

The text for our teaching this morning is found in Luke 16...

Gospel of St. Luke...Chapter 16 verse 19 (we will get there in a moment).

So we're doing a series on heaven...

And if you're going to do a series on heaven, then must touch on hell...

And that's what I've been tasked with today...discussing the **alternative** to heaven.

But I realize that this is an unpopular topic...

In fact, in undergrad...had experience that sums up way many think of hell.

In literature class...enjoyed the class actually **and** the prof...

Talking about various religions, prof raised in Christian home (but not so good representation).

He likes idea of pantheism, **not** Christianity...

He says this idea...that you get one chance to live life, to choose Christ, and if not, then hell...is absurd.

"I find it ridiculous, insulting, and childish."

Now, not here just to bash the professor as a pagan or something like that...like I said I enjoyed the class for the most part.

But it struck me how it seemed that many in the class almost agreed with him.

And I think it is because this is a common belief held by those who are not Christians...

Or maybe held by those who ARE Christians, and are afraid to acknowledge it.

The idea of: How can a loving God send people to hell? How can he judge?

So I want to say up front how many find the idea of hell **ridiculous**.

But is it?

Let's look at the parable, and see what it teaches us about the nature of heaven and hell...

### **Luke 16:19-31**

<sup>19</sup> "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

Here we are introduced to a rich man that lives in luxury.

We see that first in what he does. If you wanted to party, you went here. He celebrated **every day**.

But we also see his wealth in what he wears. He dresses in purple, a kind of modern-day Gucci.

He is wearing his Gucci with **fine linen** it says. In other words, this man was living in luxury down to his **underwear**.

By all accounts, this is a successful person, someone we would think of today as "somebody".

Yet did you notice? It is the **beggar** who has a name. Isn't that interesting?

No other parable of Jesus contains a character with a name. More on that later.

On the other hand, we have the poor man **Lazarus** at the rich man's gate. Notice how it says he "was laid" there.

Meaning here is a man who is dependent on others for everything. He is likely so physically ill that someone else had to take him there so that he could beg.

Commentator Dr. Darrell Bock notes that rabbis had a saying that three situations resulted in what they called "no life". Two of those are found here. Someone who is dependent on others for food, and someone full of sores.

Lazarus is doubly considered to have no life at all. On top of that, dogs come and lick his sores. Now we modern people go aw at least the dogs were nice to him, but dogs back then were considered unclean.

Just as the rich man's life cannot get any better, Lazarus's can't get any worse.

Notice the contrasts throughout this parable.

While the rich man feasts, Lazarus is longing for crumbs. While the rich man is covered in expensive clothes, Lazarus is covered in sores.

If we're being honest, here we have a man who God seems to show favor on, the rich man, and one in which God does not show favor on. God has seemed to help the rich man, but does not seem to help Lazarus.

But then we see a reversal in the next scene...

So let's look at the rich man and Lazarus in the next life. (larger chunk to look at)

<sup>22</sup> "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

<sup>25</sup> "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

<sup>27</sup> "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

<sup>29</sup> "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

<sup>30</sup> " 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

<sup>31</sup> "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

If I may briefly point out, the first three words of this section should be like smelling salts to every one of us.

“The time came...”

For every one of us in here, it sounds morbid, but our time will come.

While we are still here, while our time has not come **yet**, we ought to listen to what Jesus is saying...

And take note of the reversal that takes place. The time came for these two men...

**Death changes everything for these two.**

Now Lazarus is carried off into heaven and is comforted...

While the rich man goes to hell...or Hades.

And he is in **torment**.

So he starts appealing to Abraham. Appealing to his heritage, “oh, Father Abraham, you can help me.”

“Send Lazarus, I am in agony.”

First of all, the rich man reveals he knows exactly who Lazarus is. All his life he knew exactly who he was, but never acknowledged him.

But secondly, he won’t even address him directly.

We see the incredible selfishness of the rich man.

And yet...look at how Abraham responds.

He calls him “son”. This is the same word used by Paul when he addresses Timothy as his dear son. The same word used by Jesus when the paralytic comes down through the ceiling to see him and he says “son, your sins are forgiven.”

It is a tender term, though Abraham is firm. He says this was your doing. You chose this.

And that raises the objection from the beginning. Isn’t it cruel of God to send people to hell? I want you to know that he doesn’t send people to hell, the rebellious human heart chooses that path.

