

The Rich Man and Lazarus, Part 3

Luke 16:19-23

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. The rich man is not as rich as he appears to be. He's not as secure. He's not without a care in the world, as he thinks, as we suppose him to be. Likewise, the poor man is not so impoverished as he seems to be by our outward observation, because he has a name.

Inserted into the starkly contrasting descriptions of the rich man and the poor man, Jesus adds this clue. He gives us this hint. Not everything is as it seems. Tells us, basically as the audience, don't judge by appearances. Poor man's name, that he gives him, his Lazarus, rich with significance. He's not a, I should just clear this up right now. He's, he's not alluding to his friend Lazarus. Jesus is not alluding to his friend, the brother of Mary and Martha, the one he raised from the dead in

John 11. That's not that Lazarus. That Lazarus in John 11, Jesus' friend, brother of Mary and Martha, he was not poor, he was not paralyzed, he was not covered with sores. He was financially very well off.

The name Lazarus is not significant because it's Jesus' friend. It's significant for another reason. Lazarus is the Hebrew name Lazar, which is a shortened form of the name Eliezar. Eliezar means, God helps or God has helped. Again, judging by outward appearances, it would seem like God isn't helping this poor man at all. By how it seems on the outside, God seems to have abandoned this man. Still, by his condition, by virtue of this hint of his name, Jesus is showing us a man whose only hope is in God. And if he's to be helped at all, his hope will not come from this world. His hope will only come from God.

By all, all outward appearances, Lazarus has nothing going for him. The rich man has everything going for him. Lazarus has everything stacked against him, so it seems. For Lazarus, there's no sympathy coming from any other human being, not a hint of help. So with hope and humanity shattered, gone, no help coming from men, the poor man's help, well, it can only be from God, right? From God alone and that is enough.

In God, the source of all life, if we have him, if he is our help, we have no lack though we be Lazarus at the gates, covered in sores licked by the dogs. We are in an advantaged position. The rich man may seem to have it all together. He has the world on a string, always with money in his pocket and a smile on his face. But actually, it's Lazarus who is the richest of all. With God as his helper, he lacks not one thing.

And that's what we see next as death comes, and death is the great revealer. Death removes all the illusion. It rips away the mask and shows that how things seem to be are not as they may appear, and it reveals, point number two, write this down, how things really are, how things really are. From here on, that's what we're going to see: stark reality. For the rest of the parable, we're going to see how death has revealed things as they really are, and Jesus starts with the beggar Lazarus, gives this poor man some relief.

Poor man died, verse 22, and he's carried by the angels to Abraham's side. And stop there for a second. Poor man died. No mention of his burial, probably because his body is half-eaten by the dogs and then captured and dumped into a rubbish pile. But there is an immediate transfer, isn't there, to Abraham's side. And Jesus is not trying to teach immediate bodily

resurrection, here. That's not, he's not teaching doctrine here. He's simply using popular imagery to aid their imagination. We might talk today when we're talking to people about, going to see Saint Peter at the Pearly Gates, but we don't really try to say that the Apostle Peter is up there checking IDs and taking tickets and all that. It's the same thing here, same thing in the imagery. Angels carry Lazarus to Abraham's side, and that's a picture, for the Jews, of paradise. That's how they picture it.

So Jesus wants his audience, here, to picture this radical reversal of fortune. Here's the Lazarus' limp, useless, helpless body, once carried by men and dumped at the gate of the rich man. And now he's carried upward in the powerful arms of angels, transported from the lowest low he'll ever know, transported from what is the closest to hell he'll ever come. He's taken up to the highest height that any Jew could ever imagine, to be at Abraham's side in paradise.

So when Lazarus crosses over this threshold, death is no enemy to him. Death is a friend. He's moved from this life into the afterlife, afterlife, and all that suffering is forgotten in this place of refuge and rest. All his humiliation is forever eclipsed in this place of honor and glory, all his loneliness

replaced with intimate friendship with none other than Abraham. He's in the company of the righteous men made perfect.

