

Two Men With Opposite Eternities

Our text today is yet another parable addressed to the Pharisees. The thrust is similar to those from the previous weeks. Jesus receives sinners because in the Kingdom of God, in heaven, things are pure without corruption. This reversal of how things play out on earth often has to do with those who seem to be rich in this life - often will be in great want in the life to come. Likewise, those who are poor in this life may be, in fact, those whom God has selected for eternal life.

This passage may have been what prompted Charles Dickens to write in 1859, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness ... it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period ...” (*A Tale of Two Cities, opening paragraph*) The truth of right and wrong – good and evil – light and darkness; these conflicts existed at the time of Christ and Dickens and this very day.

Some years ago, Joyce and I led team to work in El Salvador and afterward we were invited to a wedding by a El Salvadorian family – what a great time of celebration. Following the wedding, friends treated Joyce and me to a few days with them at a resort. I meet a man at the pool and we began to visit. He was retired, divorced, estranged from his children and spent his life living for months at a time in resorts and he would describe his life as living a care free life of partying. He had sold his house and lived for months at a time in resort after resort from one country to the next. As we visited each day, I began sharing my testimony with him, to which he let me know he had no use for God. Life was to be lived to fullest and as the old saying goes, “wine, women and song”. I had not thought of David in some time, but

as I prepared this morning's message, he was brought to mind for he reminded me of the rich man in Jesus' parable and to a lesser extent reminded me of my broken life before Christ saved me. I have often thought, why did God save me? Like David the pool guy, I did not have a great concern for the condition of my soul, that is, until the Lord began awakening it to my desperate need for a Savior. I praise the Lord every day for saving me. God is gracious – praise be to God.

Please stand as we hear the life bearing eternal truth of God's Word as it is ready by Garth.

Pray

The Rich Man

There are two main players in this parable, Jesus begins, **“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.”** Jesus wastes no time in describing this rich man. He quickly gives us a couple of important details: notice first, this man was clothed in purple and fine linen. His clothing was the best money could buy. When it came to himself, he spared no expense. Many of you may recall in the Book of Acts, Lydia bought and sold purple goods (Acts 16:14). I love history and history was one of the subjects I taught as a High School teacher many years ago. So, here is some background on purple fine linen. The rich loved to be clothed in purple for it was the color of royalty. The linen was dyed using a very costly Tyrian purple dye and seen as a luxury only for the very rich. This purple dye was extracted from the murex shellfish a predatory sea snail housed in large beautiful shells. The dye was first produced by the Phoenicians in the city of Tyre around 14 hundred BC. It was sought after because of its resistance to fading it was greatly desired by the rich for it was expensive to extract the dye from the murex. Fine linen was made of a very finely spun wool and soaked in a clay pot by which the process bleached the linen and made it brilliant white. When this

brilliant white linen was dyed it also made the purple brilliant. So, in today's terms; this man was not "upper middle-class" but truly wealthy. Compare his attitude towards extravagant wealth and the woman who searched for the coin she had lost. I am also reminded of those who prepared Jesus for crucifixion, they draped him in purple and pronounced him king of the Jews while they insulted and beat him. Purple remains the color of royalty to this day.

Jesus goes on to say this rich man feasted every day. The very concept of feasting at this time was something done on a special occasion, such as a wedding. To feast every day made the feasting no longer special, but a normal meal. So, to this man feasting was a normal day's experience. Remember, some time before this parable Jesus had told the parable of the lost son or as the parable has come to be called, the "Prodigal Son" and upon the return of his son the father killed the fattened calf and began to celebrate. There was no sacrifice for this rich man for he could eat fattened calf and many other delicacies every day.

We quickly understand how wealthy this man is and yet just outside his beautiful home with its gardens, just outside the walls lay a man in tattered clothing who was sick and starving. This brought the thought to my mind, would I or would you, be able to ignore such a man outside your gate? How do we react and serve the poor?

The Poor Man

Jesus gives the word picture that this poor man was positioned where the rich man would have known about Lazarus. Reading at verse 20, "And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores." The rich man, who had servants, could have easily been able to help Lazarus, but it appears he did not give Lazarus a thought.

As Jesus notes, Lazarus was covered with sores, whereas the rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen. Do you see the imagery and contrast Jesus is picturing before us? One man clothed in fine linen and costly purple the other clothed in open sores. At this time, the Pharisees would have viewed Lazarus as unclean and as such, his suffering was Divine judgment. Much like Job's friends felt God was judging what great evil Job must have secretly done. Zophar says to Job, ⁴“For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God’s eyes.’ ⁵But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, ⁶and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. **Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.**” (Job 4:4-6) Some suffer because of their sins, but the innocents also suffer, they suffer due to the collective sins of this corrupt world.

