

Sunday 13th February 2022

Glynde Lutheran Church

Sermon on Luke 12:13-21

Theme: “If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity?”

“Life is preparation for eternity”

** “The Parable of the Rich Fool” (No. 4)*

Introduction:

I want to begin this morning with a story. I read it recently, and it’s a story that a pastor tells. It goes like this:

Apparently, a man stood up in prayer service that this pastor had in the middle of week, and he gave a testimony about his life. He said: “I was at King’s Cross in Sydney waiting for the traffic light to change. As I stood there, someone tugged on my jacket, and when I turned, this shabby- looking man looked at me and asked, ‘Sir! If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity?’ That question haunted me for more than three weeks. I could get no rest as it came back to me time and time again. I had to find an answer to it, and I found that answer in Jesus”.

A couple of years later, another man stood in that same church and gave a testimony that had an incredible familiar ring. He, too, had been at King’s Cross in Sydney, when a derelict man had pulled on his jacket and asked him the same simple question:

“If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would spend eternity?” The man giving his testimony went on to say that that question haunted him for several days and eventually drove him to his knees and led him to trust in Jesus as his Saviour.

Well, a couple of years later the pastor of this church was in Sydney. He went down to King’s Cross on the outside chance that he might find this derelict man. He stood on the corners for some time scanning the faces of the people around him. Then, suddenly, he felt a tug on his jacket. When he turned, there was a man who obviously was poor and ragged. Before the man could say a word, the pastor raised his hand to silence him and said,

“I know what you are going to say. You’re going to ask, if I was to die tonight, where would I spend eternity?”

The old derelict man was amazed and asked how the pastor knew that. The pastor told him about the two men who had given their testimonies at his church about how they had become Christians because of his question to them.

The man was reduced to tears and said, “Mister, some eight years ago, I was an old drunk. But then I gave my life to Jesus. I’m uneducated. I don’t know how to say much or do much. The only thing I could think of to do, was to go around asking people this question over and over again.

I’ve been doing this for eight years, mister, and today was the first day that I had any idea that I was doing any good at all *(Tony Campolo, Let me tell you a story, p. 104).*

Now I don’t know who this derelict guy was, or how much of the story is word for word truth, *because stories tend to get embellished over the years*, but this derelict guy does sound a lot like a man by the name of Arthur Stace.

Arthur Stace was born in 1884, and spend the first part of his life up to his mid-forties as an alcoholic who was in and out of jail. In 1930, he attended a meeting for men at “Barneys”, *as St. Barnabas’ church in Sydney was known.*

There, he dropped down on his knees and prayed for God’s forgiveness through Jesus, and asked for God’s help and strength. Some months later in the Burton Street Baptist church, of which he had become a member, he heard the noted ‘give-’em-Hell’ preacher, Rev. John Ridley, there say, “I wish I could shout ETERNITY through all the streets of Sydney”.

Stace, recalling that day when he talked about it later in his life, said: **“He repeated himself and kept shouting ‘ETERNITY, ETERNITY’, and his words were ringing through my brain as I left the church. Suddenly I began crying, and I felt a powerful call from the Lord to write ‘ETERNITY’. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and I bent down there and wrote it *on the pavement*”.**

After that, Arthur Stace used to spend time each day writing the word 'ETERNITY' on pavements everywhere in Sydney. He used to get up at 5.00 a.m. or so, pray for a while, and then go out to where he believed God wanted him to go on a particular day, and on the pavement there he would write the word 'Eternity' in his own particular way. He did this, because he wanted to focus people on the fact that this life isn't all there is, but is rather preparation for eternity.

By the way, up to 4 billion people saw Arthur Stace's word "Eternity" when the Olympic games in Sydney in 2001 were opened.

It was emblazoned across the middle of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in fifty foot high letters....

In focusing people on eternity, Arthur Stace was just echoing the message of the man who he knew to be his Saviour: Jesus. This was Jesus' message to people: that it is foolish to focus on getting things for yourself in this life, and to forget that this life is preparation for eternity, *for the life to come*.

I love the story of the Rich Fool that Jesus told. All the stories of Jesus are powerful and relevant to us today. But if you had to rate the stories that Jesus told and put them in order of those which are most applicable and powerful for people today, the story of the Rich Fool would have to be in the top few.

