

Part 59: The Unknown Rich Man and Lazarus

Daniel Bourassa | Luke 16:19-31

July 16, 2023

You know I can't think of a funeral I've been to where someone hasn't said the phrase "they're in a better place." And when a genuine Christian dies, there's so much hope and joy mixed with the sorrow at their passing. For all who are in Christ Jesus, it *is* far better for them when they depart to be with him.

But is that the case for *everyone* that dies?

You know the death of a family member or friend has a way of making us reevaluate our lives. We can get so focused on the next thing that we hope for in life and forget how small and fleeting it all is. Death is this great equalizer. We all have to face it. And at the moment of death your suffering in this life is over. But also you lose everything you've spent your life accumulating.

And even if you identify as an atheist or an agnostic or maybe you're just looking for answers – we have to at least consider the real possibility that one day we might have to give an account for our lives. What will *our* assurance be? What will we trust in on that day?

And as we see in this passage today, if the Bible is true, then a day of reckoning *is* coming. And at death there are *two* destinations. And only one is a better place.

So Jesus is going to help us to understand what we have to do and how we need to live if we're going to have objective assurance that we're going to go to a better place when we die.

And our main point today is this: **False hopes and assurance will fail, but repentant faith will save on the day of reckoning.**

False hopes and assurance will fail, but repentant faith will save on the day of reckoning.

An accounting is coming for how you lived, what you trusted in, and how you responded to God's Word.

And so we're going to look at this in two points:

1. Reversal at the Reckoning
2. Repentance at the Word

We're going to start with Reversal at the Reckoning.

Reversal at the Reckoning

Let's read Luke 16:19-21:

"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

So we see all of these contrasts that Jesus is making between the rich man and the poor man. Remember earlier it said that the Pharisees (and Pharisees are the Jewish religious leaders) – the Pharisees love money. And now Jesus gives us this story about a rich man. So the rich man is going to illustrate the false hopes and the false assurance of the Pharisees that will ultimately fail them.

So let's look at some of these contrasts.

False Hopes

-Attention

First, there's a contrast between what "covers" each the rich man and poor man. The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen while the poor man is covered with sores. At this time, wearing purple was reserved for only the most important and respected people. It was a sign of status. **So the rich man would have gotten a lot of attention for this. His identity is wrapped up in his social standing. He likes the attention.** Lazarus on the other hand is covered with oozing sores. Even worse, dogs come and lick his sores. Apparently, he's not even able to fend them off. And these dogs would have been scavengers roaming the streets. They would have been dangerous and considered unclean. And this is important to note because we often think of being an *outcast* or an *underdog* as a badge of honor. But the Pharisees would have made a direct correlation between prospering and God's favor - and on the other hand being unclean with being unacceptable to God. In fact, this term for "dog" was also used to refer to those who were outside the covenant community - or were their enemies. So the Pharisees listening to this would have imagined Lazarus as unclean - and his condition as evidence that he was despised and cut-off from God. On the other hand, they would have been sure that the rich man was worthy of honor and blessed by God.

-Wealth/Security

And there's a contrast in location. The rich man is in his house at his table, but the poor man is begging for mercy outside the rich man's gate. This gate is further evidence of **the rich man's wealth and security**. And in the story, the gate's only function is to keep Lazarus out. And Lazarus had to be "laid" at the gate. So he's lost all mobility.

-Pleasure

And then there's a contrast in diet. Sumptuous, daily feasting is contrasted with desiring to be fed the *crumbs* from the rich man's table. The rich man is daily living in "luxury and self-indulgence." **He loves pleasure, and he is totally consumed with self.** And it says Lazarus "desired" to be fed with table scraps. It doesn't even say his desire was granted. The rich man shows a complete lack of compassion and mercy towards Lazarus.

What Are Our "Good Things"?

