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Luke 16:19-31  
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### Rich Man and Lazarus

Author and professor Scot McKnight in his book, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, teaches that the Book of Revelation was written for a particular people, in a particular time, living under a particular situation. It prophetically and cryptically described how things were for Christians in a day of violent persecution by the Roman Emperor Nero simply on account of their faith in Jesus Christ. They claimed Jesus as Lord, not Nero.

Pastor Matt Chandler in our Adult Sunday school video states, “Revelation cannot mean for us what it did not mean for the Christians to whom it was written. It is an unveiling of how things are today, kind of like the way you peel away layers of an onion skin. It did not and does not mean some futuristic foretelling of the end of the world. That’s Hollywood, not the Bible.” And so we can read Revelation, learn about the spirit of Babylon (which was John’s code for the Roman Empire) and see how it is alive and well today.

So about what signs of Babylon did John warn us?

Babylon was Anti-God and Anti-Jesus. That’s where we get the term Anti-Christ.

Babylon was opulent. Pretentiously showy, luxurious, rich. Focused on image.

Babylon was murderous and militaristic.

Babylon was economically exploitative of lower classes to benefit the rich.

Babylon was all about the self, arrogant and prideful.

Babylon was dishonest and promoted false narratives that people eventually believed to be true.

When we witness these things today, we are seeing the spirit of Babylon and the Anti-Christ and not that of Jesus.

But what is the way of Jesus? That is what we turn our attentions to today.

In our scripture, Jesus was telling parables or stories to tax collectors and “sinners” gathered around him. The self righteous Pharisees and teachers of the law, who loved money more than God, then muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Then Jesus told a string of several parables. The Parable of the Lost Coin, The Parable of the Lost Son, The Parable of the Shrewd Manager, and then The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus which should have really grabbed their attentions.

Please join me as we read from Luke 16:19-31.

Jesus said, **19** “Once there was a rich man. Dressed in purple cloth and fine linen. He lived an easy life every day. **20** A man named Lazarus was placed at his gate. Lazarus was a beggar. His body was covered with sores. **21** Even dogs came and licked his sores. All he wanted was to eat what fell from the rich man’s table.

**22** “The time came when the beggar died. The angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. **23** In the place of the dead, the rich man was suffering terribly. He looked up and saw Abraham far away. Lazarus was by his side. **24** So the rich man called out, ‘Father Abraham! Have pity on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water. Then he can cool my tongue with it. I am in terrible pain in this fire.’

**25** “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember what happened in your lifetime. You received your good things. Lazarus received bad things. Now he is comforted here, and you are in terrible pain. **26** Besides, a wide space has been placed between us and you. So those who want to go from here to you can’t go. And no one can cross over from there to us.’

**27** “The rich man answered, ‘Then I beg you, father Abraham. Send Lazarus to my family. **28** I have five brothers. Let Lazarus warn them. Then they will not come to this place of terrible suffering.’

**29** “Abraham replied, ‘They have the teachings of Moses and the Prophets. Let your brothers listen to them.’

**30** “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said. ‘But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will turn away from their sins.’

**31** “Abraham said to him, ‘They do not listen to Moses and the Prophets. So they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

No surprise. Jesus loved to tell parables which were stories about everyday things that had meaning. Parables cause us to stop and think. For Jesus, signs of the kingdom of God were present in things he saw each and every day.

As we consider this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, I’d like to explore several things within it. We’ve already talked about the parable proper or how it is framed and why it is located in scripture the way it is. But we will learn more about the characters. We’ll consider what this tells us about Jesus’ way as opposed to that of Babylon and the Anti-Christ. And finally we’ll consider what is God saying to us as followers of Jesus and how we are live in our world today.

Jesus introduces three main characters in the parable.

The rich man. Lazarus. And Father Abraham.

Notice that the rich man has no name. Jesus just described him “a certain rich person.” He could be anyone of us who have more than some. But he is rich. Dressed like a king, wearing purple and fine linen. Made good cheer. Lived in splendor. The Greek word for rich is “plousios.” It means wealthy, abounding with resources. The Greek word for making good cheer is “euphrainomenos.” It means to be put in a good frame of mind, merry, or rejoicing. The Greek for splendor is “lampros” which means sumptuously or luxuriously.

Either way, we get this sense that this person lived the good life. He could play golf whenever and wherever he wanted. He could go to any restaurant and pick the most expensive thing on the menu without blinking. He had no cares in the world. He was “blessed,” though in reality lived as if he had no need for God...because he was his own God.

We even get this sense that he lived in a house nice enough to have a gate where a guard could shield him from the evils that existed just outside his domain.

In contrast, we see Lazarus. He is named. Jesus described him as “a poor man, a beggar, or public nuisance.” He laid at the rich man’s gate, covered in sores, longing to eat whatever scraps the rich man put in his trash. Clearly he was unable to care for himself whatsoever. Even the dogs had more compassion towards Lazarus as this rich man did. He was invisible to the outside world and yet people “saw” him every day.

Then we get to Father Abraham. The patriarch of the Jewish family, including the rich man and Lazarus. Father Abraham is in heaven, providing comfort to those who were neglected on earth. He seems to carry some weight and authority, between heaven and hell.

Both men die, because death is no respecter of persons. Death comes to us whether we are rich or poor, young or old, male or female, slave or free. The rich man died and is buried. The grave is his final resting place.

