

God's Word is Worth More than a Blank Check

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Luke 16:19-31 ¹⁹ "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ "Then he cried and said, ` Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' ²⁵ "But Abraham said, ` Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ ` And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' ²⁷ "Then he said, ` I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to

my father's house, ²⁸ ` for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "Abraham said to him, ` They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ "And he said, ` No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ "But he said to him, ` If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

What Would You Do for a Thousand Dollars?

If I offered you \$1,000, what would you do? Cluck like a chicken? Sing a solo on Sunday? What if it was \$1 million? Money exerts a powerful influence over us—more than we often admit. It stirs our sinful desires, as James reminds us:

***James 4:3* — "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."**

But we have received a greater power—a power not rooted in our desires, but from God:

***Romans 1:16* — "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation."**

The account of the rich man and Lazarus isn't about wealth and poverty. If it were, the story would end at verse 22: the rich man in hell, Lazarus in heaven. The real purpose of this

parable is to illustrate the contrasting powers—the fleeting influence of money versus the eternal power of God's Word.

The Limited Power of Money

In the first part of the parable, money appears to hold sway: the rich man's luxury, his burial, and the ease of his wealth all seem compelling. Yet, after death, we see the stark contrast—the full power of God's Word and the fleeting, at-best, influence of wealth. Money promises much but its promises are limited. God's Word, however, endures forever, and His promises are eternal.

The Power to Save

The rich man had everything—clothing, food, even family and friends. Lazarus had nothing. He could not even keep away the dogs. Yet, the rich man ends up in hell, and Lazarus in heaven. Does this mean wealth condemns us? Not necessarily. Luke's Gospel emphasizes that God's kingdom brings about a radical reversal:

Luke 1:52 — "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate."

Luke, a physician committed to helping the poor and sick, delights in Christ's message: in God's kingdom, the least are lifted up, and the mighty are cast down.

***Isaiah 11:4-5* — "He shall judge with righteousness for the poor... with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked."**

However, Luke also records in chapter 15 the parable of the prodigal son. There we see that he who was lost is welcomed into the feast of his Lord, by the grace and undeserved love of the Father. So once again it is not about who is rich and who is poor. It is about who trusted in God's word and who trusted in riches.

The key is trust—not your riches, but God's promises. The rich man trusted in his wealth but “was not rich toward God.” Conversely, Lazarus trusted in God's Word. Wealth’s promises—happiness, popularity, security—are illusions that vanish at death. God's promises, though seemingly insignificant, offer salvation and eternal life. His Word *delivers*.

Power to Give You a Name

This parable isn’t just about the rich man; it’s about Lazarus, who has a name—known to the Lord. The Lord calls him by name:

***Isaiah 43:1* — "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine."**

The power of God's Word gives us an identity. While the world might know of Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos, without Christ, their names are unknown to God. Lazarus's name is recorded in heaven because God's Word has written it there.

This is the power of the Word of God. It takes a pathetic useless beggar like Lazarus and us and writes these names in the book of life.

Concerning people like Lazarus the writer of Hebrews says:

***Hebrews 11:16* — “God is not ashamed to be called their God.”**

***Hebrews 11:38* — “of whom the world was not worthy.”**

We are all beggars before God. Through Jesus, our names are written in the book of life—by the power of His Word, not by riches.

Power Over Death

Finally, the rich man recognizes his powerlessness. He pleads for just a drop of water, appeals to Abraham, and even asks for someone to return from the dead. Abraham responds:

***Luke 16:31* — “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.”**

The Gospel—the Word of God—is the means by which God comes to us. If we refuse to heed His message about Jesus's sacrifice, no miracle will compel repentance. Yet, the greatest miracle has already occurred: Jesus's death and resurrection.

We might well envy the apostles who saw the empty tomb and the risen Christ, but we have something even greater, God's Word. His word has power over death and over our hearts.

***Jeremiah 23:29* — "My word is like fire... like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces."**

***Romans 1:16* — "The gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."**

It is not the poverty of Lazarus that saves him, nor the wealth of the rich man that condemns him. It is the power of the word that saves Lazarus and gives him a name. It is his unwillingness to repent that condemns the rich man.