

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus Prizes Us

Luke 16:19-31

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Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

[14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. 15 So Jesus said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God....]

19"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' 25But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' 27He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— 28for I have five

brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'

29Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' 30He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"



Rich man and poor man (from Canva)

"Money makes no promises about eternal life or mercy or love or peace. Our old self made up the idea that "money buys happiness." Jesus makes promises, and those promises are what our hearts can trust and prize."

DIAGNOSIS: I Got It

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): It's Not What You Got

Grounding: Jesus told a story to illustrate what he meant when he said that God knows people's hearts, and what he meant by the difference between what God values and what humans value. Jesus had just said that no one can serve two masters. No one can serve God and wealth. So this story does not say that the poor get heaven and the rich go to Hades, though a surface reading of the story would make the reader think that was the point.

Tracking: We evaluate the worth of ourselves and each other by how much wealth we have. Wealth includes more than money. Among other things, wealth includes success, glory, reputation, family achievements, pride in hard work, and standing up for one's political beliefs ("beliefs" is the right word because people have put their faith in their political leaders or political programs). All these things can be seen. They are the prizes we covet.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): What's the Heart Got?

Grounding: Beneath the surface of the story talking of the poor and rich is the deeper place God looks—our hearts. Lazarus has faith in God, the rich man has faith in his wealth. If the rich have faith in God, then the rich would trust God's call for people are to love their neighbors as much as they love themselves. If people love themselves enough to feast sumptuously every day, then they get to make sure the person at their gate (their neighbor) also has food every day. And if we were to dare try to find an excuse not to feed our neighbor by

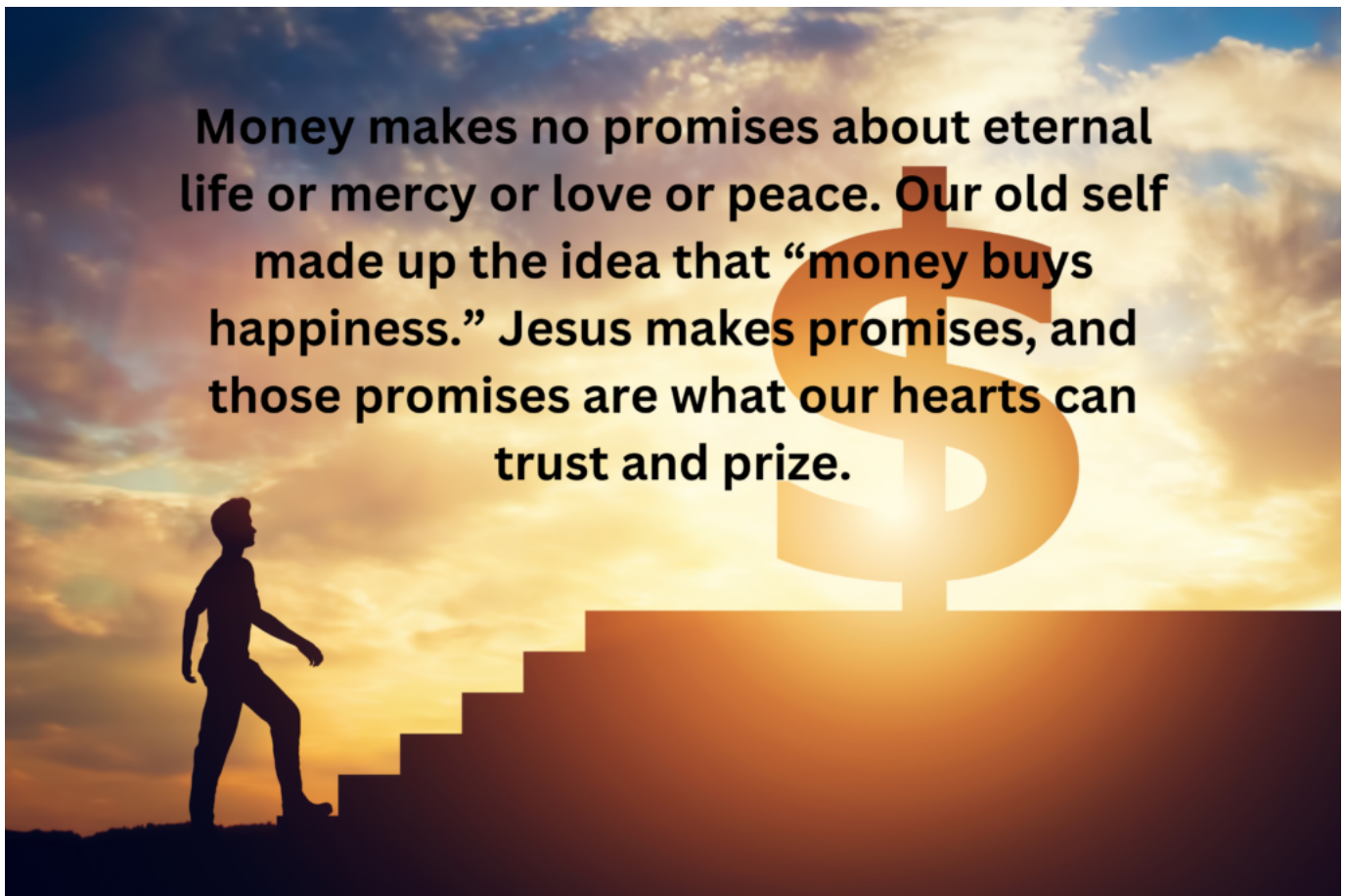
asking about who is our neighbor, well, Jesus' answer is our neighbor is the one who is merciful. Jesus' answer points us to ourselves, at what we believe and do, instead of pointing at definitions and rules. Our hearts are what God covets.

