

# The difference Jesus makes to the future (Luke 16)

*[adapted with permission from the 'Introducing God' course material]*

- (SLIDE 1)
- **Main point:** Jesus says to look at the future and act accordingly.
- **Application:** Act now in the light of the future.

## 1 A man who saw the future

(SLIDE 2)

- 2.30am December 11, 1992. Huddled around Dad's shortwave radio on a remote Fijian island of Galoa – suddenly our decision to ignore travel warnings of the pending cyclone Joni seemed foolish
- (SLIDE 3) We had heard warnings about Cyclone Joni before we even left Australia, and again before we left the safe island of Vitu Levu in Fiji but we weren't going to let the possibility of a bit of wind and rain change our holiday plans so we pushed on with our travel plans island hopping to Galoa and now were right in Cyclone Joni's path
- We were not like those people in New Orleans who couldn't leave with Hurricane Katrina fast approaching – we had the opportunity to totally avoid the tropical cyclone but instead we stubbornly travelled right into it!
- The radio report said that Cyclone Joni would strike where we were at 12pm with 220km winds.
- The trouble was that at 2.30am we were already terrified – we could hear huge palm trees crashing down outside, the walls of our hut were shaking violently, my sister was huddled in the corner cowering. Our hut could be blown down at any second.
- But we knew that if we went outside we would be blown away
- But at the first break of daylight we received a knock at the door! One of the villagers, Surelli, had bravely come to evacuate us

- Locked arm in arm, taking one step forward and being blown 5 steps backwards, he led us past huts that had been blown down and destroyed right next to us and past 15 metre palm trees that had been uprooted like matchsticks, and finally into the safety of the one cyclone proof concrete building that had Surelli just recently been built.
  - We stayed there all day, as the wind got even stronger and caused even more damage until eventually it passed
  - We saw the sign, the future – and stubbornly ignored it – we travelled right into the cyclone.
  - Surelli – saw the signs. He knew that cyclones came every now and then
  - He saw the future.
  - And he acted accordingly. He had built the cyclone proof building to be ready
  - (SLIDE 4)
  - Jesus would have praised Surelli. Why? Well that's what we will look at now
- 
- In light of a future reality of cyclones, the cyclone proof hut made a big difference to Surelli's life – AND OURS!
  - We have been looking in this mini series over the last few weeks at the difference Jesus makes.
  - Asking questions like, "What difference would it make to be in relationship with God through Jesus?"
  - And so the question for today is "In light of the future, what difference would we make to our lives now?"

## **2 Jesus' journey to his death**

(SLIDE 5)

- And we are picking up in Luke chapter 16.
- Jesus is on a journey to his death.
- And Jesus is speaking to his followers.
- But the Jewish religious leaders are listening.

### 3 A positive example of seeing the future and acting accordingly 16:1-18

(SLIDE 6)

#### a The shrewd manager sees the future (Sentence 1-3)

- And Jesus tells what at first seems like a puzzling story in the first part of chapter 16.
- But the point is clear enough: **see the future and act accordingly.**
- Let's see how it goes. You can follow your outlines
- Luke 16, sentence 1:  
*16:1 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions."*

- The manager is a senior employee.
- He's the manager of the rich man's whole estate.  
*16:2 So he [the rich man] called him in and asked him, [it's really 'accused him']:  
'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'*

- What's the manager to do? Sentence 3:  
*16:3 The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job.'*

- Now this manager is not in a good situation.
- It seems he's been given notice to wrap up affairs, and then he will be out on the street.
- And the dishonest manager can see the future: it's poverty and hunger — unless he does something now.
- He's had a white-collar job.
- And the dishonest manager doesn't want to go back to manual labour. He says:

*I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg.*

(PAUSE)

**b** *The shrewd manager acts in the light of the future 4-7*

- So the manager acts in the light of the future.
- His fate with his master is sealed.
- He sees that his long-term interests lie outside his current employment.
- So having seen the future, he does as our Fijian friend Surelli did, and acts accordingly.
- He acts to improve his status with others.
- Sentence 4:

*16:4 'I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' 16:5 So he called in each one of his master's debtors.*

- Now these debts he's looking at are to do with farmland.
- It looks like the master rents the land out to tenants, in return for a share of the crops.

