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## *Hell is Truth Known Too Late – The Rich Man and Lazarus* [Part 4]

*September 4, 2022*

**Sermon Text:** Luke 16:19-31

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus' parable (and never forget, this is the Lord Jesus Himself speaking)... his parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus emphasizes several sobering if not terrifying doctrines meant for our good. Doctrines such as the truth that Hell is real. And Hell is eternal. Men may try to adjust these facts so that eternity is more appealing to them, but they can never, never, never alter them. Hell is real. And Hell is eternal. As we heard R.C. Sproul say so often, *right now counts forever*. Right now. This

moment. This minute. This present life – counts forever because this life in the now is, one could say, a great probation for every human being. And the test is, *what will we do with Jesus? With the gospel that declares the Son of God came into this fallen world, revealed the Father to us, perfectly obeyed the Law and went to the cross to bear the curse that was upon His people. And that He rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for His elect.*

Right now counts forever. What a person does with this gospel now, counts forever – either to eternal life, or eternal damnation. And these two ways – the Broadway and the Narrow Way, are illustrated for us in this very parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Are you beginning to see as we

keep coming back to these words of Jesus, how remarkable this Scripture is? How many people, including ourselves, wonder at times – *what happens when we die?* Some researchers have even observed the weight of a dying person to see if they can detect any change when the soul leaves the body – if indeed, they wonder, if the soul even exists. What happens when we die? Cemeteries remind us. The obituaries remind us. Traffic fatalities, deaths from disease, the local funeral home on the corner – all are reminders of this thing called *death*. What is it? What happens when we die?

And this Scripture, I say, is remarkable because *the Lord Jesus answers that question!! He gives us a window into the “beyond,” into the “afterlife.”* And the only question which all of this puts to us, which Jesus puts to us, is...*do you believe this?* God, in His Word, sometimes intends to scare the devil out of us. That is exactly what He is doing here. This is why the parable focuses primarily on the Rich Man in Hades rather than Lazarus in Paradise.

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If you are being careless, if you are someone who has deceived yourself about your standing before God...then I pray that the Spirit of God would use this account of Hell to make you shudder, to cause you to lose sleep, to go before God and plead, because of Christ, to save you. Before today becomes tomorrow, and it is too late.

This morning I want to begin by sharing with you the words of J.C. Ryle on this very passage. Let's all pray intensely that the Lord will use this to strike us all powerfully with God's Word: [You can find Ryle's words in his book, *Practical Religion*, in the chapter entitled, *Riches and Poverty*].

There are probably very few readers of the Bible who are not familiar with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It is one of those passages of Scripture, which leaves an indelible impression on the mind. Like the parable of the Prodigal Son, once read it is never forgotten. The reason for this is clear and simple. The whole

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parable is a most vividly painted picture.

The story, as it goes, carries our senses with it with irresistible power. Instead of readers, we become onlookers. We are witnesses of all the events described. We see. We hear. We believe we could almost touch. The rich man's table-the purple-the fine linen-the gate-the beggar lying by it-the sores-the dogs-the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table-the two deaths-the rich man's burial- the ministering angels-Abraham's side-the rich man's fearful waking up-the fire-the great separation-the hopeless remorse-all, all stand out before our eyes in bold relief, and stamp themselves upon our minds. This is the attainment of the famous Arabian standard of eloquence-"He speaks the best who turns the ear into an eye."

But, after all, it is one thing to admire the brilliant composition of this parable, and quite another to understand the spiritual lessons it contains. The eye of the intellect can often see beauties while the

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heart remains asleep, and sees nothing at all. Hundreds read Pilgrim's Progress with deep interest, to whom the struggle for the celestial city is foolishness. Thousands are familiar with every word of the parable before us today, who never consider how it applies to their own situation. Their conscience is deaf to the cry, which ought to ring in their ears as they read, "You are the man!"

Their heart never turns to God with the solemn question, "Lord, is this my picture? Lord, is it me?"

I invite you today to consider the leading truths, which this parable is meant to teach us. May the Holy Spirit give us a teachable spirit, and an understanding heart, and therefore produce lasting impressions on our souls!

**I. Let us observe, first of all, "How different the conditions are which God allots to different persons."** The Lord Jesus begins the parable by telling us about a rich man and a beggar. He does not say a word in praise of either poverty or of riches. He describes

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the circumstances of a wealthy man and the circumstances of a poor man; but He neither condemns the earthy position of one, nor praises that of the other. The contrast between the two men is painfully striking. Look closely at the picture before us. Here is one who possessed an abundance of this world's good things—"A rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day." Here is another who literally has nothing. He is a friendless, diseased, have-starved destitute person. "At the rich man's gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores," and he begs for crumbs.

