

Hope Church South Haven April 26, 2026

Luke 16:19-31

Heaven and hell and everything else.

We're in this series *Frequently Asked Questions* – not surface stuff, but the kind of **questions people wrestle with**. Here's the one for today:

What are heaven and hell really like?

What comes to your mind when you think about HEAVEN and HELL? If I'm honest, we all have our own version. Here is my perspective:

- HEAVEN: Barefoot on the 12th green at Augusta. No wind. Perfect temperature. Lynette's my caddy. Carrying my bag. No rush. No pressure. Just right.
- HELL: Listening to Taylor Swift on repeat...FOREVER!!!

Nope. Not really. But when we think about heaven and hell, we tend to **fill in the gaps with our own ideas**. Our preferences. Our experiences. And that's where things start to drift.

Because pretty quickly, the *conversation turns into speculation*:

- **When** will it happen?
- What exactly will it **look like**?

- **Who's in?** Who's out?

And before long, something that should be clear **becomes complicated**. Something that should bring hope **become divisive**.

I need to be upfront: I'm not answering every question today. I'm not mapping out **every detail**. But I'm going to try and be clear on what matters. Because this isn't THEORETICAL.

- Heaven is real.
- Hell is real.
- Eternity is real.
- And our lives need to start reflecting what's real.

2nd Peter gives us a great starting point for today. Not to satisfy every curiosity or chase every speculation. But to keep this **conversation grounded**. To keep us TRUSTING. And to KEEP US LIVING in a way that brings a piece of heaven into a broken world.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: **With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. **Instead he is patient with you**, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. **But the day of the Lord will come like a thief**. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

- **God isn't dragging His feet.** He is PATIENT.
- His return – the final judgment – isn't delayed. It's *mercy*. God is giving people TIME:
 - ⇒ TIME to **rethink** the direction of their lives.
 - ⇒ TIME to **turn back**.
 - ⇒ TIME to **come home**.
- But that patience isn't endless. There is a day coming.
- And even Jesus says in **MATTHEW** and **MARK** no one knows when. Not the day. Not the hour.
- **We don't live guessing.** We live ready.

Before we jump into **LUKE 16**, we need to get this clear:

- Jesus isn't trying to **GIVE** a play-by-play of the afterlife. He's pulling back the curtain just enough for us to see what's real.
- The Bible speaks in images people could understand in that moment. DIFFERENT **world**. DIFFERENT **culture**. DIFFERENT **way of seeing life**.
- When you read it, don't get stuck on the surface details. It's pointing to something bigger. Something deeper.

- Think about it like this. Take the **Khoisan people**:

⇒ One of the oldest people groups in SOUTHERN AFRICA. Traditionally **hunter-gatherers**.

⇒ They've lived across SOUTH AFRICA and NAMIBIA and BOTSWANA for thousands of years. Harsh land and hard conditions. And they've **learned how to survive it**.

⇒ VIDEO.

Now *imagine* **Jesus** stepping into their world. How does He talk to them about heaven and hell?

- He probably **would not start** with streets of gold and gates of pearl. That language and images wouldn't work. WHOOP WHOOP.
- He will speak their language.
 - ⇒ HEAVEN might sound like steady rain and water sources that doesn't run dry and antelope when you need it and safety to pursue their way of life.
 - ⇒ HELL might sound like **drought** and **no provision** and **no antelope** and **sickness that takes over** and **their life slowly slipping away**.

Same reality. **Different words**.

When Jesus speaks about HEAVEN and HELL, He is not trying to satisfy curiosity. He is trying to **wake us up to what's coming**. He is trying to **wake us up to what matters now**.

Verses 19-21:

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

- Jesus starts with a contrast you can't miss.
- A RICH MAN.
 - ⇒ Dressed in purple. Luxury you don't just buy. **Luxury you display**. Purple dye came from *thousands of crushed shellfish*.
 - ⇒ **Fine Egyptian linen**. Made the softest of underwear. The kind only the wealthy could afford.
 - ⇒ Feasting every single day. Not occasional celebration. This is **everyday excess**.
Which also meant: the people that worked for him got no rest.
- AND THEN THERE'S LAZARUS.
 - ⇒ **Poor**. Covered in sores. Too weak to even move himself.
 - ⇒ Laid at the gate. Close enough to see abundance but COMPLETELY CUT OFF from it.

