**God Left Nothing Undone**

Based on [Luke 16:19-31](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk16.19-31)

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Today’s Gospel lesson illustrates a number of teachings/doctrines about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus teaches that to disregard the poor has eternal implications. **He teaches that where you go when you die is final, and that it is inevitably one of two places…either a place of eternal torment, or a place eternal comfort** (v. 25). He teaches that those in hell never will understand their sin and repent; that even when suffering punishment they retain their pride and self-justification. **And most centrally, Jesus teaches today that God has left nothing undone in reaching the lost. He has done everything for them, and that if they persist in unbelief and find themselves in hell, it is by their own willful neglect of the kingdom of God.** This is because God has given his clear, perfect, all-sufficient, spirit-giving, soul-saving Word to the church, to his chosen messengers to preach it to the end of the world until the end of days. And we learn from the account of the rich man and Lazarus that the quality of the messenger makes no difference at all in one’s willingness to believe it. If one fails to believe God’s unimpressive human messengers; neither would one believe if God came to them Himself.

Jesus tells about a rich man who had the best this world has to offer. At his gate was Lazarus, poor and covered with sores and hoped the rich man would help him. **His wretchedness and suffering in the world was so great, so obvious that even dogs licked his sores. Even dogs knew Lazarus needed to be comforted and shown mercy; but the rich man showed him none.** Lazarus died and was carried to heaven’s comfort; the rich man died and went to torment in hell. And between the two places there is an eternal chasm, a divide, an absolute separation of one place from the other. This means, now that he has died there is no chance Lazarus will ever end up in hell, and likewise there is no chance the rich man will ever be delivered from his anguish and inherit heaven.

There is no halfway place between heaven and hell. There is no purgatory, no passing from one to the other after a passing of time. When you die your soul is carried immediately to heaven or to hell. And once you arrive, there is no escape. The rich man is told, “A great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.”

This is fair warning, to all who would presume not to seek God’s word, or heed his teaching. Do not presume to say, “**I have a happy life and no spare time to seek God now; He’ll reveal to me the truth when I die, and I can wait**.” Portentous words. Such a man will certainly find out the truth when he dies, but then it will be too late to act upon that information. It will be too late to repent.

Please consider for a moment the helplessness and hopelessness of an eternity in hell. In this life we suffer, and fail, and feel hopelessness and despair from time to time. But in this life we always have the option to act, to better our situation in some way. We may not succeed in all our ventures but we can try. As mankind we found a way put a man on the moon; to design a supercomputer that fits in the palm of our hand. Mankind has used his time and his brains to establish civilized government that provides for the welfare of millions and millions of people.

**Yes, we have the permanent problem of sin in our lives, but even our sin can be bridled and subdued for a time.** And though you cannot get rid of it, you have help and you have hope. Because you who have been baptized and believe know that some day--when your body does die, your sin will cease to be--because what’s left, your soul, has already been perfectly renewed in the image of Christ your king. And he will preserve it, even through death until he raises your body to new incorruptible life. And, in this life there is always help and hope *even for the unbeliever*…because God has given his Word of eternal life for all nations tribes and tongues to speak and to hear and to believe. Any who truly seek God will find him, and so none are truly helpless or hopeless *this side of eternity*.

But hell is a place of utter hopelessness and permanent despair. Jesus says it is a place “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48)…an “outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” There is no end to the misery and agony of hell. No help no hope; nothing to be done for eternity, but to suffer forever with no chance of escape; and no possibility of being rescued.

Jesus teaches that there is an reverse relationship--an “inverse proportion”--between “**success and misery in this world**”, and “**success and misery in the world to come.**” He resonates with Abraham who says to the rich man in hell, “**Remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in a like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.**” This does not mean that all rich people will end up in hell, and poor in heaven. Rather it means that whatever you seek in this life you will find. If you seek the true riches of God, you will find Christ. If you seek the unrighteous wealth of the world, you will find it…but you will not find Christ--the one who suffered hell to spare you from it.

This is why Jesus came into the world in humility and poverty, without a place to lay his head. **The hypocrites, those who make a great show of themselves but who really only seek worldly riches will not seek Christ nor see God in him.** But the poor in spirit, who have no earthly riches and therefore hold fast to their promised inheritance in heaven, *they will seek God where he is to be found in this world*, in lowliness, poverty, in suffering, and they will draw near and he will save them.

