

Les Misérables is a book written by Victor Hugo in 1862 considered one of the greatest novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The title can be translated as The Miserable Ones. Literally, the ones in need of mercy. Mercy is compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy, or other person in one's power. In *Les Misérables* this mercy is illustrated as Bishop Myriel gives shelter to the recently released convict Jean Valjean. Valjean runs off with the Bishop's silverware, and when the police capture Jean Valjean and take him back to the Bishop to return the silverware, the Bishop explains to the police that he gave the silverware to Jean Valjean. Then the Bishop gives Jean Valjean two silver candlesticks in addition as if the Bishop had given those to Jean also and he had forgotten to take them. Bishop Myriel shows mercy to someone in need of mercy, namely, Jean Valjean.

As we examine our Gospel text today from Luke 16, we read, **“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.”**

Now in this text, who is *le miserable*? Who is the miserable one? “Who is the one in need of mercy?” 3. In the eyes of the world, it is Lazarus. Of course, this is a no-brainer. Lazarus is the one we pity, especially as we compare it to the life of the rich man. The rich man had no cares in the world. He had the finest clothing and had the richest food.

Compare that to Lazarus who was a beggar, simply asking for table scraps from the rich man. He was covered with sores, and if that wasn't bad enough, the dogs came and licked his sores.

A 20<sup>th</sup> century poet wrote, “money, get away, get a good job with more pay and you're okay. Money, it's a gas, grab that cash with both hands and make a stash.” The more things change the more they stay the same. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Martin Luther wrote, “There are some who think that they have God and everything they need when they have money and property; they trust in them and boast in them so stubbornly and securely that they care for no one else.... Those who have money and property feel secure, happy, and fearless, as if they were sitting in the midst of paradise.”

And doesn't that describe the rich man in our text today? He lived with paradise on earth, and so many people today seek that paradise on earth. Some have achieved it: movie stars, CEOs, and professional athletes. Others fight tooth and nail for that chance to amass riches of their own because they think it will make them happy.

When money becomes the only measure of happiness, then many well-meaning charities work to alleviate poverty which indeed is a laudable goal to help

the Lazaruses in our world today, but we find there is more to life than money, and there is more to being rich than what's in your bank account.

As we look at the parable of Jesus, we think we have an open and shut case for Lazarus to be the one in need of mercy, but we know Jesus better than to think He'll give us the ending we expect.

Our text continues, **“The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’”**

Now in this text, who is *le miserable*? Who is the miserable one? “Who is the one in need of mercy?” 2. In the eyes of God, it is the rich man. Angels take Lazarus to heaven, but the rich man goes to hell to be tormented. He is the one who cries out, **“Father Abraham, have mercy on me!”**

*Les Misérables* was originally a book, but perhaps we are more familiar with the musical adaptation of *Les Misérables*. About a decade ago Hugh Jackman, Russell Crowe, and Anne Hathaway starred in a production of it for the silver screen.

The Gospel of Luke is the musical of the New Testament. It has four different passages that the Church has made into songs. In one such song called the Magnificat, Mary sings, **“And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.... he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”**

The Magnificat shows us what true good news, mercy, and grace is. It serves as a mission statement for the rest of the book of Luke, and even the whole Bible: the hungry are filled and the rich go away hungry. We see this in our parable. In eternity, Lazarus is the one exalted and filled, and the rich man is the one begging for mercy.

There are many on that day who will be unpleasantly surprised. Unpleasantly surprised that there is an afterlife after all. Unpleasantly surprised that their wealth and fame carries no weight after the grave. Unpleasantly surprised that their evil actions in this life will be accounted for in the life to come. God grant that we are not those who are unpleasantly surprised on that day!

But the flipside of this is that on that day, we are those who will be vindicated. We will be with Lazarus at Abraham’s side, not with the rich man in Hades.

As our text ends, we hear the conversation between Abraham and the rich man. Abraham reminds the rich man that he received his good things in this life,

and that there is a great chasm between heaven and hell so that nobody can cross between the two. The rich man asks that Lazarus be sent to his family to warn them. The parable concludes with Abraham saying, **“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”**

1. Scripture opens our eyes to see true mercy. In this world, there are many people who have everything they need who yet do not know true joy: world leaders, billionaires, and movie stars. There are many people who do not know Jesus and think that true happiness lies in being just like one of the rich and famous. There are even many Christians who have saving faith, but fail to see the truth: that they have everything they need in Jesus and they need not worry or fret.

Scripture opens our eyes to see the real picture. The truth is that we are all *Les Misérables*, the ones needing mercy: rich and poor, young and old, criminal or law-abiding citizen. Scripture tells us that we are Jean Valjean, and we stole from God. Adam and Eve tried to steal Godhood from God as they tried to be their own gods, and we do the same every time we sin. Every time we value money more than God. Every time we overlook the needs of *Les Misérables* all around us, even in our own home.

Yet just like the kind Bishop, God repays us not with the punishment we deserve, but with giving us even more. Instead of two candlesticks, the Father sends His own Son, who is true God, to pay for the penalty of our sins. Jesus died and rose again, and even better than Jean Valjean and Bishop Myriel, Jesus shows us the picture of true mercy.

That story changes lives, and we hear about it through Scripture alone: not through a miracle, not through a show of force, not through a ghost haunting us or other supernatural phenomenon.

This message is for the rich man who is sitting alone with his piles of money, in a hell of his own making as his money doesn't buy happiness. He's right, it can't buy happiness, but we do know someone who can bring true joy.

It's for the poor person who doesn't yet know Jesus: no longer does she need to work sixteen hours a day to amass enough money to become rich. In Christ, already you are rich. In Christ, you have mercy, forgiveness, and hope for an eternal home in heaven.

Dear Christian friend, this message is even for you. Know that even despite your trials and tribulations, the Lord is blessing you even in the hearing of this message. The Lord remembered Lazarus, and He will remember you too. There's room for you in heaven, you poor, miserable sinner. **SCRIPTURE CALLS BOTH THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS TO SEEK GOD'S MERCY.** Rich or poor, you can find that mercy in Jesus Christ alone who will take us to be with Him.