

*The Rich Man and Lazarus* by James Janknegt

art selection and comment by [John Kohan](#) in the [June 29, 2022](#) issue



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Painting the parables is a special calling for James Janknegt. At the start of the new millennium, the Texas artist took up his brush to create 40 images of the teachings of Christ in what he calls “modern day American vernacular,” one for each day in the season of Lent. He published them in a book of meditations on the parables in 2017.

These contemporary variations in paint on the oft-told New Testament tales turn the first-century Middle East into suburban America. A stock character like the builder of bigger barns becomes a real-estate developer. Flashlights in need of batteries take the place of empty oil lamps.

In this painting of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Janknegt depicts the former as an all-you-can-eat glutton wolfing down large portions of takeout food. The sore-plagued beggar is a man of the streets with a bedroll and companion dogs. In the great reversal of fortunes at the heart of the story, the gluttonous foodie burns in the flames of Hades, while the poor man is comforted at the bosom of Abraham. Three prophets give warnings that will go unheard by the rich man's brothers in a corporate boardroom.

The white-bearded Lazarus is a portrait of the artist. "I am both the poor man and the rich man," says Janknegt. "You can have material wealth by the world's standards and be spiritually starving. I hope, by the mercy of God, we all arrive at Abraham's bosom."