

Pastor Ben Libby
 Sermon
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To Jesus Christ, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification, be glory forever Amen.

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from Luke, chapter 16, starting at verse 19:

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.' "

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

They are everywhere. They're printed on disposable coffee cups, stuck on electrical appliances, and included on the labels of countless products from cleaning supplies to medications. They say things like: "Caution: Contents may be hot...Electrical hazard...May be harmful or fatal if swallowed."

Still, with all the warning labels in our lives, there is one thing not labeled which probably should be and that is our money. What if every dollar bill had the warning: "Use with caution," or our credit cards said, "May be harmful if used improperly"? Would we pay closer attention to how we use money?

Would we look at it differently? I doubt that money will ever be printed with such warnings, but we have something even better which is our Lord's warning in the text we just read. Man sees wealth as one thing, having money. In the parable the Jesus gives us here, wealth is viewed from a different point of view. Wealth is not how much money you have, rather it is about who you have faith in!

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN.

Some things like health foods and supplements include warnings not to use them for more than what they are intended. They may be an aid to good health, but they are not meant to treat or cure diseases. An inflatable toy is meant for fun in the water. It is not a life preserver.

Money too has its benefits. The Lord provides it through our work or by gift and with it we are able to buy things we need or want for our earthly lives. The rich man enjoyed the finest clothes, the best food, and a prestigious address. It is the dream of many to have enough money to buy a larger home, a cottage on the lake, or be able to travel. There is nothing wrong with that. They are gifts from the Lord which can be received with thanksgiving; and that is the real point. They are gifts, not gods. Money becomes hazardous to spiritual life when it becomes "god." Whatever we look to as our highest joy and depend upon for our ultimate security and hope for the future is our god. For the rich man it was his money. He lived for his wealth. Everything else was secondary.

That false god beckons to us too. Do you feel a twinge of envy when you hear of a baseball player who makes \$100,000 every time he makes a plate appearance? When you struggle to meet the mortgage, car payment, and insurance each month, do you daydream about how much better life would be if you had somehow won the lotto? You could pay off the mortgage, replace the old car, send the kids to college, and still fund a comfortable retirement. Money whispers, "Just pay more attention to me. Put me first and I will reward you." Often it works. Make money your priority and you may gain more. The god of wealth tries to convince us that money is the key to a good life and to happiness.

But like every false god, wealth fails to help just when the need is the greatest. **Mark 8:36-37** ³⁶ "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? Despite all his money, the rich man died. The funeral was lavish,

the flowers beautiful, and the eulogies eloquent. But what was not visible was the rich man's eternal fate. He was in such agony in Hell that he begged Abraham to send Lazarus to just touch his tongue with a cool drop of water, anything to provide the slightest relief from his suffering!

The fatal danger of serving the god of money is that it excludes faith in the Savior and without faith there is no eternal life, only unending punishment. Abraham told the rich man: **"Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things."** [v.25] He chose to live for the things of this world, and because of it he enjoyed some advantages, but the unseen cost was horrific! Those who live for money and wealth in time will suffer eternal death in Hell. **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9** when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

When you receive a paycheck, when there is money in the bank, when you are able to buy something you've had your eye on for months, thank the Lord for it. But also note the warning label: **"Cannot prevent death...Not intended to give eternal life."** Only the Lord who laid down His life for us and rose again in victory can give us the life that never ends.

Have you ever taken a medication which did a wonderful job of relieving pain but which also left you so groggy that you really weren't aware of what was going on around you? Those drugs slow reaction time and affect judgment so the warning states not to drive, operate heavy machinery, or do anything else which requires concentration. Money can have the same effect. It can cause spiritual drowsiness, so that the person affected is not aware or concerned about death and judgment.

The Pharisees in their money-altered state of mind saw wealth as a sign that all was well between them and God. “We are doing so well materially because we are so pleasing to the Lord.” I once spoke to a well-to-do farmer who told me, “I stand here and look around at my land, cattle, and family, and I figure I must not be too bad in the Lord’s eyes.” By that same standard, the sufferings of Lazarus would be evidence of God’s displeasure.

But as the Scripture account makes clear, God doesn’t operate that way. Lazarus, wearing tattered rags, too weak and sick to walk, and dumped at the rich man’s gate was the one pleasing to God. What makes the difference is not a person’s wealth or poverty, but what is in the heart. The name Lazarus means “God is my help.” Lazarus put his trust in God and His Word. He lived for the Lord, rather than for money and other earthly gain. Even though he did not see obvious evidence, he trusted that God is love, that He receives those who come with nothing except pleas for mercy. Lazarus looked past the trials of this life to the Savior who would suffer the agony of Hell so that he wouldn’t have to suffer it. Lazarus looked beyond the passing joys which so captivated the rich man to the complete, perfect, and endless happiness of heaven.

