

Title: Living (and dying) without remorse
Text: Luke 16.19-31
Theme: What “not caring” really means
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Not caring for needy people is a symptom of an eternally serious condition.

How do you treat people you have authority over? How do you treat people who appear to need you more than you appear to need them? How do you treat people who don't appear to matter? Before I press that a bit further, let's stop and ask those questions about Jesus. How does Jesus treat people he has authority over? He humbled himself to become one of us in order to live for us even as he lived among us. He suffered for us. He was more than inconvenienced for us, he died for us. He was completely spent for us. Did he need us? No! We need him, but he does not need us and yet he did all of that for us. Truth is, we are one of billions of people and in the massive ocean of humanity, we are barely blips on the screen, and yet he knows us and cares personally for us. One evidence of genuine conversion is the practical care you display for the needy.

James 2.14-17

That section of James concludes with, *“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”* (James 2.26) Not caring for needy people is a symptom of an eternally serious condition. Jesus warned about this back in Luke 12.13-21 when he told the story of the rich man who had so many crops that he had to build bigger barns to store them. The rich man's conclusion was that he was set for life. He could relax and care about nothing but himself. His goal was to eat, drink and be merry. He made it. Jesus called that man a fool because he was going to die and his stuff would go to someone else, but what's worse was this man had laid up treasure for himself but was not rich toward God. Jesus returns to this theme in our text because the Pharisees were lovers of money, which meant that they used people. Loving God is evidenced in loving people. Again, not caring for people is a symptom of an eternally serious condition. That is the heart of this story that Jesus tells us in Luke 16.

Read Text:

This story, like many of the stories that Jesus told, draws us in, like a lure draws in a fish, only to hook us. We are drawn in by the contrast that Jesus describes between two men here in this life. The one is fabulously rich and the other is devastatingly poor. The

1. **The Contrast Here** (19-21)

The rich man displayed his wealth and enjoyed his wealth. He dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day. Purple was the color of royalty because in those days, the only way you could make cloth purple was through purple dye that came from a spiny sea snail called a murex. This dye was known as Tyrian Dye because the ancient city of Tyre, which sat on

the Mediterranean Sea, was a famous source for this dye. In order to get enough dye to color a garment, it would take thousands of snails. Because the murex snail secreted this pigment, you could milk the snail, which was very labor intensive, or you could simply crush the snail. That was easier, but it was a one and done deal as well. One researcher said that it took 12,000 snails to yield 1.4 grams of pure dye which was only enough dye to color the trim of a single garment. Now you can understand why purple was often reserved for royalty. In the time of Christ, to be clothed in purple indicated massive wealth. Why would you wear purple? Hmm, good question, right? The fine linen is likely an Egyptian cotton. This man was more than dressed comfortably, he was dressed opulently.

The poor man was covered as well. He was covered in sores. If the rich man had physical features that wanted to hide, he had the means to cover them up. Not so with the poor man. The poor man was so poor he did not even have clothing to cover his sores. These sores, were like ulcers. They were open wounds, ripe for infection, whose seeping and therefore scent attracted dogs. He looked like Job. His poverty, disease and despair were obvious to all. His need was painfully and pathetically evident. Honestly, he would be difficult to look at.

The rich man feasted sumptuously every day. He enjoyed a feast, every day. You may enjoy a special feast on Thanksgiving or Christmas or on another special occasion, but this man was so wealthy that he had a feast every day which meant that he employed an army of servants to prepare this meal every day and wait upon him. The rich man did not wonder whether or not he would eat tomorrow. Food and feasting were not in question. It was his life.

The poor man by contrast, was so famished and so starving that he could only hope for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. He did not hope for the feast, that would be to hope for too much. In his dreams, he did not imagine sitting at the table. Jesus said that he "*desired to be fed with the what fell from the rich man's table.*" The rich man had so much, he did not need to clean his plate. He did not have eat what was set before him. There would always be more. He could choose to be picky. The poor man longed for anything. As they say, beggars can't be choosy and he was not choosy. The rich man did not need anything. In fact, he had everything and more. The poor man had to be carried since he did not have the ability to walk. Either he was ill or crippled but someone(se) laid him at the gate of the rich man. The rich man had more than enough and his excess would benefit the poor man. It may not cure him, but even some food would comfort him. Surely, he would find some help here. However, the only personal attention he received was from the pack of street dogs that roamed the area.

