

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. ²⁰A beggar named Lazarus had been laid at his gate. Lazarus was covered with sores and ²¹longed to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Besides this, the dogs also came and licked his sores. ²²Eventually the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In hell, where he was in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴He called out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in misery in this flame.’

²⁵“But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in misery. ²⁶Besides all this, a great chasm has been set in place between us and you, so that those who want to cross from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

²⁷“He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, send him to my father’s home, ²⁸because I have five brothers—to warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

²⁹“Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them.’

³⁰“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

³¹“Abraham replied to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

Do you ever feel inundated with warnings? You drive down the road and you find signs that warn you about construction a mile ahead. Your phone pushes you a notification to warn you that the weather this afternoon could be less than ideal. Your teacher warns you that there is going to be a quiz on Monday. Our lives are filled with warnings, some important and some less so. But the warnings Jesus gives today are the most valuable. No, he’s not accusing you of any wrongdoing. He’s just warning you that one false step in life can lead to eternal destruction.

How you believe is how you live. The rich man showed what he believed by how he lived. His god was himself and his wealth. These are the things he put his trust in. And he thought he needed nothing more than his comfort and his appearance. So, he hardened his heart to God. We know he did that, not just because he was rich, but because a beggar was laid outside his gate, a beggar who was never take care of and died at that gate.

On the other side, not much is said about the faith of Lazarus, the man lying outside the gate. But that makes sense that we don’t know much about him. He’s not the one we’re focusing on in Jesus’ story. But we do know from what transpires, he had saving faith in God, even as his life ended in struggle. His name also means “God helps.” Now, we don’t know whether Jesus is

telling a parable or a real-life story here, but either way, the Lord is making it known that this man believed and lived his faith. Lazarus' trust shaped his daily life. Because he knew he was in God's hands, he endured suffering in faith.

What you believe shapes the way you live too. A man who had his bike stolen multiple times as a child may make his kids lock their bikes wherever they go, even if they live in the safest neighborhood in the world. A woman who endured spousal abuse may come out of it with an understandable distrust of men. What we experience shapes what we believe and what we believe shapes how we live, whether true or untrue. The rich man believed goodness came from living high on the hog in self-gratification. This is what would bring meaning and purpose to his life. But Lazarus knew what really mattered was God's mercy, so he trusted God's hand of providence, even if he could not see it just then.

Our faith shapes us as well. If our faith is strong, the way we live – especially how we interact with others – will reflect our trust in God. If our faith is strong, we will not live for the world, no matter how comfortable or uncomfortable our lives become. If our faith is strong, we won't let the beggar at our front door starve and freeze. Our faith will not just be empty words and platitudes. It will live as we live.

But if our faith is just words, like the rich man's faith was, it will be empty. It will ignore all others for self. It will make money and social status into a false god, forsaking the true God's mercy in exchange for comfy living. And no matter what you want to call it, that faith is dead. Really, it is no faith at all.

How you live is how you die. Death always reveals what is hidden in the heart. The rich man lived for the here and now, so when it came time to account for his faith, he was found lacking because his faith did not exist. All that stuff he carried to the grave didn't make the grave one bit more comfortable. Lazarus, however, was carried by angels to Abraham's side in heaven. He lived his faith and was vindicated. Certainly, all of us would rather live life like the rich man, dressed in expensive clothing and feasting for every meal. But in death, who wouldn't want Lazarus' position? Eternity in heaven instead of hell? It's hardly a question.

And so, it brings us to an important question: How does a person die well? I think we understand it in our world. Everybody wants to die surrounded by a family who loves and appreciates them. They want the kind of funeral at the packed church, where people whose lives were touched come to pay their respects to the family and mourn a big loss. How you live is how you die. You can come to church every Sunday and post about your faith online. And that's part of living your faith. But it goes beyond that, doesn't it? Faith that looks inward at self instead of outward at others isn't all that active, is it? Because that's not faith. That's narcissism. The rich man in Jesus' story probably lived a pretty upstanding life. There were probably many people who saw him as an industrious man, worthy of the great riches he had.

But what did he do with his riches? Did he use them to further God's kingdom, to help the sick man on his stoop? No! He used them for himself. He did it because he wanted to live life to the fullest. But death came to him just as it came to poor Lazarus. And the way both of the men lived showed what was in their hearts when they died.

Of course, there are some who come to faith at the eleventh hour, who come to trust in Jesus on their deathbed or before an accident tragically ends their life. We rejoice that there are those "thief on the cross"-type situations, where the Holy Spirit turns people to the truth at the very end. But these are the rare exceptions and not the norm. Jesus warns us that death will reveal our hidden priorities. If we lived trusting in ourselves and not God as our Savior, we will die dependent on ourselves and all that we've accumulated here on earth. And I don't care how nice your car is. It cannot drive the road to heaven.

How you die is how you're judged. There is no middle ground after death. The teaching of purgatory is nothing more than made-up hope to bring a false comfort that is found nowhere in scripture. Some will go to heaven. The rest will go to hell. Those are the only two options.

The rich man in Jesus' story went to hell. And look at how Jesus describes the conditions of those who reside in hell. They are in torment. They are constantly thirsty. They are in agony. It doesn't matter what you've been through. You have never experienced what Jesus describes. And the worst part of hell isn't the physical pain. It's the spiritual pain. This rich man was certainly not oblivious to God's promise to save his people. He was a Jew living in Israel. While true Old Testament Judaism had been pretty corrupted by that time, there were still those who awaited God's promised Messiah instead of taking salvation into their own hands or leaning on other gods. But this man was not one of them. What he did he did for himself and not for God or his neighbor. And you can imagine that his biggest regret – and the biggest regret of all who are in hell – is that they heard the truth and rejected it. We all experience regrets about things we did or left undone, because we often pay a price for our foolishness. But this price exceeds the rest. It's not just a hurting conscience or a broken relationship. It's separation from God eternally.

Of course, Lazarus didn't put his hope in earthly gain. He died destitute in worldly wealth but rich in God's grace. Now don't misunderstand this story. Jesus is not saying that those who die with the least in the world will have the most in eternity or that those who die with the most in the world will have the least in eternity. He's saying that living out your faith will have a cost. Just before this, in the Gospel from last week, Jesus said, "You cannot serve both God and mammon." It's not about what you have or don't have. It's about what its place in your life is. Do you serve your stuff, or do you use your stuff to serve God and his will? Because when all is said and done, and your life here has passed away, you will be judged on whether you died in Christ or in any false god.

How you're judged is how you'll remain. Eternity is sealed. The rich man begged for relief. But no relief was possible. No one could cross between heaven and hell. So, the rich man pleaded for his brothers: "Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's home, because I have five brothers—to warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." But what did Abraham say? "They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them." Abraham pointed to the Old Testament scriptures. This is what would change hearts. Not the appearance of a dead man back to life. The rich man pleaded again, "No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." Abraham responded by slamming the door, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Consider seriously what Jesus is saying to you, friends. How you meet God's word now is how you will meet eternity. Reject it, and you will be judged eternally. But trust it and cling to it, and your salvation is sure. Why? Because in Christ, our judgement over sin has already been carried out at the cross. The grave could not hold him, so it will not hold us either. That's why the last words Abraham said to the rich man are so prescient: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." Christ has risen from the dead. And we believe it, not because we have seen it, but because the scriptures testify to it. That is saving faith, holding to the promises of Christ that we have eternal riches in him. So, dear brothers and sisters, heed Jesus' warnings. Live in his grace like Lazarus and not for the things of this world like the rich man. Keep your focus on the empty tomb, and see what comes about from it in your life. Amen.