

Luke 16:19–31
Trinity I
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Throughout the Scriptures, there are examples of great reversals—examples of the exalted who are humbled and the humbled who are exalted. Joseph was sold by his brothers into Egyptian slavery. He was humbled, but then ended up ruling the realm as Pharaoh’s right hand man. He who was humbled was later exalted. King Saul, on the other hand, was powerful and mighty, but cast down from His throne. Exaltation was followed by humiliation. And then the humble shepherd boy, David, was exalted to the throne of Israel instead. This theme of great reversal is found throughout the Scriptures, always pointing to or reflecting the humility of Christ followed soon by His exaltation, the shame that was turned into glory. Suffering and the cross are followed by eternal joy. This morning, we see that same kind of great reversal in the rich man and Lazarus.

It can be tempting to read this account of the rich man and Lazarus and mistakenly believe there’s an inherent wickedness in having an abundance of earthly goods and an inherent blessedness in having nothing in this life. The Christian faith is more nuanced than that. Jesus doesn’t tell us to eat the rich. Our Lord certainly does warn against the allure of wealth and material goods. Jesus teaches us that it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus also teaches us not to be anxious about what we will eat or what we will drink or what we will wear. Our Father in Heaven looks after us, even more so than the way He looks after the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Seek

first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these other things will be added to you. As Christians, we're warned against putting our trust in riches, and yet we don't reject the material blessings God has given us. Instead, we put our resources to work for godly causes, not for evil.

There's not an inherent wickedness in wealth. But there is an inherent temptation in wealth, the same way there's an inherent temptation in all good things, making them prone to abuse. That's the power of sin in this fallen creation. What God made good has been corrupted by our sin. It's observable the world over that those with more than enough creature comforts often end up worshiping the creature rather than the creator. They start living for themselves instead of for God and they put their trust in what they have instead of in the one who gives all good things. On the other hand, those who are poor, weak, and suffering in this world are often more open to the good things of God because there's nowhere else to turn. That's why you so often see Christianity on the decline in wealthy countries and on the rise in poor countries. Christianity is a religion for the poor, the weak, and the downtrodden. The rich man is distracted by His comfortable life. Lazarus, on the other hand, had nowhere to turn but to the LORD. Let this be a warning to everyone who has more than enough. Receive your daily bread with thanksgiving, and don't forget the one who's providing for you.

Of course, it's often the case that someone with earthly wealth also has treasure in Heaven, and that those who are poor are also suffering from spiritual poverty. We must often pray with wise King Solomon: "Lord, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God" (Prov 30:9). The rich man did not go to Hell because he was rich and Lazarus did not go to Heaven because He was poor. The rich man lost sight of

the Lord and His promises. That's why he ended up in Hell. And Lazarus trusted in the promises of God. That's why he went to Heaven. Wealth plays a role, but it's not the deciding factor.

Trusting in Christ or not trusting in Christ: that's what determines Heaven or Hell.

Poor Lazarus died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. He entered paradise. In this world, Lazarus had bad things. He suffered terribly and received little, if any, mercy. Now He's comforted for eternity. There was nothing in this world for him to hold onto. Lazarus trusted in the LORD and now he has his reward. His light momentary affliction was preparing him for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor 4:17). This account of Lazarus serves to remind us of the eternal realities we can't see, and yet which are even more real than our earthly experience right now. When the day of the LORD comes like a thief in the night, the heavens and the earth will go up in flames (2 Pet 3:10). This world is wasting away. It's temporary, like temporary housing. But the new heavens and the new earth will last for eternity. This transient world is nothing compared to that world to come. Heaven is real and we ought not confuse it for the life we build for ourselves here.

But Hell is also real. Jesus is the first and the last, the Living one. He died, but behold, He is alive forevermore and He holds the keys of Death and Hades (Rev 1:18). He who holds those keys opens for us a window in this text so we can get a glimpse of the reality of the torments of Hell. The rich man received good things in this life, but he neglected the one thing needful: the promises of God in Jesus Christ. Now he's suffering in Hell and he cries 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." A great reversal indeed! The rich man never had pity on poor Lazarus. In fact, even in Hell it seems he still sees Lazarus only as someone to be taken advantage of. Now poor Lazarus is not able to show pity to the rich man. A great chasm

separates Heaven and Hell. After death comes judgment and the verdict is final. Lazarus suffered in time but is blessed in eternity. The rich man thought he was blessed in time, but now he suffers in eternity. May this be a warning to everyone. Take seriously God's promises right now in time. Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Heb 3:15).

The rich man then begs Abraham to send Lazarus back to the land of the living to warn the rich man's brothers lest they also end up in Hell. Does the rich man pity his brothers? Or does he recognize the greater judgment that will come on account of all the others he has led astray? Regardless, Abraham points out that the Word of God is sufficient, indeed more than sufficient, to warn against going to that place of torment. "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." You have Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles. God the Holy Spirit is active in His Word. Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ (Heb 10:17).

Scoffers who don't trust in our LORD wouldn't trust in Him even if a miraculous resurrection from the dead were to take place. The rich man wanted something more than the written word of God. He said: "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." Unbelief cries out for a miracle. "If only Jesus would appear right now I would believe in Him." "If God would just reveal Himself, then we would finally understand." Well, God did reveal Himself in Jesus Christ. He miraculously healed the sick, fed the hungry, cast out demons, and raised the dead. And for that our LORD was crucified. "Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (Matt 27:42). And then when He did rise from the dead, as promised, the scoffers continued in unbelief. They tried everything to cover up our LORD's resurrection. Only faith can open our eyes to the reality of what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will continue to do. But unbelief is blind to the things of God and chooses not to see what God is doing. Scoffers want a miracle, but we have something more

sure: the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Pet 1:16).

Beware of riches and a comfortable life, dear Christian. Beware of fretting over what you have or about what you don't have. Don't let the things of this world blind you to the things of God, but instead place your entire life—body, soul, and spirit—into His loving hand. Our modern decadent society tempts us to live for right here and right now, and to avoid talking about or thinking about what's to come after death. Here our Lord calls upon us to consider what is more important: the eternal unseen realities that are in fact a matter of eternal life and eternal death. Soon you will cross over to that place where your destiny cannot change, where there is a great chasm separating Heaven and Hell. Jesus has already crossed that chasm in your place and He wants to bring you along with Him, to be with Him forever in the place He has prepared for you (John 14:2-3). "Working together with Him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain...Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). Repent and believe the Gospel right now when the opportunity is here. Humble yourself before the LORD right now in time, trust in the LORD, and He will exalt you (James 4:10) in eternity. When Jesus Christ returns, He will then waken you from death. Then you will open your eyes and behold Him face to face, to live and praise Him without end (LSB 708). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.