

JJ¹

Over the last few years we've hear a lot about the 99% and the 1%. The media and politicians often paint a picture of huge disparity and difference between the so-called "haves" and "have-nots." They do so to the point of making us wonder if we are living in feudal England 500 years ago and not in the most abundantly blessed nation since king Solomon sat on the throne in Jerusalem! In spite of this it is true that we still have many people living in poverty, even living in homelessness. It is also true that some who are wealthy acquired that wealth through dishonesty, cheating and injustice. And yet considering these things, many who think they are "have-nots" in our land would be the "haves" in most nations on this earth, ourselves included. Yet we often forget this. And more importantly, we forget how truly blessed we are in Christ.

Today's text is all about stark contrasts. Jesus uses these stark contrasts to remind us that **GOOD THINGS ARE COMING** and therefore we are to live our lives accordingly, whatever our station in life.

Jesus tells us about two very different men, worlds apart in their earthly lives and eternal lives. There was a rich man who lived in the lap of luxury every day

of his life. He certainly was the type who lived by the motto, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die!"

Then there was the poor man, named Lazarus whose name means "God has helped." He was so weak and diseased that people had to carry him to the rich man's gate in order to beg. He sat there day after day, longing to eat the scraps from the rich man's table. What's worse, stray dogs would come and lick at Lazarus' sores, as if getting a taste of a future meal!

While both men were worlds apart in this life and the next, there was one thing they shared. There was one thing in which they were equal. It is the one thing we all share. Both had to face the awful consequence of sin in this world—death. And for each one death was a doorway, but that is where the similarity ends. For poor Lazarus, it was the doorway to heaven. For the rich man it was the doorway to hell.

In their death we see the stark contrast. Although poor Lazarus had no ornate burial like the rich man certainly did, he was ushered into the glories of heaven by the Lord's angels. The rich man on the other hand was only buried. No angels came to bear his soul to heaven. His soul

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

was dragged down into hell by a force beyond escape—God’s wrath.

Jesus continues, “In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’”

Now before we go any further, we must realize why Lazarus was in heaven and the rich man was in hell. Lazarus was in heaven, not because he suffering in life, but simply because he believed in Jesus as his Savior. The rich man wasn’t in hell because he was rich. It also wasn’t just because he didn’t show any concern for poor Lazarus. His selfishness was only a symptom of the greater disease—unbelief. The rich man went to hell because money was his god and he did not share in the faith of Abraham, who he arrogantly calls his father.

We see this truth in the way Abraham addresses him. Notice that Abraham says

“your good things.” He doesn’t just say “good things” as he says Lazarus received “bad things” from a human perspective. “You lived for the things you thought were good. You forgot what God says is the most important “good” to have.” Spiritually, the rich man was a “have-not.” As Solomon taught us in our first lesson, this man’s love was wealth and it lead to his eternal harm.

Friends, the warning rings true for us as well. But how do we know if we’re in danger of being a spiritual “have-not”?

An easy way to do this is to examine your heart according to God’s Word spoken through Solomon today. “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income” (Eccl. 5:10). Are you content with the gifts God has chosen to give you in income and possessions?

Or... Do you grumble and complain that others have more than you? Do you wish you had what others have? Do you sacrifice your time on the altar of the false god named “Lifestyle”?

You see, friends, that’s one I’ve been hearing more and more about lately. I’ve heard people say that they hope they don’t have another child, not because they couldn’t afford to raise another child, but because they wouldn’t be able to continue living their current lifestyle. I’ve seen people sacrifice time with family and God all so they can maintain sta-



tus quo. But friends, even if your current lifestyle isn't extravagant compared to others that doesn't mean you're not turning money and possessions into your god!

Friends, this kind of toiling and struggle is a chasing after the wind and will only leave you as a spiritual "have-not"! Don't be like the rich man we hear about today. Instead be like poor Lazarus who lived his life, even in great pain and poverty, knowing that **good things were coming**.

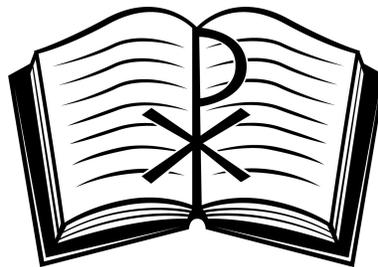
Even though Lazarus looked like a "have-not", he had great riches in his heart. Lazarus had received the gift of faith from God. He lived with the full assurance that his sins were all forgiven by his Savior. He lived each day with the knowledge that **good things were coming**.

Friends, you and I, we have something to look forward to! **GOOD THINGS ARE COMING!** And don't think of that word "good" as we usually mean use it. Think of God's use of the word "good." When he created the world, God said that it was good. When God says "good" he says that it is perfect! Friends, it isn't just good or even better things that are coming, it's the best!!! When we think of our loved ones who died in faith, let's not think and say that they have gone to a better place. It is the best place! And Jesus shows us why it is the best place when he describes the new life Lazarus is living.

He says that now in heaven, Lazarus is being comforted. The Greek word translated "comforted" is a beautiful word because the picture is calling someone to your side. Lazarus was by the side of his spiritual father, Abraham, the father of all believers. Abraham receives this title in Scripture because righteousness was credited to him, not because of things he had done, but because of his faith in God's promises. (cf. Gen. 15:6)

And so friends, we too, who share in Abraham's faith, know that we will be comforted forever in heaven. For in heaven there will be no pain or disease. And for Lazarus that is indeed an immense blessing. But no longer being hungry, weak and covered with sores isn't what brings him the greatest comfort. The greatest comfort is being with Jesus and living without sin! He has a perfect relationship with God and now there isn't even a chance of him ever being tempted to sin, let alone to sin!

Friends, these same spiritual riches are made your own through faith in Jesus. And remember, Jesus hasn't just dipped his finger in some cool water to ease our pain for a short while. Jesus poured out his blood for us so that one day all our pain, sorrow and suffering would be gone forever! And he made that promise to you individually when a hand was dipped in some water and poured over



your little head as you heard: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit." In that moment you were no longer a spiritual "have-not" and received God's solemn promise, **GOOD THINGS ARE COMING!**

So then, knowing that **GOOD THINGS ARE COMING**, how are we to live our lives?

Those of you who have much, or at least more than others: First, don't be ashamed because God has blessed you as he has. Abraham was an extremely rich man and yet is a hero of faith! Thank and praise God daily that he has blessed you. Recognize, as Abraham did, that everything you have comes from God's gracious hand. But also don't live as if **good things aren't coming**. See your possessions as things God has given that you might serve others less fortunate than yourself. Most importantly, use your good things so that the spiritual "have-nots" of this world would have God's Word and be brought into the spiritual "haves."

Those of you who don't have much, or are even struggling to make ends meet; those of you who are suffering from poor health: First, don't be envious of those who have what you do not, thinking that your life would be better only if you had what they have, for this is sin. Remember

that the station in life you have at this time is given by your God in perfect love and wisdom. And if the Lord one day decides to remove that hardship, rejoice! But if he doesn't, remember that he is the one who has promised you, "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). But most importantly, remember that you are not a spiritual "have-not" but are rich in Christ because you have Christ. And because of him **good things are coming!** That means you also have something to offer to the spiritual "have-nots" of the world. You have eternal riches to share with them!

Dear friends, as you live your lives in this cynical, greedy world, never forget that whether you find yourself in plenty or in want, **GOOD THINGS ARE COMING!** Remember him who makes you truly rich who will one day send his holy angels to bring you to his side! Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.