

If you had never before heard the parable in today's Gospel reading and heard only the first part, which of the two men would you rather be: the rich man, well-dressed, eating sumptuously, or the sore-covered beggar, starving for even crumbs, tormented by dogs? It's depicted pretty well on the bulletin, the rich and powerful are front and center, seated in splendid clothing, the table jam-packed with food. Poor Lazarus, you hardly notice him. It seems he's not just getting removed from the rich man's home, "Oh you disgusting man, go away, you'll offend our guests with your disgusting appearance, ruin our fun with your begging for help!", he's practically being thrown out of the painting!

It's no contest right? We all want to be the rich man. Except there is one thing that Lazarus has in this life that the rich man lacks and that makes all the difference, so that as the parable continues on, it becomes clear that for all of his misery which he endured in this life, Lazarus is the one we want to be. That for all the comforts and glories and pleasures of the rich man, we see that it is not worth it.

So what is the one thing Lazarus has that makes all the difference? What is it what we are bid by the Lord Jesus to attend to and prize above all other things? The Holy Scriptures. This parable teaches us that if we have all the money we could ever want, enjoy all the best clothing and finery this world can offer, if we feast sumptuously every day, have whatever our desires crave, but do not have the Word of God, we will end up in eternal misery.

And so also if your life in this world is absolutely miserable, if you are a beggar in the street who must live entirely off of people's generosity, if you are sick and there is no one to care for you, so long as you have God's Word, you have the promise of eternal consolation, the confidence of being escorted to heaven by the angels, and there no sorrow or needs will ever arise again!

Where's that in the parable, you might ask. This is a common issue with many people, even many pious Christians when it comes to biblical teaching. We saw this last Sunday a bit. There is no passage in as many words that says, "There is one true God, existing as three Persons equal in divine essence, distinct in their Personhood." But as was set forth for us last week, that assertion is entirely biblical. But because that teaching is not stated directly in those words, there are some who would say that the doctrine of the Trinity is not biblical.

Another example, during COVID some of our congregations started streaming the pastor saying the words of institution and people would watch that at home with bread and wine, and it was asserted that this was a way that people could have Holy Communion. This was a conversation that raged the Lutheran internet world for a while, with lots of phone calls and emails, convention resolutions. One pastor friend of mine was talking with someone about this, said this practice was wrong, contrary to Scripture, and the person he was having this discussion with said, "Where in the Bible does it say you can't have communion over the internet?" As though, in order for that practice to be out of bounds, impermissible, that specific practice had to be stated in as many words.

When we are studying biblical teaching, what we are to believe and do, what we ought not believe and not do, we are able to deduce, to look at what is clearly stated, and from those passages make deductions that are certain, that are true and godly. So the Trinity as we confess it is the teaching of Scripture. There is no such thing as internet communion, that is an oxymoron. Today we see another example of this. How do

we know that while still in this life Lazarus had the Scriptures and believed them, that he was a Christian, and how do we know that the rich man did not care about, did not listen to or believe the Word of God, and so is shown to not be a Christian, how do we know that this is the central teaching of this parable even though Jesus does not come straight out and say that we need to hear and believe the Scriptures, that it is God's Word and faith created by and in that Word, that this alone is what saves us from eternal condemnation?

In torment the rich man is told there is no chance of relief for him, no change in his eternal fate. But then he asks about his brothers, is there a way that they can be warned so that they do not join their brother in hell? And the answer given is "Yes." There is a way for them to know what they need to know to not suffer the same fate as their brother. What is it? **"They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them."** Moses and the Prophets is simply shorthand for the Word of God, the Bible. If they simply have the Scriptures, not simply hold them in their hand, have a Bible somewhere in the house, but hear them and believe them, then they will have mercy, they will go to heaven. Because as the resurrected Jesus makes clear to the disciples at the end of Luke's Gospel, Moses and the prophets testify of Him. They are the Scriptures who make known to us the Savior of the world, the promised Messiah who would bear our sin and defeat Satan for us.

This parable is not making the point that well the rich are just so corrupt and wicked just because of their wealth. Father Abraham, in the consolation of heaven, he was a man of great wealth. The problem is not the presence or lack of wealth and possessions, but the presence or lack of the Word of God which gives us Jesus. Poor Lazarus believed in the Jesus given him by the Scriptures.

