

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*What Produces Godly Repentance?*"<sup>i</sup>

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 16:30** toward the end of the account of the rich man and Lazarus.

Let's start at **verse 27** for context...

**Luke 16:27** And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— **28** for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' **29** But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' **30** And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

**Moses and the Prophets** is a New Testament way to refer to the Old Testament.

The rich man objected to the idea that his brothers could listen to **Moses and the Prophets**, probably because he knew that his family did not take **Moses and the Prophets** seriously. He didn't think Scripture would work, because he had such a low view of Scripture.

He never obeyed Scripture, so why would they? Instead, he thinks they need a miracle to repent.

And this brings us to lesson one...

**Lesson One: Godly repentance allows people to avoid the rich man's fate.**

This is very interesting. The rich man knew what his brothers must do to avoid the torment he's experiencing: repent,

This also means he knew why he was in torment: he didn't repent:

- He wasn't lost because he was rich.
- He was lost because he wouldn't turn from his sin. Many will also be lost for the same reason.

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And something interesting about the rich man's lack of repentance in his earthly life is there's no evidence of repentance, or change, in the next life either.

Let me explain what I mean by getting you to notice some things about him...

First, two times he tried to order Lazarus around and treat them like a servant who is inferior to him:

- **Luke 16:24** And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and **SEND LAZARUS TO DIP THE END OF HIS FINGER IN WATER AND COOL MY TONGUE, for I am in anguish in this flame.**'
- **Luke 16:27** And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to **SEND HIM to my father's house—**

Second, he argued with Abraham. In **verse 29**, Abraham said his brothers had Scripture available to them, but in **verse 30**, he thought he knew best and told Abraham that they needed to witness a miracle.<sup>ii</sup>

The point is that even in death the rich man remained stubborn, proud, and argumentative. There's no sorrow or remorse about his earthly lifestyle whatsoever.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "*In spite of the fact that [the rich man] was in torment in Hades, he did not change; he was still self-centered. He argued instead of submitting. This indicates that the punishment of lost sinners is not remedial; it does not improve them. Hades and hell are not hospitals for the sick; they are prisons for the condemned.*"

There is only one thing that changes human hearts, and that is the gospel. Because the rich man rejected the gospel his heart can never change, no matter how much torment he experiences.

Now let's pause looking at this account and turn to **Luke 3** so I can show you something that will relate in a moment.

Here's the context...

John the Baptist is performing a baptism of repentance to prepare people for the Messiah. Look at **verse 7**...

**Luke 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.**

John sees the religious leaders coming and tells them to repent, but he knows they won't because of something they trust in. Anticipating what they will say, look what he adds...

**Luke 3:9 And DO NOT PRESUME TO SAY TO YOURSELVES, 'WE HAVE ABRAHAM AS OUR FATHER,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.**

John knew they trusted in their relationships to Abraham for their salvation. They think they are God's chosen, special people who don't need to repent. They get to go straight to heaven where they are welcomed by Abraham himself.

And this brings us to lesson two...

**Lesson Two: Being Abraham's descendant is no substitute for repentance.**

We must understand the Bible describes Abraham having two kinds of children:

- Physical children or descendants, and that's the Jews
- Spiritual children, or Christians, who have put their faith in Christ.

Listen to these verses:

- **Romans 2:28 No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly (or physically)...29 But a Jew is one inwardly (or spiritually).**
- **Galatians 3:7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.**

Now the interesting thing is this:

- There were lots of Jews who were physical children of Abraham, but not spiritual children of Abraham
- And there were lots of non-Jews, or Gentiles, like us, who are not physical children of Abraham, but are spiritual children of Abraham.

During Jesus's earthly ministry He had to contend with Jews trusting more in their ancestry to Abraham than in their repentance and faith in Christ.

Turn to **John 8**.

**John 8:32 [Jesus said], "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free?'"**

Jesus talks to them about being free, but they responded that they have always been free because they're Abraham's descendants.

Skip to **verse 37**...

**John 8:37 I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.**

Notice Jesus said they are **offspring of Abraham**, but only physically. In a minute he will say they're not **offspring of Abraham**, spiritually...

**John 8:38 I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.” They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did**

Now Jesus says they're not Abraham's children, because they're not spiritually.

Instead, He says they're the devil's children. Look at **verse 44**...

**John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**

Now turn back to **Luke 16** so I can show you something interesting.

Many of the Jews thought that having Abraham as their father meant they're on their way to heaven, so what did Jesus do?

