

Coming Face to Face With Eternity

Building Core Strength

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The story is told of two farmers who attended different churches on Sundays, but who compared notes their pastors at the country café on Monday mornings. And one the men had continual tales of woe about their church's pastor because Sunday after Sunday after Sunday the man preached about hell. And so on Monday his friend would say, "What did you pastor talk about yesterday?" And the answer was always the same. "He talked about hell. He talked about hell. He talked about hell."

Finally the members of the church got fed up with that pastor and they went through the process of dismissing him. But they went a few months without a pastor and finally called a man they believed they liked better. And so they moved he and his family to town and had the installation service. And then the next Sunday the pastor gave his first sermon to this brand new congregation of his and, of course, on Monday the man's friend wanted to know how things went.

And the farmer went on and on about how wonderful it was, how much they appreciated and liked the new pastor. And eventually the man asked, "Well, what did he preach on?"

And the other farmer said, "Well, he preached about hell."

And the man said, "Wait a minute, that is why you dismissed your last pastor."

The farmer said, "Well, the difference is the last guy acted like he knew we were all going there and he was really happy about it."

Now the point of all that is there is different ways of talking about the issue of our eternal destiny. On the one hand would be people in churches who would never ever touch the subject, because in their minds the worst sin imaginable in this culture is to be accused of being a hellfire and brimstone church. But on the other hand are those who handle the topic in a way that is proud and insensitive like the pastor in this story that I just mentioned. Somewhere in the middle is the church that preaches and teaches the whole counsel of God, all that the Scripture says on every topic that it touches, but does so in a way that is careful to remember that real people are involved in this discussion. And our eternal destiny, what happens after we die to ourselves and our loved ones, that is about a

sensitive a topic as there is. And if there is ever a time to speak the truth in love, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:15, this is for sure.

With that mind, open your Bible this morning to Luke chapter 16. That is on page 61 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. You probably figured out that the next passage in our study in the gospel of Luke deals with the issue heaven and hell. And this is one of the many reasons that I like preaching and teaching verse by verse and chapter by chapter through extended portions of the Word of God, so no one accuse me or accuse us of just riding certain hobby horses. And we talk about what we talk about because it is the next thing in the next. And I understand there are certain aspects of what we are going to study this morning that are very difficult to consider, but reality is not always pleasant. Do you know that? And wise people face facts while they have the opportunity to do something about the outcome.

If a tornado is coming, you want somebody to sound the siren. And you don't like to hear it, but you ignore it at your own peril.

Now while this is challenging, on the other hand, I can't think of a subject that would be more appropriate in light of where we are in this particular year. And I say that for a couple of reasons. Remember, our church's theme this year is building core strength. We have been talking about that from all sorts of different perspectives, but around this verse, Psalm 138:3.

“On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.”¹

You need all that the Word of God teaches on all topics in order to be there, bold with strength in your soul. And we are emphasizing this in three special ways this year. One, shoring up foundational areas in our walk with Christ personally and also our church ministries that comprise the basis of godliness and effective community service and focusing on the fundamentals of the faith. And we have said, especially because there is so much development going on all around this church right now. We want to seize those opportunities and we want to be strong in order to accomplish the ministry that God has sovereignly provided for us this year and in the coming year.

And then, secondly, planning and praying for the construction of Faith West and the successful launch of a cluster of new ministries in West Lafayette. We have to be strong in order to do that. We have to be armed in our hearts with all that the Word of God says, pleasant or not, in order to be committed to that. And then if Christ carries his coming, preparing for the next round of ministry dreaming as we embark on a new strategic planning process next year.

I really do believe that each one of those emphasis can be positively impacted by the truth of Luke 16 and this parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

But then there is also this issue of fall readiness. I have been talking about that a lot this

¹ Psalm 138:3.

last month or so, understanding that in just a few weeks in reality it becomes new years for us as individuals and certainly as a church. And what I mean by that is school starts and people become more open than most times of the year to consider visiting a church or to getting themselves and their families back in church or maybe in church for the first time. And the question every last one of us needs to be answering right now is: Are we going to be ready? Are our ministries going to be well staffed? Are they going to be well trained, ready to go? And will all of us in view of this particular time of year with personal and ministerial expectancy.