But Lazarus just died and Jesus doesn’t even say that he was given a proper burial. Perhaps his body was placed in potters field, an unmarked mass grave along with other outcasts of society or those people who we wished would just go away. When Lazarus dies he is attended by angels and is carried away in heaven to be with Father Abraham.

Notice how quickly the tides change. The rich man ends up in hell. And yes I just said, Hell. The Greek word that Jesus uses was “hades” which was the place for departed souls. He is suffering unquenchable thirst. All alone. Yet keenly aware of the good life that Lazarus has inherited.

Lazarus, however, ends up in heaven with Father Abraham at his side. Completely oblivious to the rich man’s suffering. He is now the one living in luxury and comfort. But his blindnesses is not caused by sin, like the rich man was

in life. There is a fixed chasm between heaven and hell, created by God, from which there is no possible way to cross over from one side to the next.

This parable is one of Jesus' most vivid teachings on the existence of hell and should quite frankly scare the hell out of us. It starkly contrasts a life of self-indulgence with one of suffering, and the eternal outcomes tied to our earthly choices.

So how is Jesus wanting to grab our attentions today as we compare the way of Babylon in our midst to that of his way.

Babylon is all about the self. It makes itself first and most important. And it expects the world to bow to it.

Babylon says, "Forget the needs of the rest of the world, let it take care of ourself."

Just like the rich man in Jesus' parable, Babylon is indifferent to the suffering and pain of others. It ignores doing even the smallest thing when it is in our capacity to help.

Babylon hoards its wealth and doesn't share.

As of today, Elon Musk's net worth is about \$352 billion US dollars. In comparison, the combined Gross National Product of the world's ten poorest nations is just \$198 billion US dollars. Take the African county of Burundi for example, which some of us support through World Vision. Their Gross National Product is just \$2.15 billion US dollars. Musk's net worth is 150 times that.

Musk's charitable foundation of about \$5 billion US dollars is dedicated to promoting renewable energy, crewed space exploration, pediatrics, science and engineering education, and development of safe AI for the benefit of humanity. It's all focused on his own company's needs. And he spent \$288 million US dollars in the last election. And yet nothing is reported about alleviating any of Lazarus' suffering. The scraps that fell from his table could have more than cared for the needs of all these people.

That is the way of Babylon.

But folks, Jesus' way is so much different.

Jesus' way is one of compassion. Of not doing anything out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility considering others better than ourselves. Jesus is about attending to others interests, as we care for ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is about loving our neighbors as ourselves, not wage tariff wars with them.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is about loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:3-4

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 22:39

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:44

Jesus is about making ourselves nothing and taking on the nature of a servant.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus is about caring for the most vulnerable in our midst, especially the orphans, widows, and aliens.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus is about sharing our resources with the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, helping the sick, and visiting those in prison.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is about telling us hard truth even when it hurts, not making up stories to make himself look great.

Jesus is about understanding the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus is about self-denial and self-sacrifice, even if it should mean picking up our cross and following him.<sup>8</sup> For Jesus said, “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for his sake will find it. What good will it be for a person or nation to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”<sup>9</sup>

This is Jesus’ way. And if we are going to claim to be a Christian nation, then this is how we should act as a nation. Not like Babylon.

My friends, the decisions we make today individually and nationally have temporal and eternal consequences. Even after death, the rich man’s fate was sealed by his choices in life. His pleas for relief and warnings for his family reveal his regret. But he was too late. Father Abrahams’ response seems cold and uncaring. “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them,” emphasizing that Scripture already provides clear guidance on how we should live.

The Bible consistently teaches generosity and justice as central to godly living. Acts 2:44-45 even describes how early Christians shared their resources so that no one was in need. Our stewardship of wealth is not just about personal gain but about serving others as God’s hands and feet on earth.

Caring for the poor is not optional - it reflects God’s character and God’s heart. God consistently identifies with the oppressed and commands us to do likewise. When we extend compassion to those in need, we embody God’s love and mercy. As John Wesley famously said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can.” Even small acts of kindness—like sharing food or offering support—carry immense value in God’s eyes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:7

<sup>5</sup> James 3:27

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 20:16

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 16:24

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 16:25-26

<sup>10</sup> Mark 12:41-44

So what is God saying to us as followers of Jesus and how we are live in Babylon today?

What we can't do is say, "Well, I'm no Elon Musk. He should do better." Well, my friends, guess what? To every person in Burundi, we are Elon Musk. Even the poorest among us.

What God is saying is "Start small. Open your eyes. Look for Lazarus at our gate. See the person in need within our community or circle of influence. And simply acknowledge their shared humanity. Start there.

Then act generously. Share your resources sacrificially, knowing that everything you have is an undeserved gift from God.

Advocate for justice. Work toward systemic change that uplifts the marginalized.

And finally remember, when you serve others, you serve Jesus Christ Himself.<sup>11</sup> Don't do this out of guilt or compulsion, but out of gratefulness for how good God has been to you. Let it become your act of worship."

As we leave here today, let us reflect on how we can better embody Christ's love for the poor and marginalized. Let us reach out to Janet VanFleet, our elder of Mission and Peace, to see how we can get involved. Let us reject nationalistic ideologies that prioritize power over compassion, and instead embrace a faith that actively seeks to lift up the downtrodden. And please let us write to our president and graciously ask him to restore resources to USAID that are lifelines to so many people in extreme poverty of the world. For in serving the least of these, we serve Christ himself.

May we have eyes to see, hearts to feel, and hands ready to help those in need. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 25:40