

Rich Presumptuously Expect the Poor to Serve Them

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “presumptuous” as “characterized by presumption in opinion or conduct; unduly confident or bold; arrogant; presuming; forward; impertinent.”

If that doesn't clear things up, you should read Jesus' parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31.

The rich man dressed exquisitely and dined sumptuously every day while poor, sore-ridden and hungry Lazarus sat at the gate, longing for scraps of garbage to eat and being comforted by dogs licking his sores.

Both men died. Angels carried Lazarus to the arms of Abraham while the wealthy fellow found himself in hell. Despite the distance, the rich man could manage to see Lazarus and Abraham together in a heavenly place.

So he proceeded to beg Abraham for mercy by sending Lazarus down to cool his tongue with a fingertip of water. To the rich man, Lazarus was still the inferior meant to serve the privileged. Now that's presumptuous!

Abraham told the rich man that he had already enjoyed more than his share of good things during his earthly existence while Lazarus experienced genuine deprivation and suffering. Now this would be permanently reversed.

The rich man continued to plead with Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his five brothers of what they needed to do to avoid his eternal fate, but Abraham rejected this enduring presumptuousness.

The five brothers, Abraham replied, had all they needed in order to avoid their brother's fate - that is, Moses and the prophets. Those brothers, too, were so presumptuous that they'd never listen to the likes of a Lazarus, dead or alive.

<https://ethicsdaily.com/rich-presumptuously-expect-the-poor-to-serve-the-m-cms-21151/> September 27, 2013 Larry Greenfield

If a modern parable is needed to clear things up, how about this?

How about a national legislative body so interested in protecting the good life of the wealthy that it forsakes the poor, suffering and vulnerable? The wealthy in this modern parable are doing very, very well.

The Associated Press [reported](#) on a study based on IRS data that reviewed the gap between rich and poor over a 100-year period. That gap in the United States has been increasing for the past three decades; in 2012, the gap was the largest it had been in a century.

In 1927, just before the stock market crash, the top 1 percent of earners had 18.7 percent of income. In 2012, it reached 19.3 percent.

The top 1 percent saw their income rise 20 percent in 2012 while the 99 percent realized a 1 percent increase in income.

Others in the upper income brackets did well, too. The top 10 percent (those earning more than \$114,000) secured 48.2 percent of all earnings in 2012, compared to the earlier record high in 1932 of 46.3 percent.

What about the poor? In terms of the national poverty rate in 2012, it remained at 15.4 percent (46.5 million Americans), according to Census Bureau figures.

And what about income for the “typical” American family? It also was flat.

These figures tell the first part of the contemporary parable about the rich and the poor - the part that describes disparity. But what about the rest of the story?

What about the U.S. Congress’ response to that disparity? Let’s just say it’s presumptuous.

Rather than trying to narrow the gap between rich and poor by raising taxes on the wealthy so that more resources can be directed to the poor, Congress insists on maintaining a tax system full of loopholes for the rich.

In effect, it's like asking the Lazaruses to help those who are dressing exquisitely and eating sumptuously.

Instead of welcoming a reform in health care in which millions more Americans without insurance would get coverage, many members of Congress would rather shut down the government and allow the nation go into default on its debt than fund health insurance for the millions without it.

In effect, it's like expecting the sick and vulnerable to help maintain the lifestyle of the rich and famous.

And then there's the decision to cut the funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (commonly known as "food stamps") by \$5 billion over 10 years and the desire to end or curtail unemployment benefits in the near future. Again, let the poor serve the rich.

In the contemporary parable, of course, we don't have an account when both the rich and the poor both come to the end of their lives. But if the story Jesus told remains true to form, we can expect that the wealthy will continue to expect the poor to provide relief eternally.

Such presumptuousness will not be overcome by a warning from the dead about their future fate. It's too ingrained in their consciousness.

The only hope of overcoming their presumptuousness, according to Jesus, is a serious reading of Moses and the prophets. And, we could add, the Gospels.

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