

RADICAL: What the Gospel Demands

The Gospel Demands Radical Giving

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THE GOSPEL DEMANDS RADICAL GIVING **Luke 16:19-31**

The Foundations ...

We are halfway through the series "Radical: What the Gospel Demands." We're looking at seemingly startling words from Jesus, tough words from Jesus, life shifting, challenging words from Jesus. And as we're processing through these words, we set up a couple times to have some dialog, just some question and answer kind of time, where you can ask me any questions that you're wrestling with and just get my perspective on things based on our studying the Word. But I want to help shepherd you through this Word in any way that I can.

At the same time, I want to put before you a couple of things that I think are extremely important for us to remember, especially as we go into the last half of this series the next few weeks, and especially as we talk more about how the gospel affects our possessions.

I think that the adversary does not want us to be focused on the right things. I believe he would like to veer our focus for the wrong things, and to distract us and to tempt us with the way we think and respond to his Word. So I want us to guard against that in these ways. There are four of them, as I've been praying for you, and as I've been wrestling through these things in my own life and talking with individuals and families. These are some things I want to encourage you with.

We do not compare...

Number one: We do not compare because Jesus' life is our standard. Here's what I mean by that. I believe there's a dangerous tendency in this series, and in the application of these truths to begin to look at each other in an unhealthy way.

C.S. Lewis and a great chapter on pride in *Mere Christianity* talks about how pride is inextricably linked to comparison. We are constantly comparing ourselves to others, and if we're doing better than others we feel good about ourselves. If we're doing worse than others, we begin to think poorly of ourselves. And we're constantly looking at how we match up according to where others are.

This is something the disciples were familiar with. You go to John 21, and Jesus says some hard words to Peter about how he's going to die, some very radical words. And the first thing Peter does is he turns around and he sees John standing there, and he says, "Well what about him?" And he immediately turns to comparison, and Jesus looks at him and says, "If I choose to let him live until I return, what is that to you, Peter?" And He says these two words, He says, "Follow me." Follow me. Fix your eyes on me. Focus on me and follow me.

So it would be wrong for us, as we continue to walk through this series, to begin to think things like, "Well, I hope that this family who really has a lot of money is thinking about listening to these things. Compared to them, I'm doing all right." Or, "I'm giving more than this family is doing or this person is doing. I'm doing more," and we constantly; we start the comparisons. It's not the path we need to go on. Jesus' life is our standard.

Now I want to be careful here, because there's a healthy way in which we can look to each other to see the life of Christ. This is why I read biographies. This is why I need to read biographies in my life, because I need to see men who have given up everything they have, given away everything they have to give their lives to the lost and the poor. And I read stories like that and I see that there is another way to live, and they call me to a higher plain, but not in an unhealthy way, in a way that I see the life of Christ in them and I'm spurred on toward Christ. So this is a good thing we do for each other.

We need each other in this way. I need to see what the life of Christ looks like radically in action in you, and you need to see that in me. So we need to spur one another on toward Christ. God help us. We need to be delivered from examples of nominal Christianity that abound. We need to see brothers and sisters who are living out the Christ life and obeying these words radically, and to spur one another on toward Christ in that, in the process to guard against unhealthy comparison that gets our focus off following Christ. So we do not compare. Jesus' life is our standard.

We do not despair...

Second, we do not despair. Jesus' presence is our hope. We do not despair, because Jesus' presence is our hope. Here's what I mean by that. I think there's a tendency, when we look at some of these radical truths in Scripture, when we see Jesus saying, "If you don't hate your father and mother or your brother or sister, or if you don't pick up your cross, an instrument of death and torture and follow me, if you don't give up everything you have you cannot be my disciple."

There's a tendency to hear those kind of words and to walk away and think, "I've so far to go. Where do I even begin? I don't think I'm ever going to be good enough." These words start to creep in, and this is where I want to remind you that that kind of despair is not coming from Christ. It's coming from the adversary, because Christ has never called you to be good enough. He said, "I'm the only one that can make you good enough," and He's not called any one of us to hear these words and to figure out how to put them into practice on our own. This is the beauty of His presence as our hope. He lives in us. He lives in you. He dwells in you, and He does not say, "Hate your father and mother, brother and sister. Pick up an instrument of torture and give up everything you have and follow me," and then say, "Now figure out what it looks like in Birmingham."

Instead He says, "Here's my word, and I'm going to show you what it looks like in action. I'm going to change your thoughts. I'm going to change your desires. And I'm going to transform everything about you so that you are enabled to put all of this into practice. So trust me."

Trust in Him, brothers and sisters. Trust in Christ. He's good. Go to Him. Pray before Him. Pray long, pray hard, pray together, pray alone. Seek Him and ask Him to bring these truths to life in you, and He's good for that. He's honored with that kind of praying. Don't despair. Jesus' presence is our hope.