He preached this account about a Jew who had Abraham as his father, but...found himself in torment:

Notice the rich man repeatedly called Abraham father:

- **Luke 16:24 And he called out, ‘FATHER ABRAHAM, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’**
- **Luke 16:27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, FATHER, to send him to my father's house—**
- **Luke 16:30 And he said, ‘No, FATHER ABRAHAM, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’**

This account served as a rebuke to the all the Jews who thought they didn't need to repent, simply because they were Abraham's children.

I have told you a few times up to this point that this teaching, like many of Jesus's teachings, would have sounded outrageous to His listeners:

- They couldn't handle a rich man who they thought was an object of God's divine favor suffering torment in the next life
- They couldn't handle a poor man, like Lazarus, who they thought was an object of God's divine disfavor experiencing comfort in the next life

Well one more thing that made this account outrageous and offensive to them is a Jew, who has Abraham as his father, is in torment.

The lesson is that even being a descendant of Abraham is no substitute for repentance.

Now if we pick back up with the account, the rich man was in the middle of arguing with Abraham that the Word of God was not sufficient to produce repentance in his brothers' lives. Look how Abraham responds in **verse 31**...

**Luke 16:31 He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”<sup>iii</sup>**

Notice the words **neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead**. And this brings us to lesson four...

**Lesson Three: Miracles don't produce godly repentance.**

Take your minds to the Old Testament for a moment. Can you think of any instance of miracles producing repentance?

Let me ask this another way to make it easier to answer...

Who were the miracle workers in the Old Testament?

There are three of them:

1. Moses
2. Elijah
3. Elisha

Moses unleashed the plagues on Egypt. It wouldn't be too much to say that there has never been a greater demonstration of the miraculous in all human history. Yet the Egyptians didn't believe.

Listen to these verses about Passover...

**Exodus 12:29 At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 30 And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And THERE WAS A GREAT CRY IN EGYPT, FOR THERE WAS NOT A HOUSE WHERE SOMEONE WAS NOT DEAD.**

Why did all these houses cry out in anguish?

Because they didn't put blood over their door posts. And why didn't they?

Because even after the previous nine plagues they were still unrepentant.

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And the entire generation of Israelites, who witnessed those miracles and many others in the wilderness, died in the wilderness because of their unbelief...

**Hebrews 4:17 With whom was [God] provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF.**

Even after all the miracles the Israelites witnessed they remained unbelieving.

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What about Elijah and Elisha?

They were the other two miracle workers, and did people repent under their ministries?

No.

They were prophets to the apostate northern kingdom of Israel that remained in rebellion during and after their ministries. That is why the Assyrians came decades later and wiped out the nation.

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Think about Gideon. Did miracles help him believe?

I would say no:

1. In **Judges 6:21** fire rose out of the rock and consumed the sacrifice. Seeing this miracle was not enough for Gideon.
2. In **Judges 6:36-38** Gideon put the fleece out and asked for the fleece to be wet and the ground to be dry. Seeing this miracle was not enough for Gideon.
3. In **Judges 6:39-40** Gideon asked for the fleece to be dry and the ground to be wet. Seeing this miracle was not enough for Gideon.
4. In **Judges 7:10** God had to send Gideon down to the Midianite camp to overhear the dream because he was still did not believe.

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Moving to the New Testament, Jesus's ministry is the best example. He performed incredible miracles, yet the majority remained in unbelief.

Listen to this verse...

**Matthew 11:20 [Jesus] began to denounce the cities where MOST OF HIS MIGHTY WORKS HAD BEEN DONE, BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT.**

Imagine that: Jesus rebuked the cities where He performed not just some, but **MOST** of His miracles – Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. We would expect these cities to have the greatest commitment to Him, but they wouldn't repent.

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Let me show you a few examples.

Turn to **John 2**. Look at **verse 23**...

**John 2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.**

This is interesting. It **LOOKS** like many people believed, because of the miracles Jesus performed.

But the next verse...

**John 2:24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.**

These people did not believe unto salvation. They had an excitement about Jesus because of His miracles, but their faith was not genuine.

Jesus recognized this, because He knew all people, so He didn't commit Himself to them.

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Isn't this sort of enthusiasm – that doesn't lead to salvation – common?

Haven't we all seen people who seem very excited about Christ, but that zeal doesn't last?

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I don't take any pleasure in saying this, but this is the kind of zeal and excitement that is produced in some charismatic circles that focus on experiences more than Scripture.

It doesn't produce anything lasting, such as salvation or spiritual growth.

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Turn to the right to **John 6**.

**John 6:2 And a large crowd was following him, because THEY SAW THE SIGNS THAT HE WAS DOING on the sick.**

They were following Him because of His miracles.

