

**Prayer of the Day:**

Mercifully grant, O God, that Your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, for without Your help we are unable to please You; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Verse of the Day:**

Alleluia! If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. Alleluia! (Luke 16:31 NIV84)

**Sermon Text:**

The parable of the Rich man and poor Lazarus, have you ever heard of such a sad story? A man so poor he can't afford home, clothing or food lays weak and starving at the gate of a rich man, no strength even to chase the dogs away. Another man so engrossed in the world's tantalizing traps that he has lost all grasp on what is truly necessary for his eternal welfare. It's a story told by our Savior that teaches a number of valuable lessons to His people.

It has been used to teach the importance of the Word of God, through which God continues to work to change hearts apart from works of man or miracle, though we still often crave them and seek to program God's Gospel message and power. It's there at the end of the lesson as Abraham speaks to the rich man, "*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead* (v31)." It has been used to teach the irrevokable nature of the judgment of God as the rich man cries out for relief but Abraham replies, "*besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.*" There is so much packing into this one parable that we could devote a series of sermons to realities that it contains, but we may just miss the mark if we don't pause and consider the two men themselves and the stark reality their temporal and eternal lives reveal. Often in this life **GOOD CAN BE BAD AND BAD CAN BE GOOD.**

How many years have you been working? I've been at it to varying degrees since I was old enough to be more help than hindrance on construction sites. Before that, I spent days off with mom at a telecommunications company honing my skills at the dartboard by the loading docks taught largely by the techs who awaited their next assignment. Ever wonder why we do it? Work, that is.

**Text: Luke 16:19-31**

<sup>19</sup> "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' <sup>25</sup> "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' <sup>27</sup> "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' <sup>30</sup> "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (NIV84)

Like some giant army of robots, we seem programmed to work, spend, save, and repeat. Is it not because we dream of becoming the rich man? Or if viewed from the outside in, let's say a third-world country, is it because we have set a standard of living that is so high (so rich) that we must slave away in order to keep it?

Now don't get me wrong here. Work of itself is not an evil thing. In fact, God tells us we should work. 2 Thessalonians 3 warns against idleness. Give Ecclesiastes a read sometime and Solomon will even say it is our lot in life through which we are to find joy and fulfillment. But how we do so is important.

Do I work for wealth and the rest in a blind pursuit of more? Or do I work to be of service to God and neighbor? Do I do it because God has provided me with an ability which allows me to be of service, to be useful in this world of mine and in so doing to be useful to Him? In this, there is a godliness to all of my labor, a holiness in vocation. Sadly, I don't always see it that way. As we heard last week, an all-consuming desire for more has me losing sight of neighbor, even sight of God as the almighty dollar and all that it can do for me becomes my lot in life.

For the rich man, the good became bad. All of his wealth and luxury could not prevent the death he too faced just as the beggar at his gate. But because wealth had wrung any faith from his heart, he ended up in the torments of hell for all eternity.

I think very few of us would argue that poor Lazarus life in this world is bad. Our story doesn't tell us why he is destitute but he is. Perhaps, it has something to do with the sores all over his body which would have left him unclean and unable to work as others feared contamination. Regardless of the why, his inability to sustain himself left him without home, without food, growing weaker and weaker. The dogs could have been further torment or at least a small measure of comfort but regardless, He could do nothing about it.

I don't think any of us if given the choice would ask to be poor Lazarus in this life but in death, notice something strange. It is this poor beggar and not the rich man who ends up in heaven. Why? Because in the agony and despair of life, without wealth or strength, Lazarus had clung to the only hope he had left. He had Moses and the Prophets no doubt taught as a young boy in the loving care of his parents. He knew that wealth, strength, sores, poverty all these things mattered naught when it came to eternity. His agony and despair, had only driven him more deeply into these truths as he awaited the deliverance of his gracious God in hope. His earthly cross had driven him to the cross of His Savior and through Jesus's saving work into the paradise of heaven. For Lazarus the bad was good. In fact, a blessing from God.

As a pastor, it's a truth I see born out over and over again at death beds, some long-lived, some incredibly short. Believer after believer no longer thinking about tomorrow and the list of things to do, what work is left done or undone, or the long list of their own achievements, the time for such things is past. No now it's time for eternity. Life's trials have left them yearning for it, hoping for it, and in some cases even welcoming the greatest "bad" of all as our world would consider it. Yes, even welcoming death itself because they know, they know their God, their Savior, their eternity is on the other side.

This is a hard truth which ends our series of hard teachings. It turns our whole process of evaluating life, success, wealth, and happiness on its head. For so often Satan will use the Good things of this world, twisting them to become traps and snares to enslave the people of God and strangle faith from the heart as we rely on the world rather than the Word. And God, God will use the cross both Christ's and our own to draw us ever nearer to Him and the eternity His suffering, death, and resurrection have earned. Yes, dear friends, sometimes **GOOD CAN BE BAD AND BAD CAN BE GOOD** as God uses all things for the good of His people, for you. Amen.