

The Rich Man and Lazarus

PART 3: REGRET (LUKE 16:19-31)

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It is good to be together this morning. We do plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper right after we study the word of God today, so if you do not yet have the elements for the Supper, this would be a great time to get those. And if you are visiting with us, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online. The QR code is on the wall up here, it's on the bulletin, it's on the bulletin board in the entryway, and it can also be found on our website at fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

We'd like to begin this morning by inviting everyone here today to obey the gospel, and this goes for anyone joining us live online, on the phone, and anyone who may watch, read, or listen to this message in the future. The good news is that although we sinned, God sent his only Son to take our place on the cross. He died, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We obey this good news by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be immersed with him, a burial in water, for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and we come up out of the water to live a brand-new life.

As our tradition has been, we do have several examples this week. The first one comes to us from Barry Grider at the Riverbend congregation in Dalton, Georgia. Barry says, "I had the opportunity this evening to make some visits with brother Dale Puryear. Among these visits we stopped to see Ernest Greeson, who has attended our services at Riverbend church for quite some time, despite numerous health issues. I know what has been on Mr. Greeson's mind and we have talked about these important spiritual matters on numerous occasions. Though he was not planning to obey the gospel of Jesus at the time Dale and I arrived, he was ready before we left. As a penitent believer he made the good confession, and we took him the same hour tonight and baptized him. To God be the glory!" One thing I love about the pic on the right is seeing Barry's wet shirt. Among preachers, if I say something about "wet sleeves" on a Sunday night, my fellow preachers will know what that means. It means somebody has obeyed the gospel. What I see here is a total failure of the hip waders. Barry is soaked. But that is awesome, and we certainly rejoice with Ernest and the Riverbend congregation this morning.

This one comes to us from Seth Turner at the Oliver Creek congregation down near Memphis. He says, "This picture truly does not do justice to the power in the room this past Sunday. I feel so blessed to be a part of a church family so committed to one another in love. We gathered around, laid hands on, and prayed a blessing over our new brother Tony after he committed himself to Jesus and was raised to life through baptism last

Sunday.” He explains that, “Last Saturday we took our students to the Grizz game and Tony, a friend of one of our students, showed up and quickly became a part of the group. He is funny, bold, and full of life. It is simply a joy to be around Tony. The next day he showed up for Bible study and for worship and quickly pulled me aside after class asking loads of questions and sharing his testimony. Before long, he pulled me out of worship and had more questions about faith, discipleship, and of course, baptism. After just a little while his intentions were clear. He said, ‘I want to leave it all behind – right here, right now. I want to be baptized. I want to follow Jesus.’ and the rest is history. We are so thankful for Tony. For his heart, his energy, and his desire to know, and be known by Jesus. We are so thankful for a group of teens who love Jesus and seek to be filled with the Spirit. We are so thankful for the community of believers at Oliver Creek, committed to being transformed into the very image of Jesus Christ. – I do not post this to boast but to simply remind us all that even in the most unexpected moments, God is still doing what he has always done: pursuing his people with an unimaginable and unwavering love.” And then he quotes 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”***

We have a quick update from the church in Honolulu as they say that “Rafe and Erix made the decision to put on Christ!” this week. I love the shirt on the right that says, “I paused my game to be here.” It was definitely worth pausing a game for this. And as is always the case in Honolulu, I love the kids gathered around the baptistery.

And then, like last several weeks, we have more good news from Ukraine, from a church basement. This comes from a gospel preacher over there. He says, “Yesterday was the first day I’ve sat in the basement for more than three hours. The reason for this was not - ordinary. Right there, we talked with Denis and Anya about forgiveness of sins and baptism. Today they took a step towards Christ and accepted Him as their Savior through repentance and baptism. He then quotes 2 Corinthians 6:2, ***“For it is said: ‘In the time of prosperity I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’ Behold, now is the time, behold, now is the day of salvation.”*** And he also quotes Acts 2:38, where Peter says, ***“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”***

This last one comes to us from Mark Posey, a preacher from Alabama who just returned from Ukraine about two weeks ago. He says, “Praise God - the Kingdom grows in Ukraine,” and then, “It is so touching when a mom becomes a sister!” That’s all we know about this picture, but I am assuming that a son had the privilege of baptizing his mother. We certainly remember these new brothers and sisters in our prayers. We are thankful for good news, and we invite you to follow the examples we’ve shared this morning. Please get in touch if we can help in any way.

