

Father, we come before you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do declare your glory. Father, we also declare the fact that you are sovereign over our ears. You are sovereign over our eyes.

We pray that you open our eyes that we may see. Open our ears that we may hear the glories of your word. Father, it will be to your glory. It will be by your spirit. It will testify to the power of your word. And Father, it is to your word we turn as your people. Feed us, we pray in the name of Christ. Amen. You may be seated. Our great honor is to turn to the word of God. And so we turn to Luke chapter 16, beginning in verse 19. Here now the word of God. There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and he saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 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'm in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, child, remember that in you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. And besides all this between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able and none may cross from there to us. And he said, then I beg you father to send into my father's house for I have five brothers so that he may warn them lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, no, father Abraham. But if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God for his word. What a privilege it is to be here again at the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina. I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. What an honor it is to be here. What an encouragement. It is good from time to time for me to be able to say thank you to a congregation that has given so much and meant so much to me. You know, through a succession of pastors here, in particular Sinclair Ferguson and Derek Thomas, and now, of course, with Dr. Neil Stewart, I just want to thank you for your gift to Christ's church, of the preaching of this church, and the witness of this church, and the fellowship of this church, your reputation. precede you. And it's not a small thing these days for me to be in a city as historic as Columbia

and find a first church twice on the Lord's Day filled and will be yet again for the preaching of the Word of God and the gathering of Christ's people. I just want to say thank you.

It is such an honor to be here once again. And I also want to say this because I lead the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

I've been president there for three decades. I feel it. We have students sometimes who

they come for orientation. They're in the room and there are the portraits of all the presidents. Mine was painted when I was 33. And I point to them and I say, that's the same man, and they don't believe me. But nonetheless, I have through those 30 years grown to even greater, greater sense of gratitude and indebtedness. The founder of our school, James Pettigrew Boyce, was for many years pastor of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, South Carolina, and our institution was born in Greenville, South Carolina, chased away by circumstances, and we are now in Louisville, Kentucky, but it is good to be here in South Carolina, which is in so many ways God's providential home and incubus for the institution I have the honor of leading.

I also just want to say thank you for who you are as a congregation in terms of the friendly bonds this congregation and its many pastors have had with other evangelical Christians, and especially those of Reformed theology, who stand together and encourage one another. I've been so encouraged by Dr.

Stewart just during the time I'm here. I'm just so thankful to know he's here, and I look forward to years of friendship ahead. My great privilege today is to preach the word of God. And to turn to Luke chapter 16, and we just read the text together. And so as we've come together to this point in Christian worship, which in Protestant worship, which we understand to be the biblical pattern, we ready ourselves to hear the word of God, and then we hear it together. The preacher is hearing it with the congregation. And what an amazing text, Luke chapter 16. It's one of the parables of Jesus. And one of the dangers of the parables is that to use a term applied elsewhere, we domesticate them. We think we know them, we think they're safe, and yet the parables of Jesus are not at all safe. As a matter of fact, they are absolutely explosive. And what we need to think of when we think of the parables is not so much a sweet story told by Jesus as Jesus taking out a hand grenade holding in front of people, pulling the pin out, and everyone knows this thing's gonna go off. Now, I don't know about you, but I'm one of those people who hears things and has to think about them. And so there are times when, and this was especially true when I was at home, taught by my parents, at some point, I don't know, after the conversation, I would realize, oh, that's what he was talking about. Now, I did not want him to think I did not know what we were talking about at the moment. Happened often with my mother.

