

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹⁹There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And 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." ²⁵But 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. ²⁶And 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." ²⁷And he said, "Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- ²⁸for I have five brothers-- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." ²⁹But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." ³⁰And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." ³¹He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

It's natural for us to applaud the outcome of this narrative from Jesus – the arrogant, rich, entitled man receives punishment for his sins, and Lazarus, the perennial recipient of misfortune, triumphs in the world to come. What about those who have more power and possessions than others?

Isn't the 9th and 10th commandments broken every day by the sinful nature of man? Doesn't it look like the rich are overly blessed in this life, that they have it easier than everyone else? Everyone seems to listen to what they have to say and does what they command to be done. It is easy to covet this kind of stature, power, life of leisure. We should be aware of this ourselves. It's easy to covet these things.

Where is the trouble? Is it inevitable that those with great wealth will also lack saving faith in Jesus? Some might read this passage and think so. Abraham's strong words to the rich man indicate that he's getting the punishment that he deserves, seemingly because he was rich all his life; now it's time for him to be taken down a peg, to experience just what he inflicted upon Lazarus. Lazarus, on the other hand, is said to be receiving the reward he deserved because he was poor – carried off by the angels to the bosom of Abraham, comforted in the luxuries of heaven, without any more lack, need, or pain. This is an assumption that is often made about this text.

As with most of the rest of the commandments of God, it's not about just the outward acts, but the motivations and mindset involved in living the daily Christian life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reinterprets the Ten Commandments so that they can be understood not only from the direct violations, but also that which can be derived from them. It's the spirit of the law, not just the letter of the law, that counts, especially if you're trying to keep track of a tally of good works versus evil deeds. From this analysis, the rich man comes up extremely lacking, since not only his actions, but also his attitude, suffer from unrepentant sin and lack of trust in God. The rich man trusted in his wealth to take care of him both now and forever. That's why he was shocked where he ended up for eternity. It would seem, also, that Lazarus, not having the ability to be tempted with the riches of this world, was in a much better place. However, let's explore just how this works out, and what this top-level analysis misses.

A true "rags to riches story" describes the experience of Lazarus in this text – he went from living on the edge of survival, to the blessings of heavenly glory. A literal translation of vv. 30 and 31

from the Greek – “*and at his porch was THROWN a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed from what fell from the table of the rich man.*” Those who were trying to keep the streets clear from beggars literally tossed Lazarus onto the porch of the rich man, hoping that he would stay there, and away from the wider view of society. He was covered with sores – may not have been as bad as leprosy, when skin actually peeled off the body, but at the least, Lazarus was not only burdened with poverty, but also long-term illness. He didn’t have anything – the only source of food that he had were the scraps from the table of the rich man. The dogs came and licked his sores – an indignity, to be sure, and probably making sure that Lazarus’ sores wouldn’t heal, but would continue to plague him over and over again. But, also, the mention of the dogs, and Lazarus doing some of the things that dogs did (eating table scraps) I’m sure is no mistake – there’s a correlation here, that Lazarus is being treated as something less than human.

Lazarus moves from being this disheveled embarrassment to society to being carried to Abraham’s side, when he died. This narrative is full of comparisons – the rich man died and was buried, and went to Hades; Lazarus died, was carried into heaven by the angels – completely different situation. Not only that, but Lazarus was at the bosom of Abraham – laying on his chest, being comforted and nourished and fed by God’s glorious servant, in the luxuries of heaven.

The roles have largely been reversed between the rich man and Lazarus – Abraham says as much, when he says that the rich man already received his good things, while Lazarus lived in this world in pain and lack and need. The rich man wants Abraham to have Lazarus dip his finger into water and cool his tongue – this sounds a lot like something he would have done here on earth, given orders to a servant to meet his needs, and the servant would have done it. There’s a deeper meaning here – the rich man hadn’t abandoned the mindset of being a rich man, and this to the point of death itself. He hadn’t realized that everything that he was given in this earthly life was a gift of the heavenly Father, not

of his own striving, hard work, or good fortune. He died without faith and trust in God, and with trust in his own merits and works.

At the point of death, there is a chasm fixed between heaven and hell – the judgment has been made at our death, and there is no appeals process, no change possible after that point. Because the rich man wound up in hell, we can be sure that he didn't have faith in Jesus, and that's what caused him to wind up there.