*He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 16:6 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'*

- When you work that out: back then, that's the equivalent of a man's salary for three years, that he's just knocked off the price.
- Sentence 7:

*16:7 Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'*

- And that's eight to ten years' salary that he's just knocked off the price.

(PAUSE)

- Now, some things are clear here, some things aren't.

- What is clear is that the guy knocks something off the bill.
- In fact he knocks a lot off the bill.

(PAUSE)

**c *Jesus says the manager has acted correctly 8***

- Now, Jesus praises the manager's shrewdness.  
*16:8 The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.*
- Just incidentally, I don't think 'shrewd' necessarily implies 'dishonest'.
- I don't think Jesus is praising dishonesty.
- The manager may or may not have been dishonest in this case.
- But he was certainly shrewd.
- He had seen the future and acted accordingly.
- And that's shrewd. That's wise. That's smart. That's being on the ball
- So Jesus praises the bloke's prudence, wisdom, shrewdness.
- Listen to how Jesus praises the man's shrewdness, sentence 8:  
*8 For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.*
- What Jesus is saying is that all around us there are people being shrewd in their dealings with the matters of the world.
- And he is saying how crazy it is when people give more thought and effort securing their temporary physical well being than securing their eternal spiritual well being

- There was an interview on the radio a while back.
  - Clive Robertson was interviewing a consultant from the superannuation industry.
  - (SLIDE 7)
  - And Clive was asking the superannuation expert questions.
  - And the superannuation expert was arguing: **We need to think about the future.**
  - We need to look after our futures.
  - The population is aging; we won't be able to afford the pension for everyone.
  - You need to think about the future — your future — and make sure you prepare properly.
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- And really he was saying, be like the Surelli the Fijian.
  - Prepare properly.
  - Be shrewd.
  - Think now in the light of the future.
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- And Clive Robertson, who is a Christian man, said to this superannuation expert, "Yes, it's an excellent point you make, the importance of thinking about the future, and preparing for the future, and living rightly now, in the light of the future."
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- Then Robertson asked his next question:
  - "Have you thought about your future, and what will happen after you die?"
  - There was a long pause on the radio!
  - And this man from the Australian Superannuation Association was completely floored. He had no idea what to say, and finally stumbled back to Clive, "Ahhh, no!"
  - And Clive said to him, "Well you should think about the future! You should think about what will happen after you die."
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- And I think Clive's point is the same as Jesus' point.

- The people of the world are shrewdly putting all this effort into thinking about and planning for their superannuation or thinking and planning about their career.
  - But the people of the light, that's people in a relationship with Jesus, are to be shrewd in that same way, but their efforts shouldn't be poured into superannuation or working – but our efforts should be invested in the eternal futures, sorting out our eternal superannuation!
  - I think Jesus' point is that those who follow him will be people who think about the future, with the same diligence and enthusiasm that the superannuation people think about their futures.
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- (SLIDE 8 – BLANK)
  - What I think Jesus is particularly getting at, is that our **view of the future must have an impact on our actions in the present.** In particular, it must have an impact on the way we spend our money in the present.
  - Well that raises the question, doesn't it: What is going to happen in the future?

#### **4 A negative example of not seeing the future and not acting 16:19-30**

(SLIDE 9)

- Now, having taught so clearly on the importance of looking at the future, and acting appropriately, Jesus now paints a negative example
- He tells the story of a rich man who should have seen the future, but failed to. He wasn't shrewd, and so the consequences for him were dreadful.

## **a The rich man lives for the moment**

- Jesus tells of a rich man who man spends his life celebrating.
- Sentence 19:  
*19 There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.*
- Fine meals. It's a New Year's Eve party every night.
- And Jesus draws a sharp contrast between the rich man and the beggar at his gate:  
*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.*
- This beggar, Lazarus, was probably a cripple, immobilised.
- He was laid down, covered with sores.
- Surface ulcers, abscesses.
- The dogs that come and lick his sores aren't poodles!
- These dogs are feral.
- And the feral dogs are licking the open abscesses.
- And Lazarus is so immobilised that he can't move to avoid the feral dogs licking his open sores.

