

Luke 16:19-31

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Date: 17 July 2016

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[0 : 00] What would that spiritual right relationship with God start to look like on the outside, in other words, if it were to be worked out into your everyday life?

Tonight, Jesus is going to show us just one of those signs. There are many in Scripture, but tonight he's going to point us to one of those signs. And he's going to do that through a story, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. And in this story that we're going to look at, we're going to see Jesus give us two characters, and then he's going to show us a great reversal, and then he's going to teach us an important lesson. And this parable that we're looking at tonight is found in Luke chapter 16, verses 19 through 31. So let's turn there together.

It's page 876 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there. Luke chapter 16, verses 19 through 31. Now, it's always helpful to read some of these parables in context, so we're going to do that.

If you look up to verse 14, we're going to pick up some of the context in verse 14. That's on a previous page if you're looking in the Pew Bible. So verse 14, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things. That is, things that Jesus had just been teaching them about money.

And they ridiculed him. And he, that is Jesus, said to them, you are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Now, we covered verses 16 through 18 last week, so jump down to verse 19. This is the parable we're going to look at. Jesus says, there was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and

[2 : 25] Lazarus at his side. And he called out, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, child, remember that you in your lifetime received good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things.

But now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us. And he said, then I beg you, Father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, no, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. He said to them, if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you that when you ascended to the father's right hand and sat enthroned as the king of the universe, you left us not at a distance from you, but you sent your Holy Spirit into our hearts to carry on your work of redemption. Thank you that by your spirit, you've inspired your word, and you give us the illumination that our hearts need in order to understand your word and live it out in our lives. So we pray, Lord Jesus, that you would be at work in that way tonight by your spirit, helping us to understand and to apply what you're telling us in your word. We pray this in your mighty name, Lord. Amen. So Jesus tells us a story of two men.

One of these guys is a rich man. Look again at how he's described in verse 19, clothed in purple, purple dye, as it happens, was very expensive in the ancient world. In order to get purple dye, you actually had to extract it from sea snails. Imagine that being your job, gathering snails and then extracting from each one a little bit of dye, enough to actually clothe a robe. So you can tell purple clothed was very expensive. It was typically something that only royalty wore because it was so costly. I'm not sure what the equivalent would be today. I actually did a Google search. What are the most expensive clothing brands right now? And what came up was Gucci, Prada, and Armani and some others I couldn't pronounce. So there you go. This guy rocked it every day in his Armani clothes.

We're also told that he wore fine linen. That was typically something that royalty wore as well. This would have been his undergarments, what he wore under that purple robe. And just the word fine linen, right? I mean, here was someone who didn't have to work for a living.

[5 : 25] This wasn't a manual laborer or a farmer. He wasn't involved in construction or manufacturing. He could wear fine linen. And he feasted sumptuously every day, Jesus says. His cooks and his maids could serve him up a full course meal at every sitting and he could invite all his friends over and they could feast together and he didn't have to do a single one of the dishes.

But then Jesus tells us about another man, a poor man. And this poor man is covered not in the robes of royalty, but his body is actually covered in what? Covered in sores, Jesus says.

And this man is not feasting sumptuously with his friends every day, but he actually has to shoo the dogs away who are coming to lick at his sores. Which dogs licking your sores, by the way, isn't sort of a cute, nice image. You have to remember that dogs weren't sort of nice pets in the ancient world. They were street scavengers. And here they came to lick at him and he's shooing them away. Now, of course, these two men couldn't be more different on the outside, could they?

A rich man and a poor man. And let's pause right here in Jesus' story. What do you make of these two men? Of course, Lazarus evokes our pity, to be sure. But if you didn't know the rest of Jesus' story, which one would you say is doing it right? Which one's life might show some evidence of God's favor? Which one of these guys is blessed, as we might say?

Which one of these guys has got some evidence of being in a right relationship with God? And of course, if we were just shooting from the hip, we'd probably say, well, probably the rich man, right? Clearly, he's got it all together. Doesn't his external material wealth prove that he has some kind of internal spiritual favor? But after introducing these two men, Jesus shows us next a great reversal.

[7 : 43] Look at verses 22 and 23 one more time. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. That's a way of speaking about the feast of heaven, that they're there with Abraham and the other saints who have gone before feasting together. The rich man also died, Jesus says, and was buried.

