

The Rich Man and Lazarus **Luke 16:19-31**

The Pharisees ridiculed the idea that the way you view money now might be connected with your eternal destiny. They responded like that because they were 'lovers of money'. So Jesus tells another parable about how things turn out, after death, for a man who loves money.

Rich or Poor?

It was not difficult to tell these two men apart. The rich man had everything he could possibly want. The poor man had nothing. The one thing they had in common was that they both died. They are about as different as you can get. But interestingly, their wealth and standing in society were not the biggest difference between them. The greatest contrast is that the poor man, Lazarus, has a name; and the rich man doesn't.

Lazarus means, 'God is my help.' So Jesus has set up a contrast between an individual who gets his identity from what he has, and an individual who finds his identity in God, even when stripped of everything else. And if your identity and security is tied up with your possessions, you will struggle to live the sacrificially generous life Christ calls you to.

So which of these two men had the true riches? As they both discovered, wealth now is no indication of eternal wealth.

The Road to Hell

After death the situations are entirely reversed. But how did the rich man end up in hell? It wasn't just because he was rich – so was Abraham. It was because of his heart. Paul says that, 'the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.' The rich man's conversation with Abraham shows us how loving money more than God is at the root of this man's woes.

Firstly, he thought that money, and the status his money brought him, gave him the right to lord it over others. He spoke of Lazarus as if he were his servant and errand boy. That is the pride that building your self worth on riches can bring.

Secondly, his compassion did not go beyond those who were like him – his brothers. Even in hell he wasn't thinking about the poor. But it is those who are unlike us who Christ calls us to love.

Thirdly, he has learned to say 'no' to heaven too many times. He had closed his ear to God's voice in his life, and he shifts the blame from himself to God for his being in hell. He never asks for forgiveness or to get out. The ultimate pride is that we choose hell for ourselves.

Taking a different path

The rich man wants someone to go from the dead. Abraham talks of someone rising from the dead. It's as we 'hear' Moses and the Prophets, that we learn the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. When we understand how he has loved us and died for us - who are so different from him - we will open our hearts and hands to love those who are different from us. And that will include the alleviation of suffering and poverty.