

The Rich Man and Lazarus, Part 2

Luke 16:19-23

Wealthy buyers are restricted from wearing dyed garments since no royal official wants to show up to court in his purple or blue or Tyrian dye and see some Elon Musk kind of a guy show up and upstage him. So they have to restrict this. They have to control it so that only they can wear the coveted color. No one without rank, title, status. They're restricted.

So when Jesus describes this rich man clothing himself in this *porphyra*, this purple, this, this is a visible representation of this man's status, of the degree and the extent of his wealth. He has no concern, this guy, about hiding his wealth, hiding his status, he's not like maybe some rich Americans who kind of cloak their status and their wealth in maybe common, plain-looking clothing, try to subdue it, try to be understated.

Not this guy. In fact, he's the kind of guy who spares no expense. He wants everyone to see just how wealthy he really is. Purple describes the outer garment, that by which he flaunts his

wealth and his status. This is about image, this is about how he appears to people. It's about putting his wealth on display.

This next term, fine linen, this describes the inner garment. This is the one that's worn closest to the skin, the undergarments, linen fabric. It's made from flax, and prior to the invention of machines that automated all our linen making, our textile industries, this is another very labor-intensive process when it's produced by hand.

After harvesting flax stalks, which take roughly three months to grow into the maturity in order to extract the, the fibers, the plants are soaked in water. They're cut down, soaked in water for two weeks. It's a process that's called retting. R-e-t-t-i-n-g. Retting softens the stalks, and it dissolves the pectin that's inside, that connects and binds those internal fibers together in order that they may be separated and extracted from the stalk.

So after two weeks of retting, then ten days of drying and another five days of what's called "stooking," s-t-o-o-k-i-n-g, that is, to gather the dry stocks together in stooks or bundles and then stand them upright so that they may dry and drain.

Well, there's another process that exposes and removes the fiber known as stutching, crimping, and brushing. You're like,

Man, where did this guy study this throughout the week? Don't ask. But it is interesting. But it is also extremely labor-intensive when it's done by hand. Once those fibers have been removed through the stutching, crimping, brushing, they've been removed and they are ready now to be spun into linen thread on a spinning wheel, which is also extremely labor-intensive.

All this before the modern automation, textile industry, all that technology. Back then, the linen was divided into four types, from the lowest to highest. It was smooth cloth, then thin cloth, then fine thin cloth, and then what's known as byssos, b-y-s-s-o-s. Byssos is the highest quality, the most precious, the most valuable, and that is the term, byssos, that Jesus uses to describe this man's undergarments.

Byssos linen was used in Egypt, and it was exclusively for the Pharaohs and the priestly class. It was also used for, in Egypt, for royal burials, for mummification of the royals. It was used to adorn the statues of the gods. Seems kind of worthless to, but that's how they flaunt their wealth, is to adorn statues with this linen, like the Tyrian purple. Not just anyone could wear byssos linen. This is the clothing of Egyptian Pharaohs and Egyptian priests, Roman emperors and senators. It's the top 1% of the top 1% who are wearing this stuff.

So obviously no one can see this man's byssos undergarments. Jesus is describing this. This isn't any way of flaunting his status. This, this is not about that. That's the external purple. Internally, this is about the, the, the innerwear is what is, is showing his love of physical comfort. That's what Jesus is describing here. This guy spared no expense, not just for the outward show, but also for the inward feeling, feeling of soft clothing next to his skin.

In the modern world, we take comfort for granted. Our clothing, textiles, technology, automation, all that's drastically reduced the cost of clothing. It puts comfortable clothing within everybody's reach, so we don't think, really, twice about it. But most people throughout history all over the world have worn a much rougher clothing that felt more like wearing something akin to a burlap sack, scratchy, uncomfortable, hot, not breathable, all the time. So Jesus' audience as they hear about this rich man's undergarments, they can only imagine the level of luxury and comfort that this man enjoyed every day of his life. And it's over the top.

