

**SALVATION COMES FROM GOD'S WORD ALONE**  
**Sermon for the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2019**  
**Luke 16:19-31**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before Luke 16:19-31: <sup>19</sup> “A certain man was rich. He used to dress in purple and fine linen and enjoyed himself splendidly every day. <sup>20</sup> A certain beggar by the name of Lazarus had been laid at his gate. He was covered with ulcers, <sup>21</sup> and longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs used to come and lick his ulcers. <sup>22</sup> The beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades he looked up, as he was being tormented and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> He called, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue! For I am in agony in this flame.’

<sup>25</sup> “However, Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that you received your good things in your lifetime, while Lazarus received bad things! However, now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> Besides all these things, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot, and people cannot cross over from there to us.’

<sup>27</sup> “He answered, ‘Therefore, I ask you, father, to send Lazarus to my father’s family. <sup>28</sup> For I have five brothers. Let him warn them, that they also may not come to this place of torture!’

<sup>29</sup> “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets. They should listen to them!’

<sup>30</sup> “He said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’

<sup>31</sup> “Abraham answered him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Over the past few Sundays, we have found Jesus teaching through the use of parables.

In a technical sense, the word *parable* ordinarily means something along the lines of a *complete, imaginary story that illustrates some kind of spiritual truth*. However, the word originally signified *the placing of two or more objects together for the sake of comparison*. In the Gospels, parables are typically allegorical stories that one, reveals how God is inducting His heavenly reign on earth through Jesus, or two, a story teaching disciples how they should live in view of God’s reign.

Some of the parables Jesus told, warn of the final judgment, but God’s judgment is never *portrayed* as mere stories or illustrations. Thus, when Jesus used parables to tell of the coming judgment and then *interpreted* these parables, He always explained God’s real, coming judgment.

Interpreters will often label the story of the rich man and Lazarus as a parable because it fits with Jesus’ style of storytelling, while others will say that the fact that neither Jesus nor Luke calls it a parable, and the added fact that Jesus uses a personal name (Lazarus) for the main character indicates a realistic situation. Either way, the point Jesus wishes to teach using the rich man and Lazarus is that **salvation comes from God’s Word alone**.

Many people often misinterpret the story of the rich man and Lazarus. For example: Just because Jesus described Lazarus as a poor and suffering man who died and went to heaven does not mean that all poor and suffering people go to heaven. Conversely, just because the healthy, wealthy man went to hell does not mean that all wealthy, healthy people will go to hell. The culture of that time believed that God blessed righteous people by making them well-off. They also believed that God condemned the unrighteous by causing them to suffer or by making them poor. They expected people of honest wealth to go to heaven and they expected the poor and sickly to go to hell. Therefore, Jesus often taught that it is possible for the wealthy to go to hell and the poor and suffering to enter heaven. Jesus wants us to understand that the prosperity and troubles we encounter in this life have no bearing on our eternal destination.

So it was in the story that the angels carried Lazarus from a life of torment to an eternity of comfort while the rich man, on the other hand, descended from a life of comfort to an eternity of torment. It is with this background that Jesus teaches the main point of the parable in a conversation that the rich man had with Abraham.

Initially, the rich man is still arrogant and self-centred. <sup>24</sup> He called, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue! For I am in agony in this flame.’

This title for Abraham tells us something about the rich man that we did not know before. He is a Jew and claims that Abraham is his father. This recalls the Jews who came to John the Baptist claiming, “*we have Abraham for our father*”<sup>1</sup> and yet refused to show fruits of repentance and to submit themselves to John’s baptism.<sup>2</sup> To be a “son of Abraham” does not protect one from eternal condemnation.

Curiously, the rich man does not speak words of repentance, for he seems to realise that his condition of torment is permanent. His cry for mercy is not a cry of repentance, but a plea for help that results from a desperate situation. In fact, his status does not seem to affect his arrogance, for he views Lazarus, whom he knows by name, as a servant whom Abraham can send into his place of flames and cool his tongue with a drop of water. The rich man still thinks of himself and his needs before those of Lazarus. The rich man still thought of Lazarus as some sort of servant or slave that Abraham could just order around.