This morning, we return to a request that has come in from several of our members over the last year: What happens when we die? And as we have just briefly mentioned over the past two weeks, unless the Lord returns first, all of us will die. And not only that, but until that time comes, all of us will continue to lose our loved ones to death. And so, we wonder, and we want to know: What happens when we die?

Two weeks ago, then, we started answering that question by looking to Jesus, and specifically, by looking at what Jesus said concerning the rich man and Lazarus. This morning, once again, we return to this passage, found in Luke 16. I would encourage you, then, to be turning with me to Luke 16 (p. 1633).

Two weeks ago, we focused on verses 19-24, where Jesus makes a CONTRAST between these two men, in life and in death. In life, the rich man lived in luxury as Lazarus suffered in hunger and misery at the rich man’s gate,

but in death, the contrast is flipped as Lazarus is escorted by the angels into the presence of Abraham, while the rich man finds himself in absolute torment. So, we have a contrast in life and also in death.

Last week, we focused on the ETERNAL aspect of what the Lord describes for us. The eternal part comes in verses 25-26, where what happens after death very clearly seems to be an ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE for how we live in this life, and then we also looked at the ETERNAL SEPARATION that takes place, represented by the **“great chasm.”** And to illustrate this, I mentioned our family’s visit to the Grand Canyon a number of years ago. We emphasized the gap in that canyon, the distance from the north rim to the south rim and big idea is that we need to do everything possible to end up TOGETHER on the RIGHT SIDE of that canyon when this life is over. By the way, we looked at this graphic last week. Some of you asked for a copy; so, I have printed several of these, and I am leaving them on the table up here. If you are interested, just come up here at any time and pick one up.

This morning, we come to the last few verses. And since we’ve touched on the idea of fire over the past two weeks, I’ve brought something with me this morning, a smoke alarm! And I do want to warn you that I will be pushing this button at some point before the end of our study today. But we know the purpose of an alarm like this: The point of having an alarm is so that we will be alarmed when we need to be alarmed. Most of us have a number of smoke detectors in our homes. We use ours all the time, especially the one near our kitchen! Some of you may as well. Many of you know that we heat with wood at our house. And if you also heat with wood, then you might be familiar with something known as a “cold plug.” When I get up and start a fire at 4:30 in the morning, several times a year we hit the “cold plug.” To me, it seems to happen when the air is especially cold, and damp, and heavy. Basically, you try to start a fire, and due to this cold, damp, heavy air in the chimney, the smoke has nowhere to go but back into the house. And when it happens, it is very clear very quickly that we have a problem. So here I am at 4:30 a.m. with my family asleep throughout the house, and I know at that moment that they will not be asleep much longer! The smoke comes billowing out, I open the front and back door, and I wait for that alarm to go off, so I can silence it – hopefully before everybody wakes up! The key to defeating the “cold plug” is to anticipate it and to overpower it quickly with overwhelming firepower. Once that smoke comes pouring out, though, it is pretty much too late to beat the alarm.

Some of you have quite the history with fire. After the Grodi’s fire, we added a heat alarm in the garage. Thankfully, we have only had to call 911 once due to a fire anywhere on our property. We looked outside and the streetlight in front of our house had burst into flames. The streetlight is on fire, dropping globs of flaming goo onto the street below. We weren’t too concerned (there’s nothing near it), but then we thought: Somebody probably needs to know about this. So, we called 911, maybe two minutes later the fire truck shows up, half a dozen firefighters get out in full gear, they stand around the pile of flaming goo, and one of them steps forward, and puts it out with his boot. They all get back in the truck and drive off. We really didn’t have a good reason to be “alarmed” by that. But, we will get back to the alarm in just a moment.

