

THE RICH MAN CONFRONTS LAZARUS

- I. His conduct is sinful
- II. His end is awful
- III. His excuse is foolish

INTRODUCTION

Someone writes in answer to the question who are the hungry:

- “Statistics provide part of the answer: let me share some numbers with you, just because they are important for us to know. The hungry are 1 billion people who don't get enough. The hungry are 27 children who starve each minute. [The hungry are the 3 million children under 5 who die each year because of poor nutrition.] The hungry includes the 25 million who could be fed by the tons of grain used annually to produce alcohol in US. The hungry include some of 30 million Americans who live below the poverty line.
- “So who are the hungry? Behind the statistics are the faces of real men & women, especially children. They are disparately poor. They have a permanent ache in their belly & hopelessness in their eyes. You will not likely meet many of them because most of the 1 billion live far away, speak a different language, & live in a different culture. They seem to be on a different planet. But the Bible tells me they are my brothers & sisters, & we ought to think of them that way. [Think of them] as if [we] all sit at the same dinner table & can pass each other milk or vegetables when it's asked for.”

Well, we just observed **World Food Day** & will be observing our annual denomination's world hunger awareness week & **Sunday** at the end of the month.

- so we must listen to what God says in His Word what must be our response to the world hunger.
- & we do so by considering Jesus' parable in Lk.16 that pulls no punches about the eternal consequences of closing our hearts & hands to the needy.
  - about living in such a way that we deprive them of the necessities of life.
- th'fore we want to look at THE RICH MAN CONFRONTING LAZARUS & we see 3 truths:
  - 1<sup>st</sup>, his conduct is sinful; 2<sup>nd</sup>, his end is awful; &, 3<sup>rd</sup>, his excuse is foolish.

I. HIS CONDUCT IS SINFUL

Now we must 1<sup>st</sup> note that Jesus didn't give this **parable** to satisfy our curiosity about life after death.

- we may not take the details given here with absurd literalness.
- for the language is symbolic to show us the solemn realities of heaven & hell.

The main purpose of this **parable** is to warn us that life here on this earth surely counts for eternity.

- & that, after death, our eternal end is sealed finally & forever—there is no more time for salvation.
  - there is no change of condition or communication between the lost & the saved in eternity.
  - that's what is symbolized by the great gulf mentioned in vs.26.
- so then Jesus is emphasizing the tremendous seriousness of how we must live in relationship to others.
  - for the way we live here determines our final, eternal state beyond the grave.

Well Jesus says: “There as a rich man who was dressed in purple & fine linen, & lived in luxury every day.”

- now each of those words graphically describes just how rich this man was.
- it says he was dressed in purple—the most expensive dye of that day.
  - it was the color of nobility & royalty.
  - his clothes then were the finest, most exquisite & expensive & fashionable anyone could have.
- it also says he was dressed in fine linen—that was the type of underwear he wore.
- & the verb was dressed also points out he was constantly clothed in splendor.
- also the word used here for gate indicates beautifully & artistically decorated.
  - it means his home was lavish & luxurious, finely furnished with the latest styles.
- the phrase lived in luxury every day points out he had all his heart desired.
  - his whole life was grand & gorgeous & flamboyant.
  - he lacked nothing & enjoyed everything.

But in contrast & confronting the **rich man** was a man who was laid at his gate each day.

- he was beggar meaning he had absolutely nothing—not even the necessities of life.
- he was starving so that he longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table.
- & the result was that Lazarus was sick, full of sores.
  - so typical of the poor & hungry today too.

The **passage** also says **Lazarus** “was laid” at the gate—it really says he was dumped there with the hope he would get something to eat so he could live each day.

- & the only ones who paid any attention to him were the town's stray dogs.
  - they came & licked his sores, & nobody, not even man himself, shooed them away.
- it all shows the absolute poverty & complete neglect & utter hopelessness of this man.

Now, of course, Jesus isn't teaching here it is sinful to be rich.

- that if we possess & enjoy worldly wealth we are automatically going to hell.
- or that the life of poverty will itself bring you to the eternal blessedness of heaven.

You see, in the **verses** before this **parable** Jesus told another one about the right use of material goods--in an unselfish way of kindness & generosity.

- but those pious Pharisees of the day, who loved material possessions, ridiculed Jesus.
- th'fore Jesus rebuked them by telling this Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus.
  - & warned them about the eternal end of selfish attitudes & actions in the use of material wealth.

Indeed, the **rich man** wasn't condemned for being so wealthy.

- nor for the way he got his riches, or because he lived a gross, evil, immoral life.
- as a matter of fact, the parable seems to indicate he was a very pious, religious person, for he knew Abraham & Abraham knew him.
  - probably went to church regularly, read his Bible.
  - he prayed, maybe even for the poor that ways could be found to help them.

But notice too: the **rich man** was given no name.

- no doubt to indicate he wasn't known in heaven because he didn't really believe & belong to God, for he wasn't obeying His will.
  - he didn't have a real living faith that expresses itself in loving service to Lord & our neighbors.
- instead this man failed to do that because he disregarded poor Lazarus, his neighbor.
  - he lived in all kinds of luxury with heartless, loveless selfishness.
  - he used material wealth for his own pleasure while at his door lay 1 who was destitute & neglected & unhelped.

