

In the spring of 1905 a real life cowboy show came to New York City's Madison Square Garden. The performers brought with them their unique abilities including roping cattle. One part of the show was to release a steer into the circle and cowboys from all angles would rope and bring it down. But on May 7<sup>th</sup>, during the evening performance, the steer took off and jumped into the crowd. All of the cowboys sat shocked except for one. Going after it he had to be careful, too close and he'd be trampled. Too far and his lasso would miss. With one toss he roped the steer and saved the day. The New York Times the next day gave credit to this 25 year old cowboy from Oklahoma. From that moment he became a celebrity hero who would bring his rope tricks and humor to stage after stage all across this country. He became a fabulous performer who could throw a dazzling rope, tell a joke, and once rescued a pack of city folk from a runaway steer. His name, Will Rogers. Only now you know the rest of the story.

That punchline accompanied the end of dozens of stories over many decades from Paul Harvey. It was Saturday ritual for my family to listen to him. Paul Harvey spoke with a smooth deep voice. He told a story each week, by the end you never saw the twist coming. From the radio, he built up the suspense until he dropped the punchline. Then he would tell you, "now you know the rest of the story."

It was the story behind the story that was important. The rest of the story necessary to know so that the first part made sense. That's what we have in the gospel. Jesus tells a story. His point is that we learn something from it. And to learn something from these two individuals Jesus knows we need...

**The rest of the story  
Looks now can be deceiving  
The means can be deceiving**

Every day was a great day. He pulled himself out of his four poster bed and hit the shower. Hot water was always on demand. In his closet were any number of brand name suits, shirts in all colors, and ties to match any combination. His shoes were always shined so he could see his reflection. Downstairs in the gourmet kitchen breakfast waited for him. His ride to work was comfortable in the soft leather seats of his dream car. Money poured in from investments that always did well. It was clear he was rich. **"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day."**

At the other end of life was someone who didn't even have a bed to get out of. His bathing happened in a ditch. His clothes were barely there having worn the same dirt colored ones for years. Shoes had holes from where he had long ago broken through them. His breakfast was whatever came out of the local restaurants the night before in the trash. Money didn't exist in his life. He was poor. **"At [the rich man's] gate laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table."**

The logical conclusion regarding these two people is that one is blessed by God and the other is not. Who figured it was the rich man going to heaven? It would seem he was blessed by God. Who had the poor man as rejected by God? After they died the situation was drastically different. **"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment..."** The poor man was in heaven and the rich man was in hell. Now you know the rest of the story.

Let's clear up before we go any further. Being rich does not get one sent to hell. Being poor doesn't mean heaven automatically. Having wealth or not isn't enough to tell where someone will end up for eternity. Looks now can be deceiving. But the rest of the story Jesus tells was so we understand something. How we treat wealth is important. The pursuit of wealth can easily consume us. Everything can be pushed aside while we try to get rich, if not rich then comfortable, if not comfortable then at least so we don't have to live paycheck to paycheck. We might even convince ourselves that because we're not wealthy we don't face the same problems as the rich man. We're insulated from falling into that trap. But what was that trap? Was it simply having a lot of money, fine clothes? Wasn't it more how he looked at his money and his position in life? He figured he was okay. He had no time for God or to hear anything about God. His money, his comfort, his luxurious life was everything. It betrayed what was most important in his heart. Does that betray what's sometimes most important in our hearts?

Now the rest of the story in your life. Life later isn't affected by how much money is in your bank account. The size of your home or the toys in the driveway don't matter. The only thing that counts is Christ Jesus. You have a Savior who was willing to give up being the richest and most powerful being. He left the purple of his heavenly mansions to take on the tattered earthly clothes of our earthly poverty. Jesus shows wealth doesn't get us into a right relationship with him. Forgiveness earned by the Savior who did leave wealth does. Believe in that Savior. Trust in Jesus that whether you face good times now or bad, riches or poverty, your Savior will bring you to Abraham's side in heaven forever.

The rich man was in hell. Across the great chasm that separates heaven and hell, which no one can cross, Jesus' story allowed for the rich man to talk to Abraham. **"Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."** What he asked for was impossible. Besides, the rich man had already received his good things. His good things came on earth. His life was filled with things, food, luxury. But since during his life he didn't want anything to do with God, he wouldn't have anything to do with God in the afterlife. This rich man didn't give one thought to the means to get to heaven before, he would receive no comfort now in hell.

But his five brothers still lived on earth. The rich man feared they would follow in his footsteps and end up in the same agony and torment. So he makes a request of Abraham to warn his brothers. More like a demand. If only Lazarus would go to them. They'd listen to a man back from the dead. But Abraham replied, **"They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them."** Abraham spoke for God. God clarified the means that gets someone to heaven. The means were the Word. God's Word spoke of the fires of hell deserved by anyone who was a sinner. God's Word spoke of a love like no other that came from God himself through Christ. A love that alone could rescue someone from an eternity of burning. Jesus was found in the Word of God. That was the means that saved.

People for centuries have been agreeing with the rich man though. God's Word doesn't seem enough. There's no power in old words. We're talking about avoiding hell. That's got to take something miraculous and jarring. Some people don't even believe hell is real. They need something major as a wakeup call. They really need something big that'll shake them so they can't avoid it. People are too comfortable, maybe we're too comfortable. And we've thought, if my family could only see a miracle, that would make them believe. A sign from God like him speaking or him walking in the front door that would do it. Or we figure this country needs a wakeup call. And what will do it? A powerful disease, widespread violence, maybe Christians being persecuted? We're saying the same thing the rich man did. **"No father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent."** Basically proclaiming the Word of God must not be enough. Something bigger would be better.

Jesus provides the rest of the story. God limits himself to one thing. **"If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."** You know when the real Lazarus, friend of Jesus, was raised back to life by Jesus what the response of most was? They wanted to kill Jesus and Lazarus. You know when Jesus was raised from the dead what the response of most was? They claimed it didn't happen. They didn't believe. You know what the response would be if God let someone from your past walk into this room, or if Jesus himself appeared, or if a miraculous sign was given in the heavens? Many people would still reject. God tells us what will work. It's the means of grace, the gospel message of Christ. It's in the Word, the Bible. God limits himself to **"Moses and the prophets"**. A powerful message that's more than words. It wins people with promises of love from God for even the worst of sinners. It works in your heart as forgiveness from Christ lives inside you. No shows of power, not necessarily major transformations, nothing that would make the evening news on TV. Just a Savior who died, a Father who loves, and a Holy Spirit who converts.

With the promise of heaven secure, God's Word also is the rest of the story for your life today. God's Word provides you with comfort when others attack. God's Word has been the power for you in every situation. It's a place to go back to and take your worry away that it might not be enough. It is enough. It always has been. And you'll be convinced it always will be by the Word. We just sang in the first song, **"Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord, forsake me not! I trust your Word."** Jesus is your rock. The message of his life and work is the means by which you're saved and by which you're blessed. And rest assured, everything in life is a blessing because it comes from God. Riches. Poverty. Sickness. Health. Everything from piles of cash to no cash at all is a blessing from God through Christ.

With all the ways in which we screw up how we view wealth and ways in which we look to be saved other than God, we could write the ending to our story. It would end like the rich man in hell. But by his grace, God says looks can be deceiving. He used the means of grace, his Word and the sacraments, to bring the Holy Spirit to work faith in your heart in Jesus. Jesus died for your sins and gives you the promise of eternal life in heaven. It's the twist no one saw coming. And now you know the rest of the story.