



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
**Pastor James Tiefel**  
**(262) 853-9723 (cell#)**  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

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## **The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**September 25, 2022**

**What seems to help in life fails in death;  
What seems to fail in life helps in death.**

The value of wealth must be measured against the value of faith on earth and especially for eternity. In the Gospel for today, Jesus tells a story about two men, a man of wealth and a man of faith. The man of wealth lived in luxury; the man of faith lived in poverty. Because he cared nothing for faith, the man of wealth endured the agonies of hell. Because of his faith, the poor man lived with God in paradise. We Christians must carefully consider the value of wealth and the value of faith.

### **Sermon**

**Luke 16:19-31**

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

**The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 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 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. 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."**

**He answered, "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." "No, father Abraham," he said, "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."**

Introduction - *What is it worth?* When I was little, one of the shows that was on TV in our house was Antiques Roadshow. If you haven't heard of it, it's a show where people bring in their gadgets and heirlooms and other things that collect dust in their houses to see how much they are worth. They'd bring in old books, weapons, records, you never really knew what you might find on Antiques Roadshow. There were plenty of times where someone would bring in a beautiful painting, something you'd expect to be worth thousands of dollars. But it often turned out to be a fake and wouldn't be worth anything. But sometimes, someone would bring in an object that was old and dusty, but it turned out that the item was worth way more than the person would have ever imagined!

Antiques Roadshow teaches us a simple truth: something can *look* valuable, but that doesn't mean it is.

Today in our Gospel, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees. We usually think of the Pharisees as the proud religious leaders of Jesus' day. But the Gospel writer Luke reveals another flaw. He specifically describes them as people "who loved money." In fact, they loved money so much that they associated being rich with being on God's good side. And so sadly, they looked down on the poor people of society. What's more, when they found out that Jesus ate and drank with the tax collectors and "sinners", the Pharisees were disgusted and they sneered at Jesus!

Jesus saw a problem here. They had put too much stock in what they owned. And so he told them a parable to help them understand the value of their stuff. And so today, we also have the opportunity to ask ourselves: **what is wealth actually worth?**

Jesus' words grab our attention as he engages his crowd in a vivid story: He said there was once a rich man who lived in luxury every day. He probably ate the finest foods at the time, he probably lived in a mansion. He even dressed in purple cloth and fine linen – incredibly expensive clothes! This was the kind of person the Pharisees wanted to be friends with, because this was the kind of lifestyle they treasured.

But there was another man. His name was Lazarus. By his appearance, he couldn't have been any more different from the rich man. He didn't have fine clothes to wear, he was covered in sores. He didn't have a house. He didn't have enough to eat. He sat outside the rich man's gate and begged for food every day. His situation was so bad that even dogs came and licked his sores. This was the kind of person the Pharisees had no time for.

By all worldly standards, it was painfully clear which one was rich, and which one was poor.

But one day, Lazarus died. And angels carried him up into heaven, where Jesus tells us he reclined with Abraham at a great banquet. His sores were gone. He wasn't hungry or hurting anymore. He didn't need to beg for food. He had everything he could possibly need.

The rich man also died. And he was buried. But he wasn't carried by angels up to heaven. Jesus tells us he went to Hades, another name for hell. And there he was in torment. He was surrounded by flames, and the pain was intense. And as he looked up, he could see Abraham in heaven. And so he called out, **"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."** I think most of us can remember a time where we worked outside in the summer heat, and we looked forward to that cold glass of water. Can you imagine pain that intense, that a drop of water would even make a difference? Just like that, the rich man, who was accustomed to living a life of luxury, was found longing for even the smallest bit of comfort. But he was too late.

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. 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."**

It seems that the rich man finally realized the seriousness of the situation, because he said to Abraham: **"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."** No one, especially his brothers, should experience this sort of suffering. It wasn't worth it. They needed something drastic to happen to warn them, so they would repent of their sin and trust in God.

But Abraham replied: **"They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them."** But the rich man wasn't buying it. He doubted what the Word could do. **"No, father Abraham," he said, "But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." Abraham replied, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."**

A vivid parable. Harsh words. And it's really a parable of contrasts, isn't it? But it's not just about who is rich and who is poor. It's an evaluation of what truly has worth.

