

The One Whom God Helps

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[0:00] In our series in the Gospel of Luke, especially these middle passages as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, to the cross.

! The best way to think of this series of sermons on Luke is journey with Jesus, or journey with Christ on his way to the cross.

And this morning we're going to be in the latter part of chapter 16, Luke 16. It's on page 1041 of your Pew Bible. I encourage you to open your Bible as we go along in those verses.

Now, as you think about this probably well-known parable of Jesus, I'm sure this isn't the first time many of you, if not all of you, have heard it. How are we to understand this parable? Is it teaching about a great reversal?

Is it saying that if you leave a comfortable and affluent life in this world, you will suffer in eternity? And if you live like a pauper in abject poverty in this world, you will be rewarded with wealth in eternity?

[1:14] Is that all that this story is saying? Is it saying that, you know, wealth bad, poverty good? I take it by your laughter, you realize that's not the point of the story at all.

And it isn't. This isn't the point of this story. This story has to do with what truly matters in this life. It has to do with not just being rich and being poor, but really where do you place your trust, your ultimate trust?

In what or in who do you place your ultimate trust? It also has to do with death and hell and heaven. Those are things that we often don't talk about anymore.

We live in this modern age. It's so easy to push death as far away from us as possible. How many people have seen a dead body?

Okay, that's a good amount. But there's a good amount here that haven't raised their hands as well. And you realize that if I had asked that question 100 years ago, 150 years ago, even when a child as young as 5 years old would raise their hands.

[2:36] Because death is a reality of life and death was close. But now we've pushed it to the far fringes of our lives. There is, there is, it's not altogether a good thing.

Because we think in our modern age that we can push the discussion of death and the act of life and eternity as far as possible. We'll deal with that later.

It's not really a modern thing, but it's more, it's more prescient in our age than any other age before. But this, this parable of Jesus does not allow us to push it away.

It pushes right into the forefront of our minds. It's like that Aunt William song, House of Gold. It says this, I'd rather be in a dark, dark grave and know that my poor soul was saved than to live in this world in a house of gold and deny my God and doom my soul.

So, this parable sort of gives us a picture of what it is like to live in this world of wealth and affluence with a doomed soul.

[3:54] But I think for us to best understand this parable, we must look first at the context in which God, Jesus Christ, told the parable. And we can see that in the preceding verses.

So, I encourage you to look with me even from verse 13 to 18. Those are the preceding verses. And these verses gives us contextual clues to better understand what this parable is saying.

Last week, remember that Jesus had told his disciples about this parable in the first half of chapter 16 of this unscrupulous, dishonest manager.

And he ends that parable by saying in verse 13, No one, no one can serve two masters. Jesus says in there, One must win out.

Does God win out in your life? Or does your worship of money and material possessions win out in your life? You can't do both.

[5:00] Does your greed of covetousness win out? Has money mastered you? Are you living in service of the almighty dollar? Or is God still your heart's deepest treasure?

So, Jesus sets that as a call to his disciples. And in the midst of saying this parable, the Pharisees are still there.

They're hearing Jesus tell the parable. And what was their reaction? In verse 14, there, the Pharisees, this is the way Luke characterized them.

This is the way Jesus sees them. This is the way they are. They are lovers of money. And they heard all these things that Jesus said. Verse 14. And they ridiculed Jesus.

They ridiculed Jesus because of what he's saying to them. They sneered at Christ. Why?

[5:57] And Jesus, seeing that, said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

You are those who justify yourself before men. This is at the root of this parable. So, self-justifying Pharisees, mocks Jesus, based on his message in verses 1 to 13.

And this is the basis of their mocking. They've come to believe that their self-justification is tied intimately to their money, to their material possessions.

They love money. And upon hearing what Jesus has to say about money, they laughed at him because they're accustomed to seeing the size of their wealth as a sign of God's blessing and pleasure.

The richer you are, the wealthier you are, the more influent and influential you are, God must love you. And the reverse to them is true. The poorer you are, the more destitute you are, God must hate you.

[7:15] You must be under God's judgment, under God's curse. So, Jesus says, you are these people who justify yourself in the eyes of others.

