

The Rich Man and Lazarus

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[0 : 00] That's one way to break the ice, isn't it? Good morning everyone, are we well? We are well. Thank you so much, Eliza, and thank you so much everyone who's participated so far in our service.

It's going to be great if you have sight of those verses in Luke 16 in front of you. We're going to be referring to it a lot as we go through this morning, so it's vital that we have the Scriptures opening in front of us.

But let's pray as we come to Luke chapter 16 together. Dear Father, we would still ourselves now and just recognize what we are doing this morning, that we have come together to hear your word preached.

We've come here together to hear your voice. And Lord, we ask that as we come to your words now, that you would help us listen, and you would help us heed, and you would help us absorb. And by your Spirit, would you change us from the inside out, we ask for your glory. And we ask in Jesus' precious and strong name. Amen. So I wonder if you've ever been accused of being a selective listener.

[1 : 10] Selective listening, the art form, and I think it is an art form, of being able to be in a conversation with somebody and listen to the things that you want to listen to, and not listen to the things that you don't want to listen to.

Selective listening. Apparently this happens all the day, all the time, in everyday conversation. So I remember reading an article not so long ago about the selective listening habits of men and women.

And it has to be said, men, I think unfairly, we come off very poorly in this article. So, apparently the things that cause us to switch off, any talk of babies, the article, not me, okay, talk of babies, talk of soaps, don't mean like dove, I mean like neighbours, or you take your pick, of soaps.

And ladies, don't think you're off the hook. Apparently it's sports for you guys, most especially golf, which I think is harsh. Cars is another one.

Things that, as we speak to people, cause us to switch off. Apparently as a nation, one in three of us admit to having a conversation with somebody daily when our mind is somewhere else and we don't actually have a clue what the other person is saying to us.

[2 : 22] Selective listening. Well, today we're going to meet a man who is brilliant at selective listening. He's got God's Word.

He's got his Bible and he's picking and he's choosing the things that he wants to listen to. And he's given a wide berth to the things that he doesn't want to listen to.

And that's exactly what the Pharisees, who are in earshot of Jesus talking at this point, Jesus is speaking to them, that's exactly what they are doing with their lives.

Now, if you've got a Bible here, let me just get us up to speed with the context and see the flow of Luke's gospel at this point. Chapter 16, verse 1. See how Jesus introduces that parable?

There was a rich man. There was a rich man. Chapter 16, verse 19, our verses this morning. There was a rich man. Why does Jesus keep banging that drum?

[3 : 19] That's the question I'm asking as a reader. Because these Pharisees are rich. They're rich. And the question is, what are they doing with their riches, their possessions, their stuff?

What are they doing with it? Again, see the flow. Chapter 15, the prodigal son. He wastes his father's possessions.

Chapter 16, the dishonest manager. He wastes his master's possessions. And so this morning when we meet a rich man, the question we've got to be asking as readers is, what will this man do with his possessions?

Do you see the flow? God has blessed these Pharisees with money and possessions, but they're choosing to ignore what God has said they are to do with the things that he's given them. Now, why would they do that? Well, Luke tells us, verse 14 of chapter 16, they loved money. Not just that they had money, they loved money.

[4 : 28] And so instead of caring for the poor, of sharing God's heart for those who cannot help themselves, for being a help to the helpless, those people who are on their doorstep, what they're doing with their riches is that they are hoarding it, and they're loving their money and possessions.

And what it's doing is it's choking their compassion for their fellow man, for their fellow Jew, and it's causing them to take their eyes off the God who they're claiming to worship and focus on them. They love money. Now, I don't know if you've noticed this as we've gone through this bit of Luke's Gospel, and I must say, this is one of the joys of doing this consecutively. You see it, don't you? Jesus has got an awful lot to say about money. An awful lot to say about money. Here's some statistics I was reading this week. One in every seven verses in Luke's Gospel is about money. Eleven out of the 39 parables that Jesus tells that are recorded in the Gospels are about money and treasure.

Jesus has got an awful lot to say about money. And this is why it's really struck me this week that I need to take heed of what Jesus says about money. Is it because we're rich?

[5 : 40] Do you know how I know that? I googled it. And there's this website that you can go on to called GlobalRichList.net. I'm not joking, right? GlobalRichList.net by the charity Care International.

GlobalRichList.net. You enter your salary and it tells you, I don't know how they figure it out, but it tells you how rich you are compared to the rest of the world. Now the average UK family having the average UK household income in 2017, do you know where that put you in ranking in the world? In the top 0.87%. That's the average UK salary in this country. The average UK household income. We are rich. And I walk to church every morning.