And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off. And Lazarus at his side. So Jesus says, both men die. And it's not the rich man who ends up at the feast of heaven. The rich man actually ends up separated from God. You see, his material wealth was no guarantee, no evidence of eternal life. He had everything that this world had to offer, but he had nothing of lasting value.

Now, Jesus's point here, pay attention, Jesus's point here isn't that having lots of money is inherently bad and being poor is inherently good. That's not what Jesus is saying. He's not saying that every rich person is going to be separated from God and every poor person just naturally has eternal life. No. Rather, Jesus wants us to think about the sort of life that shows evidence or fruit really knowing God. What would that life look like? And that's why verses 14 and 15 are important.

Jesus is talking here to Pharisees. Who, even if they aren't necessarily materially wealthy, although some of them were, the Pharisees are very, very externally righteous.

They know all the Bible verses. They pray the long prayers. They keep all the rituals and rules. And of course, none of those things are bad in and of themselves. We should be reading scripture.

[9 : 42] We should be praying. We should be caring about God's law. But to do those works of external righteousness, to have all of that, does that put us in a right relationship with God?

Is being successful financially or even successful religiously a sure sign of God's favor?

And Jesus is saying, not at all. The rich man dies, is buried, and immediately upon his death, lifts up his eyes in torment. He looked good in man's eyes, but to God, his heart was an abomination, as Jesus said back in verse 15. Now, of course, we don't like to think about the reality that Jesus is describing here. And remember, Jesus is telling a parable, so not all the details are literal here, but the reality that he's describing is true. Could there be a more unpopular doctrine than the doctrine of judgment and hell? And yet, friends, do you know who spoke about the reality of eternal judgment more than anyone else in the Bible? It wasn't Moses with his law. It wasn't Paul in his epistles.

But it was Jesus himself in the gospels. Jesus talks about the reality and the possibility of eternal separation from God in hell more than anyone else in the entire Bible by about 10 times.

Is that because Jesus is cruel and unloving? No, just the opposite. If you and I were barreling down the highway on a road trip, and up ahead in just a few hundred feet, the bridge was out, and we were going to go crashing a thousand feet down, what would be the most loving and right thing for you to do as my co-pilot? Not to say, oh, I don't want to be cruel or unkind. He is doing a good job driving after all. No, the loving thing for you to be to say, Nick, the bridge is out. You have to stop the car. You have to turn away. There's nothing but destruction ahead. Stop. You see, Jesus understood that where we stand with God is the most important thing we could ever think about.

[12 : 24] God. Because where we stand with God has eternal consequences. God created us to be eternally related to him. And where we stand with him will be where we stand with him forever. You know, you can spend a lot of time thinking about your job. And that's okay to spend a lot of time thinking about your job. But the reality is your job is not going to last forever. And you can spend a lot of time thinking about maybe getting married one day. But your marriage, if God gives you one, isn't going to be eternal. And you can spend a lot of time thinking about all sorts of temporary things, clothes and video games and cars and homes and all kinds of things. But friends, none of that is going to last forever. And if like this rich man, we're leaning on our external wealth, or our physical well-being as a sign of our spiritual well-being. Or even if we're just taking that as, you know, even if that's just something that's distracting us from considering where we truly stand with God.

And friends, we are in incredible danger. You see, I think the reason that Jesus gives the poor man a name in this parable, and yet he doesn't give the rich man a name, is because I think he wants us to put ourselves in the shoes of the rich man. The main character in this story isn't Lazarus. This story is really about what happens to this rich guy. It's about you and me. It's as if Jesus is saying, you fill your name into the blank. And Jesus is warning us that when our short life is over, we will enter into a permanent state. And however we stand with God when our life ends is how we will stand with God for eternity. Look again at verses 24 through 26.

And he, the rich man, called out, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I'm in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things, and now he's comforted here, and you are in anguish.

And beside all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us. If you look closely at the rich man's words in verse 24, what do you see?

At first, it looks like he's had a change of heart, right? Father Abraham, have mercy on me. You know, we can often think, is it cruel and unjust for God not to allow this man a chance to cross over and enter the feast of heaven?

