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# The Rich Man, Lazarus, and You

By Ivan T. Blazen

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**T**HOUGH spoken 2,000 years ago, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) has continued relevance and value. In picturesque and symbolic language Jesus illustrates the lessons of unselfishness and service to others.

Let us take a close-up look at the two main characters involved. It is said of the rich man, or Dives, as his name comes to us from a Latin tradition, that he was clothed in purple and fine linen. This was the garment that those of royal blood, kings and princes, were accustomed to wear on very special occasions. The fine linen was the same material that became the garb of Joseph when Pharaoh made him the highest ruler in all the land of Egypt. So we see that Dives, the rich man, lacked nothing for clothes; he had the best and most exquisite wardrobe that money could buy.

The parable goes on to say that he fared sumptuously every day, the idea being suggested in the text that every day he made merry with great splendor and outward show. Each day was a day of feasting and merrymaking. As we would say today, he was "living it up."

The second character in the parable is a poor, diseased, humble creature whom Jesus calls Lazarus, a strange name for one in his physical condition, for his name means "God is my help" or "God has helped." Lazarus presents as notable a figure of poverty and misery as the rich man, Dives, does of luxury. He is in great suffering, covered with sores, wasting away under some loathsome disease, with the pangs of hunger surging through his body, a hunger that is aggravated, not satisfied, by the few crumbs the rich man's servants throw to him. His pain is further intensified by the presence of the wild, neglected, unclean, scavenger dogs that roam the streets of Eastern cities. They come and lick his sores.

Dives is clothed with purple and fine linen; Lazarus is covered with a garment of sores. Dives feasts sumptuously every day; Lazarus hungers for crumbs. Dives undoubtedly has a host of attendants to wait on him; the

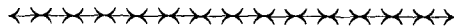
mercies and association of dogs are all that Lazarus knows.

According to the parable the rich man is condemned and relegated to a state of eternal loss; the poor man is saved and given eternal peace and happiness. Why was the rich man condemned? Certainly not because he was rich, for both Abraham and Job were rich. Furthermore, it was not because he was an open sinner; the parable does not mention offenses against either God or man.

## Sins of Omission

It has sometimes been said that Dives did nothing for which he could be blamed. But this is just the point. How many people there are who congratulate themselves on the wrong things they have never done! But the rich man was condemned not for the things that he *had* done, but for the things he had *not* done. His sins were not sins of *commission*, but of *omission*.

A believer, in the New Testament sense of the term, is not one who merely mentally assents to the fact



## By the Grace of God, I Resolve

*By Kathryn Barnett Cash*

A year is much too long.  
I may forget along the way  
And crush the resolution  
That I would make today.

I've tried before and failed.  
A year is much too long;  
And I am short of strength  
When I hunger to be strong.

But try I must. Once more  
Forget the past of broken hope.  
A year is much too long—  
I'll try a shorter scope.

Today is here—right now!  
Not distant is the evensong.  
I'll only make it for today;  
A year is much too long.

By the grace of God, I resolve—

that God exists and that we owe acts of love to Him and our fellow men; a true believer is one who embraces God's truth with his mind and then fulfills in a practical way the things that his mind consents to as right. The rich man may be classed as an unbeliever because, though he perhaps believed in God, in heaven, in judgment, in righteousness, and in mercy, yet these things were in reality foreign to him; he did not live in harmony with them. He denied them by the way he lived. He lived only for self, thus he was in fact an unbeliever.

"Today there is a class in our world who are self-righteous. They are not gluttons, they are not drunkards, they are not infidels; but they desire to live for themselves, not for God. He is not in their thoughts; therefore they are classed with unbelievers."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 270.

Lazarus, whose name means "God is my help," and whose life has testified to his belief in this motto, finds that God is indeed his help. In the figure of the parable, he is borne to Paradise by a host of angels. The rich man, who had been so well attended in life, lies alone in his solitary gloom. On earth there was a gulf fixed between Dives and Lazarus that Dives never crossed. The condition is reversed in the next world. There, an eternal gulf is fixed between Lazarus, who is now rich, and Dives, who now becomes the beggar.

Lazarus, while on earth, chose to receive the true, the eternal life from God. He set his affections on the things which are above. Now he is given that which he has chosen. He finds his reward in heaven.

The rich man has already received that which he chose. He chose a life of pleasure and self-seeking, a life of material comfort. He received his reward while on earth. There is nothing left for him in eternity. God does not give us eternal life if we do not choose to have it. We learn from Lazarus that to wear the crown of gold we must first wear another crown—the crown of thorns.

The rich man's penalty was just. He had showed no compassion, consequently no compassion could come back to him. This is a law of God's kingdom and of life itself—unless we give, nothing shall be given to us; unless we love, we shall not be loved; unless we pardon evil, our evil shall not be pardoned; unless we are merciful to others, God cannot be merciful to us. Unless we live *for* that kingdom, we shall never live *in* that kingdom.

