

Luke 16:19-31

Trinity 1, June 2, 2024
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- ²⁸ for I have five brothers-- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

I'm sure some of you have seen the movie, "The Pursuit of Happyness." It's a biographical drama starring Will Smith who plays the lead role of the real-life Chris Gardner. He's a homeless medical device salesman in the beginning of the film, and through *really* hard work and *many* sacrifices and *much* heartbreak, by the end of the film he's a successful stockbroker. And right before the end credits roll, we find out that Chris Gardner eventually founded his own brokerage firm which he later sold in a multimillion-dollar deal. It's a true rags-to-riches story; he went from bouncing around between homeless shelters to now being worth around \$70 million! (If Google is to be believed.)

And we *like* that type of movie; we like that type of feel-good story. That's the American Dream—even if you have nothing, through hard work and dedication you can make yourself into *something*. As opposed to those who just *inherit* their wealth from their parents, the "self-made" man can be a source of inspiration for so many; proof that you should *never* give up on your dreams.

The only problem with it is that it's a lie. Not Chris Gardner's story, but rather the idea that there are any "self-made" men out there! *Everything* that we have comes from God, as James writes, "**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.**" (James 1:17) If you have any skills or abilities, if you have a hard-working mentality or are dedicated to a craft, if you are fabulously wealthy—none of it is "self-made." It all comes from God. And for that reason, God is the one to be praised, not any "self-made" man. And so, the theme we'll be considering today is:

There Are No "Self-Made" Men

I. Not here in time

II. Not hereafter in eternity

Here was a guy who was fabulously wealthy. He wore only the best—his outer garments were purple, which at that time required an extremely expensive dye that could only be sourced from snails in the

Mediterranean Sea. He wore fine linens, which I take to mean his *under* garments—only the finest Egyptian cotton was good enough to be worn against *his* skin. *Here* was a guy who looked good on the surface and who felt good underneath. And he ate only the best. He feasted sumptuously *every* day, our text says. He wasn't observing the feasts of the Jewish calendar, feasts dedicated to God—no, *every* day was a feast in his house, all dedicated to himself. He was very, very wealthy, and his whole life seems to have revolved around letting everyone else know that he was very, very wealthy.

And I don't know if he was a "self-made" man. He *could* have earned it all himself, or perhaps he had inherited his wealth. It really doesn't matter though, because he *carried* himself as "self-made" man. That is to say, he believed that he didn't owe *anything* to *anyone*. He had a wall surrounding his house, to be accessed only by a gate, likely to try to keep the riffraff out—like this poor fella, Lazarus. He didn't owe anything to the poor, and so even though Lazarus was laid by the gate day after day to perhaps receive something from this rich man or his wealthy friends, nothing was ever given. He also *clearly* didn't think he owed anything to God! He was a "self-made" man, after all. Or, at least, he carried himself as a "self-made" man; he thought he didn't owe anything to anyone, because he thought he didn't *need* anything from anyone. He'd gotten here *by himself*. Or so he thought.

Because then, we come to that great reversal. Lazarus who was left on the outside was finally on the inside, whereas the rich man was now left on the outside looking in. Lazarus, who had formerly been in much torment, covered with sores, had been carried by the angels to paradise, whereas the rich man was now in the torments of Hades. The rich man who had formerly feasted sumptuously every day was now begging for even just a drop of water, whereas Lazarus who had formerly begged for crumbs was now feasting with the saints in heaven. (That's what that means that he was at Abraham's side or "bosom" in other translations; much like when we read about John leaning on Jesus' bosom during the Passover Feast—because they reclined on their sides at the table—Lazarus being in Abraham's side or bosom is to remind us of the feast God promises us in heaven.)

Long story short, the one who formerly had nothing now was given everything; and the one who formerly *had* everything and *shared* nothing was now left with only himself in torment. And we *like* that. That tickles our sense of justice! That greedy man, that selfish man, that arrogant man—he got what he deserved! Right? But, before we get too carried away with our righteous indignation against this rich man, we ought to ask ourselves: "Whom are we represented by in this story?"

I'm going to confess, I see a lot of the rich man's mentality when I look at myself. And maybe you'll find the same to be true about you, too. And I don't want to spend too much time talking about wealth, because I don't think we have anyone here that's fabulously wealthy, although even so there is application for us there. Instead, I want to just think about his *mentality*, that said, "I don't owe anything to anyone, because I don't need anything from anyone." That's where I see myself.

Early on in my ministry, I thought of myself as the glue holding my congregation together. There was a lot to do, and I was the only one who could do it. And when people asked if they could help, I said I would take care of it. I thought of it as some noble pursuit to sacrifice my time and energy to go it alone, to bleed myself dry for the congregation. And a big problem with that, besides the pride, was that I wasn't all alone. I had a wife and two young boys who needed me, and yet more often than not

I left them alone, just as I thought I was alone. And when Matthew was a year-and-a-half old, and tried barring the door in tears so that I wouldn't leave, I picked him up, and I moved him aside because I had important work to do, and only I could do it. I didn't need anything from anyone, because I needed to handle it all by myself. I was a "self-made" man. I was this rich man.

Or, I think about the times in my life when I was greatly discouraged, maybe even depressed, and rather than talk to anyone about it, I grinned and bore it because I could handle it myself. I didn't need anything from anyone. I was a "self-made" man. I was the rich man.