[15 : 38] But look a little more closely. Has the rich man really had a change of heart? During his life on earth, the rich man lived in utter disregard of Lazarus.

Lazarus suffered right at his doorstep, and the rich man did nothing to help him. And now, how does the rich man treat Lazarus? Like a servant.

Like a slave. Like Lazarus can just do his bidding. Tell Lazarus to come cool my tongue. I'm in anguish over here. He can come away from the party and help me out.

He can come meet my needs. Friends, you see what's happened? The self-centeredness with which the rich man lived his entire life persists.

It keeps going into eternity. He's still only thinking of himself. And friends, that's one way for us to understand hell.

[16 : 51] To be handed over to the utter horror of our own selfishness forever. When Jesus began his public ministry in the Gospel of Luke, he announced the year of the Lord's favor.

He said, now is the time for liberation. Now is the time to repent, to turn from sin and selfishness, and believe the Gospel. But friends, what Jesus is saying here is that time won't last forever. If we live our entire life trusting in self, and looking out for self, and caring about self, and living in self-pity, and seeing all the things that we ourselves have earned and deserved, and thinking of ourselves as good enough and all the good things we've done, then eventually God will say, okay, have it your way.

To self, you can belong. And when God hands us over in that way, there will be no repentance.

You see, it's not that God will refuse us entrance into heaven after death, although he's perfectly just to do so. But it's that those who haven't trusted in Jesus won't even ask.

We will continue to make demands for ourself, and we'll continue to try to use others to meet our needs, and we'll continue to make excuses, and justify ourselves, and say that God wasn't fair, just like the rich man in this story.

[18 : 35] Amen. Amen. So what is Jesus trying to teach us in this parable?

Not just the reality of eternal separation from God, but he's also teaching us that having material wealth is not evidence of a right relationship with God.

Rather, it's what we do with our wealth that's the evidence. Do we use our wealth to serve ourselves? Or do we use it wisely and shrewdly to serve others?

Last week, we looked at the parable of the shrewd manager, and one of the lessons we learned there was what Jesus said in verse 9 of this chapter. Make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth.

That is, material wealth. Make friends for yourself by means of your wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. That is not the rich man of our parable the exact opposite of that.

[19 : 44] That when his wealth fails, there's nothing and no one to receive him. He's alienated, and he's alone. Now, friends, hear me very clearly.

Jesus is not teaching us here that how we use our money is what actually saves us. He's not saying that we're saved by serving others with our wealth.

That's not what makes us righteous. That doesn't put us into a right relationship with God. We're not saved by our charity. No. But if we are already in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, that will be one of the fruits that comes out.

That will be one of the ways that that new life within us starts to express itself in our daily life. Why?

Why is that kind of other-centered generosity one of the signs of knowing God in Christ? Why is Jesus saying that the generous use of our money is a sign of being a child of the kingdom?

[20 : 54] Because, friends, what the gospel tells us is that our sins have made us completely destitute. And the one who holds all the wealth in the universe spent it all to pay the debt of our sin and to give us eternal life.

You see, friends, isn't this the gospel? That the one who wore the purple robes of heaven came to earth, became poor, died on a cross in our place so that we could be forgiven.

Haven't you and I in the gospel received unimaginable generosity? As much as we're the rich man in this story, in our sin, aren't we also Lazarus?

Weren't we the ones that Christ came and took in at great cost? And didn't he feed us at his table and put ointment on our sores? And didn't he clothe us in his own royalty?

Isn't this what's true of us in Christ? And so how can we look at the Lazaruses around us and not respond in the same way that our Lord responded to us?

[22 : 12] How can we, who've been given infinite spiritual wealth in the gospel, not turn around and give some of our material wealth to those in need? What a small thing to do in response to what Jesus has done for us.

It's not having wealth that's a sign of being in a right relationship with God. It's not just having wealth. Some Christians are wealthy. Some Christians are poor. It's what you do with it, friends.

Do you give? Do you serve? Do you think of creative ways to bless others through what God has given you, whether it's a lot or whether it's a little?

Do you love those less fortunate than you? In fact, do you even stop seeing people as less fortunate than you because we're all equal at the foot of the cross? In other words, those who have received mercy show mercy.

