

**LUKE 16:19-31****30/9/18**

Do you have a fridge, a motor car and a home you either partly, mostly or fully own? If you do, you're in the top 4 percent of materially wealthy people in the world. I hope you feel good about that if being materially wealthy is what it's all about for you.

This week I found another way of measuring material or economic wealth. I entered the value of our house (which seems to change on an almost daily basis), our material assets and a rough idea of what we've saved for retirement on this chart. The answer came back that I was in the top 2.6 percent of the world's wealthy. And we've only got one house – no bach, no investment properties and no overseas travel planned beyond Sydney this week. We have no spa pool, no surround sound TV/audio, no shares, no hidden gold reserves etc. etc. But according to these statistics we're in the top 2.6 percent of the world's wealthy. **By international standards we are wealthy and I guess we're not alone in this building.** I have to confess we have two fridges (for storage of course) and two cars (well one and a half really, one's only 1000cc). Oh dear, such extravagance, ministers and teachers obviously get paid far too much, almost as much as the CEO of Fonterra you might think. \$8 million isn't it?

I note in passing that the top 1 percent of the world's people own 50 percent of the wealth in the world and it can be readily assumed this Percentage is growing. And it probably goes without saying that the top 0.1 percent of people has over 25 percent of the world's wealth.

But is it the same to be wealthy and to live in luxury – that's a very good question. The late Alan Hubbard had an interesting take on this didn't he? And why am I talking about wealth and possessions – this is church! Well Jesus did - lots!

**SLIDES 1-7: Luke 16:19-31**

**19 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.**

**20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.**

**22 The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 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.'**

**25 '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. 26 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 can anyone cross over from there to us.'**

**27 'He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'**

**29 'Abraham replied, 'they have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'**

**30 "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'**

**31 '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.'"**

This is tough stuff, if we take it seriously, because the statistics say that many of us, if not nearly all here may be more like the rich man with the purple shirt in our economic state than the beggar lying covered in sores.

So let's hear Jesus out?

He's still speaking to the Pharisees and he's following a theme that's consistent with other parts of Luke who notes in 16:14 that the Pharisees love money – this is a warning to the affluent, the rich. In several places in Luke he's already done this.

**SLIDE 8:** Starting with chapter 6

**6:20: 'Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.**

**6:24: 'But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.**

**13 – The parable of the rich fool and learning not to worry**

**14 – Places of honour and the great banquet; giving up everything we have**

**15 – The older brother who had everything but had nothing**

**16 – You cannot serve both God and money**

And central to this teaching on wealth is the assumption in all of Jesus teaching that this life isn't the end and how we use our wealth here does have consequences for our life after death. It's as if all this is brought into clear focus in this parable.

Jesus introduces us first to the rich man who wore purple clothing and fine linen (I've only gone so far to illustrate the point) and lived in luxury every day. We're to use our imagination as to what living

in luxury every day must look like, Jesus doesn't tell us. Presumably he had all he could ever want and more.

And outside his gate there's a poor man called Lazarus (meaning God has helped). His life was the pits – a beggar, weak and prone to infections, of which he had plenty, sores breaking out all over his body – the sort of person you'd see in any third world city today multiplied 10 000 times over (More in ours too). He was so weak he couldn't chase away the dogs that licked his infected skin. And he was hungry!

Not in a good way.

Nothing is said about the men's state before God. Interesting – it's only after they died that we discover how their living impacts on their dying.

We discover:

Lazarus goes straight to Abraham's bosom – a poetic description of his faith and life after death. In Hebrew terms how much better could it get? In Christian terms it would be like sitting next to Jesus...

Things don't go well for the rich man – he's in Hades and he's in torment. Hades doesn't appear to be freezing over. He's awfully hot; sweating profusely and running out of fluids. Some here know what excruciating pain is – you're with the rich man at this point.