Finally and forever, Lazarus's state of being has been transformed radically, utterly, eternally. He's been, his state of being, what he really is, despite all appearances to the contrary, what he really is, is now brought into alignment with reality, and it is the just pleasure of God to do so. He is the righteous. He is a believer in God, the God who is his help.

And you say, wait a minute, wait a minute, time out. I didn't see anything in the description, there, that said Lazarus is a believer. How do you know he believed in God? Well, it's by deduction. At the end of the conversation between Abraham and the rich man, what is it that kept the rich man out of paradise? What is it the, that would keep his five brothers out of paradise? It's the fact that they disregarded and did not believe Moses and the prophets, right?

So if the rich man is in torment for refusing to regard Scripture, and Lazarus is in paradise, then what do we conclude? He regarded Moses and the prophets. This man is a true believer. He obeyed the word of God. Even in his severely diminished, extremely limited capacity that Jesus has described for us, Jesus has also confirmed that Lazarus is a believer in God, that

he is a believer in his name's sake, the God who helps. He believed and obeyed Moses and the prophets. That's where he found his hope, not in what he could see. It's what was unseen, what was promised to him in the Scriptures.

And the God he read about there is the God who knows him. It's the God who sees all his suffering. This is the God who helps him. This is the God who lifts him up from the deepest pit to bring him to the highest height: paradise at Abraham's side. Takes us back, doesn't it, to Luke Chapter 6, what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus pictures, here, in a parable, what he taught in the Beatitudes, there. Luke 6:20-23, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours," is what? Highest height, "the kingdom of God. Blessed are you are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied," filled. "Blessed are you who weep now. You shall laugh." Trust God. Trust him. This poor man, Lazarus, he trusted God. And God turned it all around. And that is not for a short minute, amount of time in this life. That is forever in the life to come.

Jesus now turns in verse 22 to the rich man's fate, and this is where things get somber, sobering. If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, this should be terrifying, deeply troubling. It illustrates the woes that Jesus pronounced in Luke

6:24-26, where he said, "But woe to you who are rich, for you've received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry, then, woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."

Look at verse 22. "The rich man also died, was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off, Lazarus at his side." In his death, the rich man no doubt had a lavish funeral. He's not there to enjoy it, but it's one last hurrah with his money, on his dime. It's attended by the wealthiest, prettiest, most important, influential people. Jesus mentions none of that. Doesn't matter. "The rich man also died and was buried." That's it. Party over. Reality sets in.

Several points mark his new state of being. First, he's got a new location. He's taken up residence somewhere else. He'd been living in a palatial mansion. That no longer translates. Now his new residence is in Hades. Concept of Sheol, that's the, actually the word used here, Hades. Concept of Sheol is what predominates the Old Testament. That's where Sheol is a picture of where all souls go, righteous and unrighteous, that's where they go after death. But in Sheol, that's where the righteous will receive their reward on the way to an eternal reward. And

it's where the unrighteous receive their punishment while they await judgment. So Sheol in the Old Testament, same place, different fates, different outcomes, different judgments.

New Testament separates the fates of the righteous and the unrighteous into paradise for the righteous and Hades for the unrighteous. Hades always describes the place, in the New Testament, of torment for the unrighteous. So while they await the final judgment and sentencing to eternal Hell, to the lake of fire, that's where they are.

You can think about it in, in criminal or, or, you know, judicial terms. You can think about it in terms of that's where the criminal waits in jail as he's going through his trial process while he awaits, you know, the final outcome of the trial and the sentencing. Once he comes to the sentencing, they take him from there. He never goes back to, to the jail. He never goes back to Hades, so to speak. He goes on to his final sentencing, and in this case, the final sentencing would be what? Eternal hell, right? Eternal, conscious torment.

