



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 16
September 28, 2025

Lap of Luxury

Luke 16:19–31

¹⁹ [Jesus said:] “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’ ”

What can we learn from this account of the poor beggar Lazarus and the rich man, both of whom seem to have died on the same day?

First of all, we should notice that the one who is blessed in this account is not the one who lives in the lap of luxury, but rather the one covered with sores, too weak to chase away the dogs licking his sores. Our culture’s normal view of the world is skewed. God chastens those He loves. In grace and mercy God keeps the beggar Lazarus close to Himself in suffering. He does not allow the temptations of this world and its joys to come between Himself and Lazarus. The rich man fares sumptuously everyday – but that’s only in this short life. In the life to come he suffers the torments of Hell – forever. Lazarus’ worst day in this life was not nearly as bad as a single moment in Hell. Nor is it worth comparing with the glory revealed in him in heaven.

Secondly, we should recognize that the gulf between heaven and hell is fixed. Lazarus couldn’t dip his finger in water and cool the rich man’s tongue, even if he wanted



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to. Nor can the rich man order him around like one of his servants.

Finally, we should notice the character of unbelief – of that which damns. The Holy Scriptures do not pity those who “never had the chance,” or who had a false faith in a false god, even if they were sincere and meant well. This is not a game. Our Lord explains His mission and the nature of damnation to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, saying: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

So it doesn’t matter if the unbelievers were sincere and devout. It doesn’t matter if they kept their lawns trimmed, supported the community, and sent their kids to college. It doesn’t matter if they come from good families where the Bible is read every day or whether or not they were raised to have good manners. What matters is that they do not believe in the Name of the only begotten Son of God – and thereby they condemn themselves. It’s not God’s fault that they don’t believe, it’s their own fault. For He did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world.

And look at the arrogant obstinance in this rich man. Concerning his unbelieving brothers, Abraham says: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” But the man wants to argue the point, making it clear that he believes Holy Scripture is not enough. He says: “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” The Word of God is not enough for this man. The miracles of Jesus are not enough. The witness of the Church is not enough. But Abraham sees through him, recognizing his unbelief and says: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

And here we have the rub. This man and his brothers are not innocent bystanders – they’re unbelievers, and it’s their own fault, their own most grievous fault, that they do not believe. Someone *did* rise from the dead, didn’t He – Jesus Christ – and it was proved by many indisputable proofs, but the world rejects it. Their sin be on their own heads.

But what of Lazarus? How is he so different? Does he deserve salvation because of his suffering? Has he already paid for his sins? Some have said so. But, no. He, like the rest of us, is saved by grace – God’s riches at Christ’s expense – by the undeserved love and compassion of the Father, and by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. It’s not who *Lazarus* is that saves him, it’s who *Jesus* is, and the faith given by the Holy Spirit Jesus sends.

What does all of this mean for us? Today’s Collect begins: “O God, You are the strength of all who trust in You.” And St. John has written: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment” (1 Jn. 4:16-17a).

So, here’s the lesson: Don’t place your trust in the things of this world – as the rich man did. Repent of such selfish and foolish desires.

Ask yourself these questions:



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- 1 – What have I loved more than God?
My car, my house, my games, my body?
- 2 – What have I trusted more than God?
My science, my reason, my intellect, my abilities?
- 3 – What have I feared more than God?
My mortality, my sicknesses, my weaknesses?

And finally,

- 4 – What haven't I loved, trusted, or feared more than God?

Repent, beloved – for the rich man's sins are ours. And put yourself into the beggar's place; be weak as weak can be, that you're not even able to beat back the dogs that come to lick your wounds, and live not by your own strength, but by the Grace and Mercy of God in Christ Jesus! Here is hope, comfort, and peace. You, who cannot feed yourselves, come and be fed by Him, eat not the crumbs that fall from the King's table, but be a guest of honor at this great banquet, the New Testament in His Blood!

In this grace and mercy – which is not from yourself and who you are, but from Him and who He is – in this incomprehensible love, be bold as you consider the day of judgment, embrace it, and eagerly expect it.

Pray with the hymn writer:

Lord, let at last Thine 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 Thy reappearing.
And, then, from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end!

Amen