

**Luke 16:19-31****The Rich Man And Lazarus****Recorded 11/5/20, Preached Live 11/8/20**

We are going to Luke 16 today.

Luke 16 is the continuation of a long section of this book that begins in Luke 15 where the Pharisees, or religious leaders, are grumbling about Jesus hanging out with the tax collectors and sinners. And Jesus pushes back, exposing the fact that they, even though they had been entrusted by God with the leadership of the people, had failed them through their selfishness, their love of money, their failure to open their tables to the least of these, their failure to reach out to the broken.

But what Jesus has been saying to them is **not just a confrontation, it's an invitation**. An invitation to not be like the self-righteous older brother in the story of the prodigal son, but rather to come in to the party and join what God is doing in the world through Jesus.

Through his parables, Jesus is exposing to them their false hopes and failure as religious leaders and pleading with them to come to Him. It's confrontational kindness - Jesus is exposing their need and inviting them to have it met in Him.

And now he tells yet another story in this context with the same goal, to invite them to receive all that God was offering in Jesus.

**Luke 16 19 "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.**

So Jesus tells a story about another rich man. He is clothed in purple and fine linen and he is feasting sumptuously. He's wearing the finest clothes and eating the best food every day. But with this description, Jesus seems to be saying more than, "This guy is a baller."

In their day, riches and religious status were completely intertwined, so if you were well-regarded in the religious community you were probably rich, and if you were rich, you were probably well-regarded in the religious community.

Jesus describes him in a way that would have made him not only rich, but also one of the religious leaders in Israel. The high priest, the highest official in the temple, at the time was a man named Caiaphas. He was a man who was made rich by the prominence that came from his priestly work, who dressed in purple and fine linen. Listen to the description of his clothing that the Old Testament gave of how the high priest dressed:

**Exodus 39 They also made the coats, woven of fine linen, for Aaron and his sons, 28 and the turban of fine linen, and the caps of fine linen, and the linen undergarments of fine twined linen, 29 and the sash of fine twined linen and of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, embroidered with needlework, as the LORD had commanded Moses.**

The purple and fine linen combination is used over and over in the Old Testament to describe the dress of the high priest. He was dressed to look like the temple. And the people who heard Jesus would have known what Jesus was saying with this description immediately.

In our day, if we say, “The olympic athletes came in displaying the red, white, and blue flags,” we are not just describing the colors of the flags, we’re saying that this is the team from the USA. We know what “red, white, and blue” together mean. In their day, purple and fine linen would have been an easy indicator that this guy is a high priest. He’s associated with the temple.

On top of wearing his expensive clothing, he is also said to have feasted sumptuously, or literally “rejoiced by lamp” every day. That phrase was used to describe the observance of the Jewish ceremonial feasts. These lamps were a central part of the holy place in the temple where the high priest ministered.

Later it would be said of this rich man that he has Moses and the Prophets, he is someone who is well-acquainted with the Bible. Verse 20 will say that he has a gate, or literally, a “porch” - the word that is used to describe the porch of a temple.

And the assumption that every good Pharisee would have about him was that he was favored by God. You got rich because God helped you more than others. You were the high priest because God helped you. You knew the Bible because God was specially for you. You had the ability to feast every day by lamplight because you were clearly God's man.

So the Pharisees are hearing this story, and thinking, "I know people just like this guy - great people." They aspire to be like this guy.

Then Jesus introduces the next character, the polar opposite of the rich man:

**Luke 16:20 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.**

Just outside the temple, on the temple porch, is a man whose life couldn't be more different than the rich man's.

This man is covered in sores. So he is sick. He didn't lay himself at the gate, he "was laid" at the gate, someone had to put him there so he could beg alms. He was too weak to even bring himself out to beg.

And he is longing to be fed with the crumbs from the rich man's table. This language is similar to what the prodigal son experienced when he had squandered his father's wealth:

**Luke 15:16 "And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything."**

So this beggar is longing for what the rich man has. He is an outsider, looking in. He is unclean, and is longing to be fed with even the crumbs from the rich man's table.

And just to add another layer of uncleanness, the dogs are coming out to lick his sores. I'm no doctor, but I assume that doesn't make sores less prone to be infected. (I've never heard anyone say that dog saliva is basically neosporin.)

This man is unclean, unwell, hungry, poor. He is disregarded by all, callously treated by the rich man.

But there's some irony in this - his name is Lazarus.

And Lazarus's name is a form of the name Eleazar, which means, "the one God helps."

So the use of this name is probably supposed to be almost funny given his description.