Then he sees Lazarus and immediately reverts back to his old life – I'm in control, I can tell people what to do; you'd better listen to me Abraham – bit of that in many wealthy people – remember the 4 percent.

Send Lazarus!

I'm in control, I can tell you what to do – when, oh when, will we give up the myth of being in control! Well he ain't and neither are we!

Abraham gently replies: **'Son, remember in your life you received good things....'** The implication is clear; what did you do with the good things. You see Lazarus, who you can see from your very hot vantage point, got nothing, and now he's in a really good space and you're not! Oh dear. But not only that son, he can't reach you to ease your pain and perhaps worse still you can't reach him; you can't get here no matter how high you were on the Hebrew rich list of your day.

Oh dear!

But he still hasn't given up the myth of power and control. **'I beg you send Lazarus to my family.'**

Oh dear, o dearie me. When will he learn, when will he ever learn? Where have all the flowers gone asks the same question?

Abraham replies – but they ought to know the score – they've got the Scriptures, they know how to live,

No father Abraham, no, they haven't got it yet – if you sent Lazarus, who we thought was dead, if you send him, **THEY WILL REPENT.**

Abraham again gently replies, actually no, they won't repent, not if they don't understand about loving others and applying Moses and the prophets; actually they won't even be convinced if someone rises from the dead. In that context the rich man may well be thinking Lazarus, but when we read Luke we can't help but think of Jesus and how so many in our day, including our regular faith and reason columnist in the ODT, believe Jesus' bones are dust somewhere in Israel.

Another great Jesus, story isn't it and it has absolutely nothing to say to us. For one thing we don't see ourselves as rich and another we're such good people how would we ever end up where the rich man ended up. And if this is how you're thinking you'll continue to live with illusions about power and control.

Jesus' teaching here can be expressed in five statements?

- There is life after death for good and bad
- The afterlife provides an opportunity for the injustices of this life to be corrected
- There's a clear and unbridgeable divide between heaven and hell
- There are no second chances
- Judgement is based on our response to what God requires

And as such this is some of the clearest teaching in the New Testament about judgment and life after death even though much of this parable is imagery, it's a picture and therefore we're not to read too much into the specifics

So, what to do, what to say? Five comments to close:

1. There is a sense in which this parable teaches that judgment is solely based on how we treat other people – just like the parable of the sheep and the goats – interesting, Jesus' atoning death isn't mentioned here. This parable cries out against socio-economic injustice. How then shall we, the 4 percent, live? Who and where are those like Lazarus in our world and aren't they just there to rip us off? There are, according to this text and Matthew 25, eternal consequences in our concern for the poor and the oppressed. At a community level I love the way we've taken up the TEAR Fund Christmas appeals lately.

2. The great reversal spoken of here is something we must take into account in our living. I believe that despite the suffering and pain we go through, ultimately, all will be made new – not right but new – and I take it from Revelation 21.
3. A challenging question is how this picture of judgment fits into the gospel of grace. It does point out the danger of seeking the gospel in one passage.
4. We must hang lightly to our stuff. As I contemplate cleaning out my study at church I'm all too aware of the tendency to hang on to stuff. Walt Henrichsen tells of a man who wanted to help other men by inviting them to a Bible Study – and the only time they could meet was at 5am. He writes, **'The night before the first meeting I stopped by the man's home to see how things were. When I walked in you could cut the atmosphere with a knife. The man's wife was present and before long she pointed out that she didn't want those men coming and sitting on her furniture; spilling coffee and doughnut crumbs on her carpet. Furthermore, 5am was a ridiculous time and why should everyone else wake up so that the men could study the Bible. Her voice began to quiver, tears ran down her cheeks and she began to tremble. Henrichsen wrote he prayed silently, 'O God, deliver me from the curse of ever believing that my living room furniture and carpet is more important than people.'** Is that for anyone here? It's tough but you're going to have to leave your stuff behind, unless of course you intend to have a very large coffin.
5. Remember: **'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'** What will you do as a result of being here today?