

THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE
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Texts: 1 Timothy 6:6–19 & Luke 16:19-31

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Luke 16:19-31

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He 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.’ But 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. Besides 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.’ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He 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.’”

If you've got little kids, or if you've ever been around little kids, you know they don't always listen to reason. And they don't always care about consequences, even when they're clearly spelled out.

When my kids were little, one of my daily battles was getting them to do their chores after school. As soon as they walked in the door I'd say, "Now listen, if you take a few minutes right now to clean up your rooms and put away your laundry, then you can have the rest of the afternoon to go outside and ride your bikes or play with your My Little Ponies or whatever."

Sounds pretty fair, right? Sounds pretty reasonable? But it was the same thing every day. They'd drag their feet. They'd moan and groan. They'd make excuses. They'd even try to gaslight me. They'd put one dirty sock in the hamper and tell me they picked up their whole room. So, I'd have to nag them, and argue with them, and take away their tv time, and it was exhausting. And sometimes I'd think, What's it gonna take? What's it gonna take to get them to do what they're supposed to do?

Well, that's the same basic question that's being asked in the gospel reading today. But before we get into it, let's back up just a little. Because the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is the last in a series of stories that build on one another.

First come the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—also known as the prodigal son. Jesus tells these back to back, and they all make it clear that God values people—all people. Everyone's important to God, everyone's worth saving, and no one's beyond redemption. Then comes the parable of the dishonest manager, where Jesus pushes us to think hard about money and possessions, about systems of injustice, and about whether we're going to just go along with them or not. And finally we get the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which makes it clear that there are consequences for not listening to what Jesus was saying in those previous parables. There are consequences for not aligning our values with God's values.

The story goes... there's a rich man who lives like a king. Purple robes, fine linens, feasting every day. And just outside his gate, in

plain sight, there's a poor man named Lazarus. He's starving, and his whole body is covered in sores. But the rich man never lifts a finger to help him, never gives him so much as a crumb, never even really notices him.

Eventually they both die, and in the afterlife, the tables are turned. Lazarus is carried away by angels to be with Abraham, while the rich man goes down to a fiery pit. He looks up and sees Abraham and begs him to send Lazarus down with some water to cool his tongue. But Abraham says, "Sorry pal. You had your good things in life, while poor Lazarus here suffered miserably. So now it's his turn to be comforted, while you suffer." "And besides that," Abraham says, "there's a great chasm between you and us, so there's no way anyone can reach you."

So, the rich man ends up stuck in that place all by himself. And that's the consequence. That's the consequence of not listening to Jesus. That's the consequence of being so wrapped up in our comfortable lives that we don't even see the people around us who are struggling, even when they're right on our doorstep. We end up like the rich man. Isolated and alone. Separated from other people. Cut off from community. And not in the afterlife, but in this life. This isn't a story about what happens to us when we die. It's not about heaven and hell. Jesus is talking about our lives right now, and the choices we make every day, and where those choices take us. And the question he's asking is: What's it gonna take? What's it gonna take for us to live the way God wants us to live? To change our values so they line up with God's values. To make room in our hearts for compassion and mercy, empathy and kindness, goodness and grace. To take hold of what Paul calls "the life that really is life"—the life that's not focused on riches but on people. Loving and caring for people.

That phrase grabs me every time I hear it: "the life that really is life." Paul knew how easy it is to settle for an imitation of life—a life that's stuffed full of things but still feels empty and lonely. And Jesus knew it, too. That's what this parable is about. It's about saying no to the imitation and embracing the real thing—a life where generosity and giving are the default; a life where compassion and mercy come first; a life where people and relationships matter more

than money and possessions. And the nice thing is, we don't have to wait to start living that way. We can start right now, by noticing the "Lazaruses" in our lives—the people in need all around us.

And that's where the idea of stewardship comes in. Stewardship is how we put all of this into action. It's the hands-on side of following Jesus—the way we take what God has entrusted to us and put it to work for the good of others. Picture a family who dedicates part of their weekly budget to the local food pantry. They may not be wealthy, but that choice, in Paul's words, makes them "rich in good deeds." Or picture someone who volunteers at a women's shelter on Saturday mornings. Same thing. They may not be wealthy, but that choice makes them rich in good deeds.

So, stewardship is about so much more than just putting money in the offering plate. It's about how we live in the world, and the choices we make every day. It's like a bridge between who we are right now and who we're called to be.

So, what's it gonna take? What's it going to take for us to cross that bridge? I know it can feel overwhelming, and our instinct is to pull back, to hold on to what we have, to keep it all for ourselves. But we don't have to do it all at once. We can take one small step at a time. Day by day, we can open our hearts just a little wider, and we can give just a little more. And once we experience being part of something bigger, being connected to something beyond ourselves, we'll know the answer. We'll know that all it takes is saying yes—yes to who God is calling us to be, and yes to the life that really is life.

Let's pray:

Loving God, you call us away from a life of emptiness, and you invite us into a life of fullness. Help us take hold of that life. Help us notice the needs all around us and give us courage to respond with open hearts and willing hands. Take what we have—our time, our resources, our very selves—and use them for your purposes. May our lives reflect your generosity. May our choices honor your compassion. And may we, together, discover

the joy and freedom of the life that really is life. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.