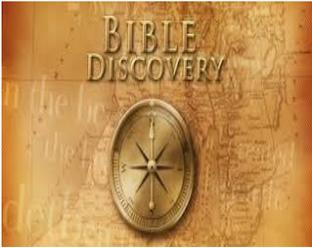


July 12, 2015

Luke 16:19-31

## I'd Rather Have Jesus



Why Jesus? Can't all religions direct us equally to God? Or is religion just the "opiate of the people" suggested for the digestion of the masses to keep them in line? How does Christianity – how does Jesus stand-alone so that we sing at the top of our lungs, *I'd rather have Jesus than anything*? First, Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. Parents desert us; spouses disappoint us; children set their own course; careers fade, relationships are strained, but our Lord is always with us, always encouraging us, always there for us, always God.

Not only is Jesus always there for us, but He chose to take our place. Think of the leper mentioned in Mark 1:40-45. As the leper came into town, knowing it was against the rules - the pain and isolation made him desperate – that and the sense that this Rabbi, Jesus was different, that Jesus wouldn't deny him what he longed for – even more than healing the chance to be touched, to be embraced, to be loved – it had been so long! The law said about contact with leprous people in Leviticus "*They must live in isolation in their place outside the camp*" it said. And so he did. But now this Rabbi had come to town with compassion – the leper had heard all about other healings, would he heal him, would he send him back to his wife, his family, would he give him back his life? "*Please,*" the leper pleaded. "*If you are willing, can you heal me?*" "*I'm willing,*" the Rabbi said, reaching out His hand. Think of that - the holy man touched him! And his skin . . . it was healed! With those simple words the leper's life was changed – but so was the life of Jesus. The news spread like the wild fires out in Saskatchewan and soon Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but instead was restricted to the lonely, isolated spaces. Look what happened: Jesus healed a man of leprosy, restoring him back into the community, while Jesus Himself was eventually banished from it. Jesus touched the untouchable, and wound up being the one ostracized. Writer Sheridan Voysey calls it "*an astonishing act of trading places - an astonishing act of love*".

With such compassion, with such love, why doesn't everyone sing "I'd rather have Jesus"? Another author, Joe Jones says in an article in October 2014, "*What I notice about unbelievers is that they're not prepared to follow the truth wherever it may lead.*" This is noticeable in the life of the rich man found in our story this morning. Every phrase adds to the luxury in which he lived. He dressed in fine clothes, feasted to the point of gluttony on gourmet, exotic and costly dishes. He did this every day! In a country where common people were fortunate if they ate meat once in a week and actually worked six days a week and would have benefited from the nourishment, this rich man is a figure of over indulgent selfish greed. Nowhere do we read that he had consideration for anyone save himself; nowhere does he seek truth and understanding; nowhere does he search for God. He misses the essence of God's law which draws us to the Father's grace.

Conversely just outside the rich man's gate is Lazarus. The name means literally, "*God is my help*". He's a beggar, covered in ulcerated sores. So helpless is he that he couldn't ward off the street dogs, the unclean animals, who pestered him. Lazarus gives us the picture of helpless and abject poverty so unlike the world of the rich, self-indulgent man who lived a short distance from him.

It's difficult to have any pity for anyone who could ignore the plight of someone in such terrific need as Lazarus but pity him we must. The rich man, as such of his hilt, had an ailment also – that ailment was sin. The rich man had no objection to Lazarus receiving the bread crumbs from his table just as long as he didn't have to see it. Therefore the sin was not that he had never noticed Lazarus or his need; the sin was that he thought it perfectly natural Lazarus should lie in pain and suffer through hunger and anguish while he, in his opulent wealth wallowed in luxury. As someone said, it's not what the rich man did that got him into hell; it's what he didn't do. The sin was that even as he looked upon the suffering and need of the world around him, he felt no answering call to pity, no sense of

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compassion within his heart, no longing to quell the pain and suffering of others. His landing in hell was the punishment of the man who never cared.

We must take care that we do not suffer from the same ailment in our hearts. We must look at those who suffer from sin while believing they're good and wholesome and blessed; we must look at those who think they're living well while ignoring the sin in their lives. We must heed the warning of Christ as He wrote to the Church at Laodicea, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." [Revelation 3:17]

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In response to those around us who set themselves secure in their own keeping, let us reach out the compassion of our Lord and show them that our God is merciful and there is no sin that is greater than His love. Let us continually pray for those who are lost, and the more horrible they are, the more wretched their deeds, the more ignorant they are of their sinful state, let us reach out all the more knowing the great need they have of His abounding grace.