This is how it plays out in my life. I walk to church every morning. As I walk down George Street. So go up onto George Street. George Street, Lothian Roads. That's my route, okay? Go down George Street.

What do I see? I walk past suit shops. And in my head I'm thinking, oh, I'd love to have a suit like that. I'd love to pretend to be a footballer. Just dressing like that. Walk from the suit shop.

[6 : 47] Walk past the ESPC shop. And I think, what's in the windows? Just houses, right? Just constantly going. Houses, houses. I think, oh, it'd be great to live there. I could dress like a footballer. I could live like a footballer.

So easy, isn't it, in our world just to get sucked in, to get lured in to the deceitfulness of riches? How easy is it in our own lives? And I know I'm speaking from my own heart here. To love money.

To love the things that God has given me. And instead of viewing them as his possessions that are just unknown to me, that he's blessed me with, I view them as my own. And I'll use them for my own kingdom.

Thank you very much. This is the temptation I find in my heart all the time. How easy is it to get distracted by money? Now listen, there's nothing wrong with having money. The question we've got to ask ourselves, though, is does it have us?

Does it have us? Does the drive, the longing for stuff, does it consume us? Or does Jesus have us? And does Jesus consume us? And do his priorities, his kingdom, a love for him, does that drive us?

[7 : 50] That's the question, isn't it? So these Pharisees, Jesus is accusing them of being selective listeners. And all of a sudden when you see it in that context, actually what Jesus has to say to these men comes a lot closer to home.

So here's what's going to happen this morning. Jesus is going to tell this parable of the rich man and Lazarus as a way of getting the Pharisees to ask themselves some searching questions about their lives.

I'm going to try and put these so that we can understand what the challenge is, okay? So there's just three questions this morning. That's all I want us to see. Here's the first question. How are you living? Verses 19 to 21.

How are you living? So this is where we get into the parable. See that we meet the rich man at verse 19. Now look how Jesus paints the picture of this man. He dresses in what color?

Purple. Now purple clothes are a sign of affluence because purple dye, it comes from this very rare shellfish. Now if you're able to get a lot of it and dye your whole clothes, that means you're very rich.

[8 : 55] And it's not like this man, do you notice it as we read the text? It's not like he's just got one purple t-shirt that he wears day after day after day after day. He wears purple. So his wardrobe, presumably, has got a lot of purple in it, which means he has got some serious cash and he wants the whole world to know it.

Look at Jesus go on. He wears fine linen. Now that word there literally meaning undergarments. I think we're meant to laugh. Jesus is saying this guy is so rich, he's so posh, that even his boxers, even his briefs, are first class.

And he lives in luxury, not occasionally. Do you notice every day? You've got an ESV there. It says that he feasted sumptuously every day. I mean, every night is brought to you by waitress's finest. That's this guy's house. And how does this man do this every day? Every day. I don't believe for a minute that he's all night peeling the potatoes, carving the meat, setting the table.

He's clearly got servants who are doing this round the clock so that he can live his lifestyle. He's a rich man. And he's got a gate. Do you see that? He's got a gate.

[10 : 04] Now most likely it's a grand gate. And the gate is where the action happens in this parable because he is living his life of luxury at one side of the gate and who's at the other side of the gate?

Lazarus. Now it's really interesting, as far as I can find, as far as I can see, that Lazarus is the only character in the whole of Jesus' parables that gets a name.

He's the only one. And that's significant. Because what does Lazarus' name mean? It means God helps me. Or God helped me. And you say to yourself, well, is that some kind of sick joke that Jesus is telling here?

What an ironic name. God helps me. Look at the description of him. He's a beggar. Perhaps he was dropped off at the rich man's gate every morning. To beg.

He's covered in sores. To add insult to injury. The dogs are his only friends. They come and lick him. And he's hungry. And he's longing to eat the scraps, to eat the spares, to eat anything that's going to fall from this rich man's table.

[11 : 12] Lazarus is destitute. Remember in this day, there's no help from the state. There's no benefits package. There's no free health care. This man is helpless. Lazarus has got no hope.

And so on the one side of the gate is this rich man. And at the other side of the gate is God helps me. Now there may only be a short distance between these men, but you see how Jesus is painting the picture of the massive contrast that exists between them.

Jesus as he introduces us to these two men, as he draws out the contrast, he's asking the Pharisees and the crowds. How are you living? How are you living? Do you see yourself in this rich man?

Do you see his excesses? Do you see his utter neglect for his fellow man? This rich man doesn't get it. This rich man is a selective listener.

