

St. Luke 16:19-31

Dear Friends in Christ,

During a phone conversation with a pastor friend back in late August I listened as he described the anxiety and upset he had been experiencing from a few members in his congregation as he confronted them with the Scriptures. The pastor discussed the importance of maintaining the truth of God's Word. A man in the group said, "The truth of the Word isn't what's important."

And then I got to thinking about the t-shirt being promoted by Planned Parenthood. The wearer - a woman - can proudly display the statement: *I HAD AN ABORTION*.

And then I got to thinking about what children watch when they watch...oh...say...MTV. Seems I've caught a cartoon commercial where one man is patting another man. You can figure out where.

And then I got to thinking about one of our Pilgrim couples who happened to be in Champaign during late August and saw the following sign posted at a fraternity house: "Thanks Dads for dropping off your daughters."

And then I got to thinking about the thrust of Christianity in America. For the most part, a non-Biblical emphasis for fear of offending tender ears. Felt needs drown out the "one thing (that) is needed" (Lk. 10:41)

Judgement Day will be quite interesting, don't you think? *Mouths on the ground*, as we say of those who face shocking reality. Realities God clearly reveals throughout Scriptures. The very essence of why Christ came into this world. We face it this morning . . .

## ***STARK NAKED TRUTHS***

### *I. Death and Heaven and Hell.*

I don't mean to shock you with that theme this morning. But it is what we are to see in this account of *The Rich Man and Lazarus*. It addresses the purpose of God's Word and Christ's mission.

"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 . . .

"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 . . ." (vs. 19-23)

It's simple. Everybody is going to die. There is life after death. When you die you will either land at Abraham's side, which is just another name for Heaven - or, you will land in hell. It's so stark and simple it hurts.

Now, the object of this incident is not to avoid it because someone might be offended or upset by it. The object is to hear and face it squarely. Heaven or hell is inevitable for everyone. They're real. And we will each spend forever and ever in one place or the other. That's what Scriptures teach. That's what Jesus came to address.

### *II. Agony.*

"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.'" (vs. 23-24)

Of this man's predicament Martin Luther wrote:

If we look at the rich man according to the fruits of faith, we find a heart and a tree of unbelief. ...this rich man is not reproved because he had fine food and splendid clothes, for many saints, kings, and queens formerly wore fine dresses, as Solomon, Esther, David, Daniel and others; but because he set his heart upon it, and made it his idol.

Raw, naked unbelief. As Jesus taught, "...whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (Jn. 3:18) The words stand out, starkly so: "he was in *torment...in agony*." He was "*condemned*."

David F. Burgess relates this incident:

Two soldiers on an American troopship crowded around their chaplain and asked him, "Do you believe in hell?" "I do not," was his answer. "Well, then," they said, "will you please resign, for if there is no hell, we do not need you, and if there is a hell, we do not wish to be led astray."

It would appear, judging from present day culture, that most prefer to be led astray. And most who stand in pulpits are willing to oblige. Hiding the truth will not make the torment and agony of hell any less real - any less truthful. As someone chillingly stated: "Hell is truth seen too late."

### *III. Comforted.*

But for our comfort, we are to grasp the truth of the Lazarus' situation:

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side..."

"...Abraham replied (to the rich man), 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here . . .'" (vs.22,25)

Comforted. Comfort. Forever and ever. This was Lazarus' reward. Not because he was poor, miserable and mistreated, but because he believed. As Jesus said, "For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned..." (Jn. 3:17,18a)

Lazarus had simple faith in God's payment for his sin through Messiah, the Christ. Simple faith that hoped of things better in eternity. And get this: The Lord did not take away the rags of his life in this world. He did not take away his ragged living. On the contrary, the Lord exchanged the passing, earthly rags for the white robe of a forgiven life. Lazarus spent his last moments in pain and empty-handed. He entered eternal life comforted and given the fullness of God's life and love through Jesus Christ . . . forever.

### *IV. Beyond Human Reasoning.*

"(The rich man 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.'" (vs. 27-31)

I constantly ask myself how many more “how to” and flights of fancy books will inundate the lives of Christians in this country? People read and read and read . . . but little of God’s precious Word, the Scriptures. And after all their reading they still remain the same lost, sinful creatures - the same people with the same struggles, or just new ones. But the Word is life! It’s the stark, naked truth: Without the Word there is no faith in or understanding of Jesus Christ. And without faith, there is no life!

The Apostle John reminds us: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” (Jn. 1:1,4) And Jesus impresses upon us, “If you hold to my teaching (His words), you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn. 8:31,32)

This is not earthly freedom but body and soul freedom. It’s the freedom that was granted Lazarus. It’s the freedom granted us in Christ. It’s the freedom our friends and loved ones who have died in Christ now know to its fullest. And it’s ours. It’s the stark truth that gives us peace and eternal hope!

A fellow by the name of John Cumming wrote:

The empire of Caesar is gone; the legions of Rome are moldering in the dust; the avalanches that Napoleon hurled upon Europe have melted away; the pride of the Pharaohs has fallen; the pyramids they raised to be their tombs are sinking every day in the desert sands; Tyre is the rock for bleaching fisherman’s nets; Sidon has scarcely left a wreck behind; but the Word of God still survives. All things that threatened to extinguish it have only aided it; and it only proves every day how transient the noblest monument that man can build, how enduring is the least Word God has spoken. Tradition has dug for it a grave; intolerance has lighted for it many a (fire); many a Judas has betrayed it with a kiss; many a Demas has forsaken it, but the Word of God still endures.”

It does. It’s ours. It’s the Word that impresses upon us the lifting of our sin and assurance of Heaven through faith in Jesus. The Word is Life. It’s ours. And that’s the stark, **glorious** truth!

Amen.

Pastor William K. Abbott

October 10, 2004

St. Luke 16:19-31: **“Stark Naked Truths”**

- I. Death and Heaven and Hell.*
- II. Agony.*
- III. Comforted.*
- IV. Beyond Human Reasoning.*

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526*