

## “The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus”

(Luke 16:19-31 – Pentecost 19 – October 19, 2025)

Luke 16:19-31 – <sup>19</sup>“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup>But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, <sup>21</sup>desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup>So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. <sup>24</sup>Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ <sup>25</sup>But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. <sup>26</sup>And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’ <sup>27</sup>Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ <sup>30</sup>And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup>But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

Dear fellow Redeemed, by the grace of God in Christ Jesus:

Are you rich or poor? If asked that question, would you think of how much money you have compared to the average person and say: “I’m pretty well off,” or “I don’t have so much”; or “I’m somewhere between in the middle class.” We have our status symbols that show what we have in life – the kind of house we live in, the kind of car we drive, the kind of comforts we enjoy. It is easy to think of richness or poverty in terms of such outward things. But as we consider the account of **“The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus,”** it leads us to consider what true riches are in spiritual and eternal terms.

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.” (vs. 19). From a worldly perspective, the rich man seemed to have it all. We can picture him living in a beautiful mansion, where he threw lavish parties and invited distinguished guests. Dressed in fine clothes, he was the honored host. Perhaps they gave toasts to him for his success, and all the good things he had done for society. According to common thinking, his success in life might seem to be proof that he was blessed by God, maybe as a reward for his faith and good character.

“But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover

*the dogs came and licked his sores*” (vs. 20-21). From a worldly perspective, Lazarus seemed to have nothing. With his health issues, he had to be carried to the gate of the rich man so he could beg even for crumbs. In his friendless misery, his only comfort was dogs licking his sores. According to common thinking, his misery in life might seem to be proof that he was not blessed by God, maybe because his faith and character were faulty.

As it seemed in life, so it seemed in death. For Lazarus, it says: *“So it was that the beggar died”* (vs. 22). Perhaps there was no funeral, no tearful guests to say great words about this no-name beggar. It was a matter of disposing of his body in an unmarked grave.

*“The rich man also died and was buried”* (vs. 22). No doubt his wealth provided an elaborate funeral. Many came to offer eulogies for the great things he had done, to praise him as one who was surely in heaven. His body was laid to rest in a prominent tomb.

So far could the world see riches and poverty and judge blessedness. But how different it was in the afterlife. *“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.’ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us”* (vs. 22-26).

What happened? Do some people go to hell because they had it so good in this life? Do others go to heaven because they had it so bad in this life? Do they somehow merit a better afterlife by what they suffered in this life?

No. The Bible teaches that we are saved by God’s gift of grace alone, through faith in Christ. It has nothing to do with worldly riches, status, or merit (Ephesians 2:8-9). Scripture describes every fallen child of Adam as coming into this world as a poor, miserable sinner before the holy God. As beggars, we had nothing to offer Him, no reason why He should let us through the gates of glory into His heavenly mansions. We were by nature dead toward God in our trespasses and sins, children of wrath deserving only the wages of everlasting death and condemnation (Ephesians 2:1-3).

*“But the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 6:23). When God saw our miserable condition, He took pity on us. He sent His Son to save us. Jesus left behind the riches of His heavenly mansions, and became poor that we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). He took all our poverty and debt of sin to the cross, suffering and dying to win our forgiveness. His body was laid in a no-name grave without ceremony.

But then He rose from the dead, having conquered death and hell, to give us His gift of eternal life. Through faith in Jesus, He makes us spiritually and eternally rich. Already in this life we have the riches of God's grace and forgiveness. As baptized children of God with His saving name on us, we have all the riches of a heavenly inheritance awaiting us.

This was the true richness of Lazarus. He was taken to the bosom of Abraham because he shared the faith of Abraham. He clung to the promise of Christ, who was coming to redeem sinners for eternal life. With the poor in heart, he confessed his sin and unworthiness to God. He clung to Christ in whom he was forgiven. So with Abraham and all believers, he was credited with Christ's righteousness.

