

Just How Far Will You Go?

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[0 : 00] Please sit down. As the women leave, thank you so much for leading our music this morning. It's been terrific. Terry is away and so we've had a great week of music together.

Would you, let me say that again. We're really sad that Terry is away. We're very glad. Actually, I'm very grateful to Richard for leading the services.

Richard's filling in a bit while Dan is on leave. It's nice to hear the service read without an accent again. How much more trouble can I get here?

Let's, yeah, keep digging. Let's turn, let's get out of the hole. Turn to Luke 16. You'll find it helpful if you're new with us to open the Bible and to turn to the back, page 75.

We're looking at this passage, verses 19 to the end. It's a bit hard to move on from Easter, frankly. We could spend years and years, we will indeed spend years and years thinking about the resurrection and what it means to each of us.

[1 : 10] But I want to come back to Luke 16, this is where we are, and say to you that the chapter has three big reversals in it. Last week was Easter.

The week before we saw that it is possible for us to free ourselves from the slavery to money. When we take our money and use it for the same purpose Jesus came, to seek and save the lost, giving it generously that others might hear about the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection means for us now that life is about much more than money, and we have the amazing privilege of investing in what Jesus is doing.

Last week in the centre we find that money was a big deal for religious people. This might come as a great shock to all of you, but there are religious people who are churchgoers and Bible readers who say that God is their God, but who in fact had raised something else up as more important, and it was money, and we all do this.

And in the resurrection, as we saw last week, God raises Jesus to the highest place and demotes all our idols, even the best of our idols, to second, third, fourth place. The resurrection of Jesus is the biggest reversal in the universe, and Christ is now the thing around whom we build our lives. And now we come to verses 19 to the end, and this is a red-hot reversal. Before we start, you notice in verse 19, although it feels like a parable, we're not told it's a parable.

[2 : 49] There are pieces of this that are figurative, but as Jesus deals with heaven and hell, he's not dealing with fictional literary devices.

He's speaking about ultimate realities. And the story has two scenes. The first scene takes place in this life, and in verses 19 to 21, we meet two men, and the first in verse 19 is simply called a rich man.

He is the acme of success. He is the guy we want to be. He is the guy who's on the front of the magazines, and he is clothed with the most expensive fabric of the day.

The purple dye is the most expensive, and it's used for royalty, which is why bishops wear purple, which is another reason I'm going to get into trouble.

The point is that he's using... Even the white linen is his underwear. You see, he's got designer underwear, and his clothing is made by royal designers, and he wears it well.

[3 : 56] And he's a consummate foodie. He doesn't eat too much. Everything he eats is the most exclusive, most expensive, best presented. His house is full of hangers-on.

His five brothers and their families come around once a week to taste the best prepared food, the most refined food in town. And he has a massive house.

If you look in verse 20, the word for gate there is not just a little gate. It is a massive ornamental gate. He has the finest security system Shaughnessy has to offer because he wants to keep the riffraff out.

After all, you never can be too sure, can you? The second man is an amazing contrast. He is sick and poor, and he smells.

He has no purple clothing to cover himself. He is covered with sores and scabs. He has no food, but he longs to scrape through the rich man's garbage.

[5 : 00] And it's not an easy thing because the dogs want to do that as well. And the dogs become more interested in him as a meal than in the trash. And he lies outside the gate of the rich man, watching the family come in and out, hoping they'll throw him a bone.

He has no property. He has no RRSPs. He has nothing to his name. But did you notice he has a name? The rich man is not named, but this man is named.

He is Lazarus. He's invisible to everyone who walks by him. He's the kind of person you just want to look through and not see and avoid. But he's known to God. He's a man.

He's Lazarus. But from verses 22 onwards, we move into the second scene and we move after this life. And this is really the focus.

More than three quarters of the story is the second scene. And part of the point of this story for us is that although we live 70, 80, 90 years in this world, our lives are followed by forever in the next world.

[6 : 07] And Jesus again assumes to speak with consummate authority about what is going to happen in the next world. And the power of his words depend entirely on whether you can trust him or whether you think you know better about these things.

Or that his words, well, they just don't apply to you personally. And of course, the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead is very impressive as an endorsement.

Well, what happens? After death, there is a massive reversal. The rich man, all his money, all his assets, all his status, all his purple clothing, all his admiration, he leaves it all behind.

He can't take any of it with him. Certainly in verse 22, he receives a burial it's a massive send-off. A full page in the local newspaper describing his magnificence.