It is a really important phrase. I hope that is resonating in your heart right now, personal and ministerial expectancy. In other words, believing that God is alive. Do you believe that? And he is at work in the lives of people all around us and he has given us the privilege to be involved in that redemptive mission if we choose to organize our lives and organize our priorities around things that matter most.

If the answer to all that is yes, well, this passage might just be the reality check all of us need to be sure that we are doing our parts to be ready for what the Lord has in store for us this fall.

We are talking this morning about building core strength by coming face to face with eternity. As I read this text, I would encourage you to begin to look for three principles to help us give our lives to things that really matter the most.

In Luke 16 beginning in verse 19:

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house — for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

But Abraham *said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’

But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’

But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’²

And we are talking about building core strength by coming face to face with eternity. With the time we have remaining, let’s talk about three principles to help us give our lives to things that matter most. We want that for this fall, don’t we? Absolutely. Absolutely. Let’s let this text help us.

And, first of all, for some, their eternal destiny will be a grand reversal. Anybody who believes that the conditions they are experiencing today are an automatic indicator of what things will be like for them in eternity needs to think long and hard about the reality of this text and not for everybody, but for some there is a coming grand reversal. And that means for some men and women one second after they die is going to be dramatically better than anything they ever experienced on this earth. For others what happens in eternity will be dramatically worse. In fact, that is undoubtedly the understatement of the day, but that is one of the central points of this text.

Now let’s break it down. The passage begins by talking about the rich man’s life. It was pretty good, wasn’t it? He habitually dressed in purple and fine linen. And purple was the color of royalty. And this fine linen wouldn’t irritate his soft skin. And notice he wasn’t just dressed that way on special occasions. He did this habitually, being dressed to the nines was part of his life every day. And the text goes on to say:

“...joyously living in splendor every day.”³

It is talking especially about the way the man ate. That is why the New King James version translates that particular verse:

“...he fared sumptuously every day.”⁴

Think about the finest meal you ever ate. Think about how much that cost you or somebody else who bought it for you. But that one sticks out in your mind, huh? That was this rich man’s life every day. Every day he was rich for sure.

² Luke 16:19-31.

³ Luke 16:19.

⁴ Ibid.

Now let's be clear about something. Does that make it wrong? Absolutely not. It is not wrong to have nice clothes. It is not wrong to be able to afford nice meals. There is nothing particular spiritual about being poor and there is nothing particularly wicked about being rich. But please remember the context. If you have been with us the last couple of weeks you know that what Luke has been talking to his friend Theophilus about, examples of people who squandered their riches on things that were not going to matter in eternity, like the prodigal son.

“And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate.”⁵

He didn't care about anybody but himself.

Or last week that fascinating text about the unjust steward.

“Now He was also saying to the disciples, ‘There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions.’”⁶

That is the context of what we are talking about this morning, people who have squandered their riches.

You may remember that incredible plot twist from last week with this unjust steward. When he realized he was about to be fired he brought several of his master's creditors together and he quickly reduced their bills so that in the future—that was the key to that whole thing—in the future when he lost his position, then he would have friends because of what he had done. And his master who was a wicked man himself actually commended him. Why? Because he was... remember? Shrewd, someone who thought about the future and then Jesus actually held that man up as an example to you and me, not obviously because he condoned stealing or condones embezzlement, but because people like you and me have every reason in the world to be especially shrewd with whatever God has entrusted to us, because we have our eyes on eternity. We have access to the ultimate long range view. And that is why Jesus said, “For the sons of this age, unbelieving people, are more shrewd in relation to their own kind, like the unjust manager to his wicked master are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than people like us, for the sons of light.”

See, not for everybody, but for some there is a coming grand reversal and the issue before the house is: What evidence is there that you are a shrewd person? Because you are investing your time, you are investing your giftedness, you are investing your financial resources in a matter that is truly going to count in eternity. Instead of squandering what you have been given, you are wisely investing it in ministry to people.

⁵ Luke 15:13.

⁶ Luke 16:1.

