than dropping to his knees and praying for his brothers, and their salvation, he continues to act the way he did while alive. He wants Abraham to send Lazarus on an errand for him. '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.' He believes that if somebody that has risen from the grave comes back to warn his brothers, they will understand their danger and change the way they live. But Abraham sees the truth. He knows that everything they need to know has already been given to them through scripture - 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

¹⁷ Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,
and he will reward them for what they have done. - Proverbs 19:17

¹⁰ Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this
the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand
to. ¹¹ There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be
openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land. -
Deuteronomy 15:10-11

We have been given the same instructions. In addition, we have been given the Gospels
and the letters that make up the New Testament, with that same message.

³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak,
remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to
receive.’ ” - Acts 20:35

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? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with
words or speech but with actions and in truth. - 1 John 3:17-18

Despite these instructions, don't we often ignore God's instructions? Hasn't each of us
ignored a Lazarus at some point? I remember several years ago when Michelle and I were
walking around in Boston after dinner. At one point she suddenly said, "Oh that poor man." I
didn't know what she was talking about until I looked back and realized I just walked by a man
slumped over, with a needle sticking out of his arm. I don't know why I didn't notice him.
Perhaps we were talking, and I just wasn't looking that way. I'm not sure. I'm also not proud of
the fact that I didn't do anything to see if he needed help. When I thought about it later, I felt as
if I had been slapped across the face. I hope that since that day, I have become more aware of the
needy that I see. Trying to help people, or at least talk to them. Not always, and not everybody,
but when I can.

How do we follow God's message to us? What steps are necessary so that we are not
ignoring the needy among us

- Open Your Ears - Know that Jesus is King and that He has given us the path to walk.
Listening to him and following his instructions gives us guidance. We listen to him
through scripture, through sermons, through study and through prayer. This sermon series
we are doing on the parables is a great example. It is easy to hear these sermons or read
the passages and come away thinking what a great message it was. Jesus really told it to
those Pharisees, didn't he? But it becomes a little troubling when I take these parables
and insert myself into them, and suddenly realize that Jesus is talking to me, or to us. It
underlines the difference between hearing – and listening.
- Open Your Eyes – Understand that all of us are God's children? Rich or poor – black or
white – employer or employee – man, woman, sick, healthy, addict, athlete: it doesn't
matter. You will never look into the eyes of a person God does not love. Whatever you
do, wherever you go – keep your eyes open to those around you. I'm not saying you have
to spend all of your time seeking out people that have needs. I'm just suggesting you
keep your eyes open from those who are hidden from you, in plain sight. As I opened

with: If something, or somebody's circumstances, makes you uncomfortable – ask yourself why.

- Open Your Heart – If you have heard Jesus's message. If you have opened your eyes to those around you. Then how can you possibly not open your heart? What are you doing? How are you serving? Who are you helping? It's more difficult than usual. Many of us have been affected by this virus. Business slowdowns, hours cut, jobs lost. And yet most of us are still eating, have homes and can get the services that we need. But because of economic stress, giving has dropped off. Because of social distancing there aren't as many programs being offered. I look at the events that I am usually leading or part of. We have held Recovery Worship Services, here at Woodside, once per quarter since 2012. We had to cancel the May and August services this year and will almost definitely be cancelling the November service. We haven't been able to host the Recovery Café in Frankford since March. But that shouldn't mean giving up. There are still plenty of ways to help. It may just be that we must reach down a little deeper and look a little harder for those opportunities. And if you need some help, Woodside already has plenty of opportunities.

The first is your continued support of Woodside, so that we can continue to help others – as a church. Any of you that have not completed your pledge for 2021 take a minute and do that today. We have commitment cards available that you can drop in the basket after service.

- Coat Drive for Millhill in Trenton until November 15th
- Toys for Tots collection until December 10th
- Angel Tree collecting through mid-December, tree will be up by November 8th in the lobby
- Team up with Children's Ministry to do Operation Christmas Child Boxes as a family
- Food Pantry Collection is always ongoing
- Serve meals at TASK once a week
- Bring your Family to Advent Night, which will be in early December

In this time of the COVID pandemic, it is easy to justify why we aren't helping people. I haven't been able to go into the prison since early March. And I have to admit; if I was told tomorrow the prison was opening back up to outside ministries I would need to think twice about that potential exposure – and what that would mean to my clients, since the elderly are so vulnerable. But I also know to keep my eyes open to those around me who need help. I'll wear the mask, just not the blindfold.