

## Fed By Grace | Food in the Gospels

### “Hungry Man/Thirsty Man”

Luke 16.19ff

3.17.13

*“Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. **20** And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, **21** and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. **22** Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. **23** In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and \*saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. **24** And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’ **25** But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. **26** And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’ **27** And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— **28** for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ **29** But Abraham \*said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ **30** But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ **31** But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

We’re looking at the theme of FOOD in the four Gospels, the food events and social gatherings where Jesus Christ did so much of His teaching AND *how often He refers to food in His parables and teaching* as a symbol or a comparison.

In the modern world (esp. in urban settings) we’re often removed from food production and we may mistakenly think that money makes food. But in the ancient world food was seen as a resource (from God and soil) ...*it was hard to get and hard to keep.*

Hunger and thirst were a daily reality for many people (as it still is, today). *This is a parable that addresses hunger and thirst and sees food as a resource.* And resources are meant to be invested and utilized. We speak of money being “in circulation” like blood, like it’s alive and moving and, if it stops circulating, the organism dies.

And the folks to whom Jesus Christ was speaking loved money (v. 14) and wanted to hold it...didn’t want it to circulate. And in that way they were wasting a resource that God had put at

their disposal. They were wasting their money and food and opportunities by failing to circulate what God had given them. Stagnant, wasted, misplaced resources.

This is a story of two men: "Hungry Man/Thirsty Man." It's the third of three stories about waste. The Wasteful Sons (one wasted his inheritance – the other wasted his relationship) then The Wasteful Manager (start of ch.16) and *NOW* The Wasted Life – the rich man who was given money by God but did not make friends with it...instead, wasted that perfectly good money on himself...

It's an *eerie story*...about *conspicuous consumption* in the face of poverty and sickness. It's about the afterlife and a person being punished for his crimes. AND there IS – *if you listen carefully* – some very good news for the living...in some sense, we get to write the ending. Let's look at:

#1 – The Pros and Cons of Minding Your Own Business

#2 – The Voice From the Great Chasm

#3 – Getting persuaded

#1 – The Pros and Cons of Minding Your Own Business.

I remember hearing about a sermon in chapel when I was in college, an old man, an English professor preached it and called it, "Mind Your Own Business". I liked the title and it's a needed emphasis against two of our common tendencies: 1) We can tend to be half-hearted in our work, to be living for the weekend. So, it's good to take care of business. It's good to do what you do, whole-heartedly like it's a calling from God, a vocation. AND 2) It's good NOT to be a busy-body i.e. not to mind other people's business. So, minding my own business is better than idleness (on one hand) and better than being nosy (on the other hand).

But, it's not an acceptable alternative to actively loving our neighbors. And one of the warnings here is that a proper mind-your-own-business can degenerate into a selfish lack of compassion, and an idolatrous love of comfort and money. We can turn a corrective into an excuse – mind your own business is not an excuse for ignoring needs and for finding your security in money.

There's a section in Proverbs (18.10-11) that warns of our tendency to put money in the place of God:

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe. A rich man's wealth is *HIS* strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination."

*Jesus is saying the same thing in these three parables and especially this third one.*

These listeners had put money in the place of God had made an idol, a source of security out of money and when wealth takes the place of God, it becomes a cruel master and *bad things happen*. It desensitizes the human heart.

*That's WHAT this story is meant to show.* We meet two men; carefully contrasted for us. One is called simply "a rich man". This is typical. Jesus Christ never gives names to the characters in His stories. Not one single character is ever named – not the Prodigal Son, nor the Good Samaritan ...except *here*. The rich man has no name but the poor man here (ONLY here) is given a name (the ONLY character). It was a very common name. Abraham's servant in Genesis had the same

name; this is a variant of Elieazar – Lazarus. It means, “helped by God”...and ironically he is apparently NOT!

The rich man (w/o a name) is described by what he wears and he always wears the finest clothes (purple dye was very expensive – came from snail shells) and even his underwear was expensive (fine linen – silk boxers). He ate well every day and enjoyed the finer things.

But Lazarus was thrown (or even dumped) at the man’s gate to beg and he was sick (had to be carried) and in pain (covered in sores, like Job) and he heard the feasting and celebration *but was NOT invited in*. In fact, he craved the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table but got nothing. His only help came from the guard dogs – they get the leftovers and they licked the wounds of poor Lazarus. If you saw it, I’m sure you’d think it was a very pitiful picture if you saw it...THAT IS... IF YOU SAW IT....but

The problem with the rich man was that he didn’t. He simply didn’t notice Lazarus. I mean...he did at one time. He apparently learned the man’s name, because in the afterlife he refers to Lazarus by name. He may have thought it ironic or even funny that one so pitiful and destitute should be named, “Helped By God”

“Fact is” ...thinks the rich man... “I should be named Lazarus...it’s pretty clear that I’m the one blessed by God! ...and he is...sort’a forgotten by God/cursed.”

Then after a while...Lazarus just became...part of the landscape. First a shocker, then a bit of a curiosity then a nuisance and ...then you just don’t even notice him anymore. You just get on with business ...can’t save the world.

I remember going fishing as a young boy and a little horrified watching my dad pull the hook of a fish’s mouth. And he said, “Oh, they don’t feel the way we do – they’re not like us – they have no nerve endings in their mouths.” Ohhhh! What a relief to learn that: we are different – fish and people.

And the rich man probably told himself something like that about Lazarus. “That type...that class...that kind of person doesn’t feel like my family feels... never been taught that kind of sensitivity and that high view of life...so when they lose a baby or a limb...it doesn’t affect them the same way (no nerve endings).”

Then, the two men die. The rich man is given a proper burial but Lazarus just dies...and where he’s once been dumped, now the angels of God carry him; they help Lazarus (“helped by God”) and this time, he’s admitted inside the banquet...seated right up against the Patriarch of Israel, Abraham himself! Wow!

And the unnamed rich man is in torment. Like Lazarus had been in torment, smelling that food and wondering...so close but never invited IN...never given any scraps; never befriended but by the dogs.

Then the rich man sees the tables are turned and cries out (plays the race-card), "Father Abraham! (same nationality!) Have mercy on me!" (that's weird...that's what beggars say)...Send Lazarus with a bit of water!"

The idea is: Lazarus must BE there *as your servant*, "because he's ... you know ... one of those people... a servant type."

But Abraham says, "Well, he's not a servant *ANYMORE* – he was always dismissed but now he's included...Plus, he can't get there! There's a great divorce, a great divide between there and here – no one can cross over...even if they wanted to...and who would want to?!"

Then the rich man tries again (a second request – he's really not used to being denied!) "Then I beg you (see? he sounds like Lazarus used to sound, "I beg") send him to my father's house to warn my five brothers!"

We wonder why the rich man never actually addressed Lazarus directly... Was he still thinking of himself as essentially above Lazarus and of a superior class?

He seems aware that he's failed and wants to save people from making the same innocent mistakes... but he wants to save HIS people... his class ... the deserving. "If they only had the info, I'm sure they would avoid this plight, which has come upon me (and maybe there's an implied accusation)...if only someone had told ME, then I would have avoided this place...I'm only here because no one told me!!"

Then Abraham answers, "We already told them (and you!) – It's right in Moses and the Prophets! Anyone who listens to the Scriptures will hear God's heart for the poor and God's disdain of arrogance. You really can't miss it. Your brothers have all the facts (just like you did!) It's really not a matter of education."

Then the rich man takes one more run at it. This time he really shows that he's NOT used to taking "no" for an answer. V.30 "NO! Father Abraham!" (wow! That's gutsy...or *arrogant!*) "if someone goes to them from the dead they WILL repent!"

"But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

It ends there. It's very final: the man who was arrogant in life and who looked at people and yet didn't SEE them as people...didn't see them as fellow human beings but as somehow...different...lower (no nerve endings...like fish!). "Their pain/loss is somehow different than mine."

And it turns out that AS his heart was *in life*, SO it remains in death. He is "setting up" like concrete. As Lewis would've said, "He once was an arrogant human – in time he will become less human and more arrogant until there's no humanity...only arrogance."

It's eerie. *It's frightening...*and YET, in the shadows a Figure is walking. Between the lines, from out of the Great Chasm...good news is offered to the living...to the listener.

