Rich man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

Key Verse 16:25

“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.”

Happy Valentine day! I have one joke for your Valentine day. One day a husband and a wife were walking down the street. In front of them came a beautiful woman. After they passed the beautiful woman the wife asked her husband. What do you think about her? There were three possible answers from her husband. The first one is "she is beautiful". The second one is "She is so ugly". The third one is "What are you talking about it? I didn't see anything." Now which of these three answers is the best for her husband? The best answer is the third one. “Um? What are you talking about. I didn't see anything." Husbands, love your wives as yourself, and as Christ loved her church, and you will be happy husbands.

Now let us think about today’s passage. During my 30 years of life together with msn Isaac, he never demanded anything from me. He was embodiment of God's grace, always encouraging and bearing. But there is one thing he asked me to do several times. That is "to read spiritually good books". In my stubbornness I did not listen. I said in my heart, "well, I am not even reading the Bible much. How can I read other books?" Now these days I am trying to read several books, and I tell you I learn so many things. And I realized that had I listened to msn Isaac I could have repented many of my sins a long time ago, and I could have been freed from them a long time ago.

Now today's passage is also teaching about "listening" and "repentance". When Jesus taught the Pharisees saying “No can serve both God and money” they sneered at him. In their pride they did not listen to Jesus. They rejected his teaching and put it aside as incorrect teaching. But Jesus had mercy on them, and he wanted to help them to repent. How could he help them to repent? That is what we want to learn from today's passage.

My message has two parts. Part I. Lived in luxury everyday. (v.19-26) Part II. Let them listen to Moses and the Prophets (v.27-31)

**Part I. Lived in luxury everyday (v.19-26)**

Look at verses 19-20.

**““There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.”**

Here, there are rich man and Lazarus. This Lazarus is different from Lazarus who is the brother of Mary and Martha and whom Jesus raised up from the dead. The rich man was dressed in purple and fine linen. “Purple” could be a color of king’s clothes in those days. The rich man’s whole life style is summarized in one sentence. “He lived in luxury every day.”

At his gate of the rich man there was a beggar named Lazarus. He was brought by someone and laid at his gate. There is possibility that he was crippled man. He was laid there so that he could eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Not only was he poor and possibly crippled but also he was sick. He was covered with soars. His condition was so bad that even dogs came and licked his soars. Even dogs felt so comfortable with the beggar that they did not mind coming to him and licking his soars. And he did not have such strength to drive them away. Indeed his life was not different from dogs. Such was his life. What a miserable life it was especially when it was compared to that of the rich man.

But that was not the end of the story.

Look at verses 22-26.

**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. 23In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24So 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. 26And 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.’**

Jesus did not talk about in detail how they were judged by God and ended up living in Hades or Abraham’s side.

The rich man went to hell. And he was in agony. Then he saw Abraham and Lazarus far away and called out 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.”**

Here Abraham talked to the rich man about ‘his lifetime.” The rich man had his lifetime. But there was another life after that. It was life after death. Of course the rich man might have heard about life after death. But he never thought about it seriously. Many people never think about life after death seriously especially when they are young or can not think about it properly. If I remember correctly, once Confucius, who was arguably known as the wisest man in China, was asked about ‘life after death’. He answered, ‘I even do not know life here on earth. How can I know life after death?”

The Pharisees believed the resurrection of the dead. But they did not think about their life after death seriously.

Many Christians may feel God’s judgment is not personal. It is like the story of other unbelieving people because they believe God’s forgiveness. They may believe God’s forgiveness without repentance. But forgiveness without repentance is called ‘cheap grace’.

The word ‘cheap grace’ was first used by German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book ‘The cost of discipleship’.  During Hitler’s regime, many German pastors compromised with Hitler to save their lives. But Dietrich Bonhoeffer did not do it. He opposed Hitler’s persecution of the Jews. And Hitler killed him. He became one of the glorious martyrs of Christ.

He described ‘cheap grace’ as **“The preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, and communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”**

How can we know if someone believes in God’s forgiveness truly? We can know it if we see there is repentance. It is because ‘true grace’ is ‘forgiveness with repentance’.

