

An Evangelist in Hell
Luke 16:19-31 (04-26-2020)
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If you want to sell a book today, write about how you died and went for a tour of either heaven or hell. That'll sell. You may even get an interview on one of the news shows. I don't believe any of these tours of the afterlife unless they are from the Bible. And that's exactly what we have this morning. It is the only passage in the Bible that takes us beyond the grave into both heaven and hell and into the thoughts and feelings of people in both places. We find it in Luke 16.

Jesus has been focusing on the power and dangers of money. Right in the middle of chapter 16 is verse 14 describing the Pharisees.

Luke 16:14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

Not only were they lovers of money, but they were lifting their noses and sneering at Jesus as He was warning against loving money more than God. This is not unusual for this world. The world lusts after money and envies rich people. Some of you remember the show in the 80s, "The Lives of the Rich and Famous." The world views wealth and the power it gives as the crowning achievement on earth. Wealthy people are given great respect and admiration. I watched a series in our Covid-19 lockdown on the men who built America. Now I don't know about their hearts toward God, but the railroad builder and the oil and steel magnates all ended up competing bitterly and raking in huge sums of money. As I watched I wondered, "Did they ever think about dying and facing God?" They did so much for America's industrial development in the late 1800s, but were they prepared to enter eternity? We can ask that about anyone. This morning we meet a wealthy tycoon who was definitely not ready to go into eternity.

Before we go further, let's be sure we realize that Jesus isn't condemning wealth in itself. Many of the Old Testament saints were very wealthy, beginning with Abraham and Isaac. No, Jesus is aiming this story straight at the Pharisees who loved money and saw wealth as God's blessing and poverty as God's curse. Understand this: being wealthy and loving money are two different things. The rich man in Jesus' story, like those Pharisees, loved his money. Loving money more than God has eternal consequences. Jesus illustrates this truth in his story.

Two very different men in this life.

Luke 16:19-21, "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs (what was falling) which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

Jesus couldn't have drawn a greater contrast between two human beings. Here is an enormously wealthy man. He is the envy of the world. He took great pride in his appearance. Every day he got out of his comfortable bed and clothed himself in purple and fine linen.

Purple cloth was very expensive. Purple dye came from tiny glands of mollusks or snails gathered along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, especially around Tyre. These little creatures were smashed and the mucous-like substance was gathered and exposed to the sun for a specific amount of time to produce this purple dye. You can watch demonstrations of this process on Youtube. It took 250,000 of these snails to produce an ounce of purple dye. Only the very elite rulers and kings could afford purple clothing. This is what our rich man wore, every day. Plus, his wardrobe included fine linen, probably from Egypt. It was so fine they said it was like woven air. This guy dressed to the nines. He was the envy of all who laid eyes on him.

Not only that, but he went into every day mindless of God, but excited about all his wealth and comfort and pleasures. ESV says he "feasted sumptuously" every day! John Wycliffe translated the phrase, "He ate every day shiningly." He drank his fill of worldly living, not once in a while, but every day! Remember,

the Pharisees were lovers of money and were sneering at Jesus as He taught them. But if this rich dude would come by, they would admire him as their model of success.

The other character in this story is a poor man. Jesus gives this man a name, Lazarus, meaning "God helps." His appearance would make you wonder about that. He's not just dirt poor; he has nothing. He was totally dependent on others. Every day someone plopped him down at the rich man's fancy gate. His skin was covered with oozing ulcers. The rich man was clothed in purple and linen; poor Lazarus was clothed in ulcers. A more miserable picture of a human being made in God's image couldn't be imagined. Why didn't God heal him? The Health, Wealth, and Prosperity boys would say, "You just don't have enough faith, Lazarus." But that wasn't the reason.

