

## **“Hear the Word and Be Saved”**

**Luke 16:19-31**

**16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost + Sept. 25, 2022**

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

**Earlier in the Chapter Jesus addresses the Pharisees, who were lovers of money. Jesus warned them: “God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). Now, in yet another attempt to lead them to repentance and eternal life, Jesus tells this account we know as “The Rich Man and Lazarus.” (Notice that Jesus does not say it was a parable, but simply starts by saying, “There was a rich man who....”) The account has also been written down for our learning. Life in America is, by almost any standard, more prosperous than life in the vast majority of other countries in the world, and Americans enjoy a lifestyle on a daily basis that the greatest kings of history could never have imagined. We have way more than enough food and instant communications and entertainment. We can turn on that little box and watch many different things happening all over the world. But we also have greed and selfishness, disregard for our neighbor, cruelty, crime, and selfishness at horrible levels. Jesus’ warning comes by way of a contrast between two individuals. Let’s get a handle on this by (1) first, looking at the rich man, his life and his afterlife; (2) second, Lazarus, his life and his afterlife; and (3) their attitude toward the written word of God that made the difference.**

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**Take a look at the rich man. The wealth of the rich man is obvious: “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day” (v.19). Most people were lucky to have clothes on their back; he was clothed in the best and most expensive clothing every day. Most people could enjoy a feast only a few times a year—on the high holidays of the worship calendar—but he enjoyed the most wonderful food on a daily basis. Abraham later summed it up by saying, “You in your lifetime received your good things” (v.25).**

**Those are the things about the rich man that were noticed by others: he had lots of good things. But now let’s take a look at the things under the**

surface. For one thing, notice that he is not given a name. He is simply “a rich man.” In this life probably everybody knew the name of the rich man. They probably referred to Him often and no doubt many people aspired to have what he had. But before the Lord God, and in the words of the Lord Jesus, he is simply “a [certain] rich man.” God had desired to call Him by name to be His own child, but this rich man rejected God’s call. In reality, even though the world honored him, he was a nobody.

Notice also his lack of mercy for his neighbor. The poor man Lazarus, covered with sores, was laid at his very gate. The rich man cared nothing for this man. He did not heed the command in the Bible to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He did not remember the many instructions in the Books of Moses to remember and care for the poor, to help the sick and downtrodden, to share the abundance that the Lord gives. The dogs at least gave Lazarus a little comfort by licking his wounds; the rich man was worse than a dog. He did absolutely nothing for this man at his gate who simply desired a few crumbs from his table. Remember the account the Lord gives of the Last Judgment, when all nations are gathered before Him. There we learn that those who care for the least brothers and sisters of Jesus did it as unto the Lord: “I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me. . . . Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the last of these My brothers, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:35-36). In the case of the rich man, there was none of this kindness. Why was there no kindness and help for his neighbor? Because there was no faith in his heart. His disregard for Lazarus was evidence of the fact that he did not have faith in the saving promises of God. In fact, apparently he did not feel that he even needed a Savior.

It is that lack of faith that landed him in hell when he died. What was that like? It is described as “being in torment” (v.23), being “in anguish”—anguish so severe that the formerly rich man desired to have Lazarus sent to dip the tip of his finger in water in order to cool his tongue. Imagine! He thought Lazarus was still his inferior, one who should do the work of a slave and get him a cool drink. How the tables have been turned! The formerly rich

man could now not even afford a drop of water for his tongue. And he was totally cut off. No one could get into that place of torment to give him any relief, nor could he escape. A great chasm made that impossible.

The formerly rich man finally turns his attention to his five brothers still on earth: “I beg you, father, to send [Lazarus] to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment” (v.v.27-28). In his lifetime, the formerly rich man had rejected repentance. He continued in his stubborn, wicked way of life and never turned from his sin to the God who was eager to receive and forgive Him.

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Now look at Lazarus. In the world’s view this man was the nobody. Today he would probably be called a homeless man, a transient, a bum. And when he died a guy like this would probably be known as “John Doe.” But in the eyes of the Lord, this man was precious. He had been summoned by name by the Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit he had placed himself into the arms of his Savior who had redeemed him. What happened to him when he died? Whereas we simply read that the rich man “died and was buried” (v.22), it says that Lazarus “died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side”—into the “bosom” of Abraham, as we have heard it in the King James Version. God’s almighty angels, who have attended him throughout his difficult earthly life, now bring his soul safely home to heaven. That’s what happens with God’s own children: when the time is just right, God sends His angels to take His dear children home. For Lazarus to be at Abraham’s side reminds us of how John, the beloved disciple, was at Jesus’ side during the Last Supper. It seems to be a description of that wonderful banquet feast that has no end, being in close fellowship together and enjoying the presence of the Lord and his people. There, Lazarus is “comforted.” There is the end to all his trouble, all his heartache, all his sorrow. Even his body will be raised on the Last Day, this time free from all pain and suffering, a glorified body like the Lord Jesus had after He rose from the dead. This is the eternal home for which we as the people of God long.

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Now comes the most important part of the account. What made the difference? How can we be sure to have the gift of eternal life that Lazarus enjoyed and avoid the unending torment that the once-rich man suffered? Jesus explains that it all comes down to hearing the written word of God. The once-rich man insisted: “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent” (v.30). Abraham answers—and we can be sure that this is the word of the Lord Himself—“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (v.31). “Moses and the Prophets” was a short-hand way of saying “The written word of God”—that is, the Bible. Do you realize what this means? This means that when we pick up the Bible we have God’s most powerful saving tool right in our hands. There is nothing more powerful that God could provide us. It is all right here. When the word of God is proclaimed faithfully according to this word, the Lord Himself is present to convict people of their sins and to bring them to put their trust in the Lord Jesus. This is the repentance that the Lord Jesus speaks of here. The results would not be any better if someone came back from the dead to warn people about hell and to try to convince them to turn away from sin and to the Lord.

That word of God is centered in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the One who suffered for all the sins of all the world, including the sins of disregard for the poor and needy. When Christ suffered and died on the cross, He made full atonement or payment for our sins of failure to hear the word, failure to hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it—all sins. His righteousness covers our weaknesses and failures so that when our last hour comes, we may be carried by the angels to Abraham’s side and enjoy everlasting comfort and fellowship with the Lord and His saints. Christ rose again from the dead and many still do not believe in Him; we believe in Him and know that He rose to seal our forgiveness that we too might rise.

**Hear His word and be saved! Amen.**