I am sure the rich man in today’s passage must have heard about Moses and the Prophets. Many places in Moses and the Prophets, which represents old testament, emphasized that the Israelites should care for the poor. For example,

[**Leviticus 19:10**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Leviticus+19:10&version=NIV)

**Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.**

[**Deuteronomy 15:7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+15:7&version=NIV)

**If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them.**

But the rich man did not repent. He did not do anything for the poor Lazarus although he saw him everyday. Why didn’t he care Lazarus? It was because he was selfish. He might have believed God’s forgiveness through his sacrifice on the altar. But God’s forgiveness he understood was ‘cheap grace’ because there was no repentance on his side. He did not bear fruit of repentance.

Jesus said in **Matthew 7:15-20.**

**15“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.20Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”**

We don’t know the inside of false teachers. But we can see their fruit. By their fruit, we can recognize them as false teachers. We don’t know if a tree is good or bad. But we can know it by its fruit. So Jesus said, ‘Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

Jesus continually said in verses 21-23 right after he said in verses 15-20.

**Matthew 7:21-23.**

**21“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ 23Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’**

Calling Jesus “Lord, Lord” will not save us. Who will enter the kingdom of God? Whom will Jesus recognize? “Only the one who DOES THE WILL OF JESUS’ FAHTER in heaven.” So obviously there are many deeds that does not belong to the will of our Father in heaven.

Probably these people prophesied and drove out demons and perform miracles in order to boost up their pride. God knew their hearts. The will of God is ‘hallowed be God’s name, God’s kingdom come, and God’s will be done”. But those evil doers probably did all things for their name, their kingdom, and their will. So Jesus said to them, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.”

The rich man must have invited many people to his house and had so many parties. He might have thought that he was using his money to gain friends.

But listen to what Jesus said in **Luke 14:12-13.**

**12Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”**

So the rich man used money for himself. He thought his money was his money because he earned it. But that was not his money but God’s money entrusted to him only for a short time.

So he was judged by God and sent to hell, Hades. He could not argue with Abraham, saying, “God is not fair”.

We don’t know what Lazarus did. But he must be a righteous man who was rich toward God although his life on earth was so miserable.

Now Sovereign Lord established justice through his judgment. Abraham said, ““**‘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.”**

“Justice” is a huge topic. Who will uphold justice? How can it be established? In our study of 1 Samuel chapter 22, we saw terrible injustice against a priest named “Ahimelek” by Saul (1Sa 22:16-19). Although Ahimelek was completely innocent when he gave the consecrated bread to David, Saul murdered him and 85 entire family of the priest, men and women, children and infants, and even their cattle, donkeys and sheep. And there was no evidence that Saul was punished even a little bit in his lifetime.

When we look at this, we cry out, “Where is justice?” “Who will serve justice for Ahimelek and his entire family members?” Indeed when we look at the world, there is so much injustice, so many victims of evil men.

If we see only our lifetime here on earth we can see so much injustice. Injustice is so much that some people even do not believe in God saying, ‘If there is a God, he will not allow this much injustice.”

But there is God, and he will establish justice. He will uphold justice in the perfect way.

[**Revelation 21:8**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+21:8&version=NIV)

**But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”**

There is another life after death. God will judge all evil doers including murders like Saul and throw them into eternal fiery lake of burning sulfur. There they will be tormented day and night in great agony.

Abraham revealed God’s justice to the rich man. Then Abraham further explained why he could not send Lazarus to comfort him. Look at verse 26.

**26And 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.’**

God set up the system that once we finish our life here on earth there would be no more chance for us to change our destiny.

**Part II. Let them listen to Moses and the Prophets. (v.27-31)**

When the rich man realized that he could not do anything for him he made another request. Look at verses 27-31.

**27“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28for 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.’”**

The rich man wanted to help his 5 brothers. He wanted them to repent so that they would not come to the place of torment. So he begged Abraham to send Lazarus believing that his brothers would repent if they saw a man from the dead. 5 brothers all knew Lazarus was dead. But Abraham said, they had Moses and the Prophets which refers to the old testament, and let them listen to them.

