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TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 29, 2019

“THE DISPOSITION OF THE HEART”

PSALM 91:1-6, 14-16

LUKE 16:19-31

*The main point of this sermon is that when we receive a supernaturally changed heart, we lose our love of the world and gain a love for God that is evident in our love for our neighbor.*

**The Target Audience Loves Money**

Jesus was an expert at making people feel uncomfortable. How do I know that? Jesus talked about money! And remember, Jesus didn’t condemn money. The issue isn’t that easy or neat. Instead, as we heard in the parable last week about the rich man and his manager (16:1-13), Jesus says that money serves as a test. “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much” (16:10).

Jesus knew that someone could look outwardly religious and pious. They could say all the right things and spend their time in all the right places, but their hearts could be far from God. And one of the ways Jesus proves is this is true is by peeling back and examining whether someone uses their money and resources to advance the cause of God’s kingdom.

Jesus was never fooled by appearances. And that’s why he made (and still makes) people uncomfortable. He knows our hearts. He reveals the secrets of our hearts. And that’s what he did to the Pharisees. After Jesus finished his parable about the rich man and his manager, verse 14 says, “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money heard all this, and they ridiculed him.” What happened? Jesus got to the center of their hearts, and it hurt. He showed them that outward appearances cannot cover up what flows from the heart (cf. Matthew 15:19-20).

And so, our parable about the rich man and Lazarus is aimed at them. Its purpose is to show that the love of money will exclude someone from the Kingdom. Why? Because the love for money is “a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). A heart that treasures money cannot treasure Christ. And a heart set on the pursuit of wealth and comfort will not be set on loving our neighbors – neighbors like Lazarus.

**The Rich Man and Lazarus**

The parable begins as most do. Jesus presents us with two characters. Verse 19 introduces us to the rich man, and the brief details tell us he lived a life of the highest degree of opulence.

In terms of his clothes, only a select few could wear purples and fine linen. And we’re told he “feasted sumptuously every day.” Remember what happened when the prodigal son came home? His father prepared a feast (15:23). Only the rarest and most special events, like a wedding, would solicit a feast, but this rich man enjoyed an extravagant party every day. And we’re told his home was protected by a gate. He had closed himself off from the outside world. He was protected and able to live the life he desired without having to interact with anyone outside his social class.

Verses 20-21 introduce us to a poor man, Lazarus. And what doesn’t come out in our English translation is how Lazarus ended up at the rich man’s gate. There’s good reason to think that Lazarus was crippled, which would mean Lazarus was purposely laid outside this man’s gate in order to receive alms.

And instead of being clothed “in purple and fine linen”, Lazarus was covered in sores. Instead of an extravagant feast every day, Lazarus “longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table.” And the rich man’s gate protected him from the outside world, but Lazarus was exposed, so that “even the dogs would come and lick his sores.”

The rich man had the world, didn’t he? He had all its treasures – wealth, status, comfort, privilege. But there’s one thing he lacked that Lazarus had. What is it? A name. And what’s so important about a name? This is the only parable where Jesus gives a name to one of his characters. Well, Lazarus literally means “my God helps.”

What strikes me is that Jesus never explains why these two men received such vastly different things in this world. But what Jesus does tell us is *how* each received what came to them. Everything that came into the rich man’s life was used to enrich himself. He looked out for himself and those like him. His wealth was used to make his own life more and more pleasurable. And so, his riches became his identity. He trusted in those things to guard his life. To give him meaning and a sense of importance.

But Lazarus? His eyes were on fixed on the Lord. He trusted that nothing could separate him from his Lord. And so, when he died, what happened? Verse 22 says, he “was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.” But a better translation is that Lazarus “was carried back home.” He was carried to the place he truly belonged. The Greek tells us that Lazarus was carried back home to Abraham’s bosom. Sounds a little awkward, but “Abraham’s bosom” is a metaphor that indicates that Lazarus was given the place of honor next to the great patriarch Abraham. Remember, every day Lazarus was excluded from the rich man’s party. Then the great reversal happens, and now, the rich man is looking up at Lazarus and sees him clothed in honor and in a place of eternal security and protection.

You see, unlike the rich man, Lazarus didn’t make this world his ultimate home. He knew what he experienced in this life would come to an end. And so, he could endure, because he trusted and knew God had prepared a better home for him. And so, his eternal destiny tells us he had made the Lord his treasure (cf. Luke 12:32-34).