Now one more important piece of this puzzle. This rich man clearly considered himself to be part of God's family. And I say that because he repeatedly referred to Abraham as his father, meaning he had been around biblical teaching. He knew about this matter of shrewdness regarding what God had entrusted to you. And that is not some ethereal concept that can't be tested. The New Testament would later say things like this.

"But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"⁷

You could say Abraham is your father all day long, but if your works say otherwise, that is what reveals the truth. That is why James said:

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.⁸

One of the questions we ought to keep in the back of our minds is: Did this rich man ever had an opportunity to invest his resources in a way that was shrewd? And did he seize that opportunity or not? And what does that say about his true spiritual condition whether he said he was a follower of God or not? And how was that revelation confirmed in his eternal destiny?

Now let's pan the camera over to the other side for a moment. Think about Lazarus' life on earth. And I realize if you are new to studying the Bible that might be confusing. The name Lazarus was very common in the Bible. This has nothing to do with the man that Jesus raised on another occasion from the dead. It is actually very unusual for a person to be named in a parable. There may be a couple of reasons why Jesus named this man in this parable. One might just be the sense of irony, because the name Lazarus means he whom God has helped. Think about that in light of his earthly description. He was a poor man the text says. Everything the rich man had he didn't. He was laid at this rich man's gate every day. The idea was that somebody had to carry him and place him at this rich man's gate in hope that somebody would show him mercy, somebody would show compassion, somebody would make an eternal investment in his care and therefore practice biblical shrewdness. He was also covered with sores, the text says, probably because of his lack of nutrition.

And it goes on to say he was longing to be fed with the crumbs that were falling from the rich man's table. So he knew about these banquets. Perhaps he could see into that part of the man's house. Certainly he could smell that sumptuous food cooking each day. And the description ends by saying even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

And please don't romanticize that. Oh, at least he had his puppies. To a Jew a dog was a filthy beast, ok? I am not trying to be offensive to anybody. Don't put that out on

⁷ 1 John 3:17.

⁸ James 2:15-17.

Facebook in criticism. I am just telling you. They thought dogs were filthy beasts. And this man didn't even have the strength to shoo these dogs away.

Now we know that the rich man had all sorts of material possessions, but he was anything but biblically shrewd. And we can't say, "Well, maybe the rich man didn't know him."

No, that actually may be why Lazarus is named in this parable, because later in the passage the rich man demonstrates that he did know Lazarus. Why? Because he called him by name. He was anything but biblically shrewd. He demonstrated that the love of God was not in him regardless of what he said.

Now it is time for the grand reversal, because both of them died. Hebrews would later say:

"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once..."⁹

That was true for Lazarus. It was true for the rich man and it is true for you and me.

"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment..."¹⁰

That truth comes screaming out of the text. And it is interesting, by the way, to note that this reversal occurs even in the order in which the men are described. It started talking about the rich man and then it talked about Lazarus. You would assume that next we would hear more about the rich man, but no. You hear more about Lazarus' eternal destiny. Jesus said he died. And it is interesting that there is no apparent burial. It does say that the rich man was buried, nothing about the poor man being buried. Maybe because he didn't leave enough material resources for that to occur, maybe because he didn't have friends and family who were able or willing to do that. A body in that situation would often just be cast out on a rubbish heap outside of town. We don't know for sure what happened to his body, but we know for sure what happened to his soul. He was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

And then you might say, "Well, does that mean that that is what happens to every believer who dies? Is that what is going to happen to all of us?"

And this is as good a place as any to remind us of the nature of parables. I have said this several times here in the last couple of weeks. This is not a treatise on all the details of the afterlife. And in a parable you can't press every one of the ancillary details into absolute truth. There is one central point here. But there is no question that he went to heaven when he died, because of his faith in God.

In fact, one of the interesting things about this text is we never hear Lazarus speak. You know, you would have with this thing is going on and the rich man is saying, "Hey, Abraham, send poor Lazarus to give me some water. Send him here." You would have

⁹ Hebrews 9:27.

¹⁰ Ibid.

expected Lazarus to speak up. What a great opportunity he had to rub it in the rich man's face. He didn't say a word. Sometimes faith is most glorious when it is quiet.

