

**Luke 16: 19 - 31: A disciple of Jesus listens to and is changed by the Holy Scriptures.
Parable of the rich man and Lazarus.**

Introduction:

Today's text gives us an important element of the answer to the question, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus: **If we are not willing to listen to Moses and the prophets, it will not benefit us that Jesus rose from the dead!!**

In Luke 16 Jesus is talking to Pharisees who were lovers of money. Notice verse 14: "The Pharisees who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed at him."

Jesus wants to teach us that money will on our deathbeds do us no good at all. And whether you have an eternal home with Christ, is indicated at least in part, on whether you used your money to advance the cause of Christ in the lives of others, or whether you used it to advance your own comforts, status symbols and agendas.

Verse 14 says the Pharisees heard all this and scoffed at Jesus, because they were lovers of money. Christ has touched a raw nerve of their lives. Beneath all their religious veneer, they loved money more than God. Jesus saw it and revealed the truth about it. What is the real meaning of their scoffing? Verse 15 gives us the real meaning: they were trying to justify themselves. Instead of repentance, which would have opened the way to receive Jesus for who he really is, namely a radical teacher of righteousness, the Pharisees tried to justify themselves by making Jesus look foolish with their scoffing.

The meaning of the Parable about the rich man and Lazarus.

In verses 19-31 Jesus tells another parable where being wealthy plays a role in whether we are willing to follow Jesus as his disciple, or not. This was a well-known existing Jewish parable, one that the Pharisees probably also used to teach charity as instructed by the Law of Moses, **but Jesus gives it a new ending**. In the Jewish version, Abraham sends Lazarus back to preach to the brothers of the rich man, and they are saved, because they changed their ways. Jesus wanted to show the Pharisees the error of their ways and the error in their parable. He wanted to warn them, that although He would rise from the dead, it would not change their hearts about Him, because they corrupted the Holy Scriptures and anyone doing that, will never be a follower of Jesus and be saved.

Verse 19 **presents us with a rich man** who used his money to own the finest clothes and enjoyed the best foods on his table every day—"clothed in purple and fine linen and feasting sumptuously every day."

In verses 20-21 **we meet a poor man with a disease of sores**. He lay at the gate of the rich man where he would be seen each day as the rich man went in and out. All he wanted was to eat what was left over from the rich man's table. He was so destitute that his only comfort came from dogs that licked his sores.

Then (in v. 22) the inevitable end came to both, as it will to every one of us: they die. The poor man goes to paradise where Abraham is. The rich man goes to hell where there is fire and torment.

Then the rich man calls out in verse 24, "Father Abraham." So the rich man in the parable is one of those who apparently said, "I am secure as a child of Abraham." But he bore no fruit that is suitable for repentance: he shared no food and no clothes with the destitute, so the axe fell and now he is in hell. And this is no doubt about the very mockery that the Pharisees threw back at Jesus in verse 14: "We are the children of Abraham! Don't threaten us that the ways we use our money might indicate our eternal destiny."

What would be the corresponding way to this attitude in the church today? It would be professing Christians who read these parables and say, "I am an eternally secure child of God. I am justified by faith alone. Do not tell me that the way I use my money shows that I am lost!"

The answer to this contemporary form of cheap grace is this: the faith that justifies, purifies. It also purifies from the love of money. Or as Galatians 5:6 says, *when it comes to justification before God, nothing is of any avail "but faith working through love."*

The point of this parable is that the rich man is in hell, not because he was rich, but because he delighted more in luxuries for himself than in love for Lazarus. It didn't make any difference that he thought he had a secure standing as a son of Abraham.

And so in hell he looks up and pleads for some mercy from Abraham. Abraham responds in verse 26 by telling him that there is absolutely no way out, once you are there : "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish."

In other words, if during our time on earth we pursue after "things" instead of God, pursue luxury for ourselves instead of love for others, then earth will be the scope of our heaven and eternity will be our hell. But if during our time on earth God is our treasure, no matter how many bad things happen, then earth will be the scope of our hell and eternity will be our heaven.