Let me tell you the story that Jesus told about the rich fool. Jesus said: **There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. He began to think to himself, "I haven't anywhere to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do", he told himself. "I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store my corn and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, 'Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!' But God said to his man, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?'"** (*Luke 12:16-20; cf. Slides in H. Wendt, Parables, p. 24*).

This man *in the story that Jesus told* thought that he had it made. He'd won the lottery, *or at least the next best thing to it*: his land had produced a great harvest and he was set up for years to come. He thought that he was set up for life, and that his goods and his money would allow him to

“eat, drink, and be merry” for many years to come.

But he forgotten one thing: that our life is limited, and we haven't got control over how long we will live.

And Jesus finished off his parable, his story, by saying:

“This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves, but are not rich in God's sight” (*Luke 12:21*).

In other words, Jesus is saying:

“Don't get so wrapped up in this life, and the things of this life, that you forget God and forget that this life is preparation for eternity. The wise person is the person who is well prepared to face eternity, by being “rich in God's sight”.

Let's get back to that derelict man's question to those whom he tugged the jacket of, the question:

“If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity?”

How would *you* answer this question? Would you answer this question with: “I don't know”?

It is an honest answer, and I guess a fairly common answer. Well, if you don't know where you'll be when you die, let Jesus tell you. Listen to what Jesus has to say:

- * **“Come to me, all of you who are tired of carry heavy loads, and I will give rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me...and you will find rest”** (*Matt. 11:28-29*)

- * **“Don't be worried and upset. Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so.... I am the way, the truth, and the life. No on goes to the Father except through me”** (*John 14:1-6*).

- * **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me with live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”** (*John 11:25-26*).

And listen to John, the apostle, as he summarises Jesus' message:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that

everyone who believes in him may not perish, *be lost in eternity*, but have eternal life” (*John 3:16; cf. Matt. 13:40-43, 47-50; 25:31-46*).

Life in eternity will either be “eternal life”, *that is, life with God in the place in God’s new Kingdom, what we often call ‘heaven’*, or it will involve “perishing”, *that is, being lost and living apart from God in the place that we call hell*.

Where we go for eternity depends upon our reaction to Jesus now, and what Jesus has done for us on the cross. There on his cross Jesus took the rap for us, for all that we done to hurt others and to hurt God. And as we believe *and trust* in Jesus in our Saviour, our Rescuer, we are rescued, *we are forgiven....*

How else could *you* answer the question:

“If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity?”

Another possible answer to this question might be: “I *hope* that I’ll be in heaven”.

Again, an honest answer, but you can do more than “hope” that you’ll be in heaven after you die. You can “know” for certain that you will be with God in heaven, *if you are trusting in Jesus as your Saviour and standing before God with empty hands praying*:

“Dear God,

Forgive me for Jesus’ sake. Forgive me all that I’ve done to hurt you and to hurt others, because you love me, and because Jesus, your Son, has taken the rap for me”.

That’s the prayer of faith, the prayer of a child of God.

When we are asked the question,

“If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity?”

...We can respond:

“I know where I’ll be. I’ll be with my heavenly Father and with my Lord Jesus and with all of God’s forgiven children in heaven. Because I was baptised into God’s family and I trust in Jesus as my Saviour”.

Listen to some of the things that the apostle Paul says in the New Testament as he reflects on what God has done for us through Jesus:

- * **“But now God’s way of putting people right with himself has been revealed.... God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence.**

But by the free gift of God’s grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free. God offered him, so that by his death he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him.... For we conclude that a person is put right with God only through faith, and not by doing what the Law requires” (Rom. 3:20-28).

- * **“For it is by God’s grace, *his mercy*, that you have been saved through faith...” (Eph. 2:8).**
- * **“There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).**

Conclusion:

The one word that Arthur Stace used to write again and again on the pavements of Sydney some fifty years ago or so, the word “ETERNITY”, reminds us too today of the fact that this life isn’t all there is, but is rather a preparation for eternity: for life with God, or life apart from God.

Do you know for certain where you will be, after you die? If you have been baptised into God’s family, and if you are trusting in Jesus as your Saviour, then you can know for certain *who* you are now: that you are God’s forgiven child, *period, end of story*.

And you can know for certain *where* you will be in eternity: that you will be with your Heavenly Father and with your Lord Jesus and with all God’s forgiven children in ‘heaven’, *in God’s new Kingdom to come*