

Sermon: Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man / “Blinded”

Series: “Does God Care About What is Lost?”

Scripture Reading: Luke 16:19-31

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While the second parable in Chapter 16 appears to be much more accessible than the previous one, we cannot dismiss its complexity, for it teaches us that if we don't pay attention, we may eventually arrive at a turning point at which it is simply too late.

We all have “too late” stories - stories that bring heartache and regret. Stories that remind us how we are all running out of time and opportunities. Stories that humble us as we come to terms with the chances we missed.

As I considered “too late” stories for this sermon, I found a plethora of examples, both in my own personal life and through the lives of others. I remembered that nasty feeling in my gut when I found out my beloved Aunt Miriam had passed away due to cancer. I wasn't able to visit her before then due to travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. I also remembered when my family celebrated my grandfather's 80th birthday in a big and joyful way, but I couldn't leave the country because I was waiting to receive my Permanent Residency. Those are moments that continue to haunt me to this day. Missed opportunities that I will never get back.

I also spent some time reading blogs and articles, as well as listening to podcasts that presented “too late” stories in a moving and honest way.

Some people talked about how they ignored the warning signs of illness because they were “too busy” to go to the doctor, only to eventually find out a catastrophic diagnosis. Others shared about that unspoken love they wish they could have shared with that special someone. They talked about the heartache of losing that opportunity. And there were plenty of stories about family members not speaking with each other due to politics or disapproval of life decisions, only to discover that they had missed the chance to spend valuable time with their loved ones.

We all have “too late” stories. These stories—about missed opportunities, unspoken words, neglected relationships, or paths we wish we had taken—carry the weight of hindsight. They are often painful to tell, but when voiced, they do more than recount regret; they invite reflection, change, wisdom, and connection.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is one of those “too late” stories that invites us to look beyond our regrets to find wisdom, a willingness to change, and a desire for a relationship with God and neighbor.

Unlike the previous parables we have read and studied over the last three weeks, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man does not offer a favorable resolution - the rich man remains in hell. There is no happy ending. It is simply too late for the rich man to repent and do what he needs to do.

This parable is found only in Luke’s Gospel and serves as a poignant conclusion to the teachings Jesus has been offering throughout chapters 15 and 16.

We are led to believe that this is the same crowd - religious leaders, tax collectors, sinners, ordinary people, and Jesus’ disciples. I must highlight once again that this is a rare and unique crowd. All those personalities would not have crossed paths if it weren’t for Jesus drawing their attention.

And this may be the reason why Jesus chose a teaching like this parable to remind all those people that their time was running out to repent, change their lives, and follow him. He is giving them a second chance to make things right.

At the same time, he also warns them that while God’s love is vast and benevolent, there may come a time when it is no longer accessible - when our separation from God may be final and eternal because of our reluctance to change.

Luke’s gospel is one full of stories like this one. Bible scholars refer to them as “The Great Reversals.” These stories present two drastically different realities as the starting point. As the story progresses, those realities are reversed - the low are exalted while the exalted are humbled; the poor find riches while the rich lose everything; the hungry are satisfied while those who are satisfied face famine. We see this kind of teaching in various places, such as the Beatitudes, the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Great Banquet, and the Magnificat.

Luke’s Gospel is primarily concerned with teaching us that God sees and cares about our suffering, our hunger, our oppression, our pain, our wandering, our restlessness, our loneliness, and our rejection.

This is the kind of God who would care for someone like Lazarus. Someone who was invisible to many. Someone who experienced hunger and thirst. Someone who endured the heat of the day and the coldness of the night. Someone who didn’t know what it was like to have friends and celebrate with others. Someone who didn’t experience love and a sense of belonging.

Luke's message is direct. God cares about people like Lazarus. And God also cares that people like the rich man care about people like Lazarus.

The constant theme throughout this parable is that if we have the opportunity to do good, to welcome back the lost, to feed the hungry, to see the invisible, to celebrate the small things in life, we must take that opportunity. Life is too short to be concerned only about our own well-being.

If God is giving you the opportunity today to show mercy, act kindly, share forgiveness, build others up, and love despite all hesitation, do it! Don't wait until it is too late.

What if your life can be used to reverse someone else's fortune? Can God use you to restore all that is lost and broken around us?

A pastor from a church in Atlanta once shared in a sermon about the time when he struggled to welcome someone into their 8:00 a.m. chapel service. He was new to the Atlanta area and had never really worked closely with people experiencing homelessness.

As he began his ministry at this church, he noticed that one man would consistently attend the 8:00 a.m. chapel service only to fall asleep. Falling asleep wasn't the problem. It was all loud snoring from the back pew that constantly interrupted the service, and especially during the sermon.

After a few weeks, the pastor didn't know what else to do. He could not concentrate, but he was also unwilling to tell this person that he wasn't welcome at church.

After checking with his outreach staff, the pastor discovered more information about this man - he was well-known to those at the church. He often came during the week to shower and have a meal. He was known by name and had developed good relationships with others. He felt safe, seen, and welcomed in this church despite his homelessness.

It was at that moment that the Pastor realized this man was just as important as the CEO of a local company, who also attended the worship service. "It takes a lot of courage to see people through the same lens, to give them the same value. But isn't that what the church is all about?" The pastor added.

In the end, the pastor recognized that the real disruption wasn't the man's snoring, but his own hesitation to see him with the dignity God gives every person. The moment taught him that doing the right thing often means choosing compassion over convenience—before it's too late to show someone that they truly matter.

CONCLUSION

Friends, as Jesus concludes his teaching to this crowd, he refuses to escape the urgency of the moment. He tells them (and us) that we cannot put everything off until tomorrow,

assuming we will always have more chances to love, to forgive, to speak the truth, to see the invisible, or to care for those in need.

The rich man was not condemned because of what he did, but because of *what he failed to do*. He had every opportunity to notice Lazarus, to extend compassion, to open his hand in generosity, but he remained blind and selfish. And in the end, as death came for both of them, it was too late.

The good news of the gospel is that God still gives us time today. It isn't too late yet. God still calls us to open our eyes to the people at our gates, to respond with mercy, to live in such a way that our lives bring about reversal for those who are hurting and unseen.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

So, as Swiss poet and philosopher, Henri-Frédéric Amiel once wrote, "Life is short and we never have enough time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. O, be swift to love! Make haste to be kind."

The Rich Man and Lazarus

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.[a] The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.[b]

24 He called out, '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.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.

26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'

27 He said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'

29 Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' 30 He said, 'No, father Abraham, 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, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' ”