Now there is a great consolation in this for us. You can be as poor as Lazarus, every joy this life can offer, every comfort from the world, taken away, be in absolute, total, bodily misery, and yet still have what matters, what saves, what opens heaven to you. This is what we sing at the end of Luther's *A Mighty Fortress*:

*and take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife,
though these all be gone our victory has been won,
the kingdom ours remaineth.*

And here's the thing: I will dare say none of us here have it as bad as Lazarus. Who here, as troublesome as this life can be at times, it absolutely can be, and is right now for some of you here, who has absolutely nothing good in this life? Has no home to live in, must beg for the smallest scrap of food, has no friends to check in and care for you when you need it?

Your Lord does not call you to total misery and suffering in this life. There is misery and there is suffering. The Christian does have a cross to bear. But you are blessed with good things. God gives daily bread to everyone. Far above that is that you are given God's own Son as your Savior, as your guarantee that the Father is pleased with you, He loves you. That He is working through all things in this life to draw you to Himself, and when this life is over, and all its troubles are past, He promises you a blessed end and eternal consolation. That is what is promised and given to you in God's Word.

There is also in today's Gospel both a warning and an exhortation to action, to boldness. The warning is against letting whatever it is you have in this life, whether great or small, to let that crowd out what God gives His children that cannot ever be taken away, that is to lose everything. The man in poverty who is

bitter and angry over what he does not have and thereby makes it an idol, he goes to hell just as much as the rich and the famous who worship their money and possessions.

Do not think about or worry about anything else more than Christ. Each day has its own troubles. There are things in life that need planning and attention. There are things we should be concerned about. But nothing, nothing, ought receive more due than Christ. So however much time or attention you give to other things, more should be given to the things of God. Spend more time in the Bible than tracking your investments and bank statements. Spend more time in prayer than poring over your social media. As much as you are concerned by medical test results or the state of your health, be mindful of the God who created and redeemed you, and who has promised to care for you even unto raising you from death and corruption.

Finally an exhortation that I pray will move you and me to bold action. Because we all know people whom we love who, like the rich man are not ignorant of the Scriptures, who have them in their home, who surely will say they know Jesus and believe, but their attention, their love, their worship, is given to other things: to wealth, to clothing, to food, to the comforts and pleasures and conveniences of this life.

We do no favors to them, we do not show them love, when we do not speak to them of the one thing that matters not just for this life, but for eternity. They need to hear Moses and the Prophets. They need to hear the Bible. They need to hear Christ's call to repent of their sins, starting with despising preaching and God's Word, and when they repent, they need to hear of Christ's forgiveness for that sin.

We are often timid to use the one authoritative word that every Christian has, the one word that actually changes things. Our fear of bringing up church, faith, sin, and repentance, and so staying silent, that doesn't change anything. God's Word does. Now it might very well be that speaking that Word, saying, "son, daughter, husband, wife, father, mother, you need to come to church." That exchange might change things outwardly in that it finally brings out of their mouth that they don't want to go, they don't care, they don't even believe. That was already the case, the only difference is that now it's out in the open, it's been said and everyone knows.

If that's how it goes, the conversation is not done. Then you know you need to keep on confessing. Pray yes, pray that God would open their ears, change their heart and bring them back, but He does that through His Word. You can and need to do more than "just" pray. You can and you need to speak God's Word. You are a Christian, you know and you have the one thing that makes all the difference. Do not be afraid to use it. So at your family Fourth of July cookout, don't avoid your mealtime prayer or family devotion just because you have family or friends who have fallen away or aren't believers and it would be awkward or you're afraid it will make them uncomfortable. It's your house. In your house you pray before you eat. In your house you do devotions, you read God's Word and you sing hymns, and you talk about God's Word. Let them hear Moses and the Prophets.

And if, God grant that it be when that word sinks in, and there is the realization that what they need is lacking, and they come with you, they come back, well then it will be as we will hear in two weeks' time, there will be joy in heaven and here on earth when one sinner repents and comes back. May God grant this to be so in our conversations with our family and friends, and especially those not here who need to be.