

LET THEM LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD!

May we not be distracted from its power to save -- May proclaim it at home, at church and abroad.

Luke 16:19-31

TEXT: *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. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. 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 by his side. 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.' 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. 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.' He answered, '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 also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 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.'*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

The story before us this morning has caused many questions in the minds of Bible students. First of all, it is debated as to whether or not this is a parable, one of those made up earthly illustrations that Jesus often used to teach a spiritual truth, or if it might be an actual situation of which Jesus our Lord is aware. This Scripture doesn't fit the regular formula of the many parables for which Jesus was famous. And it tells of a specific man named Lazarus as if Jesus had personal knowledge of his existence.

Then our Lord presents heaven and hell as if those in hell might be able to see and to speak to those in heaven. However, as Jesus points out, ***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.*** This begs many questions, such as the possibility that part of the suffering of the damned might include the unbearable view of our glorification and joy in heaven.

It's best to avoid too much speculation about these things that our Lord has purposefully left unclear lest we are drawn away from the point that our Lord is making in this story, whether it be a parable or an actual situation. We do not want to go to hell because we did not hear or listen to God's Word. That is the point Jesus powerfully makes. He says: ***They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them ... If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*** May we not be distracted from God's Word and its power to save. May proclaim it at home, at church and abroad.

One of the blessings that poor Lazarus had was that there weren't many things to distract him from his Lord. He had no means of income except for the humiliation of begging. He had sores on his body that probably drove him to pray day and night for the Lord's mercy and for that blessed day of his departure from this veil of tears to his home in heaven. This is what Jesus meant when he said: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*** Mt 5
It's the nature of our Old Adam, our sinful flesh, to become arrogant and conceited when things

go well for us. When there is no adversity or pain we quickly feel no need for God's mercy. We might flip the Lord a little gesture of thanks and blessing, but then we must run off to our busy lives.

That's why Jesus also said: ***How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*** Lu 18 A case in point is before us. The place where Lazarus regularly sat begging for alms and scraps of food was outside the gate of the rich man who went to hell. The man obviously was a Jew since he recognized Abraham and even called him "father Abraham." But just being Jewish didn't save him from eternal damnation. There would be no mercy, ever! His plea would be ignored: ***'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.'*** ***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. 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.*** Sorry! I couldn't show you mercy even if I wanted.

Now the irony set before us in Jesus' account is that there are TWO rich men talking. One is in hell and the other is in heaven. Abraham was one of the world's wealthiest men who lived in his day. So it cannot be that being rich disqualifies you from eternal life, nor does salvation mean that we must make ourselves poor like Lazarus and live like monks and nuns. So what is the great chasm that separates those who are being saved and those who are going to go to hell?

When Abraham was on earth, the Lord had revealed to Abraham that the promised Savior would come into this world through him: ***I will make you into a great nation ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*** Ge 12 But you already know that Abraham and Sarah were 75 and 65 respectively and had no children. It would take another 25 years before that baby boy would be born. At one time, when Abraham was spiritually down he prayed to the Lord: ***O LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? ... You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.*** What good is all of the wealth of this world? If I do not have this baby boy, there will be no Savior and then we will all go hell anyway!

Compare Abraham's prayerful longing for the Savior to the rich man Jesus says went to hell: ***There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.*** This man's goal was to enjoy his riches to the fullest. But for Abraham, the Bible says: ***Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*** Ge 15 It was the simple Word of God, the good news of the promised Savior simply repeated in the ears of this old man. And Scripture says: ***Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*** Ge 15 Simple faith alone in Jesus alone receives the promise of forgiveness of sins, the righteousness of God, life and salvation.

May none of us ever be distracted from fact that God made Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God through faith in His name! May we ever make the proclamation of this Word of God top priority at home, in this church and everywhere we go!

Fathers, this warning about distraction from God's Word is for you. Note what the man in hell says: ***'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 also come to this place of torment.'*** Listen closely: ***send Lazarus to my father's house...*** His father is still living and caring for five other children. Obviously there had been no teaching of the Gospel in that household. Jews who didn't know the Gospel. It's like so-called Christians today do not know God's Word, its history of our salvation or its teachings. In most cases it is the father who has failed to lead his family to prioritize the Gospel, to see to it that his children are taught to pray and to discuss God's Word, first and foremost in his home of which is the divinely-ordained head. Fathers, this month of June has a special day called "Fathers' Day." How many children are now in hell cursing their fathers for never teaching them about Jesus!

Many still think like this rich man in hell. Preaching and teaching about Jesus, baptism and the Lord's Supper are a silly waste of time. So the rich man in hell, still arrogant and conceited argues: ***'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'*** Scare the hell out of them! Send Lazarus, back from the dead! You see, the sinful human being, always an arrogant smart-aleck, presumes to tell God how to grow His Church. But the fact is simply stated by Abraham: ***'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'***

This past Tuesday afternoon I was given the privilege of baptizing another grandchild. It never ceases to amaze me that with that water is God's Word that His Holy Spirit is graciously creating the faith that saved Lazarus. God has done His work of rebirth in a child that was born spiritually dead, blind and hostile to God. But my work isn't over. Here is another one to pray for, that his parents remain faithful to the Lord and that they continue to bring him to Jesus until Jesus comes to take him to Abraham's side. This is the most important work we have as Christians! To proclaim God's Word, at home, here in this place, and wherever we go.

We are finishing up that time of the year when many of our children and grandchildren are graduating from various levels of education. Celebrations and gifts are extravagant. Hopes and dreams run wild. But we have here and in our homes the greatest power of God that saves us for eternal life. Rich or poor it is the Holy Spirit who opens human ears and hearts to listen, believe and be saved. May the distractions of this world never overcome our faithful listening to God's Word. Amen.