

## Luke 16:19-31

“He whom God helps.” This is what the name Lazarus means...“God is my help.” Why do we begin here this morning? We are drawn to the name Lazarus because this parable in Luke 16 is the only one in which Jesus gives a name to someone in the story. And He doesn’t name both of the men in the parable. He does not give a name to the rich man; He only names the poor beggar. Lazarus...”he whom God helps.”

But it sure doesn’t look to us as though God is helping him very much. This poor man is so decrepit that he cannot take care of himself. So we find him at the gate of a rich man. But he is not able to walk there; he is laid at the gate. He is desperately hungry; he longs for the scraps from the rich man’s table. He suffers in extreme pain, for ulcers cover his body. Scavenger dogs come to lick his sores. But does this help? They may only aggravate, and not alleviate, his suffering.

From our perspective, the rich man in the parable, and not the poor man, should be named Lazarus. Just look at how he is blessed. God is surely helping him and not that man dying at his gate. The rich man is dressed with the finest clothing. He feasts; he doesn’t just eat, he feasts every single day. He has the best this world has to offer. He lives without care and concern. Every day is a day of pleasure. And so we would think that his name, and not the other, should be called Lazarus. For were anyone to ask, “Of the two, which one is God helping?” hands down, we would all say: the rich man.

But Jesus tells it the way it is. Lazarus, “he whom God helps,” is the poor beggar. And the rich man? He is not even given a name. “*I know My own,*” Jesus says. “I call My sheep by name.” But He does not know those who do not belong to Him. “*I never knew you,*” He tells the ones who knock and cry outside the door of heaven.

The poor man is Lazarus because, though his life here is wretched and miserable, he believes that God is his help, his Savior. And those who trust in God in this way are helped by Him. Lazarus is carried to heaven when he dies.

The rich man does not see God as his help. He helps himself to God’s material blessings; to anything and everything that is good for his body. But he refuses God as the helper of his eternal soul. How do we know this? Because of his attitude toward Moses and the Prophets - the Word of God. He despises it. He tells Abraham that Moses and the Prophets cannot help his five brothers. For himself too, therefore, this rich man does not want any help that could come from hearing the Word of God. “God is my help” is not what the rich man believes. And so when he dies, he finds himself in agony in hell.

Jesus spoke this parable against the Pharisees. They, like the rich man, had little use for Moses and the Prophets. The people around them had need of God’s Word, but they did not. They despised it. They despised the One of whom it speaks. This parable was a warning to them. Unless they humbled themselves to hear God’s words to them, they would not, and could not, repent. And they, like the rich man, would end up in agony in hell.

Jesus does not speak this parable against you, my friend, for you are Lazarus...”he whom God helps.” Nonetheless, that rich man lives within your heart and mine. Our Old Adam, our sinful flesh, has no use for Moses and the Prophets. When the Old Adam gets the upper hand in us, we stay away from hearing God’s Word; away from the Sacrament on the altar. This is nothing less than despising Christ, who is the Word of God; and for this, the rich man perished in agony.

The rich man did not go to hell because he was rich. Nor did Lazarus go to heaven because he was poor. What we have, or do not have, here on earth does not determine our place in eternity. That place in eternity is determined by whether or not the Word of God has us. The rich man had everything except for Moses and the Prophets. And so, in truth, he had nothing. For when he died, his riches could not help him. They were but a fleeting memory. Lazarus had nothing during his lifetime except for one thing: Moses and the Prophets. God's Word had him, and so Lazarus had everything. When he died, he was carried to heaven by the angels of God because God was his help.

When we are tempted to seek God's blessings for our body, but to despise His Word, this parable becomes a warning to us. Friends, we have too many in our midst who do not want the help that comes to them by hearing and feeding upon the Word of God. Let this attitude not be found within you. Rather, from hearing Moses and the Prophets today, let us repent of following that Old Adam who lives in our hearts.

Jesus' parable here in Luke 16 is, for us, comforting assurance as we live the struggle called life. You and I will probably never end up like Lazarus in his wretched state here on earth. We will not be laid at the gate of some rich person. We will not suffer from hunger and ulcerated flesh. Scavenger dogs will not be our only companions as life draws to a close. But whether life becomes wretched for us, or not, we have peace in knowing that God is our help. We do not judge how much God helps us by how much we have; by how pleasurable our life is here. Rather, we believe and confess, "God is my help" because He puts Christ, the Word, into our ears and into our mouths.

God is your help, friend, because He refused to help His Son as He hung on the cross. God turned away from Jesus in His agony. But in doing so, He was showing mercy toward you. If your sin is laid upon Jesus, then it is not laid upon you. If Jesus suffered the punishment of hell you deserve, then no punishment awaits you. If God called His Son the rich man on the cross, then He calls you Lazarus.

God is your help, for here today in word, bread and wine, He forgives you. God is your help because in your Baptism you are laid at the very gate of heaven; and the scraps from Jesus' Table are not withheld from you, but are given to you, and these scraps sustain your life in Christ.

God knows you as Lazarus. He does not help those who are wise in their own minds. He does not help those who are well-fed with the things of this world. He does not help those who have no need of His grace and forgiveness. These are not laid here at the very gate of heaven. They feast sumptuously on everything but the Word of God. God has laid you here, Lazarus my friend, because here God is your help. He does not help those who sit within the house of the rich man; He helps those who suffer with Christ, who are despised by the world, who do not have treasures laid up within the store houses of the rich, but who are laid as God's treasures on the steps of His house - at the very gate of heaven.

Lazarus did not walk to the gate of the rich man; he was laid there. And for you, God is the One who laid you here at the foot of the cross. Lazarus was a beggar, and so are you. To beg at the rich man's gate did not help Lazarus, but to be a beggar before God is to be one whom He helps.

God named you Lazarus on the day of your Baptism. He was your help then; He is now; and He will be your help tomorrow. When the angels carry you to heaven, your loved ones can gather, and rejoicing say, "Our Lazarus is with Jesus because God was his help, and this he truly believed, lived, and confessed. " Amen.