Therefore even in this life, Lazarus was truly rich toward God. Even in his poverty, he had true riches and an inheritance in heaven. Though dressed in beggars' clothing, he was adorned in the royal garments of a child of God. Though hungry, his soul was filled in Christ. In his earthly suffering, he had true comfort and hope of eternal life in heaven. Though laid in a nameless grave, his name was written in God's book of eternal life.

The rich man despised this gift. Feeling pleased with his life in this world, he cared nothing for the Word of God and the promise of eternal life in Christ. He put his faith in his idols of worldly riches and pleasures. He did not care to hear about sin and repentance or his Savior's forgiveness. His lack of faith showed in his lack of love, as he had no pity on the poor beggar who sat in misery at his gate every day. Despite all his riches and lavish life, he was spiritually poor and dead, separated from the life of God in Christ.

In death, his true poverty became painfully clear. All the façade of worldly riches and comforts were torn away. He had no more friends to acclaim him righteous and blessed. Standing before God in judgment with only the rags of his sin, He was cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He was tormented in the flames fueled by his own sin, guilt, and shame. He begged for a drop of water from the tip of Lazarus' finger to cool his tongue, but he would spend eternity with no hope of any relief.

*“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’”* (vs. 27-31). Moses and the prophets and all Scripture testify to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection to save sinners (Luke 24:44-46). God's Word is the means His Spirit uses to work repentance. In life, the rich man hardened his heart against that Word. Now he accused God of not doing enough, that He should provide another miraculous way. But whoever cannot be brought by God's Word to repent and believe in Jesus, cannot be converted by a thousand miraculous signs.

The Word of God is all-sufficient to work repentance and saving faith in the heart. 2 Timothy 3:15-16 says: *“The Holy Scriptures... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*

This is the all-sufficient Scripture by which the Spirit guides and keeps us in true faith, amidst all the temptations of life. Are we tempted like the rich man to despise God’s Word and follow our own heart and reason? Are we tempted to put pursuit of earthly wealth and success before God? Are we tempted to hold an unmerciful and unloving heart toward someone God puts near our gate? Are we tempted to follow worldly friends and pleasures in paths leading away from Jesus? Satan will use whatever sin and vice is our weakness. He will tempt us to let that sin grow in our lives until it overtakes us like the rich man in impenitence and hardness of heart.

But in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit brings us reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. When that Word convicts us of our sin, we bow with Lazarus as beggars, pleading only the blood of God’s Son to cleanse us. And in the riches of His grace, He lifts us up in His Absolution and full forgiveness. In Baptism, He washes our sin-stained garments and presents us in the white robe of Christ’s purity. In His Supper, Jesus gives us His Body and Blood as a seal of our forgiveness, life, salvation.

Like Lazarus, we cling to that all-sufficient Word of God in the hard times. How often did Satan tempt him to think all the bad things were happening because God had forsaken him? Yet the Word of God assured him that in Christ, God looked on him with everlasting love, still working all things together for his good. In his misery, Lazarus cried out in faith, trusting God’s promise that He hears and answers for the sake of Christ.

And in death, all his prayers were fully answered. God’s angels, sent to serve believers, carried him to Abraham’s bosom. In heaven, the friendless beggar was welcomed into the great multitude of saints in Christ, all whose robes were washed white in the blood of the Lamb. He was taken to that blessed home where there are no more sorrow or tears, suffering or death. There in the place Jesus prepared for him in His Father’s mansions, he experienced incomparably great riches, joys, and pleasures at his Savior’s right hand.

Like Lazarus, through God’s gift of faith in His Son, we truly are rich! As His children in Christ, we are heirs of the everlasting riches of His Kingdom. When our bodies die, Jesus will send angels to bear our souls to the heavenly mansions He is preparing for us. On the Day of Resurrection, He will raise our bodies up with our living souls, to eternal joys and pleasures in the presence of our heavenly Father and with all His family in Christ.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.