

A Spoiled Life

Sermon March 20, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 16:19-31

Golden Verse: *“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”*

- Luke 16:29

In explaining the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, I gave this title: “A Spoiled Life!” There is a lot of spoiled life! A bad marriage, or a wrong career choice, or some old sin can ruin a life. There are so many people who once fell into a temptation, made a bad decision, and chose the wrong way, and they cannot get back on the right track anymore. They have to suffer the consequences of a wrong decision for a lifetime. They know they ruined their lives, but they cannot do anything about it anymore. In their cases, they know that they ruined their lives, but they have no strength to change it.

However, there are also people who cannot see that day by day they are destroying their lives with their continuous actions. They live a corrupted life, and they cannot see where they will end up in eternity. The rich man’s life of this parable was such a corrupt life.

Apparently, by earthly measure, this rich man had a very successful life. Jesus says of him that he was rich, clothed in purple, ate extravagantly, and rejoiced abundantly every day. He had plenty of money. He did not have to save. He had the best clothes, fun, comfort, a great luxurious home, cheerful company, all the good things on earth that could make his life beautiful and cheerful. Most people would dream about such a lifestyle. I am sure many envied his life. Many said how lucky a guy he is, how happy he can be since he has everything he needs. He must have had some high dignity in public life, and this is why he was so wealthy. Probably because he was rich, he was respected and worshiped by a large group of his friends who were partying with him. Maybe he enjoyed a great prestige. What a successful life – we would say. How many envied him in certain moments? But we don’t envy him today because we know his whole story now. This man lived a fatally ruined life.

Why?

The way Jesus Christ presents his situation: “Once upon a time there was a rich man ...” expressed that something is wrong. Please understand me clearly: it is totally fair if somebody works hard and creates a pleasurable lifestyle for himself. To be rich after working honestly is not a sin and it is not evil. We do respect those who are working hard and earn the fruit of their labour. But it is strange that the only thing that can be said about this person is that “he was rich.”

If we write our fond memories about a deceased friend or a relative, we try to describe the person in a few short words, like: he was a sacrificial father who loved his family and he worked hard for them; or, what a loyal friend he was; or what a great and wise leader he was; or what a great church fellow he was, how deeply he was able to confess his faith in our Lord, or something like that. But imagine that, after this man died, there were no other characteristics which could be said, except that he was rich! That was all that was left about him in the memory of his fellow men. Apparently, he was just looking out for himself, and his only goal was to provide himself with what he needed and what he desired. This reveals his spiritual emptiness, the inner content of this man.

If a person has no other ideal in earthly life than to earn more money, to have more fun or to dress more fashionably, to enjoy earthly pleasures, at the end this person will lose everything, because everything has to be left behind. This man from our scripture reading was a practical materialist. All his thoughts were around money. Today we all have a great temptation to live a materialistic life, focusing on clothing, cars, travel, sports, pleasure, enjoyment, company, power, authority, and technology. In certain ways, all these things can be good and a blessing. The problem is if these goals are occupying our whole being and we don't take time for our spiritual life and to stay in a living connection with God. In many cases, the souls will remain empty. But our souls are hungry for love, kindness, gentleness, understanding, support. If people cannot find these values, they will try to fill their needs with empty material belongings.

Let's try to imagine: if you knew you had only one more hour to live, what would be really important to you? Cars, money, the lottery jackpot, or something else? Would you ask yourself: how am I going to stand before God in an hour? Life is unpredictable.

There's another character in the story: Lazarus. His name means "God is my help". He had nothing else in this life but God.

But his faith in God escorted him beyond the grave into the everlasting glory of God. The so called "rich man" had everything this earthly life could give a person but, at the end, he left everything behind. We can say: he lost everything. Unfortunately, he realized only in hell that he lost everything, and he ruined his earthly life. The last act of our life always takes place in eternity, where the last word is spoken by God Himself.

I can hardly believe that if anyone has everything, if the person can afford everything, he or she might be totally happy. Our souls cannot be satiated, satisfied with eating and drinking, pleasures, money, or bank deposits. Our souls need something else.

Decades ago, I met a very wealthy family in Switzerland, who said to me: "Money doesn't make us happy. We are rich but you are more satisfied. We can afford more, and you are happier."

