

**Investing in the Future
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Luke 16:19-31

What do you invest your life in?

This morning Jesus is telling a parable. A parable is a narrative or story that is set along something to help us understand a point Jesus has been making, or a situation Jesus is in.

Parables shine a different light on a subject so we might gain a new understanding.

This parable of Jesus' picks up a theme and plays it again about what we treasure and where our hearts are.

***"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
(Luke 12:34)***

I look at the values of the world around us, and I think an awful lot of people want to be the rich man in Jesus' parable.

Our world idolizes the lives of the rich and famous. Almost everyone wants to be the person who is dressed to the nines – like royalty, like a star, like the person on the red carpet. In Jesus' day they were described as dressed in purple and fine linen. Everyone in our culture idolizes those who have the personal chef and feasts sumptuously every day.

What's wrong with great clothes and feasting? Nothing, except there is not just the rich man in the world, there is a beggar, laid at his gate daily.

Why is a beggar laid at someone's gate?

He's laid there because he can't walk, and so the hope is that this rock star, this superstar, this super rich person of means, with the private chef, will give Lazarus, the lame or crippled beggar, the scraps from his table. But it seems that the scraps went to the several dogs the rock star owned, and the dogs licked the sores of Lazarus.

The lifestyles of the rich and famous superstar and Lazarus both died. You'll notice that everyone dies. We try to ignore it, we try to forget about it, but we all die, and we are all accountable to God for our lives, for what we invested in, in how we lived, for the choices we made every day.

Lazarus died and is found in the parable, to be taken by the angels to Abraham's side. That is a parabolic way of saying he went to be with God. Abraham was said to be "a friend of God."

The name Lazarus tells us a little about who he was, his name means "God helps".

In death there is a complete reversal of fortune for these two people, but I think that in death they are very much as they were in life.

The rockstar, Mr. Rich and powerful is separated by a vast chasm from Father Abraham and Lazarus. Lazarus may have been placed outside of the gates, but there was a huge chasm between them in life. The lifestyles of the rich and famous person separated themselves completely from Lazarus and from Father Abraham, as Father Abraham points out.

Do you remember back in the beginning of Luke's gospel, John the Baptist, the fiery preacher at the banks of the Jordan called people to turn to God saying; *"Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'WE have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."*

The crowd asked John what they should do, and John answered: *"whoever has two tunics is to share and whoever has food is do likewise."*

The Law and the prophets, the whole Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament called God's people to care for the poor.

Our Superstar, lifestyles of the rich and famous, separated himself completely both from Lazarus, his neighbour and from God (in the parable represented by Father Abraham).

What are we commanded to do? How do we live as a community of Jesus' followers? We love God and love our neighbour.

Lifestyles of the rich and famous superstar did neither. He separated himself from his neighbour, and from God and God's teaching.

Consider for a moment the conversation between our Superstar and Father Abraham. The first thing I noticed was that the Superstar wasn't repentant even in death. He didn't long to be with Abraham in death, any more than he longed to be with him in life.

And he didn't treat Lazarus any differently really either, he did stop completely ignoring him, but he thinks that Lazarus should be his lackey, his errand boy and go and warn his brothers.

You'll also notice that he doesn't long to leave hell, he simply longs to be comforted, and again thinks Lazarus should be there to make him more comfortable.

C.S Lewis has a wonderful quote about hell – hell being eternal separation from God. Lewis says:

"In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: What are you asking God to do? To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But he has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. [It is not that God will not forgive it is that they will not allow themselves to be forgiven] To leave them alone? Alas, I'm afraid that is what he does."

Our lives are on a trajectory, every day we make decisions, choices, that draw us closer to others and God, or further away.

In the parable, the superstar with the lifestyle of the rich and famous, was so caught up in himself, and in all that he had, that he had no love for God, or care for a person in need outside his door.

Money, position, power, the lifestyle of the rich and famous, can blind us and make our hearts hard towards God and towards our neighbours, but so can other things.

Jesus is aiming his comments and this parable at the Pharisees who were outwardly the most religious and morally upright.

There is no end to things that will distract, and things that will take the place of God if we let them.

Lent is a great time to ask ourselves some questions:

What are we investing our lives in, what is the foundation we are working on?

Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem, and all along the road he is teaching and healing, bringing new life, offering hope and the love of God, and inviting into the kingdom of God every kind of sinner.

Jesus is building a community where we learn to love God deeply, where we learn that we are his forgiven and deeply loved children.
And we learn to love others.

This is where abundant life is found.

And as we follow Jesus towards the cross, we see that He will give his life for us so that we have abundant and eternal life in Him.

Thanks be to God.