*Years ago a joke circulated, before internet memes but it would have been one. It was a lost dog poster that said "Lost dog, 3 legs, blind in one eye, missing right ear, tail broken, recently castrated, answers to the name 'Lucky.'" The name creates the irony - the name makes the joke.*

Jesus didn't use names in parables anywhere else, but here, the name is important to set up the irony.

Jesus says, "Man, poor, covered in sores, can't walk, kept outside the temple, begging for food, starving for crumbs, festering wounds licked by feral dogs, answers to the name 'The One God Helps.'"

They would have laughed at this name. Everything in their theology at the time would have said this man is cursed by God. He has all the signs, everything about his life says to anyone who observes him, "God doesn't help that guy." And it continues right up until his death:

**Luke 16:22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried,**

Notice the poor man dies, but the rich man dies and is buried. There's no mention of a burial for Lazarus. The burial of the rich man was notable - he was probably honored by the community in his death - all through his life he was on top, and mourned and honored and buried at the end. The burial of Lazarus wasn't even mentioned, he received maybe a simple burial at best. The rich man is highly regarded at his death, and Lazarus is just

kind of thrown away, never honored before people. Cursed right up until his death, it seems.

But after death everything changed. Again:

**Luke 16:22 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.**

This was completely unexpected. The guy who was “clearly” cursed by God turns out actually to be helped by God and goes to Abraham’s side. And the “hero” of the story, the rich, religious, blessed-by-God high priest, maybe Caiaphas himself, is being tormented in hades.

*Just a brief note on what Jesus teaches about the afterlife here. Common teaching in their day, under second temple judaism, that Jesus affirms with this, is that when people die before the final judgment in the future, they go to their interim state in Hades. And in that state, the souls of the redeemed are in paradise, and the souls of the lost are in torment. They start to receive their reward or punishment, but that’s not the permanent state. There’s still coming in the future a final judgment. They begin to receive in Hades the firstfruits of what will be made official and enhanced at the final judgment.*

*So when someone who knew the Lord dies, we can have real confidence that they’re in heaven, in paradise with Jesus. But there’s coming a resurrection and a judgment where their fate will be made official, their bodies will be resurrected in a glorious state, and they’ll then begin inhabiting a renewed paradise earth with Jesus. The ultimate final state of the redeemed is not a disembodied floaty place, but a real perfect creation - the end of the story we wanted when we read the beginning of Genesis. People filling the earth, cultivating it for God’s glory, with God in the midst of it.*

*And for the lost, when they die, they begin to receive their punishment. But there will be a judgment at the resurrection, and a final sentence. Revelation 20:11-15 describes that judgment scene.*

*So it’s like the lost are in jail until the trial, and then the final sentence makes it permanent.*

*And the saved are in the presence of Christ in some kind of existence of perfect paradise and peace, then comes the resurrection and the final judgment, and then finally new heaven and new earth forever, creation restored, paradise regained, no more sin or sorrow, and everything more glorious than ever.*

And this parable tells us a little more about what the afterlife is like:

**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.'<sup>25</sup> 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.'**

So Lazarus used to long for the rich man's crumbs but didn't receive them. Now the rich man is longing for Lazarus's water, but can't receive it.

And when the rich man says, "Have mercy on me," it's the root word for almsgiving. So just as Lazarus used to beg for alms, this rich man is begging for alms in hell. He is in need, in agony, can't be helped.

And, his state is permanent - here's a great chasm fixed between the two places, and there is no passing from one to another. So the eternal fate of a person is finalized at the end of this life. There's no possibility of going from hell to heaven. What's happening there is not a temporary cleansing or purging of sin, but an eternal sentence for sin.

Now none of this description of this place of the dead would have shocked the hearers, it wasn't a new idea Jesus was presenting. So this parable is not meant mainly to inform us of exactly what hell and the afterlife are like, it isn't spoken just to give a topography of hell. That's incidental to the main point.

The key to understanding the main message of this parable is to understand the words of the rich man. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, so the words of this rich man tell us what's in his heart. So the emphasis here is not mainly on the nature of

hell, but the heart of hell. This rich man's words reveal why he's there to begin with, which is meant to serve as a warning to us when our hearts are like his.

So look again at what the rich man says:

**Luke 16:24 And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me,**

Who does the rich man go to for mercy and help?

Father Abraham. Not God, but he is crying out to Abraham for his salvation.