Now, what about the rich man's eternal destiny? The text makes it clear. He, too, died. What the writer of Hebrews would later say was true. And you notice he didn't get to take all those expensive clothes with him. He didn't get to take all those fine meals with him. You will never see a u-haul behind a hearse. And he wound up in Hades, a place of obvious torment awaiting the final resurrection and judgment.

And I really want everyone that is going to hear this sermon this morning to lock on to this. He was still in conscious existence. Some people believe in Annihilationism. In other words, they believe that we just cease to exist when we die. I have to love you enough to tell you that it is certainly not what the Bible teaches. Remember how this passage ends, because the rich man said, "Well, send someone from the dead to talk to my brothers."

And Abraham made it clear. If they won't listen to their Bibles, if they won't listen to the prophets, they won't listen to anything. And you might say, "I just believe in Annihilationism. I believe after I die I am just going to cease to exist."

I have to love you as a pastor enough to tell you that is not what the Bible says. And you might say, "But you just made the point that you can't press every detail in a parable. How do you that Annihilationism is not true?"

A lot of reasons, but here is one of the strongest. It comes from the book of Isaiah which is one of the most important Old Testament books for a lot of reasons including the fact that it is there that we see the great vision of the holiness of God in Isaiah six. Well, how does the book of Isaiah end? Well, here it is in Isaiah 66:24.

"Then they will go forth and look On the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."¹¹

And I realize you might say, "That is a very unloving passage of Scripture to use in a church service. I can't believe you did that."

You know, somebody else used that very passage of Scripture in a sermon he gave once. Do you know who it was? It was Jesus himself. Don't say that the Old Testament is a book of judgment and the New Testament is a book of mercy. They both have both. And Jesus said this in Mark 9:47.

If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into

¹¹ Isaiah 66:24.

hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.¹²

Now lastly he was in torment. And, remember, this is a parable. There are plenty of things happening as part of this story that aren't what Scripture says eternity is or will be like. For example, a believer lying in Abraham's bosom or believers and unbelievers being able to see and converse with one another. Those are just parts of the particular story. But the fact that hell is a place of literal torment and judgment is clear for anyone who is going to take the Scriptures seriously at all. That is why the Bible ends with this passage in Revelation chapter 20, just one of the last chapter of the Bible where we read:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.¹³

And, friends, if we are going to take our Bibles seriously at all, we have to come to the conclusion that there truly is a heaven to be gained and there truly is a hell to be shunned.

Now let's bring the gospel into this discussion and think about this. That is the price Jesus was willing to pay for you. And Paul said it this way. He, God, made him, Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Scripture teaches the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Christ. In other words, Jesus was willing to take our place and Jesus was willing to bear our hell. That is why Jesus asked from the cross:

“MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”¹⁴

And understand that the worst thing about hell is not that it is torment, but it is that it is eternal separation from God forever. And Jesus, as an infinite person, was willing to pay a finite price for us and he didn't ask that question from the cross in order to get information. He asked that question in order to teach us:

“MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”¹⁵

¹² Mark 9:47-48.

¹³ Revelation 20:11-15.

¹⁴ Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Answer: Because Jesus was bearing the weight and the penalty of our sin. He was taking our hell upon himself. That is grace. And that is why the previous verse Paul had said:

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”¹⁶

And, friends, you have to know truth like that and you have to believe truth like that if you are going to be strong at your core. And that is very, very important for us to remember. Church is not always going to be light and airy. Ok? Does everybody get that? Because there are some truths that are not particularly light and airy. And I am not up here as the Sunday morning comic. In fact, one of the things that the Word of God says is a requirement of a pastor is that he be sober minded. And that doesn't mean that every Sunday has to be exactly like this. But pastors have to help us be as serious about things as matter as reality would dictate, especially as we think about what would God have for us in these coming day together.

And the answer is if what we are talking about is true, then you had better believe we are going to take serious the role of being an ambassador for Christ as though God were making an appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, we beg, be reconciled to God.

And I would just ask you this morning. Has there been a definite time in your life where you trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, where you have acknowledged your need, you have acknowledged your sin, you have acknowledged the fact that you deserve hell. And then you are amazed at God's grace and you place your faith and trust in what he did on the cross for you.

