

Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 26th July 2026.
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The Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31, Jesus confronts one of the greatest spiritual dangers of our age ... not ignorance, but indifference. This message explores how comfort can slowly blind us to the people God places right in front of us, and how the kingdom of God calls us to see others as God sees them: known, valued, and loved. In light of Christ's resurrection and the reality of eternity, Jesus invites us to live wisely, noticing and moving toward the people at our gate.

Luke 19:19-31, ***“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor***

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can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Introduction

For my birthday a couple of weeks ago, my family gave me a Garmin watch. I haven’t had a watch for many years, and this isn’t just a watch – it records my heartbeat, how many steps I take each day, and it tells me in the morning how well I slept — although I’m not sure I appreciate a device judging me before I’ve even had my first coffee.

We live in a world where we have more information at our fingertips than any generation in history. Yet one of the greatest challenges of our age is not knowing more; it's noticing people more. We can become so focused on screens, notifications, and information that we miss the actual person who is often standing right in front of us. And that's exactly the warning Jesus gives us in Luke 16.

Last week we looked at one of Jesus' strangest parables in Luke Chapter 16 Verses 1-15. A manager gets caught out, realises that the future has arrived faster than he expected, and acts decisively, and shrewdly. The word Luke uses is **phronimos**, meaning wise, sharp, or switched on. The manager saw where things were heading, and he adjusted his whole life around it.

Jesus then turned to His disciples and asked them, *“If people are this sharp about money and self-preservation, why are my own followers sometimes so complacent about eternity?”* Then came Verse 13 which is so confronting most of us would just rather forget it, ***"You cannot serve both God and money."*** And Luke tells us who was in the room ... the Pharisees. And they weren't just listening, they were ***“sneering”*** because Jesus wasn't talking about their bank

balance, he was talking about their worship. The issue was never what they possessed. **The issue was what possessed them.**

Now here's what we often miss: our Bibles put a heading and a gap between last week's parable and today's. But Jesus didn't. There's no break, no new setting, no new audience, no *"and then Jesus told another parable."* It's one continuous story. Jesus is still talking to the same room, about the same subject, and He tells one more story to drive it home.

- Last week we saw a man who understood the future and acted wisely.
- This week we see a man who never saw the future coming at all, and paid for it.

One man saw reality clearly. One didn't. And through both stories, Jesus is asking us the same question, *"What future are we actually living for and what are you investing in?"*

The Rich Man Who Couldn't See

Luke 16 Verse 19 says, *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day."* For Jesus' first listeners, this man had made it. Purple dye was eye-wateringly expensive. Fine linen said 'old money.' *"Luxury every day"* - this is not a man having just a good week. Bring him into today's terms and he's got the waterfront property, the Range Rover in the driveway, a La Marzocco coffee machine in the kitchen, and he's just released a book called, *The Secret of My Success*. If this guy turned up at Windsor, we'd be asking him to speak at the men's breakfast.

Then Jesus introduces someone else in Verse 20, *"At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores."* That's not a pretty picture, but it's classic Luke - the Gospel writer who never tires of putting the exalted and the overlooked side-by-side. Throughout the Gospel we've seen Mary singing that God pulls down the proud and lifts the humble. We've seen shepherds, of all people, get the birth announcement. Tax collectors get invited in. Sinners get embraced. Outsiders become insiders, and now, two men, either side of one gate:

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- One has everything. One has nothing.
- One lives inside the gate. One lies outside the gate.
- One feasts. One longs for scraps.
- One is known by everyone. One appears forgotten.

Or so it seems. Because there's a detail here that's so easy to miss, and yet it's so important I don't think I can overstate it. The rich man has no name, but the beggar does. **Lazarus** is the *only* person who's given a personal name in any parable Jesus tells, across all three Synoptic Gospels. Think about that. We can think of the Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Great Banquet ... categories and titles, every one of them, but the only person Jesus ever names in a parable is a beggar nobody else in that society bothered to name at all. **Lazarus**. A name that means, 'God is my helper.' **The man society had forgotten carried a name that declared something society could not see: God had not forgotten him.** It's so significant.

What does it mean that the rich man had everything except a name, and Lazarus had nothing except a name? Pretty much every society we know of runs the other way - the powerful get remembered, the poor get forgotten. Jesus flips it. The man who spent his whole life curating status becomes anonymous and the beggar at his gate gets remembered for two thousand plus years. Why doesn't anyone in our country name their son, Lazarus?!

