

“Warnings from the Dead?”—Luke 16:27-31

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Warnings from the Dead?”, is Luke 16:27-31 → The rich man said, *“Then I beg you, father, to send Lazarus to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.”* But Abraham said, *“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”* And he said, *“No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”* 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.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How do you know that God loves you? Answers to this question sound something like this: “I don’t know if He loves me;” “Because I feel Him in my heart;” “Because He has been so good to me throughout my life and blessed me so much;” “Because I believe He sent His Son to die on the cross for me.” Notice that most of these answers are hard-pressed **by themselves** to bring you the certainty of knowing you are loved by God. When asking people who claim to be Christian about the certainty of their faith, it is interesting how many times they are either speechless, not knowing what to say, or tell me about an experience in

their life.

It is at this point that I usually ask them to sing along with me: “Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong; They are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.” From early childhood many Christians have been taught to know they are loved by Jesus **because the Bible tells them so** . . . yet, later in life flounder to find the certainty of His love. It causes me to ask the question: “The Bible tells them of God’s love for them but are they listening?”

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus was spoken by Jesus directly to the Pharisees while teaching His disciples. The Pharisees were a sect within the religion of Judaism who held that God’s grace extended only to those who kept His law perfectly. They were a legalistic and separatistic group who strictly, but often hypocritically (cf. Matthew 23:1-35), kept the law of Moses (i.e. the Torah—the first 5 books of the Old Testament), as well as the unwritten “tradition of the elders” (cf. Matthew 15:2), and they strove to make sure other did likewise. Thus, they knew the written Old Testament Scriptures well. The question is: “Were they really listening to them?”

After Jesus spoke the parable of the dishonest manager (cf. Luke 16:1-8) with His teaching about using *unrighteous wealth* properly (cf. Luke 16:9-12), followed by His assertion that one *cannot serve God and money* (cf.

Luke 16:13), Luke 16:14 says *the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed Him*. Jesus' proclamation of law had done its work—to make these men conscientious of their sin (cf. Romans 3:19-20). However, ridiculing Him instead of repenting of their sins and trusting in Him, Jesus continued teaching with hard-driving law intended to bring them to their knees in contrition and repentance. Thus, the parable of our text is very pointed at these self-righteous men of faith in Yahweh.

One could be tempted to read this parable and conclude that *rich* people who have nice clothes and food to “pig out” on everyday will go to hell, having already *received* their *good things* in this *lifetime* (cf. Luke 16:19,22b-25a), while those who have nothing but *sores* in this life will go to heaven (cf. Luke 16:20-23a,25). Unfortunately, this relative perspective is very common amongst people in general (i.e. “I must be going to heaven because I’ve suffered so much on this earth.”)

However, the parable is not spoken to the rich. It is spoken to *the Pharisees, who were lovers of money*. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 describes such people: *Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires **that plunge people into ruin and destruction**. For the **love** of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have **wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs***. The Pharisees, who searched

the written Old Testament Scriptures to *have eternal life*—Scriptures *that bear witness about* Jesus as the Messiah (cf. John 5:39-40)—*wandered away from the faith* and were plunging themselves into *ruin and destruction . . . with many pangs* eternally. These words are spoken to the idolatrous heart of any person who refuses to trust in Jesus **on God's terms.**

The rich man's idolatrous heart continues to display itself by his request while suffering the torment of hell. He begs *father Abraham . . . to send Lazarus to . . . warn his five brothers . . . lest they also come into this place of torment* (verses 27-28). Abraham's reply? "Why send someone? *They have Moses and the Prophets* (i.e. the Bible); *let them hear them.* (verse 29) Faith is based upon the written Word of God, the Scriptures. Apparently, simply taking God at His Word is not enough for many people. There is a need for some other verification of the message, like . . . warnings from the dead? The rich man countered: *No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.* How can one refuse to believe a dead person showing up at your house to warn you of eternal suffering in hell? He literally wanted Lazarus to scare the hell out of his brothers . . . or shall I say scare his brothers out of hell? Either way, hell is not avoided by fear and heaven is only given as a gift by faith in the Person & Work of Jesus, the Christ.

Abraham finally says: *If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets*

(i.e. the written Old Testament Scriptures), *neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead*. Jesus' words ring with prophetic accuracy. He Himself rose from the dead and, even though many of the Jews placed their faith in Him as their Savior from sin, the Pharisaical system in Judaism refused to believe in Him as the Christ. If the credibility of God's written Word (i.e. the Bible) is undermined or ignored in your life of faith the certainty and comfort of your salvation is robbed from you. You know God's forgiveness of your sins, His love, His grace and His will for your life because . . . the Bible tells you so.

A number of years ago I encountered a woman who stopped me to ask if I had seen a movie about a little boy who had almost died. During his comatose state he apparently went to heaven, saw dead family members and talked with Jesus. In our conversation she mentioned that everyone needed to see that movie because once they did, they would know heaven is real. My response was: "Of course heaven is real. The Bible tells us it's real." Immediately she replied, "It's real because if this little boy saw it heaven must be real."

The desire to verify the credibility of the inspired Word of God (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21) by messages from those who have died is more popular than one may think, even amongst some who claim to be Christian. King Saul sinned when he called up the spirit of Samuel from the dead through a seance with the witch of Endor, looking for some

message from God (cf. 1 Samuel 28:15-17). Seances, trans-channeling, psychic readings and a host of other satanic arts are utilized everyday in an effort to give people guidance to their lives, both spiritually and physically. Yet, the Scriptures give no record of those who were raised from the dead telling people what it was like to be dead, what they experienced, who they saw and so forth.

However, it gives accounts of the risen Jesus appearing to people and admonishing them for their lack of faith **on the basis of God's written Old Testament Scriptures**. On the day of His resurrection he said to two guys He met walking on a road: *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that **the prophets have spoken!**" . . . And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them **in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself***. (cf. Luke 24:25,27) When He appeared a little later to His disciples *He said to them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me **in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms** must be fulfilled."* Then He opened their minds **to understand the Scriptures**. (cf. Luke 24:44-45) Jesus submitted Himself to the written Word of God, over which He was Lord, to fulfill those written words of God perfectly for you, so you can know your are loved and forgiven in His grace.

How do you know God loves you? How do you know you are a sinner? How do you know you are a forgiven child of God? How do you know you are going to heaven? How do you know God's will for your life? Warnings and messages from dead people cannot answer these questions with certainty. However, the warnings and promises given by *men who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21), written in the Bible for you, will answer these questions with certainty as the Holy Spirit works faith in the Person & Work of Jesus in your heart and life through those Scriptures. Amen.

*As for you, continue in what you have learned
and have firmly believed,
knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood
you have been acquainted with the sacred writings,
which are able to make you wise for salvation
through faith in Christ Jesus.
All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching,
for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

(2 Timothy 3:14-17)

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