When John the Baptist came on the scene to prepare the way for Jesus, he had this interaction with the Pharisees when he was baptizing repentant people in the river:

**Matthew 3:7-10 7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

So the scene is people repenting of their sins and being washed in the river, but the Pharisees are saying, "We don't need that - we have Abraham as our father." We don't need to repent, we are fine on our own. We are pure-bread Jewish people, we have the pedigree, we have our own righteousness, and that's all we need.

And repeatedly in the Gospel narratives, when the Pharisees are called to repent, they say, "we have Abraham as our father." We are OK.

They didn't need Jesus, they thought, because they had their family religion and were fine on their own.

And here is the rich religious man, in hell, still calling out to Abraham for redemption.

This is a warning for those of us who will trust our family religion and our religious ways for salvation. People who think they are righteous by default and don't need what Jesus has to offer.

Only Jesus saves, our religious rhythms and family religiosity don't. This means many church people will be shocked to find themselves outsiders in the next life. The arrogant, self-righteous church people are the most at risk of missing out on paradise, because they have a tendency to falsely trust in being here, being part of the religious community.

But that's like trusting father Abraham for salvation. Only Jesus can save.

So the rich man is trusting religious pedigree and family religion. But there's more (verse 24 again)

**Luke 16:24 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.'**

Notice that the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to serve him.

So he spent his life feeling superior to Lazarus, he was the blessed one and Lazarus was cursed, and now, in death, he is still treating Lazarus like he's beneath him.

He is arrogant, and his arrogance lives on in hell.

One of the objections to the doctrine of hell is that it is unjust - that people stay there forever. But in the descriptions of hell we have in scripture, people aren't asking to get out. They aren't repenting and asking God's forgiveness. They are simply given over to their sins and continue being exactly who they are, and even the punishment doesn't bring about humility and repentance.

So it's been said that the door to hell is locked from the inside. And that, if we were to go to hell and open the door and announce, "If you'll just humble yourself and bow to Jesus, you will be free and get out of this place," we wouldn't have anyone take us up on the offer.

People go through their lives rejecting God, and part of the punishment of hell is God giving them what they wanted: a God-free existence for eternity. That at least helps explain some of the justice of it all. Their resistance to God, their refusal to humble themselves, only goes on for eternity.

Skip back down to verse 27:

**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.'**

Still ordering Lazarus around, the rich man says, “Send him to my father’s house. I have five brothers there and if they’re warned, they’ll never come here.”

(It’s interesting that Caiaphas the high priest married a woman with five brothers, so Jesus may here be firing a warning shot at him specifically.)

But look what he’s saying. He’s saying, “Anyone with a proper warning won’t come here.”

This seems to be excuse making. I never actually had a warning. There’s no repentance of sin, just saying, “I wouldn’t be here if I had a chance, but I never had a chance.”

**29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'**

Abraham says, “They are being warned. They have the Bible. It tells them of their need for a Savior. That’s what Moses and the Prophets are all about. And these are good Jewish people, they hear the scriptures read in the synagogue every sabbath! They’re being warned every day, by the inspired word of God.

So the rich man says, “Well its not enough of a warning!”

**30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'**

If someone rises from the dead, and tells them what death is like, then surely they'll repent and avoid all of this. A sign like that - a resurrection - would be enough for them.

If there were just more evidence, they'd believe. And obviously, my problem, is that I just didn't have enough evidence.

**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.'**

Even that won't be enough if they won't hear the scriptures.

So notice that he speaks like the scriptures have more power to change a heart than even the visible sign of a resurrection from the dead.

We would tend to say that seeing is believing. We speak the scriptures and they are heard, but it would be really convincing if we could give them something through their eyes: a sign, a miracle, an experience.

But as far as changing a heart goes, the written and spoken word of God is more powerful than anything we see, anything we feel, any evidence we produce. These are the words of life, these are the words that change us, these are the words that breathe new life into us. And if they don't, nothing will.

If we hear what the scriptures say and reject what they say, and they are the very words of God, that reveals that we have hearts set against God. And all of the evidence and signs and miracles in the world will not be enough. Our problem isn't a lack of evidence, but a lack of willingness to turn from our other ultimates to God.

Our problem is not that we lack information and evidence. It's that we want something else. We have a will inclined against God. And we may say we just need more evidence, but that's the excuse for clinging to what we wanted in life anyways.

We see this lived out with another Lazarus in the Bible.

In John 11, Jesus went to the home of his friend Lazarus who had died. And Jesus famously called him to come forth, and Lazarus rose from the dead.

And here's what they do with that:

**John 11 45Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, 46but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 48If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."**

So Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, and the Pharisees refuse to address what that means: that Jesus is legitimate and we should repent and join up with him.

