

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2022**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Luke 16:19 – 31**  
**Theme: “What will eternity be like?”**  
**“Be well prepared, always, for eternity”**

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***Introduction:***

Recently, I was chatting with one of my sons about “heaven”.... I don’t know how we got onto the subject, but he made the observation that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus gives us a literal description of what “heaven” and “hell” will be like....

But, no, I don’t think so.... This story is not meant to give a detailed description of the afterlife (*Clement, 87*). In fact, it is almost certain that this story that Jesus told was modelled on a story that was circulating at the time about *a poor scholar and a rich tax collector*, and Jesus has used and changed this story into a story that he uses to make some powerful points.

It’s a bit like me using a story about St. Peter and the Pearly Gates of heaven to make a point. By using the story, I’m not affirming that this is the geography of heaven, and that when you die, you’re going to be met by St. Peter at the Pearly Gates of heaven.

Far from it. Jesus is going to awaken us from our sleep of death at the Last Day, *or transform us if we are still alive*, and take us home to be with him if we are God’s forgiven children, or to separate us from God if we are not....

But having said all that, even though Jesus’ story doesn’t give us the geography of the ‘after life’, it nevertheless does give us a mental picture that reminds us of the some of the things that Jesus plainly taught about “eternity”.

This morning, we’re going to explore the story that Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus, and see what the parable reminds us of, *with regard to “eternity”*.

***Point 1: “There is life after death!”***

First point: that “there is life after death!” Of course this is not something that people in our society commonly believe.... There are many thinkers like Richard Dawkins and the new atheists who steadfastly maintain that this life is all there is, and that “when you are dead, you’re dead!” (cf. *The God Delusion*).

And there are many ordinary folk who want to believe this, because it means that you can live your life however you want to live it, without fear of judgement by God. Their credo is: **“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die!”**

But what does Jesus affirm in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus? That this life is not all there is! Listen to how Jesus begins his parable: **“There was once a rich man who dressed in the most expensive clothes, lit. “who was dressed in purple and fine linen” and who lived in great luxury every day.**

**There was also a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who used to be brought to the rich man’s gate, hoping to eat the bits of food that fell from the rich man’s table. Not only that, the dogs came and licked his sores.**

**The poor man died, and he was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven (lit., “he was carried by the angels to the bosom of Abraham”). The rich man died and was buried, and in Hades, where he was in great pain, he looked up and saw Abraham, far away, with Lazarus at his side (Luke 16:19-23).**

Jesus affirms here, *what he states again and again in his preaching and teaching*, that death isn’t the end of a person’s existence (e.g., *Matt 25:31-46*).

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian writer *and author of The Narnia Tales*, spells out what this means. He writes:

**There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours (C.S. Lewis, from “The Weight of Glory” sermon).**

***Point 2: “There will be a great division...”***

Second point: Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us that “there will be great division between people at the end of time, *a division which will lead people either to “heaven” or “hell”.*

Listen again to what Jesus goes on to say in his parable:

**So the rich man called out, “Father Abraham! Take pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water and cool my tongue, because I am in great pain in his fire”.**

**But Abraham said, “Remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, while you are in pain. Besides all that, there is a deep pit lying between us, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross over to us from where you are” (Luke 16:24-26).**

Jesus’ parable gives us a mental picture of what will happen after we die. There will be a great division of people into those who are with God in eternity, and those who are apart from God.

And this is what Jesus plainly taught, didn’t he!? That at the end of time when he returns, some will go with him to the Father, and some will be apart from God. Listen to a couple of things that Jesus taught:

**<sup>29</sup> “Soon after the trouble of those days, the sun will grow dark, the moon will no longer shine, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in space will be driven from their courses. <sup>30</sup> Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky; and all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other (Matt. 24:29-31).**

And further:

**<sup>40</sup> At that time two men will be working in a field: one will be taken away, the other will be left behind. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be at a mill grinding meal: one will be taken away, the other will be left behind (Matt. 24:40-41).**

And these are just the tip of the iceberg as far as Jesus' teaching that at the end of time, there will be a great division between those who have a relationship with God through Jesus, His Son, and those who do not (e.g., *Matt. 13:36-43; 25:31-46*).

One further thought on this great division, and again it comes from C.S. Lewis:

**There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock, it is opened. (C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*).**

### ***Point 3: "Our destiny depends on..."***

...Which lead us to our third point: Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us that "our destiny depends on whether we have a relationship with God, or not".

What does the destiny of poor man depend on? And what does the destiny of the rich man depend on?

Did you listen carefully to how Jesus began his parable? There was one thing that this poor man had that the rich man did not. It is something so common that it is easily missed as you listen to Jesus' story. And that one thing is that the poor man had a name: the name "Lazarus".

This name is an abbreviation of the Hebrew name. "Eleazar", and it means "he whom God helps" (*Marshall, 635; Clements, 85*).

