

Introductory

This is the gospel text appointed for Trinity 1 in the TLH one-year series and for Pentecost 19C in the three-year LW series. It is one of the most familiar of all the stories in the Bible. It is a story filled with contrasts. The condition of the two men on this earth could not be further apart, and in the afterlife the polarity is even greater. The life of each on this earth lasts but a few short years, but the afterlife will go on for eternity.

Jesus has been talking a lot about money. Last Sunday he talked about the money manager. Then in 16:14 Luke notes that the Pharisees were “lovers of money.” He then talks about the changelessness of the OT and in v. 18 forbids divorce. The placement of the divorce saying is interesting. As is the case in our day, in Luke’s day men would divorce their wives for lots of reasons. One of those reasons was, and is, to marry money. In the Roman world women would often divorce their husbands for the same reason, but Luke is in the Greek world, where women did not have that option.

The story will be of special interest to wealthy people and serve as a warning to them not to let their temporal wealth get in the way of their eternal destiny. Very few Americans would identify themselves as “rich,” and chances are slim that, unless Oprah or Warren Buffet show up on Sunday, none of your listeners would so identify themselves.

Most people don’t think of themselves as being rich. Even wealthy mid-western landowners called “farmers” do not generally recognize themselves to be rich, but your listeners know what rich is. Nor do most of your listeners think of themselves as poor, but they know what poor is. Even the wealth of relatively poor people can distract them from more important things.

Textual Notes

19. The story begins simply and abruptly with “Ἄνθρωπος δέ τις ἦν πλούσιος – there was a man who was rich.” This is not the first time that we have run into a rich man in the NT. We have a very large middle class. In the time of Jesus, most people were either rich or poor, and the disparity between the rich and the poor would have been very great.

His identity – at least for the purposes of this story – is tied up in his wealth. In his book *The Waiting Father*, Helmut Thielicke notes that the typical obituary generally says nice things about the deceased. He ponders what the obit for this man might say, “He was very rich...he feasted sumptuously every day and possessed a magnificent wardrobe.”

Indeed, the clothing of the rich man is described in detail; “καὶ ἐνεδιδύσκετο πορφύραν καὶ βύσσον – he was clothed in purple and fine linen.” You know all about purple dye.

The Internet calls it, “Tyrian purple...also known as royal purple, imperial purple, or imperial dye” and describes it as “a reddish-purple natural dye,” (WIK) and it was rare.

The dye for purple cloth comes from “a species of shellfish or mussel” (Thayer), and because it was rare, it was expensive, and because it was expensive, it was a good way for one to flaunt his wealth with great conspicuousness. People do that today with clothes. He was also wearing “fine linen” clothing, and reference “sea silk” for that.

Historically, clothing has been an almost universal indicator of wealth. The same holds true today. It begins in junior high school or before and continues into adulthood. Who is wearing the Armani suit? Is that a Versace dress? Designer jeans? Clothing is very visible. Everybody sees it every time they look at you. Jewelry has the same function.

The man “εὐφραινόμενος καθ’ ἡμέραν λαμπρῶς – lived in luxury every day.” The words used to describe his lifestyle are not easily translatable – KJV says he “fared sumptuously every day” – but the word “εὐφραινόμενος” means a good feeling, and “λαμπρῶς” is about what we would call “luxury.” People know – or know of – people like that.

The eating of food is not mentioned, although food would have been a part of it. The phrase indicates that the man constantly delighted himself with all the pleasures his riches could buy, many of which are timeless. Choose your favorite rocker or debauched beautiful person for a modern-day example of the lifestyle that this man was living.

We also note that the man’s house is surrounded by a fence with a gate, the meaning of which was the same then as it is now. The fence kept the riffraff at bay, and the gate let in only those who were worthy. Go ahead and reference the gated community where dwell *The Real Housewives of Orange County* if you need to or maybe talk immigration.

I consult local experts all the time. If I want to know about fashion, I will talk to my daughter Kate, the clothing expert in the family. I found out about the darnel weed mentioned in the parable of the wheat and tares from a Kansas farmer. I have referenced various relatives and friends such as Tooth Expert Anna or Horse Collar Expert Lyle.

20. The rich man is not given a name – sometimes I call him Rich Mann – but the poor man is named, called Lazarus, which means “God a help.” It’s the same name as the brother of Mary and Martha who Jesus raises from the dead. That was an actual incident. This, on the other hand, is a story. The name Lazarus is neither common nor uncommon.

