

THE BEGGAR HAD A NAME

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores” (Lk. 16:19, 21).

Karl Marx didn’t care much about names. He saw people as “classes” rather than “individuals”. That’s why the Marxist is happy to eliminate personal identities as long as class distinctions remain. Have you noticed the bias today against national borders? All over the world the rights of the illegal “poor” trump the rights of legal “citizens”. This seems especially true with regard to Europe and the U.S. While your national identity doesn’t matter, your “class” distinctions do for it class envy that is the basis for the “struggle”. The poor in the bottom class are designated as “proletariat”, the middle class are called the “bourgeoisie”, and the elite at the top are classified as “rich”. The Marxist goal is to create class conflict that will bring down the rich and make everybody the same.

In this “struggle” classes are significant and individuals are not. Sadly, the poor man’s only value to Marx was to serve the cause. Consequently the “proletariat” are expendable like pawns on a chess board. Over 100 million died in the last century in Marxist revolutions and the killers didn’t one seem to care. Most of the dead were buried in mass graves and no tomb stone records identified their victims by class and not by names. Since the victims themselves were not important, why should their names be important? Once the struggle is over everyone becomes part of a classless society. Everyone is supposed to be the same. Salaries are regulated by the state and no one is permitted to “get ahead” by owning a home or business. Everyone dresses alike and lives in the same inadequate government housing. Unfortunately, while the rich are brought down the poor are not lifted up. Sadly, the poor man is still enslaved, but this time his master is the government.

The Bible offers a clear contrast to this way of thinking. In the Bible everyone is significant because everyone is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). It doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor, everyone is important to God.. Key to a man’s importance and identity is the ability to own property. God wants it to be this way. In Egypt the Hebrews were slaves and couldn’t own property, but this would all change in the Promised Land. When they came into the Promised Land God ordained that every tribe have special land which they owned. Further, every family within the tribe also owned property. This property was assigned by the casting of lots (Josh. 18:10). To this day we still speak of a “lot” as a piece of property. Even women, like the daughters of Zelophehad, could own property too (Nu. 27:1 - 10). Further, in the Bible the right of ownership was so sacred that even the king could not take away a man’s property (1 Ki. 21:1 - 29). Apparently the beggar Lazarus owned nothing on earth at the time of his death. Since the angels carried him to Paradise when he died, we assume he had laid up treasure in heaven.

Note again that God knew the name of this beggar. We should not be surprised by this for God has given a name to every star (Ps. 147:4) Obviously there are many more stars than there are people. Astronomers “estimate” that there are ten trillion galaxies and 100 octillion stars. Remember, every star is special to God and differs from every other star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41). We

should not be surprised, therefore, that we too are special to God. He has also made us to be unique and even numbers the hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30). Lazarus may have been overlooked by society, but he was not overlooked by God. God knew everything about him. God knew about his loneliness and pain. God knew that he was hungry and begging for crumbs. God knew that he was lying in his own filth and that the dogs of the street were licking his sores. During his life Lazarus had obviously laid up treasure in heaven. God knew about this too and made sure that not one penny would rust or be lost or stolen.

The rich man died and “was buried”. Lazarus also died but no burial is mentioned. This leads to the possibility that he might not have even been buried. It really didn’t matter to Lazarus for while his body returned to dust, his spirit returned to God Who gave it (Eccl. 12:7). The sufferings Lazarus experienced in his earthly life are not worthy to be compared with the glory he is now experiencing in eternity (Rom.8:18). When Lazarus repented the angels rejoiced, and when he died they carried him to Paradise. Lazarus was a very important man to God!

God judges every one of us as individuals and not as classes or groups. If we are to be like God we must also consider everyone as individuals and not as members of a class or group. Jesus warned against calling your brother ‘Raca’’. One reason for this is that labels are dehumanizing (Matt. 5:22). It is easier to hate a label than it is to hate a person. Jacob DeShazer, for example, was a prisoner in Japan during World War 2. He hated the “Japs” who imprisoned him. When he became a Christian, however, he came to love the Japanese and stopped using a label to describe them. Because of Christ he saw them as individuals for whom Christ died. He loved them so much that after the war he chose to live in Japan and lead these precious people to Christ. He even became friends and a fellow worker with Mitsuo Fuchida. Fuchida was the senior officer that led the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor. In Christ, however, these former enemies became loving brothers in the family of God. In Christ, as you know, there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male or female. In Christ all class distinctions are abolished (Gal. 3:26 - 29).

The Biblical account of David’s adultery tells us seven times that Bathsheba’s husband was a “Hittite.” (2 Sam. 11:3, 6, 17, 21, 24; 12:9, 10). This is significant for Hittites were victims of discrimination in those days. Note how brazen David was in stealing a “Hittite’s” wife. Note how easy it was for David to enlist the help of Joab to see to it that Uriah the “Hittite” died in battle. (2 Sam. 11:14 - 17). God, as you know, didn’t see Uriah the “Hittite” in the same degrading way that David did. In Christ we no longer see anyone from a purely human point of view (2 Cor. 5:16). Uriah was a person created in the image of God and David learned this lesson the hard way.

