

Reason For Evangelism Luke 16:19-31

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What is the reason for evangelism? I remember when I began the Seminary, there were a couple techniques that began in a similar vein, they tried to scare people with hell. They began along the lines of, “If you were to die today, would you go to heaven?”

During the cold war, that might have been a good technique. People were afraid that some national leader would push the wrong button and all of a sudden the nukes would be flying. Some people had fallout shelters in their yards. People were afraid that they might die on any given day. To talk about the possibility of this being their last day was not a stretch. It was simple to get them to wonder if they were going to heaven or hell.

Jesus uses the technique of speaking about the terrors of hell as a means of getting people to think about their eternal well-being. He tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, both who have died, and now the rich man is in torment in hell. Lazarus in heaven. We could talk about their lives, how one was poor and sickly, the other, “in his lifetime received good things.” And how it was not the one who “received good things in his lifetime” who was now in heaven, but the poor man.

Why? Because one heard Moses and the Prophets, while the other ignored them.

One, the rich man, was all about His possessions, wealth, and the good life. He had it all! Interestingly, you can turn on your TV or radio and listen to certain preachers tell you how you can live your good life now. They will explain that if you do not have all that your heart desires, you must not believe strong enough, or pray hard enough.

But is it all about earthly blessings? We are amongst the richest people in the world! You all eat three meals a day, and possibly some snacks in between – and even our pets have never known hunger. While there are some people who would be glad to get one meal every few days.

Some people live without permanent structure over their heads when it rains. What is the value of our homes? Of all the people in the world, the number of families who do not own **A single** car is the majority. How many does your family have? I am almost ashamed to say that last year we were ***given*** our 4th car by Pauline's parents, so that each of the boys has one to drive at college. Only one of our cars is less than 10 years old, and 2 of them are at least 15 years old.

If we stop to consider it, we have all truly received good things in this life. We are all, by worldly standards, the wealthy. I know some would think they are not very rich at all. I looked up some statistics and was shocked to discover an interesting fact. How much money does an individual need to make to be a part of the top 1% of the wealthiest people in the world? \$2 million? Nope, too high! \$500 thousand? Nope, still too high! If your income is \$34,000 a year or higher, you are among the top 1% of wealthiest people in the world.

How many people will join the rich man at death? How many will endure anguish rather than be comforted for eternity? Of course we live in this flesh, and we want nice things in this flesh, but are the nice things of this flesh as important as other things? Or are there nicer things, that have eternal comfort?

Did the rich man get eternal torment because of the fact that he was rich? No!

He had no faith! He was a man who may have, at one time been a part of “The Church.” He was exposed to Moses and the Prophets, but it is obvious that such things had long since had an effect on his life. How do we know? Look at his works, or I should say, his lack of works. How he failed to love his neighbor is evidence that he was not a man of faith.

What am I talking about? A poor man; a poor, sick man; a poor man, so sick that he needed to have others carry him and lay him at the rich man’s gate; was ignored by the rich man. Our rich man concerned himself with all sorts of finery, of showing off his wealth, eating the finest foods. Lazarus only wanted the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Leftovers would have satisfied, and surely the rich man did not eat those. This is a man who could have given aid to Lazarus left at the gates to his home, he could have fed him and cared for him – in other words, he could have loved the man that he saw, but he did not. In fact, the dogs had more mercy and pity upon Lazarus than did the rich man.

Dear friends in Christ, what is your attitude about others? Do you worry about ole number one and ignore any needs of those less fortunate? Do you seek opportunities to help others? Do you love them? Or do we ignore them and spurn them?

We have much that we can be thankful for, and we have many opportunities to love and help those who are unable to help themselves. And, we have Moses and Prophets. Do we hear them? Do we pay heed to Moses and the prophets, do we listen to God’s Word? Is God’s Word an integral part of our life?

There is a reason it should be, and that reason is because it is the message of salvation. It proclaims to the love God for us who are loveless. As Jesus spoke to the leaders of the church, He explained that Moses and the Prophets point to Christ. He said to them, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5:39-40)

In other words, Jesus was telling them, “You search the Scriptures because you think they will tell you what you need to do to keep the Law in order that you may earn eternal life by your own works. You do not earn eternal life by your works! But you do not want to love your neighbor, especially the poor, the helpless, the dregs of society. You will invite those who will return the favor to your feasts, but not the poor. And then, you think Moses and Prophets tell you the things you must do to gain eternal life. Well, eternal life comes by Me, by my works for you – my love for you – my self-sacrifice for you. If you believe in me, you will have life. This is what the Scriptures – what Moses and the Prophets – declare to you.”

Dear friends, there will be those who will enjoy eternal torment because they have not heeded Moses and the Prophet. It is unfortunate, but there will be many who do not trust in God's Christ.

Christ is the one who purchased forgiveness for our sinfulness. Christ gave up His heavenly realms of glory, who abandoned the finery of His heavenly wealth and glory in order to feed us and clothe us, the poor and lowly. He came to forgive us for our failures to love our neighbor as Christ has loved us.

This is good news! This is a reason for evangelism. Those who are already enduring eternal torment cannot come and tell us anything. They cannot warn us and prepare us for what is coming, the dead do not come and talk to us. But you do have something to proclaim good news to you – you have something that can speak to you and keep you from eternal torment. In that day Jesus proclaimed that they had Moses and the Prophets, which pointed **TO** Christ.

*Today, you have even more than Moses and the Prophets pointing **TO** Christ, you have Christ. Paul wrote to the Hebrews, *In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son.* (Hebr. 1:1-2)*

God has spoken by His Son – and is still speaking by His Son. It is the Son who has returned from the dead, and how many ignore Him. How many are not convinced even though He rose from the dead?

It is Christ who comes speaks to you – your sins are forgiven; your failures to love others as you love yourself, are forgiven.

It is Christ who comes speaks to you – Take eat; this is my body... Take drink; this is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.

It is Christ who comes speaks to you – it is He who puts His name on you in the benediction and blesses you.

Dear friends, let us invite others to come where the One who Moses and the Prophet spoke of, is still coming to us to bless us with forgiveness and eternal life. As the Lord has blessed us, so let us be a blessing to other, with eyes open that we might see where there is a need and we can help. Let us invite them that they too might be loved by God and have eternal life in Christ Jesus. Amen.