

Week 5: ONE2023 Lent Notes: The Rich Man and Lazarus Luke 16:19-30

This parable is often misunderstood to be about heaven and hell. Rather Jesus is teaching an important lesson how we are to live now and the upside down nature of God's kingdom.

Jesus confronts the Pharisees about their love of money

"13 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. 14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus."
Luke 16:13-14

Three Observations:

1. The rich man has no more riches.
2. The rich man still wants to live in the kingdom of the world (old creation).
3. The rich man is called son.

Three Keys to Understanding this Teaching

1. This is a parable.

"The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is to be treated precisely as a parable, not as a literal description of the afterlife and its possibilities."

– N.T. Wright

2. Torment is different than torture

Torture is inflicted from the outside. Torment comes from within. I can be tormented by my sin. That is very different from God torturing me.

3. His torment reveals his heart

In this parable, it reveals what is under the fancy clothes, it reveals the rich man's heart. The problem isn't that the rich man didn't have enough information... the problem is the heart.

"Hell becomes the trajectory of the soul." –Tim Keller

Hell becomes love refused.

Jesus ends the parable by hinting at what is to come.

"31 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.'"

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. If helpful, discuss your understanding of hell and the afterlife. How do they measure up to the Bible?
2. In this Parable, we are not given a direct 1-to-1 account of what the afterlife looks like, rather this is more of an illustration to help us understand how the kingdom of God operates. How do you think your life choices and the direction of your life needs to be aimed in order for you to align with God's kingdom?
3. What does that look like in your family, in your career, in your relationships? In Society?

Resources:

The Great Divorce, by C.S. Lewis

The Day the Revolution Began, N.T. Wright

Surprised by Hope, N.T. Wright

The Skeletons in God's Closet, Joshua Ryan Butler