You justify yourself based on the size of your material possession, Jesus told them. By the way, this works both ways, I think.

because the devil is deceitful. He's wicked. He's deceitful. He can make you feel self-justify, justify yourself based on your lack of money.

Do you know that? He's deceptive that way. I think it works both ways. In the Pharisees' days, in the time of Jesus, it's the common knowledge that if you're wealthy, you're probably blessed by God. If you're poor, you're cursed by God. But I think in our day, it's a mix. And we've come to be able to justify ourselves one way or the other. And that's the human condition. I'm sure in Jesus' day too, there were some who were poor who says, well, my poverty is what justifies me.

[8:23] You know? Many wrongly ascribe a life of poverty to a life of holiness. You know, the ascetic life, a life of deprivation, they would think, oh, that's what commends me to God.

I'm not like those rich, you know, wasteful people. Ironically, those who think that way are just like the Pharisees.

They might not be wealthy like the Pharisees. They might not be wealthy like this rich man in this parable, but the same mindset. Why? Because they are self-justifying.

It's not the wealth of the rich man that condemns him that Jesus is trying to bring out to us as what we should not emulate. It is self-justification.

The rich man is, in fact, the Pharisees in this interaction. The Pharisees would have seen this rich man as is described in Jesus' parable as the very vision of a righteous, elevated man.

[9:30] this man who God has blessed with such wealth. He must be holy. He must be right with God. But God, Jesus says, Jesus says to us, God knows your heart.

Man might think otherwise, but God knows your heart. God knows you and I's heart as well. God is not fooled. He sees every human heart and before him, before his majesty, what man exalts, what is exalted, what man values highly, is an abomination to him.

Now, that could mean anything. By the way, Jesus isn't saying here that what man exalts is necessarily evil, but he says, what you exalt highly, it's still in line with what God says, Jesus says in verse 13, no one can serve two masters.

What you come to exalt in your heart, in your mind, above God, is an abomination before God. It's detestable.

And those could be anything, even good things. power is not in and of itself bad, but when you search for power and seek power and influence above God, that is detestable to God.

[11:02] Money, money can be used well. We see that. This is Jesus' admonition in the last parable, last week that we talked about. We ought to use our wealth and our material possession to invest in God's kingdom so that we can make friends for ourselves in eternity.

But God, but money can also be used in a bad way to subjugate the drive for money, the greed that comes with it, that making others, treating others in a non-humane way can make that an abomination to God.

Education, good education. Who thinks good? Good education is good. Knowledge is good. But if that is said above God, that's an abomination.

So this is what Jesus is saying to these Pharisees and says to us, what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God when those things are exalted above God.

And so then Jesus now goes, after setting this parable before them, he goes on in verse 16 and 17, he says, the law and the prophets were until John.

[12:15] This is parenthetically in this statement. It's almost like, you know, Jesus is saying these and before he goes to this parable, he kind of just gives them this, you have all you need to know God's heart about this.

He says, the law and the prophets were until John. Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached. Look what Jesus is saying. Before I came on the scene, the law, the whole testament, the whole of it, has been preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

And everyone forces its way into it. But it's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

This is in the parenthesis. the Pharisees are people who have prided themselves as holy and righteous before God. And one of the things that was rampant among them was divorce.

And Jesus is saying to them, you, you have self, you so far justify yourself, self-justify yourself that you're even discounting the law of God regarding marriage.

[13:35] That's not the point of our, of the focal point of where Jesus is going here with them. He just gives us an example for them. This is signs of the way in which you've, you are self-justifiers.

In fact, you're self-justifiers but you are not justified before God because you're disobedient. You're running afoul of God's law. And then he goes on and he tells the parable. He tells this parable in verse 19.

Starting in verse 19. We see before us these two people, two persons, right? They can't be any more different.

We have the rich man and Lazarus. Verse 19. There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

By the way, it's just one verse but there's so much in that one verse. To be clothed in purple and fine linen is to be arrayed and it will denote for everybody in Jesus' day here comes a wealthy, wealthy, wealthy man.

[14:41] You know, the dye that's required to dye wool in purple is not something that anyone can come by. And this man clothes himself every day in this.