So based on how Jesus is describing the man's clothing, we can assume even more about the way he cared for himself and his body. He had baths with skin care treatments in it and lotions

and potions and all the rest, all the, the best that money can buy. All of it to bathe his body in luxury, to soothe his skin, every blemish erased, ever, no pleasure denied him. He's got personal trainers, fitness guys and exercise. And he does his exercise and he does his, his recovery process, and he gets into the bath and he's rubbed down with lotions. This is a man who loved to look good, and this is a man who loved to feel good. He is a proud man in the way he displays his wealth, and he's a sensual man in the way he lives his wealth.

And this is all illusory. Jesus' final description of the man is about how he spent his time. Says, "He feasted sumptuously every day." So by, every day, we get the point. But to emphasize that, Jesus puts the verb *eu, euphraino*, in the present tense, which conveys this continuousness, a habit of living. It's a lifestyle, his habitual way of living, it's one continuous, never-ending party. The verb *euphraino, euphraino*, doesn't, doesn't strictly mean feasting. It includes food, of course, but the term is broader than that. Refers to merriment, or what they used to call it, glad-making. In our vernacular, though, it's just strictly partying. Partying. Jesus adds an adverb, *lampros*, to describe the kind of partying that this guy is indulging in. It's luxurious partying. It's sumptuous, and

elegant, and lavish spending for the sake of the enjoyment of the party.

This is a man who's got it all. He's got the richest foods, he's got the finest of wines, he's got the most talented performers, the most exciting entertainers, he enjoys the most exclusive, most exotic pleasures. And according to the verb tenses, this is all a continuous, ongoing reality, one never-ending party.

We learn something else about the rich man from verse 20, when Jesus starts to describe the poor man. The poor man's laid where? The rich man's gate, right? Gate. This guy's home had a gate, a *pulona*, and a *pulona* describes a, a gate, or a gateway into a large, large estate such as it could be described for a walled city. That's the *pulona* that, that opens up, and it's got a moat surrounding it, and the drawbridge comes down. That huge gate, that could be described as a *pulona*. Could be a gateway into a temple or a palace complex.

Here it describes the way into this man's palatial mansion. Man's home is not merely in a gated community. The man's home is a gated community. Pictures the man's home, then, as a hive of activity, where daily operations would rival a small city. Rich man's, he owns the best, most capable, most intelligent slaves

he could, that money can buy. He has the means to train them up to their fullest potential, to their highest competencies, to get the most out of these slaves who existed for no other reason than to keep his party going.

Arborists, botanists, gardeners, maintain the visual aesthetic in the grounds, the central experience of his estates, the beauty of the grounds, the smells of the blossoms blooming, all of that for his visitors and himself. Chefs planned an exquisite menus. A skilled kitchen staff put the plans into action, provided for all the feasting, the maître d', there, to oversee the service staff, to host and to serve.

Money managers, investment officers, financial planners are all there to make sure his money keeps making more money. He's got nothing to worry about. Security staff protects his property, his assets, and high above, perched above it all underneath him, making sure the rich man is untroubled. His mind is clear. He concerns himself nothing, with nothing else but pleasure and enjoyment, is a steward, a manager of the whole enterprise. That's the rich man. Uber rich. Filthy rich. Sounds like he's got it made, right? From all appearances, he's got not a worry in the world.

And we remember again, it's just an illusion. The extreme opposite end of the social scale, the very bottom rung of the financial economic ladder, in fact, he's so low he's fallen off the ladder and he's free-falling into oblivion, is another man. Verse 20, verse 20. His situation is abject, dire poverty. "At the rich man's gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs even came and licked at his sores."

Poor man. Jesus used the word *ptochos*, someone who's in abject poverty, someone who's totally dependent on others for support and survival. Adjective comes from a verb that means to bow down timidly. It refers to a, a man who's completely destitute, no means at all. This isn't like a grifter or a con man that we see on the side of the road holding up a sign, you know, you know, I'll dance for beer, or whatever, that, you know, says, holding up some clever sign on the side of the road. This is not a guy like that.