Jesus said the poor man sat by the rich man's gate, longing for what fell from the table. He may have been able to see the rich man feasting every day on the costliest of foods and rich desserts – something comparable to Black Diamond Ice Cream at \$817 a scoop from Dubai. And as the rich man enjoyed only the best foods, he may have seen the miserable wretch of a beggar at his gate longing for a few scraps – not crumbs – that were falling from the table. One commentator notes there were no knives, forks, or napkins in those days. Even rich people ate food with their hands. Then they would wipe them with hunks of bread which were then thrown away. Poor Lazarus sat at the gate longing for anything they threw away. Jesus never said he actually was given any of these scraps. He just longed for them.

The picture gets even worse. Lazarus is sitting by the gate longing for food when scavenging dogs came along and licked the pus oozing from his sores. Dogs feasted on Lazarus, while Lazarus is longing for just a little that dropped from the rich man's feast. What a pitiful sight. From all appearances, and according to the theology of the Pharisees, God had richly blessed the rich man and had cursed this poor man lying there at the gate. Why didn't the rich man share his food with the poor man? Why didn't he show compassion and mercy on the pitiful derelict? He was so full of himself that he had no concern for others. His heart was as hard as granite.

The shocking reversal in the next life.

*Luke 16:22-23, "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.*

Death comes to everyone, rich and poor. No amount of earthly wealth has ever kept anyone from finally dying. And the moment you die, you can't turn back. You immediately enter your eternal condition of either heaven or hell. Jesus wants the Pharisees and us to see this shocking reversal of these two men. The poor man who longed to be fed and had been licked by dogs is instantly escorted to Abraham's bosom, another name for heaven. So now we discover this poor man was a lover of God. He had endured his miserable earthly condition, trusting in his God, Abraham's God, each day. He had faith to endure his sufferings.

The rich man also died, maybe on the same day. They buried him. He had five brothers so they probably had a huge funeral procession; maybe thousands came to view his cold, dead body, undoubtedly clothed in purple and fine linen. Even though he had absolutely no fruit of faith in his whole life, they assured themselves, "He's in a better place." R. C. Sproul says the world believes in "justification by death." Death takes you to a better place. That is Satan's lie to numb hearts.

Did you notice that Jesus doesn't say anything about Lazarus being buried? Was there no one there to care? However, Jesus says that God sent angels to Lazarus. He got an angelic escort through the heavens to be honored in Abraham's bosom, a place of comfort (vs 25). Will angels carry you to heaven when you die? I'm going with yes. They are sent to minister to God's people, to serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14).

What about Mr. Purple and Linen? Jesus' story says he lifted up his eyes in Hades. This was all shocking to the money-loving Pharisees listening. Jesus is uprooting their theology! Hades in the Bible is a

temporary holding place of punishment for all lost people until the final Great White Throne Judgment. At that time, Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). The rich man is already in agony from the torment of fire. What a reversal from his life on earth! And what an awful reality! This poor lost rich man is suddenly fully aware that he is separated from heaven forever. Lost souls in hell are conscious. Jesus says that the rich man sees Abraham far away and Lazarus dining by his side.

Question: Do people who curse and ridicule God, Jesus, Christianity, and the Bible ever think about the fact that the moment they die their eternity is sealed? There is no second chance. There is no returning. There is no purgatory that gives extra time to purge sin. There is no annihilation where your life is just deleted (Heb. 9:27 after death comes judgment). There is no point of restoration where all souls will be restored to heaven. There is no universalism. There is no soul-sleep, as Seventh Day Adventists teach. The moment you die you immediately are either present with the Lord or lost forever. The rich man suddenly realizes this. Dante's *Inferno* truthfully described the entrance to hell: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!"