It displays, it's a display of his position, of his wealth, of his affluence. And he's even not only that, he's clothed in fine linen. The fine linen is what's underneath its proper clothes.

That also requires a sort of process of bleaching the linen to be white. This is something that, again, a rich, so Jesus is basically saying, everything this man wears shows that he's wealthy.

even his underwear is wealthy. And not only that, he feasted sumptuously every day.

Now, as we've been going through these passages in Luke, the middle passage, we've talked about feasts and banquets. But here, we see this man, every day, he has a banquet.

[15:48] sumptuously. This is not just, you know, invite, you know, my neighbor over here. He has a party. Every meal, every dinner is a party where he invites the whole, the whole, his friends.

Remember, he's a Pharisee here. He's not inviting just anybody up the street. He's inviting the influential people. And they come and they feast at his house sumptuously.

Can you think of what it would take to do that every night? The food that would be required to have a banquet every night? The staff that would be required to make the food, to serve the food, to clean up, to decorate the party?

This man is a rich, wealthy man. It's a very picture of opulence. And then we have before us, at his gate, we're told, in verse 20, at the gate of this rich man, again, that shows that this man is, he's so

wealthy that he's able to like shield himself in.

He lives in a walled castle, shall we say. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores.

[17:09] We're not told a lot about Lazarus. Well, there's enough for us to infer from what, in verse 20, just as we infer a lot in verse 19 about the rich man. Lazarus, we're told, was laid at the gate of the rich man.

And he's covered with sores. I think the fact that he even said he was laid there means that it's very likely Lazarus is a crippled beggar. Right? He was laid there.

There's a passive connotation there. He's laid at the gate of this rich man. And every evening as he holds his banquet his rich friends come in and out. Go walk, step right over Lazarus to go to the banquet.

And comes back out. Lazarus lays there in his detestable state. Crippled, poor, penniless. He's a picture of a weak man covered with sores we're told.

He's in the lowest rung of society Lazarus. Not only is he penniless but he's probably ceremonially unclean.

[18:16] And you know that's important to the Pharisees. So not only is this man poor he's even before God in their eyes before God he's as far as anybody can be.

He is the very picture of a detestable person. They would have seen him as one who is cursed by God. Whereas the rich man is a picture of one who is blessed by God in their eyes.

But what a great surprise. Look at the turn in Jesus' tale. Verse 20 Let's look at verse 21 first. This Lazarus desires to be fed.

Look at his desire is just meal. Just a very and he's not asking for much. Is he? He's asking just for the scraps that fell from the rich man's table.

Moreover even the dogs came and licked their sores. Now there's a key thing here as when we read verse 21 it says even the dogs came and licked their sores. We oughtn't to think of your little pet schnitzel or labradoodle.

[19:30] That's not what is being talked about here. In Jesus' time in the ancient Middle East they do not have dogs as pets. They have dogs that are roving wild dogs or they have dogs who are guard dogs.

They have no notion of pet cute little dogs. So when you read dogs come and lick their sores don't think oh you know a nice cute dog having pity on Lazarus.

These are either wild dogs or more likely they're probably guard dogs because they have access to the scraps under the rich man's table. But even Lazarus is below them.

This creature below the dogs. But look at the surprising turn of events. What happens? What's the reality of life? For the rich and the poor death comes to us all.

And the poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham's side. We don't know what happens to his body. He probably was just thrown in a trash heap.

[20:41] But look before God the estate and the honor that was given to him. He died and his soul was carried by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried with him.

Imagine that funeral for that rich man. How the pomp and the circumstance that would attend that funeral. Everybody would have been saying oh what a great man.

He always throws to the greatest parties. He's always nice to his friends. He gives his generous. All that adulation that would have visited him at his funeral.

But what's the reality? Jesus is showing the reality here. The reality is that at death Lazarus is at Abraham's bosom.

Abraham's side. Where's the rich man? He also died and was buried. And verse 23 he's in hell. In Hades.

[21:43] Being in torment. That's where he ended up. This is God's economy. And he lifted up his eyes while there in a place of torment.

