

Scripture Reading:

Luke 16:4 “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. **15** And [Jesus] said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. **16** The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. **17** And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. **18** Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery. **19** "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. **20** But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, **21** desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. **22** So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. **23** And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. **24** Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' **25** But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. **26** And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' **27** Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, **28** for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' **29** Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' **30** And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' **31** But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' ""

"Hearing the Law & the Prophets"

This morning we come to another of the most famous teachings of Jesus: The account of Lazarus & the rich man

In verse 14 we see that the Pharisees had been listening in as Jesus taught His disciples and they were NOT happy because Luke tells us that they were “lovers of money.”

- They had chosen to have mammon or money as their master rather than God.

As is usually the case when arguing with those who refuse to believe the Bible, they do not dispute the teaching of Jesus, but rather attack Him personally: In this case Luke says they “ridiculed Him.”

Jesus now turns to them and gives them another lesson: We can learn much here as Christ’s disciples, but we must remember that the lesson is directed at those who are covenant breakers, having hardened their hearts against the truth. Jesus states the problem right up front, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” Jesus had already confronted these religious leaders with the fact that they were God’s prodigal people, with hardened hearts that would not rejoice at the repentance of a sinner. Jesus had warned them about the impending judgment of the nation of Israel and He is about to show them exactly where they will end up if they do not change their ways.

Jesus confronts these men who think they can justify themselves by keeping their human standards with the truth: “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the Kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is pressing into it.”

Jesus is telling them that they must pay attention to the Law and the Prophets, which may seem strange, but we must remember that these Pharisees had rejected the real purpose of the law: Being the schoolmaster that should lead them to Jesus!

In verse 17 Jesus reminds them that God’s Law stands no matter how badly they misuse it saying, “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.” Some think Jesus then uses marriage and divorce to show the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, but I think it is clear He is talking about their being an adulterous generation that has divorced itself from God’s Law...

➤ **They have turned from God’s righteousness to their own righteousness**

Jesus is now going to use the account of the rich man and Lazarus to drive home the importance of properly understanding the Law & Prophets. After the resurrection of Jesus we will see our Lord and the Disciples preach the Gospel from the Law and the Prophets! This is what these “masters of the law” had failed to see: They had replaced the Gospel with works righteousness.

Grace was in the first promise to Adam that the seed of the woman would crush the head of Satan: God would solve the problem that Adam had created. We should see grace even in the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai where God declares “I am Jehovah your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” God says that He IS their gracious deliverer and then presents His rules for living as His people so He can bring salvation to the nations!

These false shepherds of Israel had turned all of this on its head, using the very Law of God as a means to try and justify themselves before God... An impossible task.

- **As we consider these proud religious leaders, we would like to think that WE would never treat the Law and the Prophets in such a shameful way!**

I would suggest that we might want to be careful here when we consider how some treat the Bible today!

- **Errors that have crept into the church put many in the same danger that Jesus was warning these proud Pharisees about**

It is somewhat ironic that just as the 20th Century can be seen as the time where the battle for the Bible was won...

it is also a time where we lost much of the Bible in our churches!

Fundamentalists and evangelicals rightly fought so-called “higher critics” & outright skeptics that cast doubt on the authority of God’s Word

- **The Chicago Congress on the Inerrancy of the Scripture was a major turning point and a great victory for God’s Church.**

However, while slaying that dragon, the Church was taken in by errors that resulted in the practical loss of much of the same Bible they had so rightly fought to protect!

For eighteen centuries, the Church believed the simple message we have been learning from Luke and Acts:

- **That Jesus came to forgive the sins of His people**
- **That with these people Jesus established His Church to disciple the nations**
- **That through this Church, His Kingdom would fill the whole earth**
- **They saw all of these as a fulfillment of God’s Covenant promises!**
- **Promises given by Moses and the Prophets!**

God’s people certainly looked forward to future glory of Christ’s return and the final defeat of death, but for them, God’s gracious salvation impacted ALL of life:

- **They had robustly what we would call today a world & life view of the Gospel!**

Over the past two hundred years, much of the Western Church has shifted almost the entire Book of Revelation into the future and “spiritualized” our salvation with a very unhealthy pietism where spiritual things are up there and worldly things are down here!

- **This had a profound impact on how the Church viewed the Bible!**
- **The liberals wanted to throw out the whole Book and we rightly said NO**
- **However, as we changed our view of God’s gracious salvation, we gave up most of it voluntarily:**

Let me explain:

The historic church and our great reformation creeds knew nothing of the modern teachings about God having a plan “A” for Israel and a plan “B” for salvation in the church: An Old Testament plan “A” of salvation by works given by Moses which largely failed and then plan “B” with the church age bringing salvation by grace.

- **In fact this was the very error of the Pharisees that Jesus condemns**
- **The Western Church has now embraced this error and it has greatly impacted which parts of the Bible are now relevant to us as believers in the “Church Age.”**

Most of the Old Testament is GONE... different plan of salvation for a different people. Still might use some bits of wisdom in Psalms and Proverbs and maybe good moral lessons for Sunday School... But that is about it.

Even when we move into the New Testament things changed: Most of the Gospels involve Jesus debating with the Jews about Old Testament stuff so it is interesting but not much direct application: The Sermon on the Mount only provides a few moral lessons

- **Paul provides teaching for the Church in His Epistles, but even much of he has to say is left behind when he gets too practical instead of being spiritual!**

We don’t know quite what to do with James and Hebrews...

And of course, Revelation is only talking about future stuff that takes place AFTER the church is raptured, so NO application there either: Just great material for best-selling fiction novels.