Who would you rather be? Look at v.15. Jesus is talking to the Pharisees. It's not until 17.1 when his intended audience is primarily his disciples. So, if you were a Pharisee and you were, as Jesus described, a lover of money, who would you rather be? In fact, this rich man would be your hero. This guy is what you lived for. But like a good Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie story, every detail matters, and there is one detail, one more contrast that I have left out from vs. 19-21. Do you see it? This detail sets us up for the hook that is about to snag us. The rich man does not have a name. The poor man does. Jesus knows the poor man. He calls him Lazarus. Why do you think Jesus does not give the rich man a name? That is an important matter and it leads us

to the second point. In fact, there is a massive contrast between points 1 and 2. In point 1 we have the contrast here, but Jesus goes on describe (point 2) the contrast hereafter. Your appearance here is not the end of the story. If your goal is to live the dream, you are setting yourself up for a nightmare.

Up until this point in the story, these men could hardly be more different. But v.22 is another reminder that death is the great equalizer and the time when all appearances and image are stripped away and replaced by reality. The poor man died and the rich man died. The way Jesus tells this story gives us the sense that Lazarus died first. The fact that they both died was about the only thing they shared in common. And now, their lives in eternity could not be more different either.

2. The Contrast Hereafter (22-24)

Lazarus died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. I get goosebumps when I think about that. All those days, all that suffering, all that humiliation, all that wondering about the value of my life and what happens when he dies? God sends angels (plural) to carry him to Abraham's side (think paradise). Someone had carried him to the gate of a rich man who didn't give him a thing, much less the time of day. Now God sends his glorious emissaries to carry him to glory, to rest, to peace, to home. There is no mention of what happens to his body, because, in a sense, it doesn't matter. Most likely his body was discarded in a place like the potter's field for people who could not afford a burial. But the real Lazarus, the person, the soul was escorted to glory, where he was given a new body, at least for now. We know this because in a bit he will be seen and will be recognized.

Then the rich man also died (22b). But he was buried. Jesus doesn't bother to describe the funeral or the tomb since that has no significance now. Most of the resources of earth have no value in eternity. Your image on earth is replaced by the reality of eternity. What you covered up on earth is on full display in eternity. The rich man died. His body was buried, but he in another body found himself in hell. Hades is the formal name for the place of the damned. This is the word that Jesus used and it is not only a place, it is a place of torment. If the Pharisees were listening at all, they had to be stunned. Perhaps a bolt of adrenaline sent a shock of terror into their gut. Did they start to sweat, squirm, get angry, and keep scoffing? Hopefully at least some of them, maybe even one or two, let the exposure convict them of the truth. Why do we experience dread? Why do live with such deep-seated angst? Don't suppress it. Don't mask it with drink or meds. Let dread, the fear of hell, the fear of judgment (which is no joke) be the God-ordained tool to move you to Christ.

We've all heard people joke about going to hell and being with their friends. This is no joke. This is what Jesus warned about. Possessions, status, power and image are often temporary masks, temporary saviors we use to disguise our insecurities and needs. They don't last. They don't go with you into eternity. You need a covering that will last. You need a Savior who is forever. You need Jesus. Nothing else will do and there is no second chance. There is no next season, next

semester, or next life. This is it and we all die. And the older we get there is no guarantee that we will get more clarity about life. I've seen the opposite happen way too much.

The rich man was in hell and he was conscious and in torment and Lazarus was not. Lazarus was not in hell, but was with Abraham. In fact, he was at Abraham's side. The rich man, or more accurately, the man who had been rich sees Abraham and Lazarus far off. And now, the rich man called out to Abraham and asks him to have mercy on him by sending Lazarus to dip his finger in water and come to him in order to cool his tongue. Do you see what I see? The rich man did know Lazarus. He knew his name. He knew him and, in this life, he didn't care but he does now. The man who didn't show mercy is asking for it. Like the priest and the Levite in the story of the good Samaritan, they saw the need, but chose to ignore it. But what does he ask for? Just a drop of water, right? Wasn't that like what Lazarus had hoped for, just some leftovers that fell from the table? There is nothing that indicates that Lazarus ever got anything from the rich man's leftovers. Here, there would be no relief from the anguish the rich man was in from the flame.

People in power are accustomed to giving orders. I think there is still some of that going on here. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus, like a servant, to come and do what I want. I am in anguish and I need relief. I don't blame him for wanting relief. We would all want that. But I'm not sure it has really settled on him that Lazarus is not a servant, a hireling, and in fact is not an equal. He will not be serving the rich man and what is more, this setting is a new reality and this reality is irreversible.

