

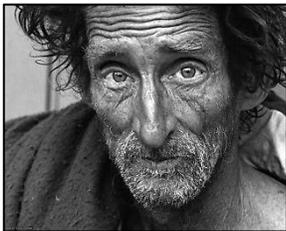
# Red Chairables

## *The Rich Man and Lazarus*

Part 13 – November 20, 2011

Who doesn't love a hot-tub? Unless you're too hot ... then you want to get out! That's when the cool of the pool feels so good. A sauna is very relaxing ... unless you're locked in; then it's no fun at all! It's just torment. In "The Rich Man and Lazarus", Jesus reminds us (in everything we do), to keep an eye on eternity; because when that day comes, and that door locks, it's locked.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." - *Luke 16:19-31 NIV*



Among Jesus' dozens of recorded parables, only *one* fictional character in *one* story is given a name: Lazarus (which means, "God is my Help"). It makes this parable unique from all the rest. And you have to wonder why Jesus did it. You *know* he had a reason and a purpose. Otherwise it would've just been "The Rich Man and the Beggar" ... but it wasn't.

In the parable of The Shrewd Manager, Jesus taught his disciples to be spiritually shrewd with worldly wealth for an eternal purpose. And we ended after he went on to teach that, "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Luke 16:13). Now, in the very next verse it says ...

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. - *Luke 16:14 NIV*



They saw this as uninformed and ignorant. The Pharisees regarded wealth (and health) as God's endorsement of virtue (the mistake of Job's "comforters"), and poverty (and sickness) as God's punishment ... not to be interfered with. And they wore their wealth, and paraded their riches, in order to demonstrate *religious* authority. So, Jesus turns to these condescending, religious snobs and tells today's story.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. - *Luke 16:19 NIV*

The lesson isn't that riches are evil. Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth, used her wealth to help spread the Gospel (Acts 16:14, 40). And the virtuous woman in proverbs epitomizes wealth *and* generosity.

She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. ... she is clothed in fine linen and purple. - *Proverbs 31:20,22b NIV*

Genesis (13:2) tells us that Abraham (a major figure in the story) was "very wealthy" ... but Abraham was *also* rich in compassion. But in the parable, even the dogs provide more comfort and show more compassion than the rich lover-of-money.

Jesus portrays Lazarus as a Job-like, sore-covered, crippled beggar, laid at the rich man's gate (where the garbage is piled till it's hauled away), eating whatever refuse he can reach.

... longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. - *Luke 16:21 NIV*



There isn't much the Pharisees could imagine being more unclean, untouchable, and indicative of God's judgment and punishment. And then comes the classic Jesus twist:

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. - *Luke 16:22 NIV*

One is carried, the other buried! "Abraham's side" is a Jewish expression for paradise. The beggar, who wasn't allowed to enter the rich man's gates, now enters the gates of Heaven. And in the story, the rich man, even in he is unrepentant; no sorrow is expressed, just a desire to continue to be served!

... Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' - *Luke 16:24b NIV*

Don't underestimate the hardness of a self-centered heart. If you can ignore the sore-covered, crippled man that you step over each morning as you pass the trash, that's cold! The rich man wasn't sent to hell for not helping Lazarus, but for what it revealed about the condition of his heart.



We can't help *everyone*, but Lazarus represents the needs of those whom God has put in our path, and laid on our heart, and we know their needs are genuine, and we have the means to help. Don't stop at good intentions or stirred emotions. And don't fall into the trap of thinking there's too much suffering for you to make a difference. Just pick a person and act!

If you made a Christmas Child box, you can say, "Well, I can't help everyone, but I can sure help *you!*" And don't feel guilty if OCC isn't your thing; it's just a very convenient example ... *you have until tomorrow at 5:00!*

The Pharisees believed that Abraham sat at the gates of Hell to keep his sons from passing through.

