

## The Haves and the Have-Nots

16<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 09/28/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 16:19-31 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 29, [Abraham says to the “rich man” now in Hades about the man’s brothers,] **“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ Folks, what we have here in this text today; in this parable from Jesus, is a classic case of “The Haves and the Have-Nots.”

➔ First, in verse 19; “There was a rich man.” It was only five verses earlier that Luke told us who it is that Jesus is talking to here, “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money...”. The Pharisees were a group of influential Jewish leaders; part of the ruling body of the Jewish church called the Sanhedrin. Verse 14 says that they “ridiculed” Jesus because He was teaching them and pointing out their hypocrisy to them. So it is very possible that Jesus intended them to understand that they were this “rich man” in His story.

➔ Second, in verse 20; “And at [the rich man’s] gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores.” This man represents all those in the Jewish society that were outcasts; that the Pharisees considered to be beneath them and therefore – by their estimation, beneath God and His love.

### **I. Who really are the Haves and the Have-Nots?**

✘ Jesus is obviously pointing out a clear distinction; a significant contrast between two groups of people in earthly society; not to bring or increase division, but to reveal a major misunderstanding among the people about who really are the Haves and the Have-Nots.

➔ Because you see, there’s a huge discrepancy regarding what it is that defines those who are the Haves versus those who are the Have-Nots.

✘ At the beginning of this story Jesus presents the world’s most common; long-standing criteria for placing people in each of these two camps. The playing field is hardly level for the two men. One is clothed in fine linen and feasts sumptuously, extravagantly, every day.

➔ The other is entirely dependent upon others. He has to be carried and “laid” at the gate in front of the rich man’s yard. You see, the Greek word in this text that is translated as “poor” literally means “one who begs; who is dependent upon others for support.” And that’s what he’s doing at the rich man’s gate; hoping for some mercy; for perhaps some crumbs “from the rich man’s table” (v.21). This man is covered with sores that the wild dogs, which were common in that day, would lick at and bring him a bit of relief. This is still how most people today determine who are the Haves and the Have-nots.

✘ We have approximately 1.3 million Lutheran brothers and sisters in the South Pacific island country of Papua New Guinea. One of their favorite New Testament stories is the Canaanite woman who begged Jesus to heal her daughter in Matthew 15:21–28. Jesus even chided her, saying it was not right to take the bread from the table and throw it to the dogs. But this led to her expressing her true faith in Jesus when she replied, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table” (v. 27). You see, the people in Papua New Guinea consider themselves to be very poor in comparison to people from Australia, Europe, or America. And in that way they consider themselves to be the Have-Nots.

➔ And it’s true by the earthly standard of things. We look at ourselves and even though we complain about how rough we’ve got it, we still can’t help but see how much more we have materially. But whatever the economy is doing this quarter, we have to be honest and say that

our country – and most of the people in it – have been richly blessed – financially, comfort-wise, tech-wise and more.

➔ Still what do we do? It's almost laughable how blind we are to the truth. We look around us; across the street or across town; and we think of those folks – the Joneses, as the Haves and ourselves somehow as the Have-Nots. Never mind that we have a house and three meals a day – some of them at restaurants when we choose – nice things to wear (in fact, we dress down for church now-a-days because we don't want to look too stuffy!). With all that we've got, we still manage to see the rich man in our text as the "other guy", don't we?

- ✘ But even if we acknowledge that we are indeed the economic Haves we still miss the actual point of this text. You see, Jesus is not talking about being rich or being poor financially. His story is not that superficial. He wants us to understand something far more important.

➔ So, what clues does Jesus give us here in Scripture to answer who it is that are the Haves and who are the Have-Nots?

- ✘ As I alluded to earlier, we know from a few verses before this text that Jesus was speaking to a group of people that were not only "lovers of money", but that He described as trying to "justify [themselves]" before the people. These Pharisees' greatest concern, you see, was their popularity; their status in society.

➔ They had no problem declaring themselves to be the Haves. They thought they had it all together. It's true, these guys knew the actual words of the Bible to perfection. I mean they had memorized all of what we today call the Old Testament word for word. They called it "Moses and the Prophets". And this academic knowledge of the Bible led them to believe that they also knew the meaning to perfection that God intended when He revealed it to Moses and the Prophets; when He had them write it down for future generations to learn and comprehend as well. The Pharisees thought this "head-knowledge" was enough; that they didn't actually need to apply God's truth to their personal lives; that they knew better than Jesus or anyone else about God's will.

➔ And folks, that same temptation stares at each one of us in the mirror today. We think and say things like this: "I went to Sunday School when I was young." "I went to confirmation class and got confirmed and that's all I need to know." "I know Jesus wants me in church each Sunday, but He didn't really mean that's what's best for me." "I know what I need." "I don't need to keep learning from God and His Word in the Bible." "I've got a Bible in my house in case I want to read it." "So I am a 'Have'."

- ✘ All of those same statements belonged to the Pharisees who were represented by the "rich man". They were sure they were the Haves, even as they looked down at the poor "sinners" who were lost and needed to be saved. *Those* people, the Pharisees thought – *they* were surely the Have-Nots.