The question is, will the Pharisees get it? And the question for us today is, will we get it? How are you living? Here's the second question, verses 22 to 26. Where are you heading?

[12 : 18] The rich man and Lazarus, they may well be living polar opposite lives, but do you see how their lives meet the same fate? What was it that Benjamin Franklin said were the two certainties in life?

Death and taxes. We'll park the taxes for just now. But he's banging on the money, is he not? It's true. Death is the great equalizer. Death knows no class distinction. Both of these men die.

You know, last time I checked, the death rate was still up around about the 100% mark. Both these men die. This is what he's telling us. The same fate comes to both. They both died. There was a contrast in life, but do you see how Jesus tells these Pharisees there was a contrast in death?

Jesus speaks about Lazarus first. Here he is. God helps me. Is that true? Is that going to be true for him? What are we told? The angels carried him to Abraham's side. Now you say, well, what's Abraham doing there?

How's he snuck in there? Well, he's the father of the faith. And here he is, welcoming, embracing Lazarus. And so Lazarus' name was clearly not just some wishful thinking by his parents.

[13 : 23] It was true for him. That he trusted that God would ultimately save him. That he trusted that God was who he says he is in his word. That he is the father of the helpless.

And ultimately, God is going to be the one that saves him. It reminded me this week of the old hymn sung by the American slaves back in the day, oppressed, destitute.

What did they sing? Swing low, sweet chariot. Now how that got to Twickenham today, I have no idea. But swing low, sweet chariot. So they used to sing, I looked over Jordan, what did I see? Coming forth to carry me home. A band of angels coming after me, coming forth to carry me home. That's the kind of thing going on here with Lazarus, I imagine. The truth that one day my God will liberate me.

The truth that one day my God will vindicate me. The truth that one day my God will come to save me. And you have to say that as we read about Lazarus here, welcomed, comforted, loved, embraced at the father's side, at Abraham's side, we have to say that's a beautiful picture.

[14:32] Doesn't it? That's a beautiful picture of who our God is. But look at the rich man. Like Lazarus, he dies. Text tells us he was buried.

Imagine it was a no expense spared burial. Is he at Abraham's side? Verse 23, no. Look at the description. He's in torment. He's in anguish.

Jesus painting it out here. He's in hell. Now, why is he there? That's a precise question that he's asking himself. Do you see how he makes his appeal to Abraham? Verse 24, what does he call him?

This is key to see this. Verse 24, Father Abraham. Notice what he calls him there. Father Abraham. So what does he do? He plays the relation card. So Abraham, am I not one of your people? We share a family tree, do we not? We share a common heritage. So why are we not sharing eternity together? And he sees Lazarus. Now, I love this.

[15:35] I love what goes on here. This man's so accustomed to barking orders. Do you see how he talks past Lazarus? Does he even acknowledge him? He talks past him and he sees Abraham and he asks him, would you send Lazarus here?

Would you send Lazarus here to help me in my anguish? Now, notice in passing that this rich man, he knows Lazarus' name. Do you see that in the text?

He knows his name. And it's not because Lazarus has got to heaven and Abraham has given him one of those conference lanyards that says Lazarus on. It's like, oh, I never knew you were called Lazarus.

He knows his name. Now, why does he know his name? Because he recognizes him as being Lazarus. He used to sit outside his house behind the gate and he used to beg every day. He recognizes him.

This is Lazarus. So, this rich man can't claim innocence here. It's not like he can say, if only I'd known you were there, Lazarus. If only I'd known, maybe I would have come down and given you a hug, invited you in, we could have chewed the fat over a hog roast.

[16:38] I just didn't know. It can't kill him innocence, this man. Lazarus, I knew he was there. He knows his name. He knew he was there. And God, who we saw last week at verse 15, he knows the heart and he knows that this rich man knows.

And so, Abraham responds, verse 25, rich man, you had your time in the sun. You had your good things. You had your chance. You had your opportunity. You had your Bible and you made your choice.

I'm sorry, but eternity for you, key word at verse 26, is fixed. Here's a little lesson that I've picked up along the way when it comes to understanding a passage like this.

And it's this, that the plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things.

Okay? Plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things.

So, what is Jesus teaching here? Will you be able to see heaven from hell? Honestly, don't think so. Honestly, don't know. Okay? Will you be able to communicate between the two?

[17:48] Honestly, I don't think so, but I don't know. There's rabbit holes here that we can take that I don't think we're being invited to take. What is the main thing from this parable? What is the plain thing that Jesus is teaching the Pharisees here?

Surely it's this, that the choices that we make in this life have consequences for the next. See, that's the plain thing from this parable. And you see that come out in the rich man's reaction.