Jesus then had Abraham inform the man of his hopelessness. **Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that you received your good things in your lifetime, while Lazarus received bad things! However, now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> Besides all these things, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot, and people cannot cross over from there to us.’** There is no relief for those who have died and gone to hell. There is only eternal suffering.

Finally, after all hope is gone, the rich man thought of someone else. <sup>27</sup> **“He answered, ‘Therefore, I ask you, father, to send Lazarus to my father’s family. <sup>28</sup> For I have five brothers. Let him warn them, that they also may not come to this place of torture!’** The rich man believed that the miraculous appearance of someone coming back from the dead will shock his brothers into belief.

It is now that Jesus began to develop the *main* point of the parable as Abraham replied, **‘They have Moses and the prophets. They should listen to them!’**

The brothers need to hear Moses and the prophets. They must heed what is regularly read in their own worship services and take it to heart! Abraham is telling the rich man that if his brothers are to avoid torment in Hades, then they must become hearers of the Word, that is, hearers of Moses and the Prophets, for in them they will find all they need to know about the kingdom of grace, characterised by mercy and almsgiving to people like Lazarus. The command to listen to Moses and the prophets also recalls the Father’s words on the mount of transfiguration when He called the disciples to hear Jesus as the *new Moses*<sup>3</sup>. So to hear **Moses and the prophets** is to hear the Word through the new Moses, Jesus. The Pharisees are being called by Jesus to listen to Moses and the Prophets as they testify to Jesus, and as they are being interpreted by Jesus and fulfilled in Him.

It is the Word of God that proclaims salvation from eternal torture. Jesus calls all to listen to the proclamation of God’s Word. He calls all men to listen as He interprets God’s promises and fulfils them in His own life and in His own death on the cross.

It is at this point in the story that the rich man expresses a false understanding that still plagues many today. The rich man thought that God’s Word was not enough. He thought that the miracle of resurrection from the dead would be more powerful than the Word of God. <sup>30</sup> **“He said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’”** Sadly, even many Christians will agree with the rich man at this point.

We still have many in the church on earth who do not believe that God’s Word is enough. While none of them would come right out and say that God’s Word is not enough, their opinions and practices show that they see God’s Word as simple information and nothing more. When a person states that preaching Christ and Him crucified isn’t working, they are really saying that God’s Word is not enough. When they say that reading the Word of God is boring, they are really saying that God’s Word is not enough. When they say that we need to reach out to people’s *felt* needs instead of the *real* need of forgiveness in Christ Jesus that the Bible proclaims, they are really saying that God’s Word is not enough.

Abraham disagreed. <sup>31</sup> **“Abraham answered him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”** The Old Testament already contained accounts of resurrection.<sup>4</sup> If they did not believe the Old Testament Scriptures, with their testimony to eternal life, hell, and resurrection, why would they believe another person’s testimony to those things? If the Word of God does not convince, neither will a resurrection from the dead.

If the sign of a person coming back from the dead is **not** as powerful as the simple proclamation of the Word of God, if a resurrection from the dead is not as powerful as the Word of God, then no marketing plan, no innovation or gimmick of any kind is as powerful as the simple proclamation of the Word of God, and here is the main point Jesus was making.

When it comes to salvation, there is nothing lacking from God’s Word. Everything we need for salvation is contained therein. The Holy Spirit spoke through the Apostle Paul when he said, “*For I am not ashamed of the Good News. For it is the power of God to save everyone who believes it*” (Romans 1:16). Paul also said, “*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17). The Holy Spirit also spoke through the prophet Isaiah and said, “*For, as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not go back there without watering the earth and causing it to bring forth and to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and*