## **b The rich man fails to see the future**

- The rich man is successful, envied and idolised, but he fails to see the future.
- And everything that Jesus recommends in the previous story, the rich man fails to do in this one.
- The rich man isn't generous with his money.
- The rich man lives autonomously.
- The rich man isn't shrewd.
- The rich man doesn't live now in the light of the future.

- It's almost like Jesus is painting a picture of Sydney living – in comparison to the rest of the world we are living in luxury every day, the question is are we like the rich man, living for the moment, living autonomously, not being shrewd, not living in light of the future?

**c *The future (after death) is heaven and hell***

- And Jesus says that this future is one of life after death. This future involves a place called heaven and a place called hell.
- Friends, we mustn't soft-pedal this, because Jesus doesn't.
- Jesus teaches clearly — without a shadow of a doubt, black and white — that there is life after death, and that there are two states in eternity: heaven and hell.

**i Heaven is the place of comfort and rich relationships 22:**

- Firstly, heaven is the place of comfort and rich relationships. Read with me sentence 22:  
*22 The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.*

- That's heaven!
- Lazarus is taken by angels to heaven, to be with Abraham.
- Jesus says Lazarus is by the side of Abraham. '
- And we can see from what Abraham says that heaven is a place of comfort. Sentence 25, Abraham speaking to the rich man:

*16:25 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.'*

- Jesus says heaven is the place of comfort and rich relationships.
- For Jesus, heaven is the good life.

- Jesus paints heaven as relaxing at the banquet, enjoying rich relationship with God forever.

(PAUSE)

## ii Hell is awful and irreversible

- But there's also hell from sentence 22:  
*The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he [the rich man] was in torment...*
- Jesus paints a picture of hell as awful, as suffering, torment, loneliness, despair, agony – permanent!
- People don't like this.
- I don't like it.
- But, I, you, we cannot avoid the fact that Jesus talks about it.
- We have to face it.

(PAUSE)

- I know it's popular — even in some church circles, and whole denominations — to say that hell does not exist.
- But Jesus is crystal clear about what happens after death.
- And so to say that hell does not exist is effectively to call Jesus a liar.
- Because Jesus, in this story that he tells (as well as in many other places), clearly says that hell does exist.

(PAUSE)

- People joke about it.
- "It will be great in hell — all my mates will be there."
- No!
- The only thing in hell will be loneliness – separation from God.

- Let's think for a moment about what God has been saying all along, about all that we've heard in *Introducing God*.
  - If I spend my life saying, "I want to be autonomous. Leave me alone — this is my life", then what I get when I die is just what I want.
  - God leaves me alone.
- 
- I travelled through Western Turkey on my own which I loved. Visiting the major tourist sites, I would often meet other backpackers during the day or at the hostel & we would go out for dinner together
  - But for a few weeks I travelled to Eastern Turkey where due to the Kurdish war, there was no tourism and no other backpackers, no-one spoke any English, and there were no hostels, only hotels – so I couldn't meet anyone
  - Every night for dinner I would eat out at a cheap & nasty restaurant by myself
  - The problem was also that I was very low on cash and could only afford the most basic meal
  - It was very lonely, no-one spoke English and no-one who would even look at me
  - (SLIDE 10)
- 
- You see it is totally foreign in Eastern Turkey for someone to eat in a restaurant, even the dodgiest kind, by themselves – they only ever eat out in groups.
  - It's the ultimate statement in social failure, to have to go to eat at a restaurant in Eastern Turkey by yourself
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- Hell is being at the dingy restaurant on your own, with no food, and no-one to talk to forever.
  - But that's a bit trivial. Hell the absence of relationship. More than that, Jesus says it is torment.
  - (SLIDE 11 – blank)
- (PAUSE)

- And Jesus says that the future can't be altered once you are there.
- If you are in heaven, you are there for eternity.
- If you are in hell, you are there for eternity.
- Jesus says that once you're there, it's irreversible!
- It's too late to change – There is NO second chance!
  