But more importantly, listen to the words of God himself from Ezekiel 18:23 – Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? [Obv answer = no!] Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

God desires all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, it says in 1 Tim 2:4, but if that is rejected, God will not put a gun to their head.

Michael Green writes “The love of God does not send anyone to hell. The love of God, with arms extended on a cross, bars the way to hell. But if that love is ignored, rejected and finally refused there comes a time when love can only weep while man pushes past into the self-chosen alienation which Christ went to the cross to avert.”

Christ took on punishment on our behalf. But if we reject that gift, the punishment falls on us.

God is just, and sin must be paid for. Christ offers to pay it for those who will trust in Him. But for those who don’t, they will have to pay for the sin.

This rich man saw no need for God.

You saw Lazarus before, but you chose not to help him. You “received your good things.”

Isn't that interesting? The rich man “received” his good things! He acted as though everything he has was his own, but it wasn't.

God graciously blessed him in life. But what did he do with it? He fell in love with the wealth instead of the giver. Used it for himself. See, the problem wasn't the wealth.

It was his heart. God blessed him to be a blessing to others, to Lazarus. But what did he do? He partied, he lived in luxury, he used it all on himself.

It's ok to use wealth for leisure, but if 100% of it goes to that, there's a problem. The rich man chose a life apart from God.

And then Abraham points out the nature of hell. It is permanent. There is no going back. The chasm has been set in place. Hell is permanent, it is conscious, and it is agony.

That's what we see here.

Notice the rich man never asks to get out, he just asks for relief.

But that fails, so notice what he does next.

He says well at least send Lazarus from the dead to my brothers, surely they will believe then. What looks like compassion is ultimately blame-shifting.

He's saying I didn't have enough evidence. Had I had that, I would have believed. He's basically saying how did I know this was all real? How did I know God was serious about this?

Send someone to my brothers so that they will know! Give them the evidence I didn't have!

Abraham says no, they have Moses and the Prophets. What is Moses and the Prophets? The Old Testament.

Moses gave the Law to the Israelites. What did that do? It revealed their sinfulness. And over and over again we see the Israelites fail to uphold the Law.

Then what? The prophets came along and warned them and commanded them to repent!

It is the call to repentance. Turn back to God.

But the rich man is insistent. He says no, trust me, send someone from the dead, then surely they will believe.

And we see this principle today. We need better music, we need more attractive programs, we need more illustrations or stories in preaching. **That** will bring people in. **That** will make them believe.

No, says Abraham, none of that will do it. It's the message of repentance.

It is the fact that the human race has turned its back on God and is under wrath. The only hope is repentance, turn back to God, and he will be merciful.

Continue to turn away from God, and he will not force you to love him, but you will face his judgment.

And so the story ends with Abraham assuring the rich man that his brothers have all they need to reach eternal life.

So what do we learn from this about heaven and hell? The parable is mainly about generosity, let me be clear, to help the needy and be open-handed, but we're doing a heaven series, so I'll focus on that this morning.

**Two applications we see here:**

First, this parable commands us **to realize where sin takes us. AKA how did the rich man go to hell?**

Look at verse 13 of this chapter. Right before Jesus goes into this parable, he concludes his previous parable by saying "no one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Do you see what happens in this parable then? Here is a rich man, who serves money. That's his god.

This is crucial to understanding sin both in general, and specifically in yourself. God is infinitely lovely and therefore worthy of all our love.

To fail to love him is an infinitely heinous crime. That's sin. That's why the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.

But the heart is deceitful, it loves all the wrong things. Anything other than God. It puts its affections and its love in all the wrong places.

The rich man put his identity in his wealth. Again, it's not his wealth that got him in hell, it's the fact that he loved his wealth more than anything.

Take away his wealth and what is he? He's nobody. And so he increasingly becomes like less and less of a person in hell, stretching out into eternity.

That's why in CS Lewis book *The Great Divorce*, the people in hell are described like ghosts, while people in heaven are vibrant looking. Hell disintegrates. And that's the default of the human heart.

That's in general the human heart, but in particular we as Christians can still struggle to put our love in the wrong places.

Let me illustrate. I struggle with putting all my worth in my performance. Sometimes it's like if you took away my preaching, or if I bombed a sermon really bad, I'd feel like a nobody. Or if I got a bad grade on something, I'd be crushed. Why? Because I didn't perform. My identity was wrapped up in being a preacher or a good writer, or fill in the blank.