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:9

<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:7-9

<sup>3</sup> Luke 9:35, citing Deuteronomy 18:15

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 4:8-37; 13:20-21

*bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so My Word will be, which goes out of My mouth. It will not return to Me without results, but it will accomplish what I desire and be successful in what I have sent it to do”* (Isaiah 55:10-11). As far as our salvation is concerned, we need nothing more than the Word of God. We don't need emotional manipulation, advertising gimmicks, or any other ideas of our own. **The Word of God is enough.**

Not long after Jesus spoke of the rich man and Lazarus, there was a real-world example of the exact point that Jesus was making. By an interesting coincidence, Jesus had a real-world friend whose name actually was Lazarus. Lazarus died and was in the grave for four days. Jesus called him forth, raising him from the dead. What was the response? *“A large crowd of the Jews realised that Jesus was there, and they came, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> However, the chief priests resolved that they should also kill Lazarus. <sup>11</sup> For he was the reason why many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and becoming believers in Him”* (John 12:9-11). Jesus was not engaging in one bit of overstatement when He spoke through Abraham and said, **‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’**

How is it that the Word of God is more powerful than the sign of the resurrection? Jesus said, *“You examine the Scriptures, because you think that you have eternal life in them; and yet they are the ones that testify about Me!”* (John 5:39). With these words, Jesus taught that the Word of God is important because it is only through the Word of God that we can know who Jesus is and what Jesus has done to save us.

It is the teaching of the Holy Scriptures that tell us that Jesus is both God and man. God's Word teaches us that Jesus, the Son of God, reigns over all things equally with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit and yet there are not three Gods, but one God in three persons. God's Word teaches us that Jesus took on our flesh in order to take our place under the Law. God's Word teaches us that Jesus took our sin and its consequences into Himself. God's Word teaches us that Jesus suffered and died on a cross and that this sacrifice redeemed all creation from the ravages of sin. God's Word teaches us that because Jesus did all this, we do not have to be like the rich man and spend eternity in torment. Instead, Jesus earned a place for us like the place of Lazarus at Abraham's side in paradise. God's Word teaches us that Jesus rose from the dead so that we may have confidence in all these things.

God's Word not only teaches us about these things, but the Holy Spirit has promised to use the Word of God to deliver these things to us. It is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit creates the faith that receives the benefits of Christ's work. It is by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God that we shall take our place in comfort at Abraham's side.

Jesus made several points with His story about Lazarus and the rich man. The first point is that there are only two possible destinations for us when we leave this world; one is a place of eternal comfort; the other is a place of eternal torment. The second point Jesus made is that there is no way to leave your eternal destination once you have arrived. The third and main point that Jesus made is that the Word of God proclaims *and delivers* the very grace of God that carries us to that place of eternal comfort.

Sadly, for all who reject God's Word, they will be like the rich man who ended up in the place of eternal torment. But for those who have the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, they will live forever in the comfort of paradise. They have God's Word that they will live with Him forever.

May we all gladly hear His Word and walk by faith in it alone, for the Word of God is enough. It truly is the Good News, the power of God to save everyone who believes it. In Jesus name. Amen.

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

#### PRAYER FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we worship You as the creator of all things and the preserver of our lives. In Your goodness You care for every one of Your creatures. We come before You in prayer with sincere and trusting hearts.

We thank and praise You for all Your goodness, but especially for the gift of Your only Son Jesus, whom You sent to suffer and die to rescue us from sin, and to rise again to guarantee the final crown of life for us in heaven. Through Him, we are Your children, enjoying the fullness of Your goodness and care. Give us firm faith in Your power and guidance, that we may continually trust You for all our daily needs, and carry out our daily tasks without worry about the future. No matter what may happen, give us the conviction that You direct all things in heaven and on earth by Your Word, and care especially for Your children.

Grant us Your grace that we may not live for the worthless values of this world or for the accumulation of wealth. We thank You for Jesus Christ, our most priceless treasure. Teach us to seek above everything else the blessings of Your kingdom in a life of loving obedience.

