

✠ Luke 16:19-31 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

The rich man was in Hades because of his great wealth. He had received his good things in this life, and so he went to hell in the next. These are the words of Jesus put in the mouth of Abraham, speaking to the rich man as he lay in torment in the fires of Hades. “Remember, child, that you in your lifetime received good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.”

This is fair. This is justice. Why should poor Lazarus suffer any more? Why should the rich man who wouldn't stoop to help his neighbor continue forever in the lap of luxury? To whom much is given, much is required. Now things are as they should be. The rich man got what he deserved; as did poor Lazarus. Now, if you are to inherit eternal life, go and sell all that you have and distribute it among the poor.

The damning thing about the Law is that it's not just for thieves and murderers. It's not just for your evil step mother or your wicked sister. It's not just for Wal-Mart and their staff that won't give you the attention you think you deserve; or for the waitress that takes too long on your Sunday lunch. It's not just for the purchaser that won't give you top dollar for your grain or cattle. The Law is for you. And whatever measure you use, it will be measured against you. Repent.

It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor according to the world's standards, the Law says to go and sell all that you have and give to the poor. But not only do this, but do it with love. For love is the fulfillment of the Law. Don't do it because it makes you feel good or because you like to see the smiles on their faces when you pour them a bowl of soup or hand them a check for a thousand dollars or give them a ride to the county courthouse. If you take pleasure in these things, then that is your reward, and you will have received your good things in this life. Rather, do it because you love them. This is fulfilling the Law. And unless you do this perfectly, you fail at every point of the Law.

But this is impossible, we say. If we gave everything to the poor we'd have to give away our wedding rings and our tractors. We'd have to give away our houses and our children's toys. We'd even have to give the shirt off our back and the food we put in our mouth. We would be left with nothing. Not even a crumb. We would be naked and homeless; exposed to the elements. We would catch pneumonia. But that's not the extent of it. For if we had nothing, not even a crumb, we would scavenge. But as soon as we found a small morsel, it would be ours, yet we couldn't even take a nibble, we would have to give it away because the Law demands we give it all away. Not just what you have earned, but also everything you have been given. If we gave it all away, we would die. The Law always kills. We can't possibly do that. But that is not the extent of it, to give everything away even to the point of death. It's that we do it with love in our eyes for those who are eating our last morsel. We starve to death, while loving those who are greedily taking everything that would keep us alive. This is the full measure of the Law. We die so that other's may live.

In the face of this, our excuses fade away like a drop of ink in the ocean. Where are our levels of the Law now? How does it sound in the ear of God when we admit that we can't fulfill the Law, but at least we try? We cannot give it all away, and don't even want to, but we give a little every now and then. We try to be good; we try to love our neighbor; we give our measly three or five or ten percent. We like the idea of “stewardship” because it has a ring of responsibility to it. We can have our pleasures and our treasures as long as we're being good

stewards. It gives us an out because we can say that giving it all away would be foolish but good stewardship is smart and reasonable. But the Law is not concerned with reasonableness. Obeying the Law is only foolish if you are concerned about self-preservation, for the Law always kills. It is no excuse at all when we say that we may not fulfill the Law perfectly, but at least we try. This doesn't matter, for with the Law there is no try, there is only do or do not. It is all or it is nothing.

Who, then, can hope to be saved? With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Come, let us beg with our brother, Lazarus. Let us throw ourselves on the mercy seat of God and beg for life. For God is merciful. He justifies the wicked and forgives the guilty. There is hope for us rich men. It is not in our money or our time. It is not in our church attendance or our volunteer work. Our hope is in Moses and the Prophets. Or more precisely, our hope is in the One to whom Moses and the Prophets bear witness.

Hear the Word of the Lord: "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. He shall be so disfigured so as not to appear human. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised, and we thought nothing of him. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... he was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities; upon him was laid the chastisement of the Almighty that brings us peace."

For our sakes He who was rich became poor. He became the beggar so that we should become kings. He gave everything that was His by right away. He gives to you the treasure of heaven, Himself. He spent Himself wholly on our behalf; holding nothing back. He keeps nothing for Himself but gives you everything. And He does this with love in His eyes as He looks upon those who both receive and reject what is His. It does not matter if you appreciate His giving or if you take advantage of His giving or if you receive His giving with a joyous heart, He gives the same to all people everywhere without thought of thanks or of being paid back. He fulfills the Law perfectly.

But with God this is not enough for His beloved. For the Law is only able to honor the one who keeps the Law, but our Lord is greater than the Law. For, He, in fact, is the One who rose from the dead and judges all things. And His judgment is this: to make His righteousness yours; to give you credit for His fulfilling the Law.

He has done what no one else can do, He has crossed the chasm that separates us from life. Yet He does not merely dip His finger in cool water to wet our parched and dying tongues. He pours His life-giving blood over our tongues that we should be made like Him. He gives us His royal garments of salvation to wear as our own; His rich linens of royal white, washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. He bathes us in His holy bath, in the purest of water, giving us His Spirit and life. And He carries us to the side of Abraham, where we join with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as we feast sumptuously, as often as we wish, on the Bread of Heaven. We are rich beyond measure, for our treasury is the storehouse of God, the pride of Jacob. He is our portion and He satisfies us. He pours out on our head the oil of heaven, the fragrance of God, so that we become a pleasing aroma to the Lord, incense in the temple of God.

What shall we render to the Lord for all His benefits to us? We will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving by calling upon the name of the Lord, by taking the Cup of Salvation and calling on the name of the Lord. In the presence of all His people we shall sing of His glory and praise His holy Name, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of Jerusalem, the city of God.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