

September 25, 2022  
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 16:19-31

## PROPHECY FULFILLED IN JESUS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 16th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

We live in a world of opposites. There is hot and cold; abundance and scarcity; light and darkness; good and evil. These opposites are observable. Few people would argue against their existence. But while people agree that good and evil exist, not everyone is in agreement about the existence of heaven and hell. A 2021 Pew Research Center survey found that only 73% of American adults believe in heaven and a smaller share, only 62%, believe in hell.

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/11/23/few-americans-blame-god-or-say-faith-has-been-shaken-amid-pandemic-other-tragedies/>) Even the Bishop of the largest liberal Lutheran denomination in the United States, when asked if hell existed, replied:

***“There may be, but I think it’s empty.”***

(<https://www.christiantimes.com/news/top-lutheran-bishop-says-there-may-be-a-hell-but-it-is-empty.html>)

Regardless of what mankind’s sinful nature might *want to believe*, God’s Word *teaches* us that there *is* a real place of eternal bliss and joy that we call *heaven*. (cf: Luke 6:23, 10:20) It is a place where a priceless and imperishable inheritance awaits all who believe and trust in Christ Jesus for forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. (cf: 1 Corinthians 9:25; Revelation 7:15–17)

God’s Word *also* teaches that there *is* a real place of eternal torment and punishment that we call *hell*. (cf: Luke 13:28) It is the final and eternal destiny for unbelievers, the spiritually lost, and all who are unrepentant. (cf: Matthew 13:42, 50; 25:41, 46) Scripture *does not* teach of a temporary holding place like limbo or purgatory. It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment. (cf: Hebrews 9:27) At the judgement, Christ will separate righteous believers from the unrighteous, the righteous into eternal life and the unrighteous into eternal punishment. (cf: Matthew 25:31–46) There are no second chances, mulligans, or do-overs. And our Gospel text describes this perfectly.

Jesus tells a parable of opposites. One man is rich and wealthy. The other is poor and his life is pitiable and pathetic. Jesus does not name the rich man in the parable, suggesting that his name is not written in the book of life in heaven. (cf: Revelation 13:8) But He names the poor man Lazarus, the name which means ***“the one whom God helps.”*** (Just, Luke 9:51–24:53, Concordia

Commentary, 631, 633) For the sake of the parable, his name marks Lazarus as being one who puts all his trust and faith in God.

The rich man lives a sumptuous life, dressing in the fine linens of royalty and indulging in banquet-like feasts every day. His whole life was one enormous celebration. His wealth was his god. Lazarus, on the other hand, had been dumped at the entrance into the rich man's palace. He could not move himself. He was clothed in sores and longed to be fed the scraps that might fall from the rich man's table.

The rich man had the means to love his neighbor as himself. He could have fed poor Lazarus and cared for his sores. He could not leave his home without the wretched Lazarus or hear his begging voice. But he ignores his misery. If the rich man did not want to help him personally, he should have at least commanded his servants to take him in and care for him. But no. Lazarus' only friends, his only comfort, were the stray dogs that came by to lick his sores.

In last week's Gospel we heard Jesus say:

***"No servant can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and money."*** (Luke 16:13)

Scripture ***does not*** condemn money or wealth – only the idolatrous use of it. Today's parable ***is not*** teaching that those blessed with good things in this life are therefore condemned in the next – nor is it teaching that those burdened with bad things in this life, for that reason, are comforted in the next. No. Today's parable illustrates the ***wrong*** use of riches and wealth – and the consequences that flow from such misuse.

As I said last week, all that you have and all that you possess is not yours. It belongs to God Almighty and He has given it to you to manage. You are God's steward. He desires you to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things – not in your money and earthly goods. God does not need your money or your good works, but your neighbor does. Your neighbor sees God through your kindness, compassion, and mercy. It is through your words and deeds that your neighbor hears the Gospel message of Christ Jesus, who loves and forgives sinners, and bestows the imperishable true riches of forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

In the parable, at the deaths of both men, the opposites continue as their fortunes are reversed. One dies and receives the riches and glory of heaven. The other dies and is cast into hell to suffer eternal damnation. Lazarus is immediately carried by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man immediately finds himself in the abyss of hell where, instead of glory, there is torment and agony.

What made the difference? The rich man refused to listen to and believe the Scriptures regarding loving God and his neighbor. His wearing fine linens and indulging in banquet-like feasts every day are not in themselves sinful. What makes them sinful is that they are the rich man's gods. He worships and enjoys them at the expense of his neighbor in need. He has physical and material blessings in abundance. He has everything except the one thing necessary. (cf: Luke 10:42) Trust in God.

