

Make a Lasting Impact 3) Impact of Scripture

Luke 16:19-31 • October 20, 2019 • Sermon Series on Luke 15-17



It's startling that according to the USDA the amount of food wasted in America is on average one pound per person per day. That's about a third of all the food from every home, restaurant, and cafeteria completely wasted. We are a prosperous nation. Growing up I had never thought much about the significance behind taking out the trash. But what we can toss out says a lot about us. I can remember in my first apartment that I needed to carry the trash all the way to the dumpster across the parking lot. I didn't think that those dumpsters said much about me and the life I had. But then I heard about a comment made by one of my neighbors who was an immigrant from Russia. They couldn't believe how quickly those dumpsters were filled. They never would produce as much trash when living in a poor area of Russia. These neighbors were amazed at the fact that they were so rich they had several garbage bags full of trash to take out every week. We have many nice things. And they are blessings from God that give us comfort in life. Most people in our country have relatively comfortable lives. We have and we use a lot of nice things. But our possessions don't give us the full picture, do they? Jesus points out that all the comforts and riches of this world won't bring lasting comfort. We might have a lot of food and comfortable things, but whether we use them much or not they all end up as trash in the end. And they can't help us one bit in our final hour. Where do we find the source of lasting comfort? Today we continue our series on Luke 15-17 on making a lasting impact. And we find our answer as Jesus explains the impact of Scripture. It brings real and lasting comfort.

Jesus presents us with two men who valued two different forms of comfort. One man seemed to have every comfort right at his fingertips. "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day." This rich man had it well! He had the best clothes. Purple wasn't cheap, it was the garment of the rich. And his inner garment was as soft as silk. Moreover, he didn't just have nice, comfortable things, we are told he celebrated. Not just a party like you and I may have on special occasions, this was his life. Every day was another feast and celebration. He was the example of someone living what many consider to be the good life.

Then Jesus presents another man by the name of Lazarus. This likely doesn't refer to Jesus' friend Lazarus who was apparently wealthy. No, this particular man was a beggar. That's all he could be. He didn't even have his own strength to get around. He was placed to beg at the gate of the rich man's house. He was helpless. To add to his discomfort, he had sores on his body. You can imagine these festered and bothered him each day. Moreover, he didn't just have to beg and put up with uncomfortable sores, we are told he hungered. He longed for even just scraps to come his way. You would think the daily celebrations of the rich man would produce a little for him to eat. You can be sure just as the average American person wastes food, this man had plenty left over. But Lazarus had no friend to bring him the scraps. He didn't seem to have any comfort. If he had any friends, they were just stray dogs that hung around him. He was the example of the pain-filled, penniless, and friendless beggar.

But Jesus presents the full picture of these two men for us. Only one of these men had real comfort. Life is short. Lazarus died. As for this poor man who seemed to have no comfort ---suddenly he was more comfortable than any of us can even imagine. God sent his angels to carry Lazarus to what Jesus calls, "Abraham's side." It is better translated as "Abraham's embrace." This was the Jewish designation for heaven -the comfort of God's people. Life is short for all of us. The rich man also died. And when he died his comfort died with him. Sure, he had a nice burial. You can imagine all the wealthy dignitaries showing up and the nice tomb he was placed in. His dead body received a "comfortable" funeral and burial. But his time of comfort was over. He didn't end up in comfort like Lazarus. Lazarus' name was written in the book of life. The rich man's name mattered not. It wasn't found in the book of life. Unlike Lazarus, the rich man was in hell, in torment.

Why did things end up this way? Why was the rich man now in torment? Was it because he was rich? Certainly not! Just look at Abraham the 'father of faith' who greeted Lazarus in paradise. Abraham was a very wealthy man! Yet Abraham entered into eternal life. So why didn't the rich man? The fact that he was wealthy did not condemn him to hell and torment. No, it was the rich man's use of his possessions that reveals something about him. We will see more of this later in Jesus' story. The rich man had a complete disregard for God's Word. Moses and the prophets told of giving to the poor. But as he disregarded Scripture, he also disregarded showing the love of God. To him this was just an empty command. What did it matter if he was already comfortable? It was obvious that his own personal comforts on earth mattered far more than whatever Scripture said. So enamored with his earthly wealth he dismissed the treasure of God's Word.

Does our desire for personal comfort ever lead us to disregard God's Word? We may be lulled into disregard for God's Word by the comforts of this life. What do you treasure more, your golf score chart, your hunting achievements, your sporting events, whatever brings you temporary pleasure, or the holy Scriptures? Now there is nothing wrong with golfing, hunting, sports, travel, and pursuing life's comforts. There's nothing wrong with going out to eat. But there is if it leads us to disregard God's Word. Like the rich man such a focus on earthly comfort and disregard for God's Word can dangerously grow into total disregard. For some it has. Such comfort is fleeting. Like the rich man, total disregard of God's Word will result in lasting and total separation from God's goodness.