The rich man had no such poverty of spirit no such faith, because Jesus Christ the image of the invisible God, the radiance of his glory, was to be found in this poor helpless man, Lazarus. The rich man did not believe that the glory of God could be found in such squalor, but rather a God of power and might would be found in the power and might of the world. So he sought worldly wealth and success, he ignored Lazarus, thus ignoring Christ, who says “**whatever you have done to these the least of my brothers, you have done to me**” and “**whoever rejects you, my disciples, rejects me.**” He did not receive Lazarus; and so he did not receive Christ.

The Gospel lesson directly follow Jesus words from last week that resonate so plainly. Jesus said, “**Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they will receive you into eternal dwellings.**” There are pious, god-fearing men of wealth, devote their life and wealth to God. But the rich man devoted his life to wealth. It wasn’t his wealth that damned him, He ended up there because he did not make friends for himself by means of his unrighteous wealth. So when it failed--and don’t be deceived, money always fails you at death—when it failed Abraham, Lazarus friend would not receive him into eternal dwellings.

Just to be clear here; you not justified before God by your charity, by your giving alms to the poor. You are justified—“made right with God”--solely by faith alone in Jesus Christ and what he has done for your salvation on the cross. You are saved by faith; but make no mistake you are to be judged by your deeds. John writes in Revelation 20:12, "**And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.**" Romans 2:5 warns those with hardened hearts that they are storing up wrath for themselves on the day of judgment, for "**He will render to each one according to his works**." James 2:18 says, "**Faith without works is dead**" that is, it is no faith at all. And Jesus our lord says plain as daylight in John 5:28-29, "**Do not marvel, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have *done good* to the resurrection of life, and those who have *done evil* to the resurrection of judgment**." Jesus also says, "**Wisdom is justified by her deeds**" (Matthew 11:9). So keep this straight: feeding the poor will not save you; but those saved by faith will feed the faithful poor.

And notice I said the *faithful* poor. When you give material worldly help to the faithful poor, you give it to Christ and heaven. But when you give such worldly help to the faithless poor, you give it to satan and hell. **You are called to help the faithless poor, but you need to feed the soul while you feed the belly. Otherwise you are just fattening them up for the slaughter, which is what most churches do today.** You do not just feed the poor and without teaching them Christ. Rather you are to feed the poor with daily bread ***and*** with “the bread of the Word.” You feed them and teach them. And if they are Christ’s sheep, they will welcome your teaching, and the Holy Spirit will cast out the devil even as you feed them. But if they aren’t of Christ’s flock; they will reject your food, in order to reject your teaching; and insodoing reject you and Christ who sent you.

These words of Jesus about the rich man are especially hard for us. It is because we all have friends or family that--like the rich man--don’t see, and don’t believe. And when you imagine your unbelieving parent, sibling or your unbelieving child in hell calling up to heaven for mercy, just like the rich man does, you can hardly bear it. **And when you imagine Abraham, and Jesus, not offering them any help or any hope, you think “this can’t be right.”** It seems to go against our belief in the infinite mercy and grace and power of God.

We think, “If God truly is merciful he would never turn a deaf ear to a man crying in agony for mercy even if he is in hell; and if he does he’s not really merciful. On the other hand, maybe he is merciful, but there’s nothing He can do because there’s a chasm. **Yes there’s a chasm, but no chasm can stop God from reaching over or even bridging it to bring the rich man across. If a Chasm can stop God, then he’s not really all-powerful is he and not God, the Chasm is.”** On the face of it, it looks like this is teaching that God is not really merciful and loving after all; or else he cares but is too weak. Either option leaves us with a false picture of God, and if that’s our understanding, it is damaging to faith.

This is why, as a sinful man or woman, you need to hold to God’s word to hold perspective. First, God is not upset that the rich man is in hell. Abraham, Jesus, Lazarus, none of them are bothered or regretful about the rich man. **Neither will you, the saints, be bothered in the slightest in paradise, when your friends or neighbors who rejected Christ end up in eternal torment. Rather you should be bothered now, and speak to them now while there’s still hope.**

Notice your sin. You think it’s unmerciful of God to not help the unbeliever in hell; and yet there are people in your life who are on that path and you don’t warn them while there’s still hope and help available; now who’s being unmerciful really? **But if you tell them about the dangers of hell it will make your life uncomfortable, or you might lose clients and connections in the world.** Notice how subtly the rich man’s priorities are to be found in your own sin. Repent. Realize, the most unmerciful thing you can do to a person on the road to hell, is not warn them when there ***is*** still help and still hope in a savior for them. Repent.