Just as the prodigal son longed to eat the pods that were fed to the pigs, so Lazarus longed to just eat the crumbs that fell from this rich man's table. The parable at this point begs the question; was the rich man blessed because he was rich and was Lazarus under divine judgment because he was suffering so? This is what the Pharisees would have said. Lazarus was in such a poor state and so utterly unclean that, Jesus tells us, the wandering village dogs added more misery to him. They were not licking his sores to help him; Jesus gives a mental picture of the depth of Lazarus suffering. When we speak of someone “licking their wounds” after they have suffered a defeat it means, they are healing and recovering from the wounds inflicted upon them, but here Lazarus was unclean, physically dirty and his sores were licked by unclean dogs as continuing abuse and mark him as an outcast that no one would want to be around. I do not want to gross anyone out but can you picture the sad state of Lazarus. He smelled terribly not so much from his lack of bathing but because his skin was rotten and full of sores.

Next, Jesus contrasts their homes. The rich man lives in a state compound, which is signified by the fact that he has his own gate. Cities had gates and fortified

towns had gates but not the average house. They did not have gated neighborhoods like we see today. However, this man was so rich, his home and property had been walled, it was a compound with gardens and had its own gate. Lazarus, on the other hand, had no home at all, he lay outside the gate exposed to the elements. Poor Lazarus laid at the gate. He was so sick and weak he may not have been able to stand. We do not know but the picture Jesus has painted is truly pitiful.

Jesus gives everyone a very vivid picture of the life of both the rich man and Lazarus on earth, on the mortal side of eternity. I am sure those listening asked themselves, at this point, “Did God bless the rich man because he fared so well? Was Lazarus under divine judgment because he suffered so?” But as Jesus continues the story and suddenly everything changes. The falsehood of the Pharisees is exposed and the questions of the crowd are now answered.

Abraham’s Side

Taking up the parable at verse 22, “**The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried,²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.**” To be at Abraham’s side is a figurative phrase that appears to have been drawn from a popular belief that the righteous would rest by Abraham's side in the world to come, as described in Jewish literature at the time of Christ. Remember, Jesus had not risen, so at this point in time there was no thought of Christ at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. The word “*kolpos*” literally refers to the side or lap of a person. Figuratively, as in this case, it refers to a place of honor reserved for a special guest, similar to its usage in John 13:23, “**One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side.**” In the case of Lazarus, the reserved place is special because it is beside Abraham, the father of all the righteous. As Paul wrote, “**faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.**” (Romans 4:9) The phrase may also be

synonymous to the paradise promised to the thief on the cross, who said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”⁴³ And *Jesus* said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43) To be at the side of Abraham or later on, Jesus the Christ was a place of honor. Together these passages support the conviction that a believer enjoys immediate bliss at the moment of physical death.

Jesus continues with His comparison and contrast of these two men. No longer are they living their earthly lives but both have died. Notice the change in their circumstances, their roles are now reversed. Lazarus no longer suffers. He no longer is hungry and needy. He now has a home and rather than being mocked as he lay at the rich man’s gate, he was cared for and it was he who now feasted. In life his only companions were the scavenger dogs roaming the village, but now he is in the presence of Abraham and the angels. As soon as Lazarus breathed his last breath, he was whisked up by the angels and transported instantly to heaven or as Jesus symbolically explains, he is at Abraham’s side, which depicts a place of the beloved. So, Lazarus is receiving his eternal inheritance and the rich man his eternal suffering. It is now the rich man laying outside of heaven and in dire need. He cannot fully understand his suffering, but he is in great pain. The tables have now turned. The one who suffered greatly in this life now feasts daily at the side of Abraham and the other who in this life enjoyed many pleasures now is the one suffering for all eternity.

I want to examine the logic of the rich man in the next few verses to see the fallacy of his thinking. I really believe if we can understand where this man was gravely mistaken, it may just help us eternally and may help us help others understand their need for Christ, so they do not fall into the thinking of the fallen world.

Five Assumptions Leading To Hades

The rich man, just like many of today, assumed wrongly about God and life and eternity. The rich man “called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and 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; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.’²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ”

Assumption #1: Claiming Heritage As Righteousness

The rich man “called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me... ’” As kindly and as fatherly as Abraham’s response was, he was not the rich man’s father. To be a child of Abraham is to be a child of God. All the rich man had was a Jewish lineage, not saving faith. The Pharisees taught that the Jews were God’s chosen people, but they went too far when they taught that Jews were saved by their lineage and not by their faith in God and the coming of the promised Messiah. All he could claim was to be a physical descendant of Abraham not a spiritual descendant. It is true, Abraham addressed him as *child* but this indicates a kind Jewish address not an indication of faith. Sadly, he is not a child of God. This brings forth one of the Five Solas; Sola Fide or Justification by Faith Alone. Reading Galatians, chapter 3, beginning at verse 6, “Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel

beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’ (Genesis 12:3) ⁹
So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. ¹⁰ For as many
as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone
who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.’
(Deuteronomy 27:26) ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for,
‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’ ” (Habakkuk 2:4) (Galatians 3:6-11)