Do you see how he plays the race card to Abraham? He doesn't play the grace card to Abraham. What does he say? He says, I deserve to be in heaven because of my heritage. Whereas the consistent testimony of Scripture is that we are saved by grace alone.

That God sent his promised son. That's amazing grace. The son died on the cross for our sin. That is amazing grace. And that through faith in Jesus and what he did, as Charles alluded to earlier, we

are ransomed, we are healed, we are restored, and we are forgiven.

That is amazing grace. And that God has adopted us as his children. He's given us a new heart. He's taken out that heart of stone and he's put in there a heart that beats for him, a new heart.

[19 : 03] And we have a quite incredible life to live. We have a quite incredible destiny ahead of us of delighting in his presence and singing his praises for all eternity. That is amazing grace.

It is by grace that we have been saved. As the old hymn puts it, sing the wondrous love of Jesus, sing his mercy and his grace. In the mansions bright and blessed he'll prepare for us a place.

Oh, where would we be, friends, without God's grace in our lives? Where would we be? But this rich man has chosen to ignore God's words and ignore Lazarus and Abraham's making it quite clear that that race card, that I ain't gonna save you.

He's a selective listener. This rich man doesn't get it. Will the Pharisees get it? Will they see that there's still space for grace? Will we get it?

Where are you heading? Here's the third question, verses 27 to 31. What are you trusting? And so as Jesus tells the story, it seems like this rich man, as he hears Abraham explain things, he kind of comes to see that there's nothing he can do to change his fate.

[20 : 17] What does he do? He begins to think about his family. Again, he's still barking the orders. Do you notice this? Would you send Lazarus to go and speak to them, Father Abraham? I don't know how Lazarus puts up for this.

I find it really fascinating that Lazarus doesn't even speak in this whole parable. Look at Abraham's response. Verse 29, they've got Moses and the prophets.

They've got their Old Testaments. So this Jewish family, they will likely heard Moses and the prophets read and taught every week as they go to synagogue. They've heard it taught of who their God is, what he's like, what he's done for them as his people, what he's asked of them as his people, and how he's warned them down through the ages through Moses and the prophets about the consequences of keeping ignoring what he's telling them.

They have it all, says Abraham. They have it all. They have it right there written. The question is not do they know? The question is will they listen? Fair enough, says the rich man, but if only you could give them a sign, if only you could give them a sign, I bet my bottom dollar, and he's probably got a lot of dollars, okay, bet my bottom dollar that they would listen.

What does Abraham say? No, they wouldn't. Even if somebody came back from the dead, strong language, isn't it? Even if somebody came back from the dead, they still wouldn't listen because believing is not a matter of lack of knowledge.

[21 : 43] Failure to believe is because of a hard heart that just doesn't want to listen. This is what Abraham's saying. And we see that in the Gospels, do we not? Think about what we see. John 11, the other Lazarus that's in Scripture.

Jesus raises him from the dead. And what did the Pharisees say? I tell you what, they don't say, oh Jesus, we've got you completely wrong. Now we understand, now we surrender. What do they say? We say we want Lazarus dead because he's telling people that Jesus brought him back from the dead and he needs to stop talking. Even Jesus himself when he rises from the dead, what is Matthew recording?

You can check it out later towards the end of his Gospel. What does he record? Jesus rises from the dead. The reports are there. What did the Pharisees say? The religious readers. Not Jesus. We get it now. We get it now.

Please forgive us. We get it now. No, they say, they go to the guards. And they say, here's a large sum of money. Would you tell people that the disciples came and they stole the body?

[22 : 42] Because we cannot risk this getting around. And when you begin to see it in that context, you see that Abraham here is bang on the money. He's bang on the money. They will not be convinced even if somebody rises from the dead.

The question is not, do they know? The question is, will they listen? I remember as a young Christian at university walking along the road with my mate from football and he said, Graham, I wouldn't mind believing but I just would want to see something more.

I just want to see something more. And I'll be honest, as a young Christian, a new Christian, that threw me. It threw me. Begin to ask yourself. Begin to pray in my mind, God, would you just speak to him?

And then you begin to think about it and you think, well, what do I actually believe as a Christian? What do I believe the Bible is? I believe it's, as Calvin called it, God gone public with himself. That God's made himself known, that God's on full disclosure, that God has spoken. This is what the Bible is. What a privilege. We were looking at the Reformation earlier. What a privilege it is. And men and women down the generations have given their lives that we can have the Bible in our own language.

[23 : 54] That we can know what God has said, that we can read about Jesus, that we can read about God's rescue plan from before eternity to rescue men and women to himself through his Son. God has spoken.

