

✝ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

TWO WEEKS AGO, we heard the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The Lord Jesus *will find* his lost sheep, just as the shepherd did, just as the woman diligently found her lost coin. We need not have anxiety or fear about whether the lost will be found, because the parable reveals the character of our Lord Jesus — he is the Shepherd who seeks out the lost.

As Christians who hear these parables, we must remember that our Lord looks for lost sheep indiscriminately. That is, he looks for his lost sheep among those who are heartbroken over the evils of this world, and among those, to our horror, rejoiced over the evils of this world. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, is in the business of calling all of his sinners to repentance, of offering his mercy to those undeserving — for such was our state when we came to faith in Jesus. He does not have a favorite brand of sinner — he is after the lost.

Always Jesus is searching for his lost sheep — two thousand years ago among the tax collectors and the Pharisees, and today, in churches and football games and vacations and homework.

LAST WEEK, we heard the parable of the unjust steward, and we heard Jesus explain it: “You cannot serve God and money.” This warning is meant to get to the depths of our souls. It's a warning meant to keep us away from the kinds of pursuits and desires that will lead us away from Jesus forever. It's a warning to keep our souls out of hell; and it's an encouragement to think and live instead in terms of eternal riches and eternal friends.

The parable itself is strange — the man who was fired squanders his master's riches further by marking down the debt of those who owed his master, winning friends for himself in this life.

When we put this parable alongside the Lord's Prayer and focus on “debt” and “owe,” we see right away the connection of debt and debtors, of trespasses and forgiveness. The bad steward marks down the debt of those who owe his master, but he does this as a thief. Our Lord Jesus — the good steward — takes all of our debt — our sin — upon himself on the cross. It's through the cross, through the outpouring of his life, that Jesus makes us his friends through forgiveness. He makes friends for himself through his *righteous* wealth.

And so we see, that focusing on riches in this life is too small and too dangerous a goal, and one that might not end with the goal we should all desire — life forever with Jesus.

Like our Lord Jesus, we forgive the trespasses of those who have sinned against us; we give to those what we ourselves have been given; and we share the good gift of the news of the resurrection — that perhaps some may turn and live — but at the least, that we should continue in faith.

We want to be good stewards of not only the things we have received in this life — our money and our own lives! — but also we want to be good stewards of things we have been promised in the life to come. Whatever riches we have been given, we do not want to keep those for ourselves.

THIS MORNING, Jesus warns his disciples (and us!) of the danger of money and urges us to consider our actions in view of the life that is to come.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus shows us that riches in this life may mean hell in the life to come.

Daily, the rich man was arrayed in purple and linens — dressed like a king! Daily, the rich man feasted. Daily, “at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table.”

Pause for a moment and reflect from just a few weeks back when we heard about Jesus being invited to a ruler of the pharisee's home for a dinner party. The disciples heard, just as we did, that our Lord Jesus told his dinner

host to not invite his friends and to instead invite the poor, the lame, the blind. And so, returning to the parable at hand, we already know what this rich man should be doing for the poor man Lazarus. Lazarus only wants the scraps of food, but the rich man should have given him a place at his table, elevating him to a place of honor and dignity. Instead, his dogs lick the poor man's sores.

The parable continues. Both die. The poor man joins Abraham; the rich man descends to a place of anguish. A chasm separates them. Before, the rich man's gate separated Lazarus from him; now the Lord's gate keeps the *formerly* rich man from Lazarus. Whatever kindness Lazarus may wish to do for this former rich man, he cannot; neither side can cross from theirs to the other. The torment from which this former rich man wants reprieve, he will not get; he cannot get to the other side.

Seeing that he will not escape torment, the former rich man turns his attention to the fate of his five brothers. But alas, Abraham will not send Lazarus to them, either. If his brothers will "not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

This line brings the cross in view. Indeed, in all of these warning passages from Luke, Jesus has the cross in view. He is making his way to Jerusalem, and along the way, he is preparing his disciples — and all those who hear him — for his death upon the cross. Constantly, consistently, Jesus warns all who will hear him of the dangers of wealth, of the danger of placing ourselves *above* others or God, and of *not placing* God in the highest place. Time is running out for them to hear Jesus, for them to take his words to heart, and for them to repent and change their ways. Soon, Jesus will be betrayed, beaten, and lifted high on the cross.

And then, three days later, Jesus rises from the dead. But as the parable tells us, this will not help the former rich man's five brothers. For if they have been unwilling to listen to Moses and the Prophets, if they have been unwilling to listen to Jesus in this parable, they will be unwilling to listen to someone when he rises from the dead. Even so, the Lord Jesus is incredibly gracious.