The rich man was condemned not because he was rich. He was lost because he manifested unbelief in the

principles of God's kingdom by hoarding his wealth, by showing no mercy and compassion, by not taking hold of the opportunities for service that lay before him. He had denied the reality of every other object, both divine and human, and had affirmed only the existence of himself as the subject. Thus he was an unbeliever, and in accordance with his unbelief he was rewarded.

Likewise the reward of the poor man was just. But let it be remembered that he was not saved because he was poor in the flesh, but rather because he fulfilled in his life the beatitude of Christ, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven." He had humbled himself before God, believing, in Paul's words, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory" that would be revealed. Self was subordinate to God. God was his help. This is why he was saved. He was a genuine believer.

There is one further aspect of this parable that should be emphasized, and this has to do with a statement that Abraham made to the rich man. It will be remembered that the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to the land of the living to warn his five brothers, lest they come into the same state as he. But Abraham refuses to do this. He says, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

These words, "be persuaded," have great meaning for us in the light of this parable. In harmony with the injunctions that God's Word sets forth, He wants each of us to be persuaded. Persuaded of what? Be persuaded first to realize that we have lived in sin; that we have followed the path of selfishness and worldliness many times; that we have in the past turned our souls from the living God to find the center of our satisfaction and pleasure in ourselves and in this material and temporal world in which we live. On the basis of this He wants us to be persuaded to consider some very vital questions: where we came from, who made us, to whom do we owe our allegiance, our powers, and possessions; and to consider our duty to our fellow men in the light of God's love for us.

Then He wants us to be persuaded to repent, that is, to establish a new and vital relationship between ourselves and Him; to be extremely sorrowful that we have not lived for Him in the past; to change the direction of our life from downward to upward.

Then He wants us to be persuaded

to pray for God's enabling power to live for Him. Our prayer should be something like that which the great Augustine prayed more than a millennium ago: "O my God, thou sweetness ineffable, make bitter for me all carnal comfort which draws me away from the love of eternal things, and in evil manner allures me to itself by the view of some present delightful good. Let me not be overcome, O Lord, by flesh and blood. Let not the world and the brief glory thereof

deceive me. Let not the devil and his subtle fraud supplant me. Give me strength to resist, patience to endure, and constancy to persevere. Give me instead of all the comforts of the world, the most sweet unction of thy Holy Spirit and the love of thy blessed name."

Finally, God wants us to be persuaded to decide that henceforth we, by the help of His grace, will become true believers and will live for Him alone all the rest of our days.

## "Like Him"

By W. B. Ochs

Vice-President, General Conference

WHEN we think of Christ and what it means to be like Him we usually think of His love, His kindness, His perfect character, and His sinless life. These are vital. But let us consider five words that express phases of His life that we seldom think about—characteristics that are also important, for in all of these we must be like our Master.

1. *Humility*. Paul says, "He humbled himself." He was not forced or persuaded; it was a voluntary act. That is why Jesus was able to say, "I am meek and lowly in heart."

The word *humble* comes from the Greek word *humas*, which means ground, or earth. That is about as low as one can get. For the Greek or Roman to say that a man was humble was to say that he was cowardly, low, mean, and cringing. Christ, however, exalted humility. He came to tell us that true greatness is found in being lowly.

Humility is the opposite of pride, and pride is the cause of all sin and misery. Pride led Lucifer to say, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I

will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14).

Pride, the never-failing vice of fools, causes one to feel independent; it closes one's heart to God. Pride, like a magnet to the pole, constantly points to self. Pride is increased by ignorance, for the one who assumes the most generally knows the least.

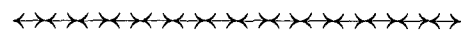
Spiritual pride is the most dangerous and the most arrogant of all pride. It was Mr. Moody who said, "Be humble or you will stumble." We are to be humble that Christ may exalt us in due time (see I Peter 5:6). Pride is always offensive to God.

2. *Unselfishness*. Selfishness! What a curse it is! It is human to be selfish, and divine to be unselfish. Christ was never selfish. Henry Ward Beecher said, "Selfishness is that detestable vice which no one will forgive in others, and no one is without it himself."

As man goes down in self-esteem he goes up in the sight of Heaven. We could well afford to pray daily, "Deliver me, O Lord, from that evil man, myself." Earth would be heaven if selfishness were banished from the hearts of men. "We shall be like Him"! He was unselfish. We, too, must be unselfish.

3. *Tact*. Webster's New World Dictionary says of tact: "Originally, the sense of touch. Delicate perception of the right thing to say or do without offending; sensitive skill in dealing with people."

Christ was always tactful. He was teaching His followers to be tactful when He said, "Be ye . . . wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Tact comes as much from goodness of the heart as from fineness of taste. Tact and sympathy are to be com-



### The Silent Artist

By Helen L. Kelly

Quietly, softly, the snow drifted down,  
Etching each object with a glistening  
white crown.

Noiselessly as the light step of a fawn,  
Hushed as the gray emergence of dawn,  
Still as the moon high in the sky,  
Mute as the viol now laid aside,  
Silently, soundlessly, the snow gently fell,  
Painting a picture no artist can excel.