

Every time this parable comes up on a Sunday, I remember my seminary internship, also Luke's year in the lectionary cycle, and a lunch following worship when I was cornered by the wife of a very successful local businessman who asked, *Why is the Bible always saying that rich people are going to hell?* That's maybe an oversimplification, but there's no denying that scripture has a lot to say about money and our right relationship to it, far more than it says about other moral issues. By this point in Luke's gospel, we should be conditioned, as Jesus' first audience probably was, to anticipate that when he begins a story by saying "There was a rich man..." the rich man is not going to be the good guy, and a reversal of fortunes is likely in store. However, there's more to take away from these riches to rags stories than the perverse satisfaction of watching the mighty fall.

The rich man in this parable is ultra-wealthy, dressed in the most expensive clothes, eating a sumptuous feast every day, even the crumbs of which would have been enough to satisfy the poor, hungry, disabled man at his gate. Just as our contemporary "self-made" millionaires and billionaires usually turn out to have had their early business ventures bankrolled by affluent family benefactors, this man's wealth was likely inherited, as he tries to warn five brothers in his father's house who were presumably living as he had. Again, as we see modern CEO's making millions while their employees qualify for public assistance, social mobility in first century Israel was even more stagnant, and it was hard for the rich to get or stay rich without exploiting others.

Yet Luke's story doesn't condemn the rich man for inheriting his wealth instead of earning it, or for making his money by cheating or taking advantage of others. For the sake of Jesus' argument here, we could assume that this man came by his wealth as honestly and wholesomely as one could, yet he didn't use it well. He sees Lazarus in his desperate condition and, even though he clearly has the means to help, fails to take care of a fellow human being in need. He couldn't claim ignorance. When the rich man saw Lazarus in the afterlife, he recognized him and even called him by name; he knew this person had suffered, as close to him as at the gate to his property, but he did nothing to help. He pays no attention to Lazarus, until he sees Lazarus in a place of honor, and, he thinks, in a position to help *him*. He doesn't seem to see the hypocrisy of asking favors from someone whose desperate condition he ignored; he doesn't apologize or express any remorse. Even in the afterlife, he still doesn't acknowledge Lazarus' humanity or speak directly to him; he presumes to address Abraham, demanding for himself the mercy he never showed to others and instructing Abraham to order Lazarus around like a servant on his behalf.