

# This Sunday's Sermon

## ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES – LUKE 16:19-31

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ SEPTEMBER 29, 2013

**“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 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 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 in your lifetime you received your 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 from 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.’ “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.’”**



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Last week I began with the story of *The Tortoise and the Hare*. A story that teaches kids, and reminds adults of an important lesson: Slow and steady wins the race. This week I want to remind you of another lesson you probably learned from your parents, a lesson that probably runs in the background of all your daily activities. It’s the lesson that ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES. It’s really a simple lesson that has a profound impact on your life. If you don’t study in school, you won’t do well. If you speed when you’re on the interstate, you could get a ticket. If you don’t pay your electric bill, TEP shuts off your power. These are just a few examples, I’m sure you can think of many more.

Doesn’t it make a lot of sense then that not only do our ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES in this life, but that our ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES in the life to come? In the Hindu religion your actions in this life will determine how you will be reincarnated in the next life. But it’s not just that either – in America, we have people that are determined to be nice and generous to others so that the God they don’t believe in might look kindly upon them and welcome them into heaven. And isn’t that what the parable Jesus tells this week is all about, ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES?

Jesus names two characters in the story. The first was the rich man, and he had no pity on poor old Lazarus, so when he died he went to hell (or Hades as the new NIV puts it). While Lazarus, endured the poverty of this life, so when he died he went to heaven. It seems so simple right? ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES. But it's not simply that the rich man was a 1%er of his day so he went to hell, and that Lazarus was poor that he went to heaven. It goes deeper than that. This parable of Jesus comes in the same chapter of Luke as the parable we heard last week. The parable of the unjust manager reminded us about the proper use of earthly wealth, and Jesus concluded with the words, **"You cannot serve both God and money."** Jesus makes the connection in this parable of what happens when you serve God and when you serve money. This parable teaches us that ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES.

The story begins with a rich man, who lived in splendor each day. At the gate of the rich man is dumped a poor beggar named Lazarus. This is what we know about these two people. But, as is common to happen, both of these men died. We aren't told if they died at the same time, and it's not important. What is important is that Lazarus was taken to Abraham's side in heaven, while the rich man is suffering in hell. What transpires next gives a better indication of who both served while here on earth.

The rich man looks over and see Abraham and Lazarus far away up in heaven, and the rich man asks Abraham if Lazarus is able to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool the rich man's tongue. One thing is made clear – the rich man is clearly in agony in hell. So many people today dismiss this thought, they figure if they're going to hell, then at least they will have company, at least they won't be badgered by all the "do-gooders." But that's not what hell is at all. Hell is a place of torment, so much that even a drop of water would be a welcome relief. Nobody is there because they want to be there, not even the devil.

But Abraham says that this request cannot even be granted. "This would not be just" he says. **"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."** Besides, even if we could do that, we can't because there is this canyon that is separating heaven and hell, a canyon that no one can cross. This brings us to a second point – there's no fence sitting in heaven. You are either on the one side or the other, but not in between. And once death comes there is no opportunity to switch.

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES, and the rich man knew what actions had caused the consequences he was now facing. He knew he was in hell, not because he was rich, but because he had failed to listen to God. Oftentimes parables are called earthly stories with a heavenly meaning, but this parable could be called a heavenly story with an earthly meaning. And what is the earthly meaning this story is bringing out? Listen to the word while we can. Because after this life, there are no second chances. The rich man knew that full well. On earth he thought his riches were the

important thing, he was wrong. Now he knew that he was stuck in this place of torment forever. But he held out hope that his brothers would not find a similar fate.

He reached out to Abraham again and asked for a request. This time the request was to send Lazarus back to earth to reach out to his brothers and tell them to listen to God and be warned about the place of torment. Abraham replied, **“They have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them.”** They had God’s word. That isn’t enough the rich man thought, those are just words on a page, but if someone came back to life, they would certainly listen to that. Then Abraham gives the rich man words that are so difficult to swallow, **“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”**

Wow! How does that jive with our human intellect. God’s Word is more powerful and is more convincing than if someone rose from the dead. I have to confess, sometimes this is hard to believe for me. I oftentimes think that if only God would send some sort of miracle, more people would come to church. If only I am able to present God’s Word in a way that is palatable to people. I wonder how often you have thought that way too. Maybe we only see God’s Word as words on a page, it’s able to teach us something, but it doesn’t really make a difference. It isn’t what people are looking for. It isn’t what people want to hear. People want something flashy, something noticeable, something they need. Now a miracle would fulfill all that.

But no miracle would be able to tell you what the Word of God says. And it gets back to ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES. God’s Word says that sin has a consequence. Every sin has a consequence. **“The wages of sin is death”** The consequence of every little sin is death. The wages of looking lustfully at the *Sports Illustrated* swim suit edition is death. The wages of going over the speed limit is death. The wages of taking the name of God in vain is death. These may all seem like insignificant offenses to us, but they are not insignificant to God. And we haven’t even begun to scratch the surface of the sin festering in your heart and you know it. Each of those sins’ consequences is death too. Because every sin we commit is telling God that we know better, we know what’s best for me. The actions that we have committed have the consequences of being with the rich man from Jesus’ parable in eternity.

Only a miracle could save us from this fate, and interestingly enough, that miracle was from a man rising from the dead. It was our Savior Jesus who rose from the dead. But this miracle didn’t convince us to listen to him. The book of Romans says, **“he died for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification.”** This miracle bought and paid for our ticket out of hell and into heaven. This is what made us rich. This was the CONSEQUENCE of Jesus’ perfect ACTIONS. It was this miracle that completely fulfilled the law of God that we could not.

This is the very miracle that the Word of God contains. The miracle to make us believe this message. God’s Word is more than just a dusty book sitting on your coffee table, it’s more than just an out of the way app on your smartphone or tablet. It’s the living and active Word of God,

feeding our souls and giving us life into eternity. This is what makes us rich. And it is this message that so many in our world do not know.

Let us put aside the notion that a miracle will change people's hearts and get them into church, it won't, but God's Word will. A miracle won't magically fill up these church seats. You will, by inviting and sharing God's Word. Studies have shown that three out of every four guests that walk through a church door were invited by someone they knew. So where does that leave us? We have the most powerful and rich treasure in the Word of God. The Word of God that tells us about this Savior who died for us. If you don't believe it's power, then read more of it for yourself, discover this treasure you hold. So many in our world see charity as a good and wonderful thing, sharing with those less fortunate than yourself. What can be more charitable than sharing God's Word with those who do not have it?

Your ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES. Because of Jesus Christ, your consequences are no longer an eternity separated from God, but an eternity at God's side. But your ACTIONS STILL HAVE CONSEQUENCES. The actions you take in this life to share the precious treasure of God's Word will have consequences on other people's lives, their eternal lives. Amen.