➔ Remember, the Pharisees were the ones who accused Jesus back in Luke, chapter five, of heresy because He said to the paralyzed man that was lowered down to Him through the roof, "Your sins are forgiven you" (v. 20). They said that only "God alone" (v. 21) can forgive sins. Yet with all of their knowledge of God's Word, they couldn't see the clues that pointed to Jesus as God, the Son. Well, Jesus knew that inside these Pharisees, they actually believed they were keeping God's Word to perfection; that they didn't need forgiveness.

➔ Which is why Jesus told them the story about a man just like them, standing in the temple and saying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers" (18:11).

✕ You and I, we know what God says about that in His Word, don't we? It's quoted in one of our orders of worship. 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And so, we confess our sins every Sunday as we begin our time with God in worship. We know that our place in this house of God is to stand right alongside the tax collector in Luke 18:13-14 who sincerely said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" To which Jesus then replied in love and truth, "This man went down to his house justified." That's you, my fellow believers, after you confess your sins before God and then hear your pastor as God's servant proclaim, "As a called and ordained servant of the Word...by the command of My Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins..." (LSB, pg. 185).

➔ Yes, Jesus spoke to the Pharisees here in this text, but there is so much more to this story of the Haves and the Have-Nots.

## II. What Constitutes Real "Having" or "Not Having"?

✕ In verses 16 and 17, just before our text, Jesus reminded the Pharisees, "The Law and the Prophets were until John (the Baptizer); since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached." This, my friends, is what Jesus says determines real having or not having: God has given "the Law (that's the books of Moses) and the Prophets" and the "Good News of the Kingdom" for all people to Have as His saving Word of truth.

➔ "The Law and the Prophets" – that's what you and I today call the Old Testament, and "the Good News of the kingdom" – that's what you and I today call the New Testament – together they add up to all of God's revealed Word of truth; what we call the Bible. That's what makes the difference between the Haves and the Have-Nots.

✕ When Jesus was born as a baby in human flesh, the angel said to the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:10–11). That same Jesus later told the people in Luke 4:43, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God."

➔ So what is the content of that "good news of the kingdom of God"? Paul summed it up well for us in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. ... He was buried. ... He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." This is the entire point; the true meaning and application of God's Word into a person's heart, mind and soul. This is what Jesus had been preaching to the Pharisees and to all of the people. It was, is and always will be freely given – Christ took care of the payment in His death and resurrection. So, either believing it for oneself or rejecting it in unbelief is what determines who truly is the Haves and the Have-Nots.

✕ As Jesus moves the story about the rich man and Lazarus forward, we see this play out in each man's life. Lazarus died, and what did he have? He did have the angels carry him to Abraham's side in heaven.

➔ The rich man died, but he did not have the same outcome as Lazarus. He did have people bury him. And he did have a place in Hades - that's hell. He did have torment. And in Jesus' story – for the sake of our learning, he did have eyes to see Abraham far off with Lazarus.

✕ The rich man, in eternal punishment, wants Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve his anguish in the flame. But Abraham said, "That's not how things work in God's design. You did have the warnings before you in all of that Scripture that you memorized. But once you die, there is no going back and forth between heaven and hell."

➔ The story could have ended there, at the great divide. But the rich man pressed the issue, thinking his earthly influence still counted for something. So, revealing his complete inability to actually pay attention to God's Word, he said in verses 27–28, "Then I beg you, father, to send

[Lazarus] to my father's house – for I have five brothers – so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” He did at least acknowledge that there was a reason why he and they had needed to be warned; that their knowledge lacked the crucial component of faith. But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them” (v. 29).

- ✘ That right there is the heart of the story. This whole time Jesus is talking about having God's Word. The five brothers, they do have that at their disposal. They just need to actually hear God's Word and take it to heart! Sadly though, they haven't done so, just as their brother in hell rejected the truths that it reveals.

➔ Now, my friends, you ... you also have God's Word – both the Old Testament, including the Law that shows us all how desperately we need that Savior that God sent to us in Jesus and the Good News of the Kingdom; that is the Gospel, in the New Testament; the fact that Jesus the Savior has come for you ... and for me!

- ✘ You have God's life-giving Word here and now; for you to hear, study and take to heart every Sunday with your fellow believers – every day in personal devotions. You have God's Good News of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection for your salvation; the assurance of your place with Him in heaven. You have the application of His saving Word in Jesus' body and blood that gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation here at this altar. And you have God's declaration of His unsurpassed love in the water and Word of baptism, where He adopted you into His eternal family; into the blessed family that could also be called the Haves.

## Conclusion

- ✘ Yes, you are like the people who heard and took to heart the shepherd's words as they returned from seeing the newborn baby Jesus. Luke 2:18 says that the people “wondered” at the words they proclaimed. That's what happens when we take God's Word beyond head-knowledge and apply it to our hearts in faith. Then you are truly amazed and astonished at the Good News that Jesus came and did all that is required for you to be saved from sin, death, devil and hell!

➔ As in Jesus' parable of the sower, your heart is not like the seed that fell on the path or the rocky ground or among the thorns, all of which describe the hearts of the Have-Nots here in Jesus' story today. No, your heart is the good soil, as Jesus said, which is the one who “hears the Word and understands it” (Mt. 13:23) so that you repent of your sin and trust always and only in Jesus for forgiveness and eternity at His side.

➔ You have that right now in faith and you have it forever, because you have Jesus! Amen.