So our ‘end-times’ madness and Gnostic pietism have indirectly accomplished most of what the seminary liberals were unable to accomplish with a direct attack:

- **Most of the Bible is gone for all practical purposes!**

It is VERY important that we understand what has happened here, because we are in danger of doing just what these religious leaders that Jesus confronts were doing: Ignoring the Law and the Prophets!

- **AS we shall see from the lesson that Jesus now gives to the Pharisees, this is NOT a position that we want to be in!**

In verse 19, Jesus says, “There was a certain rich man...” There is a great debate over whether Jesus is here telling another parable or if He is using a real historical account as His example.

The lessons learned are the same in either case, but I come down on the side of this being real history because it adds to the weight of the warning: Jesus almost always identifies a parable as a parable and this would be the ONLY parable where a person is actually named

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.”

Jesus is pulling no punches showing this rich man as the priests of Israel wearing their fine robes and making their daily sacrifices for the nations. BUT, they had become self-righteous AND had forgotten their responsibility to serve those at the gate!

- **Thus we see a beggar named Lazarus, full of sores laid at the rich man’s gate!**

The rich man gave this beggar no thought whatsoever, but cared only about his own welfare and comfort

- **The only comfort that Lazarus finds in this life are the dogs who come and lick his wounds as they would their own.**

Suddenly there is a major shift: In the midst of the warning to the Pharisees, Verse 22 brings one of the greatest comforts in all of the Scriptures for those who know Jesus as their Savior: “The beggar died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.” Jesus told the thief on the cross, today you will be with Me in paradise and here we see angels taking the soul of Lazarus to a place of great comfort and rest...

We must be careful NOT to allow our theological curiosity to get in the way of the great comfort provided by God’s Word:

- **Whatever experience we may have in this life: great luxury or abject poverty, on our death bed the angels of God will carry us into the presence of Jesus!**

Then we see the end of those who have tried to justify themselves... And the contrast could not be more stark!

The rich man also died and was buried... Not a word was given about the burial of Lazarus. He may well have been left by a roadside or thrown into a beggar’s grave, but it did not matter because he was carried away by angels!

Jesus mentions the burial of the rich man because it was likely a grand event. His body would have been given the best of care, his coffin the best that money could buy and many of his friends giving long speeches extolling the life he had lived.

- **All of this was NO comfort to this rich man who now found himself in torments in hell.**

Again we do not want to allow our theological curiosity to soften the point that is being made: This man was in real torment and it will only grow worse at the final judgment when he, hell and all of its inhabitants are cast into the lake of fire...

How does fire cause pain for a soul or spirit? I can’t explain it, but since the lake of fire was created as the place to judge Satan and His fallen angels, who are only spirits, I can assure you that it does!

- Next we see the rich man who is not named, looking up to see Lazarus, whose name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life resting in Abraham's bosom.

Here we clearly see the truth of Hebrews 9:27, "... it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment!"

- Not believing in heaven will certainly keep you from going there
- Not believing in hell will NOT keep you from going there!

The rich man finds himself in torment and begs for even the tiniest bit of mercy: Not even a drop of water, but just a moist finger to cool his tongue. Abraham explains that he will receive no comfort: He says that the rich man has the memories of how he lived his life and now those very memories will be part of his torment.

- The rich man makes a final request which takes us to the heart of the point that Jesus wants the Pharisees, and all of us, to learn!

Since Lazarus cannot come and comfort this rich man, he then requests that he be sent to his five brothers to warn them about what lies ahead for them...

- Abraham simply says, "they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them!"

"NO Father Abraham" the rich man protests... Just reading the Bible is not enough... "If one goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" Abraham then explains a truth that Jesus would dramatically demonstrate in just a few short weeks: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

Does this picture of suffering in hell cause you concern... We should remember the blessing we have right here between THESE covers...

- Moses and the Prophets!
- As well as all that Jesus and the Apostles have added!

As Peter said in His final letter to the Saints, "you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts!" BUT surely God has not entrusted His grand salvation to just a Book!

- This is what many think today looking for experiences, outreaches or other ways to communicate the Gospel.

This is what the rich man was appealing to for his brothers... They don't need the Bible, they need something to get their attention! Someone coming back from the dead would certainly "work."

In John's Gospel we learn of another Lazarus... The brother of Mary & Martha and a dear friend of Jesus.

Lazarus WOULD come back from the dead as a final testimony that Jesus was the Messiah spoken of by the Law and the Prophets!

- **So how did these Pharisees that this account was aimed at react?**

Witnesses came and told them of what had happened... One HAD come back from the dead... and John tells us that “from that day on, they plotted to put [Jesus] to death. And not just Jesus, but the witness as well because John tells us that “the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also!”

- **As Abraham told the rich man, “neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.” Such is the hardness of men’s hearts**

Jesus called them to hear the Law and the Prophets as should we. We can take great comfort with the care of Lazarus in this account, but we must also guard our hearts against the apostasy that we see in these false shepherds of Israel. We must hear the Law & the Prophets as they reveal God’s gracious salvation: Listen to the words of Moses as he commissions God’s people, His chosen ones to enter the promised land:

Deuteronomy 30:11 “For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'

13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' 14 But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.”

- **No excuse today with Moses & the Prophets right here!**
- **And we must hear the Gospel offered by Moses & the Prophets**

15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, 16 in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live...”

As Peter declared to those who were convicted of their sins at Pentecost: “The promise is unto you and to your children and to all those afar off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself!”

If we have chosen life, we need have no fear of the torments of hell because our hearts are trusting in Jesus, the keeper of our souls for all eternity!