- Look at sentence 24:
 

*24 So he [the rich man] called to him [Abraham], '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.'*
  
- On earth, the beggar was hungry and wanted a crumb of food, but couldn't have it.
- Now the rich man is thirsty and wants a drop of water, but Abraham says — well, follow it with me, sentence 25:
 

*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.'*
  
- The Punch line, comes in sentence 26:
 

*26 'And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*
  
- Jesus says that the chasm in eternity is unbridgeable – it's a permanent gulf.
- There's nothing that can be done in the afterlife to change one's status.
  
- Friends, just incidentally, there is a teaching that is popular in some church groups about Purgatory.

- And the idea is that Purgatory is some kind of a waiting room after death, where things get sorted out, and if you have been a bit naughty, God makes you wait on detention for a while.
- It's an idea that I was told and believed for most of my life
- But it is an idea that is inconsistent with what Jesus is teaching here and with what the whole Bible says.
- Jesus teaches gently, but with crystal clarity.
- Once you get to wherever you are going, you are there for eternity.
- The future can't be changed once you are there.
- The chasm won't move, and can't be bridged.

(SLIDE 12)

- In Nepal, I went hiking for several weeks – during our first few days of hiking in the foothills of the Himalaya's there were some rickety bridges that allowed us to cross from one side of the river to the other,
- (SLIDE 13) but then as we got higher, and higher and higher we were forced to stay on the side of the mountain we were on.
- Even if we wanted to cross to the other side it was impossible! It was several thousand metres from where we were to the bottom of the valley and a raging river was in between us and the other side – with NO bridges
- Once we die, the chasm won't move, and can't be bridged.

(PAUSE)

## 5 Jesus' punch line: Act now in the light of the future

- (SLIDE 14) So the rich man works out it's too late for him, but he wants others to act now in the light of the future, to act more shrewdly than he did. To cross over the bridge before it's too late
- Sentence 27: It's Jesus telling the story, the rich man speaking.

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

- Listen to what Abraham says back to him,  
*29 Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'*
- Abraham says, "They have got the Bible."
- That's what Moses and the Prophets were — the Scriptures, the word of God.
- That doesn't persuade the rich man.
- Because he knows that *he* had the Bible, and he didn't look at it; he didn't listen.
- The rich man on earth ignored God's clear, open, revealed word.

(PAUSE)

- That should shake us.
- Because that is true of some of us.
- Certainly it's true of all of us.
- We may read the Bible regularly, or maybe we have just started during Introducing God – but reading or hearing is not enough – we need to listen and act on God's Word
- But the rich man isn't satisfied with that, and so has another shot.

- He pleads with Abraham, sentence 30:  
*30 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent' [turn around].*

The rich man pleads:

- Send them a wake-up call.
  - Shock them.
  - Shake them.
  - Send them a person from the dead.
  - SHAKE THEM!
  - WAKE THEM!
  - Tell them to turn!
  - Tell them to repent!
  - Tell them to live now in the light of the future.
- And Abraham says:  
*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.'*
- Fascinating that last word from Jesus.
  - Fascinating coming just weeks before Jesus himself rose from the dead.
  - And Jesus' point is clear in hindsight: if someone won't listen to the Bible, of course they won't listen if someone rises from the dead.
  - Which is why, friends, Introducing God has not been filled with a whole lot of proofs about whether or not Jesus rose from the dead — because Jesus says that won't persuade you.

- Rather, Jesus says, the way to persuade you is to encourage you to look at the biography of God, to look at Moses and the prophets. To look at God's very words to us
- (PAUSE)

- Friends, some of us are the rich man's brothers.
- Still on earth, still alive, still with a chance to turn — and yet still ignoring God.
- We need to repent, to turn around.
- We need to apologise to God for ignoring him, ignoring Jesus.
- We need to start living, recognising Jesus, listening to Jesus, respecting Jesus, honouring Jesus. Living with Jesus as our Lord and King

(PAUSE)

- But if we were to do that, there would still a problem.
- What about everything that's happened already?
- What about all the time we have spent ignoring God already?
- And what about the time in the future, where despite the best of intentions today, we will muck things up?
- Well, we need to remember again that Jesus was telling this story as he was on his way to his death — the death to pay for our autonomy.
- His death on the cross is like the bridge wedged between two mountains of the Holy God and our autonomous, sinful state
- It is only acting now, by repenting of our sin and putting our faith in what Jesus has done that we can cross the bridge to experience the future of eternal life.

