

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, from Luke 16.19-31, we find a man who uses his wealth in an attempt to glorify himself, to show off how important he was. We also see Lazarus, who was poor and too sick to work, who would have gladly suffered the humiliation of eating the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table: quite a contrast! The rich man in his importance ignored the great needs of Lazarus and refused to comfort him.

Now both men die, and the scene is changed to a spiritual place where the dead exist after this life. The rich man calls to Abraham for mercy, to see if he would allow Lazarus to come and comfort him. Isn't it funny how all of a sudden the rich man acts like he knows Lazarus! But even now he has no idea unfair it is to ask Lazarus to do something that he himself did not do. Many times those who are insensitive to other people still expect to be served by them no matter what they have done. If the rich man had learned anything, he would have at least expressed sorrow at his treatment of Lazarus. I think he still didn't realize what real goodness was meant.

Look at the selfishness of the rich man, who never thinks what the trip might mean for Lazarus. How could Lazarus have brought the water and not have been tormented himself? The rich man treated Lazarus in the afterlife much the same as he treated him on earth. Abraham gently reminds him that while he had been comforted on earth, he had shown no comfort to Lazarus, and therefore did not deserve any mercy. There is nothing mentioned here about the rich man keeping or breaking any law or command. There is simply an absence in the heart of the rich man of any semblance of goodness or mercy. He was concerned only with himself.

Next the rich man wants a special messenger to be sent to earth to his family to show them that this religion business is for real. The rich man still thinks that he is important enough for such a special favor to be granted. And he has no thought for Lazarus, who would have to leave his place of comfort and return to the earth, where he had known so much pain. Abraham tells the rich man that if the words of Moses are not enough for them to see the goodness of God, then nothing will truly convince them.

The main point that I would like to bring out here is that the rich man thought so highly of himself that even in the midst of his punishment he could not understand what goodness is about. He still felt that he was someone who should be served by others, instead of being a servant himself. Many times we feel this same way, that we should be the object of everyone else's concern. But Jesus would have it very different, for in Matthew 20:27-28 he says, 'whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' In Mark 9:35 he also tells us to be 'servants of all'. The rich man should have been the servant of Lazarus, instead of callously expecting him to suffer for him. We must not let our need to feel important keep us from being what God wants us to be.

How much of a servant are we? I wonder what Lazarus would have done if Abraham had let him decide for himself whether or not he would help the rich man? What would the unselfish servant have done? What would we have done?

It is time to become servants of all. The first step is to submit to Christ through baptism into His name. If you need to do this we hope that you will come now as we stand and sing ...