

## Christians “Care”fully Consider the Consequences!

A sermon based on Luke 16:19-31.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Think about the consequences.” “Think about what’ll happen if you do that.” I’m sure you’ve heard those words, or something similar to that, before. What’s their intent? Right, they’re meant to get you thinking about something before you just go ahead and do it. They’re meant to get you to think about how your actions might affect someone else...because, everything we do has consequences, either good or bad. Even Mara knows when she’s done something wrong, something she shouldn’t, and she’ll put herself into timeout.

Often times, it’s important to think about the consequences; it can serve as a gentle encouragement to deter us from doing something wrong. Well, as Christians, as believers in Jesus, we get to consider the consequences of everything we do in our lives. Whether it’s how we use our money, our words, our jobs, our families, our thoughts, our health, our spiritual health, everything we do has consequences.

Today, Jesus is asking us to do just that, to carefully consider the consequences...of what you believe, how you live, and how you will be judged. As we work through this section about the rich man and poor Lazarus, Jesus has these truths for our consideration....that as you believe, so will you live...as you live, so you will die and be judged, and as you are judged, so you will remain.

So, the first truth to consider? As you believe, so you will live. Now, if you quick glance over our verses from Luke again, you might notice we’re not explicitly told what was in their hearts...what the rich man and poor Lazarus individually believed. I don’t think we need to be told.

The easiest way to know what was in their hearts was the consequences of their faith...how they lived. For the rich man, his life was pretty telling. Not in the fact that he was rich or wealthy...there wasn’t anything wrong with that. Wealth can certainly be a gift and blessing from God.

But his goal in life was set too low. He honestly believed the important thing in life was to enjoy the good things life has to offer. He believed in himself. His god was the god of this world...the god of goods...the god of money. The rich man loved his wealth more than doing the will of God, which in this particular case, was helping those in need. I mean, he had an opportunity sitting right outside his front gate in Lazarus, a beggar, a sick man, someone who would have been content to eat any scraps from the rich man’s table...not even leftovers, but probably what got thrown into the trash. But it seems the rich man couldn’t even spare that. What do you think his heart looked like?

And on the other side of the fence (or gate) was Lazarus, a man who likely led a rather miserable life, where the only kind of relief he ever got was the dogs licking his sores. Although very little is said about the life of Lazarus, his name which means “trust in God,” that tells us enough about his faith and also his life.

But, the final proof of their faith (or lack thereof)? Consider the consequences...what happened after they lived...as you live, so you will die and be judged.

This is how we know what was in their hearts. Both men died, and at their death, Jesus' words from earlier in Luke rang true for both, ***"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied...woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry."***

That only begins to describe the sharp reversal of fortunes both men experienced in death, doesn't it? Lazarus, downtrodden, poor, miserable his entire life, now at the side of Abraham, enjoying the riches beyond compare in heaven, satisfying his hunger at the feast of the Lamb who was slain. And the rich man, rich no more, in complete torment. This man, who in life couldn't even bring himself to share his scraps, who didn't even care to consider the consequences of how he lived in his luxury and what he did with it, now in death, in agony, in hell, reduced to a beggar who couldn't even satisfy his eternal thirst with a single drop of water.

No, his punishment, his judgment was final. Consider the last consequence, the last truth: as you are judged, so you will remain. The formerly rich man knew. In a heartbeat, the greedy, the unfaithful, went from extravagance to begging for mercy. But it was too late. Not even his wealth could buy him an ounce of relief.

Listen to what Abraham said, ***"Son, remember that in your lifetime you received good things...but now you are in agony. 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."*** His judgment was final...it would not...could not change.

Sons and daughters...brothers and sisters...remember. Carefully consider yourselves. Because the truths that applied to the rich man and Lazarus, in life and in death, they apply to us as well.

So first? Consider your faith...consider your life. Because, just as with the two men in Jesus' words today, the same is true of us, that as you and I believe, so you and I will live.

So, what do you believe? I don't have doubts about you and I differing there. We're here, where we confess we believe the same thing... the same faith in the Triune God who has blessed us with so much...life, health, material goods, family, friends, a Savior, faith in that Savior, and so on.

But, maybe the more important question needs to be, what do you believe about how God wants you to use those blessings...how he wants you to live this life? Or, in other words, does what you believe match up with the way that you live?

