

September 28, 2025

St. Luke 16:19-31:

What's Really Important - For You?

- I. The Rich Man
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St. Luke 16:19-31

Dear friends in Christ,

When I read this text, my thoughts went back many years ago to a conversation I had with another pastor. He described the anxiety he was experiencing after confronting several members of his congregation with Scripture. The pastor discussed the importance of holding on to the truth of God's Word. One member argued with him and stated, "The truth of the Word is not what's important."

I believe I can speak for a fair number of pastors who have spent time in a hospital room with a dear brother or sister in Christ hooked up to a life support system. I know I can speak for the pastors here. You're there with the understanding that the relationship you've had with the person over the years is possibly coming to an end and you will no longer have face-to-face contact with them. All they have gained will remain behind. Within three or four generations there will no longer be distinct memories of them; here, gone, forgotten! When it comes to life here and eternity the truth of God's Word is everything.

I'm thinking everyone here, and hoping everyone here, knows understands God's love in Christ. I'm thinking that everyone here has experienced the traumas and struggles of life. So, I ask you, when you size up all you have of this world, when you look at how the world sees your importance, when you consider that you only have a limited amount of time to walk this earth, when you consider this world's violence and corruption - I ask you . . .

WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT – FOR YOU?

I. The Rich Man

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores (vv.19-21).

There is the question as to whether our text for this morning is a real incident or a parable. You will find differences in opinion. It is interesting to note that one person is given a name, Lazarus. He is not considered to be the brother of Mary and Martha. Unquestionably, the description of the rich man's suffering puts everything in perspective.

And then, there's the thought by some that very rich people go to hell. Well, Luther clarifies this for us:

If we look at the rich man according to the fruits of faith, we find a heart and a tree of unbelief.... This rich man is not reprov'd because he was (rich and) had fine food and splendid clothes, for many saints, kings, and queens, formerly wore fine dresses, as Solomon, Esther, David, and others; but because he set his heart upon it, he sought it, he clung to it, he chose it, he had all his joy, desire, and pleasure in it, and made it his idol.

I know, the account of Lazarus might be a bit troubling considering all the people running the streets in our city begging for money. However, there are businesses in this city constantly seeking help, and designated places where people can receive needed help. The problem is that so many just don't want to work. It would be good to remember the words of the apostle Paul: "If anyone is not willing to work let him not eat (2 Thess.3:10b)." We're not given a description of Lazarus' condition other than the words "covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores." His condition was genuine and serious. Jesus then states...

II. Heaven and Hell

The poor man also died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in anguish in this flame (vv.22-24)."

Well, let's start with the rich man, the man who wanted his heaven on earth, and got it; had no time or place for the Lord, and found himself in the torment and agony of hell. John Gerhard, a highly noted Lutheran theologian of the past, wrote:

... the souls and bodies of the wicked are to be lost in *Gehenna*...for the worm gnawing them will not die, and the fire burning them will not be quenched...and therefore their bodies will likewise rise again incorruptible and immortal, never to be separated from the souls, but to be reserved for eternal and never- ending tortures. (*The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p 64.)

I find this chilling, don't you, pleading for a drop of water while existing in flames in the agony of unending hell? One drop of water! It is a commentary on the words of Psalm 119:120 - "My flesh trembles for fear of you, I am afraid of your judgments." I say to you, dear friends, there is no room to ignore God's word here: "... while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (Rm.5:6,8,10)." This is where we were: weak - ungodly - sinners - enemies. Without their covering for our sin, we are naked and exposed to God's wrath.

We know the promise that whoever believes in Christ has eternal life (Jn.3:16). Jesus is the covering. We know the judgment against those who do not believe: "... Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn.3:17)." The rich man was in hell, torment and flames for one reason alone: he wanted nothing to do with the love of God that would save sinners - the greatest gift anyone could ever receive. It's the gift that changes worldly thinking.

And Lazarus? Here was a man with an earthly lifetime of suffering. Have you ever thought about this? God did not take away his suffering as he walked through this world, but he saw him through. We heard the words: "...the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side." *Abraham's side* is a Jewish designation for heaven but includes all believers. Paul writes, "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham (Gal.3:7-9)."

Lazarus had faith in God's payment for his sin. Though the New Testament Scriptures were not yet written, Lazarus believed the Old Testament promise of the coming Messiah who would pay for all sin. He would have understood this word of the Lord through Paul: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved (Eph.24:5)."

The Lord did not take away the rags of his life in this world. He did not take away his ragged living. The Lord exchanged his ragged world for the white robe of righteousness, eternal joy and peace.

I suspect many would wonder why God lets situations such as Lazarus experienced to exist. Or maybe we wonder why God allows certain things to happen in our lives, or why he doesn't do something about something that's happening in our lives. We're constantly reminded that we live in a fallen world. God uses everything for good purposes no matter how It appears to us. We need to recall these words of Job concerning each person's life: "... his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass (Job 14:5)." And we can't ignore this word of God: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps (Prov.16:9)." And I must confess, the words of David always stand in front of me: "... in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them (Ps.139:16)." There's no way a child of God can ignore that!

Do we ever stop to think that while on the cross Jesus willingly suffered the fullness of the hell we deserve and paid the penalty for our sin, then watched as he was forsaken by His Father because of that sin? He did that so we would not be punished and forsaken by God. Can you tell me what's more important than eternal joy with Christ? Would we ever think that God would allow us to become so comfortable and happy with this world that our faith begins to fade? Well, consider this...

III. From Here to There

Remember the rich man's pleading to send Lazarus to his brothers on earth and then Abraham's reply to this pleading: "They have Moses and the prophets; Let them hear them." Moses and the prophets, the Old Testament Scripture. But the damned continue in their ignorance and wants: "No, Father Abraham, he said, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." And then Abraham's final reply: "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.'"

It's like this, if people don't listen to the Word of God nothing else will convince them. The Scriptures declare it: "The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rm.1:16)." And here we are with both Old and New Testaments. It is the Word of God that keeps our focus on salvation by the grace of God through faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ; instructs us in person-to-person relationships, marriages, parent-child relationships, the hard times of life and, finally, lifts us to eternal life and joy. It's the suitcase packed with everything necessary to see us through this world and lift us into eternal life. So, in our journey from here to there, *What's Really Important – For You?*

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott