

Text: Luke 16:19-31

Theme: Before the Chasm Comes

September 25, 2016

It's a common refrain on television commercials and it seems to be especially prevalent among used car salesmen. "Now is the time. Now is the right time to buy that used car you always wanted." Because we're so familiar with those refrains, we've learned to tune them out, to simply ignore them. However, in our text, we're reminded that time is of the essence, that soon it will be too late. As we focus on this unique conversation, we consider our theme: Before the Chasm Comes.

I. Our loving God has made it clear that a great chasm exists between heaven and hell. A. Aware of that chasm, what we can do before that chasm arrives? 1. Before the chasm arrives, we acknowledge that the chasm exists. Sounds obvious, doesn't it? Here is heaven; there is hell. Any questions? As obvious as it sounds, many choose not to believe hell exists. "God is a kind and loving God. He wouldn't send anybody to hell!" The implication? Hell doesn't exist. This place of torment is artificial, non-existent. But that's a lie! Hell is real; the torment is real. Before the chasm comes, we desperately need to believe that this great chasm does exist.

2. Before that chasm arrives, we need to acknowledge the stark difference between the two. Believing hell exists is a starting point, but before our last moment on this earth arrives, we need to comprehend the dramatic difference between heaven and hell. Hell isn't like life on earth nor is it a little worse than your worst days here. Hell is extreme torment, unimaginable, never-ending pain. In hell you want to die, but you can't die, you want the pain to end, but it never happens. This chasm isn't a separation between average and great, but a separation between the most amazing ever and the most horrifying ever. It's clear where we don't want to end up.

3. Before the chasm comes, we need to realize that there is a point of no return. The moment you take your last breath, it's over. The moment your soul leaves your body at death, it either goes to heaven or hell. Beyond that moment, nothing you do, nothing anyone does will ever change your eternal destiny. Our God is surely a God of second chances, a God who forgives and gives us a new lease on life. Yet, the moment this life ends, it's over. It may sound harsh or unfair, but our loving God has made it clear, "Before the chasm comes, you need to know where you stand because after the chasm arrives, your future path is unchangeable."

4. Before the chasm comes, we realize where we deserve to be. Based on your own efforts, which side of the chasm would you find yourself on when you took your last breath? We want to so badly believe that we'd be on the heaven side, that because we're good people and live a good life, God would surely welcome us to His side of the chasm. But it's simply not true. On our own, we deserve to be on the other side; we would surely be on the other side if it depended on our actions. We deserve nothing, and would never be invited to stand in the presence of God if it were merely about us. It's a humbling reality, but a reality we need to acknowledge on this side of heaven.

5. Before the chasm arrives, we acknowledge that the cross was for us. This is the good news, the great news, the news that turns everything from gloom to glory. We sing it, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling," and that's exactly what we do as the people of God who understand that the cross was for us.

Jesus died for you. That's the greatest story ever told, the great truth we hold in our hearts. While we wait for our departure, we cling to the cross, we acknowledge that we are unworthy of all God's gifts, and we allow that cross to be our daily reminder that this is what I need to believe before that chasm comes.

6. Before the chasm comes, we endure whatever comes our way. In the Gospel, was life fair for Lazarus? Do we find him complaining? Events will occur in our lives that appear unfair. If God sets it in your path, God intends you to face it, to endure it, to get to the other side. He doesn't promise that it will be a walk in the park, but He does make it clear that endurance is necessary, that we must press on in the midst of life's pain and heartache. Comparing and complaining is wasting precious time. As tough as life gets, and it gets tougher than we ever thought possible at times, our God says, "Endure. It's what you need to do for the moment."

7. Before the chasm comes, we invite someone to discover the other side. Many years ago, Billy Graham described the Lutheran Church as the "sleeping giant." Why? Because he knew that we had the message, that we had the message straight, but we were sleeping because we weren't getting the message out. We don't know when the chasm will arrive, but what we do know is that there are neighbors, friends, family members that haven't discovered the greatest story ever told because we haven't told them or shown them the love of Jesus in action. Before the chasm comes, it's our great privilege to invite others to the heaven side before it's too late.

8. Before that chasm comes, we celebrate the grace of God. When we realize our place on the heavenly side by faith, because of the cross and because of the grace of God and nothing else, our hearts well up with praise, with joy, with celebration. Once we were lost, but now we are found. Once we were on the other side destined to an eternity we don't even want to think about, but now, because of the love of our God, heaven is our home. That reality gives us every reason to celebrate, to offer our talents and our abilities as our response of gratitude, our humble act of thankfulness that God stepped into our lives and set us on the right side of the chasm.

9. Before the chasm arrives, we appreciate the gift of each new day. When you woke up this morning, how many of you thanked God for another day? For most, complaining comes too easy and praise seldom reaches their lips. But it doesn't need to be that way for us. Who values and appreciates each new day the most? When someone faces a critical health issue that changes normal for the future, they most often become those who appreciate the gift of another day most. But that's not the best way to learn appreciation for life. Before that chasm comes, we do well to appreciate life before something forces us to do what could have been done all along.

10. All those commercials may clamor that now is the right time, and, in one respect they are absolutely correct because now is the right time for us to act - before the chasm comes. Amen.