Jesus is making some extreme contrasts between what he will call "good things" and "bad things" in this life. And we'll talk about our experience of bad things later, but for now let's think about where we can relate to some of these good things.

What's *our* purple and fine linen? Maybe we get the same kind of status out of driving a nice truck, or the remodel on our house, or wearing a particular label, or attention on social media. We like to *appear* a certain way and the *attention* we get.

And we are definitely no strangers to feasting. You can Door Dash just about anything you want on any night of the week.

And we're overwhelmingly blessed with wealth and security compared to most of the world. I just looked this up the other day and if you have an individual net wealth of just over \$138,000 then you are in the top 10% wealthiest people in the world.¹

We have received a lot of good things.

I wonder if you're here this morning, and you feel like you're at the top of your game. You look at your life and say, "I think I've got it made." But what if you lost everything tonight? How would you respond? What might that reveal about whether or not you're really a Christian?

The rich man's hope is tied up in his good things. But he still has to deal with the beggar on his doorstep. So he protects what is his by avoiding the unpleasant. We can relate to coming across unpleasant people. We're no stranger to avoiding eye contact on a sidewalk or avoiding a call or text from someone who's "needy."

So even though Jesus is intentionally using these extreme contrasts, we should recognize that – at root - our hearts really aren't that different.

False Assurance

Let's read v.22-23:

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

Now as we get into talking about heaven and hell, I don't want you to be distracted by some of the questions that this story might raise, like, "can people in hell actually talk to people in heaven?" Jesus' stories like this are called "parables." And so they're normally like analogies that aren't meant to be over-interpreted. But interestingly, this is the only parable where Jesus gives someone in the parable a name. And it's also the only parable where he portrays a real historical person like Abraham and puts words in his mouth. So this is a parable and yet it's framed in a vivid, realistic way. Jesus isn't trying to explain the mechanics of how heaven and hell work. But he also isn't just trying to give us a metaphor. He is illustrating the reality of desperate, permanent, conscious torment in hell. And he's contrasting that with eternal fellowship and comfort in heaven. So let's try not to be distracted by those questions so we don't lose the gravity of what Jesus *is* making clear.

Proof of God's Favor

¹ <https://www.mpamag.com/nz/news/general/youre-probably-in-the-top-10-wealthiest-in-the-world-heres-why/422802>

In verses 22-23, did you notice the only thing that was the same between the rich man and Lazarus? They both died. Yet even in their deaths there are contrasts. The rich man was given one last affirmation - the honor of a burial. But there's no mention of a burial for Lazarus. His body was probably just thrown away. Surely this is one more sign of God's displeasure with the poor man.

But that's the last contrast in the rich man's favor. From this point on there is a complete reversal in their situations.

First, Lazarus is carried by angels to Abraham's side. And Abraham was the great ancestor (or "father") of the Jewish people. So for Lazarus to be at his side is an incredible honor. Surprisingly, the one they thought had the displeasure of God is the one who is *vindicated* as having God's favor. This proves that in his lifetime, Lazarus actually had the right Master. And he is received into fellowship in heaven.

Idols Fail

But there's no one to receive the rich man. All of the rich man's **wealth, pleasures, security, and the praise of man can't do a thing for him beyond the grave. All his false hopes fail him.**

What might your life be devoted to that you're going to have to leave behind? When you live for attention from other people, remember that the most they can do for you in the end...is bury you.

Now it's the rich man's turn to be outside the gate in torment while Lazarus is comforted in community.

Desires Fulfilled

Upon death, the rich man finds himself in a series of shocking circumstances. First, he is in torment. Second, Abraham is far off. And third, *Lazarus* is at Abraham's side. Where Lazarus wasn't permitted the *scraps* of the rich man's table, now he's *reclining* at table in a seat of honor in community. By comparison, now all of the rich man's feasts seem distant and trite. And notice that there's no mention of welcome or comradery for the rich man in hell. Whoever else is there, he's as alienated now as Lazarus was outside his gate.

