

Have you ever regretted not listening to someone? Maybe someone gave you some wise advice and you didn't follow it. And later it became obvious that you should have followed it. Have you ever regretted not listening to someone? Well, the Rich Man in the parable today, didn't listen to Moses and the Prophets. Moses and the Prophets wrote God's Word. He didn't listen to God's Word. Instead of rejecting God's Word like the rich man did, let's...

Listen to Moses and the Prophets

- I. Listen to their warnings about worshiping wealth.
- II. Listen to their promises of God's help.

First, listen to Moses and the Prophets when they warn you about worshiping wealth. Last Sunday, Jesus said at the end of the Gospel lesson: **"You cannot serve both God and mammon."** (Luke 16:13) "Mammon" is an Aramaic word which means "Wealth" or "Money." In the very next verse in Luke, it says that **"The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus"** (Luke 16:14). And Jesus responds to the Pharisees' sneering by telling a parable.¹ And in this parable, Jesus shows the Pharisees, and us, where the worship of money will lead. He says, **"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day"** (Luke 16:19). It was not a sin for the rich man to be wealthy. What was sinful was that he worshiped his wealth. His worship of money had clouded his heart from having mercy on the poor man who was laid right at his gate.² It says, **"At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table"** (Luke 16:20-21). John the Baptists said that **"Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same"** (Luke 3:11). The rich man had many sets of clothes and overflowing amounts of food, but he never shared with Lazarus. Jesus said, **"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind"** (Luke 16:13). The rich man had banquets every day, but he never invited Lazarus. His worship of wealth clouded his heart from having mercy on the man at his gate.

His worship of wealth also blocked his ears from listening to Moses and the Prophets. Later Abraham says that the rich man's brothers have Moses and the Prophets (Luke 16:29). So we can assume that the rich man had Moses and the Prophets too. Perhaps he went to the synagogue services and heard Moses and the Prophets read. Moses once wrote, **"If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites ... do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need"** (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). But the rich man did not listen to Moses. He did not listen to the Prophets either. God said through the Prophet Isaiah: **"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen ... Is it not to share your food with the hungry ... and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"** (Isaiah 58:6-7)³ He had Moses and the Prophets, but his worship of money caused him not to listen.

The rich man probably thought that he would go to heaven because he was a descendant of Abraham. He calls Abraham, **"Father Abraham"** (Luke 16:24). But John the Baptist had said, **"Do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'"** (Matthew 3:9). You have to actually repent and believe the good news and produce the fruits of repentance. The fruits of repentance in the case of the rich man would be showing mercy to Lazarus. But he never listened. He never repented. And when he died, he went to hell. It says, **"In Hades, 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**

¹ Joel Green points out this connection within the Luke 16. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 599.

² I owe this thought to Martin Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*.

³ I owe these references to Luke Timothy Johnson, *Luke*, Sacra Pagina.

water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire” (Luke 16:23-24). This is where worshiping wealth leads. We need to hear this warning from Jesus that this is where worshiping wealth leads. And once a person is sentenced to hell, it is permanent. It says, **“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” (Luke 16:26).** The rich man realized it was too late for him, but it wasn’t too late for his brothers, so he said, **“Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 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.’” (Luke 16:27-28).** We don’t need someone to come back and tell us what God wants. We have God’s revelation in the Bible. But the rich man didn’t have faith in the power of God’s word. He says, **“No, father Abraham, 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’” (Luke 16:30-31).** The rich man thought that if someone came back from the dead his brothers would repent. But in John chapter 11 Jesus actually raised a man named Lazarus from the dead. And Jesus’ enemies still didn’t believe in him. In fact, in John it says that after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus’ enemies plotted to kill both Jesus and Lazarus (John 11:53; 12:10). It showed the truth of these words: **“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31).**

What this teaches us is that we need to stick to God’s Word. God’s Word is the only thing that has the power to convert people. God’s Word is the only thing that can create and strengthen faith. How do we avoid going to hell like the rich man? We avoid going to hell like the rich man by listening to Moses and the Prophets. Repent when they tell you about your sin. Believe them when they tell you about your Savior from sin. When the jailor of Philippi asked, “What must I do to be saved?” The apostle Paul told him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” And then we produce the fruits of repentance, living according to God’s Word. Listen to Moses and the Prophets! Listen to Moses and the Prophets when they warn you about worshiping wealth and, secondly, listen to Moses and the Prophets when they promise you God’s help.