He is said to be “πτωχὸς δὲ τις ὀνόματι Λάζαρος – a poor man named Lazarus.” In my mother’s world, there was “poor,” and there was “dirt poor.” The NT has two words for

poor, and this word means “dirt poor.” Obviously. We might use words like “destitute” or “penniless” to describe somebody in his condition and his condition was miserable.

He was “ἐβέβλητο πρὸς τὸν πυλῶνα αὐτοῦ εἰλκωμένος – laid at his gate full of sores.” AI says that “Skin ulcers can be caused by poor blood circulation, prolonged pressure on the skin, infections, or certain medical conditions like diabetes and atherosclerosis. Other factors include limited mobility, obesity, nutritional deficiencies...old age and smoking.”

Go ahead and look up “meth sores,” and if you feel brave, click on “images.” You are likely aware that poor health often comes with extreme poverty, but your listener may not be or may need a reminder. Many of those causes articulated by AI of those symptoms are directly or indirectly related to poverty, in this case certainly nutritional deficiencies.

He did not desire to feast sumptuously or live in luxury but only wanted “τῶν πιπτόντων ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τοῦ πλουσίου – that falling from the table of the rich man.” Many poor and hungry people are satisfied with the table scraps of the rich. Restaurants and grocery stores donate food to hungry people, and food pantries generally contain basic food.

It doesn’t say that he *wanted* the dogs to lick his sores but describes “ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ κύνες ἐρχόμενοι ἐπέλειχον τὰ ἔλκη αὐτοῦ.- but even the dogs came and licked his sores,” which should make people cringe, which is probably the desired effect. It is generally thought that Lazarus would have gotten some sort of comfort from the dogs licking his sores.

Upon further examination, I don’t think so. The tongue of a human is soft and smooth, but the tongue of a dog is hard and rough, and that tongue on those open sores would have brought anything but comfort. The picture painted here is rather of a man who is too emaciated and weak to move or even defend himself from this torture by wild dogs.

22. And then he died. And then the rich man died. Let’s start with Lazarus, “ἀποθανεῖν τὸν πτωχὸν καὶ ἀπενεχθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἰς τὸν κόλπον Ἀβραάμ – the poor man died and was carried by the angels into the bosom of Abraham,” reclining at table, his head on the belly of the Patriarch. Bengel says that here God considers Lazarus

as his own genuine son, the coheir and sharer of the same table with Abraham, who “sits down” to the banquet in the kingdom of the heavens [[Matthew 8:11](#)]. An abbreviated mode of expression: For the bosom presupposes the banquet; the banquet presupposes the kingdom of the heavens. Lazarus attained to the kingdom of the heavens; nay more, to the banquet: nay even to the bosom of Abraham.

As for Rich Mann, “ἀπέθανεν δὲ καὶ ὁ πλούσιος καὶ ἐτάφη – the rich man also died and was buried,” which is not nearly as cool as being “carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom,” and the obvious contrast between the two men in the physical realm comes into sharp focus as they take up their respective places – heaven or hell – in the spiritual place.

23. He finds himself in Hades, “καὶ ἐν τῷ Ἅϊδι ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ, ὑπάρχων ἐν βασάνοις, ὁρᾷ Ἀβραάμ ἀπὸ μακρόθεν καὶ Λάζαρον ἐν τοῖς κόλποις αὐτοῦ.— and in Hell, lifting up his eyes, being in torment, he sees Abraham from afar and Lazarus, in his bosom.” The souls in Hell will be able to see the souls in heaven, but not vice versa.

The common word for “Hell” is γέννα. The word here is ἀδη, or “Hades.” In Greek mythology Hades is both the name of a place and the name of a person. Hades is the King of the Underworld of Hades. The word occurs ten times in the NT, used four times respectively by Luke and John – who write to a Greek audience – and twice by Matthew.

Some Bible Scholars want to talk about the OT word “Sheol” as if it’s some “place of the dead,” or an ambiguous place of afterlife, almost like a purgatory. I’ve never quite gotten that. If you look at how Sheol is used in the OT, it is *not* a place where you want to be. It sounds a lot like Hell. They want to make the NT Hades correspond to the OT Sheol.