Today, we come back to Luke 16. I’d like for us to take a fresh look at the text itself, and then we will close this series by focusing in on the last few verses. So, let’s go back to Luke 16:19-31, the words of Jesus,

¹⁹ “Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. ²⁰ And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, ²¹ and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. ²² Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. ²³

In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' ³¹ But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

So, we've already looked at the CONTRAST in verses 19-21, we've looked at the ETERNAL part of this (in verses 25-26), and today, we come to verses 27-31, where the rich man has a special request, and this request is motivated by a deep sense of REGRET.

I. And I'd like for us to start with the REQUEST itself (in verses 27-28).

Once the rich man realizes that he is in torment and that there is no way out, he says to Abraham, ***"Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."*** And to me, this sounds very similar to the rich man's demand (back in verse 24), ***'Father Abraham...send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'*** In my mind, the rich man is still thinking like a rich man! He still doesn't get it. He thinks he can have Abraham send Lazarus on a mission. It's condescending. Yes, he is begging, but it seems to me as if the rich man still thinks he is in some way superior to Lazarus, "Abraham, I need you to go send Lazarus on a mission for me" [paraphrased]. And this is now the second time for this.

And the request is: I want Lazarus to go warn my brothers, so that they do not also come to this place of torment. I would note that this seems to be the first time he ever thinks of somebody other than himself. That's good; however, I would also note that he's only concerned about his ***"brothers."*** He's not concerned about his other friends and neighbors, he's not concerned about the other poor men at his gate, but he's only concerned about his own family. Baby steps! At least he is thinking about somebody other than himself here. And tied to this, I would also note: Although he is most certainly lonely, he is willing to forego any future fellowship with his brothers by trying to warn them to stay away from where he is. I would just have us think back to the ***"great chasm"*** in last week's lesson. Remember how our family talked about being on the right side of that chasm together when this life is over? The rich man, on the wrong side, though, does not want his brothers to be on the wrong side with him. No, he is willing to break that relationship if it means that his brothers will avoid being in torment. He's not looking forward to a great reunion, but he wants to do anything possible to avoid having them come to where he is. So, the man finally has what appears to be an unselfish thought! It's too late to do

him any good personally, but with perfect hindsight, he's able to remember the choices he made that led him to this place, and he wants to warn his brothers to stop making those same choices.

I would also add that this thought of his brothers following his example only adds to his torment! As the rich man is in agony, as if the torment of the flames is not bad enough, he is also tormented by the thought of his brothers also coming to the same place. It is hard for us to imagine being in torment in the next life, thinking that our brothers, and sisters, and children might be following our example all the way to the grave...and beyond. We might compare it to watching a train wreck in slow motion. One commentator suggested that "the torment of the dead is that they cannot warn the living, just as it is the torment of the mature that the erring young will not listen to them." That's a very interesting comparison! If you have ever tried to talk some sense into somebody younger or perhaps less mature. We've been where they are, we have made the same bad decision that they are about to make, we have learned from our own experience, we are trying to share that experience, but this person is still heading down a dangerous path. And really, that is a bit similar to what the rich man is trying to do here. He wants to warn his family, but the message isn't really making it through to the other side. Nevertheless, this is the REQUEST: Send Lazarus to go warn my brothers.

II. This leads us to verses 29-31, where we come to Abraham's answer to this request, as Abraham emphasizes the importance of listening to and ultimately obeying the WORD OF GOD.

The rich man wants Abraham to send Lazarus, but Abraham says, ***"They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."*** Immediately, the rich man objects, ***"No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!"*** At which point Abraham says, ***"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead."*** Let's notice, first of all, how Abraham explains that the word of God (Moses and the Prophets) is all the rich man's brothers need to avoid going to that terrible place. If I could paraphrase, Abraham's answer is, "Let them read and obey the word of God!" They have those passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-5, where Moses says, ***"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*** This is what Jesus would go on to describe as the "greatest commandment." They also had passages like Leviticus 19:18, where God says, ***"...you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."*** Jesus will go on to describe this, of course, as being the "second greatest commandment." This is the whole law summarized in just a few words: Love God, and love your neighbor. The brothers had these words from Moses. They had the prophets. The problem is: They weren't LISTENING to the Law of Moses. The problem is: They weren't OBEYING Moses and the Prophets. The problem was not a lack of information; no, the problem was a lack of obedience. The rich man, then, wants Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead, but Abraham basically says: No, they already have everything they need to make a decision. In fact, not only is the word of God sufficient to save the rich man's brothers, but it is the only option. It's the word of God or nothing, "Ancient words, ever true, changing me and changing you. We have come with open hearts, o let the ancient words impart."