It would take me some time to figure out, oh, that's what she

meant. I think that should not feel really strange to us. I think that's one of the dimensions of Christian preaching we often don't think about. And that is the fact that after the word is preached, I hope and pray that several points during the week, perhaps the Holy Spirit brings this text to mind and you realize, oh, that's what that was about. Now, I say that in particular about this parable because a few of the parables of Jesus turn in ways that are unexpected. Now here we are at Luke chapter 16. The previous chapter, Luke chapter 15, is a series of three parables about lostness and foundness. And you'll recall it starts out with a lost sheep. And then it moves to a lost coin and then to a lost son. And the prodigal son, you'll remember, is a son that goes off into a far country. He treats his father as if he were dead. And then there is what we know, a picture of illumination, of the Holy Spirit's work in calling him back to his father. And he goes back to his father, his father's merciful. And you look at that and you say, well, that's what it's like. It's one thing to, though, have a lost sheep, one out of many sheep. It's another thing to have a lost coin, one out of several coins. But this is a lost son, and the son has now come home. And yet then comes the swerve. And the swerve in the parable reminds us, oh, wait just a minute, this is not a parable about a lost son. This is a parable about two lost sons. One lost having gone into a far country and the other one lost while thinking he's very much at home. And all of a sudden the thing explodes on us and you recognize that people got angry about this parable and they didn't so much get angry about the first son as they were angry about Jesus speaking of the second son. Turns out that Jesus tells that parable and the climax of it is the son who refuses to rejoice with the father when his brother has come home. Likewise in Luke chapter 16 this parable begins in a way where we think we know what it's about and we think we know where it's going and then all of a sudden there's a swerve and it turns out it was about that but more importantly it's about something else. And it's to that we will turn. The parable begins with Jesus speaking about two different men. And this is a situation you probably have heard this parable many times. You're familiar with it. It's a setting in which you have a rich man and a poor man. And the rich man is as fabulously rich as you could imagine. But the problem is not his wealth. The problem is his heart. And so there was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. Now you look at that and you go, what a life. But it's actually such an exaggeration. For one thing, in the first century, a feast was the entire day's preoccupation. In fact, they had to have days leading up to it to get ready for a feast. And as is so often the case for our feast, it takes a few days to get over it as

well. But to feast every day, that's absolutely ridiculous. It's a cartoon character. Not only that, he's a cartoon character in other ways. He's laughable because he wears purple, which is the color of royalty. This is nouveau riche. This is bad class money. This

is too much money, too little class. This is a guy, he wants to look like he is a king, when really he's just a fat guy with a lot of money. because he feasts sumptuously every day. And so that's one picture, and it's a picture of complete self-centeredness to the extent that you no longer even see yourself. He doesn't even understand how

this looks, but he's committed to it. Meanwhile, there's the other man, and at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus covered with sores who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Now, this too is a very stark picture, but it's not a stark picture of excess and of gluttony, of selfishness and self-centeredness. It's a picture of a man dying of desperate hunger. And just imagine the picture.

He's laid, and so often the case, you would have somebody who was in horrible shape, they would be laid near a person of means home, maybe at the gate of the house, as an obvious case of needed charity. And it was an act of desperation.

And apparently the friends of Lazarus did that, they put him at the rich man's gate. Didn't have any effect. He desired and would have survived had he eaten only what fell from the rich man's table. But, and the text is really clear, no one was giving anything to him. And so the picture is one that's grotesque, but we can pretty much understand it. You have the rich man, he has more than he needs in a way that's almost indescribable. And he's self-centered in a way that is beyond our understanding, frankly. And then you have this poor man and his desperation is so horrible that not only is he starving to death, but he is dying of what happens when the body breaks down. And then the ultimate indignity and even the dogs came and licked his sores. Okay, that sounds bad enough, but you need to think about something else, and that is that number one, dog does not mean exactly what you think it means, at least in a cultural context. Americans are increasingly confused about dogs. It is a sign of the secularization and post-Christian nature of the age that you have people speaking of their dogs as their children. At a restaurant last night, I passed a sign that said, only certified assistant dogs allowed. I don't believe anybody's policing that. You can go on the internet and buy a little vest in which you can designate such. This is the world we're living in. It's not the way dogs were thought of, especially by Jewish people in the first century. And for one thing, the big problem is that dogs are scavengers. So you think of, you know, Sarge or Buffy, you should think instead of a vulture, of a buzzard. The dogs lick to sores, there's

