

Jesus Teaches About Our Eternal Destiny

Luke 16:19-31

Key Verse: 16:25

“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.’”

This passage is a continuation of Jesus’ teaching about how to use money. In 16:13, when Jesus urged that each person must decide whether to love God or money, the Pharisees sneered at him. They loved money and deceived themselves that they could love God too. But they failed every day to love God and to be concerned for the needy around them. In order to open their spiritual eyes, Jesus told the story of a rich man and a poor beggar, Lazarus. This story starkly contrasts what God values and what fallen men value. Though it may be regarded as a parable, Jesus also teaches directly about heaven and hell, and about what happens after death. Jesus wants us to learn a godly value system and to live well in light of eternity.

Let’s consider this passage in three parts. In verses 19-21 we can see the lifestyles of the rich man and Lazarus on earth; it makes a great contrast. In verses 22-23 we see their eternal destinies; it is another great contrast. Finally, in verses 24-31, we learn of God’s justice in judgment, the finality of one’s eternal destiny, and the way of salvation.

First, a rich man and a poor beggar, Lazarus (19-21).

In these verses Jesus draws a sharp contrast between the lifestyles of a rich man and a poor man. Some people have misunderstood this. Some poor people have concluded that simply because they are poor, they will go to heaven. Some rich people have concluded that simply because they are rich, they will go to hell. Neither assumption is valid in light of the Bible’s teaching as a whole. It is not riches themselves that are evil. Nor is poverty in itself a virtue. There are plenty of poor people who are godless and wicked. And there are some rich people who are godly. We must keep in mind that the impetus of Jesus’ teaching in this chapter is on how we use money.

Let’s consider Jesus’ contrast between the rich man and Lazarus. Look at verse 19. **“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.”** This man wore the finest clothes: shirts made of

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Egyptian cotton, Italian designer suits and Gucci shoes. Depending on his mood, he drove a Ferrari, a Corvette, or a Rolls Royce. Or, if traffic was heavy, he took his helicopter. He ate choice foods, such as imported lobster, New York steak, and Chicago style pizza. He lived in a large mansion with a winding driveway, which was lined with trees on both sides. The color purple denotes royalty. He was a man of standing in society, who was used to exercising power. He knew many other rich and famous people, and frequently hosted or attended elegant dinner parties.

Verses 20-21a say, **“At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table.”** Lazarus must have been crippled. He was powerless and a burden. He needed urgent treatment for his sores. He needed food and lodging. But he had nothing and no one to help him. So he was laid at the rich man’s gate. This suggests that God, in his divine providence, put Lazarus right in the pathway of the rich man. It was God’s opportunity for him to share his wealth with the needy and gain heavenly blessing. From God’s point of view, the rich man needed Lazarus. What happened? The rich man drove past him again and again without paying any attention. Hungry Lazarus longed for leftover crusts of pizza or the meat that clung to discarded bones. But these were given to the rich man’s dogs. The dogs ate well. But when they saw Lazarus, they felt sorry. So they began to lick his sores with canine affection. Lazarus’ social status was a little lower than the rich man’s dogs.

In this parable, the rich man is unnamed, while the poor beggar is named Lazarus. This suggests that Jesus had a personal relationship with the beggar. As we learned in Jesus’ teaching about the narrow door, being known by Jesus is priceless: It is the way to eternal life (Jn 17:3). Jesus knew Lazarus. The name “Lazarus” means “whom God helps.” As a poor beggar, Lazarus suffered a lot. Yet in the midst of hard trial, Lazarus learned to depend on God. He found that although no one else was concerned about him, God was concerned. He could pray to God and experience God’s kindness. He could taste spiritual joy with just God alone. He could overcome bitterness by thanking God. In this way his faith in God and love for God grew. To men’s eyes he looked pitiful. But he was very precious to God. If the rich man had cared for him even a little, he would have used his wealth wisely, and God would have been pleased. But the rich man was too selfish.

We cannot deny that America is a rich country. Even during economic downturn, most Americans enjoy a higher standard of living than many of the world’s inhabitants. This is due to God’s blessing on the faith of our forefathers who worshiped God foremost. Historically, we Americans have been willing to

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give to the poor and needy generously. We must continue to do so. On both a national and a personal level, we must be alert to help the “Lazarus” who is put at our gate. Then we can bear the blessing of God.

Second, two very different eternal destinies (22-23).