Both are children of Adam. Both came from the same dust, and belonged to one family. Both are living in the same land and subject to the same government. And yet how different is their condition! But we must be careful that we do not draw lessons from the parable, which it was never meant to teach. The rich are not always bad persons, and do not always go to hell. The poor are not always good people, and do not always go to

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heaven. We must not rush into the extreme of supposing that it is sinful to be rich. We must not run away with the idea that there is anything wicked in the difference of condition here described, and that God intended all men to be equal. There is nothing in our Lord Jesus Christ's words to warrant any such conclusion. He simply describes things as they are often seen in the world, and as we must expect to see them.

**II. Let us observe, in the next place, that "a person's worldly condition is no test of the state of their soul."** The rich man in the parable appears to have been the world's pattern of a prosperous man. If the life that now is were all there is, then he seems to have everything that a heart could wish for. We know that he was "dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day." We needn't doubt that he had everything else which money could buy. The wisest of men had good reason for saying, "Money is the answer for everything. The rich have many friends." [Ecclesiastes 10:19; Proverbs 14:20]

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But who can read this story completely through without seeing that in the highest and best sense *the rich man was pathetically poor*? Take away the good things of his life, and he had nothing left-nothing after death-nothing beyond the grave-nothing in the world to come. With all of his riches he had no “treasure laid up in heaven.” With all of his purple and fine linen he had no garment of righteousness. With all of his rich and successful friends he had no Friend and Advocate at God's right hand. With all of his sumptuous food he had never tasted the bread of life. With his entire magnificent palace he had no home in the eternal world.

Without God, without Christ, without faith, without grace, without forgiveness, without holiness, he lives to himself for a few short years, and then goes down hopelessly into the pit of hell. How hollow and unreal was all his prosperity! Judge what I say-“The rich man was very poor.”

Lazarus appears to have been one who had literally nothing in the

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world. It is hard to conceive a case of greater misery and destitution than his. He had neither house, nor money, nor food, nor health, nor, in all probability, even clothes. His picture is one that can never be forgotten. “At the [rich man's] gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores.” He longed, “to eat what fell from the rich man's table.” Moreover, “the dogs came and licked his sores.” Indeed the wise man might well say, “The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends. Poverty is the ruin of the poor.” [Proverbs 14:20; 10:15]

But anyone who reads the parable to the end cannot fail to see that in the highest sense *Lazarus was not poor, but “rich!”* Lazarus was a child of God. He was an heir of glory. He possessed enduring riches and righteousness. His name was in the Book of Life. His place was prepared for Him in heaven. He had the best of clothing-the righteousness of a Savior. He had the best of friends-God Himself was his advocate. He had the best of food-he had food to eat the world knew nothing of. And, best

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of all, *he had these things forever.* They supported him in life. They did not leave him in the hour of death. They went with him beyond the grave. They were with him in eternity. Surely in this point of view we may well say, *not "poor Lazarus," but "rich Lazarus."*

We would do well to measure all men by God's standard--to measure them not by the amount of their income, but by the condition of their souls. When the Lord God looks down from heaven and sees the children of men, He ignores many things, which are esteemed by the world. He does not look at men's money, or lands, or titles. He looks only at the state of their souls, and judges them accordingly. Oh, that you would strive to do likewise! Oh, that you would value grace above titles, or intellect, or gold!

Often, far too often, the only question asked about a man is, "How much is he worth?" It would be good for us all to remember that every man is tragically poor until he is rich in faith, and rich toward God. [James 2:5] As wonderful as

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it may seem to some, all the money in the world is worthless on God's scales, compared to grace! Hard as the saying may sound, I believe that a converted beggar is far more important and honorable in the sight of God than an unconverted king. The one may glitter like the butterfly in the sun for a little while, and be admired by an ignorant world; but his end is darkness and misery forever. The other may crawl through the world like a worm, and be despised by every one who sees him; but his end is a glorious resurrection and a blessed eternity with Christ. Of him the Lord says, "I know your afflictions and your poverty-yet you are rich!" [Rev 2:9]

King Ahab was ruler over the ten tribes of Israel. Obadiah was nothing more than a servant in his household. Yet who can doubt who was the most precious in God's sight, the servant or the king? Ridley and Latimer were deposed from all their dignities, cast into prison as criminals, and in time burned at the stake. Bonner and Gardiner, their persecutors, were raised to the highest point of

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ecclesiastical greatness, enjoyed large incomes, and died content and untroubled in their beds. Yet who can doubt which of the two parties was on the Lord's side? Baxter, the famous clergyman, was persecuted with savage hostility, and condemned to a long imprisonment by a most unjust judgment. Jeffreys, the Chief Justice who sentenced him, was a man of shameful character without either morality or religion. Baxter was sent to jail and Jeffreys was loaded with honors. Yet who can doubt which was the good man of the two, the Chief Justice Jeffreys or the author of the Christ honoring book, "Saint's Everlasting Rest"? We can be very sure that riches and worldly greatness are no sure marks of God's favor.