Second, it is wrong to mourn for the damned because they never do repent. Once they die, they never turn from their wickedness. Once they lose their chance to apprehend Christ in his weakness, and receive the Holy Spirit from his wounds through his Word, there can be no repentance. And God would no more let the unrepentant into paradise, and then he would let the serpent in a second time.

God is right in not being merciful to the rich man simply because he cries for mercy. Remember, not everyone who cries out for mercy, does so out of sorrow. The rich man in agony is still unrepentant and has no sorrow for what he’s done. **While burning up in flames, he is still arrogant enough to assume Lazarus as his servant and subordinate.** “Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.” In other words, he considers Abraham is equal, and still Lazarus his inferior. He still doesn’t see in Lazarus, Christ.

And when Abraham explains the chasm, the rich man makes this request instead. “Then I beg you, father, to send Lazarus to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.” **Once again, do not be deceived. He’s saying something that sounds nice and caring and selfless—“Fine leave me here, but help my brothers”—but he doesn’t care about his brothers.** He’s blaming God for not helping him. He’s saying, “If someone would have come and given me fair warning about this place, I wouldn’t be here, because I would have listened to the warning and repented.” He’s saying is “It’s your fault, Abraham, Jesus, God—It’s your fault I’m here for failing to help me; your fault that I’m in this place. When he says, “Go help my brothers who are like me,” he’s saying “You never sent me such help.”

But he did send help to the rich man, to his brothers, and to all believers and unbelievers throughout the world. He sent his Word into the world. Does he not give you fair warning? With these words of Jesus today and others, is there something he has failed to tell you; failed to help you with, failed to do for you…that he would be to blame for your unbelief? **To the unbeliever who says I need more help, Jesus says: I have given you my word and you ignore it; I have given you daily bread all your life, and you think you earn it; I have died on the cross to forgive your sins and you won’t even forgive your brother.** I have done everything for your salvation, for the salvation of your brother, for the salvation of your neighbor, for the salvation of the world. And I built my church, and sent it with authority to the end of the world and the end of the age to give everyone fair warning of what’s to come so that they will seek a savior. And those who seek me will find me, and when they find me, they will have the full assurance of faith that there is now no condemnation for those who are in me.” And whom does Christ invite to him? “Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

The rich man, who gained his life in the world by forfeiting his soul, he thinks that God could have done a little more. God sent his servant Moses and the prophets to teach the people his word and his will, and they recorded God’s word in the Old Testament but that wasn’t enough. **When Abraham directs his brothers to Moses and the Prophets the rich man replies, “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”** In other words, Abraham cannot just expect people to believe God’s word when they hear it. There are people, the rich man claims, who would believe if God did some astounding miracle, like sending a messenger whom he raised from the dead.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead. There were witnesses. His resurrection is as historical of a fact as any other, and yet people refuse to believe. “It must have been a trick”, or “The apostles just made it up.” **There is no good historical reason to doubt the resurrection of Jesus Christ, except to remain comfortably in your sin and feast sumptuously of the world. The only people who doubt it are those who choose to ignore the evidence and embrace ignorance.** They have the Apostles and the Epistles, let them listen to them. And if they do not listen to the testimony of the New Testament, neither will they believe if someone would rise from the dead. Because someone has risen from the dead, and yet they still don’t believe.

There is an ironic comfort in Jesus words and the words of the rich man. God has done everything so that you, your family, your friends, your neighbors, and all nations of the world might repent and believe his word. He even surrendered his own son to death on a cross and then, rose him from the dead, and he appeared before hundreds of witnesses resurrected before ascending from our sight into heaven. **And nevertheless only a few believe. Many are called, few are chosen. And you are chosen, because it is not seeing the resurrected Jesus that causes belief.** It is the Holy Spirit that he sent forth from his cross to give you the new birth of water and spirit, and to give you faith through hearing his word. If they will not hear those who preach in the church, then neither will they be convicted should Christ himself preach to them. Jesus says, “Whoever hears you hears me” and again, “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me.” You don’t need the right messenger. You only need ears. And you who have such ears to hear; hear the word of the Lord.