You're not trying to earn kudos before Jesus. We're not trying to earn or get anywhere. We are experiencing the reality, the presence of Christ in us more and more and more and

more, and that is a journey not of despair. It's a journey of hope. So don't despair. Jesus' presence is our hope.

We avoid apathy...

Third, we avoid apathy, because Jesus' words are our authority. Apathy is one potential reaction, and I fear it's likely a common reaction across this faith family when we hear words like we're looking at in the Gospels. There is a temptation to become indifferent toward these words.

Some of you were thinking, well if you're talking about wrestling with these truths, and the reality is there are many who are not wrestling with these truths, maybe teenagers who are thinking, "What does this really have to do with my life?" Or adults, they are so programmed toward a nominal Christianity, to be here, hear a sermon, go through the routine and move on with our lives as soon as we can afterwards. And we need to avoid this at all costs.

I want to urge you to avoid becoming indifferent or apathetic toward what Jesus is saying. I want to urge you in that way, because if you are a follower of Christ this is simply not an option. It's not an option to be indifferent to the words of Christ, if you are a follower of Christ. Now some of us have become Christians, so to speak, and we were told that all we needed to do was pray a prayer and we could live our life however we wanted and we would go to heaven, and that's what it means to be a Christian.

And if you came to becoming a Christian under that illusion, I want you to know that biblically you are not Christian. You have not come to Christ at all. This is not what it means to be a follower of Christ. To be a follower of Christ means to come to an awareness of your sinful rebellion against God, and to see in Jesus the only substitute for your sins, and by His grace to turn from your rebellion against God and to trust in Him as the Lord and Sovereign King over your life. And when that is the case, then what Jesus says determines how you live.

Let me repeat that one more time. What Jesus says determines how you live. Therefore, it is not possible to be a follower Christ and be indifferent to what Jesus says, because whatever He says determines how you live.

So let me urge you not to be apathetic. His words are our authority. This radically affects the way we listen today, and because we are listening to words, not to say let's hear what Jesus says and figure out if we want to obey them. What we are saying when we open up this Book is, we are saying, whatever Jesus says we will obey. His words have that kind of authority.

We avoid lethargy...

Finally, we avoid lethargy, being lethargic. Why? Because Jesus' glory is our goal. Apathy is indifference to what Jesus says. Lethargy is laziness in applying what Jesus says.

And I want to be careful here, because I believe this is a dangerous temptation for even the most devout follower of Christ. I want to be honest with you and say that this is something that I struggle with. I think there is a dangerous temptation to look at words like we're looking at in this series, and to look at our lives, and look at the culture around us, and to think, "I just don't want to deal with these words. Besides, I cannot deal with these things and live a good life, and be a good pastor, and be a part of a good church."

And we don't have to deal with giving up everything we have, and examining how our lives and our possessions must be spent for the sake of the lost and the poor. We don't have to dive into these things, and all of a sudden we can begin to think it's just not worth fighting the battle. And I want to encourage you; this is a battle worth fighting.

It's worth fighting against materialism and consumerism, and professionalism, and even legalism. It's worth fighting against the self-saturated and self-indulgent culture that not only surrounds us, but consumes us. It's worth fighting against hypocritical, nominal, un-biblical Christianity. It's worth fighting, struggling, wrestling. These are all words that are familiar to the New Testament.

The New Testament nowhere gives a picture of Christianity like you're going down a hill and the wind is just blowing through your hair and it's this easy ride. No, you see words like, we're in a fight, and a race and a battle and a war, and that's the picture here, to really wrestle with these truths, to fight through our tendencies that are so prone to the culture around us and the wisdom of the world around us that we have completely ignored much of the Word of God in the middle of us.

We need to fight this battle, and it's worth fighting because Jesus' glory is worth it. He's our goal. We want His glory. We want to experience His glory. Not only do we want to experience His glory, but we want the lost and the poor to experience His glory, and it's worth diving into these things and wrestling through these things, and working these things out in our life.

And it's not going to end at the end of this series. It's not going to end a year from now. It's going to be a continual battle until the day when we will see Christ, and that's the beauty of it because we're guaranteed the victory in this battle.

So I want to urge you, encourage you, to fight through these things, to wrestle through these things and how they look in your life. Let's fight together through these things as a faith family. Let's join with one African pastor who said, "We won't give up, shut up, let up until we have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ." We are disciples of Jesus and we must go till He comes, give till we drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops us. And when He comes for His own He will have no problems recognizing us. Our banner will be clear. So let's fight like that, dive into these truths like that.