He was prideful and arrogant, seeking to do what was best for himself. He was rich and believed himself to be a respected descendant of Abraham, but his works and deeds show him to be quite the opposite. He has no faith in God. God blessed him with great wealth and he, in turn, gave it all to his false god. Himself. He rejected the testimony of God's Word. He had no love and mercy for others, only for himself. Lazarus, on the other hand, had nothing but his trust in God.

The rich man who once desired for nothing in life, had in death received the wages of not loving God and serving his neighbor. In torment, his only desire was now that the man whom he refused to touch and care for at his gate, might come and touch his burning tongue with his moistened finger. Because of his unbelief he received God's righteous judgment. (cf: Romans 2:5) Lazarus, on the other hand, who once was poor and beggarly, had inherited the riches of eternal life.

Hoping to protect his brothers from the same fate, the rich man begged that Lazarus be sent to warn them so that they might avoid the torments of hell.

***“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*** (Luke 16:29-31)

The rich man is a warning sign to you and me. You cannot claim to be a Christian and at the same time have disregard for the Word of God. Jesus' once told the Pharisees:

***“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”*** (John 5:39-40)

At the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, all the people had were the writings of Moses and the Prophets: the Old Testament. In the parable, Abraham is not really talking about the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. He is talking about the resurrection of Jesus. Even when Christ was raised from the dead three days after His crucifixion, His enemies still refused to believe. Because they rejected the Word of God, they also rejected the Savior of the world, Word become flesh. (cf: John 1:14)

The writer to the Hebrews says:

***“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”*** (Hebrews 1:1-2)

In His infinite wisdom and mercy, God gave you Moses and the Prophets through His revealed Word as recorded in the Old Testament. Their prophesy points to the Messiah, the greater Moses who would come and lead and save His people. And now in these last days you have the prophesy fulfilled, God in the flesh of man, crucified to save sinners. You have the eyewitness accounts that Jesus was delivered into suffering and death to pay the wages of your sins and was raised for your justification, fulfilling all Old Testament prophesy, and assuring your bodily resurrection into eternal life. (cf: Romans 4:25, 6:5) God has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for the creation of faith and salvation. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that,

by patience and comfort of God holy Word, you may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life just as Lazarus did.

God's Word teaches that there is a heaven and there is a hell. It also teaches that the righteous live by faith. (cf: Romans 1:17) God never promised riches, wealth, or good health in this life. Like Lazarus, sometimes His people suffer from poverty, sickness, and despair. Sometimes they people must endure humiliation. Sometimes they must live as beggars. Whether you are rich or poor, when you die will stand as a beggar before God. The good news is that, in Christ, God makes beggars rich.

What God has promised us is that everlasting riches and joy are found in Christ Jesus and in the life to come. That is the testimony of Moses and the Prophets and the entire New Testament. The holy Scriptures convey the promises of God, and God does not lie. (cf: Titus 1:1–3) Whoever does not cling to His divine promises but trusts in earthly pleasures and treasures is in grave danger.

Faith clings to Jesus' promise that He makes beggars rich through His precious gifts of His Word and Sacraments. It is a faith which grasps hold of Jesus' promise that Baptism saves you. (cf: Mark 16:16) His promise that He is present in, with, and under the bread and wine in His Holy Supper Lord's Supper – and in His Supper His Body and Blood forgives your sins and sustains your faith unto life everlasting. His promise that He'll be with you to the very end of the age. (cf: Matthew 28:20)

God has given you Moses, the prophets, and all holy Scripture. When you look into the mirror of God's Law and it accuses you of your sin and cuts you to the heart, repent of your sins and believe the Gospel. (cf: Mark 1:15) Drown your old Adam in baptismal waters and arise a new creation in Christ so that you love and serve your neighbor as God, in Christ, serves and loves you.

Like Lazarus, you might fall on hard times in this life. You may notice that wicked people prosper while you seem to barely get by. But there is much, much more than meets the eye. The Christian walks by faith, not by sight. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:7) In Baptism:

**“[you] *have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer [you] who live, but Christ who lives in [you]. And the life [you] now live in the flesh [you] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [you] and gave himself for [you].*” (Galatians 2:20)**

After you have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith, our Lord will give you the crown of righteousness as He welcomes you into His eternal kingdom which has no end. (cf: 2 Timothy 4:7–8)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.