

26th Sunday: What is wrong with the Rich man?

This is one of Jesus's best parables and it is probably the most misunderstood. Many people think that it's telling us about life after death, like- who goes to heaven, who goes to hell. But it's not.

Others think that it's a judgment on riches, riches in themselves, like if you have riches you're no good, and if you're poor you're okay. But, that's not the point Jesus is making here.

Some others say, well, Jesus is making a choice of poor over wealthy people. While we all project many things into this parable, Jesus is very clear and he only has one thing to say and that is the most important part of the whole parable, the real message of this parable.

Jesus had said two verses earlier in Luke that he was talking to the *Pharisees who loved money*. This is important to note. Jesus was explaining this parable to the large number of Pharisees who loved money: – not who *had* money, but who *loved* money. And, of course, that's very important, because we often hear money is the root of all evil, but that's misquoting. We should know that **it is love of money, greed, that is the root of all evil**. And we have many examples of that in recent times in our own world. The love of money can destroy families, relationships and even nations.

in Jesus' time, they didn't have napkins. When they ate all the food, they would wipe their hands on special bread that was thrown under the table and the dogs could pick it up. You will notice Jesus hasn't said anything about the rich man being good, bad or indifferent. He hasn't said he was wrong to be dressing up and all of these other things. And he doesn't say that Lazarus was a noble little poor man either. He just says Lazarus was a man at the gate who was so poor that the dogs came and licked his sores as his only consolation.

Though there are two men, the rich and the poor, only one has name. The rich man is never mentioned, he's not given a name. It's Lazarus and the word Lazarus means, "*God is my help*" Now why would that stand out? Because to have a name is *to be valuable for God*; to give you a name means that you are really special in God's eyes. A person without a name is a person without a vision, without a purpose, without meaning.

Now let's get to the heart of the story. What Jesus is teaching us is that God does not condemn people to hell or bring people to heaven because they've been rich or poor. He is saying that there's a big difference. But then, what is the way to heaven?

You heard Jesus, who says this all the time, saying it again and again, "*If you follow me, you will learn to love. You will love me with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind, and **you will love your neighbor as yourself.***" "You will be humble, to follow and serve, and try to love and forgive and show compassion." That is why the parable speaks about a *chasm-between the rich and Lazarus* that even God, cannot join together.

Because the rich man has been selfish, incredibly selfish: my life, my money, my way. If he was given heaven, he wouldn't know what it meant. He was *where he placed himself*: far from love, far from caring, far from loving, far from forgiving. He loved wealth and served wealth, rather than God. For, the first step to heaven *is know your need for God and know your need for each other.* B&S, If you're looking for heaven, learn how to love. It says if you're looking for heaven, you must learn how to love the way Jesus loves.

What will you remember from this parable? They're stories that reveal deep, deep-down truths that are true, not just for us but for everyone. And, if you follow this story and work it out and know where it's coming from and know where it's going, you will find your truth. Because nobody can explain this story except you, in your life and in your heart. Amen.