There IS a Person who sees the needy and really sees them...in fact it's His normal pattern in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – He sees the needy, He feels compassion and He moves to help them. He is the Rich Man who became poor for us. (2 Cor 8.9) If He sees you and you simply receive, you will be, “helped by God” – you will be Lazarus!

AND between the lines we meet One who actually did cross the great fixed chasm – the great divide – Who came from Heaven to Hell. Who took our place and was engulfed in the justice we deserved when He hung there between two thieves, between heaven and earth and bridged the chasm!

AND between the lines of this dreadful story is One Who not only *endorses* Moses and the Prophets (says “not one letter of the Law will fail”, v. 17) but Who ALSO *fulfills* the Law on our behalf. He lived the obedient and compassionate life I failed to live. Identified with us.

And here, *telling* this fantastic story, is One who actually did raise a Lazarus from the dead (traded places with Lazarus!) and He Himself *will rise from the dead to persuade hard hearts like ours*, “Look, I have given you Moses and the Prophets, given you the Scriptures to make you wise to salvation and ...IF that were not enough...*I have come back from the dead to appeal to you ...to persuade you...Will you be persuaded?*”

And that's it – that's the point. Will we be persuaded? It's as if God is saying, “Just in case you needed more – so it can never be said that I didn't do all that was needed to persuade you, SEE, *I have sent One back from the other side! WILL YOU BE PERSUADED?* “

To be persuaded and changed by this you have to see yourself a brother to: 1. The Unnamed Rich Man 2.The Named Rich Man 3. Lazarus

1) I have to see how I am like that unnamed rich man. Someone will say, “Am I arrogant?...I've never thought of myself as an arrogant person...I'm not sinless by any means but...arrogant?” And this parable is there to say, “Yes! The arrogant rarely see their own arrogance SO *assume* that you are.”

If you want evidence here are some areas: Look at what you want others to know about you. It may not be “purple clothes” or conspicuous consumption but what are you trying to project? Listen to your words. *How are you trying to communicate that you are a little better and superior to others?*

Also, the way you see people or DON'T see people is another telling sign. Look at how you treat waitresses and employees and people who are subservient to you or under-privileged or different... The new guy at work OR the old guy at work. Racially different, educationally. How do you see them? Do you see them?

Another big lesson, don't misinterpret your blessings. Are you convinced that God likes people like you? You have signs of God's blessing...they don't! Well, don't be so sure. That's one loud message in this parable.

Another symptom of arrogance is anger. What gets you aggravated? Trace your anger back to its sources and it'll often lead you to some sense of entitlement and some sense that you deserve this or that. The rich man eventually tipped his hand and blew up at Father Abraham. Ask God to help you sort out your anger and be willing to see the arrogance that may be behind it.

Second, see yourself the brother of the named Rich Man, Jesus Christ. Moses and the Prophets are pointing to Him and By His resurrection you are assured that whatever you wager on Him, you will NOT be disappointed! You cannot lose!

If we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we will not be afraid to identify with the poor – He did! He became one with the poor; He emptied Himself and God the Father highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name above every name. The rich man has no name. But the One who became poor for us so that we might be rich, (might be helped by God) – HE has the name above every name!

Lastly, we have to see ourselves as brothers with Lazarus.

We're like Ebenezer Scrooge and we have met the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future and WE ARE AWAKE – it was a dream or a nightmare and we have opportunity to say, "Lazarus! My brother had we adopted you and welcomed you – the six brothers would have become seven – the number six, the number of evil would become the number seven, the number of completion or perfection!" I have to see Lazarus and say, "I have a true sense that I was outside the gate...covered in sores...a wretch...I know what it feels like to be condemned and despicable in the eyes of the only One that matters...and therefore I can identify with the downtrodden...I feel a kinship with them. I see them. Feel what they feel. Empathize. Their pain isn't different from mine. We are brothers. When they have a miscarriage it hurts like anyone else's. When they lose a job or a parent. Read C.S. Lewis sermon "The Weight of Glory" and ask Jesus Christ to go with you, "Lord help me see people like You saw them...like You saw me" (Let's pray.)