

Mr. Smith was an engineer who after many years of working, died. He arrived at the Pearly Gates and the angel on duty told him that he was in the wrong place. With a fair disposition, Mr. Smith went to - the other place. He began doing what engineers do - organizing committees, fixing problems, etc. Well, St. Peter was reviewing things and found that Mr. Smith was not in heaven and called the devil directly to request Mr. Smith's immediate return. In response, the devil said, "No way! Things have never been so smooth, he fixed the air conditioner, everything is running on schedule you can't have him back!"

St. Peter said, "That is ludicrous! He is in the wrong place. If you don't send him back, I am suing you!"

The Devil laughed, "A lawsuit, sure, go ahead, where do you think you will find a lawyer?"

In our Gospel text today we have two men who are in community, yet living very different existences, the rich man in the story remains unnamed throughout this parable. His unnamed status makes it possible for him to be any wealthy person who ignores the poor and goes about their life in finery. Meanwhile, we have Lazarus, a poor man, who quite literally only wants a scrap of what the rich man has in his life, The Gospel writer Luke tells us, "All he lived for was to get a meal from scraps off the rich man's table."<sup>1</sup>

This poor man, named Lazarus, wanted only compassion and mercy. The rich man wanted prestige and glamor. When thinking of our own life is it not possible that what we seek should be the same as Lazarus. When our life comes to a close, our hearts will be opened to God's will. We must live for God's mercy and implement the graciousness we received from God in our life.

It is a bit strange to say in our society that we wish to be like a beggar, someone who is poor. Our ambitions are to take us to new heights of glory - to be Albert Pujols and hit 700 home runs!

As I have mentioned before, in Luke's Gospel there is a preference for those who are on the outskirts of society: the marginalized and poor.

Perhaps this is because when someone has very little; they seek God the most. What else do they have except for their faith? They are as treasured in God's eyes as in society.

Together, let's look deeper at Lazarus: first, it is impressive that he was named at all in this parable. He is occasionally tied to the resurrected Lazarus, brother of Martha and Mary, the one who was raised from the dead after beginning to stinketh.<sup>2</sup>

The Lazarus we hear about in this story is likely not the same person, however, the name is important to the story. Through much, very exciting conjugation and language tracing, it means, "God has helped."<sup>3</sup>

Imagine that for a moment. *This beggar* is the one who God has lifted up and helped. The one who sought only something minor was the one that God exalted. The life Lazarus led was

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 16:20-21 The Message

<sup>2</sup> John 11:38-44; Luke 7:12-17

<sup>3</sup> "The name is Latin and is derived from the Greek Lazaros (from Elezaros), which in turn, represents the Hebrew name Eleazar meaning, "God has helped." There is debate about whether this means the man in all his help has turned to God." Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.782-790

pitiful to say the least, he was left by himself each day with only dogs as friends, “His best friends were the dogs who came and licked his sores.”<sup>4</sup>

He was not said to be buried, further proof of his poor and lonely life: no one mourned him. Yet this parable reminds *us that it is not for earthly* glory that we are striving. Eternally, he was given peace. I cannot imagine anything more perfect in the world. The evidence of his actions were seen in the fruit of what happened after his death: he was with Abraham in heaven.

In Contrast to Lazarus we have this nameless rich man. He too had a true love, sadly, that man’s love was himself. He was proud of his accomplishments. His role in life. His joy. His family. This man was perhaps a leader in his family and led them to similar dispositions. Though Jesus was not the first to state that wealth and poverty are not indicative of God’s pleasure with humanity,<sup>5</sup> This tale was certainly haunting for those in the audience. Jesus is intentionally drawing out a picture of haunting for those listening so they know the torture of the trappings in the world.

In a way, the story almost shows the rich man having a change of heart when he asks for help for his brothers, “Then let me ask you, Father: Send him to the house of my father where I have five brothers, so he can tell them the score and warn them so they won’t end up here in this place of torment.”<sup>6</sup>

The chilling part of this is we can imagine his motivations are egocentric. The rich man is not necessarily asking for his brother's good, but because he led them astray with his actions. Rather than compassion it is likely he is continuing in selfishness.<sup>7</sup>

As easy as it seems to make this into some type of moral lesson about being rich v. poor; the parable of Lazarus and the Rich man is more than that: It is a way to see how we treat others and have compassion.<sup>8</sup> There are selfish rich and poor people: the point of the story is to have a grateful heart. In order to seek God’s mercy we must have such compassion in our own hearts without this; we are left void and heartless.

We see the parable better if we look back at what is told in chapter 15: the parables told to a large crowd about the lost sheep, son, and coin. Those parables were somewhat gentle, nearly pastoral speaking about redemption and mercy. This is a similar message, with a caveat. Jesus told his disciples the story of the dishonest steward; telling them to be cautious.

Naturally, the Pharisees objected and their answer was the parable of Lazarus and the Rich man.<sup>9</sup> Jesus is telling the Pharisees that they are too focused on themselves: on their own reputation and glory rather than on having compassion for others. It is this parable that marks one more division between Jesus and the religious leaders. Of course, they would like to keep the status quo while Jesus would like to change things.

Priest wrote in his Book on the Gospel of Luke, “It is often easy to conclude that something is inherently wrong with people who do not meet cultural norms...can we wonder how people carry their burdens instead of condemning the burdens they carry?”

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 16, 20-21 The Message

<sup>5</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 16:27-28

<sup>7</sup> Mohn, K.C. (2022). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-8>

<sup>8</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

<sup>9</sup> Mohn, K.C. (2022). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-8>

This is something that I know is difficult. It is easy to look at the unhoused friend, because they are addicts. That the parent in the grocery store is too lenient and that is why their child is throwing a tantrum. With so much social media and gossip on the news it is easy to judge and hard to examine.

Our call as Christians is to be compassionate. We see Jesus in a new light, because Jesus is answering the Pharisees plainly: what you do on earth matters because it shows your heart.

It is not that we are saved by works, it is that our hearts are reflected in our actions.<sup>10</sup> It is not for us to judge those who are poor: it is for us to care and have compassion in the best ways possible. We receive mercy when we truly turn our hearts to God. When we see God completely and give over our earthly reputation, we see Christ. The best way we can find God is through the scriptures.

The chilling response from Abraham to The rich man that closes the parable is telling, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”<sup>11</sup> Our savior has been raised from the dead. Still, our life and our hearts must be a reflection of the words we study. When we are steeped in these sacred texts, when our heart pours out love, then we will receive Christ’s mercy. Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 16:31 and Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.