

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES!

Luke 16:19-31

Scripture Readings

Exodus 8:16-24

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Hymns

742, 777, 776, 779 (Worship Supplement 2000)

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

+ In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen. +

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 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. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘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.’ But Abraham replied, ‘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. And 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.’ He answered, ‘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.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘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.’” (NIV)

He was sixteen years old when he bought his first car. He knew how to drive it well enough, but he didn’t know much about how to take care of it. His older brother informed him that it looked like he might be leaking a little oil, and that he should make sure to regularly check the oil. The problem was he didn’t really know how to do that, and he didn’t want to admit he didn’t know where the dipstick was. Instead of swallowing his pride and asking big brother for help, he just kept driving it. Eventually the motor froze up and was completely ruined. When big brother looked under the hood, the first thing he did was check the oil, only to find the dipstick was bone dry. The lesson? There are always consequences for our actions, or in this case inaction.

Our text today is all about consequences. In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Jesus talks to us about eternal consequences. What we believe, how we live, even how we die, do not merely affect us in the here and now, but everlastingly. We live in a world that is caught up in the here and now. Very few in our world look beyond the horizon of this life. Many people prepare for their future in time, but most do not calculate today’s attitudes and actions with eternity in mind.

Unfortunately, even Christians can allow themselves to become dulled to the fact that the choices we make today can have terrible consequences for the afterlife. We regularly check the oil level in our vehicles, but are we just as careful to check up on our faith? Do we take the time to consider the consequences of how we are living our lives?

1.

Jesus introduces us to two men: A rich man and a beggar. It's interesting to note that the rich man is not given a name. That's because in heaven, where it really counts, the rich man has no name. His name is not written in Heaven. Why? Because he is one who believes in himself, with no time or room for God in his life. His life is centered on this life and the things of this life. He may have a big and important name in the community, but not in eternity.

In contrast, the poor man is given a name, Lazarus. Lazarus means "God is my help." His name indicates that he is a believer in Jesus. He is one who trusts in the grace and mercy of God for deliverance from his sin. His life is centered on the cross and the future glory for those who are led to rely, not on themselves, but on the blood and righteousness of Christ for forgiveness and salvation. This nobody in the eyes of the world is someone very special to God. God's angels know him well. His name is written in Heaven.

The rich man makes two big and common mistakes. First of all, he mistakes his body for his soul, in that he treats his body as though it were the more important of the two. Secondly he mistakes time for eternity, in that he gives more significance to his life in time than he does to eternity's endless ages.

During his life on earth did the rich man ever pause to consider his mistakes? We don't know. But whether he did or not, it didn't change the fact that if he continued down that path, there was going to be dire consequences.

Do you and I ever make these same mistakes? Are we truly mindful of the fact that there are consequences to how we think and live from day to day? If we go week after week without opening our Bibles or hearing God's Word, are we not mistaking the soul for the body? Are we not in effect saying that the body's needs are more important than the soul's? Are we not playing fast and loose with our eternal salvation?

The parable is a stinging indictment against those who reject the One True God and live only for this life. Yet the lesson serves as a warning for you and me as well. At all times we need to alert ourselves to the temptation of setting our hearts on the riches and pleasures of this life; and we need to be reminded that there are consequences for all who shut Christ out of their lives in unbelief.

In a no-nonsense way Jesus spells out the consequences. ***"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried."***

Everyone dies. No one, whether rich or poor, can escape the inevitable fact that one day he will die. But while everyone shares this common fate, there is a world of difference between the death

of the believer and the death of the unbeliever. Note that when the rich man died the best that could be said is that he was buried. As he lived, so he died. He lived without God in this life and so is faced with living without God in hell forever.

Notice how the rich man tried to argue with Abraham about how unfair it was for him to be in hell. He said if someone is sent back from the dead to his five brothers than they will believe. The implication is that if God had sent someone back from the dead for the rich man then he would have believed, and not ended up in hell. Not true. Abraham says, “*They have Moses and the Prophets.*” It’s the hearing of God’s Word that creates true faith and sustains faith. Sending someone back from the dead isn’t what is needed. What is needed is giving close attention right now, before it’s too late, to what the Scripture says about the way to salvation. Neglect the saving Word and, again, there are eternal consequences.