I mean, we can see an obvious stewardship connection here. God's Word tells us how the ***"earth is the Lord's and everything in it,"*** and he entrusts a bit of that to each one of us to use wisely, prudently, how he wants us to. And he tells us how he wants us to in his Word, with encouragements to ***"give what he/she has decided in [their] heart to give (to God), for God loves a cheerful giver,"*** that ***"if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever,"*** that ***"by this kind of hard work we must help the weak (and poor), remembering the words of the Lord Jesus himself: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"***

But our stewardship goes beyond just our earthy riches and how they use them, though that's certainly a big part of Jesus' whole point here. It involves everything about us, everything about our lives, everything we think, say, or do. And in that, God's Word tells us, ***"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or***

***vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.***

So, considering that, are you really the rich man or poor Lazarus? And do you care? Do you care to live as God wants you to live? Are you interested in that? Because friends, what we say, what we think, what we do...all of that (the way we live) reflects what's in our hearts, what we truly believe. And, truth be told, sometimes what we say and think and do doesn't match up with what God wants. The rich man may have loved his wealth than following the will of God (and you might, too), but, ultimately, we love ourselves more than following the will of God and love living for ourselves more than living how God wants us to.

But what we sometimes fail to consider is this: as you and I live, so you and I will die and be judged.

You see, putting our trust and seeking our pleasure in the things of this life, in satisfying the cravings of our sinful nature can cause us to forget about God...about living for God. And while that might seem to fly here (as in, we don't always suffer immediate consequences of our selfishness and sinfulness here), it won't once we die. Living for today and putting our trust in the things of this life, as the rich man did, that results in suffering the eternal punishment in the life which is to come. That's Jesus' stern message for us today.

Our Formula of Concord confesses the same, ***“The reason some are not saved is as follows: They do not listen to God’s Word at all, but willfully despise it, plug their ears, and harden their hearts. In this way they block the ordinary way for the Holy Spirit so He cannot perform His work in them. Or, when they have heard God’s Word, they make light of it again and ignore it. But their wickedness is responsible for this (that they perish), not God or His election.”***

That kind of eternal suffering and punishment, once there, can't be changed...because, as you are judged, so will you remain.

In a heartbeat, those greedy for temporary pleasures will go from extravagance to begging for mercy. But it is too late. The chasm between heaven and hell is too great. It's not just a harmless "timeout." There's not an opportunity to change your mind after you die. There's no appeals process...no second chances. The book of Hebrews reminds us, ***“man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”***

But what we deserve, what we have been working towards our entire sin-filled lives, Christians, those aren't the consequences we get. Consider these words of God. Yes, ***“just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, [but] Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”***

Christians, consider the care of Christ for you in his life, death, and resurrection....how, for every time we've been careless in how we use our earthly blessings and even how we follow God's will, Jesus always and carefully made sure he lived according to God's Word. He did that so he could offer the only kind of sacrifice that could possibly rescue you and me from the same eternal fate as the rich man here...the sacrifice of his perfect life and his precious blood, given on the cross, paying for our sins.

And Jesus rose, came back from the dead, not so that we might repent of our sins or instantly put our faith in him, as the rich man in our gospel imagined would happen if Lazarus were to do so. We know how later in Jesus' ministry, a Lazarus would rise from the dead, but the result would be a deepening of the animosity against Jesus. And the resurrection of Jesus himself did not bring about mass conversions. No, Jesus rose to open that door to eternal life for us, so that when we poor and miserable sinners die, we, having been made rich through Jesus' saving work, through his grace, we too will stand by Abraham's side and enjoy the incomparable riches of heaven with Lazarus. That's our final judgment!

That was in our best interest, so God, in his love and care, changed our eternal consequences. In his love and care, he's changed us as well. In his love and care, he's given us Moses and the Prophets and all of Scripture. And in that love and care, he's caused us to listen to those words, words through which he's worked the gift of saving faith in each of us.

And Christians, that saving faith changes us. It enables us and moves us to be more considerate and caring in our lives. It moves us to consider the consequences, to think about how what we do affects our relationship with God and with others...to think about how we can live more (and really, always) for Jesus, whether it's with our money, or if it's our thoughts, our words, whatever we do.

Because it's true, how we believe, that's how we will live. And when what we do doesn't match up with what we believe, then we have God's Word, which moves us to repent and remember just how rich in Christ God has been towards us.

And finally, how we live, in Christ now, we are assured we will die in him and be judged with his righteousness as our everlasting garment...with the crown of life our eternal reward.

Friends, Christians we carefully consider the consequences, and here's what we conclude. We care more about the riches waiting for us in heaven than storing up wealth for ourselves here. Seeking the things that last, we care about the people God puts here in lives and we care for them. And we find comfort in knowing that when this life is over, we will be judged...because of Jesus, our judgment will be eternal glory. And there, we will remain. Amen.