

Our first reading is from Paul's letter to Timothy One. Timothy, chapter six, verses eleven through 19. Hear the word of God, but you, man of God, flee from all of this and pursue righteousness, this Godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses in the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who, while testifying before Pontius Pilate, made the good confession. I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time. God, the blessed and only ruler, the king of kings and Lord of Lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see, to him be honor and might forever. Amen. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant or to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. The word of the Lord. Please stand for the reading of the Gospel. The Gospel of Luke, chapter 16, verses 19-31. There was a rich man, Jesus said, who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. And 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 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 during your lifetime you received 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 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. Jesus. 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 word of the Lord.

All right, our kids are now going to go to kids alive. Father, we pray for the kids that you would bless them deeply, that you would open their ears and their hearts to receive great nourishment from Your holy Word. And you would bless those who teach them, that they might teach them the very words of Jesus. It's in his name we pray. Amen. All right, kids. God bless you. Now, Father, we pray that you would speak to us, that you would use My words. Lord, I know that they are weak and nowhere near in comparison to Your Word, but you choose to use broken vessels, and I ask that you use me today to open up our hearts to Your Word. I ask that you would speak to each and every person here and that we would come away from this place more like Jesus, Your Son, in his own name we pray. Amen. Today's passage, if you really think about it, is truly frightening. Can you imagine being that rich man? I wonder if it happened something like this. I wonder if he woke up as if from a dream and then realized that he was in a very hard place, that he wasn't rolling out of his comfortable bed, he was rolling on rocks, and he was in a darkness.

And yet there was light from the flames around him that the heat was worse than any heat wave he had ever experienced in his life. And he noticed then he was terribly, terribly thirsty. And he began to feel around in the darkness and he saw a light, and he started moving towards that light. But he came to the edge of a cliff, and looking across the way from that cliff, he saw beautiful land all lit up. And there he saw Lazarus, the beggar that had been at his gate, the beggar that this very morning he had stepped over. And when he stepped over him, he noticed he was dead. And he felt something of relief and called to his servants and said, get this body out of here. Take them and throw them outside the walls of the city where the dogs are. Little did he know that when he laid down his head on his pillow that night, on his luxurious pillow, it would be the last time he'd ever wake up in his bed. And now,

looking across the chasm, he sees Lazarus with Father Abraham. The Abraham he'd heard about in synagogue, the Abraham he thought he believed in.

And Lazarus was receiving comforts and the kind of luxuries that he was used to in the chasm as he looked down over the edge, was deep. It's a pretty terrifying story. It's one that Jesus tells to tell us about the kingdom of God, about wealth and riches, about ultimate judgment and destiny. It's a story that might seem far from us, but it's not far at all. It's a story that's meant to be read in the church as a warning, because Jesus said that the weeds would grow up with the wheat, that within every church body there would be those who are living not for the Lord, but for themselves. And so the story is told, and it's repeated in churches. And we come to this chasm and we wonder, what can we learn from it? And it's something we'd rather avoid because we know how people feel about the idea of eternal judgment. People say, what kind of a loving God do you believe in? What kind of a loving God is filled with wrath? But, you know, any loving person experienced wrath at some point. Any loving person is wrathful at some point. And hope has its reasons.

The author Rebecca Manley Pippert writes, think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance, as we might towards strangers? Far from it. Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is. And the final form of hate is indifference. See, Jesus told this parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the face of the religious leaders, the Pharisees of Israel, who, because of their own love for money, were massively indifferent to those living in the community around them and those who were suffering. In fact, if you remember last week, he tells this parable because of the response of the Pharisees when he had said, use your worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself, so that when it is gone, you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Remember what Jesus said? No one can serve two masters. Either you'll hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one and you'll despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. And what do the Pharisees do? They scoffed at Jesus, and he said, you are the ones who justify yourself in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts.

What people value highly is the testable in God's sight. He's speaking, of course, of the Pharisees own value, of their reputation, of themselves, of their comfort, of their leisure. He tells this parable out of his compassion for them. It's out of that context. And he begins with a vivid contrast of these two characters in verse 19 of chapter 16. And Luke, if you want to follow along. He says, there was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. Purple was the Armani suits of the day, right? Only kings wore purple, and very, very, very wealthy people. The purple dye was taken from these rare snails that were found in the sea. And it was pretty hard process to extract that purple dye. And so it was that only the wealthy wore purple. And he says that this man feasted every day. He denied himself nothing. But there's Lazarus at his gate, the beggar Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's tables. And even the dogs came and licked his sores. How many of you have dogs? Any of you ever let them lick your face?