God's Favor vs. Worldly Pursuits

To the Pharisees who were listening to this, the fact that Jesus cast this unclean poor man as the one being honored at Abraham's side – this would have been scandalous. And this respected rich Jew being in hell would have been equally scandalous. The Pharisees think they check all the right boxes to have assurance that God is pleased with them. But this great reversal is meant to pose the question, "who really has God's favor?"

One time I was talking to a man who had had an affair, left his wife, caused a lot of pain, and had never tried to be reconciled. And he had recently gotten remarried to a different woman. I clumsily tried to do the polite thing and congratulated him on his marriage. But I immediately realized that he had entered into that marriage through an act of adultery. And his response to being congratulated was this: "It's all God's grace." Pursuing what we want through sin and then attributing the results to God's favor is dangerous.

How do you know God is pleased with you? **The affirmation of other people, career success, income bracket, experiences...we're seeing that...these are no sure sign of peace with God.** And on the flipside, suffering and difficulty are no sure sign that God is *displeased*. Far from “good things” being evidence of God’s blessing, Jesus is exposing the Pharisees’ true master.

Which Blessing Will You Pursue?

The things we place our hope in are what we are truly devoted to – what we truly worship. The object of your worship is on display in whether you squander your life feeding your appetites or spend your life in the service of God. Either way, the master you love will drive this life into the next. So this reality of being held to account for our lives should humble us and cause us to reevaluate: “What am I hoping in?” “What am I banking my life on?” “How do I *know* I have peace with God?”

The Need for Mercy

Let’s continue by reading v.24:

And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’

Jesus wants us to feel the desperation here. Look at all the ways the rich man’s suffering is described. Torment, anguish, being in a flame. He would have considered even a drop of water to his tongue to be an act of mercy. This is a terrifying description of judgment.

So the rich man cries for mercy. And this is the only instance of the word “mercy” in the story.

The Means of Mercy

-Race

And did you notice the basis for his appeal for mercy? He appeals on the basis of his race and his status.

He cries out “Father Abraham.” All three times he addresses Abraham he addresses him as “father.” This was the appropriate way that a good Jew would have seen his relationship to Abraham. He’s sure that he *belongs* to Abraham. But not all who descend from Abraham belong to him.

Now we don’t normally think of heritage and religion as connected in this way. But it’s kind of the same thing as what we would call “cultural Christianity.”

The rich man probably went to synagogue. He probably gave a prayer of thanksgiving before each of his sumptuous feasts. He probably kissed scriptures stored on the doorframe of his house as he passed by Lazarus. When someone complimented his fine clothing, he probably praised God for his blessings.

Likewise for us...being American, having some church background, being baptized, having a Bible at home, checking the “Christian” box under “religious preferences,” knowing the words to “Amazing Grace,” – none of these things carry any weight at the judgment.

-Status

And the other thing he's banking on is his status. Twice in the story he tells Abraham to send Lazarus on an errand for him. Did you notice that in all the story, the rich man never says a word directly to Lazarus? He thinks that there's some sort of carryover of their social standings in the afterlife. Not only does he want Lazarus to serve him, but in order to do that, he wants Abraham to send Lazarus to hell. Even his *later* request would require Lazarus to leave heaven. And interestingly, this condescending view of Lazarus shows us that hell doesn't change a hard heart. Seeing his own judgment hasn't changed the rich man's prideful estimation of himself.

False Assurance

So in all of these things, the rich man is trusting in himself. But we're seeing that trusting in yourself produces a false sense of assurance. The rich man thought he was good with God. The rich man's hope was in his wealth, his status, his cultural religion – but what you have, what you've achieved, being a cultural Christian – none of these things can save you.

What you think makes you secure reveals what you worship. Let me say that again: What you think makes you secure reveals what you worship.

Or as we saw last time: What you think saves you, shapes you.