These foundations will lead us into the next few weeks. Luke 16. Before we read this passage, I want to show you who Jesus is speaking to. So I want you to hold your place and turn back just a couple of chapters to chapter 14. The end of chapter 14 is the passage that we studied a few weeks ago, 14:25-35. So when Jesus says, "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sister,*" take up his cross and give up everything he has...(Luke 14:26). We studied that passage. These are hard words.

Then you get to Luke 15. It's one of the more popular, maybe most famous—I guess if you could use that word—chapters in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels. It's the parable of the prodigal son at the end, after the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

You'll remember at the very beginning, look at what's happening. "*Now the tax collectors,*" 15:1, "*and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'*" (Luke 15:1-2). So here you've got a picture.

The Pharisees, the religious establishment, the religious people of the day are criticizing Jesus because of His concern for the spiritually needy, the tax collectors and the sinners. And Jesus is confronting their ideas about the fact that their lives are supposed to be lived for the sake of these people, and that's what He talks about in these parables in Luke 15, His love for them.

That's exactly where we've been. This is following the development of this series. We've spent the last two weeks looking at what it means to have radical compassion and radical urgency for the lost, for people who are headed to a Christ-less eternity, who are on a road that leads to an eternal hell, and how we must spend our lives on behalf of people who do not know Christ. That's the picture and He is confronting the religious establishment on that in Luke 15, and then He shifts, like we're shifting now, to look at possessions.

What happens is in Luke 16:1, He starts speaking to His disciples, and He tells a parable. And basically the point of this first parable in Luke 16 is that we should use our money not to serve ourselves, but to serve the Kingdom, and our resources and our possessions and our money are intended to be used for the advancement of the Kingdom, not for the indulgence of ourselves.

And again, He's confronting the religious establishment there, and we know this by verse 14. Look at what it says there. After Jesus finishes speaking, He's talking about people who love money and are devoted to money, He says in verse 14, "*The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight'*" (Luke 16:14-15).

So here's the context that is the setup for what we're about to read in verse 19. Please don't miss it. Pay attention real close.

Jesus is speaking to religious people, who are so blinded by their affluence, the love of money, that they justify their affluence in the middle of their religious devotion. Let me say that one more time. Jesus is speaking to a religious people, so blinded by their affluence, so consumed by their possessions that they don't even realize it, and they're operating in devotion to their religion while indulging in love for stuff. That's the picture of who Jesus is speaking to.

This is a word for us, and this is what Jesus says to people who love their money and justified it in their religion. Verse 19,

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my

father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead'" (Luke 16:19-31).

God, we pray that you would help us not to respond like the Pharisees responded. God, that you would help us not to sneer at your words or to justify ourselves when we hear them. Help us to hear them truly and to obey them quickly. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Story...

A Divine Contrast

I want us to look at this story through three different lenses: first, a contrast that dominates the story, a divine contrast. It's here in this story and in this, all over Scripture. Here's the contrast. First, God responds to the needs of the poor with compassion. He responds to the needs of the poor with compassion.

What you've got here is something very interesting in this story. The rich man and Lazarus, and he is named. It's the only story, parable like this that Jesus tells, where you've actually got somebody named in it, which points us to its significance. Lazarus is named for a reason. His name means "one whom God helps," or "God is my helper." That's what his name means.

And it helps us to guard against thinking. We need to guard. Let's just get this out on the table from the very beginning. The Scripture here is not teaching, nor should we equate what Luke 16 is saying with the idea that if you have material poverty you automatically go to heaven, or you have material wealth you'll automatically go to hell. The Scripture is not teaching that, and we're going to see that unfold, but let's just go ahead and get that out on the table.

At the same time, the Scripture is teaching that God is passionate about, caring to, compassionate for the needs of the poor. He is their helper. That's the picture of this poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, sitting at a gate, eating scraps from a table while dogs lick his sores. And this is the one whom God helps.

This is the picture here in Luke 16. It's all over the Book of Luke. It's all over Scripture. We're not going to have time to turn to all of these places, but I want to encourage you by giving you some listings of some different places in Scripture for you to go back and look at that show us that God shows His greatness by His concern for the poor.

1 Samuel 2:8, *"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor."* Now this is contrary to what we would picture in greatness in other world religions then or other world religions today. You go to some of the poor countries in the world today and you will see a religious system that despises the poor, and God shows His greatness by showing compassion for the poor. He raises up the poor, 1 Samuel 2:8.

Job 34:28 says, *"They caused the cry of the poor to come before him, so that he heard the cry of the needy."* He hears their cry. He does not turn a deaf ear to the poor. He hears the poor.