⇒ **He's not asking for a seat at the table.** Just for whatever falls off it. And he doesn't even get that.

- Jesus is pressing his point: *Even the dogs gave him more attention* than the rich man.
- And here's what makes it hit so hard: the rich man doesn't attack Lazarus. He doesn't **mock him**. He doesn't **push him away**. He just **doesn't see him**. Not cruelty.

INDIFFERENCE.

- In a world where the rich were known and the **poor were invisible**; Jesus turns it

UPSIDE DOWN.

⇒ The rich man has no name.

⇒ **The poor man has a name. LAZARUS.** And his name means *God helps*.

Verses 22-23:

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw

Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

- **Both men die.**
- LAZARUS – the one who had nothing – is carried by angels.

⇒ **He finally has a place at the table.** Right next to Abraham.

⇒ A position of *honor* and *respect*.

- The RICH MAN gets a funeral.

⇒ And now he's in HADES. The *realm of the dead*.

⇒ In torment – **βάσανος**.

◆ **βάσανος** was a testing stone. It was used to RUB METAL AND REVEAL if it was *real or fake*.

◆ The word was later used to describe the torture used to extract confessions from slaves.

◆ By the New Testament, it's talking about **real and intense suffering**. Not symbolic. Not light. **Real**.

- And everything flips. The man who used to look down on others is **now looking up**. He is looking up to the one *he passed by*. The one *he overlooked*. The one he decided didn't matter.

Verses 24-26:

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.' 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. 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.'

- Now the rich man finally speaks: Have mercy on me.
- The man who ignored Lazarus begging at his gate is now the one begging. And he's calling out to ABRAHAM.
- But even here we see **his heart hasn't really changed** – send Lazarus.
 - ⇒ He still sees him as *beneath him*.
 - ⇒ Still sees him as someone *to use*.
 - ⇒ Still sees him as someone *to run errands*.
- And Abraham answers:
 - ⇒ On **earth there was a gap** between you and Lazarus and you could have crossed it. You saw him. You had the opportunity. *But you didn't move toward him*.
 - ⇒ Now that **gap is fixed**. PERMANENT. Not something anyone can cross anymore.

Verses 27-31:

He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 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.'

- The rich man PIVOTS: warn my family.
- And Abraham responds with something that cuts straight through his words: They already have what they need. God has **already spoken**.
- This was never about a lack of information. It was about a **refusal to listen**.
- And then that line just hangs there: *if they won't listen, they won't even be convinced even if someone rises from the dead*.
- This isn't just a moment in a story. **It's a pattern**. A heart that over time learns to tune out God and tune out people.
- That's not just how his story ends. **That's a warning for our stories**.

What does Jesus reveal to us about life and HEAVEN and HELL in **LUKE 16**?

ETERNITY IS REAL – your life is heading somewhere.

- Jesus doesn't speak in *vague ideas*.
⇒ Two people. Two lives. Two very different outcomes.
- **Eternity isn't abstract**. It's real.

Time is but the fringe of eternity.

A.W. Tozer

- it means this life isn't the whole story. It's the **beginning of one** that never ends.
- What feels long right now is insignificant in light of forever.
- And the direction of your life. Even in those small everyday choices **is not neutral**.

They're FORMING SOMETHING.

- **Your life is headed somewhere**. And over time, the direction you choose becomes the destination you arrive at.

HELL IS REAL AND JUST.

- Let's be honest. Jesus doesn't soften this.
 - ⇒ HELL is **conscious and immediate**. It isn't drifting into nothingness. There is awareness. You will feel it. You will tangibly *experience* it. IT WILL BE REAL.
 - ⇒ HELL is **irreversible**. Death is final. No reset button. No second chance. No crossing back over. *Who you've chosen in this life is fixed*.
 - ⇒ HELL **doesn't change you**. It's not where people turn back to Jesus. It's where a life that kept pushing God away becomes permanent. What you've been becoming settles in.