Remember, what is exalted in the sight of man is an abomination in the sight of God. But in death, it is Lazarus whom God honors.

[7 : 16] There's no funeral for him in the passage, but he is personally transported by angels, the angels of God, to the side of Abraham, to the place of intimacy and honor and privilege in the heavenly banquet.

And there he is eternally comforted, we're told, living in fellowship, feasting together in the presence of God in paradise. It is a most remarkable reversal.

And in verse 23, the rich man finds himself in hell, far away, far off from Abraham and from Lazarus.

Twice we're told he is in torment, twice we're told he is in anguish, and astoundingly, he is still not humbled. He still assumes that Abraham is his father and that things are going to be okay.

He assumes there's a vast mistake that's being made and he demands an answer. Doesn't quite come across in verse 23, but down the end of verse, no, verse 24, when he says, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, send Lazarus, in the Greek, there are two commands.

[8 : 33] He expects action. He shouts out and he says, Abraham, mercy, send Lazarus. He still thinks Lazarus is there as an errand boy for him.

You know what I mean? Come on, send him down. He has not learned anything about repentance.

And so in verse 25, 26, Abraham gently explains, this is never going to happen for two reasons.

The first is, verse 25, the way the rich man lived in his earthly life without repentance has set the trajectory forever.

That God has taken his decisions in this life with eternal seriousness. And secondly, there is a massive separation between heaven and hell, which is completely and eternally impossible from both sides.

Abraham says, there is a chasm that has been fixed. It's been fixed by God and no power in heaven or on earth can unfix it. Very interesting. No second choice after death in Jesus' view.

[9 : 45] No annihilation. No purgatory. And in verse 27, just over the page, the rich man speaks again. This time he begs Abraham this time he begs Abraham to send Lazarus back to his five brothers lest they too enter this place of torment.

I don't think this is a sudden show of sensitivity and generosity. It's really just exposing one of his underlying concerns and that is the circle of his privileged family.

He still sees Lazarus as his lackey. And Abraham's answer in verse 29 is that God has provided everything and more that his brothers might come to know the truth of God and turn from their sins and be saved.

God has provided the scriptures. Because Abraham's view and the view of heaven is that the written word of God, Moses and the prophets, are not a stingy act of God which make it difficult for us to come to repentance but are wide and generous and are much more than sufficient for salvation and they're more convincing and they're more transforming than any personal miracle that we can experience.

So in verse 13, sorry, verse 30, he finally says, No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

[11:18] He says, Abraham, you're wrong. My family know the scriptures. They've read Moses and Abraham. They go to church but they've never repented. They need special consideration.

They're my family you're talking about. More is needed. They need an envoy to come back from their dead. Then they will repent. You sometimes hear people say, I'd like to believe.

I'd like to have faith. I'd like to repent. I just, I really just can't do it. What I need is a special or great miracle for myself and then I will believe. And do you know what Abraham says to that?

Nonsense. Verse 31, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. You see what he's saying?

The issue is not the clarity of revelation. The issue is not the amount or transparency of God's word. The issue is in our hearts. And if someone will not repent, you can see a million people raised from the dead.

[12:25] It's not going to make one hair of difference. So I warned you, this is a red hot reversal. And what are we to make of it?

What is this passage all about? Where is Jesus going with this? And I think there are two things that we should meditate on in this passage and take away. The first is repentance and the second is reversal.

Firstly then, repentance. Jesus lays before us again the fact that there will be people who will miss out on heaven but who will be completely shocked and scandalized.

There are people who are going to miss heaven unintentionally. Who when they arrive in hell are convinced that they deserve to be in heaven because they were religious and did no harm.

I think this is the shock of this passage. This rich man was not an atheist. He was not an agnostic. He was a churchgoer. He was acquainted with the scriptures. He calls Abraham father.

[13:30] The problem in verses 29 to 31 is that he'd never bothered to really hear. He'd never really listened to the word of God. He'd heard sermons but he hadn't allowed the sermons to enter his bones and to change him.

He'd never really listened. That's why he cooks up this scheme to have Lazarus sent back to appear to his family. But when you think about it it's an attitude of stunning arrogance towards God and his word.

He's saying, God, all that you've done and all that you've had written in the scriptures is not enough. My family, they need more than Moses and the prophets. They need pyrotechnics.

They need special effects. They need more than everybody else. I mean, you cannot expect them to repent and really believe in the truth of judgment and hell just because of the scriptures.

I was raised on Moses and the prophets. He said, I went to church. I never imagined that I needed to take judgment seriously and personally for myself. I never dreamed this applied to me.

