

# HUMANIZE ME



Sometimes people say a public figure needs to be humanized. What could this mean except that there are things in this world that make us less than human? Jesus is on a mission to make you more human—the kind of human who looks more like the Son of God. This series tackles the forces that keep us from being just as human as God always intended us to be. And it leads us to discover that when we are humanized, we get to humanize others.

## HUMANIZE ME • Luke 16:19–31 • Tim McConnell • October 20, 2019

Get rich quick! I bet you never imagined your pastor would rise to this pulpit here at First Pres with a promise to get rich quick. But guess what? I have the secret! I know the key to unlocking riches! Are you ready? Well ... wait, I'll tell you at the end. Get rich quick. In fact, get rich right now. It's easy! Before that, let's talk a little. I know money isn't that interesting to everyone, and the pursuit of money is not a big problem for most of you in the room. In fact, you look very wise and discerning to me. I bet you never find yourself obsessing over money. Jealous of others who have more. Tempted to cut a corner or step on a colleague to pull a little more money in. I'm sure none of you have ever had problems dealing with inheritance issues, wondering what to do with what your family left you or how to leave the right kind of legacy to your kids and grandkids. This looks like a group that has all that figured out. But just in case there might be one or two of us in the room who have questions, let's talk about money. Money can be a dehumanizing force. If Jesus is the model for humanity, if Jesus is the humanity the world needs, and if you and I are growing in likeness to Jesus, I wonder what Jesus has to say about our relationship with money.

Jesus addresses money in 11 of his 39 identifiable parables in the Gospels. Jesus talks about money all the time. Sit and read the Gospel of Luke this afternoon. I wish each one of us would do that before we pray and make a commitment to give to our church next week. You'll be blown away by how often Jesus talks about money. We have one of those parables before us today. "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day" (Luke 16:19). Purple dye was expensive. Fine linen and luxury was the way life went for this imaginary person Jesus tells us about. Here's the question: can a lot of money, or the love of money, get us off track? Can a pursuit of riches pull our hearts away from God? If lack of money can be a poverty that makes us feel less human, can the overabundance of money also be a challenge? Can that push us down and cause us to be less human, less than we ought to be in our relationships with God and others? Let's be clear: The Bible never says money is evil. Jesus never says money is evil. Money is just a resource; it's how it is used and valued that determines the good or evil. The love of money is the problem: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many

griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10).

So, Jesus says, there once was a rich man and there once was a poor man. The poor man was named Lazarus. Jesus is making this story up, but remember he had a friend named Lazarus. We read about him in John 11, the brother of Mary and Martha who dies and Jesus calls back to life. But this is a fable today, a parable told as a short story. The poor man suffers in this life while the rich man lives in luxury. The rich man has no compassion. His heart is not moved to love his fellow man, to love his neighbor. So, we have to start to wonder where his heart is with God. Soon we find out. They both die. The beggar goes to heaven and the rich guy in purple goes elsewhere. Is Jesus teaching that poor people go to heaven and rich people go to hell? Of course not. That wouldn't square with where Jesus says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Or, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Or much anything else we learn about salvation from Jesus. Salvation is a product of knowing Jesus and receiving His saving grace and forgiveness. The rich man did not know Jesus or receive the grace of God—as evidenced by his lifestyle. He appears to be entirely self-absorbed. The poor man apparently did know Jesus and His grace because having or not having money is not what determines salvation.

That gets us to the primary reason Jesus tells the parable. It isn't actually a parable about rich or poor. It is an illustration of how the relationship we have with God—evidenced by the relationships we have with one another, but primarily the relationship we have with God—is determined in this life and fixed in the next. Your relationship with God is determined in this life and unalterably fixed in the next. The rich man begs, in light of what I now know, please go talk to those I love. But there's no point to that. They have "Moses and the Prophets," they have the Bible and that didn't change their hearts. "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent'" (Luke 16:30). Just send someone, like Jacob Marley to visit Ebenezer Scrooge! No, Jesus has Abraham say, "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead'" (Luke 16:31). Not even a resurrection. Is Lazarus in the audience? Not even

a resurrection from the dead is enough to change some people's hearts. Not even the Son of Man, dead, buried and raised is enough to open some hearts to faith.

The story isn't just rich man, poor man. It's this life, that life. Present life, afterlife. It's about the chasm between this life and what comes next, and how your relationship with God is determined in this life and fixed in the next. But money is part of the story, isn't it? Jesus knows, God knows, money can capture our hearts. It can pull us away from our relationship with God. Riches can be a poverty, a force that isolates us from God and insulates us from others, and ultimately leaves us living a life less than human. There is a distinction to make between wealth and riches in the Bible. "Riches" is money that people pursue at the expense of others out of a desire for self-indulgence. "Wealth" is value that people make in the service of others and development of their own gifts. Think about the farmer who carefully sows seed and yields a better crop, or the shepherd who diligently watches and cares for the sheep—these two are building wealth. They are using their God-given gifts and intelligence to create and build something. Chasing riches is destructive, but building wealth is constructive. The heart given to pursue riches is in a precarious position. Where is your heart?