And we see this demonstrated in one last observation from the rich man's request. He says, "have mercy on me, and send Lazarus." Did you catch it? He knew Lazarus' name. In his life, he was not unaware of the man begging outside his gate. He just never saw Lazarus as deserving of mercy.

But the rich man's hopes and assurance have failed him. He will be disappointed by what he trusted in. Instead Abraham is going to draw attention to the glaring omission in his life. He would not provide crumbs, and now Lazarus cannot provide a drop of water.

Your life determines your final state, and it is irreversible.

Irreversible

Let's read v.25-26:

25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

Child, Not a Son

So Abraham addresses the rich man as "child." And his choice of words here seems to indicate not that he's affirming the rich man as a "child of Abraham" but rather that he pities him. The rich man is in a pitiful state. But he is no true son of Abraham.

Your Lifetime Determines Your Eternal Life

And Abraham tells the rich man, “remember.” Remembering will actually be one of the things that torments him. He will live eternally remembering what got him here. And Abraham says, “remember that you in your lifetime received your good things.”

What you do with what you are given unmask your heart. What you do with what you are given unmask your heart.

The rich man had “received” his good things. Everything he had, came from God. But the rich man only laid up treasure for himself and had no mercy on Lazarus. Now he thinks that there’s a way across the chasm - that Lazarus can be sent down to show *him* mercy. But the chasm has been permanently fixed there by God. No one gets across in either direction. The rich man need not hope for a summons upward, and Lazarus need not fear being sent downward. For the rich man, it’s too late. Now he is receiving the due reward of his deeds. And no good thing remains for those who are in hell.

Would you have your good things now?

Would you have your good things now? Look how everything that the rich man pursued in his lifetime...Lazarus has in greater degree for all eternity. The rich man had the applause of men until they buried him. Lazarus is received by angels and known by Abraham. The rich man had the security of a gate. Lazarus has the security of a chasm. The rich man had the pleasure of feasting every one of his numbered days. Lazarus reclines at table, at Abraham’s side, for all eternity. The rich man will never know comfort again. Lazarus will never know *anguish* again.

Is applause and security and pleasure and comfort better now or for all eternity? You see you don’t choose between desires fulfilled or desires suppressed. You just choose between trying to feed insatiable lusts through sin or else trusting in the person of Christ himself as the fulfillment of every good longing of your heart....an experience that is a reality now and comes to its ultimate fulfillment in eternity.

And this brings us to our second point: Repentance at the Word.

Repentance at the Word

Let’s read v.27-28:

And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’

The Need for Warning

So the rich man recognizes that it’s too late for him. But then his thoughts quickly turn to concern for his brothers. They need to be warned so that they don’t end up here too.

When someone passes away, you can often find ways to sensitively share the gospel with their friends and family. We see in this passage that regardless of the destination of the one who passes away, what they would want is for their loved ones to repent and go to heaven. Weep with those who weep. But it doesn’t honor *anyone’s memory* to never share the need to repent and believe and devote all of your life to Christ.

The rich man immediately knows that without intervention all five of his brothers are going to come to this place. And why would he think that? Because he knows that they are just like him.

While he was still alive, his self-absorption and false hopes stole any chance of him being able to warn his brothers. Now he wishes he had the chance.

Do you treat people like they are going to live forever in eternity? There was a shallowness to the rich man's judgment of others. He was unconcerned with either Lazarus' suffering or his brothers' eternity. Turning to Jesus will prove to be the most loving thing you can do for the people around you. Not only will Jesus be the source of your own joy, but honoring him and loving others in serving them, and warning them, and inviting them to him - will be the greatest privilege and purpose of your life.

The rich man wants his brothers to be convinced to repent and live with the day of reckoning in view. And Abraham agrees with the need for repentance. But they disagree over the means of repentance.

Sufficient to Call Us to Repentance

Let's read v.29-31:

But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Is Scripture Insufficient?

