

Teach us, O Lord, that Your Word is better than gold, and Your counsels are more precious than anything else in life. Grant us wisdom to seek the true riches, to know and possess You, and to be known and possessed by You, for Your mercy and truth's sake. Amen. (Luther for the Busy Man, pp. 226-227)

[*Jesus continued to say to the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem*] the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

In Christ Jesus, our priceless treasure, riches without measure, dear fellow redeemed, (*and especially you our 2015 PLS graduates*):

Whenever I hear or read Jesus telling the story of the formerly rich man in hell thinking he had the wisdom to advise the kingdom of heaven, while smiling and shaking my head on the outside, within I know that my sinful nature is also that foolishly arrogant. Here is a man who would have been accustomed to ordering people about in this life making the request that the former beggar cool his tongue. When that was denied, he wanted to ease his torment by having Lazarus rise from the dead, leave the resplendent courts of heaven, and return to the place of his torment to warn his brothers!

Condemned sinners advising the kingdom of heaven how it should run its affairs is truly laughable, but it goes on all the time. Sinners like you and me on this side of the grave need to shut our mouths, open our ears and listen with our hearts to the Word of our Lord. It is there alone we find life. Just as that formerly rich man heard from Abraham in regard to his brothers - "*let them listen to Moses and prophets*", so Jesus instructs the unbelieving Jews in our text, who supposedly did study Moses and the

prophets: **Eternal Life's Riches Are Credited to Us only thru the Word of Christ.**

I

In so many commencement addresses during this time of the year, the graduates are encouraged to go out and apply their education to making themselves rich in this life. Yes, there are usually lofty words spoken about making a difference in the world to benefit the human race. But in the end it is assumed that if such pursuits are followed, the graduate will reap personal benefits as well and be enriched in many ways as repayment for the hard work and money expended in becoming so well educated.

But our Lord promises us that there is a different course of study, which offers so much more. He said: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me." So the premise is true, searching the Holy Scriptures, God's Word to us, bestows eternal life. It is more than just information, it is the tool of the Holy Spirit, who gives us the very things that are declared therein, like forgiveness of sins, eternal life and everlasting salvation. The Spirit does this because it is in those sacred inspired words where we are given Christ Jesus and all His blessings; on every page, there the sinner receives his Savior.

But the problem comes when the sinner refuses this blessed gift of eternal life in Christ. So Jesus sadly had to observe about those who were listening to Him that day: "You search the Scriptures ... it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

Does that characterize your searching of the Scriptures? (*Graduates, you have spent time in our school for various lengths of time where daily you have heard and studied these sacred words of our Lord, have you rejoiced that you have received Christ there? Or have you ignored the significance of what you have been so liberally given?*) Those to whom Jesus was speaking were not some godless neglecters of hearing the Scriptures. They regularly attended divine services on the Sabbath. They did search the Scriptures, but for many wrong reasons.

These same reasons are still found among us to this day. Some will read the Scriptures to find the Law, which condemns their neighbors and imagine they do a far better job of keeping it. Some will read the Scriptures to find some clever pithy sayings, which look nice as plaques, refrigerator

magnets or provide sentimental greeting cards for all sorts of occasions. Some will read the Scriptures to back up their political positions with words that are ripped out of context and have nothing to do with what they are now being applied. Searching the Scriptures in order to receive what God desires them to receive is so far away from their purpose and it leaves them poor and beggarly when it comes to the eternal riches, which our Lord desires for them to receive.

II

Again, this is the sad observation of our Lord about those who were hearing Him the day of our text: “the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.” The sound of the Word resonated in their ears, but it did not find a place in the heart through faith. They were dead letters bestowing no blessings at all for them. Consequently they did not have the love of God within them.

The Apostle Paul urged the Colossian Christians to receive the eternal riches when he wrote: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

My fellow sinners, you and I need that living word of Christ to dwell in us richly. Our relationship with God our heavenly Father depends on the riches His Son bestows upon us through that word which declares to us who Jesus is for us and what He has done for us. We in turn through our worship repeat these blessed life-giving truths in our songs of praise.

The Scripture available for Jesus’ hearers on the day of our text was the Old Testament, but it is no different than the New Testament, which yet was to be written. In those OT Scriptures Christ our Savior was the focus, the Word that gave life. Consider the account of the children of Israel rebelling against God and His prophet Moses and how poisonous snakes were sent to punish these rebels. They were biting and killing them. They pleaded for mercy. God then had Moses put a brazen serpent on a pole and directed the people being bitten to look at it promising them they would live.

Jesus tells us that this was a picture of Him, like so many incidents and ceremonies in the Old Testament were. He said, "just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." In other words, Jesus, true man and true God, had to be crucified, punished for the sins of the whole world.

Sinful reason among those being bitten by the snakes in the wilderness rejected the notion that looking at the image of the problem was going to save them. Sinful reason would advise that one must stomp, kick and scream and handle the plague of the snakes himself. But these actions would lead to certain death. The same is true for you today. If you think that you must take care of your own sin by straightening out your life, presenting a better you before God, you will die everlastingly. Instead God invites you to look to the image of your problem in the crucified Lord Jesus. There alone is where your sin is paid for. There alone you find the righteousness you so desperately need in the perfect Son of God who took your place.

Jesus pointed out to His listeners that day that they were shunning the glory that God their Father was offering them so richly in His Son. Instead they sought after the glory that they could receive from one another as they would receive the compliments and rewards from other sinners for being so grand and glorious. Who do you think received the praise of men of the two men in our Gospel for today - the rich man or the beggar? Surely the rich man was considered wise, important, grand and glorious by his neighbors. Lazarus received scorn as that stupid disgusting worthless beggar.

Through the Word of Christ alone, my fellow redeemed you are credited with the eternal riches. God gives you in His Son all that you need for everlasting life. Search the Scriptures all your days to find your loving God in the person and work of His Son.

Therefore "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." Yes you and I now are thought to be poor beggars lying at the gates of the world's riches, who repent of our many sins including our misuse and abuse of God's saving Word. We have nothing to offer God in exchange for our many sins. But for Jesus' sake we are rich beyond measure, possessing eternal life in His name right now. Continue to search

and study those Scriptures (*graduates do not forsake the practice of searching the Scriptures just because you are leaving this Christian school, your parents intended this to be the beginning of a lifetime activity*) for in them alone you receive the riches of the Heir, the only begotten Son of God. Amen.