The meaning of a word is determined by how that word is used, and to that I would say the same thing as I said about Sheol; Hades is not a place you want to be, and it sounds a lot like Hell. Just look at the description of Hades that follows its occurrence here; You have fire, anguish, torment, separation from God and the Saints, and it’s irrevocable.

Looking at the word as it’s used the other nine places in the NT, that’s not a place where you want to be, and it still sounds a lot like hell. I get that Roman Catholic Bible Scholars need Sheol and Hades to be purgatory, but I don’t get how so many Protestant Bible Scholars get hooked by it. It’s a simple thing; heaven is good, and Hell is bad.

His condition is described as in “βασάνοις – torment,” a word used to refer to various instruments of torture. He can see Abraham and Lazarus from “μακρόθεν – far off,” a word that occurs fourteen times in the NT. Do a word study and note how the word indicates that one “far off” does not want to be far off but wants to get closer but he can’t. **24.** He addresses Abraham as father, “καὶ αὐτὸς φωνήσας εἶπεν Πάτερ Ἀβραάμ, ἐλέησόν με – and crying out, he said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me.’” He was a Jew who – given the theological understandings of these things in that day – was likely surprised to find himself where he did. Abraham doesn’t owe him anything. His plea is for mercy.

The specific act of mercy he seeks is “καὶ πέμψον Λάζαρον – and send Lazarus,” with just the smallest bit of water to bring the smallest relief, “ὅτι ὀδυνῶμαι ἐν τῇ φλογὶ ταύτῃ - because I am in torment in this place.” Ellicott notes that the water is requested to be placed upon the tongue, the thing that in the former life was an instrument of excess.

As for the request for Lazarus to be the messenger who delivers the water, he says,

On the one hand, they have been thought to indicate the old selfish arrogance and heartlessness of the man who still looks on Lazarus as one who may be sent hither and thither, at any cost of suffering, to do his bidding and minister to his ease; on the other, we may see in them the traces of pride conquered, and the cry for mercy at last coming from lips

that had never uttered it before, and the craving for help and sympathy from one whom in his lifetime he had despised as beneath his notice.

25. Abraham calls him “τέκνον – child,” not the preferred “son,” and reminds him that he received much good in life “καὶ Λάζαρος ὁμοίως τὰ κακά – and bad things came upon Lazarus.” You could have done something about it, but you didn’t. The tables are turned “νῦν δὲ ὧδε παρακαλεῖται σὺ δὲ ὀδυνᾶσαι – now here Lazarus is being comforted.”

That verb is a present participle of “παρακαλέω – to be called to one’s side,” in this case Lazarus being called to the side of Abraham. Meanwhile, the rich man suffers “όδυάω – anguish.” a word that can be used for either physical or mental/spiritual suffering or both. He then references what might be described as a “gaping chasm” between their states.

26. He further emphasizes the separation by noting that your condition is now fixed; one cannot go back and forth between heaven and hell. When you die, you go to either heaven or hell, and there is no second chance. Hebrews is probably the most explicit about that, “it is appointed for men to die once and after that comes the judgment” (9:27).

27-28. It seems to me incredible that the man suffering the anguishes of hell would be thinking about his living brothers but think about them he now does. Continuing to insist that Abraham is his father, “Ερωτῶ σε οὖν, πάτερ, ἵνα πέμψῃς αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου – I beg you, therefore, father, that you send him to the house of my father.”

Rich Mann wants Abraham to send Lazarus to his father’s house, “ἔχω γὰρ πέντε ἀδελφούς – because I have five brothers,” and he doesn’t want them to end up like he ended up; in Hell, “ὥπως διαμαρτύρηται αὐτοῖς – so that he might warn them.” That verb “διαμαρτύρομα” actually has connotations of “testimony” = this is what I have witnessed.

If Lazarus can tell his brothers what he has seen – Heaven and Hell – “ἵνα μὴ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλθωσιν εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦτον τῆς βασάνου – so that they might not also come to this place of torment,” (the same word used earlier to describe Hell). Realizing that for him all is lost and it’s too late, he wants to warn them about this place so they can avoid it.

29. Abraham responds by pointing out that this stuff is all in the Bible, which they could access anytime they wanted to, “Ἐχουσι Μωϋσέα καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας· ἀκουσάτωσαν αὐτῶν – they have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them,” and that’s pretty simple, isn’t it? They had the OT, and we have the NT, making things more clear, but...