This is Luke doing what Luke does: **names matter because people matter**. The rich man saw a problem at his gate. God saw Lazarus. The rich man saw a category. God saw a person. The rich man saw someone disposable. **God knew his name.**

And maybe that's the first thing this parable wants to teach us: **The kingdom changes how we see people.**

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Picture the scene in this story that's repeated daily. The gate opens and Lazarus is there and the rich man steps around him. Every morning, a small, practiced choice not to see. That's the real tragedy of this story; not Lazarus' poverty, but that the rich man became the kind of person who simply stopped noticing. And if we're honest, **comfort can do exactly the same thing to us.**

The Danger of a Comfortable Blindness

Here's what's sobering about this story: the rich man is never accused of some dramatic crime. He isn't violent. He isn't cruel. He isn't, at least not explicitly, oppressive. His failure is quieter than that, and arguably more dangerous. He simply lives as though Lazarus doesn't register. He gets comfortable with someone else's suffering, right at his own front door, and his heart slowly, almost politely, grows cold until he no longer sees Lazarus as a person.

Now, let's be clear. Scripture never says wealth or comfort or security are themselves the problem. Abraham was wealthy. Job was wealthy. Plenty of faithful people in the Bible had significant resources. The danger isn't possessions. The danger is what possessions can quietly do to our field of vision:

- Our world gets smaller.
- Our concerns get smaller.
- Our compassion gets smaller.

And we don't notice it happening, because nobody's field of vision narrows all at once. It narrows one comfortable, reasonable decision at a time.

I sit on a few governance boards that include some Baptist assets in the aged care and retirement sector, which mostly means I read reports, ask hopefully intelligent questions, and occasionally sign things while wondering if I've understood them correctly. But one phrase comes up constantly in the governance world, and it's stuck with me ever since I started thinking about this passage: **duty of care.**

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In governance, a duty of care means that I don't get to say afterwards, "*I didn't see the risk,*" when the risk was in front of me, in the reports, in the data, at the gate. Ignorance isn't a defence when the information was available and it was my job to look. A board that quietly stops asking hard questions and stops noticing the little things that can become big things ultimately will face some kind of failure that they only recognise afterwards, when the consequences have already arrived.

In this story, Jesus would say that the rich man had a duty of care to the man at his gate. Not because a regulator said so, but because he was made in the image of God, the same as Lazarus was. And he failed in that duty of care, not with a single dramatic decision, but with *thousands of small ones*, repeated daily, until it became normal, which, incidentally, is a very unglamorous way to end up in a parable. Nobody sets out to become the villain of a Bible story. You just keep stepping around the same gate long enough and there you are.

Luke has already warned us about this. Back in Chapter 12, Jesus tells the Parable of the Fool and lands this line, "***Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.***" Because possessions have a way of possessing us. Comfort has a way of dulling us. Success has a way of quietly distracting us.

And so spiritual growth often looks less like a mountaintop experience and more like God reopening our eyes to the people already around us. Not just the crisis on the other side of the world, though that matters too. The person at our actual gate. Our neighbour. Our workmate. The struggling family member. The lonely one. The teenager who needs one adult to believe in them. The older person whose whole world has shrunk to four walls and a television. The person carrying grief quietly enough that nobody's asked. **The kingdom of God trains us to see what comfort has trained us to overlook.**

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The Great Reversal

Then comes the turn in Verses 22 - 26. Both men die. And everything, everything, flips. The rich man loses what he thought would last forever. Lazarus receives what he never had in this life. The future arrives, and reality, which was hidden the whole time, becomes visible.

Sound familiar? It's the same theme Jesus has been building all along. The kingdom of God isn't defined by present appearances. It reveals things as God actually sees them. And we land back on the exact principle from last week: **future realities are meant to shape present decisions.**

- The shrewd manager understood that. The rich man didn't.
- The manager knew his circumstances wouldn't last. The rich man lived like his would.
- The manager adjusted his life because of what was coming. The rich man never did.

One acted with urgency. One drifted. One prepared. One presumed. One was *phronimos*. One was blind.

The Real Issue

Let's remind ourselves that the rich man isn't condemned for simply being wealthy. Remember who's still in the room, the money-loving Pharisees ... still listening, still sneering. Just like last week, the issue was never wealth. The issue was allegiance. The issue is what wealth had done to his heart. His life reveals that God never actually sat at the centre of it. His compassion had withered. His stewardship had failed. His concern for anyone beyond himself had shrunk to nothing. His resources served his comfort instead of God's purposes.

The warning from the previous passage has now played out in full colour. **You cannot serve two masters.** Eventually, one master shows its face. The rich man's money had stopped being a resource and had become his ruler, and the truly frightening part is that he never seemed to notice the handover happen.

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"They Have Moses and the Prophets"

The final section, Verses 27 - 31, contain one of the most important lines in the whole parable. The rich man, even in torment, who was still trying to manage the situation from a distance, asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his five brothers. He reasons that surely if someone returned from the dead, they'd repent and believe. Abraham's answer is blunt, ***"They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."***

The rich man pushes back. Surely a miracle would do it. Surely a sign would finally wake them up. And Abraham gives him a line that should stop us in our tracks, ***"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."***

That line gets more remarkable the longer you sit with it, because in John Chapter 11, a man is literally raised from the dead and plenty of people still refuse to believe. Some religious leaders even start plotting to kill both Jesus and the man He raised. That man's name was - **Lazarus**. Whether Luke and John intended the echo or not, it's a striking one.