This does not mean that, by using your money for the good of others in the cause of Christ, you buy a spot in heaven or earn your way to paradise. Not at all! What it means is that the way you use your money shows whether your heart has been changed so that love for others and not for yourself is what you long for and delight in.

The poor man is in heaven, not because he was poor and destitute, but because he was fully committed to God and dependent on his grace and mercy.

The rich man asks if Abraham will send Lazarus to warn his five brothers about the danger of hell. Evidently the rich man knew that they were pursuing the same kind of life he was and were doomed. Abraham answers in verse 29, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." In other words, God has given the Bible to them, his chosen way to warn against a life not dedicated to God and to teach the truth about love for God and our neighbour. God will not give them any other revelation than the Holy Scriptures.

But the rich man knows that his brothers do not listen to the Scriptures. They may have devotions in the morning for a few minutes and they may attend church every now and then, **but he knows that their whole mindset is shaped by the world and not by God.** And so the rich man believes it is not going to do any good for Abraham just to say to them: read your Bible!!

In verse 30 he advises Abraham about how to get his brothers to repent: "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." If there could just be a resurrection from the dead, something really startling, some miracle, then they would wake up and repent. He believes they then will forsake their selfish luxury and start to live for others to the glory of God.

Application:

Then comes Abraham's final, utterly stunning statement (v. 31): **"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."** Isn't that incredible! If a person is so deaf to the commands, warnings and promises of the Bible, then even a resurrection from the dead will not bring about repentance.

Suppose Jesus should rise from the dead – this is what Luke wants his readers to think about – and suppose he should reveal himself to five brothers like these, will they receive him for whom he is and become his committed followers - his disciples?

They would most probably be knocked out of their senses by being eyewitnesses to such a miracle. But the question remains, will they be knocked out of their sins? Will they repent? Abraham says no. They will not repent. But what then will keep them from receiving the resurrected Jesus? Answer: the love of money, the love of things.

After Jesus rose from the dead, **the Pharisees used the love of money of the Roman soldiers, who saw the resurrection of Jesus, to lie about it and spread the story that his disciples stole his body from the grave.** It was their own love of money that convinced them to lie about the resurrection of Jesus, rather than change their views and ways and follow him. Following him might have cost them their status and position and therefore their power and luxury! They abused the Scriptures by selective preaching what served their personal and their political agendas. They did not sincerely listen to what Moses and the prophets teach about Jesus, and therefore not even his miraculous resurrection could convince them to become his disciples.

If you are not willing to listen to the Bible, even the knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead will be of no avail to you! You will still not be willing to follow Jesus. It is the Word of God that can change your heart, your life and your eternal destiny! The question is: What do you do with the Holy Scriptures in your life! Is it in your heart, or is it a dusty book somewhere in your house?

So now we go back to our question: Who can really and authentically be a disciple of Jesus? The answer from today's text is: They who listen to Word of God!

What then shall we do to prepare our hearts to receive Christ as leader, teacher, king and Lord? We should take our clue from Abraham in verse 29 of our text: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."

Conclusion and appeal:

This is what we should do: Go back to the Scriptures and read again **the words of Moses:**
*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might...
. And your neighbour as yourself (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).*

Read again the words of the prophets:

*Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me, **that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23-24).***

Read again the words of the apostles: (2 Timothy 3:14 - 4: 5)).

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, **which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: **Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from***

the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Proclaim the Word! Listen to the Word! Be changed by the Word! Listen in awe to Moses, the prophets and the apostles as they proclaim the truth about the gospel of grace!
Because the Holy Scriptures are **able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**

If you are not willing to humbly and obediently listen to the Scriptures, not even the fact that you know that Jesus rose from the dead, will save you! What you have to be, is a disciple of Jesus: Listen, study and earnestly accept God's Word and good news about our Lord, Jesus Christ, in the Bible! Know and follow Jesus and you will be saved!

This is the Word of God.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Any comments or enquiries about this sermon outline, may be sent to andries@centurionwest.co.za .