Psalms 22:26, the rest of these are in Psalms, 22:26, *"The poor will eat and be satisfied."* They're neglected by the world. They eat and they're satisfied by God. Psalm 35:10, *"[God] rescues the poor."* Psalm 68:10, God provides for the poor. When nobody else provides for the poor, God provides for the poor. Psalm 82:3, God maintains the rights of the poor and the needy. He maintains their rights. Psalm 113:7, God raises up the poor, the same kind of picture we saw in 1 Samuel. Psalm 113:7, He raises up the poor. And then Psalms 140:12, *"[God] secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy."*

That's the picture we got all over the Old Testament. God is known as the God who cares for the poor. This is the God of the Bible.

Then you get to the Book of Luke. Hold your place here on Luke 16 and go back with me to Luke chapter 4. Let me show you how Jesus is the personification of this, when we see Him come on the scene in the New Testament. Jesus responds to the needs of the poor with compassion. I want to show you, Luke 4. We're going to start in verse 17.

This is the very beginning of Jesus' ministry in the Book of Luke. This is how Jesus is introduced right after the temptation. This is His introduction of His ministry, and I want you to hear how Luke introduces Jesus to his audience. Verse 17, Jesus is in the synagogue at this point, *"The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written."* Of all the places that Jesus could point to in this very beginning part of His ministry, He quotes from Isaiah 61:1, *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the,"* who? *"to the poor"* (Luke 4:18).

This is Jesus' introduction. This is who I am. I preach good news to the poor. This is who I'm defined by. *"He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luke 4:18-19).

And you get over to chapter 6. Look at chapter 6 in Luke, verse 20, *"I'm here to preach good news to the poor."*

What is He preaching to them? Look in verse 20, Luke 6, *"Looking at his disciples, he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor'"* (Luke 6:20). Now this is the despised in that culture, the poor, impoverished, despised, looked down upon, *"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh"* (Luke 6:20-21).

The picture is the disadvantaged, the poor, the impoverished; this is who Jesus came for. In fact, you get over one more chapter, in Luke 7, look with me at verse 20. What happens here is some folks from John the Baptist come to ask Jesus some questions, to find out whether or not Jesus is the promised messiah.

Listen to this in verse 20, *"When the men came to Jesus they said, 'John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"* And this is how Jesus responds, *"At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers"* (Luke 7:21-22). This is how Jesus attests to the fact that He is the promised Messiah, *"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive*

sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the," who? "Poor" (Luke 7:22).

This is how you know Jesus is real, because He's preaching to the poor. Jesus picks up on the picture, God's compassion, the needs of the poor in the Old Testament, and He continues it into the New Testament. This is the reality. The poor have God as their helper. The God who is worshipped here responds to the needs of the poor with deep compassion.

Now here's the contrast that we see in Luke 16. God responds to the needs of the poor with compassion. God responds to those who neglect the poor in a very different way. He responds to those who neglect the poor with condemnation. This is how God responds to those who neglect the poor.

Now I want to emphasize that picture of neglect the poor. Go back to what we said just a second ago. The Scripture is not teaching here that people go to hell because they have money. We know this man had money in Luke 16. We know from the things that he dressed in and the things that he ate, lived in luxury. This is the picture.

But what's the reason he's in hell in Luke 16? Not because he had money. We're going to talk about this in the days to come. Money in itself, possessions in and of themselves are not inherently evil. Wealth is not inherently evil. That's not the picture we're seeing here. What we're seeing is we're seeing a man who used his money to indulge himself and ignore the poor, and God sends people like that to hell. To those who indulge themselves and they ignore the poor, those people will stand condemned before God.

I want to point out at this juncture what I believe is obvious as we study this text together. We are the rich man. It's a mirror.

Here's the scene here. We have gathered together in our fine linen in a multimillion-dollar building. Outside, in this parking lot, today there will be literally tens of millions of dollars worth of cars. After we have finished our routine, we will get in those cars, pay thousands of dollars, thousands of dollars on the way home on food for ourselves, where we will come to literally hundreds of millions of dollars worth of homes, where we will be safe the rest of this week, and the majority of us living in the wealthiest county in Alabama, with the best school systems wealth can buy, and we will come back together again next week.

Meanwhile, there are poor at the gate. They are here and around the world. You don't have to go very far north or south from here to find the people who have no plumbing, no kitchen, scraps for food. Expand that around the world and you will find hungry people at our gate. In just the time that we have gathered together here, approximately 1,000 children have died because they didn't have food. Thirty thousand of them will die today, either of starvation or a preventable disease.

The reality is if our children were at the gate they'd all be dead right now, all of them. But the good thing is we can flip the channels on our big screen TVs so we do not have to see these realities. And we can ignore these realities. We are ignoring these realities. We are throwing scraps to the poor outside the gate. And while millions of them powerless and silent hover on the edge of starvation, we live like they don't even exist, and the God of the Bible cares for the poor and He condemns the rich who neglect them.

