

We are all familiar with the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus didn't say much about what Lazarus might have thought about all of this, though, so I would like to think about what might have gone on inside his head.

We don't know what was wrong with Lazarus that caused him to need a benefactor. But he seriously needed help and I just have to wonder why he chose this particular gate as his place. Did he know the rich man and just assume that he would be shown favor? Or did he just expect a man with such riches to be kind?

Look at the contrast in their way of life! The rich man had everything that he wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. The rich man was obviously not very compassionate, but Lazarus stayed at his gate until he wasted away and died.

When the scene shifts to the afterworld, the rich man seeks to turn the situation around, as he is in torment. But all of a sudden the rich man acts like he knows Lazarus, like they have been close. The rich man finds himself needing what he wouldn't give Lazarus in the other world, and he expects Lazarus to serve him as though he were still important.

It is almost amusing the way that Jesus presents this contrast of attitudes. The rich man never paid Lazarus any attention, but when his own existence isn't going very well, he begs for a crumb of compassion. He asks Lazarus to go back into the world, which had been so miserable for him, to get him just a drop of water to place on his tongue. The rich man does not care that Lazarus would be tormented, too! He is only concerned with himself.

Remember that the rich man asks Abraham to let Lazarus go back to the physical world. We never hear how Lazarus felt about it. It makes you wonder -- what do you think that Lazarus would have done, given the choice? What if he had been able to speak for himself? Would Lazarus have offered to help the rich man, or would he have told him no? Helping might have been an even greater torment for Lazarus! Abraham didn't give him the opportunity to answer, but made the rich man understand that he had gone to a place from which it was impossible to return.

The rich man, having been denied, then asks for mercy for those he did care for, his brothers. And he still thought that he was important enough to be granted this wish. But Abraham showed that the rich man's family could not see the True Good, either, for they continued to reject God's word as presented by the prophet Moses. And so we are left with Lazarus in the embrace of Abraham, and the rich man in eternal torment.

This story is a very powerful one, and it makes me wonder if there are people around us that need us in the same way that Lazarus needed the rich man, and we never see it. We may have our own personal Lazarus; we may have many of them, and we had better do a better job than the rich man in Jesus' story. Any of us could be in a similar situation; we must look for opportunities to help those around us who are in need (Matthew 20:25-28).

I have at least one of them in my life. When I bought my Dad's house, I sort of inherited his handyman. I could have mowed my own lawn and raked my own leaves, but it didn't seem like the right thing to do to tell him to go away. He had no education, and his health was poor, but he was a very hard worker. Pretty soon I came to expect the appearance of Aubrey or his wife at least once a week to "borrow" twenty dollars (always at what seemed like an "inconvenient time" -- see Luke 11:5-8). And every once in a while they paid twenty dollars back.

After I had been doing this a while I realized that this man had the last name of, and looked a whole lot like, a family that my Dad used to take to church when I was a kid. And I thought that it was very fitting that I carry on that tradition for him.

Do you have your own personal Lazarus? Think about it. We need to have more than just an intellectual understanding of this story. It needs to be firmly planted in our heart every day that we live, so we don't miss an opportunity to do Good.