Or, I think about the temptations and sins that I have so struggled with throughout my life, and rather than asking a colleague for help or confessing my sins to anyone and unburdening my heart, I've often thought I'd rather handle it myself. I can do it alone, I'm a "self-made" man. I've *been* the rich man.

Or, I think about just last week when my parents were here for a visit, and my mom was giving me advice. And there was something in me that just couldn't accept the advice, but instead I bristled and told her I knew what I was doing. I'm a "self-made" man, after all. But I am *this* rich man.

Dear friends in Christ, I tell you all this because I don't know in what areas or how you've perhaps fit into these same shoes, I only know that for myself. But I do believe there are a lot of "do-it-yourself-ers" in this congregation. And if we allow ourselves to get stuck in this pride, with this idea that "I can do it all myself," and that "I don't need anyone else," then we can easily end up where the rich man ended up; by himself and without anyone else. Make no mistake, **There Are No "Self-Made" Men. Not here in time.** And the rich man found out when it was too late. He was told by Abraham, **"Remember that you in your lifetime received your good things..."** The things that he had in his life that he held so much pride over, that he kept for himself—he hadn't *earned* them. He had *received* them. He wasn't a "self-made" man at all, and he had *never* done it alone.

And we need to take this to heart, because you can hardly have pride over not needing anyone else when it comes to things of *this* life, without having that same attitude bleed over into matters of eternal life. That pride that leads us to thinking we can handle things ourselves can also cause us to think that in some ways, in some *small* ways, maybe we also have something to do with where we end up in eternity. But **There Are No "Self-Made" Men. Not here in time. Not hereafter in eternity.**

So, if you have any fancy duds—those purple garments and those fine linens that you have concocted for yourself that make you look good on the outside and feel good underneath, if there's anything you've done that you take pride in that makes you feel like you should stand out to God; then I would encourage you to throw away those garments, to exit the estate which you've built up for yourselves, to pass through that gate, and to take up the post of Lazarus as a beggar. Because, guess what? That's what you are. You and me—we *are* beggars. We have nothing to offer, not to God. And if you can admit that, then *that* is the perfect place to be.

I said last week that some of the hardest words in the English language to say are, "I was wrong." "I've sinned." "I'm sorry." And today, I'm going to give you some more difficult words to say. "I need help." We don't like that one either. You say those words, and it proves that you just *can't* do it by yourself, which is what we'd like to think. And so, when a worker asks me in a store if I need help finding

anything, I always say, “Nope!”—no matter how lost I am. “I need help,”—that’s hard to admit, but that’s what we need to admit. Because we can’t offer anything to God, and we can’t make it to heaven by ourselves. “God, I need help.” And help is on the way.

You know, it’s interesting, in this parable—which by the way, there’s an age-old debate whether this is a parable or a true story, and it really doesn’t make a difference to the point I’m about to make, but I’m just going to call it a parable—in this parable, Jesus only names one individual. Which *is* very telling. You have the rich *somebody* whom everybody who was anybody knew, yet *Jesus* doesn’t name him. That’s a reminder that when Judgment Day comes that rich man would be on the outside looking in, with Jesus saying, **“Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.”** (Matthew 25:12)

But the poor man—that poor nobody whom nobody else knew—*Jesus* knew him. And Jesus *names* him. And in fact, if you went through every parable of Jesus, you will never find any other names given to any other characters other than this man here: Lazarus. And that’s a great name for a beggar. Because the name “Lazarus” means: “God is my help.” As that man begged and asked for help from every wealthy passer-by, receiving none, he knew that his help would come from the Lord. And so, the Lord came, and blessed him beyond measure, and shepherded his soul to heaven.

Jesus knows your name too. He tells you, **“Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”** (Luke 10:20) You won’t be on the outside looking in, with Jesus saying, **“I do not know you.”** He *knows* your name. And Jesus is also *your* help. Abraham says, **“Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.”** But there is a bridge between those places, and it’s none other than Christ Himself. Though we ought to end up alone and in suffering, Christ did not leave us alone. By His blood, your sins have been washed away. He has carried you over from death to life, and He has given you the promise that you will end up in that feast with the saints in paradise.

Now, sometimes (maybe even oftentimes) this is hard to believe. As conscientious Christians, it’s so *easy* to convince ourselves that we haven’t done enough. That our faith isn’t strong enough. And you’re right. **There Are No “Self-Made” Men.** We *are* beggars. But like the beggar Lazarus, you can say, “God is my help.” And He has more than helped. He’s washed your sins away in the waters of Baptism; He gives you His own body and blood with the assurance that your sins are forgiven; and He’s spoken to you through Moses and the Prophets, the Apostles and Evangelists, so that even if you have nothing else, you can cling to His promise: **“I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”** (John 14:3)

So, **There Are No “Self-Made” Men.** But actually, that’s not true. There is one, and He is Jesus. Jesus was a “Self-Made” Man, that is, He made Himself to be a man. He *chose* to become a beggar for you and for me. He’s the one who willingly humbled Himself and took the form of a servant and begged Himself all the way to death. And if you’re wondering why in the world He would make Himself that way, the answer is what I think is at the center of this text: pure, unfettered grace. “Grace”—that beautiful word that means that even though you *do not* deserve it, Christ Jesus still loves you. So, no, **There Are No “Self-Made” Men.** And we can admit that happily, because God is and always has been and always will be our help. Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.