[14:37] During this week I got out some of the passages in the Old Testament of the prophets and I urge you if you find it hard to believe that Moses and the prophets warn us of judgment just read one of the prophets.

Take one of the prophets which has one of the least judgment passages in it, Jonah. Jonah is sent to Nineveh and do you know what his message is? Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed.

That's his whole sermon and I can't figure out whether he said that over and over or whether he expounded a little bit on it but the judgment was clear. Read the prophet Isaiah.

Behold, the Lord will come in fire his chariots like storm wind to render his anger in fury. The rich man says, yes, he says, but we are far too sophisticated to think that you actually mean to do that. It's preposterous to think that all my cultured and sophisticated and highly educated lovely pleasant friends and family should be here with me simply because they didn't take your word seriously and

repent.

[15 : 44] You see, he knows the data of the Bible but he doesn't really believe it. He's never bothered to repent. He's never allowed the reality of judgment to enter into his heart and to affect his life which is the point of repentance.

He will not let scriptures change his life. He thinks, I guess if you asked him, he would say they're important but he never gave himself to their prayerful study and when he came to a passage like the one we are looking at this morning, he just in his mind, he just did this equation where he just dismissed it.

It doesn't really apply to me. So he doesn't listen to God, he doesn't care about his neighbour and he doesn't repent. The story is not really about money and I think we've got to avoid the simplistic and sentimental views that say God is against the rich, if you're rich you're going to hell in a handbasket.

That's not what this is saying. Nor is it saying the other, that if you're poor you're somehow going to sneak into heaven because you're poor. Nor is it saying if you're generous with your money you're going to be saved.

What is the one thing the rich man lacked in verse 30? He had never repented in his life. And I think Jesus is still talking about how our idols work.

[17 : 08] This man's obviously intelligent, he's obviously familiar with the Bible but he's not living for God. He's got something else that he's arranged his life around. And I'm not actually certain what idol he's built his life around.

Jesus I think points to three. You're going to have to, you'll have to decide and let me know later which one you think it is. It could be money. I mean he could be saying to himself I'm so rich, I'm so busy, I just don't really have time for God.

And so his religion is just an outward thing but in his heart when he sits in church he's calculating his wealth and how to show it and how to keep it. And this may explain why he's completely indifferent to Lazarus who's at his gate.

He probably sees Lazarus as a sponge. And every time he comes in on the gate he thinks to himself that guy ought to just go and get a job. Because Jesus is still speaking to the Pharisees who love money and justify themselves.

And it may be that the reason this guy dresses in purple and eats as well as he possibly can is he's trying to display, he's trying to justify himself. Perhaps his idol is money.

[18 : 21] But it might be control because Jesus draws our attention to the massive gate, the security gate that he has at his front door. Because he spent his whole life building his fortune, he's not going to let someone break in and take it away.

I mean he's got the best security system money can buy. And as he puts out his carefully designed clothing and decides what to wear today, he keeps telling himself something like it's lonely here at the top and I have to give the right impression.

He's terrified of disapproval of others and so he is determined to make things go his way. And I find it interesting even after hell, even after he is cast into hell, he is still trying to control things.

But I think it's most likely that his idol is actually his family. Because when money is shown to be empty and when his control is shown to be empty, the thing that gives him his worth and he returns to is his family.

His deepest concern is to make his family happy. He wants a special miracle for his family. His money was in service of the family. His control was in service of his family.

[19 : 31] I think this is what he's using to justify himself. This is what he really lived for. And although it might have appeared as though he was worshipping his God, in fact he was worshipping his family.

And of course the question this passage pushes towards us is what can his family or his money or his control do for him now? And the answer is nothing.

So where does repentance come from? It comes simply from hearing God's word. It is as we hear God's word that God reveals himself to us and he begins to reveal to us the idols that we have elevated, the good things he's given us that we've elevated to the status of idols.

He reveals to us that Jesus has come to seek and to save all of us and that if we live for family or for control or for comfort or for luxury or for money or for whatever, it's not only going to punish us in this life, it's able to steal heaven away from us unless we turn to him in repentance.

It's God's word that shows us that Jesus is the only one who's exalted. He's the only one who can justify us. He's the only one who's worth living for. And the point of this life is not how much money you and I can make.

[20 : 55] The point of this life is to make sure you have Jesus Christ, that you know him personally, that you've truly listened to his word, that you do more than just hear a sermon occasionally, that you've taken the warnings of judgment personally, and that you've taken the death and resurrection to yourself personally, and that you know the joy of repentance.

