

Luke 16:19-31 AM

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[0:00] Our Father, we are very thirsty and we pray that you would give us to drink of the living water. We're hungry, feed us with the bread of life and we're sick and we ask that you would give us the true medicine for our souls, even your word and the ability to inwardly digest it. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.

Thank you. Please sit down. Yes, I have the flu. Yes, I have lozenges. Thank you very much. If I go off and say anything heretical, Will has been instructed not to let me finish.

So if you turn back to Luke 16 on page 876, that would just be great. This whole chapter, Luke 16 is an absolute masterpiece of Jesus' teaching, I think, full of red-hot reversals.

And it is motivated by Jesus' love. He's trying to woo and warn the Pharisees and his disciples.

And the seriousness and the solemnness of this second, this last section comes from the fact that the Pharisees, what's keeping them out of the heavenly feast, the kingdom of God, is like so many of us, they just love money. And so Jesus warns them of the danger of the love of money because it can steal away our love for God, make us deaf and blind, not just to God, but to the needs of people around us.

[1:45] And I know what Jesus says about money sounds basically ridiculous to most Vancouverites, as it did to the Pharisees. They turned their noses up at Jesus. And Jesus simply came back and said, well, of course, what is exalted before men and women is an abomination to God. And while they're struggling to swallow that, he then tells this story from verses 19 to the end. 80% of this story takes place in the afterlife between heaven and hell. And there are three points Jesus makes. One, he contrasts two lives in this world. Two, he contrasts two eternities in the next world. And then thirdly, he draws out one big lesson. Isn't it great? One big lesson. Just nod. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. So firstly, a contrast of two lives. The first two verses, verses 19 to 21, you couldn't have a more violent contrast. Here is a rich man who wears the most expensive clothing. The linen there is his underwear. It's the most expensive underwear that you can possibly afford, not just to go out, but around the house.

And there at his magnificent gatehouse, there is a poor man, not covered in clothes, but covered in ulcers, sores. And while the rich man is welcoming guests inside, the poor man is laid at the gate. And that is a word used for throwing out trash. You lay the trash out. And it may imply he can't even stand up.

And the rich man feasts sumptuously every day. He doesn't just dine, he feasts. And he doesn't just feast, he feasts sumptuously every day, cooked by private chefs. And the poor man would love to eat any of the scraps that fall from the table, any of the trash that might come out from this house. But we already know he is the trash. And there's no indication that he's allowed to rummage through the bins. And when Jesus says that the dogs lick the ulcers of the poor man, this is not the cute, cuddly companions of compassion. These are filthy, ravenous street dogs. And I think the implication is that he's so weak, he can't even shoo them away. But he has a name.

He is the only person in any parable of Jesus who has a name. And his name means, God is my help. The rich man doesn't have a name. It's as though he has sunk his identity so much into his wealth and lifestyle. That's all, that's who he is. And when he dies, there's nothing left really. But Lazarus continues, he's known to God by name. That's the contrast of two lives now. Secondly, the contrast of two eternities from verses 22 onwards. Throughout this section, we're used to Jesus making reversals, aren't we? You know, those who exalt themselves will be humbled. The first will be last. Well, the greatest reversal takes place in this story at death. And Jesus speaks first about the poor man, Lazarus. He dies, and we're told the angels carry him to Abraham's embrace. It's a lovely touch.

[5 : 24] All his life, he'd been a cast off, an outsider, treated like trash. Five minutes after death, he's there at the feast in the kingdom of heaven, embraced in a love that he had never experienced on earth by Abraham himself. The rich man dies, and he has a funeral. He's buried, he has a big society, and maybe an expensive crypt. Maybe Lazarus's body was thrown in a common grave. We don't know.

But the rich man wakes up in hell, and he's missed the narrow door, and he's missed the eternal feast, and all his wealth and sumptuous living that have focused his energies on this life have made him blind and deaf to the reality that our lives now are followed by an eternity. And I know we very naturally recoil from the whole idea of hell and eternal punishment, as though it's somehow unworthy of God. And just remember that the Jesus who teaches this is the Jesus who's on his way to Jerusalem to give his life over so that we might come into the feast, and when he gets to Jerusalem weeps.

And when Jesus pictures hell as conscious eternal torment here, we have to pay some attention to the details. Two times the rich man says he's in anguish, and two times in torment. And the most popular way of explaining this away is saying, well it's not literal, it's just figuratively, Jesus is just warning us.

But if there's no truth to what Jesus is saying, it makes Jesus into a monster who's telling us lies and exaggerating to scare us into the kingdom of God. Yes, of course it's figurative language, but the reality behind the figurative language I think is worse than the figures.

C.S. Lewis said, there are only two kinds of people in the end. Those who say to God, thy will be done. And those to whom God says, thy will be done. All that are in hell, choose it.

[7 : 43] Without that self-choice, he says, there would be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek, find it. Those who knock, it will be opened.

That's what's going on here. And you can see it because the rich man absolutely refuses to accept the reversal that's happened. He rejects the fact that Lazarus is now in glory, and particularly he rejects the idea that this is a final decision. And you can see it in two ways. Firstly, how he treats Lazarus in verse 24, he says to Abraham, send Lazarus to cool my tongue. I'm in anguish in this flame.

It's a command. Lazarus, do this. As though Lazarus is still there to serve him.