Tracking: We look at the worth of our lives by looking at the things we see and do. We do not look at our hearts. What do our hearts love? What motivates our hearts? Why do our hearts judge? Why are our hearts inclined toward prejudice. What master do we serve—God or wealth? What do we take pride in? And why are we compelled to have things to take pride in? We are pushed, shoved, and told we have to fill our trophy case with what we have. It's a constant demand, but we never question why we feel the need to do it. The demands we ascribe to becomes a burden and an accusation for those who have little.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): It's What God's Got for Us

Grounding: At the end of the story, the rich man has a problem with God. He is upset at where God has placed him. God also has a problem with the rich man, which is why the rich man is in Hades. (Remember, this is a story, not a doctrinal statement about the infrastructure of heaven and hell.) The rich man did not serve God. Lovers of money serve money as their god. God is seen as less of a god than money.

Tracking: When we trust money as better at giving us good things than God, then God—out of concern for our misplaced trust—tells us quite clearly that our choice of that god is going to hurt us. Our choice of money as our god may feel good today, but money can do nothing to make us kind. Money cannot forgive us or make a good relationship between God and us. Money can do nothing to change the fact that we die. Death is the chasm that separates us from God and everything else.



Money makes no promises (from Canva)

PROGNOSIS: Jesus Got Us

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus Got the Cross

Grounding: Jesus, on a cross outside the city gates, was ignored by those who had their whole life ahead of them. Yet he is raised to sit at the right hand of God, which is even better than being at the side of Abraham. Jesus on a cross is not prized by people, but he is prized by God.

Crossing: Jesus, being prized by God even when on a cross, promises that God considers us his prize. Jesus joins us outside the gate so he can invite us to come inside. We are his prize.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Jesus Gives Us His Heart

Grounding: Jesus promises to give us his good gifts of eternal life, forgiveness from God, and peace with God. God is not a generic deity, but the God who raised Jesus from the dead so that God could then raise us to a new life with God.

Crossing: Money makes no promises about eternal life or mercy or love or peace. Our old self made up the idea that “money buys happiness.” Jesus makes promises, and those promises are what our hearts can trust and prize. We will prize whatever gives us meaning and purpose. In faith we trust Jesus and receive what he offers.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): It's What We Have to Share

Grounding: The Pharisees had Moses and the prophets to tell them to love God and their neighbor. A person rising from the dead who repeats the message of Moses and the prophets will do no better at changing people's hearts and who they serve. Jesus rises from the dead and does not repeat Moses and the prophets. He has a new message, the new promise, the risen one who fills our hearts with his Holy Spirit.

Crossing: We get filled with Jesus' Holy Spirit when we hear about him dying and rising for us and giving us life, forgiveness, and love. Because we prize Jesus most, and live in his love, we see Lazarus at our gate, and invite him to join us for dinner. We do this not only to honor Jesus, to prize Jesus, but to give his comfort to those he died and rose for.