

The Pharisees were “lovers of money”, and we’re in a section of Luke, where Jesus is speaking into that, and how “the love of money” and how the “selfish accumulation or consumption of wealth”, is a short-term indulgence, that results in long-term pain.

“When the Rich Man and Lazarus died, their worlds, their fortunes, and their positions were completely inversed... But, the lesson of this story, really shouldn’t come as a surprise to us.

Way back in Chapter 6, Jesus: looks at His Disciples (alright, so He’s speaking to His disciples. This is not a message for every man and his dog – this is a message for those who are Disciples of Jesus.) And He said:

²⁰ ... “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

25 "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

"Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

26 "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

What a wonderful encouragement this is, for those who belong to Jesus.

- Your current experience might be suffering in poverty, but in your poverty, you are still blessed. Why? Because the Kingdom of God is yours..
- You might be hungry, and hardly ever have enough to eat, but that's OK. A time is coming, when the tables are going to be turned, and you will be filled...
- Your life might be one big experience of tragic loss and bitter sadness. But you will laugh...

And so, suffering may be your current (earthly) experience, but in Christ Jesus, our reward in Heaven, is great.

And so, the story of the Rich man and Lazarus, simply illustrates what Jesus has already taught, right back in chapter 6.

But the thing is, when a person reads this, some of us will be filled with joy and anticipation, longing for the Kingdom of God to come (because things are not so good for them at the moment)... But when others read it, and comprehend what it's saying, they will be going "Uh Oh. Hang on a minute. Am I getting caught up on the wrong side of this?"...

And that's a typical "Jesus thing" to do – His stories and His teachings force us to consider: Is the faith that's in my head, getting through to my heart, and being expressed with my actions...

Poor old Lazarus, hey....

And yet, out of all of the stories that Jesus told, and out of all of the characters in all of his stories, this is the only Person, who is given a name (Lazarus). The Rich Man – he's not given a name... Today, I'm just going to call him Mr Rich. But Lazarus: He **does** get a name. And that in itself, reveals, that even though Lazarus is a picture of utter despair and broken lowliness, Lazarus is known by God, and ear-marked for blessing in the Eternal Kingdom.

Righto:

The story doesn't begin with Lazarus. It begins with Mr Rich, so let's start there.

When it comes to Mr Rich, we are given a picture of opulent, decadent wealth.

He **was clothed in purple** ... Now, that mightn't mean much to you and I (purple in Kmart), but back in “the day”, purple dye, was very, very expensive. It was so expensive, only “royalty” and “the very wealthy”, could ever afford it.

And he was clothed in **fine linen**. – the very finest fabric, imported from Egypt. And apparently the word used here, often referred to “underwear”... Even his undies, were really expensive.

And he was a man **who feasted sumptuously every day**.

Now, there's nothing wrong with a feast. There's nothing wrong with a **sumptuous** feast. In fact, in the Bible, God set aside for his people, times for feasting – for celebrating – with a real party-like atmosphere...

Christians are **not** supposed to be dull and dreary. We are a people who have a reason to feast and celebrate...

But the thing is, Mr Rich was so rich, that he **feasted sumptuously every day**....

Imagine having Christmas dinner, every day...

But all that (in itself), isn't so bad... ... That is, until we meet Lazarus. You see, there's nothing wrong with being rich. But everything we have, belongs to God; And with wealth, comes responsibility, to use what belongs to God, for His purposes; And a large part of that responsibility, is to

show mercy and compassion, to those who are unable help themselves.

And at Mr Rich's **gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus**

Now, the word used here for "gate" is *πυλῶνα* (*pylōna*). And in the Bible, it usually *refers to a large, ornamental gateway to a city or a mansion*ⁱ. Now, these types of gates are designed to protect what's on the inside. They're designed to keep the outsiders (you guessed it), on the outside.

And there on the outside, of the gateway to the mansion of Mr Rich, was laid "Lazarus". He was a poor man, unable to work, because he was obviously sick or disabled in some way. Somebody would lay him down at the gateway to beg.

Why would they lay him there? Because if there was a person, with the means to help Lazarus out, surely it must be Mr Rich. God had blessed Mr Rich with so much, surely he could help Lazarus.

And every time Mr Rich walked out his gate, he would have to pass by poor old Lazarus...

And Lazarus was so hungry – even if he could just get to eat what dropped on the floor, from Mr Rich's table... If only...

And the picture of utter suffering and destitution, is topped-off with a simple statement: **Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.**

By the law of the Pharisees, if his sores didn't make him spiritually unclean, the licking of the dogs certainly would have...

Poor Lazarus... A picture of suffering; poverty; destitution; exclusion...

And yet, he's right there in the face of Mr Rich. So, what did Mr Rich do to help him? Nothing. Not even the food that accidentally fell on the ground, did he give him.

Now, the physical fate of all men(humans) is the same...

