

Luke 16: 14-15a; 19-31

1. It was Fredrick Nietzsche who predicted that western culture would replace God with money. Does that prediction ring true? Do we see a love of money in our culture? In us?

This is simply a reflection question to get you thinking about the main point of the parable – to expose a love of money and its dangers.

There will be a tendency to externalize this as we can often see the love of money, the idol of money in others and are blind to it in ourselves.

Encourage the conversation to become quickly personal. Where is my own love of money to be found? Your openness to share your own love of money and how it gets expressed will prompt others to reflect more personally and thus allow the parable to do it's work by the power of the spirit. Take the risk, it will be worth it for your group's sake.

As Jesus closes off yet another parable on money he makes a very clear declaration. You can't serve God and money for you will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. Upon hearing this the Pharisees mock him. Why? Well Luke tells us they loved money. Jesus tells this parable to expose the danger of a love of money and bring healing to bear.

Read Luke 16: 14-15a; 19-31

2. From this parable what are the symptoms of a love of money?
 - A. *The love of money prompts us to live life out to the edges. The man with his royal clothing, his opulent palace like home, his constant feasting reveals that he lives the life of uninhibited self-indulgence. There was a principle baked into the Hebrew scriptures. As an agricultural society they were not to harvest their fields out to the edge. They were to leave the outside rows for the poor. It was a principle, live beneath your means and give the rest away. The love of money leads us to live life out to the edges.*
 - B. *The love of money hardens our heart to the poor. Lazarus was placed at his gate for this was the social safety net of the day. There was a biblical and cultural expectation that the wealthy would care for the poor out of their surplus. The poor were said to "own"*

the surplus – so if you encountered a hungry person and you had food in your fridge it was theirs – encountered a naked person and you had a change of clothes in your closet it was theirs. How many times did the rich man walk by Lazarus? What thoughts ran through his head? What can I do? I can't afford it! - and he couldn't – he was already living life out to the edges. Each time he walked by and did nothing / said nothing his heart got a little colder a little harder until he hardly noticed him at all.

- C. It became his identity. Of all of Jesus' parable only one character has a proper name. The poor man's name was Lazarus – meaning God is my help. With the stark contrast it leads us to wonder what the rich man's name was. Would it not be "money is my help" for he loved money, was devoted to money, trusted money. When death came his home, his wealth, his clothing, his feasting was all stripped away and what was left? Absolutely nothing! Hades...*

- D. It led him to treat those with less with arrogant disdain. Even in death Lazarus is a servant to him as he orders Lazarus around through Abraham. As the dogs eased your sores come and ease mine. To him Lazarus was of no more value than a dog. Does what another has change how we interact with them?*

- E. As a culture that loves money we attribute all kinds of good things to those who have "made it". You must be wise, hard working, moral, an expert in many fields. With a love of money we begin to believe our own press and with the resulting pride and self focus when things go wrong it must be someone else's fault, we'll externalize wrong. The rich man is in hell and it's someone else's fault. Have Lazarus warn my brothers! In other words I didn't get a fair shake, I wasn't properly warned.*

The trajectory of the rich man's life leads ultimately to hell. When Jesus spoke of hell he did so in metaphor, answering the question what is hell like? More often than not he answered that question by saying it's like Gehenna. Gehenna was an actual place. It was the garbage dump on the outskirts of the city of Jerusalem. A place of fire, separation, decay, and undoing.

3. In what way is this picture of Gehenna a helpful image to reflect upon the impact that a love of money has on us, our relationships, our world?

This is a question that invites a reflection upon the collateral effects of a love of money. Here are a few thoughts to get you reflecting together.

The love of money will lead us to value things over people.

The love of money will drive us to accumulate more and more fostering an overwork that takes time and energy away from other things.

The love of money will lead us to cut corners to sacrifice ethics in its pursuit. Consider the widening gap between the rich and poor. Consider the climate implications of our unbridled consumption our addiction to perpetual economic growth.

This parable of the great reversal was often told. It was already in the listeners imagination but Jesus changes significant details to call to attention, shock, scandalize his listeners to change. In the telling of the parable the ask for messengers to be sent back was always always heeded. But not here.

4. What would be the impact on the listeners in light of this detail being changed?

It's not too late for your brother's – they have Moses and the prophets. It's not too late for you Pharisee. It's not too late for you listener.

The warning is very clear within Moses and the prophets. They (the Pharisees) would often accuse Jesus of rejecting their traditions, Jesus if very clearly saying I am very much within the traditions of the law and the prophets. I am their fulfillment.

5. When Luke uses the word rise it always refers to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is making a link between Moses and the prophets and his resurrection. What can we conclude from this link in terms of how Jesus is inviting us to live in light of this parable?

Here is an unedited section of the sermon where I reflected on this question:

It's a link he makes explicit in Luke 24 - after Jesus rises from the dead he comes to the disciples - they don't recognize him - they're confused - and opening Moses and the prophets Jesus says - this is all about me - all of this points to who I am and what I've done for you

He's pointing ultimately to the scandalous reversal of the gospel - that it was we who were lying naked poor lame broken outside the gates of the kingdom - but out of his lavish and incredible love for us Jesus who had infinite heavenly wealth left all of it to become poor for our sake - that Jesus who reigned in heaven bore the depths of hell for us - that Jesus left his treasure behind to make us his treasure - that Jesus adorned in royal heavenly raiment became naked for us to clothe us with the beauty of his righteousness - and when we see that - know that - trust that - we get a new center - a new identity - a new name - Lazarus - God is my help.

And there - rooted in Jesus - the seeds of the kingdom - seeds found throughout Moses and the prophets become planted in our hearts by the power of the Spirit - shaping us to reflect the scandalous reversal - not to grasp at things for our own sake - but to lay down what we have for the sake of others - not to live out to the edges but to live beneath our means and give the rest away - not to externalize wrong but repent and be met with his lavish forgiveness - not to treat others as if money confers upon them their worth - but to behold all gloriously made in the image of God - loved by Jesus beyond imagining.