

Grace and peace to you . . .

Though the text does not explicitly mention faith, it does teach a lot about faith. It teaches about the rewards of faith, about the source of faith, and about the character of faith.

First of all, the text teaches about the rewards of faith. Faith is not a dead, inactive thing. Rather, faith is evidenced by the attitudes and actions which it motivates. The text does not identify which character of the parable has faith; it only describes their attitudes and actions. Lazarus was content with having only what was needed to support this body and life. He did not desire riches. He did not even desire relief from the sores which covered his body. All he desired was “to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” [21] If only he had the food to sustain him, then he was content. The virtue of contentment fulfills 40% of God’s Law. Because Lazarus had this attitude of faith, contentment, you know that he was a man of faith.

On the other hand, the rich man’s works were evidence of his lack of faith. This rich man gloried in his riches, not in the knowledge of the Lord. “[He] was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.” [19] Meanwhile, the beggar Lazarus died at his door. This is not the attitude of faith. You see, the rich man relied on his relationship to Abraham to save him. Every time he addresses the patriarch, he calls him “father”. Today, those who believe their

relationship to a particular church will save them are of the same stripe. The truth is: without a living faith in Christ, you cannot be saved, no matter what church you might belong to. The rich man further revealed his lack of faith in his attitude of pride. Even while he was tormented in hell, he expected Lazarus to be his servant, fetching water at his request. Because the rich man lacked good works, you know that he also lacked faith.

Because faith is evidenced by the attitudes and actions which it motivates, such good deeds give you boldness on judgment day. When you see your own good works, you have evidence that your faith is alive. Knowing that your faith is living, you can face the final judgment without fear. This is what St. John was getting at in his epistle: "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment . . . There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear." [1Jo 4:17-18] The Lutheran Confessions also indicate that works are evidence that faith is living, evidence which gives confidence in the Gospel. Article III of the Apology states:

"As in other sacraments Christ has attached the promise to an external sign, so He attaches the promise of the forgiveness of sin . . . to external good works . . . in order to indicate that, where good works do not follow, there is no faith either, [so] that we may have [in our works] external marks, which remind us of the Gospel . . . for our comfort, and that thus our faith may be exercised in many ways." [Trig. p. 197]

Therefore, you have boldness on the day of judgment because you have faith. And you know you have faith because you have the attitudes and actions which faith motivates.

It is this active faith which is rewarded. However, these rewards are often hidden or forestalled. It certainly did not look like Lazarus was being rewarded for his faith when he was laid at the rich man's gate, full of sores. On the contrary, it seemed that the rich man was being rewarded in spite of his wicked hypocrisy and selfishness. Lazarus had only mongrel dogs to lick his festering sores, while the rich man had fine clothes and sumptuous feasts. The same is often true for you. Just because you are a Christian does not mean that you will have everything your heart desires in this life. In fact, because you are a Christian, you can expect to suffer in this world. You suffer ridicule because you place true faith and true doctrine above peace and comfort. However, you do not lose hope, for you know that your reward is often hidden or forestalled.

However, in the next life the rewards will be plain to all. For this reason, people of faith look forward to the day of judgment. On that day the saints will enter into their heavenly reward as the hordes of unbelievers look on in jealousy. You who suffered for righteousness' sake will receive a crown of eternal glory in the sight of those who persecuted you. Furthermore, the rewards you will receive will never be

taken away or lost. Rather, you will enjoy the sweet rewards of heaven forever.

Because faith will be rewarded openly, the torments of the damned will be increased, seeing your reward. This is how it was for the rich man, who suffered the searing fire, while Lazarus was feasting in comfort. The beggar had become rich, while the rich man was now the beggar. He begged for even a drop of water, but was denied any mercy. Thus, as you enjoy the happiness of heaven in the sight of the damned, their torments will seem all the more unbearable. Your active faith will be rewarded, while their lack of faith will be punished forever. This is what the text teaches about the rewards of faith.

