



**“The Last Supper: Conversations that Led to the Cross”**  
By Dr. Will Willimon

**Session 4: Crumbs from the Table**

**March 15, 2026**

**5:00 PM**

**Thank you for joining us again for this Lenten journey with Jesus. Our session today deals with some of Jesus’s most challenging teachings – ones that many of us would prefer to avoid.**

**This afternoon, we turn our attention to the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.**

**INTRODUCTION**

**“Willimon notes that this parable “rarely” makes the Top Ten lists of Jesus’s stories. Why do you think that it?”**

**I listened to over a hundred video sermons preached in that congregation. Not one word from their pulpit on the two thousand verses in Scripture on the evil of riches. - Willimon**

- Why might churches avoid preaching about wealth and poverty?
- What’s your gut reaction when money becomes the topic in church?

**Because of my economic circumstances, this story sounds like bad news. I’ve preached sermons on this text, but it took a lot of fancy interpretive footwork for me to do so. - Willimon**

- How do you respond to Willimon’s honesty about his own defensiveness?
- When have you found yourself making “interpretive footwork” to avoid difficult biblical teachings?

## **OPENING PRAYER**

*Holy God, your word cuts through our comfortable assumptions and challenges our priorities. As we wrestle today with Jesus' hard teachings about wealth and poverty, help us see clearly – both the world's need and our own responsibility. Give us courage to face uncomfortable truths about ourselves and our society, and wisdom to respond with both justice and grace. Open our eyes to see Lazarus at our own gates. Amen.*

## **SESSION 4 VIDEO – “The Rich Man’s Hell”**

Thoughts to consider as we watch the video...

- How does Willimon's interpretation of these economic parables challenge your previous understanding?
- What was your reaction to his statement that “Jesus takes sides” in economic matters?

## **SETTING THE SCENE: A TALE OF TWO TABLES**

***Scripture Focus – Luke 16:19-21***

### **A Few Observations...**

- The rich man is nameless (i.e. if you've met one of these fat-cats, you've met them all)
- Lazarus is the only person in all the parables who gets a name (“One whom God helps”)
- “Feasted luxuriously” uses the same Greek word as the celebration in the Prodigal Son parable.
  
- Why does it matter that the poor man has a name while the rich man doesn't?
  
- How does the detail about daily feasting versus occasional celebration change the story's impact?

**Eighty-five of the richest people in the world own as much as the poorest 3.5 billion people. The six heirs to Wal-Mart have more money than the poorest 48.8 million American families put together. And you thought that the Bible is irrelevant to our contemporary world! – Willimon**

- How does this description help us understand the parable's relevance?
- What "gates" separate rich and poor in our community?

### **THE PROBLEM OF SIGHT**

**The rich man had the opportunity to help. Yet his lifestyle has made Lazarus invisible. He doesn't oppress or abuse Lazarus. He simply never sees him. - Willimon**

### **A Look at Other Parables...**

- Do you see this woman? (At Simon's banquet) – Luke 7:44
- The Samaritan "saw him" and stepped to help (The Good Samaritan)
- The father "saw him" while the son was still far off (The Prodigal Son)
- How does wealth create blindness?
- When have you realized you weren't "seeing" someone in need?
- What makes people invisible in our society?

**If you want to avoid the claim of those on the sidewalk begging you for a handout, take care not to look at their eyes. – Willimon**

- How do we protect ourselves from seeing need?
- What would it mean for our church to truly "see" the Lazarus figures in our community?

### **THE GREAT REVERSAL**

***Scripture Focus – Luke 16:22-26***

**The main characteristics of eternity: The life to come will be a dramatic turning of the tables for the rich and the poor. – Willimon**

**Abraham's explanation: "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted, and you are in great pain."**

- How does this reversal challenge our assumptions about success and blessing?
- How do we reconcile God's love with this stark judgment?

**The gate, your fancy security system by which you lock out the poor, has become your prison. - Willimon**

## **HANDLING DEFENSIVE REACTIONS**

**Sorry if you are uncomfortable with criticism of the wealthiest 1 percent, or if you smell some sort of socialist class-conflict being fomented here. - Willimon**

### **Common Defensive Responses...**

- Programs for the poor just don't work.
- The welfare system is broken.
- It sounds downright Socialist.

**Tell it to Jesus. He thinks he's talking about the "real world" – that is, the world as God intends it to be. - Willimon**

- What is the difference between critiquing systems and taking partisan standards?
- How can the church address economic justice without becoming a political organization?

## **GOOD NEWS FOR WHOM?**

**Who hears this as good news?**

**I'm defensive because I assume that there's nobody reading this book who would hear Jesus's story as anything but judgment, condemnation, and bad news. But if you are one of those who is often absent from or invisible to our affluent congregations, that is, somebody who can relate to how it feels to be Lazarus, then this story's for you. - Willimon**

- For whom is this parable good news?
- How does the gospel include both comfort and challenge?
- What would it mean for our church to be good news for both rich and poor?

### **ZACCCHAEUS: A DIFFERENT MODEL**

***Scripture Focus – Luke 19:1-10***

**Bypassing all the humble, down-to-earth folks serving or being served at the church soup kitchen, Jesus invites himself to the house of the richest oligarch in town.**

**“Once lunch is served, before Jesus has a chance to say anything, lay out his program, or tell any of his notorious stories, Zacchaeus taps his Irish lead crystal goblet to propose a toast: “Look, Lord! I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much.” - Willimon**

- What enabled Zacchaeus to respond so differently from the rich man in the parable?
- How does Zacchaeus model faithful wealth stewardship?
- What does Jesus's definition of salvation (“Today salvation has come to this household”) tell us?

**CLOSING**

***The Lazarus Challenge***

**Good news. You know the truth. It’s too late for the rich man in the parable, but it’s not too late for you. There’s still time to live the truth rather than the lie that masquerades as “The American Dream.” - Willimon**

- Who is the “Lazarus” in your community whom you haven’t been seeing?
- What is one concrete step you could take this week to bridge a gap between rich and poor?
- How might your congregation move beyond charity toward justice?

**Final Questions...**

- Your call: Is Jesus’s parable of Lazarus and the rich man good new or bad?
- What is one thing our congregation could do to participate more actively in Jesus’s ministry to rich and poor?

**CLOSING PRAYER**

God of justice and mercy, you see every Lazarus lying at our gates and every rich person feasting while others hunger. Forgive our blindness to need and our comfort with inequality. Help us receive your salvation like Zacchaeus – not just as gift but as assignment. Give us courage to examine our own privilege honestly and wisdom to use our resources as faithful stewards. Open our eyes to see, our hearts to care, and our hands to act. As we continue toward your table, remind us that your feast has room for both rich and poor, but only when we learn to see and serve each other. Amen.

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**Session 5: Refusing the Hose**

**Sunday, March 22 4:00 PM**

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