



Luke 16:14-31 Small Group Questions and Notes

Topic: The Spiritual Test

Opening Discussion: How different would life look if everything we thought in our minds was displayed on our foreheads? What would it change about culture. What would it change about you?

Opening Discussion: Do you ever forget that God can see every thought and intent of the human heart?

- This passage is a test of faithfulness on the heels of the prodigal son teaching.
 - Remember: Both sons, not just the wandering son, needed to reckon with their heart condition, but the legalistic older brother was not as close to the father's heart as the wandering yet returning son. Every believer should see themselves in both sons.

Discussion Question: as we have continued to glean from the prodigal son parable through Jesus' continued teachings, have you seen yourself more in one of the sons than the other?

- This chapter is a follow up teaching that Jesus graciously gave so we could evaluate our hearts and know where our loyalties lie: ourselves or God. We cannot serve both masters!
- **2 Cor. 13:5** Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!
- 16:19-31 - Jesus decided to tell a poignant story to teach the pharisees; a story that seemingly elevated a poor man over a wealthy and religious elite man.

- We don't know if this is a real story or a parable. The common assumption by scholars is that this is a parable, but there is a possibility this story really happened.¹
- We do know from this teaching that Jesus believed in a place called Hell and a place called Heaven, which means they both exist, regardless of our comfort level with the Eternal Hell concept.²
- We can glean some interesting insights into the after life from this story, but this story is not intended to be a teaching on the specifics of the after life, just as divorce wasn't the context of the last section in this chapter even though Jesus talked about divorce.
- **Jesus intended for us to see in this story the reality of where our loyalty leads. If our lives are about ourselves, the result in the after-life is profoundly sad. If our lives are about loyalty and love to Jesus, regardless of how life looks on earth, eternal life will be better than we could ever imagine!**

Discussion Question: When it comes to the idea of heaven and eternity with Jesus, what do you get the most excited about in your longing for heaven?

- John Calvin said of this teaching: "The Lord is painting a picture which represents the condition of the future life in a way that we can understand. The sum of it is that believing souls when they leave the body lead a joyful and blessed life outside the world, but that for the reprobate are prepared terrifying torments which can no more be conceived by our minds than can the infinite glory of God."³
- Jesus taught the concept of self loyalty or self worship through a rich man often referred to as "Dives" in the latin vulgate. He taught the concept of humble loyalty to God through a man named Lazarus. Let's start with Dives, the rich man.
- Let's be clear, this teaching is not an indictment on wealth and a revenge vendetta for the poor. We may think in those concepts, but God doesn't think in the same way, and the great reward for heaven is proof. This is a teaching on the loyalties of our heart. Who are we serving. If money is our master, it just might lead us toward hell in our daily lives, or even hell for all eternity. Jesus wanted us to see that our Heavenly Father should be the master of our hearts, and he is a much more loving

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Luke* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009) 195-196

² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 5.

³ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 119

and faithful master than money. This statement needs Gospel clarification, so please listen carefully this morning!

- **19 “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 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.’**
 - The wealthy man in hell, who by inference represented the pharisees (see the previous verses), was given as an illustration of the futile nature of living for the flesh.
 - “Abraham’s Side” was an early description for heaven, based on the idea of Abraham being the “father of all who believe” according to Paul in Romans 4:11.⁴ It makes me want to sing “Father Abraham had many sons...”.

Discussion Question: Have earthly pursuits, especially money, ever let you down or even brought more frustration or anguish to your life? Was there ever a time in your life when earthly pursuits were your idolatrous identity?

- **25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 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.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’**
 - The poor man harkened to Jesus’ teaching of the beatitudes in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5, especially verse 3 which states: **3** “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Luke* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009) 199

Discussion Question: Why do you think Jesus chose the name Lazarus? Feel free to speculate and discuss.

- **29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’
30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 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.’”**

- Jesus final statements in verses 30-31 is really a challenge to the Pharisees to realize the hardness of their own hearts.
 - Jesus recounts through the “voice of father Abraham” that all the law and the prophets has pointed the way to Jesus in preparation. This is so important because this reinforces a healthy scriptural hermeneutic! All of scripture is one story.
 - St. Augustine coined the famous maxim: “The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new fulfilled.”⁵ Augustine was trying to help us understand that we must look for Jesus in the Old Testament, because he is there! The Old Testament prepared the way, just like the John the Baptizer, for the coming Messiah. That is a major theme in the book of Romans and Hebrews! The pharisees willingly missed it.

Discussion: recount an example of an Old Testament passage that communicates to you the coming of or need for Jesus. (Example: The ram in the thicket during Abraham’s offering of Isaac.) Note: the best way to verify that an Old Testament passage is meant to be revealed in the New Testament through the Gospel is to see the writers of the New Testament clearly reference that passage.

- If someone came back from the dead, wouldn’t you want to hear their message? Think Jacob Marley in Mr. Scrooge!⁶ Yet, Jesus is saying something nuanced: the religious leaders were not going to listen to Him, even though He would raise from the dead. (Interestingly, they didn’t even believe after Lazarus was raised, which may be why Jesus used that specific name.)

⁵ <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/ancient-promises>

⁶ characters in Charles Dickens’ famous book *A Christmas Carol* published Dec. 19, 1843

- Jesus went full circle in his teaching back to verse 16 in conclusion. He wanted them to understand that the hardness of their hearts made it impossible for them to hear or receive the truth.
- How should this translate to us?
 - Some of us still serve God with fierce determination and dedication on the premise that God will make our lives better in return, and this story directly contradicts that premise. By the way, that is the unfortunate take away from the story of Scrooge. Scrooge's loyalty changed to loving others, but the Gospel teaches us something even higher than loyalty and love to others. Jesus taught this exact concept when he was asked by the Pharisees what the most important commandment was. His answer: Love God with your heart, soul, mind and strength. Then, love your neighbor as yourself.⁷
- **We must evaluate our own approach to righteousness and ask ourselves what the ultimate motivation for obedience is.**
 - **Romans 8:6-10 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.**
 - Paul reminds us here that our mind is a hinge-point between the still small voice of God and the raging voice of our flesh.
 - I've said it several times recently, but it bears worth repeating: trust your feelings and you will test God. Test your feelings and you will trust God.
 - The Gospel frees us to live in a godward direction, away from the attention to and lies of our fleshly desires.
 - Gospel thinking is actually a pattern of thought we have to continually remember. We call this patter of thought **The Four "G's" Gospel Fluency**, and it

⁷ Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27

looks like this pattern of thought that we can use to inform our flesh of truth through our minds:⁸

- **1. God is great, so I don't have to be in control!**
- **2. God is glorious, so I don't have to fear others!**
- **3. God is good, so I don't have to look elsewhere!**
- **4. God is gracious, so I don't have to prove myself!**

Test Questions for Closing Discussion:

- **What loss would drive you away from faithfulness in your life to God?**
- **What would cause you to distrust God's care for you?**
- **What earthly desires or possessions (if lost) would cause you to turn your loyalty and commitment away from God?**
- **What would cause you to question God's love and grace for you?**

⁸ Jeff Vanderstelt & Jackie Hill Perry, *Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into Every Day Life*, (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2017)