He lifted up his eyes. And what does he see? To his shock and surprise. I think here Jesus is shocking the Pharisees because they would have expected such a man.

Where was his destination in their mind if you'd asked him? He's a righteous man. Of course he's going to heaven. He's going to Abraham's side. He's a son of Abraham. A true son of Abraham.

And Lazarus? Well, he's cursed by God. But we see the reversal. And it might not be a shock to our ears as we read this.

It would have been a great shock and surprise to them. It would have been sort of almost revolting what Jesus is saying to them here. That Lazarus is at Abraham's side and this rich man is in a place of torment.

[22:52] And it would have been a surprise to the rich man himself. This is a man who was, again, look what the characterization Jesus gave to people like him. A man who was self-justifying.

A man who justified himself before men. And he would have been surprised to find himself where he is. But not only that, and he sees, he looks up far away, he sees Abraham.

And who is at Abraham's side? Lazarus. That poor, crippled beggar at his gates. And so he says, Father Abraham, we see here the narrative of this story.

Now we see, what's remarkable about this parable is that this rich man doesn't then see this, and sees his estate and says, oh, I've got it wrong.

Ah, I've messed up my life. There's no repentance here. There's no repentance in this parable.

What does he do? He starts to bargain. He's dialoguing with Abraham.

[24:08] And notice it still is disdain. He still does not address Lazarus. But he talks of Abraham. Father Abraham, right?

Have mercy on me, he cries. Send Lazarus, you know, to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue. For I am in anguish in this flame.

It seems, it's interesting, the reversal here. Lazarus was just hoping for scraps under his table. He couldn't even get that.

Look at the reversal. The rich man now, just wants just a dip of water in the midst of his anguish to dip in his tongue. But the reversal is not the main thing really.

The main thing is that Abraham responded to him. Son, child, remember that in your lifetime, you received good things and Lazarus in like manner, bad things.

[25:13] But now he is comforted and you are in anguish. There's an irony there in Abraham's response to him.

Abraham says to him, there's a great chasm, verse 26. There's a great chasm between us. Lazarus cannot come to you and you cannot come here.

The chasm has been fixed. I think here in this parable, verse 25, 26, this proves the notion and sometimes the notion that many people still have today, that they can bargain their way into heaven.

Even at the end. When you preach the gospel, people put it up. Maybe you're here today. You're putting it off. I'll deal with God later, at a later date. I'll deal with my eternal destination.

Here, this man is in a place where it's fixed and he's already too late to deal with it. He's still trying to deal with it. But it's too late. Abraham says to him, the chasm is fixed.

[26:26] This is this, this tells a lie. This disproves the lie of the notion of purgatory. of that anyone can die and then they can work out, you know, in hell or whatever they are, work out sort of their salvation and then come back to heaven.

there is nothing in the Bible that speaks of that. What does the Bible say? It is appointed once for man to die and then judgment.

That's what the Bible says. And that's what's going on here. Abraham says it's too late, son. There's irony in that even the word child, son, that is given there.

Because what's revealed here is that this man, as rich as he is, as Israel as he thinks he is, he's not a true son of Abraham. Because what is Abraham?

Abraham is a man who was counter-righteous by his faith. Abraham, by the way, is a rich man. So this gives you proof that this isn't about rich and poor. Abraham was a wealthy man.

[27:35] Abraham would have been a man on par with this man in terms of wealth. But Abraham's righteousness was not because of his wealth, or because of his works, but because of his faith.

And in that regard, he and Lazarus are the same. They are of one mind. But this man, this rich man otherwise, he's not a true son of Abraham.

He's on the outskirts. There's an irony there. But he still bargains. He's still bargaining. He says then, then I beg you, Father, I have five brothers.

Can you send Lazarus to warn them so that they might not come to this place of torment?

Abraham's response is, they have Moses. They have the prophets. Let them hear them.

And he said, he's arguing with Abraham here. He says, no, Father Abraham, if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said to him, if they do not hear Moses and the

prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.

[28 : 48] They have Moses and the prophets. That's the encapsulation of the whole testament, the scriptures that they have at the time of Jesus. The Bible speaks of my will and my revelation.