"Moses and the Prophets" just refers to the Old Testament which is the first 2/3's of your Bible. These are the Scriptures that they would have had at this time – before the New Testament was written.

And Abraham says that "Moses and the Prophets" are sufficient to call the brothers to repentance. But the rich man tries to correct Father Abraham. He believes there's something lacking with the Scriptures – they're not enough to warn people and keep them out of this place.

And why does he think this? Well Abraham points out that the brothers, as Jews, "have" the Scriptures. But the rich man knows *he* "had" the Scriptures too – and that didn't work for him. *He* "heard" Moses and the Prophets, and now here he is. There has to be something with more shock value – someone from the dead (it doesn't even have to be Lazarus) – just the shocking, miraculous sign of someone coming back from the dead to tell the horrors of hell and the blessings of heaven – *that* would convince them to change their ways.

But in the book of Luke, the Jews have already seen Jesus do a lot of miracles. And *they* didn't repent. They've even seen Jesus raise a man from the dead, and they didn't repent. In the Gospel of John, Jesus *does* raise a *different* man named Lazarus from the dead, and the religious leaders plot to murder them both. Later after Jesus' own resurrection, the religious leaders use bribes to try to do a cover-up – so that they can spread the story that his resurrection is a sham. So we know that shock value, graphic descriptions of hell, insights into heaven – these things aren't in themselves capable of bringing someone to repentance.

You know those books written by people who claim to have died and come back - or had visions of the afterlife. Sometimes we think that if people could just get glimpses into the supernatural – maybe

how demons operate or how bad it's going to get in the end times – we think that this will be the ticket to convince people to repent. But Abraham says that if the Word doesn't convince them, nothing will.

And what about Lazarus? He had the Old Testament Scriptures too. What made Moses and the Prophets sufficient for him?

Sufficient to Condemn

Well first, the Law and the Prophets are sufficient to *condemn* us. Remember in the last passage Jesus said that not one dot of the Law would become void. He upheld the Law's authority and standards. Remember how he called them out - for using divorce as a *loophole* in the Law to satisfy their own lust? Well this parable is further illustrating the Law's authority.

The Law *specifically* required generosity to fellow Jews who were poor.

Let's read that in Deut. 15:7-8:

"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, 8 but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

On top of this, the rich man failed to love God...by serving money instead. And he failed to love his neighbor...by ignoring Lazarus. So he even violated the most fundamental *summary* of the Law. The Pharisees affirm the Law, but they won't acknowledge how they have hopelessly broken it. They don't live like there's a coming reckoning. If they had truly *heard* the Law they would have felt conviction of their sin and known their need for mercy. The problem isn't with the message.

So what is the problem?

A Hard Heart

The Law said "you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother." Do you see why the rich man shut his hand to Lazarus? It's the same reason the Law didn't convince him of his need to repent. Because he had a hard heart. A hard heart doesn't see its own need for mercy. Man's issue is not that he needs further supernatural signs to *confirm* Scripture - but that **his love affair with the world and trust in himself leave him unconvinced of his need to repent.**

Last week a few Jehovah's Witnesses came to my door. And I earnestly pleaded with them to see their need for a savior who is fully God and fully man in Jesus. I was sad when they left. I put their names down on my prayer list. And for days I replayed the conversation in my head – kicking myself for not asking *this* question or taking them to *that* passage. But I've had to continually preach to myself, reminding myself that my job isn't to convince. The problem is a hard heart. Only God can give a new heart. When we evangelize, - in love - we witness and we wait...because God gives the growth.

So we've seen that the Law is sufficient to condemn us. It shows us that we don't measure up. But that only tells us what we've done wrong. Repentance is a turning both *away* from something and *to* something. If I failed to keep the Law in the past, then I have little hope that I can suddenly obey it from now on. And besides I still have a reckoning coming for what I've already done. Where can we go

for mercy? What hope can come from the Scriptures that condemn us? If we heard Moses and the Prophets - the way Abraham wants us to - what would we hear?