They are often, on the contrary, a snare and hindrance to a man's soul. They make him love the world and forget God. What does Solomon say? "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint." [Proverbs 23:4] What does Paul say? "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and

into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." [1 Timothy 6:9]

We can be sure that poverty and trial are not sure proofs of God's anger. They are often blessings in disguise. They are always sent in love and wisdom. They often serve to wean man from the world. They teach him to set his affections on things above. They often show the sinner his own heart. They often make the saint fruitful in good works. What does the book of Job say? "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty." [Job 5:17] What does Paul say? "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." [Hebrews 12:6]

One great secret of happiness in this life is to have a patient, contented spirit. Strive daily to realize the truth that this life is not the place of reward. The time of retribution and reward is yet to come. Judge nothing quickly before that time. Remember the words of the wise man: "If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and

justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.” [Ecclesiastes 5:8]

Yes! there is a day of judgment yet to come. That day will put everyone in their right places. At that time there will be seen a distinction “between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.” [Malachi 3:18] The children of Lazarus and the children of the rich man will in time be seen in their true colors, and every one will receive according to his works.

**III. Let us observe, in the next place, how “all classes of persons will eventually come to the grave.”** The rich man in the parable died, and Lazarus died too. Different and divided as they were in their lives, they both had to drink of the same cup at the end. Both went to the grave. Both went to that place where rich and poor meet together. Dust they were, and unto dust they returned. [Genesis 3:19] This is the fate of all men. It will be ours too, unless the Lord will first

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return in glory.

After all our scheming, and contriving, and planning, and studying-after all our inventions, and discoveries, and scientific attainments, there remains one enemy we cannot conquer and disarm, and that is death. The chapter in Genesis which records the long lives of Methuselah and the rest, who lived before the flood, winds up the simple story of each by two expressive words: “he died.”

And now, after thousands of years, what more can be said of the greatest among ourselves? The histories of Marlborough, and Washington, and Napoleon, and Wellington, arrive at just the same humbling conclusion. The end of each, after all his greatness is just this--“he died.”

*Death is a mighty leveler.* He spares none and he waits for none. He will not wait until you are ready. Doors, and bars, and locks will not keep him out. A man boasts that his home is his castle, but with all his boasting, he cannot

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exclude death. An Austrian nobleman would not allow death and the smallpox to be named in his presence. But, named or not named, it matters little, in God's appointed hour death will come. One man rolls easily along the road in the most elegant carriage that money can buy. Another struggles as he walks along the path on foot. Yet both are sure to meet in the end under the earth, in the grave.

One man, like Absalom, has fifty servants to wait on him and do his bidding. Another has none to lift a finger to do him a service. But both are traveling to a place where they must lie down alone. One man has in his possession hundreds of thousands of dollars. Another has scarcely a penny that he can call his own property. Yet neither one nor the other can carry one cent with him into the unseen world. One man owns nearly half of the farmland in a county. Another doesn't even have a small garden. And yet six feet of the earth will be fully sufficient for either of them when they are dead. One man pampers his body with every possible delicacy, and clothes it in

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the richest and softest apparel. Another scarcely has enough food to eat, and seldom enough clothes to put on. Yet both are hurrying on to a day when “ashes to ashes, and dust to dust,” will be proclaimed over them, and fifty years later no one will be able to say, “These are the rich man's bones, and these are the bones of the poor, for they will both be nothing but dust.

I know that these are familiar thoughts. I don't deny it for a moment. I am only stating stale old things that everyone knows. But I am also saying things that not everyone “perceives” Oh, no! *if they did perceive them, then they would not speak and act as they do.*

You wonder sometimes at the tone and language of ministers of the Gospel. You marvel that we press upon you for an immediate decision. You think we are extreme, and extravagant, and eccentric in our views, because we urge you to yield your total lives to Christ-to leave nothing uncertain-to make sure that you are born again and ready for heaven. You hear, but do not approve. You go

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away, and say to one another, “The man means well, but he goes too far.”

