

## Sermon

In the past several weeks we've studied through some really tough readings. We talked about choosing God over money, we've talked about humility, we talked about cost of discipleship, and this week Luke continues with another parable that is not easy to follow in our everyday lives. The parable of Rich Man and Lazarus.

If we would take this story out of context it would be a wonderful stewardship parable calling us all to strive for social justice. And don't get me wrong these things are a part of this parable. But as we read it in its complexity we realize that this parable is not only about stewardship or social justice but it is about discipleship as a whole. This parable is about the radical call of Jesus that changes our lives from being lukewarm Christians into adamant followers who take relationship with him seriously. (pause)

There was a very rich man who was a believer, a faithful Hebrew, living a content life of luxury. And yet in today's parable we read that when this man died, he ended up in Hades, which is the other word for hell. And so we ask ourselves a question: What went wrong? Why did the rich man end up in hell? Was it because he was rich? No, being rich is not a reason for someone to be condemned. Was it because he didn't believe in God? That wasn't the reason either, for the conversation he had with Abraham indicates that he was very well aware of the God of Israel, he knew who Abraham was, I mean he called him Father. So what went wrong?

The parable indicates that even though the rich man was aware of God he did not have an actual relationship with him. When his neighbor was in need, he did not respond to this need. And thus the outcome, at the end he ends up in Hades, while Lazarus is in heaven.

So my question for us today is this: "Do we live the life of the rich man?" And I'm not talking about enjoying the material riches of this life, but about knowing of God, and yet not being willing to listen to his calling. Knowing about some kind of requirements of Christian living and discipleship, but not really exploring what they mean for our everyday lives. And yes this includes seeing the needs of our neighbor next door and across the world and yet, not responding to this need. Do we live the life of the rich man?

Jesus is speaking to us as his disciples: “You can be like the rich man, or you can live the true life of a disciple.” Spend time learning and listening to the one who came back from the dead, who was raised to a new life, Jesus Christ. Embrace your relationship with Him.

The hope in today’s message is that Christ can change the direction of our lives. Change from the lukewarm “rich” people whose riches are defined by material possessions into rich Disciples of Christ whose riches are defined by relationship with him and relationships with our neighbors. Jesus holds us accountable as he enters our lives, as he penetrates our hearts with his love through the good news of his Gospel.

But please know that to be a disciple of Christ is not easy and it’s not possible without Christ. It will always continue to be our biggest struggle. Especially in the beginning of our journey with Christ, where he calls us to leave the old behind, we struggle because we are trapped by so many things... material riches, relationships that have bad influence on our lives, addictions, bad habits and so on. It is into this mess of our lives that Jesus comes. He doesn’t ask us to clean up first; he enters into our lives just the way they are. But once he enters, things will never be the same; they can’t be the same, for Christ makes everything new. And that’s where this bitter sweet journey of struggling discipleship begins. (pause)

I was in High School when I experienced for the first time the love of Christ in my life. I remember that day, when the power of the Spirit gave me goose bumps and I was overwhelmed with joy I never experienced before. I knew Christ just touched my heart and changed my life forever. (pause) I didn’t realize then that this was just a beginning, and that the road ahead of me was a very long one, full of twists and turns and many personal challenges. And the biggest challenge was to give up the old, to give up my life fully and give it to Christ, for I liked my life, I loved being popular, I loved partying and everything else that came with it. But I loved the Lord, too. And so my first solution that I came with was, when told God, Lord let’s split this fifty fifty. I give you a half of my life and I’ll keep the other one. I’ll go to youth group and church but Friday evening I reserve for drinking and other things that come with it. I’ll give you an offering but only after I cover my needs, and I’ll help those around me if I’ll have time left. Let me tell you, it was a wonderful schizophrenic life of a Christian.

And I didn't realize that with this kind of split life I was making more damage than good. For all my friends were watching and all they saw was a hypocrite. Until one day when after one wild party, and many bad things that had happened that night, a good friend of mine came to me in the morning and said: "Drahus, you're going to go to hell." That day many things had changed in my life, for Christ spoke to me, he said I love you unconditionally but you can't live this double life anymore. (pause) I knew of God, I knew what he required of me, but I wasn't willing to give him my life, for I loved it more than Christ. The rich man loved his life, his possessions, his riches more than the God of Israel, and we know what the outcome of his life was.

Christ reminds us more than anything in this parable to not to live a double life, to not serve two masters, but to truly devote ourselves to the only one who can change our life and give us a new beginning. The most beautiful thing is that this beginning is available to all of us right now. God is here, he loves us, he calls us and he wants us to truly live. The struggles will continue, and in each stage of our lives they will be different, but as long as we're willing to walk with Christ, he will continue to show us the way and lead us in our journeys of discipleship. My prayer is that we'll become a congregation of disciples who don't live the double life of the rich man, but that we'll be able to respond and touch the lives of those who are brought to our gates.

Amen