



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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Jump Start # 2134

Luke 16:22 "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried."

I love this story of the rich man and Lazarus. We have a Jump Start book on this topic. It's been a while since I wrote about this, so I thought I'd take a look at Four Realities of Death. Hopefully, that will be tomorrow's topic. Today, I want to take a look at some things on this side of death. Lessons we see from this great text.

It is interesting to see the series of contrasts that Jesus makes before and after this account.

- Lk 15:11 a certain man had two sons. And, boy, were they different and yet in many ways they were the same.
- Lk 16 we see two men who died. So different in life and so different in death
- Lk 17:35 has two women working at the mill
- Lk 18:10 has two men going up to pray in the temple.

It is also interesting to see the similarities to how this story begins and how the chapter begins. In Luke 16:1, we read, "there was a certain rich man..." Now, down in Luke 16:19, "There was a certain rich man..." This is not the same person in both stories.

Now, let's look at a few lessons about these two men before they died. After they die, their roles reverse. In life, the rich man is doing well and poor Lazarus has no one. He is dumped at the rich man's gate with the hopes that the rich man will have some pity on him and take care of him. But after they died, the rich man is in agony and Lazarus is comforted. Their financial status had nothing to do with their eternal conditions. If it did, then every poor person is going to Heaven and every rich person is lost. There were many rich people that pleased God, such as the blameless Job, the faithful Abraham, or even little Zacchaeus who found salvation in the Lord. Poverty is not the way to Heaven. What moves God is our faith. Belief and obedience in Christ is what matters. Trust and obey is what we sing. What hurt the rich man was not the amount of his riches, but the smallness of his heart. Lazarus was not on the other side of the world. He was at the rich man's gate. Every day, when the rich man passed through those gates, he would have seen Lazarus. Somehow, in the next world, he knew Lazarus' name. He called to him by name.

First, Success in the world does not mean success with God. You may turn someone's head because of the car you drive or the clothes you wear. That doesn't impress God. I remember walking into Kansas City Royals stadium, with my friend Freddie Patek, a former player. As we walked up, people opened the doors, not for me, but for Freddie. I was just tagging along behind. They greeted him. Some came over and shook his hands. As we made our way to our seats, a few stood up and waved to him. No one waved to me.

(OVER)

The doors of Heaven aren't going to be opened to you because you were a hotshot here. You may move people, companies and money, but unless you move your heart towards God, none of that matters. Poor Lazarus didn't even have a bed to sleep in, yet the doors of God's heart had mercy and grace for him because he believed.

Second, some conditions of misery are not relieved. Obviously, Lazarus was watched over by God. At his death, angels carried his soul to Paradise. However, on this side of death, God did not take away Lazarus' illness. He died. Not every sickness will be healed. Not every injustice will be made right. Not every toxic relationship will end happily. Not every prayer of the righteous will be answered as they want. This is a hard one for us. We want everything to work out fine. We want the rich man to rush out of his house, scoop up Lazarus in his arms, carry him inside and order the best medical attention that is available. We want Lazarus to get well and he and the rich man to become dear friends. We want this story to end happily. It doesn't on this side of things. Lazarus dies. Tragically, he may have been saved. Poor as he was, he was likely buried in an unmarked pauper's grave. Likely, few if any shed a tear at his death. Likely, there was no tombstone to mark his grave. There is a strong possibility that no one ever visited his grave. No flowers were left there. It looks as if Lazarus hardly left any footprints on this side of life. This can seem so sad to us. It can seem so unfair to us. The Lazarus story has been and is being lived over and over throughout this world. Poor believers in Africa, India, and generations ago, in this country, died in obscurity. Outside of their immediate families, most were not noticed nor missed. When the history books were written, they were not named. But Heaven did not forget them. God recognized that great faith and their work in the kingdom. What they did and how they lived, may seem foolish compared to the world, but it's everything to God. These simple poor believers never traveled far. They didn't own much. Back in Bible times, many were servants and slaves to people like this rich man. Some were taken advantage of. They had little rights. They lived and died in tough conditions. But God was aware. Angels were sent.

This is an important lesson for us. Because you are a believer, don't just assume your illness will go away. Don't just assume, someone is going to open the gates and take care of you. It didn't happen to Lazarus.

Third, this story reminds us that not only is death not the end, for either the righteous or the wicked, but also, death is not the worst thing that can happen to a person. Death is simply a doorway or a passage that takes us into the next world. That door swings one way. Once you pass through, you are not coming back. How fascinating, in this story to see that the rich man could see, talk, feel, remember and know things. Basically, all that he was, remained the same. His body was buried in a grave, but he was very much alive. And, for the first time in a long time, his money didn't mean a thing. He couldn't order people around. He couldn't buy what he wanted. He couldn't even beg for what he wanted. His freedom changed. He was told "no." No, Lazarus is not going to get you water. No, Lazarus is not going to warn your brothers. No. You don't get your way in the next world. On this side of that door called death, we have choices, options and opportunities. On the other side of that door, that all changes. The rich man was in agony and he couldn't do anything about it. He was hopeless and helpless, just like Lazarus was when he was laying at his gate.

I think in many ways you and I are in the shoes of both men. There are times we are like Lazarus, hopeless and helpless. No one is coming to help us. No one is there. All we have are our prayers. Will we turn our backs on God or still trust in Him. But, then there are times that we are the rich man. Opportunities are right before us, even at our gates. They are hard to miss, but like the rich man, we can ignore them. Too busy now to help others. Too much into our world to think about anyone else. Too selfish and too stingy to do what we could. The thoughts that usually come to our minds are the rough looking guy holding up a card board sign while we sit at a stop light. Shame and guilt fills our heart. Is he legit or is he a fraud? But move your thoughts past that. Right at your gates, maybe that teenager in your congregation who just needs someone to be a friend to him. Or, it may be that person who just needs someone to answer a few questions that they have. Could it be that it's not just money, but our time, our hearts that we are holding closed to others? Could it be that someone just needs us, but we pass right by them and allow them to die spiritually because of discouragement?

Powerful lessons that can change us, if we will open our eyes and open our hearts.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)