That's the doctrine that undergirds all that we're teaching here in Luke 16. Eternal, conscious torment in hell. He's not in hell, yet. That's not the final sentencing, and yet, same feeling, same reality. Because death and Hades, according to

Revelation, will be cast into the lake of fire. So he's going to go with his abode into that final state, that final sentencing.

Rich man, according to this, immediately realizes because, where he is, because of a second reality: the experience of a severe pain. That awakens him. His new state of being is in, in a condition of torment. It's the word *basanos*. It describes the torture that's inflicted on a prisoner. And if it's a prisoner of war, it's to a, maybe elicit confession or maybe just to inflict punishment. Sometimes the word *basanos* referred to the torture implement itself, like an older version of a, of a medieval rack meant to inflict pain.

We're understandably squeamish about torture in our day. The Abu Ghraib prison scandal, that's never far from the American conscience. I can assure you, though, that our enemies have no such qualms about inflicting pain and torture on their prisoners. They have no squeamishness, no soft stomach about torture. Most of the world throughout history and even today tortures its victims without mercy. Want to see what happens if Russia wins? Want to see what happens when China wins? You want to see what happens when ISIS or Al Qaeda or any of those people win? Torture without mercy.

This is torment, that Jesus describes here. And remember, this is the Jesus that, back in Luke 15, described the father as so loving, compassionate, merciful, running to his prodigal, embracing him in his arms, saving him. We turn the chapter and see Jesus describing this: Torture. If it's torture, if it's torment, you know what that means? Means there's a torturer. Means there's a tormenter. This is intentional. Someone is in charge of the pain.

Remember, this is Jesus describing the torture of the wicked in Hades, and that adds a certain element of terror to punishment in the afterlife because it's the sudden realization that the one who's been rejected, the one who's been rebelled against, the one who knows all things and sees all things into the secrets of the heart, but hears every word and sees every deed, that is the one who's in charge of the torture. The one against whom all sin has been committed is the one in charge of pain and torture and torment in the afterlife as well. This is a terrifying, sobering reality. And, beloved, if your heart is not moved for compassion for your unbelieving friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, you've got to question whether you have a pulse. This is gripping, and this ought to grip our hearts for the lost.

We understand God is sovereign over salvation. Oh, if I didn't believe that, I could not sleep at all at night knowing one person hadn't heard the message of the Gospel. But beloved, we've got to talk to our neighbors. We've got to talk to our friends because this is where they're going if they don't put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Third reality Jesus describes here end of verse 23 shows the man who is in torment and he's conscious. He knows he's in torment, and it says here in verse 23, "He lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off," Abraham far, far away. Pleasure, pleasantness, paradise, far, far from himself. There's a vast unpassable distance. He's in total separation, total isolation. Abraham's there, Lazarus at his side. Well, what's this about? This is, this is the additional internal pain.

By, by the way, Jesus is telling a parable. So there are elements here that are not total reality, stretched. This is for the sake of illustration, for the sake of understanding. Obviously, no one in torment can look up and see paradise. So what Jesus is describing in pictorial, graphic, vivid language, is the experience of the conscience, the experience of the mind. This is the additional internal pain that's brought on by an awakened conscience and feelings of eternal regret. Jesus said

in Luke 13:28, he says, "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, you yourselves cast out.

Rich man recognizes and consciously recognizes and thinks about, with everlasting regret, that God had provided him in his life with a continuous and convenient opportunity, Lazarus lying daily at his gate, and means that he had in his possession to alleviate the suffering of a fellow human being, and he did nothing. Now in a profound, profound reversal of fortune, whereas he was once clothed in purple and fine linen, Lazarus clothed in his sores, now he is clothed in flame.

Whereas he once filled his belly, Lazarus went hungry, now he longs, verse 24, for just a drop of water to relieve his suffering, and he gets nothing. Whereas he's once surrounded by wealthy, flattering companions, tell him all the great things about him, Lazarus is surrounded by dogs who tell him nothing but just lick his sores. Now he's left utterly alone except for his thoughts, except for the unrelenting torment of an accusing and awakened conscience.

