

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

by Angela Stauffer

KEY VERSE:

But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony."

Luke 16:25

FAITH STORY:

Luke 16:19-31

FAITH FOCUS:

Jesus tells the story of a rich man who had everything he needed and didn't help out the poor man named Lazarus who sat near his house day in and day out. When Lazarus died, he went to heaven, but when the rich man died, he went to Hades. The rich man called out from Hades and asked Abraham to have Lazarus give him a drop of water to cool his tongue. But Abraham explained to the rich man that he couldn't cross the chasm between heaven and hell and that he already received his rewards on earth and now justice is being served. The rich man then wanted Lazarus to be sent back to earth to his brothers to warn them. Abraham said they had the prophets to warn them. The rich man said they would listen better if they heard from someone who had returned from the dead, to which Abraham replied "If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen to someone who rises from the dead."

SESSION GOAL:

To help students see all people as beloved of God and deserving of our care.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Think about stereotypes they have about rich and poor people.
- Think about why wealth and status can be deceitful and why they cannot give us a happy life on earth or eternal life.
- Evaluate themselves and their life in light of this story

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 The video "Mean Girls"
- 2 large pieces of poster board, markers and scissors
- 3 Props for the Bible story: a "fine robe" for the rich man (could be a nice leather jacket or letter jacket); tattered clothes; bandaids; food.
- 4 Copies of the response reading for each student

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10 minutes)

Show the first ten minutes of the video “Mean Girls.” In this movie, it seems that the “plastics”—rich, pretty girls—get whatever they want and don’t bother to be kind to those around them. In fact, most people hate them, but somehow they are still popular and everyone wants to be like them. The nerds and the other “less important” groups just hope that the plastics will look their way and they’ll do anything to be like the plastics.

CONNECT: (10 minutes)

Discuss:

- Does your school have “plastics” and other groups as portrayed in the video?
- Do popular kids get specific benefits because of their name, good looks, or athletic ability?
- Do rich kids get more attention and are more well liked than low-income kids?
- Are there stereotypes that rich people are snotty and poor people are lazy?

Ask kids to get together in groups based on the school they attend. Tell them to create a skit that portrays the groups in their school, then share the skits with the whole class.

Teacher tip: If most of your students are from the same school, you may need to divide them up. On the other hand, if you have a wide variety of schools represented, you may need to combine school groups.

Say: *Our Bible story today is about two guys—one rich, one poor—who died and went to—Well, let’s find out what happened to them.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

This story is dramatic and easily acted out, so invite students to participate as you read the story one verse at a time. Pause after each verse as students portray what is being said. Use the props—the clothing, band-aids for Lazarus’ sores, food for the rich man to eat and Lazarus to get what drops from the table. When you get to the speaking parts of Abraham and the rich man, read the verse and ask students to paraphrase it into modern language.

Example, verse 24: “Abe, my man! Give me a break! I’m burning up here! Send Laz down here with some cool water! Please! Help me out here, dude!”

After you’ve acted out the passage, discuss:

- The rich man went to Hades and the poor man went to heaven in this story. Does that mean all poor people will go to heaven and all rich people will go to hell? What do you think it means?
- The riches of the world are deceitful. Being truly rich has nothing to do with materialism. What do you think it means to be truly rich?

- At the end of the parable, the rich man wants Lazarus to warn his family to change their ways so they don't also end up in everlasting destruction. But Abraham explains to him that they must believe without seeing living proof, and also that they have been given everything they need to believe, so if they don't already believe, seeing a man raised from the dead won't make any difference. We are all given enough to believe. If we don't believe now, a supernatural act is not going to change our minds and hearts. Sometimes we think that people would believe and repent if God would just perform large amazing miracles, but that isn't necessarily the case. They would probably find some other way to explain the miracle. God knows what each person needs to believe and God provides that for us, but we always still have the free will to choose what to believe.
- We are alive right now and need to reach people now. Once we are gone, we can no longer witness. The rich man desperately wanted to be able to warn his family, but it was too late. He had his chance. God is just. The rich man finally received his fair treatment. He had everything on earth, but was missing the most important thing—God. The poor man, Lazarus, had nothing on earth except God, and was now living happily in heaven.
- We are called to see the Lazarus's in the world. We are called to help whoever God puts on our doorsteps. Because we believe in Jesus, we are called to serve the poor. We see Jesus when we look into the eyes of Lazarus. It is significant in this story that the poor man was given a name while the rich man wasn't. It is another way to show who is important in this story.

APPLY: (15 minutes)

Invite students to put it all together now. Divide them into small groups and give each group a piece of poster board, marker and scissor. **Instructions for each group:**

Divide the poster board into three puzzle pieces with your marker—each piece taking approximately one third of the poster. In the top puzzle piece, summarize what you learned in the opening activity where we talked about groups and cliques in school. In the bottom puzzle piece, summarize what you learned from the Bible story. In middle puzzle piece, write what you think the other two pieces have to do with each other—what do they have in common, what brings them together, how does this story relate to high school students? Then cut the pieces apart.

Ask students to share their puzzles with the class, particularly the middle piece of each puzzle—what brought the two elements together?

Here are some thoughts to share and discuss:

Things in this world can seem unjust and unfair. Sometimes high school cliques can feel as hurtful as a rich man not feeding a poor man. The cool kids get privileges while the disadvantaged and nerdy kids get pushed around and made fun of. But revenge is not ours to take. God will repay everyone according to their deeds.

RESPOND: (5 minutes)

Hand out the response reading to students. Divide into two groups and read it. After reading it through once, read it again, this time changing lines so that Group 1 now reads Group 2 lines and vice versa. Close with the prayer.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

People in the world look at material goods and status, but those things can't buy happiness or eternal life. At the same time, poor people won't get into heaven just because they are poor or have suffered their whole lives. Eternal life isn't about earthly possessions or lack thereof. It is about knowing God.

Another important point in this passage is that we, as North Americans, considered rich in comparison to much of the rest of the world. Where are the Lazarus's in our world? We are called to help anyone who is our neighbor, and that neighbor is both across the street and around the world.

A third point is that we cannot communicate between heaven and Hades. There is a great chasm that separates the two and no one can cross it.

A fourth point is that the poor man in this story had a name and the rich man didn't. Then, as today, it would be more common to know the rich man's name but not know the poor man's name. The name Lazarus means "God Helps," which shows the significance of how he put his faith in God and God helped him. God calls us to help those who are in need, and if we don't, we will be in the category of the rich man, and God will not be pleased with us.

RESPONSE READING:

GROUP 1: I am a rich person.

GROUP 2: I am a low-income person.

GROUP 1: I am a plastic. I am popular. I have it all.

GROUP 2: I am a nerd. I am disadvantaged.

GROUP 1: I make fun of others.

GROUP 2: People make fun of me.

GROUP 1: I am a nameless rich person.

GROUP 2: I am a poor person named Lazarus.

GROUP 1: I will receive justice at the hand of God.

GROUP 2: I will receive justice at the hand of God.

PRAYER:

God of Abraham and of us today, thank you for your presence in the lives of your people through the generations. Thank you for Jesus and for the stories he told to convey truths for our lives. Help us to take the truth of our lesson today and to live that truth. Amen.