Sufficient to Point to Jesus

If we fast-forward to the last chapter of the book of Luke after Jesus' resurrection, we find the final mention of Moses and the Prophets.

Jesus appears to some distraught disciples that don't know what to make of Jesus' death and the rumor of his resurrection.

And Jesus says this:

... "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the *requirements* of the Law and the *promises* of the Prophets. Moses and the Prophets are sufficient to call men to repentance because they not only bear witness to what we must turn *from* but *who* we must turn to.

Little kids, a simple way to remember what repentance is, is to say this: You turn away from your sin, and you turn to Jesus. Later after church, when your parents ask you what repentance means, you can tell them: You turn away from your sin, and you turn to Jesus.

All of the Old Testament Scriptures point to Jesus.

As someone once observed:

In Genesis, Jesus is the ram at Abraham's altar.

In Exodus, He's the Passover Lamb.

In Leviticus, He's the High Priest and the sacrifice.

In Numbers, He's the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.

In Deuteronomy, He's the city of our refuge.

He is our kinsman redeemer.

Our reigning King.

Our shepherd

Our bridegroom.

Our suffering Servant.

Our forever-faithful husband.

Our Savior

Our Lord who is mighty to save.²

And now the gospel is preached in accordance *with* and in fulfillment of all of the Law and the Prophets. It all points to him.

² <https://counselingoneanother.com/2019/08/26/jesus-throughout-the-bible/>

Jesus Saves and Knows Those Who Repent

The rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus across the chasm, and back from the dead. Father Abraham could not grant his requests. But our Heavenly Father has sent *us* so much more.

God the Father “sent” his beloved Son. The divine Son of God bridged the *infinite* chasm between us and him by entering humanity as our substitute.

Jesus is the substitute the prophets foretold – hear him take on our *suffering* and our *sin* in our place:

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*
4 *Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.*
5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.*
6 *All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

By crossing the chasm between us and God, Jesus has made the way into the Father’s presence. Jesus received your bad things in *his* life so that you could receive his *good* things in death. Jesus experienced the anguish you deserved on the cross so that you could experience his *Father’s* presence for all eternity.

We don't need the shocking experience of someone coming out of the grave to warn us of hell. We need to be shocked that Jesus went into the grave to offer us grace. Jesus' death and resurrection, not Lazarus', - the death and resurrection that all of Scripture points to - is sufficient to call us to repentance and faith.

The moment you respond to the Word in repentant faith, you have been transferred from the domain of darkness across the chasm into the kingdom of his beloved Son. If you trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then your eternal inheritance is secure across the chasm *today*. False hopes and assurance fail, but repentant faith will save on the day of reckoning.

Repentance as a Change of Masters

Everything that the Pharisees refuse to hear accords with the Bibles they hold. *You* have a Bible. But do you also have a hard heart? Are you trying to serve two masters – living for the world’s stuff and the

world's applause? There is a coming day of reckoning. Don't trust in yourself – bank everything on Jesus' mercy. And if you do, then there will be a change in how you use your “good things” in this life.

In 2009 I was traveling all around Kenya on a mission trip. And my guide was a Christian university student named Jacktone. I'd never met him prior to the trip, but he had been a faithful guide. As a matter of prudence I kept the bulk of my money in a hidden money belt that he didn't know about. But traveling through one of the cities I got terribly sick. We managed to get to a public health facility. I needed fluids badly, or I was going to pass out. My head was spinning – I felt like I was going to die. I was desperate, and I knew that Jacktone was the only person I could trust to help me. As I was ready to pass out, I took off my hidden money belt that had all my cash, my debit card, my passport, everything – and I handed it to Jacktone. In my desperation I literally banked everything I had on him.