another problem there, and you gotta think Jewish for a moment to get it. You gotta think Jewish for a moment to get it. What do dogs eat? Anything! That includes dead things, includes non-kosher things, includes horribly dirty things. And if a dog comes and licks your sores, you are basically not kosher, you are in the ultimate situation of indignity and you are ritually unclean. But then the scene changes, the scene changes, and Lazarus dies and look what the text says. poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side." That's astounding! His sores are being licked by dogs? He dies an ultimate indignity, he dies of starvation, he dies of malnutrition, and the next thing you know he dies inside of the rich man's table and when he dies he's then taken to Abraham's bosom? That's spectacular beyond our imagination. He died Just having been in the situation where he would have survived to what fell from a rich man's table, now he's being hosted by Abraham. Just understand what that means in the Jewish mind. Here you have the promise of Father Abraham personally hosting Lazarus in the age to come. Lazarus is now eating with Abraham, that's what it means to be in his bosom, that's to recline at the meal, it's the most privileged position. This is spectacular. Jesus says the way things are in this life that's not even a hint of the way they're going to be in the kingdom of Christ. But then the rich man also died. And you notice, this is what it says, the rich man also died. We expect Lazarus to die. The rich man, we don't expect to die, but the rich man dies. Maybe if we'd seen him eating, we'd understand why he died. But nonetheless, he died. And notice what it says, he also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. Okay, so that's not what he expected either. You know one of the problems is and there's an entire perversion of the gospel known as prosperity theology that basically says that if you are prospering it's because you have God's favor and if you are not it is because you lack God's favor. The church throughout 20 centuries of experience and biblical exhortation has had to learn that's a lie. That is a lie. We prosper in Christ, but there are plenty of Christians who have died of horrible disease, of wasting diseases, of malnutrition. Prosperity theology is not just a distortion of the gospel, it's just self-evidently untrue. But it's an instinct that's very old, and it's as old as Jesus telling this parable. The people who saw the rich man just feasting sumptuously every day, they no doubt thought, God loves him, just look at this. Lazarus, God must not love him, just look at him. But now Lazarus is comforted in Abraham's bosom and the rich man also died and was buried and is now in torment in Hades. And here's where the story gets really interesting because we don't expect this. And so the rich man seeing Lazarus with Abraham in blessedness cries out to him,

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." I don't want to rush past this too quickly. Among the theological confusions of our age, and many of them are deliberate confusions, liberal theology has sought to deny the reality of eternal judgment and of eternal punishment. And this has been a project both among liberal Catholics and among liberal Protestants. I do want to bring to your attention the fact that there were liberal Catholics who were working on this and they were trying to argue that there's no such thing as hell. Hell's not a temporal reality. It's not a spatial reality. It's not an eternal judgment. And there's no eternal punishment, so get rid of the ideas of the torment of hell and the flames of hell and get rid of the idea that it's for eternity. And the reason I mention it is because I love one conservative Catholic who responded by saying, those are liberal theologians trying to air-condition hell. You know, good luck with it because hell will not be air-conditioned. And you know, here you have a clear biblical testimony. So the next time you hear someone questioning the reality of hell, well, here we have Jesus himself speaking this parable and he is not going to lie to us about the reality of hell. And he tells us right in this text, it's irreversible and it's eternal. And for those who are in hell, it is eternal punishment. At this point, it's described as Hades, the realm of the dead. This is where the rich man awaits the final punishment that is to come, but he sees Lazarus and he has a plan. Father Abraham, send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool my tongue for I'm in agony in this flame. And notice Abraham's response is, can't do it. He says, child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. So Abraham says, this is right. Notice this, Abraham doesn't back off of this. He simply says, you are where you are to be. And Lazarus is where he is to be. And besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed so that no one can go from where you are to where we are, nor from where we are to where you are." Again, the finality of it. This great chasm has been fixed. You hear the finality of that. Christian, this should remind us of the eternal punishment that we deserve in our sin but escape by the sheer mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. That wrath fell upon Christ. The wrath for our sin he took. And thus when we read this we realize for those who are not in Christ that wrath will fall upon them eternally and it will be righteous and it will be just and it will be forever and it will be uncorrectable. It's very interesting that it ends with this moment of finality because I think as we look at this we need to recognize that in the context of first century