⇒ HELL **involves memory**. “Remember” Abraham says. There’s recognition. There’s reflection. There’s understanding. Which means the weight of it isn’t less. *The weight of it is more.*

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 NIV

- Hell isn’t just physical. **It’s deeply relational.**

⇒ Separation from God.

⇒ Isolation. No real connection and no belonging.

⇒ Regret that doesn’t fade.

⇒ A place where God gives people over to their own worst desires.

**** The movie The Purge – one day a year where anything goes. You are free to do whatever you want with no consequences. Violence and greed and cruelty. Forever.*

- Crucial to understand:

⇒ It’s not God forcing people into something **they never wanted**.

⇒ It’s God **allowing a life** that kept saying no to Him.

⇒ Hell is God ALLOWING them to **have that choice fully**.

God is not indifferent. He **warns**. He **pursues**. He **steps in**.

But He **will not force a relationship** on people that *spend a lifetime resisting Him*.

Hell is justice.

Hell is not a problem. The absence of hell would be a problem. Hell is the affirmation that God is a God of justice, of fairness, of dealing with humans in a way that is right...We tend to think that the default destiny of all people is heaven, and hell is reserved for the particularly wicked. But in truth our default destiny is hell, and heaven is reserved for those who have the honesty to admit it and look to Christ.

Dane Ortlund

HEAVEN IS REAL AND BETTER THAN YOU THINK – what heaven is like.

- Revelation gives us a picture. But it's more than just imagery. It's pulling back the curtain on what's coming:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and

he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Revelations 21:1-4 NIV

- Everything broken made right. No more **death**. No more **pain**. No more **loss**. No more **funerals**. No more **goodbyes** that keep on hurting.
- But don't miss this. Because this is the center of it all:
 - ⇒ God with us.
 - ⇒ Not just a better place. A completely restored relationship.
 - ⇒ FULLY **known**. FULLY **loved**.
 - ⇒ No pretending. No hiding. No distance.
- And here's what we miss sometimes:

Heaven isn't less real than this life. Heaven is more real than this life.

- Everything we experience in this world is touched by brokenness.
 - ⇒ *Joy fades.*
 - ⇒ *Beauty doesn't last.*

⇒ *Relationships are strained.*

- **Heaven is** without the fracture. Without the decay. Without anything pulling it apart.
- If you look around this world. The **beauty**. The **intricate design**. The **way we're wired** for joy and connection and meaning. God didn't miss anything when He made this.
- This life *isn't the finished product*. This life **is just the preview**.
- This *world is the shadow*. Heaven is **the real thing**.

And this story? It's not meant to scare you into panic. It's **meant to wake you up**.

Because HEAVEN and HELL aren't just about someday. *They're about what you do with God right now*. The rich man's problem wasn't his money. It was a heart that learned to ignore.

- IGNORE **God**.
- IGNORE **people**.
- IGNORE what was **right in front of him**.

And over time, that became his direction. And his direction became his destination.

Jesus tells this story not to push you away but to pull you in. Because Jesus does the exact opposite of the rich man:

- He sees you.

- He doesn't just move toward you. **He takes your place.**
- The separation we deserve. **He stepped into.**
- The judgment we earned. **He carried.**

Separation doesn't have to be your story. Separation doesn't have to be your reality.

Your life is going somewhere. Not randomly. Not accidentally.

Here's the question: **What are you doing with God right now?**

Not later. Not when life slows down. Not once you've got it all figured out.

Right now. Because the direction you choose today is **shaping the eternity you step into tomorrow.**

- For some of you, that means turning to Jesus for the first time. Trusting what He's done for you. Bringing your life into the open. And letting Him lead.
- For others, **it means letting Him interrupt your life.** A life that's been slowly drifting. A life that is quietly ignoring. And decide to come back. Saying yes again.

Heaven and hell are real. Eternity is real.

And Jesus isn't standing at a distance. He's at your gate. Not passing you by.

He is inviting you home.