



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

In November 1835, Andrew Carnegie was born into a poor family in Scotland. He grew up in extreme poverty and went to bed many a night hungry. His family immigrated to the US when he was 13 years old. They hoped for a better future. And Andrew got a job at age 13 as a bobbin boy in a Pittsburgh cotton factory. He worked 6 days a week, 12 hours a day. He worked hard and was promoted. After a few years he started a job working for the railroad. It was during this time that he began making investments in steel and oil companies. These meager investments reaped great returns. From there Andrew went on to build the greatest steel corporation in the world. He also went on to become the richest man in the world. Just to give you an idea, his wealth was estimated at 309 Billion, where Bill Gates is worth 136 billion and Sam Walton is 65 billion, Warren Buffet is 64 billion.

Talk about a rags to riches story, Andrew Carnegie tops the list. His goal in life was to give away his entire fortune during his lifetime and so he became the greatest philanthropist, the world has seen giving money to libraries, colleges, schools and even buying many churches organs! He said in a book he wrote, "The Man who dies thus rich dies disgraced." And "To try to make the world in some way better than you found, it is to have a noble motive in life." WOW!

It is wonderful to be reminded of such rags to riches stories, especially ones that have the life's goals of helping others and giving back to society. It is encouraging and inspiring. Our world today also tells many more stories of riches to rags, where celebrities, athletes and investors who had it all and then lost it all. Their stories are inspiring in a different way,

one of warning and sadness. Today our Gospel reading from Luke tells both sides of these stories in one parable of the Rich Man. Rags to riches and riches to rags.

Jesus begins the parable by introducing us to two different and polar opposite men. The first one is the rich man. We do not know his name, but he has been known to be called Dives, which means rich in Latin. His appearance screams of wealth with fine linen clothing colored an expensive purple color. He is also said to feast sumptuously daily. This man, Dives, feasts daily and is a picture of excess and self-indulgence.

The second man is called Lazarus and not the Lazarus with sisters Mary and Martha that Jesus brought back to life. Another note here, he is the only person in all of the parables of Jesus that is named. And his name means "one who God helps". Yet, he is on the other end of the spectrum. He is very poor; his body is covered in sores and his fare is the scraps that fall from the rich man's table. Humiliating as it was, dogs came and licked his sores. Yikes! Today dog kisses are welcomed by some but in ancient times dogs were repulsive creatures and certainly not looked on as pets. These two men are quite the pair of opposites.

And then both men die. That they do have in common, as we all do. But their death destinations are quite different. Lazarus is carried away by angels to be with Abraham and Dives finds himself tormented in hell. But worse than that Dives looks up and sees Abraham and Lazarus, in a much better place. And in this story, they are still able to talk to each other, so the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus with some cool water. Even a drop of water from Lazarus' finger was sought after to cool Dives tongue. So even in hell, Dives is still treating Lazarus as a second-class citizen, a servant, wanting him to be told to bring water to cool down Dives. But Abraham will have nothing of it and is quick to retort to the rich man's request. He reminds Dives that he had good things during his lifetime and Lazarus had evil things but now the roles are reversed. Riches to rags for sure. Jesus uses the example of a great chasm that is fixed between heaven and hell that no one can, after death cross. So, Dives is stuck in Hades for all of eternity. Not liking the answer of Abraham, he then continues to ask for still another favor.

Dives asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus to his home to warn his 5 brothers, so they too don't end up in the same place of torment. And Abraham again has an answer that Dives does not like. He tells them that the living have Moses and the prophets to listen to and that should be enough. They would not listen to a message sent by someone from the dead to understand the error of their ways.

So why do we have these two men, rags to riches and riches to rags, as our examples. What do we learn from seeing why they are where they are after death? Well, it is not about being rewarded for being poor or penalized for being rich. But rather, it is all about faith. The rich man, you see, put his trust in money. His wealth blinded him to God's grace. He was not able to see the needs of others. Lazarus, who sat on his doorstep was not even a person to Dives. And his wealth also blinded his eyes and closed his ears to the Word of Moses and the Prophets, so he could not come to know Jesus. His wealth was so all encompassing that he could not muster up the one thing that made his journey from riches to rags real, and that was belief. Belief in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. And I do think that he came to understand his mistake and did not want his brothers to experience the same

fate, thus the request for a warning for them. But Abraham is secure in his answer that the word of God is enough for faith and repentance.

Remember that Jesus used such parables to instruct and to warn people, us included. And folks we have the advantage here. We know the whole story of how Jesus died a horrible death on the cross to save us from our sins, give us abundant life here on earth and the promise of eternity in heaven with Him one day. We have not only the words of Moses and the Prophets, but the assurance of the Gospel writers and witnesses to the resurrection. We have the knowledge of the promises of Jesus being fulfilled and we can see the power of God for salvation! God is here, right here and now. He comes to us in the Gospels, in the Word made flesh of Jesus, in the preaching of the Scriptures, in the words of absolution. He comes to us in the Lord's Supper as He touches our lips and hearts when we partake of his body and blood for forgiveness. In His powerful Word, God gives us all of himself and rescues us from our sin and self-centeredness. By the Word of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, we are made His children.

We are his children, children of a heavenly Father. He knows our name showing our importance in His sight. And all our needs do not escape His sight either. So even though we probably have a closer monetary status to Lazarus than we do Andrew Carnegie, we can be assured that our needs are provided for and that we will be the "one who God helps" if we repent and believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world. It is in Him that we have our own rags to riches story. **AMEN**