But don't you see that the reality of death is continually forbidding us from speaking in any other way? We see death gradually thinning our congregations. We miss face after face in our assemblies. We do not know whose turn may come next. We only know that when the tree falls there it will lie, and that “after death comes the judgment.” We must be bold and decided, and uncompromising in our preaching. We would rather run the risk of offending some, than of losing any. We aim at the standard established by that grand old preacher Baxter, who said, “I will preach as though I would never preach again, and as a dying man to dying men”

It was said of one bold and courageous preacher: “That man preaches as though death was following close behind him. When I hear him preach I cannot go to sleep.” Oh, that men and women would learn to live with an awareness that one day they are going to die! Truly it is waste of

time to set our hearts on a dying world and its short-lived comforts and pleasures, and for the sake of momentary pleasures to lose a glorious eternity in Heaven! Here we are striving, and laboring, and exhausting ourselves about little things, and running here and there like ants on an anthill and yet after a few years we will all be gone, and another generation will take our place.

Let us live for eternity. Let us seek His Kingdom and His Righteousness that can never be taken from us. And let us never forget John Bunyan's golden rule: *“He that would live well, let him make the thoughts of his dying day his daily friend.”*

**IV. Let us observe, in the next place, “How precious a believer's soul is in the sight of God.”** The rich man, in the parable, dies and is buried. Perhaps he had an impressive funeral—a funeral in proportion to his wealth and position that he had when he was still alive. But we hear nothing further of his wealth and power when his soul and body were

divided in death. The next thing we hear of is that he is in hell. The poor man, in the parable also dies. We don't know what type of burial he had.

Today a destitute person's funeral is normally a sad affair. The funeral of Lazarus was probably no better. But this we do know-that *the moment Lazarus dies he is carried by the angels to Abraham's side-carried to a place of rest, where all the faithful are waiting for the resurrection of the just.*

To my mind, there is something very striking, very touching, and very comforting in this illustration of the parable. I ask your special attention to it. It throws great light on the relation of all sinners who believe in Christ, to their God and Father. It shows a little of the care bestowed on the least and lowest of Christ's disciples, by the King of kings.

No man has such friends and servants as the believer however little he may think about it. Angels rejoice over him in the day that he is born again of the Spirit. Angels

minister to him all through his life. Angels encamp around him in the wilderness of this world. Angels take charge of his soul in his hour of death, and transport it safely home. Yes! Vile as he may be in his own eyes, and lowly in his own sight, the very poorest and humblest believer in Jesus is cared for by his Father in heaven, with a care that is beyond understanding. The Lord has become his Shepherd, and he will "not be in need." [Psalm 23:1]

*Only let a man come honestly and truthfully to Christ, and be joined to Him, and he will have all the benefits of a being a child of the Living God.* Is he weighted down with many sins? "Though his sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow." Is his heart hard and prone to evil? A new heart will be given to him, and a new spirit put in him. Is he weak and cowardly? He that enabled Peter to confess Christ before his enemies will make him bold. Is he ignorant? He that was patient with Thomas' slowness will be patient with him, and guide him into all truth. Is he alone in his position? He that stood

by Paul when all men abandoned him will also stand by his side. Is he in circumstances of special trial? He that enabled men to be saints in Nero's household will also enable him to persevere.

The very hairs of his head are all numbered. Nothing can harm him without God's permission. He that hurts him, hurts the apple of God's eye, and injures a brother and member of Christ Himself. His trials are all wisely ordered. Satan can only harass him, as he did Job, when God permits him. No temptation can happen to him above what he is able to bear. All things are working together for his good. His steps are all ordered from grace to glory. He is kept on earth till he is ripe for heaven, and not one moment longer.

The harvest of the Lord must have its appointed proportion of sun and wind, of cold and heat, of rain and storm. And then when the believer's work is done, the angels of God will come for him, as they did for Lazarus, and carry him safely home. No, the men of the world think little about who they

are despising, when they mock Christ's people. They are mocking those whom angels are not ashamed to serve. They are mocking the brothers and sisters of Christ Himself. Little do they consider that these are those for whose sakes the days of tribulation are shortened. These are those by whose intercession kings reign peacefully. Little do they consider that the prayers of men like Lazarus have more weight in the affairs of nations than millions of soldiers.

Believers in Christ, how little you know the full extent of your privileges and possessions. Like children at school, you don't know half of what your Father is doing for your welfare. Learn to live by faith more than you have done. Acquaint yourselves with the fullness of the treasure laid up for you in Christ even now. This world, no doubt, must always be a place of trial while we are in the body. But still there are comforts provided for the brothers and sisters of Lazarus, which many never enjoy.