- We all die.
- Whether we are rich,
or whether we are poor,
we all die.
- Whether we are healthy & vibrant,
or whether we are sick and disabled,
we all die.
- Whether we are enjoying the good,
or suffering the bad,
we all die
- Whether by world standards, we are considered a
success,
or a failure,
we all die.

There will be a generation (when Jesus returns), who do **not** die. And every generation prays that it will be them... But until then, we all die. ... How crazy it is, to not prepare for the inevitable...

22 The poor man died...
... The rich man also died...

Mr Rich got a burial. If Lazarus did, it wasn't mentioned.

And in Jesus' story, the instant that Mr Rich is dead and buried, he's no longer referred to as "The Rich Man". Did you notice that? The tables have turned. He's not the rich man anymore. His wealth has gone in the direction that all wealth goes:- (Like at an auction) Going; Going; Gone...

What then???

I'm putting today's notes under 3 headings. And obviously (and this is the most important one, because this is what Jesus is addressing):

- No.1 is "The Godliness of Mercy – Caring for the Poor and Needy";
- No.3, we'll get to at the end;
- But No.2, is "What happens when I die?"

That's something we all want to know, isn't it? "What happens when I die?"

In the Scriptures, we only get little snippets. And I want to know more, but it's like God doesn't want us to know everything just yet – it's all going to be a bit of a surprise.

And here in the story that Jesus told, yes, we do get some little snippets of the after-life. But even so, it's difficult for us to tell which bits are "firm representations of what the after-life is actually like", and which bits are images that Jesus is using, to help us to understand a spiritual truth... It's hard to tell...

So, with that in mind, let's give it a go:

The **Poor** man: **was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.**

Mr Was-Rich: goes to "Hades". ("Hades" is not hell, BTW. "Gehenna" is hell.) Hades is the land of the dead – the place where the deceased await the Day of Judgment.

So, it seems that when a person dies, although the Final Judgment has not yet occurred, those who die, quickly become aware of their fate.

For instance:

- When the thief on the cross beside Jesus repented, Jesus said "Today, with me, you will be in paradise".
- **Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's side** – another picture of paradise.

- **Abraham** is there in Paradise. Alright, this is where the People of God go, when they die.

Death cannot separate us from the Love of God. Why not? Because we are in paradise...

But Mr Was-Rich, is not **in** Paradise. For him, Hades was a place of torment.

Now, is this saying that “All the world’s poor”, and “All the world’s hard-done-by”, go to paradise, while all the world’s wealthy, suffer in Hades? **Absolutely** not. The Scriptures are very clear on this: No person can be saved, except by repentance of Sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ... It wasn’t **both** the thieves that Jesus took to Paradise – only the one who repented.

But if I don’t repent of Sin (including the sin of “The Love of money”), am I even saved??? And this is where we’re left hanging.

Let’s never forget how Jesus said: “It is really difficult, for those who have wealth, to enter the Kingdom of God.” How hard? Well, it’s got about the same ‘difficulty level’ as threading a camel through the eye of a needle...

Anyway, Mr Was-Rich looked up and saw Abraham a long way away, and he sees Lazarus by his side. And he cries out for mercy... Now, we don’t know if Lazarus is aware of Mr Was-Rich or not.

But the tables have turned, haven't they....

Lazarus used to long for the scraps that would fall from the table of Mr Rich. And now Mr Was-Rich is calling out for mercy. “Can you just get Lazarus to dip his finger in a bit of water and bring it over to **cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.**

²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things

The tables had turned. Lazarus is now being comforted. And Mr Was-Rich is in anguish.

And then Abraham says: Anyway, there's a great big chasm between you and us, so that we can't go to you, and you can't go to us...

Now, does that mean “Paradise has a view of Hades, or Hades has a view of paradise?” Probably not.

I suspect this is an image – an image that reveals a spiritual truth: At the point of death, there is a great separation. And when a person dies, their fate is sealed.

- There is no crossing-over after that.
- There is no going back.

- There is no second chances of repentance.
- There is no such thing as “Purgatory”...
(You won’t find that anywhere in the Bible)...

When a person dies, their fate is sealed.ⁱⁱ

Now, once Mr Was-Rich realises that his fate is sealed, he then thinks about his brothers (who are probably just like him). And it seems a reasonable request he makes: “Abraham, can you send Lazarus back to warn my brothers, because otherwise they’re going to end up here too.”

He’s basically saying, “Send Lazarus to haunt my brothers into repenting”.... That’d do it, wouldn’t it... No.

Abraham says, “They should already know. They have Moses and the Prophets.” In other words “The Old Testament Scripture tells them how they should live”....

But No, No, No. They won’t take notice of that. But if you send somebody back from the dead, then they’ll have a change of heart – then they’ll repent...

No they won’t.

'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'

Now, the beauty of a story, is “Truth is obvious, without having to state it.”

It is obvious that Mr Was-Rich is in anguish, because of his treatment of Lazarus.