It's a surprise, isn't it? I mean, he doesn't call out, Lazarus, Lazarus, I'm so sorry for how I treated you and ignored you throughout my life. I know I lived in the lap of luxury and you were a few metres outside the gate. But I gave you no thought at all except to avoid you, and I came in the back way. Could you ever possibly forgive me? No. He's blind to the reversal that's just happened. He thinks he is in charge. He is the one that gives commands. That Lazarus is still there to serve him. He still thinks of himself at the centre. And if you look down at Abraham's answer, it's full of kindness. Child, he says, he simply explains to the rich man that the choices you make in this life, when they go into eternity, can never be changed. When you live for yourself and love anything above God, it will create a blindness to this reality. Beside, Abraham says, there's a great chasm fixed by God between us and nobody can go from either side to the other. Because the clear teaching in the Bible is that after we die, there are no second chances. There is no purgatory. But not only can you see his refusal by the way he treats Lazarus, but secondly, by the way he treats God. So from verse 27 onwards, he brings up a nasty insinuation. He says to Abraham, send Lazarus, another command, to my five brothers to warn them in case they end up here like me. Now at first sight, it seems like the first nice thing he's done, doesn't it? But it's an accusation against God. He's suggesting that God is to blame for him for him being there. He's suggesting I didn't have the full picture. If only I'd known, if only I'd been properly warned, I'd have never ended up in this place. See? It's God's fault that

[10 : 43] I'm here. God's holding back vital information. You owe it to my brothers to send Lazarus to warn them. He's still completely self-absorbed. He can't see that the decisions he made set the direction forever.

Well then what's the lesson? There is one main lesson. This is the third point and Abraham makes the point in verse 29. Abraham says, they, your family, have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. It's a command by Abraham. It's they must hear them. They need to hear them. They have to listen to Moses and the prophets. You see what he's saying? You see, your brothers, they have the Bible just as you did. And the purpose of the Old Testament scriptures is not for you to use to justify yourself, but to come to repentance. And if you read through the Old Testament, it's full of

invitations to come to God. That's where the idea of the heavenly feast come from. And when Abraham says, they must listen, they must listen, he's talking about a particular kind of listening. It's not filling their heads with data about God. It's taking the word as living water and drinking it. It's taking it as the bread of life and feeding on it. It's taking it as medicine for the sick soul.

Because this is how God makes himself real to us. It's as we look at his word, praying for the Holy Spirit to speak to us. We hear the voice of God. This is the point. God has been perfectly clear. He's revealed himself and his will in scripture. Our fate is not determined by how much money we have, but by our relationship to and our attitude to the word of God. This man is not in hell because he's wealthy. He's in hell because the word of God had no impact on him. I mean, Abraham on the other side, he was a very wealthy man, but he loved God. It's very important. See, money doesn't send us to hell.

It's the love of money, which is perfectly, it's a perfectly possible sin for both rich and poor. This is the heart of it. Our spiritual blindness comes from spiritual deafness, from turning an ear to the word of God. And it will show in how easily we don't listen to the needs of those around us. And it will show in an absolute preoccupation in this life and a stubborn unwillingness to not think about the next. But the connection between this world and the next is our attitude to the word of God.

Whether we really hear and listen and whether we seek to do it. Because if we ignore and continue to ignore God's word and put it to the periphery of our lives, that will set the course for our next life. That's why it's so astonishing that the rich man then contradicts Abraham in verse 30. No, Father Abraham. But if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

[14:11] Do you hear what he's saying? Yeah, all very well, Abraham, but the Bible is just not enough. What they need is something spectacular, something amazing, something fantastic, something astonishing.

Then they'll turn in repentance to God. You see, this rich man's view of the word of God is that has no power to convert or change anyone. What you need is to, you need to add some razzle-dazzle so that people will pay attention. It's a very common view today. But Abraham knows the truth of it. In verse 31, he says, You see, it's not the resurrection that gives us faith in scriptures, according to Abraham. It's the scriptures that give us faith in the resurrection. So when you read to the end of Luke's gospel, there are three scenes in chapter 24 on the day of Jesus' resurrection. In each one of them, Jesus appears to people, but they don't believe when they see him. He then opens their minds to understand the scriptures, and then they believe. He teaches them from Moses and the prophets, and then they believe. See, what is it that has the power to bring real transformation? It is God who comes to us through his word. What is it that has the power to open our eyes and ears, to gradually separate the love of money from us, and the love of everything else to the love of God. It is God speaking through his word. We can't change ourselves, but we can go to God's word and listen and pray for humility and hunger that God would reveal himself. Pray. And if you have friends who love money, as you pray for them, invite them so that they will hear the word of God. And the same for our own hearts.

We need to continually to bring our own hearts under this kind of listening that Abraham is talking about. Because repentance comes from revelation, and revelation comes from the word of God.

The Bible is not just a museum piece. It's not just a history book. It's not just a record of God revealing himself in the past. It is the way that God continues to reveal himself today.

That's why it's living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword. It can penetrate and divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It's the word of God that judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts.

[17:06] Or as Jesus himself said, You can't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God presently, ongoingly, today.

So the Holy Spirit of God himself uses these words written so many years ago to bring our spiritual life. We're born again through the implanted word. To open our spiritual eyes and ears to sin and grace and who God is and who we really are.

And it's through the word we continue to grow until we die. I mean, where else are we going to go and hear someone telling us with any authority about what lies beyond the grave?

And this, chapter 16, it comes to us from the same Jesus who is walking toward the cross, who went to the cross and endured the torments of hell for us, who was put out of the presence of God so that we might be welcomed and brought into the feast, who tasted death and tasted the grave so that we might taste the heavenly banquet forever.

He carried the cross and he carried the curse so that we might be carried by the angels to the place of blessing when we die, to Abraham's side in the Father's presence.
[18 : 26] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.