

Are You Convinced?

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Lessons: Luke 16:19-31; Faith 1-2; Arcana Coelestia 2568.4, 6

What does it take for you to believe something is true? What makes something convincing? Is it the amount of evidence there is to prove it? Is it because everyone around you accepts it to be true? Maybe it's the authority or credibility of the source? We live in an age where we tend to question everything. We see something on the news or on the internet and say, "Is that real? Is that legit?" Maybe then we will do a little digging to see if what we saw is true or not. We have "fact-checkers" to analyze these things for us, but sometimes people even feel the need to fact-check the fact-checkers. When it comes to just pieces of information, it is not that big of a concern whether you acknowledge something to be true or not, but what about things that carry more weight? What about moral questions; how do you come to believe that something is right or wrong? What about questions of faith; how do you decide what religion you are going to believe in?

This morning we read a parable about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. This story tells us a lot about what it means to believe in some of those weightier areas. The rich man in the story had nice clothes that were purple and made of fine linen, and it says that he "fared sumptuously every day" which means that he lived a very elegant lifestyle. There was also a poor beggar named Lazarus at his gate, who was covered in sores and wished that he could eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. When we look to the internal sense of this story we find that the rich man represents someone who knows a lot about the teachings in the Word. His clothes being purple and fine linen mean that he has a strong knowledge of genuine truth and

genuine good from the Word, which means that he knows what the Lord teaches and how it is supposed to be applied to life. Lazarus, on the other hand, is poor. He does *not* have the knowledges and the understanding from the Word, but it says that he desires to eat the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table. This means that he wishes he had some of the knowledge of the Lord's truth which the rich man had. I think another way of looking at this is that Lazarus is someone who really wants to live a good life and follow the Lord, but for whatever reason he hasn't been exposed to the Word or he hasn't been able to understand it.

The story goes on to say that both the rich man and Lazarus died, but Lazarus was "carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom," which means that he was taken into heaven while the rich man found himself in hell. How surprising! Who would imagine that someone with such a strong knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Word would end up in hell while someone who knows very little if anything of them could be allowed into heaven. In this case, the rich man was someone who knew a lot about what the Lord teaches, and he saw how those teachings applied to life, but he was not actually *convinced* by them. He had made a habit of learning what was true, but only so far as it benefitted him or made him look good because of it. This is why in the story he calls out to Abraham and asks him to have Lazarus dip his finger in water to cool his tongue which was being tormented by fire. Fire in the Word represents our love, and the rich man loved himself more than anything, so the fire of his own selfishness tormented him. Lazarus dipping his finger in water represents truth. The rich man knew what was supposed to save him, but his love of self made it impossible for him to receive the truth without twisting it for his benefit, which is why Abraham says that there is a great gulf between them.

Now, at this point we see where the man really went off the rails. He says “I beg you therefore, father, that you would send [Lazarus] to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.” Abraham then responds that they have Moses and the prophets, so his brothers can hear them. The rich man then says “No...but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” And here we find probably the most condemning part of the whole story. Abraham says “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

There is a clear message here just looking at the literal story, but let’s look at some of the deeper elements going on. What does it mean that the man has five brothers? Brothers in the Word represent the good which is paired with truth. This means that they represent the way a person actually lives their life which is supposed to be guided by their understanding of truth, but “five” represents a disjunction or things that don’t line up. In the context of this story we can clearly see that the rich man was saying that even though he has a strong understanding of what the Word teaches, his life is not actually guided by that. In fact, he says that his five brothers are in his father’s house, which we are told represents our hereditary evils. He may know how the Lord says we should live, but he is still guided by his own hereditary evils rather than the Lord’s teachings.

When we are in this state, being guided by our own thoughts and desires, nothing the Lord teaches seems compelling to us. We may learn His teachings and understand them, but our own pride or our selfishness keeps us from believing in them. This is why the man’s brothers won’t hear Moses and the prophets. We are told that in the Word, hearing means “knowing

things contained in the Word and possessing faith in it, and so also willing those things.”¹ If they had *heard* the Lord’s teachings, then they would have willed them and lived them.