This is a warning passage to the religious affluent of the first century, and it's a warning passage, not just this passage. It is all over Scripture. It's not an isolated incident. I want to show you. We need to see this. We need to see this honestly. I want to show you what

Scripture teaches about how God responds to those who indulge themselves and ignore the poor.

Deuteronomy 15, turn with me there. Let me show you. I want to show you these passages, maybe encourage you to underline them in your Bible. Deuteronomy 15:7, I want to show you the picture here. Just go ahead and warn you, we're going to see some startling words from God, then we're going to wonder if the God who we worship really says things like this to His people, and He does, and these words give us a glimpse into His character.

We'll start the foundation, Deuteronomy 15:7. This is the Law, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. This is one place amidst the Law; it's all over the place, of God's provisions for the poor. I want you to listen to what He said to His people. Verse 7, *"If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs"* (Deut. 15:7-8).

Skip down to verse 10. This is God speaking to His people about the poor, *"Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you,"* I command you (Deut. 15:10-11). You know, it's interesting. Sometimes people say, you start talking about poverty and they say, "Well there's always going to be poor people that's just the way it is." We use that as an excuse to not give ourselves to the poor. God uses that as the basis for a command, *"I command you to be openhanded towards your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land"* (Deut. 15:11).

This is a command from God. You give to the poor. You be openhanded to the poor. You be liberal and generous in your giving to the poor and needy in your land. That was a command.

Now what happened to this foundation laid in Leviticus and Deuteronomy? People of God began to ignore this command and to leave it behind.

Fast-forward with me to Isaiah 3. I'm just going to show you a few of the places in the Prophets. They're all over the place in the Prophets. I want to show you a few of them, Isaiah 3. What happened was the people of God had this command, and instead chose to indulge themselves and ignore the poor, and this is what God says to His people when they indulge themselves and ignore the poor. This is what He says.

Isaiah 3, look with me at verse 13, listen to this. Listen to how God addresses their affluence. Verse 13, *"The LORD takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: 'It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses'"* (Is. 3:13-14). Poor outside, you're indulging in houses with all kinds of stuff. The poor need food. *"The plunder from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?" declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty*" (Is. 3:14-15).

So this is how He responds,

"The LORD says, 'The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald.' In

that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls. Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding. Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground” (Is. 3:16-26).

Those are strong words from God, to people who were indulging themselves and ignoring the poor. Keep going to the right, Jeremiah, the very next book after Isaiah, Jeremiah 5. Jeremiah 5, I want you to listen to what the prophet says there. These prophets were not popular guys. Nobody likes to hear these kinds of words. This is what God is saying to His people.

Jeremiah 5:26. Listen to this, God says,

“Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men. Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?” declares the LORD. Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?” (Jer. 5:26-29).

“I punish things like this,” God says. Keep going to the right and you’ll come to Ezekiel, right past Jeremiah you come to Lamentations; the next Book is Ezekiel, Ezekiel 16. Now I want to be careful here. We’re not making a direct comparison between the people we’ve got in the Old Testament and us today. However, we are seeing how God responds to people who neglect the poor in the Old Testament, and we’re going to bring that into New Testament in just a moment.

Ezekiel 16, this is particularly interesting because remember Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament? Destroyed, annihilated. Does anybody remember why they were destroyed or annihilated? The first thought that comes to our minds as we read that story, the first thought that comes to our minds is because of sexual sin, homosexuality, that whole picture in Sodom and Gomorrah and so abhorrent and God destroyed them. We addressed this a little bit when we talked about “The gospel and Homosexuality,” and we think of sexual sin. I want you to look at what Ezekiel says.

Ezekiel 16:48. He is talking about Sodom, “*As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.*” In other words, you’re doing worse than that. Listen to what He says, verse 49, “*Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.*” This was the sin of Sodom, not that the other wasn’t there. It was there. The Scripture points to that, but this was there.

This flies right in the face of our selective moral outrage. The majority of people are appalled at homosexuality or same-sex marriage, and the Scripture speaks clearly to those things. At the same time, where is the church that is appalled at neglecting the poor and the needy? And we point the finger. Look at what’s going on in our culture. Look inside, brothers and sisters. Look inside our hearts at what is going on here.

Keep going to the right and come to Amos. Daniel, Hosea, Joel, then Amos. I want you to look with me at Amos 2. This is the last Prophet we'll look at. We'll look at a couple different places in here, Amos 2:6, another unpopular prophet.

Amos 2:6-7:

"This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.'"

This is who God is speaking to.

