

Sermon Trinity 1 2021

June 6, 2021

Luke 16: 19-31

In the Name T of Jesus. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson that was previously read, especially these words: **“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’”**

The call to hear Moses and the Prophets is a stark one, isn't it? In the story, it's even said that if the people won't be convinced by Moses and the Prophets, they won't be convinced if someone rises from the dead. I think we all assume that's not the case, though, don't we? We all assume that if just the right sign is given, then faith will come. If the words are spoken in just the right way, then faith will come. If the right explanation is laid out, then faith will come. But that's not what those words say, is it?

And as I was teaching Bible Class this Wednesday, I had one of those moments where I could understand why. However, before I get into that, I should clarify. What is Abraham talking about when he says, “Moses and the Prophets?” Hopefully, it's clear, but it's good to just make sure. Obviously, Abraham isn't saying that Moses and the Prophets are standing right in front of them talking, so what's it mean? It's talking about what we call the Old Testament. That's what I was marveling about this week. We were reading Daniel in Bible Class this week and we were looking at the prophecies in Chapters 7 and 2 and in those there is this description of four kingdoms from the time of Daniel. You see that these kingdoms are Babylon where King Nebuchadnezzar was reigning when Daniel interpreted his vision, then the Kingdom of the Medians and Persians after Babylon. After Persia it says Ionia, which is Greece, and a kingdom after that. That kingdom in history, we see to be Rome. And listen to how it describes that kingdom in Daniel Chapter 2: **“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”** In other words in the days of this fourth kingdom, that is in the days of the Roman Empire, God would “set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.” And He did just that. Do you know how? In the death and the resurrection of Jesus. This One crowned with thorns on the cross was the One whose life, death, and resurrection merited exaltation that He would reign over a kingdom never to be destroyed. In other words, God the Father gave to God the Son—the Ancient of Days as He's called in Daniel, and Jesus as we call Him—the Father gave Him an eternal Kingdom because He lived perfectly, died for our sins, and so won forgiveness for all of them for

you and me. And when did this happen? During the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire. Brothers and sisters, that is Moses and the Prophets proving its fullness. And it proves how we should all be listening to Moses and the Prophets.

Of course as I say that, I'm meaning it a tad differently than Abraham in the parable. Sure, I mean what we call the Old Testament too, like he did. After all, I haven't said it in a while, but it's like I often say: The Old Testament is the context for the New Testament and the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old. We should certainly not ignore the Old Testament. In fact, we should read it Christologically. We often just read it like it's history. And it is, and that's extremely important. It is the story of our spiritual ancestors as we also are sons of Abraham by faith in the promises of God, just as the Jews were by familial descent. That's important. But it's more than just history, it's theology. It tells us about God. In fact, it's Christology. It tells us about Jesus.

I know I've told the story before, but I was given such an insight to this by a professor in seminary. He said that as you read the fall into sin and the promise in Genesis 3:15 that there will be this offspring of woman who will crush Satan, that is, who will crush the head of the serpent, you see in Genesis 4:1 where when Cain is born, Eve says, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." At least that's how it's always translated. In the Hebrew, it literally says, "I have gotten a man, the LORD." When Cain is born, Eve thinks she's given birth to the Messiah.

Of course, Cain proves that he's not the Messiah in an indisputable fashion when he murders Abel. But the insight is given. When you see someone come on the scene in the Old Testament, that should be the question: "Is THIS the Messiah?" Cain? No, murderer. Noah? No, gets drunk and is defiled in his nakedness. Abraham? Well, he's quite the important character, right? He's key in this story for today. Is he the Messiah? No, he jumps on God's promise and tries to fulfill it by his own hands, sleeping with Hagar to give birth to Ishmael, rather than wait for Isaac from Sarah. And so it goes... Moses? No, hits the rock instead of just speaking the word. Samson? No, too arrogant. David? No, that whole fiasco with Bathsheba. Solomon? No, brings false worship into play... etc., etc., etc. Until you have silence from God for hundreds of years. Then, finally, you get Gabriel coming to Zechariah and telling him that he and his wife Elizabeth will give birth to the Elijah who will pave the way for another. Then Gabriel appears again to Mary. And there it is. The Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth. Born in Bethlehem, just like it said He would be. Crucified, cursed to hang on a tree like Moses said. Pierced for our iniquities and by His stripes we are healed, like Isaiah said.

