

Jesus On How To Launder Dirty Money: Part II

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Luke 16

[19] "There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

[20] And at his gate lay a poor man named Laz'arus, full of sores,

[21] who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

[22] The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried;

[23] and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Laz'arus in his bosom.

[24] And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Laz'arus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.'

[25] But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Laz'arus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

[26] And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

[27] And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house,

[28] for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

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[29] But Abraham said, `They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

[30] And he said, `No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

[31] He said to him, `If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Grace to you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead, the angels were given a space in the cold basement. As they made their bedroom the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem. The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a poor but hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had, the couple let the two angels sleep in their bed where they could have good nights' rest. When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel "how could you have let this happen!? The first man had everything, yet you helped him," she accused. "The second family had so little, but was willing to share everything, and you let their cow die." "Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied. "When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it. Then last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave her the cow instead. "Things aren't always what they seem."

The rich man in Jesus' parable this morning finds out when he dies that things don't always turn out the way you think they should.

He was accustomed to the finest things life could offer. His wardrobe would shame Donald Trump's. He feasted sumptuously every day. Fasting was unheard of. He lived in a gated community. He kept an eye on things with his high-powered binoculars and when he first spotted the guy lying there outside the gate, he asked a servant to find out his name. "Lazarus," the servant reported. He never thought anything more about him.

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This rich man – we don't know his name – liked to remain anonymous. You have to be careful when you have money. Unlisted phone numbers. Security systems. Guards. Dogs. And plenty of servants. The rich man was sure he had it made. But one night he went to bed and didn't wake up. He hadn't planned on that. And we know the rest of the story. He had hell to pay. The rich man's problem was that he never laundered his dirty money. What do I mean by that?

Let's review some terms from last week. Jesus teaches throughout the Gospels that all that we have belongs to God. Our time. Our talents. And yes, indeed, our money. Therefore, money that is not used as God would have it used is dirty. Last Sunday's Gospel refers to dirty money as dishonest wealth. All money and possessions we have accumulated in excess of our basic needs for survival is dishonest wealth, dirty money. And we all have it. The objective is to launder the dirty money – to make it clean – by using it the way God wants it used. How do we do that?

Jesus shows us how not to do it in the Parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus. And yes, you and I by the world's standards, are rich. And Lazarus is still lying at the gate.

The way we please God is by using our dirty money ... to give generously to the poor, the hungry, the starving and the homeless of the world. You want to make friends with God? You want to please God? The way to do it is with the right use of wealth. . . . to help the poor, the hungry, and the starving.....”

I am so happy you are giving to help purchase a vehicle for Pastor Amon's ministry in Ghana. And that you are laundering some of your dirty money to do this. The moment, though, the dirty money is turned in, it is clean and angels rejoice! I urge all of you to consider a gift today. That way all our dirty monies combined can help Pastor Amon reach out with the love of Jesus to the very poor members of his congregation, some of whom lie at the gate 2 hours away! Most of his members are included in the 2.9 million Ghanaians living in extreme poverty.

Also, did you know:

840 million people are undernourished worldwide - about equal to the population of the Western Hemisphere.

1.2 billion people in developing countries live on \$1 a day or less.

70% of those who suffer from hunger are women and girls.

6 million children under age five die each year as a result of hunger.

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More than 40 million U.S. citizens - one in ten households - cannot afford to meet their basic food needs. If they all stood in a line at a food pantry in New York, the line would stretch to Los Angeles and back. Twice. One in five U.S. children is born into poverty. One in seven has no health insurance.¹

The rich man in Jesus' parable pleaded for mercy, the very thing he had withheld from Lazarus. He received none because he had dug such a deep chasm that mercy could not cross it.

In the 6th century, a very wise monk put it this way:

"When a poor man is hungry, Christ is in need, as he said himself: 'I was hungry and you gave me no food.' ... My dear brethren, Christ is now hungry, he is hungry and thirsty in all the poor; and what he receives on earth, he returns in heaven.

"... A poor man is begging from you, and you are begging from God: he asks for a scrap, and you ask for eternal life. Give to the beggar, so that you may deserve to receive from Christ.

"Listen to his words: 'Give and it shall be given you.' What effrontery it is for you to want to receive what you refuse to give!"²

Our own dear father in the faith, Martin Luther, was a little more blunt about all this. Listen to what he said in explaining the Sixth Commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Steal":

"When the poor man comes to you ...and you are harsh to him ... and, ... with pride and haughtiness turn him off to whom you ought to give for nothing, he will go away wretched and sorrowful, and since he can complain to no one he will cry and call to heaven it will reach Him who takes care of the poor sorrowful hearts, and [he] will not allow them to go unavenged."³

Now, I know that money is not a popular subject to hear about from the pulpit. Nor to read about in the Bible. Yet, it is unavoidable, just as Lazarus was unavoidable to the rich man as he came and went through the gate.

¹ <http://www.churchworldservice.org/knowhunger/facts.html>

² Caesarius of Arles, 470-542 A.D., Monk, Bishop and Theologian

³ <http://www.stjohnslcms.com/LargeCat.asp>

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“There are over 700 direct references and hundreds of indirect references to money in the NT. Nearly two-thirds of the parables Jesus gave deal with money. Jesus taught more about money than heaven and hell combined. There are over 2,000 references to wealth and property in the Bible. That's twice the number for prayer and faith combined.”⁴

Even so, I know what I have said this morning, and what Jesus is saying, will not be paid attention to by some. There are two things I want to say to that as I close:

1. The first thing is: things aren't always what they seem.
2. The second thing is this, and I am quoting from one of my favorite writers, a Pastor in Canada, “To those who seek true riches - I tell you - continue pursuing righteousness and faith and love, feel uncomfortable, struggle with the question of what you are doing and not doing, the question of how well you love your neighbors - and how well you love your God, feel uncomfortable - but also feel assured - for the one who rose from the dead has promised to help you and to forgive you - and he will be true to his promise He doesn't expect you to do everything for everyone - only to do everything you can - and to trust him for the rest. ... know that if you ... make excuses for your lack of caring for others ... if you cling to what you have rather than letting it go – if you judge others less worthy because of their poverty and others as greater because of their riches – then you will pay for it. God is forgiving - but God is not mocked. If you ... can't bring Lazarus fresh water to relieve his distress in this life, then know that he will not be able to do that for you in the next life ... People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. To this I might add the Love of God - and loving our neighbors ... as we love ourselves is the root of all goodness. ... Amen.”⁵

⁴ <http://user.cybrzn.com/~faith/page14.html>

⁵ "True Riches and The Great Chasm" by Richard J. Fairchild
<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/c-or26su.php>

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