So go over to the next chapter, chapter 4. Look at Amos 4:1 and listen to what He says, what He's going to do. 4:1, *"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, 'Bring us some drinks!'"* In other words, those of you who say, "I want more. I want more," while the poor are crushed and the needy are forgotten, *"The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: 'The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks. You will each go straight out through breaks in the wall, and you will be cast out toward Harmon,' declares the LORD"* (Amos 4:2-3).

This is how God is speaking to His people. These are astounding words. One more place in Amos here, Amos 8. Look at Amos 8:3. Listen to these words. This is the God who's being worshipped in this room, whose words we're listening to.

Verse 3,

"'In that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!' Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?'—skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: 'I will never forget anything they have done. Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt.' 'In that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day'" (Amos 8:3-10).

God says, "This is what I'm going to bring on you, as you feast on your indulgences and you ignore the poor." This is the Old Testament. Is this a New Testament deal? Absolutely. Come back with me to Luke. Look with me at Luke 6.

I deliberately read just a couple of verses in this chapter a minute ago about how Jesus came to show compassion for the poor. This is the picture the contrast here. Don't miss the contrast.

Luke 6:20, we read it a second ago. "Looking at His disciples, he said:"—remember, God responds to the needs of the poor with compassion—" *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh*" (Luke 6:20-21). That's what God says to the poor.

Listen to what He says down in verse 24, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep" (Luke 6:24-25).

Do you see this picture, this contrast with how God responds to the needs of the poor and those who neglect the poor to indulge themselves? The neglect of the poor infuriates God and condemns man to hell. That's what Scripture is teaching.

This is a warning to us. One writer said the story of the rich man and Lazarus ought to explode in our hands when we read it sitting at our well-covered tables, while the third world stands outside. This point should explode in our hands. We've been talking the last couple weeks about those who are headed to a road that leads to eternal hell, and now we come to this passage and we see the danger here that you can be spiritually deceived and religious people, and be headed down the exact same road. That's the point.

An Eternal Consequence

Contrast leads to consequence, an eternal consequence here. This is the picture. Luke 6 here and then over in Luke 16, there is a reversal doctrine that is being displayed here. There is coming a day when this upside-down world will be turned right-side up, and for many, the conditions we've lived in, in this world will be completely reversed. That's the whole picture here in Luke 16.

There's coming a turn and the wise will spend their lives here preparing for the turn. There's an eternal consequence here. The Scripture is teaching very clearly: if we indulge ourselves and neglect the poor, don't miss it, earth will be our heaven. It's what Luke 6 just said. It's what Luke 16 says. Luke 16 tells us about all the fine things this man had, the rich man had while he was on the earth. Blessed are you who are rich now. Blessed are you who have food now. Blessed are you who have these things now. Earth will be our heaven. You will have things.

This is just exactly what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6 when He says, "If you want man's praise as your reward, you will get it." Enjoy it while it lasts, because that is your reward. If you want stuff and luxury on this earth, in this community you will get it and enjoy it. Enjoy it now, because earth will be your heaven and eternity will be your hell, Hades, the place of dead.

Four times in Luke 16 the word torment is used. This is the picture. Those who neglect the poor, ignore the poor, and indulge themselves will find themselves separated from an uncrossable, unbridgeable chasm forever and ever and ever. This is what is so frightening about this passage, because the rich man here is pleading for grace and mercy. He's pleading for it and the time for grace and mercy is gone. It's past.

There comes a day, when neglect of the poor, when indulging themselves and ignoring the poor, when it is no longer forgiven; it is punished. It is eternally punished.

Does this cause us to tremble? Can we really look at our lives and our culture and our community, our religious community? Can we really look at it and say that we are being obedient to God's command to care for the poor and not to indulge ourselves? Absolutely not, we cannot say that. In my life, in our lives, in this church we cannot say these things in this community. We could not say these things. Then how can we believe that we will spend an eternity under His love instead of eternity separated under His judgment?

I know that at this point there are people getting really uncomfortable thinking, "Well are you saying that my salvation is dependent on how much I give to the poor?" That's absolutely not what Scripture is teaching, not at all what Scripture is teaching.

A Clear Choice

But here's the picture. It leads to a clear choice. There are two choices here. I want you to follow with me here, a clear choice.

Choice number one, option number one is to continue in hollow religion that neglects the poor. This is an option that is before the hearers in Luke 16 and it's an option before us in this room. Continue in hollow religion that neglects the poor. Don't miss it. This is a religious man in hell. It's a religious man in hell in Luke 16.

He calls out, "Father Abraham." Abraham says, "Son." This is a man who thought he was in the people of God. He thought everything was okay. He was a deceived religious man thinking everything was okay, but he lived his life ignoring the poor and indulging himself; hollow religion.