Friend, if you have never done that, I would invite you. I would urge you to do that this morning while you have the opportunity to do so.

This rich man's destiny doesn't have to be your destiny, because of the grace of Christ.

Now let me just address something else that might be running around through your mind right now and that is you can say, “Well, you know, pastor Viars, if you emphasize topics like a literal hell, some people aren't going to want to come to this church. You have just made a strategic blunder.”

Well, this church isn't for everybody. And numerical growth is not our highest goal. It is just not our highest value. In fact, do you remember this story in the book of Judges? It was about a man named Gideon. And before he was going to lead a group of people into an important battle, do you remember what God did? He actually put the group through what could only be called a thinning process. He thinned the ranks on purpose to be sure that when they won that victory there would be no question about the fact that God was the one who provided that victory because of their obedience to his Word. And I just have to remind all of us. We are not driven by raw pragmatics here, meaning we don't

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:20.

make decisions on the basis of what we believe will work from a human or numerical perspective. We are driven by fidelity to the Word of God and we are going to let the Lord determine whatever outcome he prefers in such a case. We are going to follow his means and trust his ends. It is just that simple.

And you say, “Well, can you impact that comment that you made a moment ago about this church isn’t for everyone? What do you mean by that?”

Honestly I could think of two classes who will never make it here long term. Do you want to hear them? Because I want to tell them to you. One would be those who want to add to the Bible with all of their Legalism. And we are just not going to cater to people and all of their man made preferences. Why? Because what we are talking about this morning is so serious that it is critical for us to keep our eyes on the biblical ball, not all the legalists and all their things. So legalistic people who want us to add to the message or add to the mission are going to be really upset about the fact that we are not going to. The other class, though, would be those who want to take away from the Bible. And there is plenty of people out there who would call themselves followers of Christ but when it really comes down to it, they would say, “I don’t want a preacher who is going to preach on this and on this and on this, because those topics are not palatable to the modern man.”

Well, welcome to forget that. I mean, just forget that. I am commanded to proclaim the whole counsel of God. And if that results in the ranks being thinned, so be it, so be it. Or if that results not that I am particularly worried about this in me losing my job, I say so what? It is like a pastor down in Mississippi a couple of weeks ago who had an African American couple that attended their church that wanted to be married and some white people in the church got wound up about it and so he took the wedding ceremony somewhere else, because he was afraid he was going to be fired if he married that couple in his church to which I would say, “For crying out loud. There is a whole lot of things worse than being fired, like not doing what God’s Word... not having the courage to do what God’s Word tells you to do.”

And so there it is. Having a smaller or more focused committed army worked really well for Gideon. And I think it works for any group of people who want to be a biblical church. And what we are talking about this morning, I know it is not easy. But it is just too important to tinker with the message.

Now what else can we add to this? The day will come, friends, when it is too later to alter eternity for ourselves or for anyone else around us. This rich man says:

“Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.”¹⁷

That statement is amazing for a bunch of reasons, isn’t it? He is still thinking he is making the rules. He has the audacity of still referring to Abraham as his father. When is he going to figure that out? Or telling Abraham what to do as if he is in charge. But

¹⁷ Luke 16:24.

especially for the fact that he made this request on the basis of mercy, exactly what he was never shrewd enough to show the beggar Lazarus while they were alive and he was lying right outside his gate.

James said:

“For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy.”¹⁸

And just to be clear, we are not talking about showing mercy in order to earn your way to heaven, but it is by showing mercy, demonstrating that you have trusted Christ.

“But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things...’¹⁹

See, just because pay day didn’t come on Friday didn’t mean it won’t come. And that is why Paul said:

“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”²⁰

See, that is exactly where the rich man didn’t let God’s kindness and mercy lead him. And then there were these haunting words the great chasm.

“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed...”²¹

The day will come when it is too late to alter eternity for ourselves or those around us. And, friends, that is true for you and your children and that is true for you and your extended family. That is true for you and your neighbors. That is true for your coworkers. That is true for you and your friends. That is why Jesus said:

“We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.”²²

Now what should we do with that? Well, it becomes crystal clear because of the way this passage ends. A person’s path is changed by listening to the Word of God, because this rich man said, “Well, then send Lazarus to my brothers in order that he may warn them so they may not come to his place of torment.”

