

“You Have Moses and the Prophets”

Luke 16:19-31

Whether it is our First Communion class, Confirmation class, or new member adult instruction; I always include a one hour-and-a-half session on the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. We look at the bibliographic evidence (the mountain of written evidence from inside and outside of Scripture). It is beyond any reasonable doubt that the Old Testament as we have it today is basically identical to what would have been read in synagogues in Jesus' day, because, among other things, what we have is basically identical to the Dead Sea Scrolls (the few variations have no theological relevance. The only addition is one 70 word variant reading at the end of 1st Samuel 10 where the Dead Sea Scrolls make reference to some foreign king named Nahash). The Old Testament we have is the Old Testament they had.

The scrolls found in the caves along the Dead Sea were produced as far back as 408 BC up through the time of Jesus and the Apostles. God has preserved Moses and the Prophets.

In our classes, we look at the archaeological evidence (I don't think a year has gone by in my almost 25 years of ministry that there hasn't been a new significant discovery further solidifying the reality that the Bible is recorded history). Just a couple of weeks ago, archaeologists announced

that they believe they have found the town of Emmaus. Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening.

When you examine the New Testament within the field of study known as Historical Criticism, there is no ancient book or document that is more firmly rooted as having been written in the time period it was written, by the people who have claimed to have written it than the New Testament. And these writers make some very bold claims.

Couple with that the fact that it is impossible to explain the Jewish and Roman historical record of the First Century unless there is an empty tomb in Jerusalem. The body of evidence supporting the fact that there was an empty tomb in Jerusalem where a fellow named Jesus of Nazareth was placed after being crucified by Pontius Pilate – that body of evidence has more empirical support than the body of evidence that Julius Caesar was the first Emperor of Rome. I'm not exaggerating. Most of what you think you know about Julius Caesar comes from William Shakespeare.

However, as I put forth the evidence in my hour-and-a-half presentation (which I promise I will not give you the fullness of today), I begin with the Rich Man and Lazarus. Specifically, I begin with what Abraham says to the rich man.

The rich man is in hell, not because he is rich, but because he loved money, trusted his money, and did not trust in God or do His will. He feasted every day, while he allowed Lazarus to lie at his gate with little or nothing to eat.

It is an unfortunate reality that there are those who go through this life alone, and not by choice. Lazarus, the poor beggar covered in sores who Jesus speaks of – whose only comfort was to be licked by dogs, who had nothing. Jesus juxtaposes him to the rich man who has a big dinner party every night. He seemingly had won life's lottery. But in the end, it was Lazarus' faith which was the real treasure and he spends eternity with Abraham and all the saints.

As an aside, when reading Scripture, it is very obvious that care and concern for those who are alone is a high priority. Care for widows and orphans is emphasized in the Old and New Testament. Jesus says that on the Last Day, He will declare caring for those who are alone to be a sign of faith– because Jesus says, “When I was sick and in prison, you visited Me. . . Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for Me.” One of the earliest statements about man who was created in God's image is that “it is not good for man to be alone.” That is one of the many blessings of a church family. I think it is also the reason so many people who live alone have animals.

But in this parable, the part of it that I begin my “Evidence for the Resurrection” presentation with is what Abraham says to the rich man concerning the rich man's brothers. First, the rich man wants Lazarus to leave heaven and come to hell so that he can give him even the slightest relief from the anguish of the flames. A bit of irony as the rich man never lifted a finger or threw Lazarus some table scraps while he was lying at his gate.

But Abraham informs the rich man that no one can cross over. Judgment is final having passed through the depths of Sheol – to use an Old Testament image. So the rich man has another idea. He has five brothers who also are faithless. He wants to warn them. He wants Lazarus to come back from the dead and warn them.

Abraham simply says, “They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.” The rich man says, “No, if someone comes back from the dead, then they will repent. Then they will believe.” And Abraham says, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”

How do we know that these words of Abraham in the parable are true? Someone did rise from the dead. Specifically, the One who was foretold by Moses and the Prophets – Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. How do we know this? Our faith is not founded on the evidence of archaeology or the fact that a First Century Roman historian like Tacitus wrote about the death of Jesus at the hands of Pontius Pilate, and what he calls “a most mischievous superstition” concerning the empty tomb.

Our faith is founded on the sure witness of Moses and the Prophets, of the Apostles and Evangelists. We believe them, because this chorus of faithful witnesses has told us a man has risen from the dead. The good news is that just as He is risen from the dead, so will you rise and be with Him for all eternity. Amen.