That was the **rich man's** sin.

- to be sure Lazarus received some scrapes from his table.
  - but note well: it doesn't say he received it from the rich man himself.
- that means the rich man really didn't love or care about the poor, though he piously pretended to love his neighbor by allowing him to have some crumbs or cast-offs from his cupbroad or closet.

So this man selfishly & lovelessly neglected the poor.

- he probably thought he had earned all he had so he deserved to enjoy it all.
- & he thought just let the poor go to work & earn their own goods.

Well, we see then the main point of this **parable** is the **rich man** was confronted with the hungry & the starving right at his own gate.

- he didn't have to hunt for the poor; they were placed right before his very own eyes.
  - right under his nose so he couldn't miss them as he daily lived in luxury.
- but, because this man was concerned only for himself, he had no open eyes, no loving heart, no loving deeds for the needs & the sufferings of others.

Now this **parable** surely speaks volumes to us too today, doesn't it?

- for we No.American Christians, who have all we need & so much more, we are also always being confronted with the millions in this world who are poor.
- indeed the world's destitute are at our doors too so that, as individuals & families, as a church & a country, we are all neighbors to the hungry.
  - they have been put in our paths through vivid, stark, detailed reporting of our modern-day mass media—the newspaper, the radio, the television, letters in the mail.

And too, we are inescapable involved with the world's needy for all our lives intertwined.

- that's because we are part of 1 international economic community of buyers & sellers.
  - for no longer is there only the changes of goods within a local region or country.
- instead we get bananas from Central America, coffee from Brazil, radios from Hong Kong, cameras from Japan, labor from Mexico.
- & we are involved with the world's starving because now the world's resources are limited, never again to be abundant & cheap.
- th'fore, as never before & as part of an international economic community with limited goods, our every day actions affect the way others live, especially the needy.

We see this, as the **1978 Acts of Synod** points out, in our **No.American** consumption patterns, our international trade relationships, our investment practices, & aid programs.

- today, as consumers, our lives are no longer a personal & private matter as it would be if the world's goods were unlimited.
- but now with limited goods the rich often compete with the poor for goods that are luxury to the affluent, but necessary for the needy.
- so, with the consumption patterns of our Western World for the high standard of living, we are importing goods that millions in other nations need to live.
- & all that means we are depriving them of the basic necessities for life.

Th'fore, as **Christians**, on basis on what **Bible** says about love & justice for the poor, we must realize that.

- we must realize our consumption patterns & life-styles involve us in the lives of the world's needy & surely influence their well-being.
- we then, must be careful to make sure our use of the world's goods aren't helping to cause inequality & being detrimental to the poor.

And, if our use of them are, then we must change our habits of consumption & the way we live.

- for God says we must love our fellow human beings in our all attitudes & actions.
- or else we are just as guilty as the rich man who neglected Lazarus.

Then too, our international trade relationships also involve & intertwine us with people around the world so that we come face to face at our doors with its starving & shivering.

- yet, as Arthur Simons says in his book, Bread for the World, our trade partnerships with the poor world countries are a losing arrangement for them.

- they work for their disadvantage to perpetuate poverty.
- you see, we are told for the 12 main goods (except oil) poor nations export, they receive over \$30 billions, but the final consumer pays over \$200 billion.
  - that means over \$170 billion go to the international middlemen who are mostly in rich developing countries like ours.

And so, **Christians**, we must be concerned about the injustice & inequality in trade.

- we must try to correct it by not desiring & demanding such high living standards.
  - & we must be well-informed on these issues, vote the right people into office, even run for office ourselves, & let the government know how we feel, etc.
- if we simply ignore it, say it is none of our affair, we can't do anything about it anyhow, then we are guilty of living in luxury at the expense of the poor at our doors.

And too, as Christians & citizens of US., we have the responsibility for the behavior our country's companies have for poor nations as they strive for more profit while the healthy growth of poor countries is threatened.

- if we are officers &/or stockholders in some of these corporations, then we have the responsibilities to speak out against their practices, or even pull out.
- & we must also be concerned whether private & governmental aid programs are really helping the needy or are they being siphoned off to the wealthy.
  - are they making the poor self-sufficient or creating permanent dependency?

Indeed, **Christians**, we must be concerned about these things in our hearts & with our talk & walk.

- we must, so that the government gets the message, & realizes we must change so we can have proper care for the world's needs.
- & we can & must show the way with our own life-styles, or else we too will be guilty of passing by & neglecting the Lazarus' of our day as we selfishly live in luxury.

## II. HIS END IS AWFUL

But now, if we don't do that, & neglect the neighbors at our gates, then like the **rich man**, our **END WILL ALSO BE AWFUL.**

- for notice the parable says: Lazarus died, & was carried into eternal glory.
- no, not because he was poor, but only because loved Lord even in the middle of all his sufferings.
  - you see, the name Lazarus, indicates that, for it means God has helped.