Jesus brought his audience into the story in verse 23, and he wants us to come in and enter into the story as well. Our English translations in verse 23 puts all the verbs in the past

tense. It's kind of conveys right English grammar. But the verb translated, he saw, that verb is actually, in the Greek, it's in the present tense. It's, a, what's called a historical present, and it's intended to bring the audience into the story so that we would kind of picture ourselves there and think about what would this be like. Here's how it sounds, it says "in Hades, lifting up his eyes, being in tormenting pain." Here's the verb. He is seeing Abraham at a great distance, Lazarus at his side. He's seeing it. Are you seeing it?

Friend, imagine that's you and you're looking up from this perspective and you're seeing this sight, and you're coming to this dreadful realization. Imagine that's you. There's no escape from this place. There's no end to the torment. No one goes to heaven simply by being poor. Neither does anyone go to hell by being rich or vice versa. Remember Abraham? He's among the wealthiest of his generation. He's pictured here as a harbor of refuge for the Lazarus who's at his side. The wealthy are to be a harbor of refuge for the Lazaruses of this world. If you have means, is that you? For those of us with means, especially in this wealthy country, unprecedented wealth in this modern world and in this country, we need to take heed of the warning of this parable.

Albert Barnes makes an insightful point, here. "Jesus speaks of no great fault in the rich man, no external degrading vice, no open breach of the law. And he leaves us to infer that the mere possession of wealth may be dangerous to the soul, and that a man surrounded with every temporal blessing may perish forever." End quote.

My friend, I don't know anybody's financial condition. All I can do is look at the exterior, just like you do with me. But I know we are clothed well, we eat well, we've homes to live in. Friends, think about how you spend. I'm not trying to preach a social justice gospel here. I'm not. But I am trying to encourage compassion, a right ordering of your priorities. I'm trying to encourage you, make friends by means of unrighteous wealth. Be a good steward of what God has given you. Care for people.

Are you playing the role that God has chosen you to play in this world, to be a harbor of refuge and rest for those who are weary? Do you offer your friendship and the benefits of your wealth, experience, and competency to those who people who are in need, or only to those people who you think can pay you back? Is it a *quid pro quo* arrangement with you all the time? Money for favors, money for access, money for benefits, money for

money. Do you honor the poor, those with very little means? Or do you treat them with indifference and even put distance between you and them in contempt?

Remember what Jesus said, Luke 16:9, "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth," so that when it fails, and it will fail, your money is going to be gone and useless there. They may receive you. Those friends may receive you into the eternal dwellings. Why is that? Why do we think that way? Because we look to the, not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen, they are eternal.

That is reality. It's not about your comfort. It's not about your pleasure. It's not about making you feel good. We all enjoy the comforts that God provides. We're to receive all good things that he gives us with gratitude and joy, and we should not feel ashamed when God makes distinctions among us of those who have more and those who have less. That's his prerogative. But every single one of us needs to take into account what are our priorities. How do we care or how do we not care? Because death removes the illusion of what really matters, strips it away. Now friend, you can realize that now when you can do

something about it, when you can repent of your sins. You can recognize the holiness of God that you've offended with your life, with your sins against him, with your rebellion, with your self-centeredness. You can recognize how you've offended His holiness.

Repent of your sins. Put your faith in the only atonement that there is, which is the death of Jesus Christ for sins when he died on the cross, died as a substitute for all who would believe and put their faith in him, for all those who would follow him as Savior and Lord, and walk with him in patient obedience, denying self, taking up their cross and following him. That's what counts, using your life as a stewardship, all your money, your time, your resources, all that is a stewardship rendered unto him. If you wait until your own death comes to have that illusion taken away to reveal what's real, man, that's too late. You'll share in the rich man's fate. But if you recognize it now, and you put your faith in him, and you follow him, and you find the joy of a godly stewardship and the joy of generosity toward people, my friend, we'll be at Abraham's side together, feasting, rejoicing.

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