Instead they fear: we will lose our power, we will lose our money, we will lose our place and our nation. If Jesus gets prominence, we will lose what is dear to us. A man named Lazarus is resurrected from the dead, and they reject Jesus not because they don't have evidence!

Lazarus was in that tomb 4 days, his body was rotting and stinking, and now he's jogging through the neighborhood. That's pretty convincing. But they wanted something other than Jesus.

Lazarus has come back from death, and you'd think that would be enough to turn people to Jesus, but it wasn't. They were afraid of what they would lose. And look at the response of Caiaphas the high priest to one coming back from the dead to affirm the authority and power and legitimacy of Jesus:

**John 11: 49But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. 50Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." 51He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children**

**of God who are scattered abroad. 53So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.**

Caiaphas the high priest, a rich man who wore purple and feasted by the lamps, hears that a man named Lazarus has been raised from the dead. And instead of repenting, he initiates a plot to put Jesus to death.

One was raised from the dead, which made a huge demand on Caiaphas' life: give up your opposition to Jesus and join him! And the rich man said, "Nah, kill Jesus."

*'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'*

When we cling to something for our security like money, position, or power, or pride, or being right, we can be impossible to convince of anything. You've probably experienced this in political conversations, how difficult it is to convince someone, even with facts. And you ask, "How could they be so blind? Why are they ignoring evidence?"

Because they want to. They'd rather feel right than change their mind, they'd rather get what they think their side offers than align themselves with truth.

We believe what we want to believe. As Paul Simon sang, "A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest."

So what is this saying to the Pharisees here? And to us?

We might say that this is just a social commentary: that God rewards the poor and punishes the rich. But in this same chapter, in another parable, the rich land-owner was a good guy, he represented God in the story. So this is not saying we are saved by being poor or condemned for being rich.

But with one qualification: Jesus said it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. And that isn't because of the riches per se, but because riches want to master us and be our God. They offer a false version of what God offers: security, a future, peace, freedom.

And to cling to God as ultimate we have to let go of everything else as ultimate. And its hard to do that with money.

And the same is true of our religious self-righteousness. It feels good to think we are good on our own. And so when we think we're pretty good, we can be far from redemption.

The one common characteristic of those that are redeemed in Jesus's parables in this section is that they recognize their need. The prodigal is longing to be fed with the pig food, Lazarus is longing to be fed with crumbs.

**Matthew 5:2-6 “2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

Those who recognize their poverty before God, those who are hungry for God, those who trust in nothing but God for their redemption are those that have God.

But the arrogant, the self-righteous, the dependent-on-their-religion, don't receive him at all.

Lazarus made God his help, and God certainly was. The rich man was his own help, he had it all, he was righteous, he had Abraham, he had money, he had security and influence, he had a name and honor, right up until he died. And he missed God because He made everything else his help.

So this was a confrontation: those who thought they had God did not have Him. But it was an invitation: let go of those other gods and have him.

Make God your help in Jesus.

This will take admitting our sin and accepting the help He provided on the cross.

And here's how this is great news to the poor, those that already have nothing to cling to:

You feel you are too sinful to help yourself, you feel you can never know God because you have no way to get to him, you feel you are hopeless to ever get there because of what you've done. You feel like an outsider at church because you haven't behaved, you don't dress the right way, you have no prominence in the religious community, you have no money. But those who recognize their need are the closest to grace.

It's the prodigals who come to an end of themselves that quickly receive the grace of the father, not the self-righteous religious older brothers. It's the beggars that make God their help, not the rich and pompous and visibly religious. It's the tax collectors and sinners and prostitutes that are closest to grace because they recognize their need and their hunger.

**John 6:47-51 “47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”**

Come to Jesus when you're hungry, and you will be fed. His body and blood, shed on the cross, are more than enough to pay for your sins and redeem you. And it only works for you if nothing else is your help in getting to God at all. Just Jesus, just his cross, just his totally free grace.

## Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions

### I. The Rich Man and Lazarus in This Life (Luke 16:19-23)

How is the broader context in Luke 15-16 significant to how we interpret this story?

Do you think this is a parable, or an account of a real-life story? Would that matter?

### II. The Rich Man and Lazarus in the Next Life (Luke 16:24-26)

What are the characteristics of hell?

### III. The Heart of Hell (Luke 16:24-31)

What are the characteristics of a person who is in hell?

Consider reading Lewis's [The Great Divorce](#) for a fictional account that illustrates the heart of hell well.

### IV. The Call of Heaven (John 6:47-51)

What would it take for the Pharisees to receive Jesus's invitation to life?

What would it take for us to receive it?