Jesus performs one of his greatest miracles in feeding the 5,000, but look at **verse 66 to see what happened...**

**John 6:66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.**

You would think the miracle would've caused thousands to believe, but they ended up abandoning Christ when they learned they weren't getting more food.

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Turn to the right to **John 11**.

The rich man wanted Lazarus raised from the dead to go back to his brothers, and interestingly, Jesus did raise a man named Lazarus from the dead, but not the same Lazarus from the account in **Luke 16**.

Let me show you what happens...

Jesus raises Lazarus in **verses 38-44**.

Do your Bibles have a heading around **verse 45 or 47?**

- The Plot to Kill Jesus
- Conspiracy to Kill Jesus

Jesus performed one of His greatest miracles, raising someone from the dead, and the religious leaders responded by trying to murder Him. Look at **verse 53...**

**John 11:53 So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.**

And it gets even worse. Look at the next chapter at **John 12:10...**

**John 12:10 So the chief priests made plans to PUT LAZARUS TO DEATH AS WELL, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.**

Not only did they want to murder Jesus, but they also wanted to murder Lazarus.

Look at **verse 37** to see it summed up.

**John 12:37 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,**

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Things were no better after Christ's resurrection and ascension.

Turn to **Acts 4**.

Here's the context: in the previous chapter Peter and John healed the man who had been lame from birth. Look at **verse 16...**

**Acts 4:16** saying, “**What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.**”

Notice they wanted to deny the miracle Jesus performed, but they knew they couldn't.

**Acts 4:17** But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” **18** So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Instead of repenting and believing, they wanted to make sure the news didn't spread so they called the apostles and told them to stop preaching.

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There are other verses I wanted to show you, but I wanted to keep this to one sermon.

Hopefully the point is clear...

The rich man said if his brothers witnessed a miracle, such as someone being raised from the dead they would believe.

But people witnessed countless miracles, including someone being raised from the dead, and they still didn't repent or believe.

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One question you might have is, “*What is the point of miracles?*”

They were intended to provide credibility. They legitimized the messengers. They demonstrated that the people who performed them were truly from God.

Consider these two verses, and there are plenty more I could share on the subject...

**2 Corinthians 12:12** The signs (or evidence) of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

In other words, the evidence of true apostles is they perform miracles. The miracles demonstrate they are true apostles.

Numerous people claim to be apostles today even though the office no longer exists. But according to this verse they should be performing miracles. If you ever meet people who claim to be apostles, ask them to perform a miracle to legitimize their apostleship...and I don't mean knee or back pain being healed. I mean something testable.

Here's another verse...

**Hebrews 2:1** We must pay much closer attention to [the message] we have heard...**4** God bore witness [of it] by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The author of Hebrews said people must pay attention to the message, because of the miracles. The miracles didn't produce faith, but they legitimized the message.

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Here's an example in action...

**Acts 8:5** Philip went down to...Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. **6** And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and SAW THE SIGNS THAT HE DID.<sup>iv</sup>

The people **paid attention** to Philip when they saw the miracles he performed.

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So here's the question...

If miracles don't produce repentance and saving faith, then what does?

Abraham provided the answer very clearly. Please turn back to **Luke 16**...

**Luke 16:29 But Abraham said, 'THEY HAVE MOSES AND THE PROPHETS; LET THEM HEAR THEM.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 He said to him, 'IF THEY DO NOT HEAR MOSES AND THE PROPHETS, NEITHER WILL THEY BE CONVINCED IF SOMEONE SHOULD RISE FROM THE DEAD.'"**

And this brings us to our last lesson...

#### Lesson Four: Scripture can produce godly repentance.

Abraham explained that the only one thing that could prevent the rich man's five brothers from joining him in torment was hearing God's word and repenting.

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Listen to these verses about Scripture producing faith:

- **John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. THE WORDS THAT I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE.**
- **James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth BY THE WORD OF TRUTH, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**
- **1 Peter 1:23 Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, THROUGH THE LIVING AND ABIDING WORD OF GOD;**

Scripture is what produces repentance unto salvation.

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I had to change this lesson from "Scripture produces godly repentance" to "Scripture CAN produce godly repentance, because it doesn't always."

Just as there are examples of individuals repenting at the preaching of God's Word, there are also examples of people refusing to repent at the preaching of God's Word.

For example:

- The prophets repeatedly preached to people who refused to repent when they heard God's Word.
- And the rich man and his brothers had **Moses and the Prophets**, but they did not repent.

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Think about the rich man's situation...

The Old Testament is filled with verses about caring for the poor and less fortunate, so he had what he needed to repent of the way he neglected Lazarus, but he refused to do so.

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But miracles cannot produce repentance or conversion in the hearts of lost people. Someone rising from the dead is not more effective than Scripture itself. This is why we spread the gospel versus spreading miracles.