Yeah, I know crazy dog owners that do that. In Israel, the dog is a scavenger. The dog is unclean. To be licked by a dog meant that you would have to go through ceremonial washing. So this beggar would be a horror to the pharisees, to those who made it a point of being richly clean as much as they could. And to see that beggar lying there, they would never touch him and probably never give him anything, for they believed that he was getting what he deserved. So he's poor, broken, and so hungry that he's longing for the scraps that would fall from the table of this rich man, which undoubtedly he had. You know, the statistics are crazy about how much food the average American throws away every day. It's somewhere up to a quarter of the food that just comes off of our plates and into the trash can. It's probably always been that way. To some extent, this beggar is longing that if you could even just taste that, you know, the rabbis had a saying that three situations reduce a man to having no life, depending on food from another man's table.

Being ruled by your wife I didn't make that one up. And having a body full of sores, two out of three. For Lazarus, he has no life. Exactly what Jesus came to bring. I come to give you life and life abundant. And supposedly, Lazarus, in the eyes of the rabbis, doesn't have that lower than a dog. To the rich man, Lazarus was just a part of the scenery, was probably a nuisance. He was probably relieved when Lazarus died and his body could be taken away. And that's why the rich man is

condemned by Jesus, because the Chasm, it's not about vindictiveness on behalf of God, but it's about justice from God. The chasm teaches us that God is just. To give you a kind of a contemporary example, Hermann Goering. Hermann Goering was the second command to Adolf Hitler, and he'd amassed a collection of art. And he was particularly proud of a Vermeer that he had purchased for about 7 million of today's dollars. And he was proud because Hitler owned two Vermeers, so he now had one like his boss. The only problem, it was a fake. It was a forgery. And after the war, Goering was put on trial for his war crimes.

And during the trial, he was told the truth about his Vermeer and it was actually a forgery. And his reaction, according to his biographer, was pitiful. Goering looked as if for the first time he discovered that there really was evil out there. He cared more about being ripped off by a forger than about the priceless lives that he had taken over and over and over again had taken so often that he had no regard. So when someone says, how can you believe in a loving God who sends people to hell? The really correct response is, how can you not? How can you not believe in a God of justice, a God that punishes evil? But some might say, well, why not punish them but then bring them into heaven again? It's because he's loving. He will not allow evil in heaven and he will not force people to change before entering heaven. And that's one of the points of this story, you know, that the rich man doesn't change. He sees Lazarus over there and he doesn't change. He still views Lazarus as an object, as someone to serve him. He doesn't cry out to Father Abraham, oh, forgive my sins.

I see how desperately wicked I was. Please. Instead, he says, will you send Lazarus to serve me? He still doesn't get it. The Chasm tells us that there is a God of justice and it's a good thing. But the Chasm also shows us that this same God of justice is a God of compassion and love. And this is demonstrated on two levels. It's demonstrated first on the practical level, verse 20, it reads like this at his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus. You know, the commentators note that Lazarus didn't choose the spot. The spot was chosen for him. He was laid there. And Jesus doesn't say who laid him there. But many of the commentators postulate that it was God himself who laid him there. And you might say, Well, God, why would you lay this beggar at the feet of an unjust rich person who you knew would not feed him? But you know, God does that all the time, doesn't he? He puts beggars and poor and broken people in the pathway of rich people all the time, giving them the opportunity to reflect the compassion of God. God is compassionate, but his means of dispensing that compassion is through people like you and me, people who are blessed with material wealth in order that we might use that wealth to bless others.

I love Psalm 41 that begins, blessed are those who have regard for the weak the Lord delivers them in times of trouble. It's a reminder to me to be one of those people. If God himself is going to hear my prayers, do I hear the prayers and please of others? And the Bible speaks of those who are gracious and lend freely. In Psalm 125 and throughout the law and the prophets Job, Moses and Micah and Isaiah, we hear all the time talking about the poor and the needy and the alien among you in Numbers or Deuteronomy, chapter 24, it says this do not deprive the foreigner, the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Instead. If you're plowing your fields, don't plow everything. Leave some sheaves for the poor, the widow, and the immigrant among you. If you're pressing the olives at the olive press and you notice that some have dropped out, don't pick them up, but leave them for the poor and the widow and the immigrant. God intends that we not use everything for ourselves. He richly blesses us that we might enjoy those things, but he also intends us to use more than just the leftovers for the sake of others.

So God is compassionate at the practical level. He calls his people to give thought to how they might provide for people in their communities, but he also provides compassion at the ultimate level. Verses 22 through 25 says, the time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up, and he 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'm 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. The roles have been reversed. God has saved Lazarus. We're not told about Lazarus's faith, but we're given a clue. The name Lazarus, which Jesus uses in the parable is a derivative of Leazar, which means God

helps. All throughout the Scriptures, there's a sense that there's a righteousness that the poor more readily grasp on to than the rich, a faith that the poor more readily welcome than the rich.

