ANGELS CARRIED HIM TO ABRAHAM'S SIDE

1. Beware the alternative
2. Find comfort in the promise

He was loved and admired by his community. A model of success and a good family man. He cared deeply for his brothers who are with us here today. He loved entertaining people, and friends who visited never left disappointed. What a tragic lose as we mourn his passing, here today.

I could imagine words like that spoken as an eulogy if the rich man in Jesus' parable had lived today. What an elaborate funeral it would be! The finest casket and vault; the largest headstone, so many flowers; so many wanting to pay tribute. But what a tragic funeral! For we do not have those words of comfort that angels carried him to Abraham's side.

But Lazarus, whose dead body may simply have been thrown into an unmarked, common grave with few if any mourners - what a wonderful funeral that was! For we are told: The angels carried him to Abraham's side. So, which will your funeral be?

That eulogy I started with may not strike you as fitting the rich man well. It makes him sound too good. But sometimes to ease our own conscience, we like painting others as extra bad. That way we feel good by comparison. So maybe we like picturing this rich man as kicking Lazarus when he tries to beg for food or making him the butt of his jokes. Maybe we justifies ourselves by thinking: Well, I'm not rich like he was, so I don't have to care about helping the poor. But those lines of thought harden our hearts to Jesus' message.

Notice how even in hell the rich man respectfully addresses Abraham, calling him Father. No doubt, during this life he had learned his religion and carried out his religious obligations. He did his duty. and even though we are not told whether Lazarus was fed, why would they keep bringing him to the rich man's house if he did not get something? I am not saying that the rich man cared about him. Maybe only the servants dumped the scraps by him. At any rate, the rich man seems to have fulfilled his social obligation. He did his duty.

So why then did he end up in hell? Let's see how the parable answers that. Jesus' description shows that the rich man focused on the earthly. How much could he get out of life? How much could he enjoy himself.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, the designer clothes of those days. He knew what was fashionable. And he living in luxury every day. He knew how to enjoy himself.

Also, listen to what Abraham says to the rich man as he suffers in hell, In your lifetime you received your good things. Yes, your good things - the things that you thought were good, so important - the things you looked to for happiness, joy, peace, security, and comfort. That is where his life had been focused.

My friends, that is the opposite of faith. Faith looks to God as the Giver of all that is good. James tells us: Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the lights. Or, God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son. Faith trusts God as the Giver of all that is good; the rich man trusted his riches.

And you do not need to be rich to trust riches. How easy for us to get caught up in thinking: I would be happy, if I only had the money to do this or buy that. Or, I would have fewer worries then. How tempting for us to trust the almighty dollar rather than the Almighty! But the dollar cannot carry you to Abraham's side; rather, trusting in wealth sinks you into the torture of hell's flames. So beware. Yes, we want the angels to carry us to Abraham's side, but beware the alternative. Do not trust wealth to bring you good.

There is a second aspect of the rich man we need to heed as a warning. Beware. And it
has to do with this book right here.

At first we might be struck with his concern for his brothers. He wants Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead and warn them about the torture of hell. But how does Abraham answer him? **They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.** God used Moses and the Prophets to write his Word, the Old Testament. After Jesus ascended, he used his evangelists and apostles to write the New Testament. But even the Old Testament is filled with God’s promises to send the Savior, the promises Jesus fulfilled.

God's Word, the Bible, that is what changes hearts. That is what works repentance. That is the tool of the Holy Spirit. That is what saves - not someone coming back from the dead or some other spectacle. Saving faith takes God at his Word. Saving faith cherishes the Scriptures. Saving faith treasures God's written message. Saving faith trusts what God Word's says.

But notice the response of the rich man: **No, father Abraham.** He thinks he knows better than God. In fact, if God would have sent someone back from the dead for him, then he would not have ended up in hell. It is God's fault. The Bible is not enough!

