

# Rich Man, Poor Man

## September 25, 2022

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Do you consider yourself rich? Or poor? I would say that it depends on your perspective, because the world looks at wealth and prosperity much differently than God. While the Lord certainly provides for our needs, and even wants us to enjoy everything in heaven, in our Gospel reading for today, we are reminded that the riches of this world will perish but riches in heaven will last forever.

Now, while much of our national news has been focused on the tropical storms, and Russia's "mobilization" of troops, there has been increased attention on the stock market's reaction to the increase of the Federal Reserve rate. Have you heard this? Have you sensed an increase of anxiety and the fear of what might happen? Have you been concerned about not having enough or being able to provide for yourself in the future?

As Tertullian, one of our early church writers, once wrote, "He who only lives to benefit himself, confers on the world, a benefit when he dies." And so, as the writer of Proverbs tells us, "Remove, far from me, falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and [dishonor] the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8-9) You see, we can recognize God's gifts and give thanks to God who provides for all our needs. But too many "blessings" and we can forget about God, or too little "blessings" and we can be tempted to steal from others.

In our reading today, we heard about two men. One of them was a rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen—in those days, linen that was dyed purple was expensive and "fine linen" helps us to understand that it was the most expensive clothing available. So, the

rich man in our reading lived in luxury. Every day, he enjoyed the best things in life. He enjoyed his heaven on earth. That is, until he died, because the things of this world are only temporal. And instead of going to heaven, the rich man goes to hell.

Hell is a real place. It's not where God is, and not believing that hell exists doesn't lower the temperature by one degree. It's a place where there's real suffering and torment. So much so that all the rich man wanted was just a drop of water to cool his tongue because of the flames of anguish. He looked up and thought of his five living brothers. And he prayed that they might be warned before they die and experience the same eternal hell that he was experiencing, that the Word of God might touch their hearts, and they might repent and change their ways before it's too late.

While I haven't seen them, I've read that there's a series of signs in West Virginia that say, "Driving while drowsy can put you to sleep – permanently." That's true, because living a drowsy life that doesn't care about God can put any one of us to sleep – permanently. And when you mindlessly dig that chasm between yourself and heaven, eventually not even the love of God will be able to bridge the gap when it's too late. Because there isn't any travel between those places of eternal destiny.

And yet, none of us are exempt from the temptations and sins of this life. The American dream is to pursue and attain your own heaven here on earth. And we can go after that which is pleasing to our own desires with little thought for others around us. Because we all want the "good life" of this world so much, we can even allow this pursuit to choke out God's Word in our lives as if it means nothing at all. But the riches of this world do not offer the eternal answers that our souls deeply desire and need. And one day, we will all face an eternal judgment.

Now, while our reading never specifies the name of the rich man, there is another man who is named. His name is Lazarus. And while he has the same first name as that of Mary and Martha's brother, I believe that this is another man who shares the same first name.

Because this Lazarus was a poor beggar. A poor beggar who was also known to God. And while we don't know anything about this Lazarus' family, we do know that his earthly life wasn't pleasant. In fact, his life was hard, and hard on him. He was covered in sores, and yet he desired to be fed with whatever might fall from the rich man's table. Being socially outcast, not many took notice of him. Dogs came and licked his sores. And yet, when he died, he was carried by angels and welcomed into heaven.

As we live out our days, life can seem unfair. At one time or another, each of us can face challenges in this life. We can look at our lives and long for something better than what we've been given. But you know as believers, we've already received much more than we ever deserve. Because if through faith we are God's adopted children, then we are also heirs—heirs of the inheritance in heaven which cannot perish, spoil, or fade. As St. Paul once wrote in Romans 8:17, "...if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:17). We share in Christ's sufferings, because we know them and take them to heart. Jesus Christ went to Jerusalem to suffer, die on the cross, and rise again, that all who follow and believe in Him might repent of their sins and receive eternal life.

To help us, Jesus sends us His Spirit, who comes to us in our baptism and encourages us to listen and truly hear the Word of God, that we might take it to heart and see that it's only by the Grace of God that we're saved. And while the world continues to distract men and women with its wealth, riches, power, and glory, we're being reminded that it's truly the Lord, who not only offers us but also provides all things needful, that while the rest of the world might get caught up in all the news of that day, we might see with our hearts and be enlightened to see the rich and glorious inheritance that we have in Him. As St. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious

inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe..." (Ephesians 1:18-19).

The other day, I read about a Sunday School teacher who taught his class about the story of the rich man and Lazarus. He highlighted how good Lazarus had it in the end, and how terrible everything ended for the rich man. Of course, he shared with his students, how one man went to hell and the other man went to heaven. And pointed out how rich the one man was, and how poor the other man was. To make sure they understood, he asked his students, "Now which would you rather be, the rich man or Lazarus?" And it was then that one of his students said to him, "I'd like to be the rich man while I'm alive, and Lazarus when I'm dead."

Maybe that's what we all want, but that's not always how it works out. While there's nothing wrong with wealth, prosperity or money in and of themselves, often times, it's the sinful desire to get rich, or even richer, that can entice people into their own ruin and destruction. And as last week's gospel reading reminded us, "No [one] can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

So, do you consider yourself rich? Or do you consider yourself poor? It depends on your perspective. The world looks at wealth and prosperity much differently than God. God certainly provides for all our needs in this life but also wants us to enjoy everything that He has in store for us with Him in heaven. And so today, we're reminded that the riches of this world will all be gone one day, but by His grace, as children of God, the riches of our inheritance are ours both now and always. For that, we can give Him thanks and praise!

In Jesus Name, Amen.