

October 3, 2010  
Pentecost 19

*"Cheer Up, Christian, God's Word Brings You Heavenly Treasures"*

### **LUKE 16:19-31**

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*"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' <sup>27</sup> He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' <sup>30</sup> 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> 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.'"*

As we heard in our sermon last Sunday, the stories that Jesus told have a way of getting our attention. So it is with this parable or story about the rich man and poor Lazarus. We see the poor beggar so hungry and so covered with sores on his beleaguered body. We see the rich man living in the lap of luxury and not even bothering to throw a bone or crust of bread to the hungry man begging at the gate of his palatial estate. We see the poor beggar dying and going to Abraham's side. We see the rich man suffering so terribly in hell that he longs for just a drop of water to cool his tongue.

But the main point of this story is this: People won't believe even if some rises from the dead to warn them about what is coming in the future. The only thing that can save them is Moses and the prophets. Only Moses and the prophets, God's Word, can change their hearts and bring them to saving faith in Jesus.

Jesus originally told this story to a religious group of people called the Pharisees. Instead of letting Moses and the prophets direct them to Jesus the Messiah, they used Moses and the prophets to create rules and regulations by which they hoped to earn their way into heaven. People are still doing this with the Bible today. They are looking to God's Word as a guidebook to provide them with a way to become acceptable to God.

God's Word is so precious to us because it offers us the eternal treasure of God's love for us that begins now and lasts for all eternity. Let's take a closer look at this story of the rich and poor Lazarus and thank the Lord that God's Word has given us this huge eternal

treasure of God's love that poor Lazarus enjoyed.

### **The treasures of God's kingdom are real**

The rich man did not want these treasures of love that filled the life of poor Lazarus. He had riches, earthly riches, but not heavenly treasures. "There was rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day." He wore the best of clothes, ate the best food and lived in the largest house. He didn't care about that poor beggar that was placed at the entrance to his estate. This man had little love in his heart for other people, and he certainly did not know the love of God that rescued him from his sin.

Who are the richest people in the world? It is the people who have Jesus. This past week I was reading in the Lutheran Confessions where it described how we are saved entirely by the merits of Christ, not by what other people or even saints might try to do for us. The Confessions read: "For example, when any friend pays a debt for a friend, the debtor is freed by the merit of another, as though it were by his own. So Christ's merits are given to us so that, when we believe in Him, we may be regarded as righteous by our confidence in Christ's merits as though we had merits of our own." Wow, think of how rich you are. This huge monstrous debt of sin has been completely paid off and expunged from your record. Into your account has been placed the perfect life of Christ. We have the greatest treasure in the world, the righteousness of Christ. Romans 5 says that because of this righteousness we have access to God's grace, his unfailing kindness, love and mercy, that we have not deserved. It has been given to us as a free gift through Jesus.

Back to the story that Jesus told. Did you hear the news? That poor beggar, the guy named Lazarus, died last night. You know that guy that used to sit outside the estate of the rich man. Remember how the dogs used to lick his sores. It is good he died. His suffering is over. He sure had a rough life.

Ah, but that, my friends this is only part of the story. That poor beggar who died went home to heaven. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side." When some dies in the arms of Jesus, they immediately go home to be with the Lord. Jesus told a dying thief who believed in him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." It says of Jesus in John 1:18 that he existed from all eternity at the heavenly Father's side. When we die our bodies may be reduced to ashes and dust, but our souls go to be with Jesus, at our heavenly Father's side. We love the hymn verse that says, "Lord, when at last your angels come, To Abraham's bosom bear me home. That I may die unfearing."

Did you hear the news? He died last night. Who died? That rich man. You mean the one who was all decked out in purple and fine linen? You mean the skinflint who would not think of helping out someone in need? I wonder how much he left behind. I think he left it all behind. I know he left it all behind. You can't take it with you.

Jesus tells us, "The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus at his side." Jesus is telling a story or parable that is intended to get our attention. He is not teaching us that some day we

will be able to see back and forth from heaven and hell. The rich man is suffering terribly. He cries out in anguish, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony because of this fire." All his vast wealth and riches could not buy him one drop of water to cool his tongue. He longs for Lazarus to just put a drop of water on his tongue, but that was impossible because of the huge chasm that exists between heaven and hell. Jesus has Abraham telling the rich man, "So that those who want to from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." There are no second chances.

The Jehovah Witnesses who come knocking at your door do not believe that such a place of torment exists. They like to say that Jesus was just telling a story and this description of hell does not apply to our lives. They do not accept the many other references in the New Testament to such a place of eternal suffering. Jesus described hell as place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, and where the worm does not die. We know from Scripture that there are no second chances. Hebrews tells us that "It is appointed unto man once to die and then comes the judgment." The time to believe is now and not tomorrow. In John 3 Jesus "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Then Jesus went on to say, "Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

How do we get people to accept and believe in these treasures of God's kingdom? In this story Jesus has the rich man pleading with Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead so his five brothers will believe in the free gift of eternal life that God offered them.

### **The treasures of God's kingdom come through the Word**

"Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not come to this place of torment." I know people who do not believe in Jesus. I know people who have come to despise Jesus and the treasures of his kingdom. I pray for the Holy Spirit to come into their lives. I am sure that you have your list. You have those you pray for each day. Some are your friends. Some are members of your family. Some are people you have come to know that are nice people but they do not have Jesus and the treasures of his love, treasures that last forever. The rich man argues that if someone came back from the dead and talked to his brothers, then they would surely accept the warning and come to believe. Then Abraham told him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced if someone rises from the dead."

We like to think if Noah's ark were discovered on Mount Ararat that even the most ardent skeptics would accept the evidence and believe in what the Bible says about the great world flood in Genesis. We like to think if the skeptic would only read Francis Collins' book about the intelligent design he discovered in the study of genetics, they would come to believe in what God says in the Bible about the origin of the universe. If only we could have a worship service here in this church that would razzle dazzle the people of the community, think of how many people we could bring to Christ. If only I could show more love to my neighbor who is not a Christ, then maybe my example would bring them to faith and they could share with me the treasures of God's love in Jesus that are so precious to me and other Christians. Then we remember these words that grab our attention. "If

they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

In John 11 we find proof that people will not accept the miracle of someone rising from the dead. Another man named Lazarus dies, the rich brother of Mary and Martha. This was the family that opened their home and shared their wealth with Jesus and his disciples. Jesus came four days after Lazarus died. His body was already decaying for four days when Jesus raised him to life again. And what was the reaction from Jesus' enemies to this mighty miracle? They said, "If we let Jesus continue performing these mighty miracles, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." The only way to change the spiritual dead human heart corrupted by sin is to raise it to life again by the power of God's Word.

In Romans 10 the all important question is asked, "How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" The answer is then given. "Consequently faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Jesus said of his words, "My words are spirit and they are life." Isaiah the prophet said that God's Word is like the rain that falls down and waters the earth, causing things to grow. God's Word opens our eyes to see the treasures of the kingdom of God. It helps us see how rich we are with God's love for us in Jesus his Son. God's Word is the only way to open the hearts of people and lead them to believe and accept these treasures. "Lord, help us bring more of your Word to more people more often so they can share with us in the treasures of your kingdom." Amen.