

Luke 16:19-31

October 7, 2007 – PENTECOST 19 – Stewardship 2 of 2

Faithful Stewards, Listen to God's Word

‡ Pity in times of plenty (vv.19-24)

‡ Plenty in the Paradise of God (vv.19-24)

In the name of Jesus, our humble Savior, dearly redeemed believers:

We walked out of the church, and there he was, one of the most pitiful human beings I've ever seen. You hear descriptions in the Bible or see some on TV. Sometimes a newscast will even show the flies buzzing around. But these were not like the flies in northern Minnesota. And what no picture could show we finally sensed. As we got within a few yards of him lying there next to the fence, we did not want to come any closer. The stench was overpowering. And the flies were matted all over his rotting flesh. Sores covered his body. He was there to beg.

You have money, you have wealth. You have food, a roof over your head, transportation. But when you see suffering, what do you do? **Faithful Stewards, Listen to God's Word.** Show...

‡ Pity in times of plenty (vv.19-24)

The beggar I saw was not named "Lazarus," as far as I know. But he helped me understand why the Holy Spirit's Greek New Testament says Lazarus' friends or relatives literally "threw him" at the rich man's gate each day. They were willing to do this act of kindness, but they also wanted to be done and away from the stench and the putrid sight. It was all they could do to drop him off and go.

The stench of that beggar assaulted me in Wuhan, China. His relatives left him to beg at the gate of the church. Unfortunately, the pastor told us that when Christians tried to help, his relatives took all the money and clothes for themselves and left him nothing. He was just a source of selfish profit for their greed. It was very hard to accept the advice of the Chinese pastor not to make matters worse by giving him money. Instead of just throwing money at the problem and walking away, the Christians quietly helped in more beneficial ways. But the awful smell, the flies swarming his rotting flesh – all this makes me love my Lord Jesus who not only felt **Pity in times of plenty**, but actually helped. Even in the case of unclean lepers, Jesus would kindly touch those whom His fellow Jews pelted with rocks from a distance.

Isn't that what our merciful Lord wants to stir up in us today? **Good Stewards, Listen to God's Word.** In times of plenty have **Pity** on the suffering and unfortunate. Christ-like **Pity** is not looking down on someone as when we say, "Don't pity me!" Christ-like **Pity** has a dignity and grace about it that honestly admits, "But for God's grace, there lay I." We're too quick to assume like Job's friends that he must have caused his own suffering. We're too slow to realize unless the Lord shows us, the punishment we deserve because of our sins of poor stewardship, our mismanagement of God's gifts and blessings.

If you think you are something, God can show you the real meaning of "nothing." If you think you are nothing, God can show you the meaning of glory in His grace. *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:6f) Both men in Jesus' parable had friends. Lazarus' friends were the four-footed kind with wagging tails and licking tongues. Gross as it may seem, those stray dogs showed more **Pity** than all the friends and relatives of the rich man. The crumbs from his lavish banquet table never fell past the dogs, never once were swept outside to Lazarus languishing by the door.

Is that why Lazarus went to heaven, because he was poor and suffered so much? Did the pitiless man in purple and fine linen go to hell because he was rich? *"God does not show favoritism."* (Romans 2:11) The rich man's wealth and prestige in the community counted for nothing before the God who owns everything. The man who had nothing to offer God but putrid sores and filthy stench received God's kindness and pity. **Good Stewards, Listen to God's Word.** This truth still stands: *"Believe in the Lord*

Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31 NIV) – not by poverty or riches, but by faith. Lazarus believed and went to heaven. The rich man’s missing faith showed in his lack of **Pity in times of plenty**. From wine, women and song, he plunged into “Hades,” the place of torment for unbelieving souls with never water anywhere and not a drop to drink. Obviously the soul can suffer raging thirst even when separated from the body in death. At the resurrection unbelievers too will rise to have their souls reunited with their bodies, but only to suffer eternal death and destruction in “Gehenna.” The Lord says on Judgment Day, **“Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.”** (Revelation 20:14 NIV) But now thirsty souls can hear the Lord’s call in good faith. **Good Stewards, Listen to God’s Word.** **“He that has pity on the poor lends to the LORD....”** (Proverbs 19:17 KJV updated)

‡ **Plenty in the Paradise of God (vv.19-24)**

“But, Pastor, doesn’t **God’s Word** say, *‘Whoever would not work, neither should he eat?’*” Yes, that principle from 2 Thessalonians 3:10, was implemented by our State of Minnesota in “Work-to-Welfare” legislation a few years ago. But we Christians are still responsible to help the needy. God clearly says He gives us our wealth to glorify God and help our neighbor. And that same Word of God motivates and empowers us to open handed liberality no matter what the economic state of the country. **“For 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.”** (2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV) No matter what our economic status, we are **“rich”** because our sins of greed and materialism, our selfishness and heartless neglect have been washed away by the blood of God’s own Son. As heirs of God’s grace in Christ, **Good Stewards, Listen to God’s Word** looking forward to **Plenty in the Paradise of God.**

And God is so generous that He steadfastly refuses to wait until **Paradise** to bless us. No doubt Lazarus sincerely thanked God for the dogs that licked his sores. They provided some relief on his way to **the Paradise of God.** Christians in prison give thanks for cock roaches and the entertainment they provide. But I’ll admit my heart sank that day when a kindly old gentleman drove away with some of the best products of my woodshop. Dressed to sell, he said he needed to get to his route in Wisconsin. I filled his tank, bought him lunch, and found out a month later about two warrants for his arrest in Hennepin County. He ripped off pastors and priests up and down the line. I don’t know if he was ever caught. Does it matter? **Good Stewards, Listen to God’s Word.** As he drove off, this promise was ringing in my head: **“He that has pity on the poor lends to the LORD; and that which he has given will he pay him again.”** (Proverbs 19:17 KJV updated) When our family finances tightened a few months later, the LORD’s banking promise came true. We paid off our car loan to a relative who sent back the 9% interest. That surprise was fifty times what I lost, kind repayment on my way to the **Paradise of God.**

In Christ we see true wisdom. The rich man’s pity awoke too little, too late. The warning he requested for his five brothers back home got the same answer from the father of all believers. In heaven Abraham was kind. “Son, remember the good life you enjoyed in earth’s little day. But things turn around here, and there is no crossing over. Lazarus going back to your family now would make no more difference than before. People will keep proving this true: **‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’**” How many today still reject the resurrected Christ? And when Jesus raised a different Lazarus from the dead, his fellow Jews wanted to kill him again along with crucifying the Lord’s Christ. But **Good Stewards, Listen to God’s Word.**

In this vale of tears God’s people often appear to be victims of the rich and powerful. But God does not show favoritism. Jesus Himself proclaims as **“blessed”** all who are **“poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”** (Matthew 5:3) Walking by faith not by sight, we see the other side where God will set all things right out of His pure grace and mercy. May no amount of money ever get in the way of our faith and Christian profession. May we always use our wealth to spread God’s Word and express His kindness in Christ to our neighbor, looking forward to **Plenty in the Paradise of God.** Amen.