Jesus gives this poor man a name, the name Lazarus, *a name meaning, "he who God helps"*, in order to indicate to his listeners that the poor man was a man who had a relationship with God. On earth, he was a nobody, as far as virtually everyone was concerned. But he was not a nobody as far as God was concerned. The poor man trusted in God as "his helper".

The rich man, though, has no relationship with God. All that Jesus tells us about him is that he was "rich", that he "wore purple and fine linen", and that "he feasted sumptuously each day". He obviously has a fine house, too, because in the next verse the "gate" of his house is mentioned.

But that's all we are told about him: nothing about his friends, his achievements, or what he was like. He is a man whose life revolves around his material goods. End of description. As one writer says by way of comment on the rich man:

**“There is something very tragic about a man whose life can be summed up like...*this*”** (*Clements, Sting, p. 84*).

Furthermore, the rich man demonstrates that he has no relationship with God by the way that he lives his life, and particularly by the way that he uses his money. He keeps it for himself, and he doesn't use it for others, as God wants.

In Jesus' story, we are told that the rich man's life revolves around himself, that he has no compassion for the poor man at this gate, and that he certainly doesn't feed him as someone who has a relationship with God would (*Luke 16:20-21*).

This parable gives us a mental picture of what Jesus taught: that those who have relationship with God *through the Son, Jesus himself*, will be with God in eternity, while those who have not relationship with God will be apart from God in eternity.

Listen to what Jesus said:

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life”** (*John 3:16*).

And again, a little later in John's Gospel:

**“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one goes to the Father, except by me”** (*John 14:6*).

***Point 4: “Now is the time to respond!”***

...Which lead us to our fourth point that Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us of: that “now is the time to respond *to God's invitation to us to live in a relationship with Him*.”

This story reminds us of what is really important: being prepared for eternity. We are like the five brothers in this story. *Someone once said that this parable should really be called “The parable of the rich man and his five brothers”....*

Listen again to how Jesus finishes off his story.

Jesus' story finishes with Jesus saying:

**The rich man said, "Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father's house, where I have five brothers. Let him go and warn them so that they, at least, will not come to this place of pain.**

**Abraham said, "Your brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them; your brothers should listen to what they say". The rich man answered, "That is not enough, Father Abraham! But if someone were to rise from death and go to them, then they would turn from their sins". But Abraham said, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death" (Luke 16:27-31).**

What is Jesus saying here to those listening, and to us who listen to this story today? Who does Jesus want us to identify with here? He wants us to identify with "the five brothers". Listen to what one commentator on this parable of Jesus has to say:

**The five brothers of course are you and me, the Pharisees in Jesus' audience, or indeed anyone listening to the story. The destiny of Lazarus and the rich man is now determined, but not the *destiny* of the five brothers, and not ours (Clement, 93-94).**

Your destiny and my destiny, and the destiny of our loved ones and our friends, is still in the balance. Our destiny will depend upon our willingness or not to listen to "Moses and the prophets", *a summary expression for the Bible as it was in Jesus' day*. Our destiny will depend on our willingness or not to have a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *the Father of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ (ibid., 96)*.

And Jesus in his teaching elsewhere emphasised this, and emphasised that we should always be prepared for the coming of eternity. Listen, for example, to some of things that Jesus said to his disciples as he spoke to them about all this:

- \* **"Be on your guard, and let no one deceive you" (Matt. 24: 3).**
- \* **"Be on your guard, then, because you do not know what day the Lord will come.... You must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him (Matt. 24:42-44; cf. Matt 25:1-13 re the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids).**

In this parable, Jesus reminds us of a lot of things that he taught *with regard to "eternity"*.

Jesus' parable gives us a mental picture of what he taught about "eternity". For example that:

- \* **There is life after death!**
- \* **There will be a great division between people at the end of time: a division that will lead people either to life with God, or life apart from God.**
- \* **Our destiny depends on whether we have a relationship with God or not, a relationship that is ours through trusting in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord**
- \* **Now time is the time to respond**

Sure, I know that most of here have responded positively to Jesus and his call for us to have a relationship with God *through him....* What is Jesus' message for us *who have responded* this morning? I think that Jesus is saying to each of us:

**Be well prepared, always, for eternity!! Never cease having a relationship with God *through me, through trusting in me as your Lord and Saviour.* I am the way to the Father! What I say is true! And I give life now in all its fullness, and eternal life with me in the world to come! No one comes to the Father, except by me! (John 14:6).**

### ***Conclusion:***

Let's finish up.... One of the 'golden oldie' films of the past was a movie called *From here to eternity*. Do you remember it at all...

It was made in the early 1950's, and that it starred Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr. The only memory that I have of the movie was this beach scene where the two main characters are cuddling together and the waves are crashing in. This is the scene that they show as a 'promo' for the film whenever it is reshown on TV.

So I don't know much about the movie *From here to eternity*, whether it's a good film or a bad film, but the movie title itself reminds us of what life is all about: it's a journey "*from here to eternity*"!

May you and I always be well prepared for the eternity!!