But the rich man thought it would not work. How did he know it would not work out for his 5 brothers? Because it did not work out for him. As if he did not listen to Moses and the Prophets, he knew his brothers would not listen to them. So he said, “**30“‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’**

He was so sure that his brothers would repent if they saw Lazarus who was dead.

But to his great surprise Abraham said, “**‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

This verse shows if a man does not listen to the word of God no miracle can help him to repent.

For example, Jesus rose from the dead and preached the kingdom of God but some people were not convinced. They were not convinced when Jesus preached while he was alive. They were not convinced after Jesus was raised from the dead and preached.

How can we repent? By listening to Moses and the Prophets which represents the word of God. Is listening to other people easy? No. It is not easy because of our defensive reasoning. If listening to other people is challenging, how much more challenging will it be for us to listen to the word of God? That is why testimony writing is not easy job. Testimony writing is basically our effort to listen to God.

From about a month ago, I really wanted to repent all my sins, hidden or unhidden. So I began to review all my relationships with others. I leave all other people’s sins and weaknesses and focused on myself. It is to see if there is any hint of my selfishness, pride, and self-centeredness on my side. So sometimes I woke up in the middle of the night and write down all my sins I could think of. Yesterday was one of them.

I woke up in the middle of the night in order to go to restroom. Then I could not sleep again when I think about how to repent all my sin thoroughly. I really wanted to remove all my sin so much. God revealed to me that my sins are the symptom of my inner corruption, which is myself to be the Lord instead of Christ. Then my selfishness, pride, and self-centeredness blind my eyes so much that I ended up developing many sinful habits. Now in order to remove those sins I have searched them with all my heart. But I have found that there is limitation. I am exhausted and I cannot search it anymore.

Then it dawned on me, that the word of God is the answer. I cannot find my hidden sins or root of my sins anymore. But the word of God can reveal my deep sins and darkness. Three sets of the word of God came into my mind. They are 1 John 1:5-10, Hebrews 4:12, and John 3:19-21. All those verses teach me that I can walk in the light, and I can remove my darkness through the word of God and what I do can be done in the sight of God.

**1 John 1:5-10**

**“5This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”**

These verses strongly encourages me and motivates me to walk in the light. God has given the strong desire for all of us to walk in the light because he created us as children of light. And God is light. We all want to walk in the light, confessing our sins and being forgiven by God and being purified by God.

# Hebrews 4:12

**12For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**

Hebrews 4:12 gives me hope that I can find my sins continually and stay in the cleaning program of Jesus Christ because the word of God will reveal everything in my heart, and purge my sin from my heart. Jesus also said in **John 15:3 “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”**

# John 3:19-21

**19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.**

Now John 3:19-21 tells me that I can come into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what I have done has been done in the sight of God.

So indeed the word of God, which is represented by Moses and the Prophets in today’s passage, is God’s divine instrument for our repentance. But our pride, selfishness, and self-centeredness blinds our eyes toward our sin. And that is why I believe ‘humility’ is the way for us to gain true faith in God and come into the light and walk in the light.

About 2 or 3 weeks ago, this is what I told one person after severe rebuke. “What is my prayer for you? My prayer for you is this: Be humble like dust of the ground and survive many years and be blessed by the Lord establishing wonderful family of God”. People trample on the dust of the ground, but the dust of the ground is so humble that it does not complain or resist or being hurt. It still remains as a dust of the ground. Nothing can hurt the dust of the ground because there is no lower place to go down. There is no more place to be humble more. After I told the person about the dust, I realized that is exactly God was speaking to me. “John Kwon, my prayer for you is this: that you may be humble like dust of the ground and survive until the Lord establishes his house through you.” Indeed the word of God helps us to repent our sins and come into the light and walk in the light.

In conclusion, Jesus helped the Pharisees to repent by listening to the word of God. We must repent because God will judge us and throw us into the eternal lake of burning sulfur if we do not repent. We can repent by listening to the word of God in humility.

One word: “**‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’**