



PARISH OF FINCHAMPSTEAD
AND CALIFORNIA

WEEK 3 – FROM 23 MARCH 2014

LENT WELL SPENT
... *with the poor*

Bible readings – Amos 6:1-7

¹ Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria; ⁴ alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; ⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; ⁶ who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. ⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

Comment

Amos is not impressed by those who treat their own comfort and well-being as paramount, and do not care for the fate of their own nation (*the ruin of Joseph*). When the people are forced to resettle in Babylon, they will lose all their privileges and lead the way.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

⁶ Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸ but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.

Comment

Paul approaches the issue of wealth and poverty from the point of view of the dangers inherent in wanting more than we need. Wealth is not necessary for a life of godliness and contentment.

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ Jesus said, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.' ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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.' ²⁷ He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰ He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ 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.'"

Context and comment

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus follows that of the dishonest manager. That parable, which we considered last week, was in many ways difficult to understand fully. Today's by comparison is clear and unequivocal, though the implications for us may be just as challenging.

Questions about the Parable

- 1 What is your immediate reaction to the parable? Is there anything that surprises or shocks you?
- 2 What do you think is the most important point Jesus is trying to make?

3 What do we learn about the rich man's character? What do we learn about Lazarus?

4 How would you expect the deaths of the two men to have been marked?

5 Why do you think the rich man was in Hades and Lazarus with Abraham?

6 To what extent does the depiction of Heaven and Hell (as we would call them), and the relationship between the two, fit with your own ideas? Did Jesus expect his hearers to take his description literally or metaphorically?

7 What is your reaction to the final section (v27-32)?

Questions about ourselves

8 How do you respond to this parable once you have thought about it a bit?

9 Do you consider yourself to be rich or poor?

10 What is your attitude to those less well-off than yourself? How do you react to beggars?

11 Do you find the distinction between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor helpful? How much do you know about poverty?

12 How are our perceptions of poverty moulded: by politicians, by the media, by our own experience, upbringing or instinct, by public campaigns on behalf of the poor, by our faith, or by other influences?

13 If we consider poverty to be against God's will for the world, should we be putting most effort into alleviating its effects or tackling its causes? How comfortable are you when the church or aid agencies try to tackle the causes of poverty and enter the political arena?

14 What are the implications for us as a relatively well-off Christian community in a relatively well-off area?

15 How seriously do you take the implied warnings in this parable? Is the threat of everlasting agony or the prospect of everlasting bliss something that affects your day to day behaviour? If it does, in what ways? If it doesn't, should it, and what would that imply?

16 In verse 29 *Moses and the prophets* means the Jewish Bible? How seriously do we take our Bibles? What would happen if we took them as seriously as this implies we should?

17 How far are we convinced *even if someone rises from the dead*?

Jesus talks frequently about wealth and riches

Jesus often spoke about the perils of wealth – far more often than he taught about two other dangers which seem to absorb much more of the church's time now – sex and power. In addition he modelled a lifestyle which, while it was dependent on financial support from those who may well have been well-off, was far closer to poverty than to wealth.

Concluding Reflection

Every Christian to another is Christ himself; and thy neighbour's need hath as good right in thy goods, as hath Christ himself, which is heir and lord over all. And look, what thou owest to Christ, that thou owest to thy neighbour's need. ... When thou hast done thy duty to thine household, and yet hast further abundance of the blessing of God, that owest thou to the poor that cannot labour, or would labour and can get no work, and are destitute of friends; to the poor, I mean, which thou knowest, to them of thine own parish. ... If thy neighbours which thou knowest be served, and thou yet have superfluity, and hearest necessity to be among the brethren a thousand miles off, to them art thou debtor. Yea, to the very infidels we be debtors, if they need, as far forth as we maintain them not against Christ, or to blaspheme Christ. Thus is every man, that needeth thy help, thy father, mother, sister, and brother in Christ; even as every man, that doth the will of the Father, father, mother, sister, and brother unto Christ.

(William Tyndale – d1536 – *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*)