This is someone who is in abject poverty. He is a true beggar, and Jesus says he's laid at the rich man's gate, right? Passive voice. He's put there by somebody else, perhaps a equally impoverished family member, or maybe a friend. So, so



it's not just this man who's poor and destitute. He comes from poverty and destitution. Nobody in his life who cares for him, if he has such people, can provide anything for him. As they say, poverty breeds poverty, right?

So with no means to provide for the man and lay him down at the gate of a rich man, they put him in the path of the wealthy. They hope that somebody with some means and some modicum of sympathy will show this guy some mercy. He's so poor that if no one gives, he starves. He's so poor that if no one has pity on him, he will most certainly die.

This poor man, his name is Lazarus. Jesus tells us he's been laid at the gate by others, which gives us a little bit of a clue into the chief contributing factor, maybe, of his poverty. Evidently the man is unable to move on his own, which portrays him as severely crippled. He's paralyzed either, at least in his legs, they're para, maybe a paraplegic, or probably more likely, is a quadriplegic. He's paralyzed in both arms and legs. He's unable to fend off the dogs.

So this is in contrast. Remember, he's helpless. He's dependent. He's unable on his own to do anything. This is a contrast to the rich man, right? It says he clothes himself every day. He puts on his own clothes. Middle voice, reflexive

idea. Rich man, self-sufficient. Independent, able to take care of himself and his needs and his wants. Poor man can't even clothe himself, can't even move himself, care for himself. He's totally, utterly dependent on others for care and for protection and provision.

Further, while the rich man is clothed in the best clothing money can buy, the poor man is clothed only in his sores. Jesus uses the verb *helkoo* to describe Lazarus as covered with sores. The verb tense indicates that the noun *helkos* refers to an ulcerated sore, like an abscess. You can maybe picture on the skin a large round open sore in the skin. Outer border of the sore is kind of raised and thick, shiny and all that. Inside of the wound looks like a crater, and it weeps with fluid, clear fluid and blood. It's, it's unpleasant to behold, to sight. It's unsightly, unseemly. But even worse, it's painful, painful to experience.

This isn't leprosy. If Lazarus were described here as a leprous man, then the crowd, the audience, would have trouble picturing this man being able to be laid at the rich man's gate. He can't be in a public place with leprosy. He'd be remanded to the outskirts of the city. But still, what Jesus pictures

here, it paints a picture of continuous, unrelenting pain and suffering, an unseemly unsightliness in front of people.

Open, ulcerated abscesses like these can be caused by poor blood circulation. It's common to a paralyzed beggar, has no one there to turn him over and move him around and increase circulation, no one to take care of his abrasions that are caused by either him pulling and scraping himself along the ground or by be, being pulled around the ground by others. These wounds, not properly treated, well, they become infected, don't they? And the longer they're left unaddressed, these infections, the worse they get. The infection spreads even to the deeper tissues, into the bones and the joints, and even to the blood, where they become toxic and deadly and poisonous. No beautiful or soft clothing to cover this man's body. Nothing to ease the constant pain on the surface of his skin. No means of helping himself.

Jesus adds another element here, if you see, another element to the pathetic picture. It says that "he desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table." Man, Lazarus is hungry. He's hungry. He's starving. Rich man had the means to indulge every desire, and he did so. Lazarus' desires go largely unmet. As I was preparing this at different times, my stomach

would grumble and I'd say, ohh, I'm kind of hungry, and I'd go, promptly go get something to eat. Huh! How about that, huh? Imagine not being able to go, and even if you have the means to go, you had nothing to get. There's no food coming to you. He longs to have some level of satisfaction, perhaps getting some food tossed out, tossed out of the parties and the banquets, food that falls from the table, out of sight, out of mind of all the dinner guests, falling, forgotten. Ohh, it's touched the floor. Ten-second rule. It's over. I can't touch that.

And then what's ever, whatever swept up after the banqueting is tossed out and licked up by greedy dogs. That's what he dreams to have, dog food. But his belly is filled with nothing but longing. His belly is met with unfulfilled desire. Participle there, from *thymeo*. It's *epithymeon*. It's in the present tense, or *epithymon*, present tense. Most of us can only imagine what it's like to have no food at all, what it's like to experience a gnawing, unrelenting hunger that's never, ever satisfied.