Take it a step further. Money. Money is neither good nor evil in its own right in the Bible. Money is just a place to store either wealth or riches. Get it? So, as I read this week in my study, the very same gold coin can be corrosive or life-giving. "A coin in the hand of a person with a heart full of gospel-driven generosity constitutes wealth that is pleasing to God. A coin in the hand of a person with a self-indulgent heart would fit the definition of riches and be abominable to God." God knows your heart. Jesus said just a few lines before this story: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Luke 16:13). How do we check our heart? Are we trying to use God to serve money, or will we use money to serve God. One track is the pursuit of riches that will crash your relationship with God, with others, and usually with yourself. The other is the gift of wealth that can be deployed to draw you closer to God, into deeper relationship with others, and make you more human. The two tracks are stark in contrast.

A friend of mine recently shared his testimony with me, and the time he has spent on these two roads. He grew up fairly poor, and when opportunity came along he grabbed it. His gifts were valued, and doors kept opening, and he worked hard to move up in the organization, all the way to the top, not knowing that little by little his identity was getting wrapped up in his job. He said to me, "Tim, at the height I had stocks in the company, they got up over \$2 million in value!" He owned shares in his business, but his business also owned shares in him. Then the entire industry crashed. "I still own those stocks," he said, "and do you know what they're worth today? Nothing." It all came down like a house of cards. But what he wasn't ready for was that this house of cards, when it fell, was going to drag his soul down with it. When it crashed, he crashed. It felt like his life was over. He sank into a deep depression that he only escaped with the help of those professionals who can intervene in such a crisis, the faithful love of his wife, and the grace of a Savior named Jesus whose love began from that day to grow more and more valuable in his life. He tells me that what came after is infinitely better than before. "But," he says, "I had to surrender myself to Jesus and know that he was in control." I have heard so many stories like that. From nothing to uber-riches back down to the dirt before finding where true riches, true wealth, lies.

The rich man wasn't evil for being rich. But his riches eclipsed his love of neighbor. Has love of money eclipsed love of neighbor? Has love of money eclipsed love of God? Money is Jesus' second-favorite subject. Jesus talks about money all the time. Why? He knows how money creeps into our hearts and takes the seat on the throne. Jesus hates our slavery to money. This is so important to him, God gives us a measuring stick, a thermometer, a dipstick we can easily dip into our hearts and check if we've gone off track—it's called the tithe. Give 10 percent of your income back to the Lord. Give 10 percent back to the Lord who gave you your life. Give 10 percent of your income to the Lord who gave you all the ability, strength, opportunity and "good fortune" (we call it providence) to make any income at all. All of it came from His hand. The test is: can you give 10 percent of it back to him? Imagine a father handing a child 10 one-dollar bills, then saying "Now give me one back as a measure of thanks, an emblem of our love." But the child hoards up all 10 and turns his back ... maybe pulls a penny out of his pocket and drops it at the father's feet. God gives us a very clear test of our hearts. Can you give 10 per-

cent to the Lord, or can't you? Yes or no? If you can, it's a marker. Your heart is free. For many, this is just the beginning. Ten percent is just the beginning. Because they say, "well, Jesus didn't give just 10 percent of his life for me, so I'd like to go further."

Now, it takes faith. It takes faith to believe that nine-tenths of your income blessed by God is going to go further than ten-tenths held and managed by you. That takes faith. I know. It doesn't entirely make worldly sense, does it? But it's true. When we entrust our riches to Jesus, we become wealthy in a host of ways the world never thinks to measure. I hope you are not misunderstanding me, or my intent this morning. I'm not after your money. No more than Jesus is after your money. Did Jesus need money? Do you think God needs your money? Why did Jesus talk about it so much then? Because He is after your heart. I don't mind applying the pressure the Bible prescribes for us with our money. I don't mind. That pressure may be just what you need to unclench your jaw, release your grip and loosen your white knuckles, and turn around to see your Father again. There is life to be had on the other side of a commitment to tithe. In fact, it is the way to get rich.

I hope these things help you as you consider your promise to give to the work of the Lord here at First Pres. But hear me now, your relationship with money is nothing compared with your relationship with the Lord. We are not saved and we are not damned by our relationship with money. Salvation is in our relationship with Jesus. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Son of God who left all riches and comforts to become man and rescue us from our sins. Jesus is the one who at every step has taken on what dehumanizes us so we could be human. Jesus is the one who made all things and is the source of all things and is the reason for all things. Jesus is the one who, as it says, became poor for us. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Do you think that's talking about dollar bills? If you want to know what it is to be rich, take one more step toward trusting Jesus with your money. But even more so, trust Jesus with your heart. Do you know Jesus? Your relationship to Him is determined in this life and fixed in the next. Now is your opportunity.

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## STUDY GUIDE

### HUMANIZE ME • "Get Rich"

#### Luke 16:19-31

This study is designed to help your community group grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. There are three dimensions to following Jesus.

UP: growing in relationship with God

OUT: growing in relationship with the world around us as we join God in God's mission

IN: growing in relationship with other followers of Jesus

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 16:19-31.

Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note any words or phrases that seem meaningful.

- 1) Why do you think the "rich man" failed to take notice of Lazarus?
- 2) How can wealth desensitize us to the needs of others?
- 3) Reread verse 31. Jesus is hinting at His death and resurrection which will be described in the coming chapters of Luke. Why do you think He includes this in this parable?
- 4) In what ways might this passage challenge you to think differently about what it means to be human?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Consider whether you interact with someone like Lazarus in your daily life. How might you respond differently to them in the week ahead?

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

Who in your life is in need of encouragement this week? Take time to pray for this person, asking God to make His presence known in their life.