## 6 A man who saw Eternity

(SLIDE 15)

- We started with a story about a Surelli, the Fijian man who saw the future and acted accordingly
- Lets finish with a story about a drunk here in the Inner West in the 1930s, who saw the future of Eternity and acted accordingly
- A drunk who just so happened to be good friends with Fiona's great uncle and was a guest at my wife Fiona's parents wedding
- (SLIDE 16 - blank)

- Arthur Stace was born in a slum in Balmain in 1884.
- By 1930, Stace was an alcoholic who knew life at its hardest.
- He'd worked in brothels.
- He'd been to war.
- And yet on the 6th of August 1930, Arthur Stace saw the future and acted accordingly.
- (SLIDE 17)
- Stace turned back to God, and trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Arthur Stace turned and trusted in Jesus as his Lord and Christ.
- A little while later, Stace was in church, listening to a talk.
- And the minister said, "I wish I could shout 'ETERNITY' through the streets of Sydney."
- My guess is that Stace might have taken on something of that plea from the rich man to Lazarus!
- I imagine he thought, "Well, I am a beggar who could go tell the brothers. I could warn the brothers to turn and cross the chasm, before the chasm becomes unbridgeable."

(SLIDE 18)

- And so each morning, from 1930 till 1967, for 37 years, Stace would leave his home in Pyrmont at 5 am and walk, stopping every hundred metres or so to write 'Eternity'.
- (SLIDE 19)
- The dyslexic, illiterate Stace wrote (or graphited, if you like) the word 'Eternity' in chalk in Wynyard, Glebe, Paddington, Randwick, Dover Heights, Rose Bay, Leichhardt, Annandale, Balmain...
- (SLIDE 20)
- It is estimated that he wrote 'Eternity' in elegant copperplate handwriting, around half a million times, before his death in 1967.
- Stace has of course become one of the great legends of Sydney.
- (SLIDE 21)
- His word 'Eternity' was imprinted deeper into Sydney's consciousness
- (SLIDE 22)
- through the New Year's Eve fireworks for the Year 2000.
- (SLIDE 23)
- What is Arthur Stace's message to us?
- It's the same as Clive Robertson's message!
- It's Jesus Christ's message.
- (SLIDE 24)
- **See the future, and act accordingly! Turn back to God while there's still time.**
- Do not be like my family stubbornly heading into a cyclone
- Be like the Fijian Surelli – see the future and act accordingly

- If you know that you haven't been living and acting in light of the future, with Jesus as your Lord and King, then you need to repent and turn back to God before it's too late.
  - Jesus makes **all** the difference to the future!
  - We can turn back to God anytime by praying a prayer like I will pray now – simply saying sorry, thankyou and please to God.
    - Sorry for living autonomously
    - Thanking Jesus for dying for you
    - And asking God to please forgive you and give you His Spirit to help you to live his way.

- I will pray this now and pause after each line if you would like to pray along with me in your own mind and hearts. Let's talk to God now

*O God, our creator and Father,*

*I'm sorry for my autonomy and for treating myself as King and not Jesus.*

*I want to turn back now, while there's still time.*

*I thank you for Jesus and for his death, that paid for my autonomy.*

*Please, Lord, forgive me and give me your Spirit, to help me to live, not autonomously, but in relationship with you.*

*Amen.*

If you prayed this with me this morning, or if you want to pray or simply find out more about what it means to live with Jesus as King, can I encourage you to come and talk to me after the service or to one of your friends who you know is a Christian, so that we can make sure that you will be well supported in your decision to follow Jesus.

**Words 4664**