

Do We Get It?

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Jesus said, there was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen,
and who feasted sumptuously every day...

Okay, 'rich man' here is definitely an understatement. This is a very rich man. Dressed in purple: that's no idle detail. Do you know how they made purple dye back then? They crushed lapis lazuli, a very rare semi-precious stone. Emperors, kings, wore purple. The man feasted sumptuously every day. This is a desert land, prone to drought and famine. But the guy had no problem getting food. This is a very rich man. Well, today we heard from the prophet Amos just what God has to say about rich folk:

Alas for those who are at ease... and feel secure...

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches...

Alas for those who sing idle songs and drink wine from bowl...

for the revelry of the loungers shall pass away...

They sure passed away from the rich guy in Jesus' story, huh?

(But we kinda like that, don't we?) Yeah, we like seeing the rich lose it all, and crash and burn.

Heck, there's hours of prime time 'reality' TV devoted to watching the rich and famous fall from grace. *Alas for those who sing idle songs and drink wine from a bowl...* it's kind of gratifying.

But then, why are *we* reading about this? Amos isn't exactly talking to *us*, is he? Al, did you wake up on a bed of ivory this morning? Betsy, is that shirt colored with crushed lapis lazuli?

No way, right? *We're* not the rich ones, *are* we?

Here, I've got something to show you:

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GLOBAL RICH LIST

If you make \$75,000 a year...you're in the TOP 0.82% richest people in the world!
(you are richer than 99.18% of the world)



If you make \$40,000...you're in the TOP 3.17% richest people in the world!
(you are richer than 96.83% of the world)



\$20,000...you're in the TOP 11.16% richest people in the world
(you are richer than 88.84% of the world)



\$10,830 per year (the federal poverty line)... you're in the TOP 13.13%
(you are richer than 86.18% of the world)



I don't know where you are on here. So, let's just take an average, middle of the road number. If you have an annual income of \$40,000, you are wealthier than 96% of the whole world. That's a pretty arresting figure. Barely believable. When I first shared this data with a friend, she said, "In what survey? 'Cause that's a pile of ... (ahem) ... manure!" The survey is the Global Rich List. The website's listed on the bottom the page. Check it out. It is not a pile of manure. It's true. If you have any kind of spare change in your pocket right now... you are wealthier than 92% of the world. Find where you fit on the list in front of you. We are the rich ones. Even if you fall on that \$10,000 line, the federal poverty line—and I pray you don't, because that stinks; that is a brutal way to live in this country—but even if you are there, you *are* wealthier than 86% of the world. In today's Gospel story, we are not the ones lying at the gate, too sick, too weak to keep stray dogs from licking your sores. We are the rich ones. And that is how we have to read this story. That is what Jesus calls us to consider here. And that's scary. Because look what happens to the rich guy. For his self-centeredness and indifference to the poor, he ends up in hell with no possibility for escape. None. Abraham looks down at him from heaven and says, *Nope. Sorry. Can't help you. You dug that great gulf to keep Lazarus away from you in life. Now it's too wide to cross. You're sunk.* The rich man carved that chasm himself. Carved it with his greed. With his indifference. With his arrogance. And his ignorance. His *profound* ignorance: day after day after day, he passed that broken man lying in the dirt, totally deaf to the man's cries, blind to his pain. Day after day the rich man reclined in his veranda, feasting sumptuously, right before the eyes of the starving man, without even thinking about it, without a single thought for the man's crippling hunger. He wasn't *taunting* Lazarus. He didn't even shoo him away. Didn't have him removed. He didn't bother with him at all. Lazarus didn't even register on his radar. He's nobody. Not important. Nothing to offer. Not worth bothering about. Invisible. He *was* invisible. But now, the rich man looks up from the deep pit of his torment. *Now* he sees Lazarus. So, do you think some time facing the horrors of hell has changed his attitude a bit? Does it?

