

If you only had one word with which to describe yourself, what word would that be? In His parable, Jesus describes the one man using the word *rich*. “*There was a rich man...*” He begins. That word says it all. Not a day in his life went by in which he did not enjoy his riches to the full. Feasting sumptuously on the finest foods, wearing the best clothing money can buy, every day he had banquets in which friends galore would have come to dine with him.

The other man in the parable Jesus describes using the word *poor*. At the gate of the rich man, He says, “*was laid a poor man.*” Poor in every way. Poor, having no money, food, clothing, or shelter. Poor in health, being covered with sores. Poor, in lacking friend and family to care for him. Everything that describes him being the exact opposite of the rich man.

And not just during their lifetime here on earth. For even in death these two men are exact opposites of each other. The poor man being carried to heaven, having everything with comfort and joy to the full. The rich man finding himself tormented in hell.

I suppose one could draw the conclusion from this parable that poverty here leads to eternal life in heaven, and riches here leads to eternal death in hell. But that would be wrong. We need to listen carefully to what Jesus says about these two men.

He uses a word to describe the poor man which tells us everything about him that we need to know. That word is Lazarus. Jesus gives the poor man this name. Why? In no other parable does Jesus ever give a name to any of the characters. We need to understand, therefore, what the name Lazarus means. And here it is: *My God is my help*.

Even more than the word *poor*, the name Lazarus truly describes this man. He did not blame God for his misery. His pitiful existence could not undermine his faith. He trusted in God even though there was no logical reason to do so. Everything about his life told him that God was not his help. But that mattered not to him. His name remained Lazarus in life and in death. “My God is my help.” This was his confidence. And for this trust and confidence the angels carried him into heaven.

Regarding the rich man, everything we need to know about him is revealed by this fact: Jesus gives him no name whatsoever. And so, the only thing that describes him is the word *rich*. How sad and how tragic for him. He is not Lazarus. To him, God is not his help. Why should God help him? He has plenty of wealth and friends. Yet, in truth, this man is far poorer than Lazarus ever was. For Lazarus has God as his help. This man does not.

Have you thought of the one word that describes you? We may think of words such as *rich*, *poor*, *smart*, *strong*, *healthy*, *sickly*, and the like. Yet none of these words truly tell us everything that we need to know about you.

Hearing His parable this morning, Jesus invites you to take for yourself the name Lazarus as your one word. Thus, whether you are *rich* or *poor*, *strong* or *weak*, *healthy* or *sickly*, the one

thing about you that matters most of all, and that describes you best, is that your trust and confidence is in God.

This trust, this confidence, this faith was given to you in your baptism. What I'm saying is that on the day you were baptized, God gave you the name Lazarus. Is that still your name today? I pray it is. Yet I know, because I am just like you and am tempted just as you are, how easy it is to lose sight of that name.

It all boils down to this: Moses and the Prophets. The Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. Abraham made this clear to the rich man in hell. The only way for his five brothers to repent and avoid the torments of hell was for them to hear Moses and the Prophets – God's living words.

Those who do not gladly hear them can hardly be called Lazarus. But those who delight in hearing them should be confident that their name is and remains Lazarus.

It matters not how life has treated you. You are Lazarus, God is your help, not because with your eyes you see His help in your life necessarily, but because your ears hear His promises to you, for you to grasp, in the Scriptures.

And it matters not, my friend, how you have treated God. Have you despised Him? Disobeyed Him? Have you failed to pray to Him regularly? Failed to gladly hear Moses and the Prophets faithfully? This does not nullify His promises to you in your baptism. Today, right here and now, He invites you to say with joy and confidence: My name is Lazarus, for God and He alone, is my help.

What is the one word that describes Jesus best of all? He is almighty, He is all-knowing, He is love, He is everywhere present, He is God. All these words fit. But perhaps the best word is this: Jesus is merciful.

In hell the rich man asked for mercy. Yet there is no mercy in hell. There is no Jesus. Had he asked for mercy during his lifetime on earth, he would have received mercy because Jesus died for all sinners, even for the rich man, even for you.

There is mercy for you now. Jesus is not here to condemn you for your sins. He is here with mercy for you. He forgives you. He forgives each and every one of you. He is your Savior. Another wonderful word that tells us all we need to know about Him. And He is your helper. He helps you in this life, no matter how life is treating you. And because you are Lazarus, He will with the angels, one day carry you into heaven. Amen.