Now, Jesus ends his parable with a lesson. Let's pick up again in verse 27. And he, the rich man, said, Then I beg you, Father, to send him, that is Lazarus, to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

[23 : 33] But Abraham said, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said to them, and he said to him, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced.

If someone should rise from the dead. What will convince you, friend, to stop living for yourself and to put your trust in Jesus so that you might enter the feast of heaven and not come into the place of eternal, self-centered torment?

What will convince you to take that step? And Jesus is challenging us here. Because the point of this last paragraph is Jesus telling us very loud and clear that our real problem when it comes to believing the gospel isn't a lack of proof, but it's a hardness of heart.

Why wouldn't Lazarus, coming back from the dead, convince these brothers to change? Let's be honest. That seems a little odd, right? If someone came back from the dead, you'd think that would be pretty convincing.

Because he knew that these brothers had all the intellectual proof that they needed to believe already. Now let me say, if you're here tonight and you're curious about the historical evidence for the truth of Christianity, if you have genuine doubts about its truthfulness, then this church is a good place for you to be because we would love to explore and help you understand some of that evidence and to ask questions and to wrestle with the faith.

[25 : 22] Jesus never says, just take a blind leap and then you believe. No. We should believe because we're convinced that it's true. Jesus isn't afraid of giving people the evidence and the proof that they need to help understand how this all makes sense historically and rationally.

But the reality is, friends, after considering all the evidence you can, there will still remain the heart issue, which is the issue.

And the heart issue is, will we submit our hearts and our lives to another wholly?

Or will we remain our own self-centered Lord? Who will be the Lord of your life?

And all the evidence in the world isn't going to just immediately push you over that line. Because, of course, when Jesus told this parable, he knew and he had already begun teaching the disciples that he was actually going to rise from the dead.

[26 : 41] I mean, the dramatic irony of that line just bursts off the page, doesn't it? Because we all, reading the Gospel of Luke, know that Jesus is going to be the one who does rise from the dead. And the tragedy is that many in Jesus' own day, even after his resurrection, would still refuse to believe.

Friend, don't let that be you tonight. Are you still going to remain locked up in your own selfishness? Or will you admit that God is God and that his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has come and paid the penalty for your sins and rose again and ascended to the Father's right hand as King and now invites you and calls you to come and trust yourself to him?

In a minute, we're going to sing a final song. But before we do, I want us to just spend a minute tonight in just quiet spiritual reflection.

We don't often do this in the evening service. But we're just going to take a minute to just meditate and pray quietly in our seats. If you're a believer in Jesus, maybe you could take a minute and examine on the basis of this text how you have been using your material resources.

Are you serving? Are you giving? And if as you pray and as you look into your own heart and as you do so before God and if you see that that's true, then tonight, thank God for the grace that enables you to do that and ask God for more grace to be able to do it more and more.

[28 : 22] And if you're a believer and you see ways in which you're not doing that, then ask for God's forgiveness and know that Jesus' death and resurrection covers those sins too and then pray that the Holy Spirit would begin to teach you and show you and give you wisdom about how you can serve Him better in this way.

Ask for the Spirit to give you this fruit of generosity and compassion and charity in your heart and in your life. If you're not a believer in Jesus tonight, then this would be a good time to ask yourself and to prayerfully ask yourself before God.

On the one hand, are there some evidences that I need? Are there questions that I have, genuine questions I have that are sort of keeping me and holding me up in my spiritual journey for becoming a Christian?

And if so, what are they? And who are you going to ask to help you find the answers? Would you be willing tonight to start to talk about some of those and explore some of those?

Or on the other hand, is it not so much a head issue for you, but is it a heart issue? Have you been exploring the faith? Does it start to make sense to you?

[29 : 42] But honestly, at the end of the day, are you afraid to give God the control of your life? Friend, if so, ask yourself tonight, what would God need to say or do to convince you that you can trust Him with your life?

There's an old hymn that we sang this morning, actually, in the morning service that says, what more can He say than to you He hath said? Have you considered that if God loves you so much as to die for you and your sins?

Then you can trust Him. And He'll not let anything come your way that's not ultimately for your good if you're His. So let's take a moment then and let's be still before God together.

Him. Thank you.

Thank you.

[32 : 14] Thank you.

Thank you.