I suppose some people are looking for lightning bolts or some other kind of a sign, and then I’ll believe. But that’s not the case. The OT had signs – the Pharaoh saw lots of them but did not believe. Jesus did lots of signs, and when He did, some people believed that He was God, and other people saw those same signs and said He is from Satan.

30. The rich man argues that if his brothers were to witness somebody who had been dead but was brought back from the dead, “ἀλλ’ ἐάν τις ἀπὸ νεκρῶν πορευθῇ πρὸς

αὐτοὺς, μετανοήσουσιν – but if somebody from the dead should go to them, they will repent.” then they would surely repent, change their ways, and so avoid this place.

31. The irony, of course, is that Jesus will be raised from the dead, and that didn’t do it for unbelief, which is sort of what Abraham says, “Εἰ Μωϋσέως καὶ τῶν προφητῶν οὐκ ἀκούουσιν, οὐδὲ ἐάν τις ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῇ πεισθήσονται – if they don’t hear Moses and the Prophets, not even if someone should be risen from the dead, will they be persuaded.”

His being brought back from the dead is just what is going to happen to Jesus, and His resurrection was met with scorn and disbelief by the unbelievers and with curiosity and disbelief by the believers. As a matter of fact, most people have not seen anybody raised from the dead and yet we believe. From whence comes this faith? From the Word.

Law/Gospel

Poor/Rich – Lazarus was poor and the rich man was rich. Most Americans would rather be more wealthy than more poor. They do not purchase lottery tickets in the hopes of becoming poor. As Jesus notes here and in other places, the more riches you have, the more distractions you have, and the harder it is to remain undistracted. When we were in seminary, we did not worry about losing our savings or pensions or anything like that because we didn’t have any of those things. Christianity will always be a futuristic religion, one that looks to the riches of heaven and not to the riches of this life. This can be a difficult thing for us of instant gratification, but it’s pure Gospel. Preach it in such a way that the hearer looks forward to going to heaven. I’m not sure how he pulled this off, but a pastor of mine while I was growing up talked about heaven in a way that made me not want to go there. Don’t do that, and while you’re at it don’t make church a place they don’t want to go to either.

Sick/Healed – Lazarus was sick, which is the lot of man on this earth. Americans will not easily relate to the condition of starvation, but they can relate to sickness, which touches their loved ones and them often. Heaven is the place of no sickness. I have asked the listeners to think of the last time that they had the flu or another painful disease, one that maybe made you just wish you could die. Hell is to be like that always, only worse. Heaven is the absence of that ever, only better.

Forsaken/Nurtured – Lazarus was forsaken by all; by his family, his fellow Jews, and his neighbors. He had nothing but misery on this earth. In heaven he finds himself in the bosom of Abraham, being divinely fed and nurtured for eternity.

This Life/That Life – All the stuff that we have in our context makes life generally good for Americans. Add to that an increasing skepticism about the continuation of this into another life, and the temptation to live for today is almost overwhelming. My second favorite Sports Talk Guy, Colin Cowherd, who does not claim to be religious, talked about the philosophy he got from his father that told him “if you aren’t living, you’re dying” and “all you know is the here and now.” Those comments were in the context of

his divorcing his wife and the mother of his two children. For the Christian the here and now is temporary and relatively unimportant. The there and then is most important, and anything we get here and how is seen as icing on the cake.

Sermon Titles

The Life and Times of Richard Mann

Paradise Found

Carried by the Angels to Abraham's Bosom

To Abraham's Bosom

This Life/That Life

Hymns

What is the World to Me – LSB 730

Seek Ye First – LSB 712

Hymns from the *Church Triumphant*, *Death and Burial*, and *End Times* sections would be appropriate.

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ACC – Ancient Christian Commentary

RSV – Revised Standard Version

WP – Word Pictures in the New Testament, A.T. Robertson

ODCC – Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church

UBD – Unger's Bible Dictionary,

BCY – The Gospel of Luke, William Barclay

MM – The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, Moulton and Milligan

MGM – Concordance to the Greek Testament, Moulton, Geden, Moulton

BAG – A Greek-English Lexicon..., Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich

FGG – Fundamental Greek Grammar, James Voelz

VINE – An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Unger and White

WIK - Wikipedia