

Rev. Kurt Cockran, Risen Savior Lutheran Church (Basehor, KS), 16th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 21), September 24th, 2022

Lazarus Had Jesus

Luke 16:19-31

In the name of Jesus,

Dear Baptized Saints, (and dear Sloane), you are washed. You are sanctified. Made holy. By the institution of Mt 28, you are *gifted* the Triune name and have the privilege to be a lifelong disciple of Jesus, a lover of the Word made flesh. By the promise of Mk 16, you are gifted salvation itself. By the word of Jesus to Nicodemus, you are reborn from above to be able to see and enter the kingdom of heaven, by the washing of water and the Spirit. You are cleansed pure by the *washing* of that Word in the water of Baptism. Baptism now saves you.

This is yours to receive and claim as your own by faith. But there will be temptations to come. There are plenty to go around in this flesh and world, and they don't go away until the Lord blesses us with the taking away of our breath and carrying us by the angels to be with Abraham and Jesus and the whole company of heaven. But we don't look to the strength of our faith for assurance to carry us through, we look to the cross and that objective Baptism. Hold fast to the promises spoken, and you will receive the reward of Lazarus. Truly, truly, I say to you, as these two men in our Gospel stand in for the entirety of sheep who will be judged righteous on the last day versus the entirety of the goats who will be judged guilty on the Last Day, the Rich Man may have been baptized. He may have checked "I'm a Christian" on the survey. But he took that priceless treasure and kept it hidden away in his drawer next to all his other riches stored away and didn't put it to good use. But Lazarus, He remembered and he would've worn that Baptismal garment, and quite frankly, it'd be the only thing that got him through such a hard miserable life.

Our Gospel text may be a parable that Jesus made up. Or, it may be a real story of two real men that Jesus in his divinity knew about and can tell us the part no man can see: the other side of eternity. Nevertheless, it's one of the most important stories in all the Scriptures. It helps us especially understand heaven and hell better than nearly any other text. But let's hone in especially on the difference between the two men, and their relationship to us.

Take note: in this world, our impulse desire is to be like this rich man, and we don't want to be like Lazarus. I don't have to convince you of this. Just look around you. Nearly every decision we make with our time is based on how much it will help our financial bottom line. We work night and day to try to become more like this rich man and less like ever becoming like Lazarus. And here is Jesus, ready to surprise us.

And the surprise is this: even *before* death, Lazarus was blessed, and the rich man was accursed. *Before* their death, these two men *seem* at first to be at least a bit morally neutral. Things have gone well for the rich man, and poorly for Lazarus. Life strikes each person differently. Some are endowed with more wealth and health than others and that may *not* be due to any particular weakness of the poor or any particular strength of the rich. It just happens. God gives more to some and less to others. And we rejoice that He's pleased to give anything to any of us. But it's after their death that the heart of the rich man is exposed and the true blessedness of Lazarus shines forth.

The rich man in this life had it made, as any American would figure. He feasted luxuriously *every day*. He had everything anyone could ever want. Just imagine the first century mansion this man would live in, with a closet full of the finest clothing, with many servants tending to his every desire. His "friends" and brothers probably clamored to do favors for him just so they could have a seat at his table. But Lazarus had nothing to offer the rich man, and so

the rich man, following his unbelieving heart, had nothing to give Lazarus. Lazarus didn't even have the strength to do any favors for this rich man to gain even a crumb that fell from the rich man's table. He was *laid* at the gate with his many sores. So the rich man has every comfort to sit back and relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But Lazarus was destitute. The only comfort this man had was a pack of dogs to lick his sores. In your imagination you can even smell the difference. Smell the rich lavish perfume aroma of the rich man's house, with the roasting meat and the spices wafting from the kitchen to the spread-out dining table. And compare that with Lazarus, who probably smelled...like death itself.

But things change precisely when they die. At least, the *outer* circumstances change. But on the inside...their hearts actually stay the same. In their heart, Lazarus started off blessed and the rich man started off cursed, and they died and stayed the same. Lazarus still blessed, the other man still cursed. Nevertheless, they died, and go their separate ways. Lazarus, to heaven. The other man, the rich man, to hell. They both were always going to die. Lazarus saw it coming, being reminded of that fact every day by his sores that kept getting worse and worse. But the rich man never saw it coming. For we see in the conversation to come that he truly believed there was no warning about death and hell. Indeed, Lazarus was exalted, and the rich man sent down to torment. Now instead of Lazarus laid at the gate of the rich man, the rich man was laid at the gate of Hades. Instead of Lazarus yearning to have even a crumb from the rich man's table, now the rich man yearned for even just a drop of water on the tongue. This contrast is real, and it is *stark*.

But note one word that describes the rich man in hell that never described Lazarus on earth: the rich man was in torment. Anguish. Sure if we're looking at Lazarus laid with his sores, that's how we might describe him, in torment and anguish. But the text never says that Lazarus himself was in torment or in anguish. And in this is where we see the true difference between the

blessedness of Lazarus and the cursedness of the rich man even *before* they died. Even while poor and hungry and aching with his sores, Lazarus was comforted by God. And the rich man, just like every hardened rich man, could never get enough money to comfort him. But he spent all his life trying.

Hear this story correctly. Jesus is not saying simply that having riches is evil and that poverty is good. No, Jesus is contrasting two different kinds of riches: (1) the riches of the rich man with his nice home and fancy food and lots of friends and honor in the community... these are the riches of the world. But Lazarus had a different kind of riches. (2) He had... Moses... and the prophets. Lazarus had the riches of the Word and promises of God. Lazarus had the assurance from God's own mouth that his sins were forgiven, that his lowly state was *not* the result of being in a wrong relationship with God. Lazarus truly had it all. He had it made. He had the power of God for salvation, and thus the power to patiently endure with hope.

The rich man had an incredible treasury of gold and silver, but Lazarus? In the midst of the sores and the dogs and his hunger, he feasted on the *Scriptures*. After all, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. He built up for himself a storehouse of the treasures of heaven, where moths don't eat and thieves can't break in and steal. Lazarus, even while poor, possessed the kingdom of heaven. Seek first, Jesus says, the kingdom of heaven, and everything needful in life will be added to you. Lazarus is blessed even before death by binding unto Himself the strong name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, carrying him through, never leaving him, never forsaking him. While the rich man was cursed as he *worshipped* the food and the wealth, which were unable to save him from the fires of wrath against his sin. The rich man had everything (everything in life) everything...but Jesus. And

Lazarus? He had nothing but Jesus. The rich man in death lost everything. And Lazarus kept Jesus, or rather, Jesus kept Lazarus through death to life everlasting.

The rich man may have cared about his brothers, but if you only love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the worst sinners love those who love them? For a good person, one would even dare to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, while we were still wallowing in the shame of the messes we make of our lives, Christ died for us. While we were still sick with every kind of misery that the world looks down on, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. The sufferings of this present world are not worth comparing to the glory to come. And while you patiently suffer in this present world, you are blessed. Having been justified by Christ's blood, much more shall you be saved by Him from the wrath to come.

So, no, even before being carried by the angels, Lazarus wasn't in torment. He wasn't in anguish. He was blessed. The name Lazarus means, "God is my helper." And help God did. So for you all who are baptized and believe, look not at what you have. Even if in this life you have as little as Lazarus, this is what matters: Christ is your treasure. He is your life, and your joy, and your comfort, and your peace. Jesus is your savior. Amen.