**V. Observe, in the last place, “what a dangerous and soul-ruining sin is the sin of selfishness.”**

You have the rich man, in the parable, in a hopeless state. There is no other clearer picture of a lost soul in hell, in the entire Bible, than what you have here. You meet him in the beginning, dressed in rich purple robes and fine linen. You part with him at the end, tormented in the everlasting fire. And yet there is nothing to show that this man was a murderer, or a thief, or an adulterer, or a liar. There is no reason to say that he was an atheist, or an infidel, or a blasphemer. For everything we know, he was faithful to all the rules of the Jewish religion. But we do know that he was lost forever!

There is something very solemn in this thought. Here is a man whose outward life in all probability was correct. We know of no charges against him. He dresses richly, but then he had money to spend on his clothing. He gives impressive banquets and parties, but then he was wealthy, and could well afford

it. We read nothing recorded against him that might not be recorded of hundreds and thousands in the present day, who are counted respectable and a good sort of people. And yet the end of this man is that he goes to hell.

Surely this deserves serious attention. (a) **I believe this passage is meant to teach us to “beware of living only for ourselves.”** It is not enough that we are able to say, “I live a moral and respectable life. I pay every one his due. I discharge all the affairs of life with integrity. I attend church, I read the Bible, I pray to God.” There remains behind another question, to which the Bible requires an answer. **“To whom do you live? to yourself or to Christ?** What is the great end, aim, object, and ruling motive in your life?”

Let men call the question extreme if they please. For myself, I can find nothing short of this in Paul's words: “He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” [2 Corinthians 5:15] And I draw the



conclusion, that **if, like the rich man, we live only to ourselves, we will destroy our souls.**

(b) **I believe, further, that this passage is meant to teach us “the damning nature of the sins of omission.”** It does not seem that it was so much the things the rich man did, but the things he left undone, which made him miss heaven. Lazarus was at his gate, and he let him alone.

But isn't this exactly in keeping with the history of the judgment, in the 25th chapter Matthew? Nothing is said there of the sins of commission of which the lost are guilty. How does the charge read? - “I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.” [Matthew 25:42-43] **The charge against them is simply that they didn't do certain things.** On this their sentence is based.

And I draw the conclusion again,

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that, unless we are careful, sins of omission may ruin our souls. Truly it was a solemn saying of a godly man, on his deathbed: “Lord, forgive me all my sins, but especially my sins of omission” [Usher].

(c) I further believe, **that the passage is meant to teach us that “riches bring special dangers with them.”** Yes! riches, which the vast majority of men are always seeking after-riches for which they spend their lives, and of which they make an idol-riches cause their possessors immense spiritual peril!

The possession of riches has a very hardening effect on the soul. They chill. They freeze. They petrify the inward man. They close the eye to the things of faith. They insensibly produce a tendency to forget God. And doesn't this stand in perfect harmony with all the language of Scripture on the same subject? What does our Lord say? “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” [Mark 10:23,

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25] What does Paul say? “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” [1 Timothy 6:10]

What can be more striking than the fact that the Bible has frequently spoken of [the love of] money as a most fruitful cause of sin and evil. For money Achan brought defeat on the armies of Israel, and death on himself. For money Balaam sinned against God, and tried to curse God's people. For money Delilah betrayed Samson to the Philistines. For money Gehazi lied to Naaman and Elisha, and became a leper. For money Ananias and Sapphira became the first hypocrites in the early Church, and lost their lives. For money Judas Iscariot sold Christ, and was ruined eternally.

Surely these facts speak loudly. Truly, money is one of the most “unsatisfying of possessions.” It takes away some cares, no doubt; but it brings with it quite as many cares as it takes away. There is trouble in getting it. There is

anxiety in the keeping of it. There are temptations in the use of it. There is guilt in the abuse of it. There is sorrow in the losing of it. There is perplexity in the disposing of it. Two- thirds of all the strifes, quarrels, and lawsuits in the world, arise from one simple cause—money!

Ryle, J.C.. Practical Religion (Kindle Locations 4777-5035). Kindle Edition.

### A Pilgrim's Song

A few more years shall roll,  
A few more seasons come,  
And we shall be with those that  
rest,  
Asleep within the tomb.  
Then, O my Lord, prepare  
My soul for that great day;  
O wash me in Thy precious blood,  
And take my sins away!

Horatius Bonar