The problem for the rich man's five brothers was never a lack of evidence. It was the human heart. They already had everything they needed. They already knew God's commands, God's concern for the poor, God's heart for justice, what faithfulness looked like in practice. The problem was never information. The problem was obedience.

Which is a slightly deflating thing to hear if, like me, you've ever hoped that the solution to your spiritual dryness was one more conference, one more podcast, or one more really good worship set. Sometimes it might just be doing the thing you already know you're supposed to do, because I believe that real growth usually starts with responding faithfully to what God has already said. The question isn't, *"What else do I need to know?"* The question is, ***"What am I doing with what I already know?"***

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The One Who Did Rise from the Dead

Luke's original readers would have caught something we can easily miss. Jesus says people may not believe even if someone rises from the dead. And then, that's exactly what happens. Jesus Himself rises. Some believe. Many don't. But the resurrection doesn't just hand us information. It demands a response. It asks which kingdom we actually belong to, which future are we investing in, which master are we really serving. And unlike the rich man, we have something he never had. We stand on this side of the cross. This side of the empty tomb. We know Christ entered death and walked out the other side. We know God's kingdom is coming. We know eternity is real. We know people matter forever. The only open question is whether that reality is actually shaping how we live today.

Conclusion

Most of us don't wake up thinking, *"Today I'm going to reject the kingdom of God."* We just get busy. Busy paying the mortgage. Busy with the calendar. Busy with sports. Busy trying to find a park at Albany Mall on a Saturday, busy living life. And somewhere in all that busyness, we quietly stop noticing the people God keeps placing directly in front of us.

Maybe that's the most unsettling part of this whole story. The rich man wasn't condemned because Jesus tells us he hated Lazarus. The tragedy is subtle. He simply never truly saw him. Day after day after day, at the same gate, until the blindness just became normal, the way any habit does.

So here's the question this story leaves sitting with us, *"Who's at our gate? Who have we stopped seeing? What person has God placed in our path that we've simply grown accustomed to walking past?"*

Because the kingdom of God changes how we see people. Every person carries the image of God. Every person has a name. Every person matters. Every person is someone Christ died for.

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Most of us don't have a beggar lying at our front gate. But we might have a teenager at our gate. A spouse. A neighbour. A colleague carrying more than we've noticed. Someone three rows behind you this morning whose world is quietly falling apart, and who came to church today half-hoping somebody would ask.

So here's one thing to think about. This week, don't just notice someone. Move toward someone. Start a conversation. Ask a question. Make a phone call. Sit a little longer. Listen a little more carefully. Ask what their name is. Start there. That's how the rich man's story could have gone differently. It's how ours still can.

The good news of this Gospel is that Jesus is nothing like the rich man. Jesus sees us. He knows our name. He comes to us in our need. And having been seen by Him, we're now invited to see others the same way.

So may the Holy Spirit open our eyes this week.
To the Lazaruses at our gate.
To the people we've overlooked.
To the opportunities God keeps placing in front of us.

And may we live wisely, *phronimos*, in light of the kingdom that is already breaking into the present through Jesus Christ our Lord. May the Holy Spirit help us see clearly, love deeply, and live faithfully in the kingdom that can never be shaken.

Amen.

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Reflecting on Sunday 19th July 2026:

Last week Pastor Grant looked at Luke 16:1-15 and he asked, “What future are we investing in?” What is one intentional step you took in this last week to invest in God's kingdom rather than your own comfort or security?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. Who are the “Lazaruses” at your gate - people you may be overlooking right now?
2. How can comfort or busyness make it harder for us to notice the needs of others?
3. What stood out to you about Lazarus being named while the rich man remains unnamed?
4. What is one practical way you can move toward someone this week rather than simply just noticing them?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. To help you see the people at your gate more, get hold of a copy of the book, **The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical**, by Shane Claiborne. This book invites us to rediscover the biblical practice of loving our neighbour, using unconventional examples from his own life to stir up questions about the church and the world while challenging us to truly live out your faith. You could get hold of it here:
<https://www.paperplus.co.nz/shop/books/the-irresistible-revolution-updated-and-expanded>
2. Participate in a *The Rule of Life* **"Who's at my gate?"** challenge this week. Every morning when you wake up, pray this prayer: *"Jesus, open my eyes today to see the person you want me to notice today."* See where that leads – you might learn someone's name, or you might start one conversation, or listen to someone's story, or offer practical help.
3. Click below for an article called, **Preparing to Receive Christ: Hearing Moses and the Prophets**, by John Piper. This article is based on Luke 16:19-31.
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/preparing-to-receive-christ-hearing-moses-and-the-prophets>