The first Gentile to receive Christ without becoming a Jew was named Cornelius. He was a Roman Centurion who feared God with all his family. Further, he gave generously to the poor and his prayers and generosity came up to God as a memorial offering (Acts 10:1 - 6). The story of his conversion reveals that God had more trouble with the prejudice of Peter than He did with the paganism of Cornelius. Peter was a slow learner. After receiving the same vision three times he finally got the point. That’s when he said: **“God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28)**. Later, however, Peter forgot this lesson. When certain came

from James Peter separated himself from the Gentiles. Even Barnabas and others joined him in this hypocrisy. That's when Paul rebuked had to rebuke him publicly for such evil conduct (Gal. 2:11 - 13). May none of us ever have to suffer such a public rebuke!

The fact that God considers each of us as individuals is not a peripheral issue. It is at the heart and core of Christianity. God is no respecter of persons and we shouldn't be either. God knitted everyone of us together in our mother's womb. God saw every one of our unformed bodies before we were even born (Ps. 139:13 - 16). Regardless of who we are or where we are born we will all be judged as individuals. The man with only one talent will be judged individually just like the man with five (Matt. 25:14 - 30). Everyone of us will appear as individuals before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give an account of our conduct (2 Cor. 5:10). Remember the church at Thyatira? It was a bad church. They had allowed that woman Jezebel to seduce the servants of God to commit fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20 - 23). Rev. 2:24 reminds us, however, that there were still good people in that bad church. To those "individuals" who were not corrupted by Jezebel, God placed upon them no other burden. They only had to hold on to what they had until Jesus comes.

While there are many lessons we can learn from the story of Lazarus, let us focus on only two. First we learn that each and everyone of us is known by name to Jesus. Jesus knows every star by name and also knows every one of us by name! The Bible is filled with examples to prove this point. Jesus knew Simon before they met and already determined to give him the new name of Peter (Jn. 1:42). Jesus knew Nathanael before they met and recognized him under a fig tree (Jn. 1:48). Jesus knew Zacchaeus by name before they met and called him down from a sycamore tree. That very day salvation came to the house of that sinful tax collector (Lk. 19:1 - 10). Jesus also knew Saul of Tarsus by name and appeared to him in a blinding light on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4). Certainly God also knows your name. When He calls your name, what will be your answer?

The second lesson we can learn from Lazarus involves our responsibility to know people by name and to consider them as individuals like Jesus did. Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table but we are not told if he got any. The fact that he was at the rich man's gate indicates that the rich man saw him every day, but did nothing to help. Lazarus was a close neighbor to the man and was laid by his gate every day. Unfortunately, the rich man apparently loved himself, but did not love Lazarus. The rich man obviously had a "group" of friends, but Lazarus as not in that "group".

One of the most difficult commands in the Bible is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matt. 7:12). The Sermon on the Mount makes a contrast between Law and love. Every comparison reveals that love is more demanding than Law.

- The Law said don't murder - Jesus said don't be angry (Matt. 5:21, 22).
- The Law said to make offerings, Jesus said to first be reconciled (Matt. 5:23, 24).
- The Law said don't commit adultery - Jesus said don't lust (Matt. 5:27, 28).
- The Law said don't break an oath, Jesus said don't make an oath (Matt. 5:33 - 37).

- The Law said “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” - Jesus said turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38, 39)
- The Law said love your neighbor and hate your enemies - Jesus said love you enemies (Matt. 5:43, 44).
- Please consider that loving your neighbor as your self in Matt. 7:12 is the narrow way of Matt. 7:123). There is always a way around Law, there is never a way around love. With love there are no questions, and without it there are no answers. Loving your neighbor as you love yourself is indeed a strait gate and a narrow way.
- Obviously the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount is not to be understood in a legalistic way. When a rebellious child strikes his mother she does not turn the other cheek. Whom the Lord loves He disciplines (Heb. 12:6) and we must do the same.
- The Christ like love that is essential to our salvation is so difficult that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to experience it. Remember, the “fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22).
- The miracle of conversion and the indwelling Holy Spirit, however, do empower us to love one another as Jesus loves us. In fact, this is the primary proof that will convince all men that we are His disciples (Jn. 13:34, 35).

Jesus answered the question of “who our neighbor?” is by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25 - 37) Just as the rich man was to love Lazarus, we too are to love those in need. The priest and the Levite motivated by Law passed by on the other side and didn’t help. The Good Samaritan motivated by love did everything he could to meet the needs of the man who had fallen among thieves.

Note how easy it is to look up to people who can help us and to look down on those who can’t. The rich man obviously had friends and contacts in the business world that helped him to be prosperous. Since Lazarus couldn’t help him he had no value. People in the service industry often suffer discrimination at the hands of paying patrons. Regardless of how we treat them, however, every waiter, every janitor, every trash hauler, and every beggar has a name and is important to God. The measure of our character is determined by the way we treat those who are powerless to help us.

Matthew describes Judgement as a time when our treatment of the “least of these” will be remembered. When all nations appear before the Son of Man he will separate us like sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31 - 46). Even though we are divided into two groups we will still be judged as individuals. Note: **“The King will say to those on his right, ‘come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘ Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘ I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’”**

James said it like this: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say ‘Here is a good seat for you’ but say to the poor man ‘ you stand here’ or ‘sit in the floor by my feet’. Have no you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:1- 4).

The original sin in Eden involved exchanging a relationship for an object. The rich man learned too late that he had neglected both his family and Lazarus to make money. Let’s not make the same mistake that he did! May God grant us the ability to know His love that passes knowledge and thus be filled with all the fulness of God (Eph. 3:14 - 19).

“This is how we know what love us: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16).

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