Why do we need Jesus? Why must we care for the world around us and for those who are on the fast track to destruction? Because Jesus loved us when we were sinners too! We are not so different – only forgiven as we are saved in Christ. Oh, the wonderful good news that "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." [John 3:17] The person and work of Jesus is Christianity. If you take Jesus out of Christianity you have nothing, you miss the grace our Heavenly Father has bestowed on us, and miss the message of forgiveness we're to carry to all about us. Renowned pastor and theologian John Stott writes:

*"The church lies at the center of the purpose of God. God's purpose, conceived in a past eternity, being worked out in history, to be perfected in a future eternity, is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to call out a people for himself to build his church."*

It's with such compassion George Beverly Shea has sung words originally penned by Rhea Miller. It was George's mother who left a copy of Miller's poem on the family piano in their home in New York City. George Beverly Shea later wrote:



*"Instead of practicing the hymn I had intended to play that Sunday morning in Father's church, I turned to a poem that Mother had placed on the piano. Melody just seemed to form around the words. When I had played and sung it through for the first time, Mother came from the kitchen where she had overheard. She wrapped both arms around my shoulders and placed her wet cheek next to mine. In church that morning, I sang for the first time, **"I'd Rather Have Jesus."***

Yet many who would sing: "I'd rather not have Jesus ..... Not if it means my life-style and my fun times have to change." Or, "I'd rather not have Jesus if I have to accept Jesus is the way, the truth and the life" - all which will leave me unpopular with my friends. Today, questions are raised as the world searches for meaning to life. They're asking, "Why am I here?" "What is life and all about?" Many seek those answers in the wrong places to find Jesus. The good news is Jesus is always patiently waiting. Jesus knocks at the door of every heart and asks them to invite Him in.



That is until it is too late. It's too late when the grim tide of time closes over our lives and we are standing on the day of account before the Lord. For the rich man and Lazarus the scene changes and the roles reverse. Lazarus in his death has the angels carry him to Abraham's side signifying his coming to heaven while we're told the rich man was buried and then from hell cries out to Abraham for help. "Father Abraham, have pit 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." The very act of kindness which the rich man never considered giving to Lazarus, he now cries for himself. Selfish to the end! When such offer is refused along with a great explanation of the separation between heaven and hell, the rich man then begs for his brothers to have Lazarus return to warn them lest they succumb to his sentence. Listen to

his final plea: “*If someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.*” It seems hard that his request was refused. But it’s the plain fact that if men possess the truth of God’s Word, and if, wherever they look, there is sorrow and suffering, and if, they are content to deny God, and His compassion, and His grace despite the sufficient evidence of God’s wonderful love, and if none of this moves them to action to receive and accept Jesus as Lord – to decide I’d rather have Jesus – than there is nothing will change them. And of course Jesus did return from the dead.

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Joseph Stowell, president of Moody Bible College, tells of having dinner with Billy Graham. Dr. Stowell asked him: “Of all your experiences in ministry, what have you enjoyed most?” “Was it you time spent with presidents or heads of state, or...? Billy Graham stopped him and responded: “None of that - by far the greatest joy of my life has been my fellowship with Jesus. Hearing Him speak to me, having Him guide me, sensing His presence with me and His power through me. This has been the highest pleasure of my life!”

There’s only one God, and one mediator who can reconcile God and people – the Son, Christ Jesus. If we’re blessed to call Him our Saviour we can do no less than to commit ourselves to have Jesus over anything else. But what’s more, we must calculate the extent of our love through the terrible warning that the sin of those who reject Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour, the only begotten Son of God, is not so much cast by how terrible they live their lives but solely on the matter of their rejection of Jesus – in other words for what they haven’t done. They haven’t said yes to salvation through the grace of Christ which alone can save them from hell. My prayer is that you have not chosen to be among those who will one day find it too late. If Jesus is not your Saviour, what are you waiting for? Have you heard the knocking at your heart? Jesus is waiting! Let Him come in today! You’ll be glad you did.

***Give us a call at 1-519-317-8659 or through our email on this website.***

Blessings,

***Pastor Dave***