And it's intimated in this parable that Lazarus had that kind of faith, that though he was receiving nothing, instead of cursing God, he believed in God, and he called out to God and cried to God. And God ultimately heard his cry. 10,000 years from now, people who have believed in God and have shared the same fate as Lazarus, people who you and I would never want to trade places with in this life 10,000 years from now, they will be experiencing wealth and luxuries and feasting and joy and fellowship, and it is very likely that they will not even remember the sorrows and the sufferings of this life. God is ultimately compassionate. It's a good thing to remember when we're going through our own sorrows and struggles in this life, to realize how light and momentary they are, certainly in comparison to somebody like Lazarus, but definitely in comparison with our eternal destiny. For God's. Compassion is ultimate. And the chasm teaches us that for God will leave on the other side every evil, every sorrow, every trouble. There will not be one single bad thing that will cross over. That means no roaches in heaven, right?

And no mosquitoes either. I think. There'll be breezes like this in heaven, won't they? So what does it mean for us? Do we just simply hold on and wait until heaven? No, the chasm in the next life teaches us about how to live this life. Look at verses 27 through 31. So the rich man is crying out, and he says, look, I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let them 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. But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent. He said to them, if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. Here's what we know about the rich man. He's a churchgoer. Probably pays whatever the temple requires, probably gets to sit in some of the nicest seats at the temple feasts and the banquets of honor. But he's a church grower. He's heard the law and the prophets. He sees Abraham and he calls him Father Abraham.

What does it mean? It means that in every church there's a possibility of people who come and do the bare minimum, who give honor to God and glory to God, but then go out and live as if this life is all there is. Live for their own luxuries and their own comforts and their own opinions and the opinions of others. That's what it's telling us. Jesus is saying, God has provided everything in His Word necessary for our life, for our sustenance, for our instruction, for how we ought to live. We don't need someone to rise from the dead, though Jesus did, right? And that's the irony of this. But every now and then these books come out, right, of somebody who says, I died and went to heaven, and then I came back. The doctors resuscitated me, but I got to see heaven for 90 minutes. One guy said he saw hell for a period of time like that. Colton Burpo, this kid who wrote a book called Heaven is for real, right? And these books come out and people like, think, oh, if only somebody would read them. Don't waste your time. If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, if they won't listen to the word of God, which already testifies that Jesus has risen from the dead, why would they listen to somebody like that?

We don't need that. We need the word of the Lord. Ron Cider, who wrote a book called Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger, says, God's word teaches a very hard, disturbing truth. Those who neglect the poor and the oppressed are really not God's people at all. No matter how frequently they practice their religious rituals, nor how orthodox are their creeds and confessions. It's chilling. We could be within the walls of the church and one day stand before God and be rejected. And the reason wouldn't be because it wouldn't be because you didn't do enough good deeds. It would be because you never really had that faith in Jesus. You never really understood what the Gospel is all about. You know what the Gospel is all about. There is a chasm, and you and I were on the other side of it. And our situation was as desperate as the rich man. And Jesus from the other side looked out and saw our situation. And he came and he took on human flesh and he walked and he lived among us. And when a poor man cried out, he stopped and he healed him. When a leper cried out, he stopped and he made him whole.

When a blind man cried out, he stopped and he made him see. And Jesus gave up all his wealth for us so that we might have eternal wealth. And he died so that we might have a way across that chasm. But here's the truth. If you believe in Jesus, you've already crossed the chasm. You are already in the

Kingdom of God. That kingdom we will see in full one day. But now we're living it. And so Jesus says, Live it, then let those whom I fed now feed others. Let those whom I've enriched now enrich others. That's the life we're called to live. And as we do, and we reflect Jesus in this world, one day when we stand before Him face to face, he welcomes us in, along with all who are materially poor and broken, those we reached out to and loved for the sake of the kingdom. I'm going to close with one Timothy Six that was read. This is a charge to me as a pastor. As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Timothy is a pastor. He's receiving that charge to give his charge to his people. So I charge you, people of God, don't put your hope in worldly wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. Do good, be rich in good works. People of tree of life, be generous and ready to share. You will thus store up treasures for yourselves as a good foundation for the future, so that you may take hold of that which is truly life. And Jesus has come to bring what life and life to the full. Amen. Oh Lord, we give ourselves to you. You have given us life. And now may we live it to the full. May we love and bless those whom you love and bless. May we care for, may we bind up. May we provide even as we've been provided for. Lord, thank you for seeing us poor beg and for saving us. We love you, Lord. In Jesus name, amen.