“But he didn’t do anything to Lazarus”. And that, my friends, is precisely the point. He did nothing.

But also, the beauty of a story, is you and I, play that same story out in our own existence. When we:

- pretend to not hear a cry for help;
- turn a blind-eye to the one who is in need;
- enjoy (every day) the sumptuous pleasures of wealth, while the genuine needy, have nothing to eat.

Is my story, the story of Mr Was-Rich?

Two weeks ago, we nailed-down the spiritual principle that runs through 3 weeks of messages.

The Kingdom has come. The people of God, no longer live by the do’s and don’ts of the Written Law. We now live by the Spirit. The Spirit of God, lives within every genuine Christian.

But that does not mean that “The Law has passed away”. How can it? The purpose of the Law, was to spell out the very nature of God. It expressed the Justice/Love/Mercy of God. That is what The Law did. And that is what living by the Spirit does. Your character will become like the very nature of God.

You won't be like Mr Rich. When you see Lazarus – a person in a state of deep need and brokenness, your heart will be moved to compassion, and you will have mercy on them.

You see, Mr Rich's brothers, they had the Law to tell them, that God requires them to be compassionate and merciful.

And The Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament, are full of commandments to show mercy and compassion to those who are in genuine need. And the Prophets especially, condemn Israel, for not having compassionate mercy; for not caring for the widow and the orphan; for not using the resources that God has provided, to see justice for those who have nothing.

Israel had The Law and the Prophets, to spell this out for them. But, we shouldn't need that. You should not need me, to get up the front today, to tell you, to be generous to those who are in genuine need...

The Holy Spirit is already telling you that.

My purpose today, is to confirm and affirm what The Spirit is already compelling you to do – To be merciful.

It seems at the moment, I often find myself talking about this thing called “sanctification” – the way The Holy Spirit

transforms us from within. He takes us from what we once were, and He transforms us to become more like Christ.

And if I'm honest with myself (and it's important I am), I suspect, the biggest barrier for me (and probably the biggest barrier for you) – the biggest barrier to this transformation that God is wanting to work in you and I, is the values that have already been instilled into us – values that actually conflict with the Spirit of God and the Word of God – Values that we may hold dear, and perhaps even consider as truth, but they're not spiritual – they're fleshly. And so they conflict with the very nature of God.

And so, when a person is deeply in need of mercy – they need:

- food; clothing; somewhere to sleep....
- Someone to take the time to care;
- Someone to lift them up and bring them in, to share the bounty that God has provided to us...

The Spirit says

- “You've got a part to play here”;
- What you have is Mine, and My compassion is yours.
- Use what I have entrusted to you, to take care of this person...

And so, if you are saved; If you are a Disciple of Jesus, the Spirit within you, is already urging you to be merciful, and to care and to give of yourself, and to bring the broken into your world...

My purpose today, is to confirm and affirm what the Spirit is already compelling you to do.

You see, we learn from this parable, there ain't no second chances, so when do we begin this thing we call "Kingdom Living"? Our opportunity to live by the Spirit is today. And anything that holds us back from Kingdom-Living, is of the flesh because "Kingdom Living", is the very thing that God is wanting to perfect in His people, this side of the Grave.

Do you realise that? The Kingdom of God has come. And Kingdom living, is for **this** side of the grave.

So, that's the main part of the message: "The Godliness of Mercy – Caring for the Poor and Needy". Kingdom-Living, is an expression of the Spirit of God.

But there's also a third part to the message. Jesus said: **'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'**

On the third day (after He was crucified), Jesus **did** rise from the dead. The Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law had been demanding from Jesus, some kind of Spiritual sign, so that they would believe in Him. Did Jesus rising from the dead convince them? No.

Jesus has risen from the dead. The Gospel is proclaimed. All the evidence we need, is right there in God's word. **Repent;** Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved.

God isn't going to send someone from the dead to haunt an unbeliever. Why? Because it won't make any difference. A heart, that is seeking God, has all the evidence it needs. We just need to heed the message that God has already given.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,
We thank You for the gift of faith.
We thank You, for Your bountiful provision.
We thank You, for Your Love/Compassion/Mercy.

And Lord, we pray for ourselves.

Lord, forgive us for our own selfish indulgence,
while the needy crumble...

We pray that,
that by Your Holy Spirit,
we would no longer be deaf to the cry of the poor;

that we would not be blind to the needy on our own
doorstep.

Lord, give us hearts of compassion.

That we would be merciful, as You are Merciful.

And Lord, we pray for the lost.

All the evidence we need,
is right there in the Scriptures.

We thank You that Jesus rose from the dead.

And we pray that this fact,
will become an item of faith,
for those who do not yet believe.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Marshall, I.H. (1978) *The Gospel of Luke: a commentary on the Greek text*. Exeter: Paternoster Press (New International Greek Testament Commentary).

ⁱⁱ Except maybe one possible exception 1 Peter 3:19.