So far we have focused on the rich man. The other main character in Jesus’ parable is Lazarus. The description of Lazarus reminds us of Job. **“At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table” (Luke 16:20-21).** From the fact that Lazarus went to heaven we know that Lazarus had faith. Throughout all his suffering Lazarus looked to God as his Helper. Did you know that in all of Jesus’ parables, this beggar is the only one to receive a name: Lazarus. The name “Lazarus” means “God helps.” Even though Lazarus suffered through all the days of his life, Lazarus looked in faith to God as the One who Helps. And when Lazarus died, God brought about a complete reversal in his circumstances. **“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side” (Luke 19:22).** Lazarus probably didn’t have much of a funeral on earth, but the angels carried his soul up to heaven. And they put him at Abraham’s side. Sometimes the Bible pictures heaven as a great banquet or feast. For example, in Matthew chapter 8 Jesus says, **“I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” (NIV; biblegateway.com)** Lazarus had been longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. And now he was at the banquet in heaven. In Luke chapter 1, Mary sings a song and she says, **“The Lord has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty” (Luke 1:53).** Lazarus was hungry and now he was filled with good things at feast in heaven. And Lazarus was seated at the seat of honor next to Abraham. The rich man said that he was a son of Abraham. But Lazarus was a true son of Abraham. Lazarus was a true son of Abraham because Lazarus believed like Abraham believed. Lazarus believed even when he was starving and covered with sores. Through all his suffering Lazarus looked in faith to God as the One who would help him. Let’s have the faith of Lazarus. Whether you are going through chemo treatments or financial difficulties, have the faith of Lazarus. Have the faith of Lazarus because “God helps.” Even if you are suffering now, you have the promise of God’s ultimate comfort in heaven. Abraham said about Lazarus **“Now he is comforted here” (Luke 16:25).** The

prophets promised that comfort. Isaiah 40:1 says, **“Comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God.”** Through faith we have the comfort of sins forgiven now. And someday we will have the full comfort of bliss in heaven. Listen to Moses and the Prophets when they promise you God’s help.

Let’s be true sons of Abraham like Lazarus was. Let’s be true sons of Abraham by sharing Abraham’s faith. Let’s also be true sons of Abraham by sharing Abraham’s generosity. Abraham was a very wealthy man. But unlike the rich man in the parable, Abraham shared with those in need. In Genesis chapter 18 it says that one time Abraham was sitting outside his tent in the heat of the day. And he looked up and he saw three strangers coming toward him. And Abraham ran to them and said, **“Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and go on your way.”** (Genesis 18:5) Then he ran inside and asked Sarah to bake some bread and then he **“ran to the heard and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant who prepared it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them.”** (Genesis 18:7-8) Imagine how the parable would have been different if the rich man would have treated Lazarus the way Abraham treated the three visitors. Imagine how the story would have been different! When you consider all the people in the world, most if not all of us are relatively rich. The question is how are we going to use our wealth. Are we going to use our wealth like the rich man did or are we going to use our wealth like Abraham did? Let’s be true children of Abraham by believing God’s promises of forgiveness and by letting our faith be active in good works.

Maybe there have been times when you have regretted that you didn’t listen to someone. Maybe someone gave you some wise advice and you didn’t listen. But let’s be *sure* to listen to Moses and the Prophets. Listen to Moses and the Prophets. Listen to their warnings about worshiping wealth. Listen and believe their promises of God’s help. Amen.