

Luke 16: 19 – end

**'Dives and Lazarus'**

How do we react to that Gospel passage? It is a parable and so it's unlikely that Jesus – or St Luke – intends to describe the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell. But the message is clear.

Jesus warns us that our time is short. Our opportunities to serve the poor don't last forever. Our economic choices shape our deepest identities and our eternal destinies. The tragic realisation of Scrooge in Charles Dickens "Christmas Carol" comes to mind: "These are the chains I forged in life."

But tragedy isn't a necessity. In the language of this week's epistle, by sharing generously and being rich in good deeds, we **"store up the treasure of a good foundation for the future,"** and thus **"take hold of the life that is truly life."**

We're not taught to disparage the rich. Thank God for the wealthy women who supported Jesus (Luke 8: 2-3), for the rich man Joseph of Arimathea who tenderly buried him, and for all the wealthy saints today who follow their footsteps.

Wealth isn't intrinsically evil, but it's definitely dangerous. In helping the poor we acknowledge that riches can hinder our own salvation. We admit that we are susceptible to its seduction. 1 Timothy 6 describes the realm of riches as fraught with arrogance, traps, temptation, harmful and foolish dreams, ruin, destruction, grief and wandering from the faith.

There are no easy answers to the hard sayings of Jesus about money. Over the centuries, believers have grappled with parables like Lazarus and Dives, some have radically renounced wealth even though they were "super rich", others have joined the "anti-wealth" of the ascetics, some have cared for the poor, many have chosen the everyday generosity of ordinary believers.

We freely share not out of guilt, ascetic renunciation (although God calls some people to that path), not from some communistic ideal that loathes private property, nor because the poor are virtuous. Paul is clear, "God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

Rather, in serving the poor we care for our own souls by imitating the character of God himself. Only in heaven, said Mother Theresa, will we understand how much we owe the poor for helping us to love God like we should.

Adapted from <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20130923JJ.shtml>