He's living, a final comment there in the verse, "even the dogs came, licked up his sores." That adds insult to the injury here. First of all, it's the fact that dogs have gathered around him to lick his sores. It indicates he has no strength, no

ability, no arms, no physical capability to get them away from him, or himself away from their mouths to avoid being licked by dogs. Why are the dogs coming to lick him? Because his body is covered with these repulsive sores that they find appealing.

Rich man was there, too, had all the means to pamper his own skin and soothe it with lotions and ointments and, find, fine linen. Lazarus, here, he's clothed, covered in sores, extremely painful, with nothing to soothe his skin but the rough tongues of the dogs. Now lest you, especially you Disneyfied younger generations imagine this poor guy surrounded by fluffy, playful, cute little puppies, trust me, Jesus is not talking about a pet here. This is the world, the word *kyonai*. These are vicious street dogs. If you've ever been to maybe south of the US border to like Tijuana or someplace like that, or go to the Middle East or go to India, you're going to see this is a common sight.

These, these curs that roam the streets often in packs, they're mangy, dirty, flea-bitten, disease-ridden animals. They're ravenous. They're unpredictable. They're dangerous. Not only that, but the *kyonai*, the dogs, they're scavengers. They feed on dead things, and so these dogs surround him 'cause they can smell death. As these dogs catch the scent of Lazarus, they

know death is imminent for him. So when they come near to lick his sores, that's not to apply comfort to his skin. This is a sense of relief from his misery. His sores are appetizers for the dogs before they eat their main meal, which is Lazarus.

By the way, there's no good evidence, as some have supposed, that dogs licking his sores will provide some kind of analgesic or analgesic or sterilizing benefit. Contrary to popular myth, dogs' mouths are not cleaner than human mouths. All right? Put that aside. Mouths are filled with whatever bacteria that you put into them by eating food. So whenever these scavenger street dogs are eating in the streets, dead things and the like, consider their mouths not very pleasant. They're bacterial Petri dishes licking all over his body.

So his misery, sorry to be disgusting. It's in the text though, okay? It's, I got to preach, be faithful to what's there. His misery is not really by the dogs. In fact, if anything, his condition is worsened. Not only that, but because these dogs are scavengers, they're feeding on dead things, they're ceremonially unclean as well. This is what adds insult to the injury, that this is what made Lazarus ceremonially unclean through no fault of his own.

But to his pain is added the humiliation and shame of being laughed at by these mangy mongrels, these ceremonially unclean curs. And so this is all happening in public, in front of everybody. How shameful. How embarrassing. And in the judgment of his community, he's already repulsive. He's already someone they want to stand apart from. But now they see the dogs there, and he's the lowest of the low. He's the vilest of the unclean. The company of unclean dogs meant he'd get no sympathy from his fellow man because they considered him cursed.

Here's Lazarus. He's alone at the gate of the rich man. His only companions are the dogs that will devour his body once he's expired. And from the gate he can hear the sounds of the, of the partying going on, of the rich man in the company of wealthy, powerful, beautiful people, the elites, the movers, the shakers, the somebodies, all within earshot of Lazarus laying at the gate.

From all appearances, the rich man is somebody. He's made it. Lazarus, he's the nobody. He is the forgotten, accursed. From all appearances, the rich man's life, that's the one that's counted. That's the one that matters. Lazarus' life counts for nothing. He's in a condition worse than Job. He's the dregs of humanity. He's really taking up space, and the space itself is

more valuable than that life is. It's not even a life worthy to be lived, according to the rabbis.

And yet notice: Jesus has given this poor man a name. The name of the rich man is not known. Some have tried to balance this story, given the name Dives or Divase or, or Dive to the rich man. D-i-v-e-s. It looks like dives, but it's a Latin word, *dives*, that means rich. So it's not really a name, it's just a description. But that's not the rich man's name. The rich man has no name, and giving him a name in the parable really distracts from the point because there is a reason Jesus gave a name to this poor man. By the fact that the poor man is named, Jesus gives his audience, he gives us a hint. Not everything is as it seems.