Spurgeon said, *"If the Holy Scripture be not in the hands of God enough to bring you to the faith of Christ, then, though an angel from heaven, then, though the saints from glory, then, though God himself should descend on earth to preach to you, you would go on unwed and unblest."*



Look at the way **verse 31** is written. It says if the rich man's brothers **do not hear Moses and the prophets**.

Fittingly Moses and the prophets are personified as people who speak. Scripture is called God's Word, because it is what God wants to say to us. It is how He speaks to us.

If you want God to speak to you, read His word. If you want God to speak to you audibly, read his Word aloud.

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Sometimes people say, *"If an angel appeared to me, I would believe."*

The only way an angel's appearance would produce belief is if that angel also preached. Just the appearance of the angel by itself would not cut it.

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This has important application for us...

If you share God's word with people but they do not believe, there is nothing else you could do to cause them to believe. Even if you could perform miracles, it would not produce belief if they rejected the Word.

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Something sad about this is there are some Christians and churches who believe like the rich man that Scripture is insufficient to produce repentance and faith.

You see this especially in churches that place more emphasis on experiences than the preaching of God's Word.

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Let me share some examples of people being brought to repentance by preaching...

Earlier I mentioned Elijah and Elisha and the lack of repentance from their miracles.

Is there is a prophet who was able to see repentance from his preaching?

Jonah.

And this is an interesting example, because even though he wasn't a miracle worker, he was part of a miracle. He was thrown overboard into the sea, and he survived three days and three nights inside a fish.

But this didn't cause the Ninevites to repent. Who knows what Jonah looked like after being in the fish. He must have looked and smelled horribly. You would almost think that alone would have been enough to cause people to repent.

But they didn't repent until...

**Jonah 4:4** **Jonah...called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"** **5** **And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.**

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Another great example of repentance produced by God's Word occurred in Josiah's day. He sent men to restore the temple. They found the law, read it to Josiah, and listen to what happened...

**2 Kings 22:11** **When the king HEARD THE WORDS OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW, HE TORE HIS CLOTHES.**

This is an incredible demonstration of repentance in response to God's Word.

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Turn to **Acts 1:15**.

**Acts 1:15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said,**

At the time of Jesus's death, it appears He only had about 120 dedicated followers. This is another evidence of Jesus's miracles not producing repentance.

But now look at **Acts 2:40** to see this number explode from preaching...

**Acts 2:40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those WHO RECEIVED HIS WORD were baptized, and there were added that day about THREE THOUSAND SOULS.**

Pentecost just took place. Very supernatural. Lots of speaking in tongues and tongues of fire over people's heads.

But it was preaching that saved this large number.

Look at **Acts 4:4**...

**Acts 4:4 But many of those who had HEARD THE WORD BELIEVED, AND THE NUMBER OF THE MEN CAME TO ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND.**

Again, preaching that saved this large number.

## Conclusion

Let me conclude with this...

In **verse 30** the rich man said, **"If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."**

He was referring to Lazarus rising from the dead. Abraham rejected the idea, but let me ask you this...

Was the rich man's request for someone to rise from the dead accomplished?

Yes, Jesus was raised from the dead. His resurrection is perhaps the most verifiable event in human history.

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The rich man made the accusation that not enough had been done for his brothers to repent. People frequently accuse God of being unfair by saying something like: *"He has not done enough."*

But God has most certainly done enough. He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for our sins. In our case, He has given a greater, fuller, revelation of Himself in the New Testament.

We have every reason to repent and believe, and to share that Gospel message with others.

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After the service, we will introduce new members, and after that if you have any questions or I can pray for you in any way, I will be up front.

Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> Done:

- JM
- Nelson

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- EW
  - HCC
  - Wiersbe
  - Moody
  - ESV Study Bible
  - ESV expository commentary

ii Third, some commentators think the rich man's concern for his brothers isn't really concern, but is a way to communicate he shouldn't be there. He says they wouldn't end up in torment if they were adequately warned, implying he wouldn't be there if he had been adequately warned. But he wasn't, so it isn't really his fault.

iii There is such a finality to Abraham's responses to the rich man:

- In **verse 24** the rich man asked for mercy, but in **verse 25** Abraham told him he would not receive any
- In **verse 26** Abraham told the rich man he couldn't leave the place of torment
- In **verse 27** and **28** the rich man begged to have someone go back to his brothers, but in **verse 29** and **30** Abraham said they had the Scriptures to listen to

Everything the rich man requested was met with a negative response. It is a dismal situation, which captures the hopelessness of hell itself.

iv There is another example in Acts 14:8-18.