That's how *what you have*...relates to your need for mercy. It's a picture of transferring your trust from yourself to someone else and turning over everything you have to him. Once Jesus has your heart, you gladly trust him with everything else. Repentance is a worship issue first.

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance now and always,
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.³*

Repentance is a worship issue first. It is a change of your *worship* before it is a change in your *wealth*. It is a transfer of *affections* that transforms your *attitude* towards yourself, other people, your stuff, and even your suffering.

Final Applications

So in closing, I want to give three applications for how Christians should respond to this passage and prepare for the day of reckoning.

The three applications are:

1. See Yourself as Christ Does
2. Serve Instead of Squander
3. Suffer with Hope

1. See Yourself as Christ Does

First, See Yourself as Christ Does.

You know in this parable of reversals, there was only one thing that Lazarus consistently had throughout the story that the rich man didn't. Did you notice what it was? His name. Jesus never gave the rich man a name. In the story, the rich man had lived to be *noticed by all* in his royal clothes. Lots of people were impressed by him, and ironically none of them could preserve his name. But Lazarus was *known*.

³ From the hymn “Be Thou My Vision”

Whose attention matters to you? Whose attention *matters* to you? The approval of man is not a safe refuge. Someone else can always achieve more than you, be more beautiful than you. It hurts to not be noticed or to be rejected or forgotten. But if you are in Christ, Jesus knows your name. Don't live life striving after the accolades of an unknown rich man. See yourself as Christ does. As his.

2. Serve Instead of Squander

Next, Serve Instead of Squander.

Do finances make you anxious? If you're married...are they a source of *tension* with your spouse? Maybe one of you obsesses over security in savings or retirement, while the other one impulse-buys whatever feels good in the moment. Well maybe together you could work through your budget, line-by-line, and see how you can creatively align your *saving* and *spending* with gospel-motivated priorities. Grace frees you up to repurpose all of life in the service of Christ.

And that includes your time. What does your schedule say about what you are devoted to? Weekend adventures, sports for your kids, entertainment – is your calendar all about pursuing “your good things now?” Preparing your kids for life includes taking them with you as you model serving and loving others. We like to take kids with us when we visit older members or do hospital visits.

Manage your money and your time in a way that reflects worship of your merciful savior.

3. Suffer with Hope

And finally, Suffer with Hope.

The name Lazarus in Hebrew means "whom God has helped." Apart from suffering and going to heaven, this is the only thing we're told about Lazarus. He's not an impressive figure. His life is marked by suffering and isolation. But God helped him.

God helps suffering saints, like the dear sisters we lost in the last few weeks, by watching over them and sustaining them all the way to the end. Even in death, Dorothy and Gladycy were those “whom God has helped.”

Maybe you're one of the many in the church who are suffering – whether in this room or watching online because you can't be here. Maybe isolation, chronic pain, or immobility are all too familiar. Maybe it feels like you're receiving more than your share of “bad things” right now.

Dear saint, do not lose heart. You may appropriately mourn what has been lost in your life. You may continually experience limitations or restrictions or pain. But your suffering has no ability to change who you are. If you are in Christ, then he knows you *today* and you *will* reach Lazarus' joy. You too are one “whom God has helped.”

Do not lose heart. Don't give in to bitterness. Don't stop having a merciful attitude towards others. Cling to Jesus. Cherish Jesus. Suffer *with* Jesus. Love and pray for others and share that Jesus is your hope from whatever room or wheelchair or hospital bed you become bound to. Our hope is not in health but in what cannot be taken from us.

Christian, all the bad things you will experience have an end date. Loneliness is temporary. Chronic pain is temporary. Immobility is temporary. *What* can suffering take from you? *Nothing* that lasts. Only Christians can truly say, “this won’t last forever.”

Do you believe a great reversal is coming? No matter how isolating your suffering may feel, it is the one who is known by Christ who will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Very soon, we will experience nothing but his community, communion, and comfort.

In this season of heaviness, remember the words of our Lord:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”