That's the first thing, repentance. The second is reversal. And I think this story is another illustration of what Jesus said in verse 15, that what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

It means that God does not judge things the way we do. God does not judge things by external standards. He's not impressed and he's not fooled by wealth or by clothing or by success. He doesn't judge by the standards of our world. He doesn't judge by even economic standards. And, you know, if you think about it, we're in an amazing moment right now.

And I think God thinks about the economic crisis differently than the way the newspapers do. I mean, here we are in this moment where the undisputed idol of Western culture, money, is demonstrated to be deceptive and threadbare and unreliable.

[22 : 22] And I think we ought to pray not just that people find jobs, but that they begin to ask deeper questions like, why have I built my money around something that's so unreliable?

And, brothers and sisters, we ought to be really thankful that God does not judge in the same way that we do. The great reversal in this story is not just there to warn us. It ought to give us hope and joy because the one requirement for heaven is repentance.

It's to know that Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost that he's come to call sinners to repentance. And although we've majored on the warning, because I think the passage majors on the warning, I do not, we must not miss this beautiful picture of hope that Christ holds out to us, to people like Lazarus, to all who live a life of repentance, that we too will be carried by angels when we die into the presence of God.

And there we will be comforted with Abraham in the banquet, in the presence of God forever. That's what Jesus is pointing to. And the way to the feast is through him, through hearing his word and turning from our idols all the time, because in Jesus Christ and in his death and resurrection, God has provided for us everything in this life and in the life to come.

And there is a time for repentance, there is a time to cry for mercy to God and it is in this life. There will come a time for all of us when it will be too late.

[24 : 01] You will not be able to cry for repentance and mercy. If you have not asked Christ for repentance, you must do it today. Talk to me about it afterwards. Talk to someone. Talk to Christ.

Christ. Because you and I have less excuse than the rich man. We have seen someone come back from the grave.

We have seen someone who rose from the dead. We do have someone who comes and speaks to us with authority about what lies beyond death. It's the same one who tells us this story.

The one who went to the cross and was cast into hell so that we need not be. The one who gave himself over to judgment so that we never need to be.

The one who has put out of God's presence on the cross so that we might be brought in. And he carried the cross and he carried the curse so that we might be carried by angels into the blessing of Abraham and heaven at Abraham's side in the presence of God forever.

[25 : 10] Abraham. And I think that's very good news. So let's pray. To you, our risen Lord, we would pray.

To you, Lord, the fullness of the Father's glory, united with us in our humanity forever. In your spirit, Lord, we would pray.

So, Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We would begin today, Lord, by praying, praying for our much troubled world, a world without joy, without hope.

for its peace, Lord, we would pray. We pray for peace in war-torn Afghanistan, remembering especially our Canadian soldiers who served there.

We would pray, Lord, for peace throughout the Middle East. Our world is so troubled, Lord, we remember those who are refugees, for those who are so desperately poor.

[26 : 28] Sometimes, alas, Lord, we confess, even at our gates. We would pray for the hungry. We would pray for those who are in prison.

Lord, give to all a new hope. Your Father, so, Lord, you have told us, so loves the world. And so, Lord, for our world, we would pray this morning.

Lord, in your mercy. In your mercy. And, Lord, for your new world, in the midst of this old world, for the church, we would pray this morning.

Lord, the church's Lord, we give you thanks for our pastors and teachers, in the gospel of Christ, we would pray today, Lord, for Archbishop Venables, who guides us in the gospel.

We pray for Bishop Harvey, for Bishop Harding, for Bishop Ferris. we give you thanks, Lord, for their ministry and witness. We give you thanks this morning for our clergy, Lord, for David, for Dan, for Jim, for Richard, these ones who open to us the word of God written.

[27 : 53] And keep us always, Lord, teachable in that word, that word of God written, which shows us the way to heaven. to your glory, Lord, our risen Lord, for your glory.

Lord, in your mercy. Amen. And of course, this morning, we would pray, as always, for those who suffer. We would pray by name for those in our midst, Rowena.

We pray for Ben. We pray for Lee. Lord, we remember Ron and Marguerite. We give you thanks, Lord, for Paul's return from hospital.

And in a moment of silence, Lord, we pray for all those we know who suffer. Lord, give to all who suffer, give to us all, patience, as we await always your strengthening presence, and then your perfect deliverance.

Hear these, our prayers, Lord. You are our King. You who are our perfect gladness forever. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

[29 : 23] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.