Now the mistake we'd make at this point is to think that if he would have given this much to the poor then he would have been in heaven, because that would make heaven dependent on how much you'd given to the poor, and that's not what Scripture is teaching. Don't miss it. Caring for the poor is not an optional extra in salvation. Caring for the poor is not an option. Spending our money and our possessions for the sake of the lost and the poor is not an optional extra in salvation. It is not a possibility for followers of Christ. Instead, caring for the poor is necessary evidence of salvation. It's necessary evidence of salvation.

Let me show you this in two places, Luke 19. Turn over a couple chapters to Luke 19. There is a guy named Zacchaeus. He is a wealthy tax collector. Jesus is hanging out with Zacchaeus, getting a lot of grief for hanging out with Zacchaeus, and I want you to listen to what happens.

Look at this, Luke 19:8, *"But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'"* Can you imagine right now just standing up and saying, "Half my possessions I give away! Half my assets, everything, half of it I give away, and anybody I've wronged, four times as much."

So Zacchaeus says and listen to how Jesus responds. "Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house'" (Luke 19:9). Did his giving away his possessions earn him salvation? Absolutely not. His giving away his possessions at that moment was clear evidence that something had happened in his heart that had radically changed things. There was evidence.

The same picture, go back with me to Matthew. You got to see this, Matthew 25. Matthew 25, please don't miss this. Matthew 25, we'll start in verse 31. I want to read this. Picture

this. It's not just an isolated incident in Luke 16. This is Jesus speaking to His people, to religious people.

Listen to what He says, Matthew 25:31, and follow along for this picture. *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people"* (Matt. 25:31-32). There is coming a day, when Jesus *"Will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left"* (Matt. 25:32-33). Sheep on His right, goats on His left. Here's how it's determined which one you're a part of,

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matt. 25:34-26).

Now we don't have time to study this whole passage today. Likely Jesus is speaking specifically, not just generally about those who were poor or hungry or sick or in prison. He's likely speaking about His disciples. So this isn't a passage that's likely pointing us specifically to brothers and sisters of ours here and around the world who are poor and sick and hungry.

Regardless, the picture in the whole New Testament is clear that we love the righteous and the unrighteous. Don't miss it. Jesus is saying here that if you do not give to the poor and the hungry, whether they're Christians or not, then you will go to eternal punishment. Why, because you didn't earn enough? No. Because that's clear evidence that Christ is not in you. That's clear evidence that you have not been saved.

This is the thing that haunts me. This is why, as I shared with you a few weeks ago when the series began, we've been wrestling through these things, kind of a crisis of faith and belief, because these are basic things. This is not a mature believer in Zacchaeus in Luke 19 who's giving away all his possessions. This is the first thing he does, because it makes sense. It's obvious. It's obvious evidence of his salvation that he would do this.

It's the picture here in Matthew 25. Those who do not give to the poor and the hungry are obviously not followers of Christ, and will obviously be thrown into eternal punishment. And

yet we live in a community and we are a part of a religious culture that ignores these things. We ignore these things. These are not basic for us. We indulge ourselves and we turn a deaf ear.

We give scraps to the poor and Jesus says, "You're not my people. No matter what you say at 11:00 on Sunday morning, you're not my people if you live like that. My people don't live like that. There are people who believe in me and have me in their heart, and they don't live like that."

There's clear disconnect here between claiming to have this Christ in your heart and indulging yourselves and ignoring the poor, indulging ourselves and ignoring the poor. You say, "David, I am justified by grace alone, through faith alone." And I say absolutely you're justified by grace alone, through faith alone, but it is a faith that radically transforms a heart, that transforms desires, where desires are not for stuff and for selfish pleasures. Desires are for Christ and the lost and the poor. It's a radically different change, and you will be able to tell if that faith is real in you by the way you live.

James 2:14-17, "*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,'*" which is exactly what we have said to our brothers and sisters in third world countries, with the way we have indulged ourselves in this country. "*Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*" (Jas. 2:17). It's dead.

1 John 3:17, He says, how can anyone claim to have love of God in him and not care for his brother? "*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with,*" what? "*Actions and in truth*" (1 Jn. 3:18). Christ is not even real. You can't even claim to have the love of God if this is the way you live. The reality is you will be able to tell with the way people are giving to the poor whether or not Christ is in them, and, the evidence in our community is just not good. It's frightening.

And this is the choice that we have. We can continue in hollow religion that ignores the poor. The second option is to turn in honest repentance to care for the poor. This is where the dialog shifts at the end of this passage to the rich man talking about his brothers. He's got five brothers. Don't miss this. This is hell crying out for us to listen to this text today.