What does it mean to really believe something? We can learn that something is good and other things are bad, but is it enough to just acknowledge that in our minds? Think of it this way: imagine you were telling me how to find the church here and you said that it is on Cathedral rd.² If I agree and say that I believe you, but on Sunday morning I spend an hour driving up and down Buck rd. looking for it, I obviously didn’t believe you. If I had, then I would have *followed your directions* and found the church right where you told me it was. *This* is what it means to hear Moses and the prophets: understanding what the Word teaches us and being willing to follow it. Now, is this story saying that we shouldn’t question the teachings in the Word? Do Abraham’s words to the rich man mean that we are supposed to simply follow what the Word says without any doubt or concern? Should we be convinced of something just because the Word says it, or a minister teaches it to us?

Our reading from the Doctrine of Faith makes it clear that this kind of blind faith is not at all what the Lord asks of us. It says that we can not believe something if we don’t understand it. This means that it is *good* for us to ask questions. We are *supposed* to have doubts and test things out to see if they make sense to us. We have to think about what we are taught, see how it fits in with other things we know to be true and come to belief on our own. But how are we supposed to have doubts and ask questions without completely closing ourselves off to the Lord’s teaching?

It really comes down to our attitude. In our final reading from the *Arcana* we were told about two basic attitudes: one affirmative and one negative. The negative attitude is when someone denies everything until they are convinced to believe it. We are told that this attitude

¹ AC 3869.5

² Adapt the streets in this example to those of whatever church is being preached at.

leads to “utter stupidity and insanity” because it completely closes us off to the teachings of the Word. They may say that they are open as long as they find a compelling argument to believe, but just like the brothers in the story, the reality is that nothing will ever be able to convince them.

The affirmative attitude, on the other hand, is when someone “regards affirmatively the things which comprise doctrine drawn from the Word, that is, when he thinks within himself and believes that those things are true because the Lord has spoken them.” It says that this attitude leads to “perfect intelligence and wisdom.” On the surface, this passage might sound like it is telling us to believe without question whatever we see in the Word or are taught by the church, but the passage goes on to explain that it is okay to have doubt, as long as we have the right attitude. Doubting with an affirmative attitude means that when we are presented with a teaching, we start out by supposing that it is true. This is different from blindly accepting because it still requires asking questions, teasing out concepts, and wrestling with the teaching.

Let’s go back to the example of telling me where the church is. How would I test that out? If I had a *negative* doubt, I might spend the whole morning driving up and down Buck Rd. checking every structure to ensure that it’s not the church, but if I had a *positive* doubt, I would start by assuming you didn’t lie to me. I may be skeptical that the church is on cathedral rd. but I would *follow your directions* and check. Once I applied your directions and found that the church is actually where you claimed it was, then I would be convinced and know that you were telling me the truth.

This is the same process we should go through with teachings from the Word. Remember the rich man and his brothers. He knew what the Word taught, but he was never willing to step away from his hereditary nature and test out the teachings by applying them to his life. When we

see teachings that tell us how to live like don't steal, don't commit adultery, help your neighbor, read the Word, we should test them by *trying them out*. It's okay to be skeptical at first! We might think "I don't know if reading the Word or praying daily is really going to make a difference in my life," but if we start with that affirmative attitude and try it out, we might find ourselves not only growing in our faith and understanding, but also receiving the blessings of living a heavenly life.

This is the key difference between the rich man and Lazarus. Even though Lazarus is poor, and doesn't know what the Word teaches, he still wants to *live* a good life. This desire to live a good life and follow the Lord gives us that affirmative attitude which opens us up to receiving the Lord's truth. We all have Lazarus inside us. There is a part of all of us that wants to follow the Lord and live a heavenly life. And yet, we also have the rich man. We have part of us that just wants to look good on the outside, but do as we wish behind closed doors. The question is, which of these are we going to feed? When we go to church or when we read the Word and we are presented with truths about how we should live our lives, are we going to simply hold those teachings in our minds, waiting to be convinced that they are worth our while or are we going to try them out? If we open ourselves to the Lord, and approach His teachings with an affirmative attitude and a willingness to apply them to our lives, then we will be like Lazarus being held in the Lord's bosom in heaven.

Amen.