Take a moment and reflect just who it is whom Jesus raises from the dead *before* his own death and resurrection. Which man does Jesus raise from the dead? Isn't it poetic, isn't it powerful that the man whom Jesus raises from the dead is also named *Lazarus*? Perhaps the brothers are real people and perhaps they do listen to the real Lazarus tell them about Jesus raising him from the dead. Surely *someone* will listen to Lazarus, the man Jesus raised from the dead.

And surely someone will listen to *us* when we tell them that Jesus is raised from the dead. This news is the greatest treasure and the greatest riches of which we are stewards. We have been entrusted with the words of eternal life. Alleluia.

Back to the parable. The rich man dressed as a king and feasted daily. He lived as if he was already in the life to come. But inwardly, this rich man was a beggar, poor, and blind. The rich man was blind to the gift he was given. For the true gift the rich man was given was not his riches, but the poor man at his gate. There was his neighbor, there was someone who *needed* food and clothes and money, and the rich man had plenty to give him! But he gave him nothing.

We know that we come into this world with nothing and that we will leave this world with nothing. And yet, it's extraordinarily easy to miss the purpose of money. Because of how deceptive money is, when money begins to trickle in and accumulate, it's easy to begin organizing the money — extra spending, extra saving, this investment, that investment, and so on. But the reason any of us is given money beyond our most basic needs is for the good of our neighbor.

Hear this. The real gift is the person with whom we can share, lift up, or elevate through our use of money. The real gift is not the riches we have been given, but the person with whom we share our riches.

It is the same with our Lord Jesus. He gave up all of his riches — his whole creation — to become incarnate, to be born of the virgin Mary, to walk among us, to be lifted up in death on the cross. He gave up all things that he might win some of us — to share his eternal riches with us.

Likewise, whatever we have been given — our money, our time, our lives — are for God and for others. What a different parable this would have been, if the rich man had given Lazarus a seat at his table, had given him rich food, fine clothes, and medicine for his sores? What a different parable this would have been if the rich man had understood that Lazarus was his neighbor?

This is the duty and the joy of the Christian — to begin to see those whom we wouldn't have considered our obligation, our neighbor, or our friend, as indeed one who is our obligation, our neighbor, and our friend. We begin to see that the money, possessions, time, and our own lives are to be shared with those whom God has entrusted to us.

In our Acts Bible Study, we saw that the first wealthy Christians readily and gladly sold their homes and their land to provide for the needy, not because they had to, but because they did not consider themselves more worthy than the needy. And so, as need arose, those Christians would sell land or homes, bring it to the apostles, and the money was distributed to those who had need. These Christians took Jesus warnings and words to heart, and they believed that they were, in fact, one body, with one faith, with one Lord, with one mission — to share the good news of the resurrection of Jesus with those who would hear.

These parables, these warnings passages, and this example from Acts are so good for us to hear, because I suspect our culture very much loves money and possessions. It is part of the air we breathe, and so we need to hear from God's Word to hear how differently we may need to think and live in regards to money, to possessions, to our lives — to all that we have been given.

There's no question that this congregation as a whole is generous — from the roof, from gifts that are given, from the general offering, and from the special offering for mission workers throughout September, rising \$6500 in just three weeks. Generosity is one of the spiritual medicines available to us in our desire to be faithful to our Lord Jesus and to our neighbor, and to reject the love of money of our culture. As generous as this congregation is as a whole, yet still we want to hear these warnings individually and as a congregation, making sure that neither individuals nor the whole of us is becoming too swayed by money or possessions, but that we are set instead on following our Lord Jesus for life.

And so, we reflect — perhaps there is someone in *your* life, someone who has been ignored, someone with whom you can share the riches of your time, your prayers, your money, your words, your gifts.

It's serendipitous that we have just celebrated Oktoberfest and this morning hear the dangers of a man who feasted every single day. It is good that, because of our Ruth study last year, we connect Oktoberfest to an offering. And so, I again thank you for giving to the mission workers who have visited us over the past year — the Omars, the Thorstands, and Dure Negassa, representing Dagaga & their Kenyan mission work.

Let us remember and give thanks to our Lord Jesus, who gave up all his riches — all things — to die for us, that we may be raised with him to new life. And so, let none of us squander these eternal riches which he has set aside for us, but instead, give him thanks and praise, as we continue in faith, offering ourselves back to Jesus *who offered himself for us*.

✠ **All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.**