Why was Lazarus brought to the comforts of heaven? Was it because he was poor? Certainly Not! The fact that he was poor and suffering without comfort did not grant him heaven and comfort. No, it was the poor Lazarus' eternal life that reveals something about his earthly life. Lazarus joined the "father of faith" because of his faith. His death made it clear that he had faith in "Moses and the Prophets". As the extreme opposite of the rich man he did not place his comfort on earthly things. His comfort was from Scripture. Lazarus was in heaven because of his trust, his faith in a God who promised mercy and forgiveness. He had faith in the Lord who promised comfort for the sinner.

Lazarus found in life that all his earthly comforts failed. For God's people this failing of earthly comforts will actually result in the end as a blessing. Lazarus knew and was continually reminded of a comfort that outweighed all his troubles. Lazarus received what he truly needed from Scripture, Moses and the Prophets. He could say along with the prophet Isaiah, *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."* (Isaiah 40)

We often need to be reminded of this comfort. There will be times when it may seem that God cares very little for our comfort. We may not ever become beggars, but financial stress comes. We may not be covered with sores, but illness, and eventually death all seems to daily remove our earthly comforts. We may not have to face hunger, but our needs often feel unmet. And if and when all else does fail, we know that we have real comfort. We have God's Word for bringing us God's comfort. Like Paul we can say, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,"* (2 Cor 1:3) And we know *this* brings true comfort **regardless** of the fact that we are wealthy like Abraham or poor like Lazarus. Lasting comfort is found, real comfort, in God's Word.

This is Jesus' point in telling this story: What we do with Scripture now has an eternal impact. Let me repeat that: What we do with Scripture today has a lasting and eternal impact. Look at the sudden turn around for the two men in his story! One seemed to have everything but had nothing of lasting value. One seemed to have nothing but had everything of lasting value. That's why Jesus says right before this story, "What is valuable among men is detestable in God's sight."

Some might object at this turnaround. The rich man did. Is it fair that in our short time on earth how we respond to Scripture should decide our eternal fate? Why should the rich man suffer eternally? Recall what Abraham said. *"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."* Notice Abraham doesn't say because. **Remember that the rich man is not suffering because he had good things**. He suffers because of his evil relationship toward God. God's mercy had been offered to the rich man. Abraham is simply reminding the rich man that God's judgments are just, and in hell they are final.

The rich man had completely disregarded God's Word during life, and he continued to disregard God's word even in the torments of hell. **Even as he was being tormented** he charged God of not being fair. *"(The rich man) answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham 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.'"* "God wasn't fair he charged! If only God had done a miracle or forced me to believe in him!" The rich man was basically saying, "God, I have a better idea than you. Since your Scripture wasn't enough to bring me to faith and repentance, why don't you send Lazarus to convert my sinful brothers?" Abraham replied on God's defense: "God gave you his Word, and you rejected it. God has already given the rich man's brothers all they need: his holy Word." But the rich man said this was not enough. "No! But if you do a little more, then they will believe." The rich man denied God's word its power. Hell's idea of conversion is to scare people into believing in God, to force faith upon the rebellious heart. But not even this would change the heart of the one who continually rejected God's Word. Abraham made it clear that God's Word was all that was needed. *"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.'"*

When we share God's Word, it becomes easy to succumb to this same thinking. "God won't change this man's heart, not if I keep doing what I am doing, I need more than just sharing God's Word. I need a testimonial. I need a miracle. I need more, God, if you want me to make disciples of all nations!"

But God's response to such foolish thinking is, "My Word is enough. Let them listen to it. Let them hear that I detest sin, that I removed sin by sending my son. Let them hear I give comfort, real comfort, eternal comfort." Our God says, "Let them hear through Moses and the Prophets and the evangelist and apostles how I have loved the entire world. Let them hear how my Son gave up all the glory and comfort of heaven so that he might share it with all who believe in him as Savior. Let them hear how even as he suffered greater discomfort than we can imagine, he said to the criminal next to him 'today you will be with me in Paradise.' Let them look to me now for mercy and they will find free forgiveness and the sure promise and hope of eternal life. Let them listen to my Word." The impact of that powerful Word is eternal.

Do you want to make a lasting impact? You don't need a miracle or a display. You don't need anything beyond what you already have: the Word of God. In the midst of all the temporary pleasures and comforts we share a lasting comfort. All else will fail and be tossed into the trash. Only one thing brings lasting comfort. It alone brings lasting comfort. Its impact is eternal.