The Rich Man and Lazarus

Read Luke 16:19-31

Key verse: “Abraham said, ‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead’” (Luke 16:31).

There is heaven. There is hell. And the choices we make in this life help determine our eternal destiny.

In Jesus’ story, the rich man does not seem to be a terribly bad person. In fact, in Jesus’ day, his wealth would have been seen as a sign of his righteousness. Perhaps his biggest problem was his indifference to things of eternal importance:

1. The rich man was indifferent to the needs of other people.

“There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted luxuriously every day. At his gate lay a certain poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. Instead, dogs would come and lick his sores” (Luke 16:19-21).

Early church leader, Ambrose, wrote: “There is your brother, naked and crying! And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering.”

James 2:14 tells us: “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Jesus said: “I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me…. I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:42-43, 45).

The rich man was indifferent to the needs of other people.
2. The rich man was indifferent to God’s truth.

When he asked that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers, “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them’” (Luke 16:28-29). In his life, the rich man had failed to pay attention to Scripture and its teaching. He now feared that his five brothers were equally indifferent to God’s truth.

James 1:21-25 gives this word of exhortation: “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”

The rich man was indifferent to God’s truth.

3. The rich man was indifferent to Christ. More accurately, the rich man and his story represent the indifference of Jesus’ listeners, especially the religious leaders, to Christ.

“The rich man said, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will change their hearts and lives.’ Abraham said, ‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead’” (Luke 16:30-31).

Jesus’ words here seem to imply that he was speaking also of his own resurrection. If a person is indifferent and closed toward the needs of others and toward God’s truth, not even a resurrection will change him.

The opposite is also true. If we will say yes to the resurrected Christ, he can change our hearts and place our feet on the way that leads to life eternal.

Thanks be to God!

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