Secondly, the text teaches about the source of faith. At the same time, it teaches what the source of faith is not—faith does not come from miracles. Some people reject the message of God’s Word because they have not received a miraculous sign. “Why doesn’t God show Himself?” they might ask, “Or put an instant end to all this suffering?” Such are like the rich man’s brothers, who will not believe, even if someone should rise from the dead. Because they are not dazzled by miraculous wonders, these hard-hearted people reject God’s Word.

More pitiful are those who embrace the doctrines of demons because of false miraculous signs. This is what happens when you base your faith on miracles. People have the tendency to believe those who have power,

especially when that power is miraculous. But the devil can perform sham miracles, and lead many astray. Such are the miracles of the T.V. preachers, whose healings and visions and tongues are nothing but works of the devil himself. If they were true prophets, then they would teach according to God's Word. Instead, they teach the lies which the father of lies teaches. In the very same category are the so called sightings of the Virgin Mary, and the healing powers of fountains and relics. These are devices of the antichrist. Thus, miracles can lead to false belief, which is the devil's delight. Therefore, it is clear that miracles are not the source of faith.

Rather, faith comes from hearing "Moses and the prophets." "Moses and the prophets" is a description of God's holy Word at the time of Christ. You have the additional revelation of God through the Apostles, the Gospel of Christ in its fullness. Only from God's Word is faith created in your heart by the Holy Ghost. Faith is not a function of your intellect, but a gift of God given through His Word. Faith does not come from miracles, even if someone should rise from the dead. Instead, heavenly Abraham identifies the source of faith in the text, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." [v.29] God's holy Word is the only source of faith.

This faith, given through the Word of God, embraces Christ for forgiveness. In this Word of God, you learn of Christ's death for you. This is the heart of the Gospel. Jesus Christ died to pay for your sins.

For all the times you've not been content with what God has given you, the body of Christ was given for you. For all the times you've been selfish with your possessions, the blood of Christ was shed for you. Of this your faith is certain because you know it as a fact from God's Word.

Finally, the text teaches about the character of faith. True faith in Christ is active, motivating believers to virtue and charity. True faith gives the proper attitude for riches. Just like Lazarus, people of faith are content with what God gives. You do not treat riches as the key to happiness. Instead, you are happy and content, trusting and knowing that God has everything under His control. This is the character of faith. Therefore, because you have faith, you are content having only what you need to support this body and life.

True faith in Christ also gives an attitude of charity and love. You do not love others in order to earn the rewards of heaven; this is not the attitude of true faith. If you relied on your love of others to get to heaven, then you would never arrive there. Even if it was possible to get to heaven by works, and you did selfless acts of charity all your life, you could not be certain that you had done enough. Charity and love motivated by God's Law is not true charity and love, but an attempt at self-preservation. Your love does not earn heaven; therefore, you do not love in order to get to heaven.

Rather, you love because God first loved you. This is the proper

motivation for your good deeds of love. God died for you while you were still a sinner. He chose you to be His own before the foundation of the world. He filled you with His Spirit through the Gospel. Only after all this do you love in return. You love Him because He has filled you with His love. You love others because that is what those loved by God do. Because God loved you enough to send His Son to die for your sins, you love Him and your neighbor by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the attitude of charity and love which true faith gives.

Through this true faith you also will enjoy the eternal rewards of paradise, not because of your works, but because you have faith in the person and work of Christ. You will enjoy heaven forever, not on account of your works, but on account of your faith in Christ, which is eager to do good works. This is what the text teaches about the character of true faith.

So you see, this text teaches much about faith. Faith's reward is eternal bliss in heaven. Faith's source is the very Word of God, given to you in Moses, the prophets, and the Apostles. Faith's character is active, eager to do good works. Yet you do not glory in your faith, just as you do not glory in your works or in riches. Instead, you glory in the Lord Jesus Christ. By His works you are saved. By His riches, you are blessed. He is the substance of your faith. Jesus Christ gives your faith its form, its character. Jesus Christ is the subject of the Word, the source of your faith. And Jesus Christ is your faith's eternal

reward, for residing in His bosom is the nature of heaven itself. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes . . .