

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.’ ²⁵ “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. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ ²⁷ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘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 “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.’”

IF MONEY IS YOUR MASTER...

Are you motivated by the light in front of you or by the fire behind you? Ideally, you are motivated by the light in front of you. For students, the light in front of you means you love learning. If the teacher wants you to read 1 book a week, you read 10 books a week. If the teacher wants you to solve 10 math problems by tomorrow, you might work ahead and solve 100 math problems by tomorrow. But there might be a class you don’t love. Let’s say it’s writing. Let’s say brainstorming ideas and creative writing is not your thing. You would rather not organize your thoughts into paragraphs or write persuasively to prove your point. You will do the work, not because you love the light in front you, but because you don’t want the fire that comes with a bad grade. When you feel the fire behind you, all you’re hoping for is a passing grade. And yet there can be a time when a student is not motivated by the light in front of them or the fire behind them. The student doesn’t care if he fails the class. The student doesn’t care if you call their parents. And the teacher worthy of this title must fail the student and must call the parents. The student earned that grade and that phone call.

This same scenario happens at work too. Earlier in chapter 16, Luke the evangelist shares Jesus’ teaching about the shrewd or dishonest manager. This manager was not motivated by the light in front of him, that would have meant faithfully serving the master with joy. However, at least this manager was motivated by the fire behind him. Jesus’ taught the manager was not strong enough to dig ditches for money and was too ashamed to beg for money from other people. And so the manager used what little time he had left, to make friends with his master’s money so these friends would welcome him into their home and perhaps help him find another job. And the lesson Pastor Sellnow skillfully preached for us last week was you cannot serve both God and money.

And so, hopefully, every one of us reflected on how God is our master, how our Triune God has created us and redeemed and sanctified us. “And we rejoiced with those who said to us, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’” (Ps). And not only that, hopefully with a Bible class or on your own you let the word of God dwell in you richly. And as that Word of God made a home in your heart, you meditated on the Word of God day and night, always thinking about your situations in school or at work or at home or at play and how you could let your light shine because you were motivated by the light in front you and not because you were motivated by a phone call or letter because you haven’t been in church for a while, that’s being motivated by the fire behind you.

The fire behind you, ideally, is not your motivation for serving the Lord your God. Yet, it’s better to be afraid of than in the fire. And it’s better to be afraid of the Lord’s judgment than under the Lord’s judgement. But what about the soul that doesn’t really care at all? Jesus has a story for that person and the story of the rich man and Lazarus is a word that wounds because the money that helps in this life, fails in death. We see that with the rich man. He, *“was dressed in purple, and fine linen and lived*

in luxury every day.”²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.²² “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried.²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.²⁴ 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.’²⁵ “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.’”²¹st century Americans enjoy rags to riches stories. These kind of stories make for feel good movies, but 21st century Americans love riches to rags stories. The internet blows up with these stories. Americans can’t make enough reels for the CEO who gets busted for his unfaithfulness at a public concert. Americans can’t help but make comments about the entitled person who makes a very poor decision in public.

Jesus isn’t telling this story to put people down. In love, Jesus pulls back the curtain on what happens when a person dies if money is their master. In love, Jesus is telling this story because the time is coming when people in front of Jesus won’t have any more time to repent of their sins, the idolatry they have for money and the things people value in this life. Jesus makes this point clear in his story,²⁶ *And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.*²⁷ *“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family,*²⁸ *for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’* The rich man think he knows more than Father Abraham, more than God. And I think if God came to me, asking for suggestions on what would help people believe in him, I would like the raise Lazarus from the dead suggestion. Luke, the evangelist doesn’t give us that story, but John the Apostle does. In the Gospel of John chapter 11 there is a real-life Lazarus who had died and had been in the grave four days. And when the news of this resurrection reached the ears of some these people, they wanted Lazarus to die again. And not many days later, when Jesus rose from the dead and the guards at the tomb gave the report, some of these people used their money to pay these big, strong soldiers to tell a story about how some fisherman students had gotten past them and stole the body of Jesus Christ.

We are running out of time and we need the gospel. And the gospel is we still have time. We are not the Rich Man in this story and we are not Lazarus either. We are the five brothers. We have the Law and the Prophets and not only do we have these Old Testament books that tell us of the Savior who is to come. We also have the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We have the 13 epistles or letters of Paul and the writings of Peter and John and the letter written to the Hebrews that tell us about the Christ who has come and who will come again. The Good News Jesus spoke as our Prophet saves us as does his work as our Great High Priest.

The rich man in the story would have appreciated the sending of Lazarus to him in agony to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue. Me thinks if the rich would have received the water, he would also have wanted more. Jesus as our high priest only wanted to save us and on the cross when Jesus was offered wine to drink, mixed with gall, Jesus refused to drink it. On the cross Jesus tasted but the full cup of our punishment as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The only drink Jesus accepted on the cross was one that allowed him to say in a loud voice, “It is finished.” That is what a good king does. A good king wins the victory over the enemies and Jesus does even more. Jesus not only rules over all things for the benefit of his believers, but where Jesus wants to rule most of all is in our hearts. Yes, as sinners, we need the law, we need the fire behind us so that we come to worship, that we do what we are supposed to do so we don’t make more trouble for ourselves. And yet the new man in us is not motivated by such a stick. Our new man loves to learn about Jesus. Our new man sees Jesus as the light of the world. Jesus is our light and our salvation in front of us, of whom shall we be afraid? Lord, thee I love with all my heart. Forsake me not I trust your word. Amen.