But the rich man ends up in eternal hell, because it is the place he has chosen. His eternal destiny isn’t an injustice. Instead, it reveals what he consistently preferred throughout his life. He always preferred being the rich man over being a neighbor to Lazarus. God hasn’t done him any injustice; in fact, God has shown him justice by giving him exactly what he has wanted all his life. God allows him to spend all of eternity living out the reality of choosing himself over God and a life of mercy and compassion.

**The Rich Man’s Torment**

And that’s what is so shocking. The rich man knows he’s in torment. He’s suffering and in agony, and yet he can’t shed being the rich man. Look at what he says in verse 24, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” Even in hell, he still believes he exists to be served. But no relief will come. Every day he had an opportunity to serve Lazarus and ease his suffering, but he chose instead to serve himself and increase his own enjoyment. As Abraham points out in verse 25, the rich man has already received his good things and proved he was not faithful with his earthly possessions. And this is Jesus’ lesson about earthly wealth: the way we use the good things we receive testifies to the kind of person we are.

That’s why there’s a “great chasm” between the rich man and Abraham and Lazarus. The rich man and Lazarus are infinitely different. And the difference isn’t due to their different social statuses. The difference is that the rich man chose to live exclusively for himself, while Lazarus trusted in God for his help and eternal happiness.

**The Rich Man’s Family**

And now, it seems that the rich man comes to understand what Abraham is saying. He seems to grasp that he isn’t going to escape his new reality. And so, he thinks he will do what he can to spare his brothers. And so, he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. We are to assume his brothers are living the same indulgent lifestyle the rich man lived.

Seems like he’s beginning to think about the welfare of other people for the first time, doesn’t it? Let’s not be too quick to judge. Think about his request and what it assumes. What does it reveal? The rich man believes he wasn’t ever warned. He believes God’s judgment is unfair, because he’s thinking, ‘How was I supposed to know what God expected from my life.’ And maybe that’s what unites everyone in hell – the persistent belief that God has done them a wrong.

But God hasn’t wronged him. Why? Because as Abraham says in verse 29, God has given us Moses and the prophets. What does that mean? It means that God, through Moses and the prophets—the scriptures of the Old Testament—has given a credible, reliable witness about the absolute need to love and the reality of God’s judgment. Abraham is saying that if you listen to Moses and the prophets you won’t find any legitimate grounds to absolve yourself from loving the poor, helpless man outside your gate. But I think it’s clear the rich man twisted God’s Word to free himself from its commands. He must have decided certain things were not relevant to him. He drew boundaries that God never ordained. And like the Pharisees in our text, I imagine he used all sorts of religious veneer to cover up the idolatries of his heart. And what Jesus is saying in this parable is that it is our obligation to *listen* to God’s Word. We are in danger when we start looking for loopholes or excuses in order to avoid what the text says.

But how does the rich man reply to all this? He says in verse 30, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” He’s saying to Abraham that Moses and the prophets—God’s Word—isn’t enough for his family. He believes his family is owed something more. He is still clinging to a sense of entitlement!

And Abraham’s reply is that if they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, someone coming back from the dead will be of no use to them. And you might be thinking, wouldn’t that do the trick? Wouldn’t that be impressive enough to change someone’s behavior. And the answer is ‘No.’

**A Greater Love is Needed**

But, why? Remember, Jesus is telling this parable to the Pharisees, “who were lovers of money.” And that means the real issue all along has concerned what we love. You see, the rich man’s brothers do not need a supernatural warning to alter their behavior. What they need our supernaturally changed hearts. The love of money is the root that produces the evil behavior. Only when that root is cast out from their hearts will they repent and fulfill the law of love.

And how does that happen? How do supernaturally changed hearts come about? When you see there’s someone greater to love than yourself. So, here’s my suggestion: throw yourself into this story as Lazarus. See that our sin has left us helpless and destitute. Recognize that our wealth and privilege will never save us or be enough to purchase the riches of heaven. You see, we’re broken people. The fall has left us crippled and unable to stand before God on our own. None of us can enter the kingdom on our own feet. We can’t lift ourselves up.

But the good news is that there is a rich man who has come down his heavenly home, emptying himself of his riches to cloth us in his beauty and love and righteousness. He has come to bind up and heal all our wounds and bear the punishment for all the ways we’ve distorted and broken God’s law. He came to carry you home, to bring into the very presence of God. Why? Because he set his heart on you before you can ever respond.

What’s the answer to our love of the world? The greater love of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when his love roots itself in your heart, you will be so free to love your neighbor with the extravagant grace and mercy he has shown you. You’ll be freed from this passing world and all it treasures to live for the cause and glory God’s kingdom.

Amen.

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