While he lived on earth, the rich man lived a comfortable life. But while he was physically wealthy, he was spiritually bankrupt. His wealth got in the way of God's Word. How many times would he have stepped over Lazarus to enter his gate? He could have had mercy on him and helped him in so many different ways. But his lack of love showed his lack of faith. And his utter disregard for God's Word in his life created problems for him once he died. In the end his wealth couldn't save him. All the things he considered his everything, proved to be worth nothing.

But Lazarus' story couldn't have been more different. He suffered each and every day at the rich man's gate. Each day he saw the rich man walk right by. By this world's standards, he was poor. But as it turns out, Lazarus owned something of incredible worth. It wasn't fine clothes or lavish meals or a sprawling mansion. He who seemed to have nothing of value, had a relationship with God that was worth everything.

Jesus told this parable to a proud group who looked down on the Lazaruses of the world. But just because Jesus spoke this parable to the Pharisees doesn't mean he has nothing to say to us. As Christians living in this world, God has entrusted each and every one of us with wealth. He has given each of us different amounts. But God asks each one of us to pause and ask ourselves, "What it is all really worth?"

As we learned last week, wealth itself isn't bad. But the love of money can cause us to value our relationship with God less and less. We may think to ourselves, "I know that the rich man let his wealth get in the way. But that won't happen to me. You don't have to worry about me, Jesus." But isn't there a small part of each of us that still wants the best of both worlds? Isn't there a part of you that wants to live like the rich man but die like Lazarus?

But the love of money is a slippery slope. I wonder if the rich man was always rich. Maybe he started out like anyone else. But as his wealth grew, coin by coin his heart grew farther away from God. Distance between us and God doesn't happen overnight. But when it does, it's because we forget what truly has worth. And when we forget that it affects how we handle what we own. The love of wealth can make us blind to those in need. It can make us cold toward those who make less or have less. It can cause us to walk past God's Word and not think twice about what God tells us. It can threaten our relationship with Jesus and affect where we end up after this life. Because the thing about wealth is that it can't save you. And as the rich man found out, there's no crossing the chasm between heaven and hell after death.

And that's why we need this parable, too. Because God reminds us what our relationship with him is worth. While wealth will eventually disappoint us, faith in Jesus will deliver us.

As you consider the worth of your relationship with God, remember what he tells you in his Word: the apostle Paul reminds us that though Jesus was rich, for our sakes he became poor. He gave up the glory of heaven to come down to this earth, to join us in our weakness. He didn't look like a rich man. Instead, he humbled himself. He was content to die on a cross for you and for me, and there he paid the ultimate price for your soul – not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood.

And why? So that you could belong to him forever. He treasures you and loves you. In his eyes, you are worth all the pain and suffering and mocking he endured. Dear friends, Jesus alone can fill that hole in our heart that we try to fill with wealth.

He did this so you could one day join believers like Lazarus in the heavenly banquet he has prepared for us. A place without sorrow or tears. A place where you won't find sickness or sores. When we consider eternity, that which truly has worth becomes crystal clear. And what is more, we have it in Christ!

And until we join in the joys of heaven, God gives us a way to keep our eyes and hearts on him: his Word. He has given us Moses and the Prophets, his true and powerful Word! Through his Word, God grabs our hearts with the message that our sins are forgiven, and that we can stand before God and not have to try and beg our way into heaven. It's through that same Word that he helps us to maintain a proper view of wealth. It's through that Word that he helps us to realize what Lazarus did: Your faith is the most important thing you own. In both life and death, it's worth everything.

A few days ago, I was browsing through videos of Antiques Roadshow. I found a clip where someone brought in an old Bible from 1704. It was a little dusty and worn, but it was still in good shape. What was it worth? About \$100.

The world may look at God's Word and see something that isn't worth very much. And in dollars, maybe we'd agree. But in terms of life and death, what it teaches is priceless. In the words of Abraham in our text: "We have Moses and the Prophets who point to Christ!" Let us never forget what a treasure we have.

And until we enjoy the treasures of heaven, we can properly enjoy our wealth. We can use our money to provide for and protect our families and our loved ones. We can use our possessions to be generous with others. We can use our wealth to help the efforts of our ministry around the world, putting in people's hands the most valuable and important thing in this life – the message that Jesus loves them and has paid for all of their sins. We pray that God would help us all to treasure his Word and to manage our wealth to his glory, that we, like Lazarus, may die unafraid. Amen.