God is saying to us. You have in God's word all that you need for life and godliness to enter into the kingdom of God.

In other words, we even have more. Because in our day, we have a greater claim. We do have Moses in the prophets. We have the Old Testament. But we also have the Gospels. We have the Epistles.

We have the Revelation in the New Testament. We have the fullness of God's revelation of salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We have the supreme disclosure of God to mankind through his Son. What more do we need?

That's an important question that Abraham tells.

[29 : 49] What more do you and I need than God's word in the Bible revealed to us? was still the rich man attempt. He's trying here to correct Abraham's viewpoint.

He says, you have it wrong, Abraham. They need a sign. If you send them someone from the dead, they will listen.

How many today are like this rich man? Asking for the same thing. Demanding a sign from God? A method maybe? A program? How many people even in the church do that? God's word is not sufficient enough. Let's have a sign.

Let's do something else. What God is telling to you, you and I, brothers and sisters, God's word is sufficient. It is all we need. It is all we need.

[30 : 50] God's He has revealed himself mercifully, graciously to us in his word. And this is the damning thing, as he tells Abraham says here at the end.

If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, if they do not hear God's word, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.

Lazarus. This is what's masterful about this parable. Because you know in John, there is another Lazarus. Not a fictional parable one, but a real Lazarus.

The friend of Jesus, who died. And it was three days in the grave. Rotten, smelling, Jesus delayed, and Jesus came to the grave of this friend of his, Lazarus.

What did Jesus do? He called out, Lazarus. There's a lot of jokes about that. It's a good thing that Jesus said, Lazarus, come out. Because if Jesus just said, come out, everybody in the grave side would have just walked out.

[31 : 57] But Jesus says, Lazarus, come out. Lazarus came. A dead man being raised. Did the people, did these Pharisees turn to God and said, you are the Messiah of God.

You are the one we have been waiting for. We are sorry for refusing you, for rejecting you. Did they fall on their knees before Jesus? No. The very act of Christ raising Lazarus from their father embedded their mind.

John says there in that passage, they made it a point then. They decided, even at that moment, to do what? To kill Jesus. Jesus. And there's a greater resurrection, there's a greater sign, Jesus Christ himself, risen from the dead, no longer to die, risen and ascended, and he is here before us. If you don't believe God's word, there is no sign, no miracle that would convince you. essentially, God is saying to us here, you have all you need, God's word, listen to it.

God is less himself, this is the witness of God's will to us. But the tragedy is, the tragedy is here, even as we see this parable in this story, the reality of heaven and hell, the tragedy is that the things that keep us from seeing our desperate need for grace are the things that we've exalted above God.

[33 : 41] This is why the context of the Pharisees is important. They are unable to see before them the revelation of God, because they have elevated material possessions, influence, affluence, man's respect above and beyond God.

And that has blinded them to see. God is saying to us, I have revealed myself in the Old and New Testament.

I have revealed myself supremely in my Son, Jesus Christ. Listen, listen, come to me, come on bended knees, turn from your sins and your wickedness, and accept the mercy of God.

And if you do not, the Lord of this rich man is your Lord. The last thing I want to point out to us is the meaning of the name Lazarus.

Lazarus means the one whom God helps. In that regard, only Lazarus can make it to heaven.

[34 : 55] if you're not a Lazarus, you cannot be at Abraham's bosom. You cannot make it to heaven. Are you one whom God helps?

Are you one like the Pharisees who thinks I can help myself? Thank you very much. Are you self-justifying? Are you relying on the justification that only Christ as one is secure for you? Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for your word to us this morning. And we ask, Lord, that you will help us to humble ourselves, to let go of all the things, even the good things, that we're using to justify ourselves, or to disabuse ourselves of the notion that we can remain in you, even though we're in Christ, and our works amount to anything.

Help us, Lord, to rely on you and your work for us alone. Help us, Lord, to fix our eyes on you and you alone. Help us, Lord, to call others to do the same thing.

Help us, Lord, to use your word, your witness to us as the foundation of our faith, of our belief, of our trust in you.

[36 : 27] Help us let go of those things that we're clinging to, that brings no salvation, that ultimately brings damnation. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.