Don’t let money and what it can buy lull you into spiritual drowsiness so that you really don’t care about your eternal future. Stay in the Word. That alone will keep you awake and alert. The rich man wanted Lazarus to appear to his brothers and warn them. But Abraham refused and said, “**They have Moses and the prophets.**” [v.29] God’s Word was there to point out their sin and condemnation and bring them to their knees in repentance. The Gospel Word was there to lead them to Jesus as their Savior from sin.

But the rich man objected, “No, that won’t work. They need something more impressive and attention grabbing.” Many people use the same excuse for not hearing or believing the Word today. “It’s just too ordinary. I would believe if you could

show me something bigger and better.” But there is nothing bigger or better than the Word of God. “**Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God**” (Romans 10:17). Through the Word alone the sinner comes to know “**the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty mighty become rich**” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The rich man thought that the appearance of someone from the dead would be the ultimate power to convince his brothers to turn to the Lord. Another man named Lazarus did come back. After four days in the grave, he was raised by Jesus. Yet even that miracle did not convince the Pharisees. It just made them even more determined to kill Jesus. The power to convert hearts is not in dramatic, visible demonstrations, but in the hidden power of the Word.

Use that Word to stay spiritually alert and to counteract the numbing effects of wealth. While our eyes see a book which looks like any other, by faith we know the Bible to be God’s holy Word from cover to cover. While we see ordinary bread and wine on the altar, we know through the Word that in, with, and under those earthly elements Jesus gives us His body and blood for our forgiveness and eternal life. How do you put a price tag on the riches of salvation? Read the warning label: “Caution: All the money, possessions, and pleasure in the world cannot provide the salvation which God has freely given us by His grace in Christ.”

One of the most common warning labels says, “Safe and effective if used as directed.” The same is true of money. It is a gift of God which benefits us if we use it according to His direction.

One of the most misquoted passages in the Bible is 1 Timothy 6:10. People often quote this passage as saying, “Money is the root of all evil.” The real, better translation of this passage is “For the LOVE of money is a root of all KINDS of evils.” There is nothing wrong with money in and of itself.

There is something wrong, however, with loving money. Loving money is very dangerous, it can make you more reliant on it than on God. God wants us to have money, but He never wants us to put our trust in it. Similarly, God does not necessarily want us to give up every penny we have. Yes, He wants us to support our local preaching and teaching ministry, but He also wants you to use your money to support your family. We are to use our God-giving gifts and abilities to serve and support our calling, our family, and our church. We are never supposed to use them as replacements for our Lord nor His grace!

First of all, we are to use money in moderation so that it doesn't replace the Word in our lives. Money, homes, cars, I-phones, and all the other outward things in life need to be kept in their proper place. Ask yourself, "Are they in their proper place, or have they taken over my life? Have they become my god? Am I more faithful in reading my text messages than in reading the text of Scripture? Do I more eagerly anticipate and plan for weekend games or other recreation than for time in the Lord's house? Am I more concerned with getting as much as possible out of this life than with being assured of life in Heaven?"

God directs us to use His earthly gifts to glorify Him, not ourselves. Believers do that when they give up time and money in order to volunteer for church committees and boards. A wise dad may pass up overtime or a promotion in order to be at home in the evening to lead family devotions and help his children with their Catechism memory work. Young people glorify God when they bypass more lucrative careers in order to prepare for the preaching and teaching ministry. We show our gratitude to the Lord when we gladly and generously give of our material goods in our offerings for His work.

Faith in the Lord, rather than love for money, will show in a completely different attitude toward wealth. Our lives and happiness won't be controlled by how much or how little we have for in Christ we

already have it all and no recession or tax increase can rob us of it. That is the secret Paul revealed to the Philippians: ¹²**I know what it is to live in humble circumstances, and I know what it is to have more than enough. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, while being full or hungry, while having plenty or not enough.** ¹³**I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.** (Philippians 4:12-13 EHV). If we have Christ, we have it all! He promises to give us all that is good and necessary for this life; and best of all, He has Heaven waiting for us.

So then whether we enjoy the best, newest, and most, or the Lord asks us to get by with far less, may we keep in mind His warning regarding money and use our earthly gifts with caution. May we never put our love and trust in those gifts, but in the Lord and His Word of promise. May we find our joy and contentment in Him by faith and not in what we see.

Then we are rich, regardless of the balance in our checking account. Real wealth is not displayed in earthly treasures, rather it is shown by fruits of faith. We, the spiritually rich, can look forward to that day when faith will give way to sight, and we will sit down together with Abraham and all other believers at the heavenly banquet. There will be no need for warnings there. Hardships will be forgotten, and we will joyfully say, "Lord, it's even better than I imagined. It's just like You told me!"

All depends on our possessing
 God's abundant grace and blessing,
 Tho' all earthly wealth depart.
 He who trusts with faith unshaken
 In his God is not forsaken
 And e'er keeps a dauntless heart. Amen!!!