What does my friend need? He needs the Bible. And he needs me to read it with him. Again, just beginning to pray, God, would you give him a sign? Again, thinking to myself, working that through, well, what kind of sign?

Thinking it through. But I can trust these Gospels. They're historically reliable. What are they telling me? They're telling me that Jesus died and Jesus rose and Jesus ascended.

If he's not going to be convinced by that miracle, I don't know what other miracle he's going to be convinced by. God, would you save him?

Abraham's bang on the money. He's bang on the money. And so our conviction sitting here this morning is God's people has got to be heaven's conviction. And that is that the Bible is trustworthy.

[24 : 59] And our confidence can be in every single word that is proceeded from the mouth of God that we have in front of us in our own language. And I'll tell you how this works out in our evangelism. I've got another friend who I read John's Gospel with.

Do you know how long we've been doing it for? Four years. Taught me that evangelism is no short-term thing. It's about relationships. It's about people.

But it's also taught me that this conviction is true. That my confidence that my friend will come to meet Jesus is not in my ability to answer his questions. My confidence is not in my apologetic skills to explain stuff to him.

My confidence is in the word of God. And I go on the basis that my friend, wherever he stands before the Lord, I don't know, my friend needs what I need and your friends need what you need and that is he needs to meet Jesus.

He needs to meet Jesus. And so how is he going to meet Jesus? Well, he's going to meet him, he's going to encounter him in the pages of the Gospels. And not just the Gospels, the whole Bible is pointing to him, God's rescue plan.

[26 : 11] How is my friend going to know? I've got to sit down and read the Bible with him. Four years ago. Four years. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. He and she, so we're going to keep doing it.

But four years because of this conviction. What does my friend need? My friend needs Jesus. What do I need? I need Jesus. Here's a challenge before you go this morning.

Is there somebody in your life, is there a friend, is there a colleague, is there a mate at work, whoever, mate from sport, whatever you do, could you read the Bible? Will you be faithful with them? And if not, will you pray for my friend that you become to know Jesus?

Come and speak to us afterwards. Anybody that you've seen up the front here this morning, some terrific resources that we can recommend about sitting down one to one with a friend and reading the Bible with them. What our friends need, same thing that we need, we need to meet Jesus. He's glorious. He is glorious. They need to meet Jesus. This rich man doesn't get it. He's a selective listener. Will the Pharisees get it?

[27 : 14] Will we get it? What are you trusting? Are you here this morning and as we bring this to a close, are you here this morning and you're currently being a selective listener? Are you here this morning and money and possessions are distracting you?

They're choking your love for the Lord. I wonder if a lot of us this morning, and I include me in this, we've got some work to do, business to do with God. As I close, I was reminded this week of the place that I went to buy my first ever CD.

Don't anyone else remembers HMV? Is it still going, HMV? Is it not going? Wow, I'm old. There it is. HMV. Is it still going? It's. Host and Terminal.

Okay. Still going. Not as frequent, but they're still going. Life in the old dog yet. Here we are. HMV. Do you know what HMV stands for? I only learned this recently. His master's voice.

So here we are this morning talking about selective listening. I think this is a wonderful example of what it means to listen to our master's voice. Do you know the story of this dog? So there was this man called Mark Barrow.

[28 : 25] When Mark Barrow died, his brother Francis inherited two things for him. He wasn't very rich. He inherited two things. The dog, called Nipper, and the gramophone completely with some of Mark's recordings of his own voice.

Francis noted that every time he turned on that gramophone, every time that he played Mark's voice, that Nipper would go and listen. I'm distracted.

Devoted. We'd go and listen. I think it's a wonderful example of what it means to listen well. Jesus is having a go at the Pharisees for their poor listening, for their selective listening.

You see what Jesus is calling us to? Attentive, anticipatory, all out love for every single word of his. I think David Platt, he's an American pastor and author, he captures this so well and with this we close. He says, Radical obedience to Christ risks losing all things, but in the end such risk finds its reward in Christ Christ.

[29 : 30] And he is more than enough for us. Amen. Let's pray together. Maybe in the quiet now you just want to offer up your own prayer as we respond to God's word as we've heard it this morning.

Dearest Father, we would ask that you would help us to be those who don't simply offer you selective obedience, but rather, dear Father, by your Spirit who is living in us, would you make us those who are sacrificial and radical in our obedience to you.

Oh dear Father, we know our own weakness, we know our hearts that so often wander, so Father, we take the line of that song, would you come and bind our wandering hearts to you. And so this is our prayer made in the strong name of Jesus.

Amen.