He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." Nothing's changed! All he thinks about is himself. Lazarus is nothing more than a prospective servant to him. '*Send Lazarus to me.*' He still acts privileged, like he's in charge. He assumes things will still go the way he wants them to. The way he thinks they should. *Oh, this guy sooo doesn't get it.* Even staring up from the pit at Lazarus standing shoulder to shoulder with Abraham—father of the faith—Even then, he doesn't *get* it. He does not get that every single one

of God's children, even the least of these, even the gross guy at the gate, is absolutely precious to God. The rich man doesn't even recognize his sin in ignoring the poor, in failing to value them as human beings. He doesn't recognize the terrible crime of just going about his business; the crime of just blindly living his rich guy life. Does he ever even ask for forgiveness? No, he never does. He just doesn't get it. Doesn't get that he's the rich man. He doesn't get that he'd been blessed with profound fortune. Doesn't get that every single thing he had was a gift. That he'd been given an unimaginable treasure, for no merit of his own. He doesn't recognize the incredible grace he's received. He has no gratitude. And so, no good will. He does not get it. Even in hell, he believes that he is owed mercy. That he's entitled to redemption. But it's not coming is it? Well, the rich man's starting to figure that out though: *Alright, I'm sunk, but then, send Lazarus to warn my family.* What's Abraham say? *Nope. They've got all the warning they need. They've got all the info on how to treat other people. They've got Moses and the prophets.* What's that mean, 'They have Moses and the prophets'? What do they have? They have the bible. They have scripture. They should read it. They should pay attention, Abraham says. But the rich man says, *No, that's not enough...*

No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." And then, Abraham utters the most powerful, most poignant, most painful words. He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." ' Now, remember, who's telling this story? Who's telling the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? *Jesus.*

"If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Jesus is the one who rises from the dead. The one who dies for us. And lives again for us, and for our salvation. In Christ, we are offered incredible grace. Not for our merit. But in spite of our failings. In Christ we are given an unimaginable treasure: everlasting life. The question is, do we, the rich ones in the story, do we get that? Do we get what guy suffering in hell didn't? Sure we do. We're good Lutherans here. We're good Christians. We know that we are 'saved by grace through faith in not works.' And we have faith in Jesus Christ. We know, we believe... we're good. We get it.

I pray we do. Get it. But please, let us be very careful with our assumptions. There's a real danger about just going about our rich folk lives, assured of our salvation. Certain we are owed redemption. Certain that we get it—that we get Christ.

This parable is very scary. It's wake up call. It's a warning. Because it says, loud and clear, that

how we treat the poor—how we treat that guy collapsed right on our wrought iron gate out there—that is a direct indication of how well we get Christ. Sharing the love Christ gave us, caring for the hungry, the sick, the homeless and the broken, *that's* the evidence that we truly understand, that we *get* grace. That's the proof that we really love and believe in Christ. If we are not daily driven by gratitude to reach out to the needy... then like the rich man, we just don't get it. If this makes us nervous (and it should make us all nervous. Because there are consequences, eternal consequences, to *persistent* ignorance)... If this makes us nervous, there is a life raft. A place to start turning things around. To start learning the truth. What is it? What did Abraham offer to the rich man's 5 brothers? What did he say they should do? *Listen to Moses and the prophets*. We begin with the word. With the story of Christ, from Genesis to Revelation, the story of our salvation. It's so easy to let our bibles get dusty on a shelf. It's so easy to blow off bible study when it's offered. Easy to skip church. Or glaze over during that long second reading. Or doze off during the sermon. But we can't. We can't afford to be casual, careless, or unconcerned for the Word. Because we *are* the rich guy in the story. Lord, give us a burning thirst for the word. Make us as parched for the word as the rich man in the pit. Because *we* can still drink deep draughts of its saving grace. We still have the chance to let it fill us up. To let it fill up all those vast chasms we've dug around us. We can let the word change us, turn us inside out, and save us. We can really *get* grace.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.