Wouldn’t you hate it if you awoke to your eternal destiny and thought, “I hope no one I ever knew or loved follows me here?” Coupled with, “Well, I had the opportunity to do so. I never did a thing to try to help them.”

¹⁸ James 2:13.

¹⁹ Luke 16:25.

²⁰ Romans 2:4.

²¹ Luke 16:26.

²² John 9:4.

But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the prophets.”

They don’t need something spectacular, because faith comes by hearing. Now think about this fall.

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”²³

"But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’

"But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”²⁴

Friends, this passage of Scripture is alive if you will let it be. And the take always are obvious. I would just ask you. If you don’t know for sure that you are on your way to heaven, why wouldn’t you make sure while you have the opportunity to do so? And I realize you might say, “Well, I am not sure I like the Word of God.”

Friends, that is your only hope. And listen. If you won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, you wouldn’t listen to somebody if they returned from the dead. And why not let the Word of God soften your heart while you have the opportunity to do so?

I would also challenge you in this. If you are a follower of Christ and if you have not yet found a church home, why not consider making this your church home? Now it is not like every Sunday is like this, ok? I can actually be light and airy. It just doesn’t happen very often, but I can be. And I try to be exactly what the text would direct us to be. And, you know, some people treat churches like restaurants. We are going to go over to that place is time because they are having a sale on bacon. We are going to go over to that place next week because they have good waffles and I don’t really feel like eating this week and blah, blah, blah. At some point you need to go from treating a church like a restaurant to treating it like a family.

Now I love every one of you. Are you feeling it? It is time for some of you to get serious about all this like now. And it is time for some of you to stop treating this place like a restaurant and start treating it like a family or find some church somewhere that you can commit your life to. And I would encourage you. There is some information in your bulletin about taking a class called intro to faith this fall. That is one of the prerequisites for membership here. And if what we are talking about is true and you want to be part of a church that is going to proclaim it all, I want to encourage you to take the step of joining this fall. To let this text make you that serious about the things of God.

I also want to strongly encourage you to decide right now that you are going to place yourself and your family under the teaching of the Word of God as often as you possibly

²³ Romans 10:17.

²⁴ Luke 16:30-31.

can this fall. For some people they think coming to church about once a month is really a great commitment that ought to impress the Lord. And I am going to tell you—and I love you. Are you feeling it still?—some of you, you have so much foolishness coming into your ears, day after day, you need a whole lot more of the Word as an antidote that you are currently exposing yourself to. And your kids.

You do not want to be in a place where your son or your daughter is about age 26 and you are just hoping maybe God will send somebody from the dead to walk with them, because they are certainly dead to the truth of the Word. That may be because you did not faithfully expose them to the Word while they were young. And I want to encourage you to plan to have your kids under the teaching of the Word every Sunday. I want to encourage you to plan to have them there on Wednesday nights so they fall in love with the Word. And either you give them a cause to follow, or I promise you, they will find one to follow.

You saw in this text the power of the Word of God. Are you exposing yourself to it? You have a brochure in your bulletin about Faith Community Institute on Wednesday nights and we had some trouble with our printing so we will have a better one next Wednesday, but I wanted you to at least have that one. And I would encourage you to select one of those classes and plan... if what we are talking about this morning is true, then plan to have yourself there and plan to reach out to one of your neighbors and one of your friends. And then I would encourage you to look for ways to serve so that the Word could be ministered more effectively here. Why not choose to serve in one of these Sunday school classes for kids.

And I realize you might say, “Are you saying I went to an ABF and I came to worship service and then I served, that would be like I am going to be here three? Are you asking me to be impressed by that?”

Because welcome to you are talking to the wrong guy. And it is serious, folks. It is serious. It is serious enough for us to commit ourselves to serving well.

I was talking to Amy Baker just as one of many that we could talk about. They could use some help in the resource center, ministering the Word literally around the world, especially in the afternoons. Talk to Amy about that if you could volunteer a day a week like that, but to say, “If this is really true, then I want to be careful to live it and proclaim it.”

Justin, please come and close our service, would you?