The Great, Eternal Chasm

Luke 16:24-26, "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

Jesus describes the rich man as a Jew who knows Abraham is the father of the Jews. He cries out to Abraham, but he's too late for prayer. He should have prayed to heaven before he died. He begs for mercy. But he had no mercy on Lazarus and now there is no mercy for him. In hell there is no mercy. This is certainly one lesson to take from Jesus' story. Don't put off crying out to God. Now is the time to cry out for mercy, not when you are in hell. Now is the time to call upon the name of the Lord. Our hearts ache for friends and family who do not know how precious life with Christ is. We were created to know and love Christ. That is the fulfillment of life. Today is the day of salvation. To all people everywhere the Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

Just a moment ago the rich man was partying and Lazarus was suffering. He could have humbled himself before God and repented, but he didn't. He still sees Lazarus as lesser than he – "send him to bring a drop of water to assuage my thirst." He never gave Lazarus a bit of scraps from his table. Hell doesn't change the heart. There isn't a word here of repentance, of humbling. Just, "I am in agony in this flame."

In verse 25, Abraham calls him child – probably a reminder he could have lived for the Lord on earth like Abraham did. The next word is alarming – "Remember." One Bible teacher notes: "In eternity the whole life on earth will be in your memory." "Child, remember how you lived in luxury in your life and Lazarus suffered." Now the tables are turned. Lazarus is in comfort at the heavenly table and the rich man will feed on agony forever.

Plus, Abraham assures the poor rich man that there is no crossing from Hades to Heaven. There is this great fixed chasm. Hell will never come to heaven. To die in your sin means you are forever lost in your sin. Engineers have designed some amazing bridge spans to cross from one land to another. But there is no crossing over after death. You are consigned to torment forever. Today we are in the middle of this COVID pandemic and consigned to spending our time locked down in our homes. Most of us don't like it. We want to get out and get back to normal. Here's a scary thought – hell is like God's great lock-down that never ends. There is no escape. No way out. And it never ends. Matthew 25:46 says the lost go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into eternal life. Thomas Watson, my favorite Puritan, described the unending nature of hell. "If there was the faintest possibility of hell ending," he wrote, "even after millions of years, there would be hope." But, and this phrase has stuck with me for a long time. "that word 'Ever' breaks the heart." (Body of Divinity).

When Robert Murray M'Cheyne met his closest friend Andrew Bonar one Monday, he asked what he preached on the previous day. Bonar answered, "Hell." M'Cheyne asked, "Did you preach it with tears?"

After dinner one night at L'Abri in Switzerland someone asked Francis Schaeffer what happens to people who never heard of Christ. The group waited for Francis to give a well-reasoned answer. But no answer came. He just bowed his head and wept.

Friends, when we think of eternal hell and how individuals we know have no concern for their souls, we should weep.

Only God's Word has the power to bring eternal life to your soul

*Luke 16:27-31, "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- 28 for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Here we have the rich man being an evangelist in hell. He thinks about his five brothers. They were just like him when it came to a true relationship with God. "Send them Lazarus to warn them no to come to this place of torment. If Lazarus was resurrected, they would see that miracle and surely repent."

No, says Abraham, they need to hear and listen to their Old Testament. A resurrection won't convince them. A little later Jesus actually raised a man named Lazarus from the grave. His sisters Mary and Martha were amazed. Many others saw it, including Pharisees. Did that convince the Pharisees to believe in Jesus? No. In fact, the Jewish leaders determined to kill not only Jesus but Lazarus too! Seeing miracles will not change hard, unbelieving hearts. Only the truth of God's Word will do that. James 1:18 says God saves us by the Word of Truth. Only the Word of God can pierce the heart and bring life and faith and forgiveness to sinners. A miracle will not convert your brothers. If they won't listen to God's Word, nothing will persuade them.

God did not put you or me here to live for ourselves, for our own self-fulfillment, to make as much money as possible and chase as much pleasure as possible. That person is a fool who trusts in his wealth, his wisdom, or his might, says Jeremiah 9:24. God put us here that we might seek Him, love Him, and live for His glory. And that begins with repentance and trusting in Christ alone for salvation.

Believers, let's never forget the realities of an eternal heaven and hell. Thank God for saving you. For anyone who has never yet bowed your knee to Christ, now is the time to repent and turn to Christ. Once you die there is no crossing that great chasm. It is fixed.