Judaism when Jesus is saying this Every bit of what he's saying would in some sense shock his hearers as they're hearing it. This is far more definitive it's far more clear than anything that has come before in scripture. So here we have it right at this point. Jesus clarifies issues and he clarifies them across the board. No one can go from here to there or from there to here. And this is an eternal it's an eternal punishment for the impenitent and those who are outside Christ and its eternal blessedness for those who by the grace and mercy of God. are like Lazarus feasted comforted in Abraham's bosom." Well if we had that if that's all we had and the parable ended there as we might think it might end as a matter of fact it seems like that's the whole story the rich man makes his proposal Abraham says can't happen explains it period it's over it's not over but let's just think about it for a moment If this is all we had, this would be what New Testament scholars, and you can figure this out. You don't have to have a PhD in New Testament to figure this out. They call this the theme of the great reversal. And it's found throughout the New Testament. It's often used by Jesus. It's good for us to hear it because then we perhaps can see it when we're reading scripture and when we're studying the scripture. This great reversal means, okay, this is the way things are now. Not only are they gonna be different in the age to come, they're gonna be radically turned upside down. That's one of the promises of the gospel, isn't it? I mean, you look at the powers of the age, everything's going to be turned upside down. You look at the reign of sin, well, it's all going to be made right. Such a beautiful promise. God's judgment is sure and his judgment is altogether righteous. No flesh shall escape. But that's not where the parable ends. That's not where it ends. And the rich man's still talking, as rich men do. He's still talking. Look at this. Verse 27, and he said, then I beg you, Father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment. So he's never shown any concern for anybody before. He's now showing concern for his five brothers, and he knows they're just like him. Frankly, it's a wonder they got it from the table to go to his funeral. They went right back, and he understands they're there. And so, let's just say he has a plan. His plan is, send Lazarus to warn them lest they also come to this place of torment. It's not irrational, is it? Because you think there are the five brothers, it used to be six of them, but you know, older brothers now dead, and they're just going back to the same, same life, the same self-centeredness, the same gluttony, the same everything, and then there's a knock at the door. Someone goes to the door, there's Lazarus. Thought you were dead. I am dead. I was dead. I mean, you can understand the theory here. The theory is his brothers are

gonna repent. He's gonna annoy five brothers.
so that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place
of torment." So we can understand his logic, right? Let's admit
it. The old parables, take it a swerve, but we can understand
his logic. But Abraham sees right through
it. He says, listen, they have Moses and the prophets. Let them
hear them. Okay, that's astounding. That
is absolutely astounding. Abraham says, they have the Bible. You don't need Lazarus,
they
have the Bible. God has spoken to them. They have been given infallible
divine revelation concerning God's judgment, God's commands
in this life and in the age to come. And the rich man has an
immediate response and it is, no father Abraham, but if someone
goes to them from the dead, They will repent. They have the Bible, Abraham
says. They have Moses and the prophets.
They have the law and the prophets. They have the Bible. And the
rich man says, yeah, they got the Bible. But you send a dead
man and they're gonna believe. They're going to repent. Listen
to Abraham. 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. Okay, brothers and sisters in
Christ, this is just so important. Here we have in this text an
incredible testimony to the sufficiency of the word of God. And it's
not just the sufficiency of the word of God, it is as the reformers
learned in the 16th century, it's absolutely necessary to
say the sole sufficiency of the word of God. If you will not
hear Moses and the prophets, then you're not going to believe
even if one should rise from the dead. If you will not hear
the scriptures, then you will not hear ever. You know, I think all around
us are people who are confused about this. Yeah, we've got the
Bible, but what's going to compel me to believe the Bible? What
kind of new revelation am I going to receive? What kind of confirmation
am I going to receive? What kind of argument can you
come up with? You know, the church needs to be always ready to say
as well as to hear. If they will not hear Moses and
the prophets, neither will they believe, even if one should rise
from the dead. Sola Scriptura is more than a
Reformation principle. It's one of the basic laws of
the Christian life. And it's one to which Christ speaks so
clearly. And, you know, we have so many
passages that speak directly, propositionally to the power
of the Word of God as sharper than a two-edged sword, to the
strength and authority of the Word of God as the inerrant and
fallible Word that is given to us. The definitions of the Word
of God as God-breathed, sufficient Saving. But what we have right here.
is a parable that makes the same point. Unexpectedly, and after
a very significant swerve or turn, and I just have to tell
you, I think hauntingly, if we're honest, if they will not, if
they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe,
even if one should rise from the dead. Okay, and now here's

