

## SERMON

Luke 16:19-31

Our Father's Reversal of Earthly Fortunes and Earthly Misery

Nunawading and Waverley, 25-9-22

Dear friends in Christ,

This is another teaching of our Lord Jesus about the use of our money, in this case, in the light of our eternal future. Our Father is not against wealth creation, rather, he wants us to trust him as our true wealth and be ready to show generosity and kindness to the poor. He emphasises what is really at stake in his eternal future for he can reverse earthly prosperity as well as reverse earthly hardship and poverty.

**Lazarus is carried by the angels** into heaven whereas the rich man finds himself in hell. Poor Lazarus was dumped by people at the rich man's front gate but after his death is gently borne into the presence of his loving heavenly Father. The rich man went to bed but his fine bed with beautiful covers and soft mattress was a door through which he fell into hell, made worse by seeing the beautiful existence of Lazarus. Lazarus endure endless misery and malnourishment but the Lord reversed it all so that he was comforted by the father of faith, Abraham himself. The place for his head was no longer the hard steps but the embrace of Israel's patriarch. The rich man had no one to love him. He never realised on earth that his riches could not love him back and in hell he was confronted by the coldness and emptiness of hell where no one would care enough to alleviate any of his suffering. In contrast, the love Lazarus had for God returns to him in the friendliness of Abraham and the soothing intimacy of this father in the faith. The loneliness and isolation of his unclean state, with spreading skin conditions and sores so that friends, family and neighbours would shun him as one cursed by God is now compensated by the saints who are his companions, by people filled with God's love that they have an excess of it which naturally flows to Lazarus and others. In the story, Jesus gave Lazarus a name whilst the rich man remained nameless. The rich man thought his wealth made him somebody, a respected figure honoured by all but he is nobody to the Lord and would be ignored in hell for eternity. Lazarus had lived in torment on earth, an earthly hell, where he was ignored by the rich man. The dogs that licked his weeping sores were the scrofulous curs that roamed the streets, wild and shouted at, not the house pets kept indoors. Yet the Lord in his great love for the poor and forgotten, displays how precious Lazarus is to him. Lazarus was always in his thoughts and though no one really cared for him, the Lord did and had set aside a special place for him in his kingdom.

God's judgement, is not based on our success, the wealth we have or our accomplishments but what is the heart. Listen to what Jesus said a few verses before this story to those who loved money: **You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.**

How amazing that we do examine our hearts and look at what is going on in there. Each Sunday, this happens in the confession of sins or you think about it as the Spirit addresses you in the sermon. Sometimes, the Spirit will really convict you of something: selfishness or unkindness, lack of empathy or harshness towards others and we lay our hearts open and seek Christ's healing. And he does truly forgive, love us and take away our shame.

Australians are now the wealthiest people on the planet and so we have the capacity to help others. The Holy Spirit has taught us to change our focus from amassing wealth to using it to alleviate the needs of others. We know, like Job that **we come into this world naked and we return to God naked.** Our wealth, our joy, our love, or purity, our peace and our fulfillment are found in Jesus Christ. **Though he was poor, he made us rich before God** by forgiving us and justifying us. Therefore, because of Christ, we have reassessed what our priorities are. While it is good to do things, a home renovation or a career change, to see the world, there is a kind of pointlessness in these things when that is all there is. Raising a family is good, too but are we really making a difference, changing things, even in a small way, to make things better for others? My sense of meaning comes from being loved and saved through Christ but my next level of meaning comes from serving and helping others in need.

The rich man wanted Lazarus to serve him, to dip his finger in the water and soothe his tongue, in other words, to serve him yet he did not see that he himself could have been a great servant of Lazarus while he was alive.

For those amongst us who have had a rough deal and society has not treated you so well, there is a **Father of all comfort** who gives you the priority before anyone else. Jesus said, **blessed are the poor in spirit.** Christ truly cared for people whose needs were great and as the ascended king of the universe is waiting to put things right for you. But may we, who are so comfortable and already blessed in heaven do something to make things lighter for those in great need.