



WHO IS AT YOUR DOOR AND YOU DON'T NOTICE ?

—The story of Lazarus and the rich man

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his 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, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also

died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 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.’

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. 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.’

And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’

And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 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.’” Luke 16: 19-31

This parable makes a comparison between the lives of two men—one rich, the other poor-- and extends beyond this life and into the next. This man is not only rich but he makes a point of showing off his riches as he dresses daily in purple cloth and fine linen which was something only the very wealthy could afford. On top of that, he feasts sumptuously every day. That man is very rich and self-indulgent.

Lazarus is so poor he must beg for food. He is also ill, covered with oozing sores, and cannot walk. He has to be laid at the rich man’s gate by others. He knows that daily feasts are being eaten there and hopes for crumbs and left overs. Lazarus is in a miserable state.

Being by Abraham’s side expressed the blessed state after death. Lazarus, who was never invited to the rich man’s feasts, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table, is now at the place of honor next to Abraham, the father of faith. The rich man, meanwhile, experiences a very different fate. He has died and been buried, undoubtedly with an expensive funeral. However, his existence is now very different from what it was in his time on earth.

He calls out to Abraham, and we discover that he knew Lazarus’ name. He was apparently well aware of Lazarus, who sat daily in front of his house in desperate need. However, he shows no remorse about his neglect of Lazarus, he does not ask for forgiveness; instead, he’s instructing Abraham to send Lazarus to perform a service for him.

Abraham doesn't answer harshly; rather he calls him "child." *"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."* He instructs the rich man to think back on the life he led and reminds him that what he possessed wasn't truly his; it was on loan from God, and he was meant to use it wisely. Now his earthly life is finished, and due to his actions in that life, he is in anguish. Lazarus, on the other hand, is now comforted, he is no longer in pain and neglected.

The rich man then comes up with a new task for Lazarus, a mission to warn his brothers: *"Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment."* He sees that the same fate awaits them, most likely because they live in the same manner as he did, pursuing their own selfish pleasure with no concern for those in need and no thought on the next life.

Abraham states that the Scriptures, God's written Word, are sufficient to instruct his brothers in righteous living and faith. If they will *hear* those words, meaning to *obey and follow* them, they won't end up as their dead brother has. This answer doesn't sit well with the rich man. *And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."*

Abraham lets him know that's not the case. What is clear is that the rich man knew they weren't living in obedience to what God's Word taught, and that they were going to end up in the same state he was in if they didn't receive a sign. But Abraham says that no sign would be given to them, as they knew enough from the Scriptures to know what God says about how to live righteously and how to treat the poor.

The parable shows us how *not* to act. The rich man was aware of Lazarus but he took no action to help him. It's so easy to look away when one sees a beggar, especially when they are unsightly. Instead of seeing a human being, one made in God's image, one whom God loves, it's easier to avoid them or to look away. As believers, we are meant to respond with love and compassion when we see the condition of those in need.

While Jesus is using a wealthy man as a bad example in this parable, there's nothing inherently wrong with being rich. Even Abraham was wealthy. There is, however, danger in the place of importance we give our possessions and how we use them.

How we live our lives affects our eternal future. Our actions, or our lack of action, make a difference not only in our life today, but in our life forever. We should be mindful of how we live, how we use our money and possessions, whatever they are, and how we treat those in need. Our decisions, choices, and actions not only make us who we are today, but affect our future in the life after this one.

In the final analysis, the rich man's punishment is not for riches, but for selfishness and lack of compassion. This parable is above all about lack of mercy and compassion.

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me and whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.' Matthew 25 : 40 & 45