2.

Unlike the rich man, no mention is made of a burial for poor Lazarus. He is completely forgotten and unloved by the world. But God did not forget him. When he died the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. That’s what you call a royal escort. You see, Lazarus knew Jesus as His Savior and so was taken away from all the sufferings of this life to heaven.

There once was a member of our church who reminded me of poor Lazarus. Her name was Marion. By the time I knew her, Marion had no living family to speak of. For the last 30 years of her life or so she wasn’t able to live on her own, but was shuffled around from group homes to various nursing homes. Her income was the \$60.00 or so she got every month from Social Security. In the last months of her life she was reduced to skin and bones, and, like Lazarus, also suffered from painful sores on her body. Our hearts certainly go out to people like Marion. But don’t feel too sorry for her. Marion was all ears when I read Scripture to her and placed on her heart the simple Gospel truths of forgiveness and life eternal which her Savior won for her. She knew many Bible passages by heart, and loved to share them with me. Don’t feel too sorry for her because there was that special day when God’s heavenly escort came for her, just as it did for Lazarus. We can rejoice for Marion, because her name was written in Heaven!

To the world her life’s story may seem very unimportant, but in Heaven, where it matters, she’s a treasured blood-bought soul, somebody very special to God. She is His very own beloved daughter, living now in God’s presence, set free forever from all of the sadness and sorrows of this life.

Don’t feel too sorry for her; rather, let your heart go out to those who are living life without considering the consequences. The young person—healthy, strong, and smart—who has the world by the tail, but who has no room in his or her life for Christ. Let your heart go out to that person. Reach out to that person with the truths of Law and Gospel. The co-worker whose time is filled with hobbies and sports and travel, but doesn’t see the point of worshipping God on a Sunday morning. Make her, not people like Marion, an object of your true concern. Help her to see the consequences of mistaking the body for the soul, and time for eternity. Share with her a simple message of sin and God’s grace in Christ. Help them to see the indescribable treasure he has in Christ and His Word.

But don't we really need to point this lesson from our Savior right at ourselves? I asked myself who am I in this parable? Sometimes, more than I would like to admit, I'm the rich man. All too focused on what is in front of me, rather than looking up at the Cross of Christ and at the life that awaits the believer. And even though I have been tremendously blessed, both materially and spiritually, so much of my time, energy, and money are spent on my own needs, and my own wants. In other words, like the rich man, I am not always thinking about those who need my help like I should.

3.

Finally, we need to point this lesson away from ourselves and put the spotlight right on Jesus. Jesus is your Lazarus and mine. He humbled himself and became sore with our sins. To the world he was a disgusting nobody when he was nailed to that cross on Golgotha. Jesus knew the consequences of going to the cross, how He would suffer the very pains of hell as the sin of all time was put directly on Him. He knew the awful consequences, but He went ahead anyway. He went for people like Lazarus and Marion, and for people like the rich man and those in our lives who have no time for God. He went for those little orphan boys and girls in Kenya. He went for sinners like you and me, who sometimes don't realize how mixed up our priorities are, and how much we are like the rich man. Jesus' humble and sinless life, His bloody and cursed death, His glorious resurrection, has won for the entire world the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Those, like Lazarus, who believe in Jesus, receive and possess these precious gifts.

Lent is a time to remember that we need to take this all very seriously. That is why we have midweek services. It's a time to push the pause button on life, and to think soberly and seriously about our sin, and about the consequences of what neglecting Word and Sacrament will do to our faith. It's a time to stand in awe of grace and mercy that know no limits, and of precious, holy blood that washes away every sinful stain. Lent is a time to stand in awe of a Savior who promises to send His angels to carry us home when our day to leave this world finally arrives. Amen.

—**Pastor Mike Wilke**

Gethsemane Lutheran Church
Saginaw, MI