Make Christ's Word in all its richness live in our hearts and make us wise. Increase our love toward all people. Give us a special concern for those of the family of faith, and make us eager to help one another with our burdens and weaknesses. Fill Your Church with Your Spirit, that the compassion of Christ may be evident in the love and kindness we show to the fallen, the erring, and the heavy-laden. Let us never grow tired of doing good.

Grant that we, whose ears have been opened spiritually to hear Your Gospel, may speak it plainly to those who should hear it from us. Let Your light shine among the nations, so that the very ends of the earth may see Your glory, and people everywhere may learn to worship and serve You alone.

Bless our own country. May those in positions of government and authority honour You. May Your truth hold sway in politics, business, industry, education, and the mass media. Forgive us as a nation for turning away from Your Word, and remind all who openly flaunt Your commandments that there is a coming judgment, so that they may repent while there is still time.

In every day's needs and crises, help all families with Your presence. Be with them in sorrow or joy, sickness or health, disappointment or success, and make them safe and content in Your love. Watch over all our members who cannot attend worship because of ongoing illness or increasing frailty, and remind them that even in sickness or old age, You are never too far from them to hear their prayers and cries for mercy.

Continue to direct our lives in your loving providence. If it is Your gracious will, send rain again, and in the meantime, give us the resources we need to see us through this terrible drought.

Give us opportunities to use your gifts as Your grateful stewards, and keep us in the faith by Your grace and power, that we may attain to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

### The 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 6:1-7

<sup>1</sup> How horrible it will be for those who are complacent in Zion, for those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria and for the notable men of the leading nations, to whom the family of Israel comes! <sup>2</sup> Go across to Calneh and look! Go from there to the great Hamath! Then go down to Gath in Philistia! Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory larger than your territory? <sup>3</sup> Although you imagine that a day of calamity is far away, you are bringing the throne of violence closer! <sup>4</sup> How horrible it will be for those who sleep on ivory beds, sprawl out on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves out of the stall! <sup>5</sup> How horrible it will be for those who improvise to the sound of a harp and who, like David, invent musical instruments for themselves! <sup>6</sup> How horrible it will be for those who drink from bowls of wine and smear the finest oils on themselves but who do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph! <sup>7</sup> Therefore, they will now be the first of the captives to go into exile, and the revelry of those sprawling people will end.

1 Timothy 3:1-13

<sup>1</sup> It is a trustworthy saying: If anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore, the bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skilful in teaching, <sup>3</sup> not addicted to wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not one who loves money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own family well and have his children subordinate and completely respectful. <sup>5</sup> If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how will he take care of the church of God? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, that he may not become conceited and fall into the judgment of the Devil. <sup>7</sup> He must also have a good reputation with those who are outside, that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the Devil.

<sup>8</sup> In the same way deacons must be worthy of respect, not insincere, not addicted to much wine, not fond of dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must keep hold of the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. <sup>10</sup> Let these men be tested first! After that let them serve as deacons if they are blameless! <sup>11</sup> In the same way their wives must be worthy of respect, refraining from slander, temperate and trustworthy in everything. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons be the husbands of one wife! Let them manage their children and their own families well! <sup>13</sup> For, when they have been serving well as

deacons, they win a good standing for themselves and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Luke 16:19-31

<sup>19</sup> "A certain man was rich. He used to dress in purple and fine linen and enjoyed himself splendidly every day. <sup>20</sup> A certain beggar by the name of Lazarus had been laid at his gate. He was covered with ulcers, <sup>21</sup> and longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs used to come and lick his ulcers. <sup>22</sup> The beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades he looked up, as he was being tormented and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> He called, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue! For I am in agony in this flame.'

<sup>25</sup> "However, Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that you received your good things in your lifetime, while Lazarus received bad things! However, now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> Besides all these things, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot, and people cannot cross over from there to us.'

<sup>27</sup> "He answered, 'Therefore, I ask you, father, to send Lazarus to my father's family. <sup>28</sup> For I have five brothers. Let him warn them, that they also may not come to this place of torture!'

<sup>29</sup> "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. They should listen to them!'

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<sup>31</sup> "Abraham answered him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"