Assumption #2: Status Retained In The Life To Come

We observe the second wrong assumption in verse 24, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.” Even in torture, the rich man’s arrogance is seen. He does not think it is a problem for him to ask Lazarus to enter the tortures of hell to give him some relief. He assumes that Lazarus should still be low in status and serve him. He is viewing the circumstances as if Lazarus is still covered in sores and he is covered in purple and fine linen. Reality has not hit home.

Perhaps we may experience times of suffering in this life. We must never think that sorrow and grief in this life means sorrow and grief in the life to come. Like Lazarus, who experienced pain and suffering here, believer’s will be highly exalted in the life to come.

Assumption #3: The Great Chasm Can Be Crossed

The rich man did not understand how eternity works. Abraham gives him a quick education, reading at verse 26, “And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ Jesus here as well as in other scriptures is clear; wherever a person ends up after their moral death, whether it is heaven or hell, their eternity is fixed and cannot be changed. Eternity is forever, there are no second chances, no mulligans and no do-overs. In Matthew’s Gospel account it

says, at the second coming God “inflicts vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)

Assumption #4: Entitlement

The rich man now understands judgement and heaven and hell and finally has some compassion for his family. At verse 27, “And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ” But do not be fooled. His heart is still only concerned about himself and a few people, his people, who he considers worthy and the socially elite. His thought still has not shifted from Lazarus as someone who should serve those more worthy. He still does not care about the poor and needy. He does not say, please send Lazarus to the rest of those lying at my gate and warn them. He simply cares for his own. The only thing that will make his suffering worse, is to know that his family is also suffering eternal punishment. So, in truth he still is thinking of himself. This is the opposite of Paul’s instruction to believers, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-4)

Wrong Assumption #5: Miracles Will Bring About Repentance

Luke’s Gospel account makes clear hearing or to hear or those who have ears to hear – this type of hearing requires a response. This brings us to the last 3 verses, “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’ ”

It is so important that we understand that the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament teach us our need to repent. The O.T. Law exposes our sin and desperate need for the Messiah. If we do not read the O.T. and have our evil rebellious hearts exposed, there is nothing left for God to do. Do you understand this most important truth? There is no other place where God can show a human his or her need of repentance than in His written Word. In general miracles will not convince man to repent. Jesus did many miracles and few repented. Rather than seeing a miracle, like Lazarus coming back from the dead and warning the rich man's family, they must heed the warning as all people must. The same is true for all people. Believe in God, believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God incarnate and believe the Bible as the Word of God.

I pray, as we work through God's Word we do not simply read old stories but we hear God speak to us the warnings and blessings given in the pages of the Bible. If we are not convinced by God's Word that we are sinners in need of repentance and a Savior to pay for our sins, well then, there is nothing left for God to do. His Law brings forth repentance. There are no special cases and no exceptions. Our sin and need for a Savior are exposed within the pages of God's Word and nowhere else. Miracles or signs will not convince people that they are sinners in need of a Savior. This rich man should have listened to the Prophets. His brothers should listen to them as well and so should the Pharisees and so should we. As three of the gospel accounts record the words of Jesus, **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."** (Matthew 11:15, Mark 4:9, Luke 8:8) My beloved, "Do you have ears to hear?" If so, repent!

I think Peter hits on this very point when he writes... **"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this**

very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:16-21) As amazing as those miracles were for Peter, he saw in God's Word a more sure and solid foundation on which to believe. He very emphatically states that we too must pay careful attention to God's Word. Miracles alone will not bring people to believe. Miracles alone will not fill the spiritually dead soul with life. Those who believe know the eternal truth of God's Word.

Canyon Bible is called a reformed church. This means we hold firmly to the entire Word of God. Let me close with the Five Solas that came from the Protestant Revolution 500 years ago.

Five Solas

Sola Scriptura – The Scripture Alone is the Standard

II Timothy 3:14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work

Soli Deo Gloria – For the Glory of God Alone

1 Peter 4:11 Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Solo Christo – By Christ’s Work Alone are We Saved

Colossians 1:13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Sola Gratia – Salvation by Grace Alone

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight.

Sola Fide – Justification by Faith Alone

Galatians 3:6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. ¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.” ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.”

I believe these capsule what Jesus wants us to walk away with this morning.
Take time to read the scripture that supports these 5. Amen!