

“Listening to the Resurrected One”

Luke 16:19 - 17:1 ¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In hell, {23 Greek Hades} where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.' ²⁵ "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. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' ²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ³⁰ "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹ "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.'"

“Listening to the Resurrected One”

Have you ever encountered people who won't listen? It really makes us feel not respected when people don't listen to you. Not listening comes in many forms. There was a girl I used to date that whenever I tried to share what was going on with me she would immediately start to talk about herself and her problems. It took about a year and a half of my trying to be heard before I just quit sharing. That relationship lasted 4 years and then we got married for 10. Sometimes we find not being heard and not having to share ourselves easier than having to do the real work of having to communicate. Another way we don't listen is when people communicate their needs to us in such a way as to say, "I need this from you" and we acknowledge that we hear them but don't do what's asked of us. That kind of not listening is flat out betrays trust.

I think trust is why listening is so important in every kind of relationship we find ourselves in from the big ones like marriage and friendship and the little ones like simply acknowledging the presence of the cashier at the grocery store. Listening is a very basic form of compassion. Even when it is a stranger, when we feel that someone has heard us we also feel like we've been shown compassion and respect. That's why it is important to look people in the eye and smile even when it's the stock person at the grocery store who thinks he's doing the world a favour by stocking all the items with the French labels facing out.

Back in my seminary days I took a few pastoral care courses that were simply about listening. Believe me listening is a very hard skill to learn. No one is a natural at it. Even now after all the classes and years of experience I still wreak at letting people know that they've been heard. It's very easy too. All you

“Listening to the Resurrected One”

got to do is actually listen and then briefly summarize back what you've heard resisting all the urges to give advice or to share an episode from your own life, you know, all those little ways we so instinctively do to try to twist a conversation around to being all about me.

Listening is important. Indeed the reason this rich man was being tormented in Hades rather than standing at the side of Father Abraham was his failure to listen; not listening to Moses and the Prophets and therefore not listening to God. His not listening exhibited itself in his ignoring poor Lazarus who daily lay outside his door covered in sores and hungry. If you were to read the first five books of the Bible and then the prophets you would quickly learn that listening to God involves taking care of the poor in your midst.

Yet, there was more going on here than just some rich guy ignoring a poor guy who daily lay outside his door. All we've got to do is walk a few blocks in downtown Toronto and we all become guilty of that. The problem was that one child of Abraham ignoring the needs of another child of Abraham completely tars the revelation of himself that God wanted to give the world by calling the Old Testament nation of Israel into existence beginning with Abraham. The way of faith that God started with Abraham would be God's way of saving humanity from its wickedness. God called Abraham and told him to go to a land that God would show him for God was giving him a land and making him to be a great nation through which all nations would be blessed. Abraham went and his descendents became a great tribe in the land of Palestine. In time the descendents of Abraham found themselves enslaved in Egypt and God delivered them with a mighty hand. They agreed to let God be their God and they promised to be God's people and to live the way he wanted them to live. Thus, God gave them the Ten Commandments which if they made these commandments the core of their community life they would not only be a blessing to all nations they would in fact demonstrate that our God is the only true God who is steadfastly loving and faithful and an abundant provider. The nation that worshipped the Lord God would be abundantly provided for, always protected, and their community life would be just and beautifully rich in neighborliness. This rich man, this rich child of Abraham ignoring Lazarus, another child of Abraham in his great need was an utter denial by the rich man of his own claim to be a child of Abraham and thus of being one of the people of God. This is why there was an uncrossable chasm between Hades and the being at the side of Abraham. The man in his greed cut himself off from being of the family of Abraham.

Even in Hades the rich man was only concerned with his own concerns. First, he doesn't notice that Lazarus has been healed. He just wants Lazarus to bring him water even after he let Lazarus lay hungry at his own door. Then he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them, but Abraham refused saying, "They have Moses and the Prophets to listen too," which they weren't doing. The rich man insists saying that if someone from the dead would warn them they would surely listen. Abraham sternly says, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." Jesus told this story to the Pharisees who were very religious people yet they loved money. They like the rich man were not listening to Moses

“Listening to the Resurrected One”

and the Prophets. If they were they would have worked at being a just and faithful community that reflected the image of their God. They would have shared their wealth rather than just getting richer by means of twisting the Law to their own advantage and calling themselves blessed because of their legalistic obedience. History shows that because of their love of money and power the Pharisees did not listen rightly to Moses and the Prophets and even the good news of Jesus' resurrection couldn't convince them. The Pharisees led the drive to persecute the early church.

That's enough talking about rich Pharisees from 2,000 years ago. What about us who have heard the voice of the resurrected one? What does listening look like for us? First, we too cannot ignore Moses and the Prophets. Because we have heard the good news of Jesus death and resurrection with ears opened by the Holy Spirit we have been adopted into the family of Abraham and we as a church share the same blessing/burden that ancient Israel had as the people of God. We are to take the Ten Commandments and the prophets' call to faithfulness and justice very seriously so that people can see what God is like. Jesus said, “It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law” (v. 17). I would encourage you all to pick up your Bibles and read from Moses and the Prophets and let yourselves be addressed by them for by the gift of the Holy Spirit to you as those who share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ you have been given ears to hear them and hearts that are hungry for the words of the Word that are in the Bible. Don't starve yourselves needlessly.

In 1 Timothy Paul gives us some very practical direction as well. Contrary to most TV preachers Paul says that godliness is not a means to financial gain. Rather, godliness goes hand in hand with contentment. We brought nothing into this world and we can't take anything with us. Therefore, having enough is enough and in that realization one finds contentment. Love of money is the root of all kinds of evils and Paul urges indeed begs us to flee from all the materialism and consumerism that surrounds us and rather pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. God has not called us to be his people so that we can act like the culture around us. He has called us to be faithful to him, to fight the good fight of faith keeping to our confession and acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. God will provide us with everything we need therefore we must in turn strive to be rich in good deeds, generous, and willing to share. Lay up treasure for yourselves in heaven. It may seem unimaginable but the good that we do now in this age and life will persist into the coming age when we too will be resurrected and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Friends, take hold of the life that is truly life, take hold of your relationship with God that is freely given to you in Christ Jesus. Pray, read Scripture, come to Bible study, initiate a means of outreach that we can all share in as a church, increase your generosity to others. Turn your backs on the materialism and consumerism that seeks to enslave you and be the free people of God for which he has purchased you at the cost of Jesus' own life. Amen.