Why is that that so many wealthy people commit suicide? I read about a case when a son of a multi-millionaire parents took his own life. When journalists asked his parents about the cause of death, they just said: he was bored because he was disgusted with life. No matter how rich he was, he was not happy and not satisfied!

As we are driving, often we can hear that in one of those cars around us the music is so loud that it shakes even our car. In those cases, I am wondering: what are that persons' needs; what kind of voices do they want to shut down in their minds; what kind of feelings do they have to suppress; or what are they missing and why can they not stand the silence? Without any judgement, I am wondering if the silence would say something to them that they don't want to hear?

Dear beloved, the Bible tells us that, in the very moment when we die, our spirit will be taken to God who will judge us. If we live and die with Christ, He will send us to His everlasting glory. If we neglect Him, He will send us to eternal punishment according to His fair judgement, to hell, which by Christ is described as a place of torments and flame.

Let's play a little bit and try to imagine the funeral of this "rich man": a large, fancy, ornamental funeral. The merits of the deceased are praised in endless

speeches. Now, as this person sees and hears all this from hell, he wants to shout: “It is not true! I have no merit! I am tormented in this flame!” But here on earth no one hears it.

Another speech follows: the speaker tells how great a person the deceased was: how wise, cheerful, and good a friend he was. But he would like to interrupt them from hell. He would say: “I have ruined my life. I was not wise enough. I was selfish taking care only about myself. I did not listen to those voices who asked for help and mercy. I shares my goods only with some friends who surrounded me, growing and praising my ego. I opened my house and prepared my table only for those who were there to praise and admire me. I turned my face away from those who suffered and begged for some food. I can see here and now that I ruined my life.”

Somebody is closing his speech saying: Rest in peace. From hell he is yelling: “there is no peace here. There is everlasting suffering and pain. I lived a horrible life, neglecting everything that God wanted from me and now I am punished. There is no rest here.”

The last words are said at the funeral: God be with you till we meet again. He would say: “I don’t want to see you here again.”

And this is the message he wanted to send to his brothers when he said: *“I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment”* Luke 19:27-28.

His biggest problem was that this man was not a faithful believer. He may have gone to church, he may have supported the church with donations, maybe he prayed daily, but his life showed that he was not a faithful believer.

A faithful believer obeys God in every way. A faithful believer studies God’s will, follows His commandments, obeys, serves and shares with those in need without expecting glory and praise.

As Jesus says in Matthew 6:1, *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*

Please understand this clearly: based on Jesus' story, this man did not end up at the furthest point from God because he was rich, but because he was not a faithful believer, just as Lazarus was not brought to heaven because of his poverty. If we have a living relationship with God, we cannot not abandon the needs of the poor and vulnerable. We cannot be blind, seeing only our own needs. God blesses us enormously in Canada, not to live only for ourselves but to be able to share.

The greatest waste is to save our wealth so that others do not get it. This is a waste of life itself.

The reason I said this man was not a faithful believer is because this man never met God in Lazarus.

Jesus said: *"If you have done this to one of my poorest brethren, you have done it to me"* Matthew 25:40. So he who doesn't see Lazarus in his misery doesn't notice Jesus. He who does something to Lazarus today, does it to Jesus.

Everyone has a Lazarus. Your Lazarus may be your own husband or your wife, suffering next to you because you have never really seen what you are missing. Maybe one of your children is Lazarus, who is struggling alone with his problems. Maybe your neighbour, in the next house, to whom you say goodbye every day, but who you have never noticed the way he longed for this greeting. Maybe your co-worker with whom you work without having any idea about his needs. You may have talent, and he is untalented. You have dear, good friends, and he alone is on the path to life. Maybe you have health and he is sick. You may have faith and you can pray, but he lives apart from God and the riches of the gospel are unknown to him. You may be surrounded by a lot of love and appreciation, and no one thinks of him.

Do you see around you people who are lonely, helpless, weak, grief, or sad? Please do not just pass them. They are your Lazarus. In them, you meet Jesus. The Lord Jesus is asking you now: do you know whom did I place at your door as your Lazarus? God wants you to be engaged with them in love. Help Lazarus. Do not ruin your life. Amen