Well, the **rich man** also died, & the **parable** adds: he was buried to indicate that even at death he fared materially well with an elaborate, expensive funeral & lots of friends.

- Lazarus didn't have this as indicated by no reference to his burial.
  - he was just left to die & his body picked up & dumped like garbage.
- but unlike Lazarus, when the rich man died, there were no angels to escort him to heaven.

- there is only eternal hell because of his life of selfishness & lovelessness.

And we are told while he was in that terrible, awful, indescribable torment, he saw **Lazarus** in eternal blessedness so that he asked for just 1 little drop of relief.

- but the rich man was told it can't be, for his doom is sealed forever.
- you see, he was to blame for his eternal torment because he had chosen to live only for himself & to see how much he could get & enjoy material wealth.
  - & he refused to live for God & to see that all he was & had was from Lord.
  - & that he was to use it in love to Lord & for the welfare of others.
- th'fore, when the rich man died, he received the only eternal reward there is for such a life.
  - eternal torment with no possibility of relief in any degree--not even a drop!

Now do you see what **Scriptures** are saying: that the necessary, eternal end of a selfish life in which material goods are the most important,--

- that the end of a life not centered on God & not lived for others while the needy are at our doors is eternal death & anguish.
- that's what Bible says here: that's the horrible end of desiring & demanding a life-style of having the best & the biggest in our cupboards & closets, our churches & garages, while millions are malnourished or starve or shiver & die.
  - of not being concerned & caring about how our country is treating the poor for their own profit.
  - & of thinking we aren't involved with world hunger, & we can't do anything about it so why try.

You see, such attitudes & actions of having lots of the world's goods & seeing our fellow human beings in need, & yet we close our hearts & hands to them,--

- doing that means God's love doesn't really live in us, IJo.3:17 says.
- & that means we don't really believe & belong to Him with live, loving faith that dares to care so much that we pare down to share with the needy.

And, if we aren't in Christ with that kind of true faith then we will receive eternal hell.

- for remember what Jesus says in Matt.25: He will separate those who will live eternally with Him from those who will endure eternal punishment.
- & He will do that on the basis: not on how much we have gotten of the world's goods.
  - or how materially successful we are in business, or how fashionably dressed we are.
  - or how new our cars are or how lavish our churches are, or how finely furnished our homes are.
    - not even how well we can discuss & defend doctrines.
- but only on the basis of whether His saving work in us & our faith in Him are seen by a loving concern & care for the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the naked, the imprisoned.

We see then, **Christians**, now is time to act--to change our thinking & talking & walking.

- to make sure we aren't using our wealth only for our own welfare & pleasure.
- to realize we must live soberly & godly & righteously--in the way that will help the needy of the world, because they are all our neighbors right at our doors.
  - & we must realize how we live involves them too.

So we **Christians** must take a long, hard, honest, careful look at ourselves.

- examine & evaluate our thinking & doing as individuals, as a church, as a country in our response to world's poverty in the light of what Bible teaches.
  - & believe & obey & do all it teaches about what must be our relationships to others.
- then, if we do that, Jesus will say: "Well done, Good & Faithful Servant, enter into the glory to be with Me forever, as Lazarus did."

### III. HIS EXCUSE IS FOOLISH

And, know, **Christians**, there is no excuses for ignoring & neglecting the needy at our doors.

- you see, God told the rich man that HIS EXCUSE WAS FOOLISH.
- for we read in Lk.16, when the rich man was told there would be no relief from eternal sufferings, then he asked that Lazarus be sent from the dead to warn his 5 brothers.

Now, really, that was the **rich man's** way of trying to justify himself for his neglect of **Lazarus**.

- for after all, he was trying to imply that God was to blame because he had not been clearly warned about the consequences of his sin of selfishness.
- th'fore, at least, Lord could warn his brothers to save & spare them.

But God replied there is no excuse for anyone to remain unrepentant in the sin of selfish neglect for the poor.

- for we all have the Law & the Prophets: that is, God's Word, which is completely sufficient to teach us the way of salvation.
  - & to show us how to live in faith & love as Lord's in this world.
  - if we don't believe that, then we won't even believe 1 coming from the dead.
- & so there's no excuse for not knowing it is wrong to live only for ourselves.

### CONCLUSION

Well, **Christians**, we have & know God's Word; we have been richly favored by Him.

- we can't escape the fact of today's millions who are hungry, often because of our desires & demands, our decisions & deeds.
- & we are constantly being bombarded about their needs.

Let us then not neglect them, or just let them live from the scraps that roll off our lavished tables.

- but we must love & feed them with actual deeds of caring & paring & sharing.
- then we are doing it unto Lord Himself & we will be blessed forever.

In a few minutes we are going to sing a very profound song: “Here I Am Lord”.

- it talks about the Lord’s concern for His people who are in sin & darkness, in pain & poverty.
  - & about His call for those He can send to bring His light & life, His Word & love to them.
- may we respond, not just with our lips, but from our heart & with our lives: “Here I am, Lord. I have heard Your call. I will go & hold Your People in my heart.”

AMEN