But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony." - Luke 16:25 NIV



If I pursue only luxuries for myself, in place of love for God and others, the temporary joys and thrills of this life will be as close as I'll get to Heaven. But if I love the Lord and bless others in His name, in spite of my own poverty, poor health, and problems, these temporary aches and pains and trials and troubles will be as close as I get to Hell! Your eternity has already begun! The question is: will this short chapter on earth be the full extent of your Heaven or your Hell? Compassion isn't always about money, but until some action has happened true compassion hasn't.

Then the story takes a weird turn; the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus back to his "father's house" to warn his "five brothers". Besides being off topic, doesn't that seem oddly specific? Abraham explains that they've been given Moses and the Prophets.

"No, father Abraham," he said, [That won't work! They don't value God's Word!] "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." "He said to him, [Wan'na bet?] "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." - Luke 16:30-31 NIV

Seriously?! 'Cause it sure seems like it'd have an impact! "Hey, I'm Lazarus. You know me better as The Corpse. I've been sent back to tell you something *very important* about your eternity." But then, maybe *I* underestimate the hardness of a self-seeking, self-focused, self-centered heart. And this is why (*I believe*) Jesus named this character, *Lazarus*.

A couple weeks after telling this story, Jesus' good friend dies, and his name just happens to be Lazarus. He's not a beggar like the made-up guy in the parable. He just has the same name. And even though Mary and Martha call on Jesus to come quickly, to heal their gravely ill brother, Jesus waits four days "... so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (John 11:4-6)



1906 Postcard, Lazarus' Tomb

Because of the heat and the spread of disease, bodies were entombed quickly after death. And this resulted in the burial of some who were only mostly dead. And mostly dead is slightly alive. And some would revive. Possibly due to this, it was commonly believed that a spirit would linger three days before a body was considered *all dead*.



And this is where it's believed Jesus went to raise his friend Lazarus, after waiting four days. He's not only merely dead, he's really most sincerely dead!

When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, **he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled**. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. **Jesus wept**. ... Jesus, **once more deeply moved**, came to the tomb. - *John 11:33-38a NIV*

It's difficult to understand Jesus' emotions here. "Deeply moved" means "deep-seated agitation" or even "anger". And why did he weep when he knew he was about to bring Lazarus back to life?!

"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" - *John 11:39-43 NIV*



This is inside Lazarus' tomb. He's stumbling up the stairs all wrapped up. Outside nobody's breathing, and then they hear, "I'm coming, I'm coming!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. - *John 11:44-45 NIV*

Wait. "Many"?! That last sentence is deeply disturbing and troubling and sad! Shouldn't it say, "Every last person, capable of joining two words, fell on their face and cried, 'My Lord!'"? What were the others holding out for?! I think that Jesus was deeply moved and troubled by the fact that he was about to prove the very thing he had foretold in a story two weeks earlier, and it was breaking his heart.

If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.

A miracle can shake us up, but only his Spirit, through his Word can shake us out of our sins and selfishness. And his and God's heart are one: that *none* should perish. Many of the Jews who saw Lazarus rise believed ...

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. So from that day on they plotted to take [Jesus] life. - *John 11:45-47a, 53 NIV*

Caiaphas was the high priest. His *father-in-law* (John 18:13) Annas, was the former high priest. And Annas' five sons, Caiaphas' five brothers, (Acts 4:6) each later served as high priest.<sup>1</sup> And rich Caiaphas, and his father Annas' house, and his five brothers heard all about Lazarus rising from the dead. He was going around saying things like, "Hey, I'm Lazarus. You know me better as The Corpse. I've been sent back to tell you something very important about your eternity."

So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him. - *John 12:10-11 NIV*

Lazarus did come back from the dead and they tried to *re-kill* him!

Don't underestimate the hardness of a self-centered heart. And do all you can to keep yours softened by his Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> "It is said that the elder Ananus was extremely fortunate. For he had five sons, all of whom, after he himself had previously enjoyed the office for a very long period, became high priests of God ..." (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XX, 9.1)