This is people in hell crying out for us to heed these words. Don't ignore these words. Don't miss these words. And the rich man says, "Send something miraculous, something extravagant so they get it. They're sitting there and they don't get it. My brothers don't get it." He said, "Send somebody raised from the dead. Just do something miraculous." And Abraham says, "They've got the power of the Word right in front of them and this is how they will know, if they hear this Word."

So Jesus says, "How do you respond in repentance?" If they'll do these things: number one, hear the Word humbly. He says, "Their hearts are so hard..." And this is the reality I see in my own life the hardest part of dealing with our materialism is the fact that we are so blind to it. We don't know what it's like not to be materialistic, and our bent is consumed by it, and it leads to a hardness that hears these texts, hears words like this and says, "That's not for me."

The attempts to justify ourselves, our mechanisms go up. They go up in my heart when I read. "What about this? This is not me. This is other people. This is this or that. I'm okay." And Jesus says, He says, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men. You

justify yourselves by looking at the culture around you and thinking, 'Well I'm sure it's okay,' but God knows." God knows your hearts and He knows what's really going on, better than you know it or I know it.

What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight. The ways of the world are detestable in God's sight. The wisdom of the Word, hear it humbly. Do not listen to this Word and justify yourselves.

Hear the Word humbly and obey the Word quickly. We're going to talk more about this, but we must act. Sentiment is not enough here. Here, this is a repentance. It's a change. We need to change. Brother and sisters, we need to change the way we budget and the way we live and the way we spend, if this is true. If this is not true, we go on. We continue with business as usual. But if this is true and if this Word determines our life and determines the church, we need to hear these warnings, not only for the sake of the lost and the poor, but for the sake of ourselves and our own souls. That's the picture here.

Thirty thousand children, thirty thousand Joshuas and Calebs today with no food or a preventable disease that will cause their death, our brothers and sisters, millions of Christian brothers and sisters around the world who do not have food today, and have deformed bodies and deformed brains as a result. Obey the Word quickly.

The Bottom Line...

Church, where are we going to stand? This is the question. Where are we going to stand? With the poor and starving, or with the overfed? Are we going to stand with the poor man on his way to heaven or with the rich man on his way to hell? Are we going to stand hoarding our treasures, or are we going to give ourselves, to abandoning our treasures for the sake of the lost and the poor? Where are we going to stand? How can we stand over here with so many hovering in spiritual and physical need and call ourselves the people of God?

Now I want to be very, very careful here. This is the most important point, the most important moment in light of this text. Please do not miss it. It's the bottom line. We are not motivated to care for the poor by guilt. We're not motivated to care for the poor by guilt.

People will say, "Do you want to do this or change this in your life because you feel guilty?" No. We are not motivated to care for the poor by guilt. Follow with me. We are motivated to care for the poor by the gospel.

This is 2 Corinthians 8:9, "*You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*" This is the picture of the gospel. We need to see the warnings in the Old Testament. We need to see the warnings in Matthew 25 and Luke 16. We need to see Jesus speaking strongly about these things.

But don't miss it. Please don't miss this. We walk away thinking, "Well that was quite a guilt trip. How do I recover from that?" You missed the point. That's not the point that Scripture is teaching. I pray that if anything I've done has tried to communicate that, I pray that you block that out. That's not the point.

The point is to see the gravity of these things, and then to realize we obey Christ, not because we are guilty, but because we are saved. We obey Christ because we're new creatures and we're redeemed, and we don't need to indulge ourselves because we're living for another world. And so we gladly, we gladly invest our lives and our possessions and our everything in the lost and the poor, and we forsake the treasures of this world because we know there's coming a day when this upside-down world will be turned right-side up, and the gospel guarantees us this. This is why we obey these words.

So I want to urge you today, people of God, not this individual in this circumstance, but people of God, let's repent. We need to repent. If this is the God of the Bible and this is what He says, then we are in danger and we need to repent.

I want to invite you to pray. I want to urge you to repent of hollow religion, indulging in yourselves and ignoring the poor. I want to urge you to not to begin thinking about how you are going to indulge yourself when you leave today. That is not the point. The point is for us to see ourselves in the mirror of this text and fall before Him now and say, "God, we need you to bring the life of Christ in us this way alive, or maybe we need you to give us Christ for the first time in many of our hearts because it's just not a reality. It's games and we don't want to play games, but if Christ is a reality to say, I need you to remove my selfish indulging and I need you to give me grace to know how to lay my possessions, my stuff, my life, my schedule, my priorities on the altar for the sake of the poor."

Father, we pray that you would be honored in our response. We do not want to give you empty religion. We do not want to trample on your courts in this way. We pray for grace now to respond humbly and obediently to what your Word has called us to. God, help us not to ignore you, the God of the Bible, the God of the poor and helpless, to see you and respond with grace in the gospel that you provide.

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