**Luke 16:19-31**

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. **20** And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, **21** who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. **22** The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, **23** and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. **24** And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ **25** But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. **26** And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ **27** And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— **28** for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ **29** But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ **30** And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ **31** 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.’ ”

**“His Word Is Mercy”**

 Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The contrast could not be more obvious in the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. It reminds me of when traveling through Detroit to visit the Henry Ford Mansion. Block after block had vacant homes and rundown buildings. No sooner had we cleared the next block of lifelessness then out of nowhere everything changed. One extreme to another, as I now saw fancy cars pulling out of a single driveway. The initial reaction was that it had to be some kind of important company in the Lake St. Clare area. Oddly enough, they were students getting out from some kind of preparatory school.

 Life has unfortunate divisions and some look to what we call, “The Social Gospel” for an answer. It means to focus on the present situations and change them for the better. Sounds noble enough, but the cost is a short-term gain that can be all consuming. “For many it is essentially a this-worldly gospel of works, not a Gospel of grace for this life and heaven.”[[1]](#footnote-1) What Jesus points out as the greater division went beyond issues over prosperity. Instead, everything had to do with the need for God’s Word. This gift of grace is what finally provides an eternal salvation for any sinner. God promises His way gives a blessed end, so our eyes must rest to hear what He says.

1. For many it is essentially a this-worldly gospel of works, not a Gospel of grace for this life and heaven. For many it is essentially a this-worldly gospel of works, not a Gospel of grace for this life and heaven. **Jesus shows there is relief for the needy.**

A A. Lazarus had comfort, but it did not come from men.

* What we see of his life is nothing good.
1. Jesus described the details about this sad situation.
2. Laid at the gate of the rich man meant others just abandoned him there.
3. His sores showed signs of illness.
4. The dogs at least cared about him, but he was of less value than them.
* What we hear of this life is better than good.
1. The poor man was rich, because God knew his name. Lazarus means, “One whom God helps!”
2. He had the angels watching over him to take his life to heaven.
3. Rather than sores, he would be at the side of Abraham the, “Father of faith.”
4. His poverty did not earn the right of heaven, but Lazarus endured denying bitterness to man or hatred to God, but trusting in a far better promise.

B. You are to take comfort, even when the times of men give none.

* What we see fall upon us can be frightening to end up like a Lazarus.
1. God can appear as if He does not care about our situation.
2. Being passed over happens in a busy world watching out for its bottom-line.
3. It might even feel more like hell than any sign of heaven.
4. The value of your life may come into question whether if it is meaningful.
* What we hear from God is far better good news.
1. In loss, Jesus lets the grieving hear, “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).
2. When what we do fails at every attempt, Jesus never tires to say, “I have done it all for you!”
3. Whatever clouds block out heaven, St. Paul encourages us to faith saying, “Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called…”
4. Instead of questioning your life, God values it knowing the names of His baptized.
5. **Now Jesus told this story to the Pharisees, so a big warning sticks out.**
6. The rich man had a life that was out of control.
* What we see of his life is comfort.
1. Only the best foods and clothes were fit for him.
2. He fenced himself off from God or the troubles of men.
3. Lazarus might lie at his gate, but enjoying life meant finding a way to ignore him.
4. This rich man died and even had a burial fit for his success.
* What we hear of the rich man is torment.
1. There was never any need to say anything until he saw hell for what it is.
2. Of course, his cry for mercy to “father” Abraham was not repentance, but desperation.
3. Suddenly, even Lazarus becomes important, so long as he could be put to good use.
4. Abraham was not harsh, but reminded the rich man that he made his bed not in faith toward God or mercy for others, but for himself.
5. Our riches in life say nothing about eternal life.
* What can be seen is subject to a greater truth.
1. We fail to notice that success is not always the glory it appears to be.
2. We overlook how independence can end up being a lonely place.
3. We assume contentment comes after meeting certain goals, but more goals keep coming!
4. We forget that without Jesus no matter how much enjoyment, there is no life, nothing good, and the worse kind of poverty; hell.
5. **How much is there a blessedness to at last rest in what God says.**
6. This goodness is already at work to save by what any hears from His Word.
* Granted, the rich man in hell made his protest.
1. He said, “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”
2. Moses and the Prophet, God’s Word of the Old Testament, were not good enough.
3. A spectacle would supposedly do the trick where the Word appeared to fail.
4. Truthfully, the problem was not in the means God provided, but hard hearts for Abraham said, “neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”
* The Pharisees denied Jesus, but why protest hearing His Word and seeing Him as the Lord of mercy at work in this world?
1. The richest man again opens the gate of heaven and gladly serves beggars like us with food from His table of grace.
2. The poorest Lazarus endured our poverty, sinful sores, and appalling death to give us life in His Name!
3. His empty tomb is the spectacle challenging all eyes, but only ears hear the truth from God’s Word going to the heart of sinners.
4. Repentance and faith worked by God give mercy from Jesus allowing mercy for us to meet those at our gate with love rather than look the other way.

 Certainly, the social situations we see in this life are contentious and disheartening. Governments must do what they can and a social Gospel sounds good, but remains short-lived. However, Christ has bridged a bigger chasm of death that will outlast the missed managed and failed riches of a sinful world. This mercy is good for the rich and poor together for any who have ears to hear what God says. You have His Word, which works to keep us holding fast to Christ as our life. The same Word works fruits of repentance to honor Him in our lives. Amen. Now the peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=S&word=SOCIALGOSPEL [↑](#footnote-ref-1)