

Sunday, June 9, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

Week 27 | Luke 16:19-31 | "Jacob Marley"

Last week, we covered the topics of money, divorce, remarriage, and adultery. Not unlike an affair, those who love money rather than God have broken *a relationship*. To be a lover of money (or anything), for that matter, is to be unfaithful to the One who ought to be the supreme love of our life. **If a *love for God* is nothing less than spiritual loyalty—i.e., fidelity, then a *love for money* is nothing less than spiritual adultery—i.e., infidelity.**

The premise of *A Christmas Carol* is well-known. Ebenezer Scrooge must change his *uncharitable* ways or face the same fate as his business partner, Jacob Marley. Along the way, three spirits (the Ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future) visit the aging bachelor to help him realize the *error* of his ways. The whole affair is not only entertaining, but it is also instructive. At the heart of this made-up tale is a very *real* lesson about *charity*. A person with the spirit of Christmas—i.e., an authentic Christian—will be *charitable* towards their fellow man.

But suppose for a moment, rather than a story about Scrooge, there was one about *Marley*. Since Ebenezer redeems himself and avoids the fate of his friend, the original is a redemption story. But a story about Jacob wouldn't be about salvation but *damnation*. After all, before *A Christmas Carol* even began, his fate had already been sealed. There was no hope for him. Such a dark version of this classic tale would be so depressing that no one would ever want to write it, let alone read it!

However, Jacob Marley's story already exists in printed form, called 'The Rich Man and Lazarus.' As you'll see, like Jacob, the Rich Man in Jesus' tale lived in the lap of luxury his entire life, ignoring the poor. And just as Marley found himself eternally bound in the chains of torment, the Rich Man wakes up in hell. And just as Marley haunted Scrooge, urging him to change his ways, the Rich Man, speaking from beyond the grave, urges us to abandon our uncharitable ways before it's too late.

I want to notice **three** things:

- i. **Before death, the rich man lived for luxury.**

READ: Luke 16:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ “There was a **rich man** who was clothed in **purple and fine linen** and who **feasted sumptuously** every day. 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 **contrasts** between the two men are as **obvious** as they are **striking**. Indeed, it is hard to imagine two more different people than these two men. In fact, depending on how you count them, there are **five** key differences.

1. The “**rich man**” was, given his name, *rich*. “**Lazarus**” was, given Jesus’ description of him, “*poor*.”
2. The rich man had a home. Lazarus had no home; he lived on the streets within the rich man's own “**gates**.”
3. The rich man was “**clothed in purple and fine linen**.” Lazarus was clothed in “**sores**.”
4. The rich man “**feasted sumptuously every day**.” Lazarus “**desired to be fed**;” in other words, he desired to eat but was not fed. He **starved**.
5. Presumably, the rich man had many comforters. Lazarus had only “**dogs**” as companions.

However, the critical observation of this passage is that Lazarus lived in such a destitute state **within the rich man's own gates**. These two men **knew** each other. Lazarus had lain in the gates of the rich man's own estate, it is not a stretch to assume that they saw each other semi-regularly. But though they were, at least, familiar to one another, nowhere are we told that the rich man extended even the slightest kindest to the poor man. Lazarus would've been content to eat the scraps and crumbs that might've fallen “from the rich man's table!” But even this meager kindness was denied.

However, while the rich man and Lazarus are key characters in this story, Lazarus is a foil to the rich man. **In other words, the main character of this story is the rich man**. Thus, while we ought to bemoan the poor man's existence, we should not miss how luxurious the rich man's life was. After all, as we'll soon see, **just as the differences between the two men's lives are striking, so too are their respective afterlives**.

ii. **After death, the rich man lived in agony.**

READ: Luke 16:22-26 (ESV)

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. ²⁴ And he 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.'

The contrast between the two men continues.

1. The poor man dies and is "carried by the angels to Abraham's side."
2. The rich man dies, is buried (Lazarus got no burial), and then arrives "in Hades, being in torment."

Notice the rich man didn't address Lazarus directly. As in life, so in the afterlife, the rich man wouldn't acknowledge Lazarus. He spoke to Abraham and wanted him to use Lazarus like some errand boy.

Ironically, just as Lazarus would've been content with the crumbs from the rich man's table, the rich man would've been content with only a drop of water. But just as Lazarus was denied even the slightest kindness in life, so too is the rich man. After death, the merciless will not be given mercy.

In fact, Abraham himself makes this very point. The rich man's life was good, and Lazarus' was bad. The rich man could've easily helped, but he didn't. And so, it is only right that Lazarus should receive good in the afterlife and the rich man receive bad. Lazarus was tortured in life; he will be comforted. The rich man was comforted in life; he would be tortured in the afterlife.

Moreover, even if Abraham wanted to help the rich man, he couldn't. There was a great, uncrossable chasm in between. God's designs make these two eternities—comfort for Lazarus and torture for the rich man—final. There is no hope for redemption in the afterlife.

iii. After death, the rich man lived with worry.

READ: Luke 16:27-31 (ESV)

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.' ²⁹ 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.**’”

So, what’s the takeaway?

A **miser** in this life will be **miserable** in the afterlife.

When the last chapter of your story has been written, which version of *A Christmas Carol* will it resemble? Will your fate be like that of Scrooge or Marley, the Rich Man? Will you go to your grave singing, "God bless us, everyone," or grumbling, "Ba humbug."

READ: 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (ESV)

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Being poor is not a **virtue**, but being rich *can be* a **vice**. True, money is not evil; it is the “love [emphasis added] of money” that causes "all kinds of evils." However, if we're not careful, such a distinction makes us susceptible to the misuse of money. **The point is that it is far easier to abuse money than not.** We are right to acknowledge that money, in and of itself, is not evil. But we make a grave mistake if we ignore how enticing money can be.

For instance, **greed** and **gluttony** often go hand in hand. And just like money, food is not inherently evil. But food, like money, can be abused. **Given that heart disease has been the leading cause of death in the US for the past 100 years**, we can assume that most people are abusing food.¹ And as such, we ought to be aware that too much of a good thing becomes a bad thing.

Insisting that the love of food is the problem, not food itself may be correct, but it **distracts from the fact that most people (me included) have self-control issues.** No, we mustn’t starve ourselves. But we must be wise when we sit down to eat. Otherwise, we’re inviting trouble.

¹ <https://newsroom.heart.org/news/more-than-half-of-u-s-adults-dont-know-heart-disease-is-leading-cause-of-death-despite-100-year-reign#:~:text=According%20to%20the%202024%20Heart,the%20U.S.%20for%20100%20years.>

The same goes for money; we must be wise when we handle riches. We must be aware that while money has the potential to do **great good**, it is often used to do **great harm**.

The wise only use money when they have to and never pursue riches.

Therefore, be it food or money, how we use them determines their integrity.

Video Description:

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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