However, the rich man immediately objects, ***"No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!"*** And the rich man speaks volumes with this short reply. To me, he seems to acknowledge that he is in torment because he had refused to repent (he had refused to change his heart), and he sees his brothers as heading down the same path. What they need to do is turn around, just as he should have done. If the rich man had changed his heart and life (based on what he knew to be the truth from the Law and the Prophets), he wouldn't be in this place of torment. So, he thinks back to his brothers, and he knows that they are heading down the same path, that they are following in his footsteps. The rich man, then, is looking for a miracle. The rich man wants something amazing to happen. He wants Lazarus to come back from the dead with a message.

Now, what is interesting to me is that there was a man named Lazarus who did come back from the dead (over in John 11)! What an amazing coincidence! And do you remember how the religious leaders reacted to Lazarus coming back from the dead? They didn't deny that it happened; no, they tried to kill him again to hide the evidence! Lazarus is raised in John 11, and by the time we get to John 12:9, John says, ***"The large crowd of the Jews then learned that [Jesus] was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus."*** This is what happens when hard-hearted stubborn people are confronted by evidence (even miraculous evidence): They ignore it, even doing everything possible to make it disappear (as they tried to do with Lazarus, and as they will go on to do with the Lord himself, after his resurrection).

As human beings, we have the amazing ability to deny the truth about any number of things, in spite of the evidence. We think about what we know to be true concerning what we eat and how we treat our bodies, and we continue doing what we know to be terrible for us, despite being presented with the truth. Perhaps we could imagine an alcoholic straight up denying he has a drinking problem...while actually drunk at the time. I've had those conversations several times, right here in this building. But don't all of us say or do or think things that clearly ignore God's word on the issue? This is the challenge of the rich man's brothers. They had the word of God, they probably knew it, but they were not listening to it; they were not obeying it. Abraham, then, is right, ***"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead."***

Conclusion:

As we started our study today, I said I would be pushing the button on this smoke alarm. That time has come. ****PUSH BUTTON**** I'm pushing it. Let me tell you the story of this smoke detector. Just a few weeks ago I helped somebody clean out a rental house to get it ready to sell. As the tall guy, one of my job was to update the smoke detectors. And when I took this one off the ceiling, I realized that somebody (probably many years ago) had taken out the battery and never put it back. We know how this happens, don't we? We burn the bacon. The lasagna boils over in the oven. We have a hard time with the cold plug in the woodstove. The alarm goes off, and maybe to silence that alarm, we take the battery out. Or maybe it starts chirping, so we take the battery out. And then we forget about it. Time goes by, and we never think about it again. We may be in danger, but we don't know it.

The same is true of God's word. Last week, we studied that passage in 1 Timothy 4 where Paul described the conscience being seared ***"as with a branding iron."*** If we sin long enough without hearing the warning, or if we ignore the warning long enough, we stop hearing it. We stop listening. That's what happened to the rich man's brothers. They didn't care anymore. The same thing can happen to us. Sometimes, tough choices need to be made. If two unmarried adults are living together in an intimate relationship, that needs to stop. Or maybe your struggle is with lying, or putting worldly concerns ahead of the Lord, or maybe your struggle is with drunkenness or some other sin. The word of God is the alarm, and it will save us if we listen to it. As John writes in Revelation 21:8, ***"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and the sexually immoral and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*** The warning is not pleasant, but it is necessary. We could just avoid this subject altogether, but that would be like taking the batteries out of the alarm. The house will still burn, we just won't be warned about it.

Before Caleb leads us in a song to prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You sent Moses and the Prophets to preach truth and grace to your people, preparing them for the coming of your only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We are thankful for your word this morning, and we are thankful for the constant reminders.

We are thankful for those who have gone on before us. Regardless of where they may be at this moment, we pray for courage and a renewed commitment to trust and obey your word, for there truly is no other way.

We ask all of this in the name of Jesus – the way, the truth, and the life. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com