But it is enough. **If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.** Faith accepts the Bible as God's full revelation. The Bible is all-sufficient for our faith and life. We do not need anything more. As Paul writes in 2 Timothy: **All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, well equipped for every good work.** God's Word is all we need.

Do you hold the Bible in highest regard as the very Word of God? Or is it boring, and we need to add excitement for it to really do its job? Music, sermons, Bible studies, books, rallies, art, and the like cannot add anything to the power of God's Word. Those things are beneficial only when they highlight the message that is already there, revealed in the Scriptures. Faith, real faith, needs God's Word, not some sort of experience, excitement, or miracle, no matter how spectacular.

Do our actions shine with this high regard for God's Word? How much time do you spend in a week reading God's Word and reflecting on its message? Is it your comfort, your treasure, your hope? Do you turn to it for your strength? Does it shape the decisions and choices you make? Do you cherish its public proclamation so that you do not want to miss a worship service? Do you gladly hear and learn it? How we fall short!

Take this seriously, my friends, for there is no second chance after death. That chasm in the parable clearly pictures that truth. Those who die trusting wealth to bring them good will not be at Abraham's side. Those who despise God's Word or neglect it will not be there. Be warned. The angels do not carry everyone to Abraham's side. Beware the alternative.

But who will be? Whom will the angels carry to Abraham's side? Will only poor beggars who are covered in sores that dogs lick? Being poor or a beggar or having a horrible disease will not get you into heaven. You see, many who are poor still look to wealth as the source of happiness and good. They will be with rich man in hell. And many who suffer in this life, blame God for their predicament, just as the rich man blamed God for his unbelief.

So if it was not his poorness or his suffering, what made Lazarus different? Why did the angels carry him to Abraham's side? That very name for heaven, **Abraham's side,** gives us the answer. Why was Abraham there? He was not poor; he was wealthy by earthly standards with his flocks and herds. He had no serious disease; he lived to the age of 175. But Abraham believed God's promise.

Faith in God's promise, that is what Abraham had. That is what Lazarus had. Their faith trusted God's promise to send the Savior to undo the curse of death that sin had brought into
this world. They believed God's promise for a Savior to rescue them from the damnation their sin had earned and instead bring them eternal life through the forgiveness of their sins.

In fact the name Lazarus is the Hebrew name Eleazer which means God has helped. Lazarus trusted God as his one and only help. Money could not help. A health plan or medical coverage could not help. God alone was his help. He trusted God. He trusted his promises. He did not buy Satan's lie: If God cared about you, would he really let you suffer like this? Rather, he trusted God's love that had promised the Savior - his Savior. That is the promise made through Moses and the Prophets. That is the promise Lazarus clung to in faith.

In faith he looked past his earthly suffering and troubles and saw the eternal comfort of heaven, prepared for him by his Savior - yes, there at Abraham's side or as the KJV translates Abraham's bosom. Like a little child on his daddy's lap, he found comfort resting in Abraham's faith. He trusted God's promise. Nothing could take that comfort of heaven away from him.

So find comfort resting in God's promises, just as Lazarus did. Even if your life becomes so bad that dogs licking your sores is your only health care coverage and someone else's trash seem like banquet to you, even then find comfort in God's promises. He has not forsaken you. Trust him. See how he gave up his Son for you. That is all the proof of his love we need. That is the proof the Lord's Supper brings you: the body of Christ, given for you; the blood of Christ, shed for you. Such love has not failed you.

Even when this life with its wealth and promises of health fails, God's love does not. Crawl up into the lap of his promises, revealed in the Scriptures alone. Snuggle there close to his heart. Trust him, so that when your last hour comes, like Lazarus, you too can sing as we do in one of our hymns:

Lord, let at last your angels come;
to Abram's bosom bear me home that I may die unfearing.
And in its narrow chamber keep my body safe in peaceful sleep until your reappearing.
And then from death awake me that my own eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, your glorious face, my Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend, and I will praise you without end.
(CW 434:3) Amen.

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