

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Trinity Sunday, May 26, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 446 (240:4) 586, 293, 45
Lessons: Isaiah 50:2-10; 1 Peter 3:18-23; John 6:47-54
Text: Luke 16:19-31
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

What words come to mind as you look ahead to eternity? Perhaps the two most common words are heaven and hell. There are also only two classes of people, either believers or unbelievers. Believers in Christ will go to heaven and unbelievers will go to hell.

Where we will go when we die is decided already in this life, not first after we die. What Christ the Judge will say to us on Judgment Day is determined already before we die. What he will say to us is altogether dependent upon whether there is faith in our hearts or unbelief. Jesus tells us, ***“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him,”*** Luke 12:40. Therefore right now is the time to be concerned about eternity. Even tomorrow may be too late!

The lessons we need to know about eternity may be learned from the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus. So let us meditate on:

LOOKING AHEAD TO ETERNITY

- 1. Our manner of living here on earth;**
- 2. Either heaven or hell hereafter;**
- 3. The only way to avoid hell and get to heaven.**

There is a very great difference in the manner of living of a believer in Christ and an unbeliever. A believer in Christ, a Christian, earnestly desires to be heavenly-minded. He delights to sing, ***“I’m but a stranger here, Heaven is my home,”*** (Hymn 660). An unbeliever is worldly-minded and tries to avoid thinking about eternity or has the false idea that everyone is going to heaven after death.

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The contrast between the Christian and the unbeliever is presented in the parable Jesus told. He told it especially for the benefit of the Pharisees who were worldly-minded and greedy for earthly gain and pleasures. He said, ***“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.”*** The Lord does not speak of the rich man’s wealth and luxury as though this was the cause of his unbelief. The point is simply this: The rich man was only concerned about worldly things, money, living high, and was not at all concerned about spiritual things. Such people are well described in these words, ***“They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in an instant. Yet they say to God, ‘Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?’”*** Job 21:13-15. People who think like this should not be envied by those who do not have riches, as the psalmist says, ***“I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked,”*** Psalm 73:3. The wicked people are the very ones who usually prosper in the world and their riches increase. Yet because they are concerned only with worldly things they shall perish in hell. That’s what happens to people who are not concerned about spiritual matters. They will be lost because they ignore God’s Word and do not trust in Jesus the only Savior of mankind.

In contrast to the rich man, Jesus in the parable describes the poor beggar, ***“At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.”*** In describing poor Lazarus Jesus does not intend to teach that this is the kind of life we are to live. Nor does he imply that poverty is the reason why poor people are saved. Jesus simply wants to show the great contrast between the unbelievers and Christians in their manner of living. Lazarus was a poor beggar. He was sick. The only comfort he had, if you can call it that, was the dogs licking his sores. The dumb dogs showed more pity on him than the rich man!

One can be poor and sick, enduring much suffering, and yet have the greatest treasure of all - faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior. Think of what some believers suffered because of their faith in Jesus: ***“Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground,”*** Hebrews 11:36-38.

But they had faith in Jesus and were richer than anyone!

From this we should learn not to be concerned about worldly goods and pleasures, but to believe in Jesus and be willing to suffer for his sake. Furthermore, as we look ahead to eternity, we should realize that there are only two places we can go, **either heaven or hell.**

2.

The poor beggar’s death is mentioned in the parable Jesus told. ***“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side.”*** In other words, he went to heaven. The Bible says that angels ***“are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation,”*** Hebrews 1:14. Nothing is said about a funeral but simply that the poor beggar was taken to heaven.

“The rich man also died and was buried.” No doubt his funeral and burial was like his manner of living - the best of everything, with no concern about how much money was spent in putting him into the ground. But then we are told, ***“In hell where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.”***

Only heaven and hell are mentioned in our text. There is no mention of an imaginary place like purgatory. Our text does not describe how blessed heaven is beyond saying that Lazarus was with Abraham in the blessed hereafter. But hell is described as a place where people are ***“in torment.”*** The unbelieving rich man cried out, ***“Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.”*** Our text does not imply that we can pray to dead saints in heaven, nor that they have any knowledge of us here on earth. The lesson of the parable is to teach us of hell as a place of ***“agony”*** This agony is caused by fire. We are not to think of hell-fire as being like fire on this earth that consumes everything, but as a continuing punishment that never ends. The Bible says, ***“The smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever,”*** Revelation 14:11. In hell there is a more horrible agony than our human minds can imagine. ***“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,”*** Matthew 8:12.

There will be no relief of any kind for the damned in hell. The rich man in the parable was told, ***“Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.”*** The damned in hell will be tormented by a guilty conscience as they remember how they lived on earth only to enjoy worldly pleasures and ignored the spiritual treasures of God’s Word. The tormented conscience is a terrible part of suffering in hell and it never ends. The Bible says, ***“Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind,”*** Isaiah 66:24. Indeed, as the Bible says, ***“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,”*** Hebrews 10:31.

In hell there is absolute separation from God and none of his blessings. Unbelievers may enjoy many things here on earth, but in hell they are forever separated from God and all that is good. In the parable the rich man was told, ***“Besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”***

Finally from our text we want to learn about **the only way to avoid hell and get to heaven.**

3.

The rich man requested, ***“Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”*** He was not interested in the earthly welfare of his five brothers, but he did not want them to come to hell and continually accuse him for contributing to their worldly manner of living and ultimate damnation.

The rich man was told, ***“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”*** In other words, they had the Holy Scriptures that they should hear. Then the rich man asked for a miracle, ***“No, father Abraham, he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead,’”*** There is only one way to be saved and go to heaven and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. And Paul says, ***“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ,”*** Romans 10:17. The all-important thing to remember is that we are brought to faith through the means of grace, the Gospel in word and sacrament. That’s why Jesus in his high priestly prayer prayed, ***“Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth,”*** John 17:17. That is why we are exhorted to diligently search the Scriptures. Paul told the believers at Corinth, ***“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you,”*** 1 Corinthians 15:2. He also exhorted his co-worker Timothy, ***“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,”*** 2 Timothy 3:14-15.

So many people in this world think they can be saved by trying to lead a good life, by their own efforts to do good and live according to the Golden Rule. Worse yet, many churches teach work-righteousness. But let us remember what the Bible teaches about being saved by hearing the Gospel and coming to faith in Christ. Jesus is our only Savior. What he did for us poor sinners is clearly taught in the Bible. Peter writes, ***“You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect,”*** 1 Peter 1:18-19. Isaiah wrote, ***“The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all,”*** Isaiah 53:6b. ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved,”*** Acts 4:12.

Then when this life is ended and we fall asleep in Jesus we can have the precious gift of God’s grace that we spend eternity in heaven. So we pray:

***“O Christ, I pray, my soul prepare
For that bright home of love
That I may see You and adore
With all Your saints above.”*** Amen.
(adapted from Hymn 618:6)

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