

## WHO DO YOU LISTEN TO?

Luke 16:19-31 Text vs. 31 *“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.’”*

In 1986, the Boston Red Sox were getting ready to win the World Series. It was the 10<sup>th</sup> inning of Game 6. New York Mets Mookie Wilson stepped up to the plate and hit a dribbler down the right field line toward first base. 99 times out of 100 any professional ballplayer could make that play. But Red Sox First Baseman Billy Buckner didn't! He misplayed Mookie Wilson's ground ball. He put his glove down for the easy out, but the ball went under his glove, right between his legs. That led to the winning run for the New York Mets and gave the Mets a chance to win the World Series 6 games to 5. It was called “the miracle game.” Bill Buckner went on to have an excellent baseball career. But that error had him always remembered as a loser! He was a gifted athlete. He had a good career. But that one mistake made Bill Buckner a loser!

And in our lesson today, Jesus wants you to think about who's a winner, and who's a loser in life? If you look at the life of that rich man in our parable, and then look at the life of Lazarus, there's no doubt! Lazarus was a loser! He was a loser because that's the way Jesus portrayed him in this parable. Lazarus was a beggar, sitting at the gate of a rich man. Covered with sores, his only hope was to eat something that fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs licked his sores. He was a “beggar” asking for money. He couldn't walk. He couldn't work. It would be difficult even to love him. And when he died, he didn't have a proper burial. No mourners. Nothing! In the eyes of the world, Lazarus was a loser!

But the rich man? He was a winner! He dressed like a king. Wore royal purple clothing. Enjoyed the finest wines. Gave parties. Anyone would love to have him as a friend. Why, he even allowed Lazarus to sit at his gate and maybe threw him some scraps of food from his table every now and then. He was a winner! And when he died, all his friends and the community would say what a great man he was. So, who was the winner? Who was the loser? Well, there's no doubt about it! In the eyes of the world, the rich man was the winner!

Now, it's not a sin to be rich. If a poor person spends all his, or her, money on beer, cigarettes, and drugs, is that any different from a rich person spending all his, or her, money on cars, clothes, and boats? Back in the 30's, a group of the world's most successful financiers met in Chicago at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. At the time, those tycoons controlled more wealth than there was in the United States Treasury! For years, newspapers and magazines told of their success. The youth of our country were urged to follow their examples. So, what happened to those men?

(1) CHARLES SCHWAB, an American steel industrialist made Bethlehem Steel into the second-largest steel maker in the United States which became one of the most important heavy steel manufacturers in the world. However, in the last five years of Schwab's life he lived on borrowed money. He died in 1939, penniless!

(2) ARTHUR CUTTEN was the world's greatest wheat speculator. The Stock Market of 1929 started the Great Depression. After the Crash, Cutten was investigated and barred from doing anymore stock trading. He died abroad, bankrupt.

(3) RICHARD WHITNEY was an American financier and President of the New York Stock Exchange from 1930 to 1935. He was convicted of embezzlement and imprisoned in the maximum-security prison at Sing Sing in Ossining, New York.

(4) ALBERT FALL was a member of President Warren G. Harding's Cabinet serving as Secretary of the Interior from 1921 to 1923. His job was to ensure adequate oil supplies for the Navy in the event of war. So, he set aside a large oil deposit in Wyoming known as the *Teapot Dome*. But secretly, he was signing leases with big western oil executives allowing them to tap into that oil reserve. When news of that leaked out, Fall admitted he had signed leases, but with the best interests of the public in mind. However, investigations found many of his personal investments in New Mexico had recently collapsed. He was on the verge of bankruptcy! Desperate for money, he accepted “loans” of about \$400,000 from the oil men to whom he had granted leases to the *Teapot Dome* oil. Two were friends of his from his New Mexico mining days. He insisted the loans were unrelated to the *Teapot Dome* oil leases which became known as the “*Teapot Dome Scandal*.” The government forced him to resign his office. He spent the rest of his life in shame, trying to rebuild his fortune and redeem his tarnished reputation. He died in 1944 near poverty.

(5) JESSE LIVERMORE was an American stock trader. Known as the greatest bear in Wall Street, he was considered a pioneer of *Day Trading*. He was the main character of *Reminiscences of a Stock Operator*, a best-selling book by Edwin Lefèvre. Livermore committed suicide from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. (6) LEON FRASER was president of the Bank of International Settlement. He committed suicide. (7) IVAR KRUEGER was a Swedish civil engineer, financier, entrepreneur and industrialist and head of the world's greatest monopoly. In 1908, he co-founded the construction company *Kreuger & Toll Byggnads AB*, which specialized in new building techniques. By aggressive investments, and advanced financial arrangements, he built a global *matchstick* and financial empire. Between World War I & World War II he created *match* monopolies with European, Central American, and South American governments. He controlled between

two thirds and three quarters of the world's match production and was known as the "Match King". But his financial empire was a Ponzi scheme. It was based on the fantastic profitability of his match monopolies. And as you know, in a Ponzi scheme early investors are paid dividends from their own money, or later investors. He committed suicide.

Now, were those men winners? Or were they losers? What do you think? Well, they certainly were losers, financially. But in our lesson today, Jesus was talking about another kind of loser. When Lazarus died, what happened to that "loser"? There was no funeral. Angels instantly carried him to Abraham's side! He went from dogs licking his sores at the rich man's gate to being surrounded by a heavenly host of angels whisking him straight to heaven and took him straight to Abraham's bosom to be comforted! Jesus used that word "comforted" to make you think of a big brother, or big sister, tenderly reassuring a little brother, or sister who has been hurt. That's how Abraham was dealing with Lazarus. Lazarus had suffered so much!

But that "loser" in life, ended up being a winner in eternity! However, with the rich man's death it was different! He was now in torment! He looked up from Hell and saw Abraham with Lazarus by his side and called out, *"Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."* But Abraham replied, *'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'* *"The rich man answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'* And what did Abraham say? *"They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."*

Moses' Law would condemn the rich man's brothers as sinners. Prophets had predicted the coming of Christ Jesus. They said He would come and suffer and die for their sins. He would be their Messiah. And as sinners, a Messiah is what those brothers needed! But if they wouldn't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they wouldn't listen to Lazarus, either. Those Jewish brothers had the Word yet did nothing about it! They would remain losers in the sight of the Lord. Even after hearing Moses and the Prophets, they would end up with their brother, the rich man, in Hell! And what made it worse? There was no way for Lazarus to cross over to where the rich man was! If Lazarus couldn't go and help the rich man, no one could! So, the rich man was eternally lost to burn in the fires of hell, forever. Who was the loser now? Lazarus was saved by God's grace!

The rich man was condemned by lack of faith. That's what makes the poor, the disabled, the elderly, the down and out, the hungry, such good candidates for the Gospel. When the world sees "losers," God's Grace sees "winners." And because Jesus said, *"I loved you so much that I died for you. Your salvation is not based on what you can do, or what people think of you. Your salvation is based on the fact that I love you. I died for you. I covered your sins."* And that's why Paul said, *"righteousness does not come from the Law. Righteousness comes from God. And it is by faith."*

Whether you're a winner, or whether you are a loser, has nothing to do with how much money you have, or how popular you are. It has to do with who you listen to, and where you have placed your faith. It has to do with what's in your heart. The Gospel song says, *"Into my heart ,into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus, Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus."* In God's eye, it's where you put your faith that makes you a winner. *"Righteousness comes from God. And it is by faith."* If you're listening, you can become a winner! AMEN