the point, is it not, you see it, you already get the point. The one who spoke this parable was headed to the cross and would be raised from the dead. And you look at the Gospel of Luke, this is Luke chapter 16, you fast forward in the Gospel of Luke, the people who refused to believe in Christ, to receive his message, to repent of their sins, and to come to him, the people who did so before the resurrection, guess what they did after the resurrection? They said it wasn't really that he died. It wasn't true that he was physically resurrected from the dead. The point is that if you will not hear the Scriptures, even if a dead man knocks on your door, you're not going to believe. Now this is first of all a warning to us, is it not? It's a warning to us as a church that we've got the Scripture, we are to teach and preach the Scripture, We are to live our lives predicated on obedience to the Word of God. We are to share the gospel and preach the Word. And there is no plan B. Let's just admit it this morning. There is no plan B. If this whole thing doesn't work out for the First Presbyterian Church, you've got no plan B. There's a reason why the exposition of Holy Scripture has been central to the life of this church for so long. And it's not because you're so smart. It's because you've got nowhere to go. There's nothing else to do. You can draw a crowd with other stuff, but you can't build Christ's church with anything but the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. And the warning here is just so dramatic. If they will not hear Moses and the prophets, then they will not hear even if one should rise from the dead. Now believer, this is also a reminder to us that it's all God's grace. It's not only scripture alone, it's also grace alone. Why did we hear it's God's grace, it's God's mercy? We preach the gospel and we declare the good news of the gospel that sinners are saved through the redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. And that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And if we confess with our lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, we shall be saved. How do we know that? Because scripture declares it. How does that happen? It is because the word of God comes to us and by God's grace, by his sheer mercy, our heart is open to receive the gospel our eyes see and our ears hear. So this text should ground us all in the sheer gratitude of what it means to be the recipient of God's mercy as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and to be reminded of God's grace in the fact that we heard and we believed and we're saved. And then I hope it centers us also in the continuing task of declaring the gospel so that as sinners hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the word and through the testimony of believers in the presentation of the gospel in such a way that sinners do

hear and hearing believe and believing are saved. But you know in the final word, the final word is simply that this text reminds us that we do have absolutely nowhere to go. It's the preaching of the word of God is plan A and B and C and D and on it goes until Jesus comes. Until we are like Lazarus comforted in heaven. It's such a beautiful picture.

It's meant to startle us. I hope this morning it has startled you. It's meant to shock us. And I hope this morning it has shocked us all. Not so that we would merely see what otherwise we might not have seen, but so that we might be centered all the more, not just in the knowledge of and affirmation of the sufficiency of scripture, but thankfulness to God who's shown his mercy to us in sending us Moses. and the prophets, and the gospels, and the epistles, the entirety of the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation. Thanks be to God. We have the Holy Scriptures. The question is now, are we going to obey them? Let's pray. Father, we come before you aware that even in the preaching of your Word, all is not, all is nothing. unless you bless the preaching of your words. So Father, we pray that even now in the name of Christ, the Holy Spirit will be opening our eyes and applying this word to our hearts to sanctify us, to conform us to the image of Christ. Father, we pray this will take place invisibly, but assuredly in hours, in days, in years to come. It will be to your everlasting glory. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.