There was a contrast here in this life (point 1). Now there is a contrast hereafter in the life to come. This life is temporary. The life to come is eternal. Now, who would you rather be? The rich man or Lazarus? The seriousness of the rich man's plight is underscored by the verdict, his sentence and by the rejection of his appeal because it won't work. All of this comes out in the conversation that he has with Abraham. As he realizes the consequences of his choices, our initial frustration with his callousness, now turns to pity.

3. The Desperate Realization (25-31)

Abraham's response to the rich man's request is tender, but firm. The point is clear. Rich man, you received good things. "*You, in your lifetime, received good things.*" Those were not yours to own, to waste, to be extravagant on yourself. Those were gifts to you for you to use for the benefit of others. The implication is obvious. What did you do with what you received? The rich man lived for himself. Lazarus, *in like manner* (received) *bad things*. What did Lazarus do with the "bad things" the tough life, the hard times, that he received? Here is what we know. Jesus called him Lazarus. Lazarus is a simple form of the name Eleazar and it means, "God helps." Jesus picked this name for this guy because he depended on God, no matter what. Circumstances do not make you what you are, they reveal what you are. The rich man was given wealth and he wasted his opportunity to make much of God with it. Lazarus was given hardship and difficulty and he turned to the Lord. The verdict is clear. Those who live for themselves and care nothing for others are those who do not know the Lord and do not trust the Lord.

Those who depend on God, no matter are his. Riches and poverty are not forever. Eternity is. This life is not about you. Go back to the opening story of this chapter. Whatever you have is on loan from God. You are a steward. How you use what you have been given is the fruit that reflects whether or not you have a root of genuine faith.

After Abraham explains this to the rich man, he goes on to point out that there is a great chasm that is fixed between the place of torment and the place of comfort and there is no crossing between the two. Death is the great equalizer and the final say. This is hard to listen to. The rich are people with means. They are used to hiring people to do things for them. Fix this problem. Get me out of this. Call my lawyer. Hey I know this guy, he will help. For the first time, in perhaps a very long time, this man begins to realize that he has a problem that he cannot solve and he has nothing that will help him.

At this point, the man who cared only for himself realizes that his brothers are just like him and he is desperate to get word to them. This time he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers. He figures that if someone comes back from the dead then this will be enough evidence to cause his brothers to repent and change. But Abraham says that they already have all the evidence they need to repent and change. They have the Scriptures. They have Moses and the Prophets. If they don't hear the Scriptures, then nothing else will bring lasting change.

Later on, there would be a Lazarus who would come back from the dead, and there were people who witnessed this and ran to tell the Pharisees who only doubled down on their insistence that Jesus be taken out. If you don't respond to the Word of God, no miracle will cause you to believe.

Here is what this text is not teaching:

- 1) If you are poor, you go to heaven because you have already suffered.
- 2) If you are rich, you go to hell because you were rich.
- 3) If you give money to charity you will go to heaven.

You cannot buy your way into heaven. Jesus warned in Matthew 6.1-4 about giving to the needy in order to be seen by others and therefore, praised by others. The issue here is not raising funds for the poor. The real issue is whether or not you actually care about other people in your heart. Here is what Jesus is teaching:

- 1) Those who have received mercy, are merciful.

The merciful truly care about others. Genuine faith is the only kind of faith that saves. Genuine faith comes from a heart-change.

- 2) Those who are merciful, are generous.

The merciful do not love money and don't obsess over it. The merciful do not live to draw attention to themselves nor to pursue pleasure at the expense of the needs of others.

3) Heaven and hell are real and forever.

Get this straight now. Like Lazarus and the rich man, you will die and when you die your eternal condition will be confirmed. At this moment, you can address that. And I am pleading with you to do so. I am pleading with you not to presume that you are fine. This is too serious to not stop and do some personal inventory. Knowing the gospel is not the same as truly believing in Christ. So yes, you need to ask yourself if you really understand the gospel, but you also need to ask yourself if you have been truly changed by the gospel. Here is where you need to be humble and have the courage to be honest with yourself and have the courage to ask others to be honest with you. How do you treat those you have authority over? Are you generous? Are you a protector? Are you safe? Are you merciful? Do you care about them? If the answer to this is, no or not really, the solution is not to try to simply change your behavior, but to humble yourself and cry out to God to change your heart and confess your sin and your need to be changed by Jesus.

4) The Scriptures alone bring saving faith, not sensational stories, or miracles.