What are you? In a city like Dallas, a lot of you might struggle with putting your hope and identity in wealth. Others might put it in romance. It's fine to want to be married, but if you say I'm no one unless I have someone, your identity is in the wrong place, it's wrapped up in a temporal thing.

Even pastors, you can become so wrapped up in your work that all you become is a pastor.

Let me be clear, I am not suggesting you can lose your salvation. But as Christians we can still struggle with these things.

David Foster Wallace, an atheist writer, said in a commencement speech about 15 years ago:

“There is actually no such thing as atheism...Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough...worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.”

Do you see it? Build your life on riches, and you will meet the same fate as the rich man.

Build your life on anything but God, and you will come up empty.

And what’s worse, in the next life, you don’t have those things you tried to build your life on here. And you’re left with nothing. Forever.

But secondly...

This parable commands us **to remember where our help comes from.**

One character is given a name. Why the name Lazarus? If this is the only parable of Jesus where a character has a name, it must be significant. What is it?

It comes from the Hebrew, Eleazar, which means “the one God helps.” **No one else cared who Lazarus was, or what happened to him, yet he is the one Jesus gives a name to.**

And did you notice the silence of Lazarus throughout the parable? Here is the character with a name, yet he doesn’t say a word.

The rich man fills the page of why he didn’t have enough evidence and his blame-shifting.

Meanwhile, Lazarus is silent! He doesn’t say at the gates of heaven, “Let me tell you why I should get in Abraham.”

No, the Christian is the first to admit – I have no good reason why I should be let into heaven, except that Jesus Christ went to the cross and died on my behalf.

And it is on account of **his** righteousness that I should be let in.

The Christian never holds his chin high saying “yes I’m a Christian.”

The Christian says “Yes I am a Christian by God’s help. By his grace.”

Lazarus’s position allowed him to see his need for a savior.

The rich man says I didn’t have enough evidence.

And we see the Pharisees are always calling for a sign. Give us a sign!

Lazarus says just give me God.

The Pharisees says I need an argument, we want proof!

Lazarus says I just need a Savior.

You can have all the arguments, signs and proof in the world and not believe.

Foolish people say "I will believe if I just have more evidence."

I've heard people say "I'm ready to believe, I just need a sign." No you don't, that's not the issue. You don't understand your own heart. The heart is stubborn.

It's the heart. How we respond to Moses and the Prophets, as Abraham says.

That is plenty, says Abraham. It was plenty for Lazarus.

And it is plenty for us. Remember where your help comes from.

**It comes from God, and we learn about him through what he has revealed to us in Scripture.**

Where do you need to say God is my help in your life? Maybe it is a certain sin you can't shake. Maybe it is a big life decision coming up. Maybe it is a bad diagnosis. Remember where your help comes from.

### **CONCLUSION**

Well we began with the idea that **"the doctrine of hell is ridiculous, it's unfair."**

Let's end with "The doctrine of grace is unfair." (From PT)

Because the truth is, **the doctrine of hell is the most fair thing.**

If God were fair, we'd all be the rich man in hell. And we'd have no right to argue. We're all under wrath. And his wrath is just.

But God is not fair. He is just, but not fair. How?

Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth to endure hell so that we could enjoy heaven.

HE was beaten so that WE could be healed.

HE was punished so that WE could be acquitted.

HE became a curse for us so that WE could be redeemed.

HE lived a perfect life but died a criminal's death!

THAT is not fair.

**The doctrine of hell is not ridiculous, oh no...it is the doctrine of GRACE that doesn't add up.**

And if you don't understand hell, you won't understand the magnitude of what Christ accomplished.

2 Cor 5:21 - "God made him who had no sin to **be** sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

You mean I can be the worst of sinners, and be covered by the blood of Christ, free of all guilt and declared righteous? YES...and live a new life for him.

You mean I can be a Christian, fail miserably, and get back on track with him? YES.

Never forget where your help comes from. For those of us who are Christians, we are all Lazarus.

"God is my help."

Because if it weren't for that old rugged cross, we'd all be in hell.

One of my heroes in the faith...

MLJ at the end of his life - "Remember, I am only a sinner saved by grace."

That's a man who knew where his help was, when his life was coming to an end.

That's a man whose hope rested in Christ.

Just like the song we're about to sing in closing...

"Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to thy cross I cling;

Is God your help? If not, God invites you in his Word to run to him.

Because this world needs more like Lazarus.

Let's pray...

**PRAYER**