So, yes, when I say we should listen to Moses and the Prophets, I definitely mean that we should listen to the Old Testament. I marvel at how the New Testament does this, Paul and Peter and all preaching Christ from the Old Testament. But also, that we understand that to mean God's Word altogether, Old Testament and New Testament. And what does that Word tell us?

Well, look at what this says about this God, this Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that this Old Testament, this collection of Moses and the Prophets would be so attentively fulfilled. Look at what it says about this God that at the very outset, the very inception of sin, you get the promise of a Savior.

You know, it's so often said that the Old Testament God is this angry wrathful God, and the New Testament God is loving. But you see the same God throughout. You see this God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that He could rescue them from the tyranny of death, the suffering of sin, the dominion of the Devil. But you see this God promise this all the way back in Genesis Three and follow through on that promise.

It's in this, then that we see that this God is love, as John tells us in his first letter. Of course, we also see in this portion of that letter that we have this morning that that love engenders in us a love for our neighbor. I love that section there. In fact, my wife and I even had this as a portion of our reading for our wedding, **"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him... We love because he first loved us."** Now, it's noteworthy that John has explained just before this section what that love of God is for us: **"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."** That love that God shows us is this Christ atoning for our sins. And what does that do? That gives birth to a love in us that pours out for our neighbor.

Now, I think it's so important that we define what that love looks like. In our day as we say God is love, we've created an idea of love that has no grounding apart from what we feel must be right. As I always say, if I feel it's right to leave my wife because I feel love for another woman, then who are you to question that? But is that love according to what God says? No. How do you know? What do His commands tell you? **You shall not commit adultery.** Man has been joined to his wife and the two have become one flesh. What God has joined together let man not separate. This God has told you how to love. Even more importantly, He has told you of His love for you.

And that ties in so well with our lesson for today. Not only does Abraham tell the rich man that the brothers ought to listen to Moses and the Prophets, and through that, not only does Jesus tell us that we ought to hear that Word, and that Word ought to be sufficient for us, but this message is given in the context of a call to mercy.

You see, I think we have to make this connection to the Word and the call to love in light of this story. This story about how this rich man should have shown mercy and care to Lazarus. In fact, it has to be addressed holistically because on the one hand we can just talk about the Word and the need to heed it. On the other hand, we could separate the imagery of the parable from the Word and just talk about mercy, but these have to go hand in hand—like I’m hopefully doing. Hopefully, you can see that as we talk about the Word, as we talk about this beautiful collection of writings, divinely given words that tell us of the Christ from cover to cover, that this also calls us to love like the rich man did not.

Now, to be clear, it could look like the rich man goes to hell for living a lavish lifestyle, and Lazarus goes to heaven because he had it bad. The way Abraham phrases it in the story even lends to that. And in view of that we have to acknowledge the call to mercy. But that’s where we also look at what Moses and the Prophets say altogether. That’s where we look at what John says as we did, about God first loving us. That’s where we look at the words of Jesus, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”** Christians, this world needs that mercy. This world needs you to show that mercy. Do so.

But even still, most of all, don’t forget—or even in the midst of showing that mercy—don’t forget the most important thing, as Lazarus suffered in this life, but was shown mercy by the Lord, even sending the angels to carry his soul to Abraham’s bosom, so also He has already shown mercy to you. You were His enemy in sin, but He has forgiven you of it in Christ. And Christ Himself has tended to you, shown you mercy as He has washed you clean of that sin, as He feeds you His loving forgiveness with His body and blood, as He speaks forgiveness into your ears. Mercy upon mercy upon mercy.

Yes, we have Moses and the Prophets, let us hear them. Let us hear of how even from the fall into sin they tell us of this loving God, and how this loving God comes to us even still and forgives us by that atoning sacrifice on the cross two thousand years ago. Let us hear them tell us of this love that has no match. And may that always be sufficient for us by more mercy upon mercy. Amen.