But, why is there this chasm, between heaven and hell? Why isn't there a "second chance" for those who are condemned to hell to repent of their sins and enter heavenly glory? Heaven needs to be protected and kept from sin – it's a perfect place, full of God's glory – He cannot allow sin to sully His perfect kingdom of glory in heaven. There comes a point, when the time has run out, and there is no more time to repent. That point comes at the hour of our earthly death. What was the rich man's biggest sin? Love of money? Yes. Lack of trust in God? Yes. Having too much money? No – that's where our analysis often goes off the rails. It's possible for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, but it's difficult to overcome the attitude of entitlement that often accompanies great wealth. Jesus Himself speaks of this when He says that it's easier for a camel to proceed through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Not that it's impossible; but it is true that it's harder. It's easier to trust in what we see rather than what we don't see. We're told in our Old Testament reading for this morning that Abraham was blessed for his faith, that by BELIEVING, it was credited to him as righteousness.

So, should we all go and sell our possessions and give them to the poor? That's what this narrative seems to suggest, and that Jesus' own words to the rich young ruler elsewhere in the Gospels might seem to advocate. Remember, though, the rich young ruler thought that he had kept the Law of God perfectly since he was a boy. Jesus gave him the challenge that would test his keeping of the Law of God the most – the hardest thing for him to do – in order to make him realize that it wasn't through

keeping the Law that he was going to get into heaven. In our text, Abraham says this to help others realize that the rich man wasn't in hell because of his many possessions, but because of his lack of faith and trust in God, and his overabundance of reliance upon his wealth and money.

Upon first reading, you might think that this passage is rather one-sided – it's focused on the Law, the things that we have not done, and have failed to do, rather than what Christ has done. However, there IS Gospel in this passage; but, it's hidden a bit. There is a note of hope here in the final part of this passage – a hint as to the way in which we are saved from sin.

When the rich man wants Abraham to warn his brothers, send a messenger to them, keep them from following in his sinful ways, Abraham responded that this had already happened, and the rich man's brothers certainly didn't listen to them. Moses and the Prophets – accounts for the Old Testament in its entirety – this abbreviation appears all over the Scriptures – they have the promised Messiah revealed to them over and over again throughout the Bible. We, too, are given the Scriptures, in a convenient and easily-digested format – the Word of God is living and active, powerful and creative. God is love – we are able to love others because He has loved us – as we learn in the Epistle for this morning. His love surpasses all other loves; His love, which is perfect, casts out fear.

The rich man even ups the ante – he asks, even pleads, with Abraham to send someone back from the dead to speak to his brothers, to hopefully keep them from joining him in this place of torment. Again, Abraham points out that this has already happened, and it didn't work. This is a prophesy that points forward to Jesus' Passion, death and resurrection, but presented in the past tense. When God promises something, we can be SURE that it will happen. Even though this would happen soon, it's like it's already taken place, because it deals with God's prediction, God's promise. We have witnesses of this resurrection from the dead, and this, combined with the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, converts our hearts of stone toward faith and trust in Christ the Redeemer. That's how we're

saved; not through giving up our money and possessions, not through keeping the Law of God perfectly, but through the love and mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

So, how do we view this in the end? Is this a cautionary tale of what happens to those who refuse to trust in Christ, and therefore trust in something that cannot save? Yes! Does this mean that it's somehow virtuous to be poor, and somehow evil to be rich? Definitely not! There are rich men that are in heaven; there are poor people that are in hell. What we must remember, much like the Sermon on the Mount, is the motivation, the mindset, the attitude that we are called to have. A great way to say it is to echo the Scripture in Proverbs chapter 30: *"⁸ Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, ⁹ lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."* We pray that God would give us enough so that we don't sin by despising God for not providing what we need, but also that we wouldn't have too much, so we become arrogant, and think that we can "declare our independence" from God Himself.

Thanks be to God that He gives us this example to warn us away from abject sin, but also to remind us of His salvation. We are given a picture of hell that is indeed terrifying, and makes it so that we don't ever want to go there. But, we're also given a glowing glimpse of heaven, at Abraham's side, that God makes possible because of His grace and His mercy toward us. He gives us the heart to hate our family, our wealth, anything else that draws us away from the 1st Commandment's directive – to fear, love and trust in God above all things. Having money is not a sin; the love of money, if unrepented, can lead to all sorts of great shame, vice, coveting, and false gods.

God has truly done everything for our salvation – He gives us the reward described for Lazarus, and delivers us from the horrible punishment given to the rich man, solely because of His love, His actions, and His death and resurrection. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.