After a lifetime of bearing sufferings, Lazarus finally died. It was the end of his hunger pains, festering sores, and dishonor in the sight of men. This tells us that the pains and agonies of this world will end. They last only for a season, then they are over. There is no mention of Lazarus’ burial. Perhaps he had no funeral. Maybe his body was dumped in a mass grave for nameless poor, like those in Darfur in eastern Sudan. However, in heaven, Lazarus’ death was big news. As Lazarus breathed his last, God commanded his angels to go and wait upon Lazarus. These angels were powerful and glorious. At the moment Lazarus’ life expired, they took him gently in their arms and began to carry him. They treated him with great respect as they sped away, calling him “Sir,” and seeking his comfort in all they did (Heb 1:14). Then, in an instant he was at Abraham’s side. This is an allegorical expression for the kingdom of God (Lk 13:28). There, Lazarus was welcomed into eternal life in the presence of God, and stood side by side with Abraham. Lazarus was crowned with glory and honor which would last forever. Jesus had described it as a great feast. Now Lazarus could enjoy an abundance of good things. But most of all, he was in the presence of his Lord, who had loved and served him in his time of need. He wanted nothing so much as to love and serve his Lord forever.

The rich man also died and was buried. His death was big news on earth. It was announced on television, and his biography was broadcast--telling what a great man he was. His funeral was a huge social event with all of his family and friends and many dignitaries in attendance. Yet as this grand ceremony took place, the rich man was in great agony. Look at verse 23. **“In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.”** At the very moment that he died, the rich man went straight to hell. One moment he was among family and friends in his luxurious room. The next moment he was in a place of terrible torment. His material goods were all useless to him now. He could not take anything with him. He went as a naked soul to his eternal judgment. Wherever he looked there was only torment. So he “looked up.” Then, in the far distance, he recognized Abraham. And right next to Abraham, he saw Lazarus. What a surprise! How blind his riches had made him! How terribly they had seduced him, so that he thought of nothing else. Only now did he begin to be aware

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of others. But it was too late! Like this man, those who indulge in pleasure, ignoring God and the poor, will be shocked at an abrupt arrival in hell.

In these times of moral and spiritual relativism, many claim that no one can say definitely what the destiny of human souls will be. Some claim that we cannot know until we get there. They have a “wait and see” attitude. But Jesus is very clear in this story. There are only two alternatives: heaven or hell. One minute after each person dies, he will be in heaven or hell. The basis of one’s eternal destiny is determined by how we live in this world.

Third, the justice of God, the total separation of heaven and hell, and the way of salvation (24-31).

In verses 24-31 Jesus tells of a conversation between the rich man and Abraham which takes place in Hades. This is not a doctrinal statement, but a parable or story that emphasizes specific truths. Instead of speculating in regards to peripheral details, let’s grasp the main points. There are three of them that I want to mention here.

In the first place, God is just. The former rich man was in great agony. He was burning in a terrible fire that would never end, and there was no remedy. So he cried out to Father Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and to cool his tongue. He did not request to get out of hell, but to receive a little comfort. How did Abraham answer? Look at verse 25a. **“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things...’”** Abraham’s words of truth revealed God’s justice. In using the phrase, **“your good things,”** he stressed that the man had received what he valued on earth: money and luxurious living. That was what he really desired, and that was what he received. He had no room in his heart for God. God had been shouting at him through Lazarus’ suffering to stop and help the needy, but he had ignored it. He had lived a totally selfish life. Now he had to face the consequences. He was in agony, an eternal agony that would not be assuaged. Abraham taught him that he was being treated justly.

Romans 2:6,8-9 say, **“God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’...for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil...”** Though this man looked successful and impressive outwardly, his inner man was evil in the sight of God. He was

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destructively selfish, and deliberately so. Those who live like this, ignoring opportunities to help others will go to hell. It is God's justice.

On the other hand, Lazarus received bad things on earth. These bad things were not a result of his choice. They were his given situation in life. He suffered from hunger, poverty and disease. But through these sufferings, he sought God and received spiritual help from God. He made a personal relationship with God. His life became a testimony to the former rich man, and so glorified God. From a human point of view, it seemed like his life was only suffering. But God knew his heart. God was pleased by his faith. God wanted to reward him. God did not reward him fully in his lifetime. God saved his true reward for the life to come. It was in heaven that, **“he was comforted.”** God’s peace and joy and love filled his inner being to the full measure. All of his tears were turned to shouts of praise and glory to God. He would dwell in the presence of the Lord forever, beside the holy saints like Abraham. His eternal reward far surpassed his momentary sufferings. So Paul said, **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”** (Ro 8:18).

God is keenly aware of those who are suffering for the salvation of others and for his glory. God knows there are injustices on earth that are never compensated sufficiently. Many sacrificial servants of God are helping needy ones receive God’s blessing by bringing them to the regional Bible conference. Those who can barely pay their own registration fee are also trying to help others. Some have used their family vacation time to visit coworkers and pray together with them. God comforts his suffering servants, both in this life and the next. Finally, he will wipe every tear from our eyes and restore perfect wholeness to our entire beings. We can be sure that God will give us much more than we sacrifice for him. So Peter said: **“...those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good”** (1 Pe 4:19). Let’s renew our decisions to participate in the sufferings of Christ; God will comfort us.

In the second place, there is no relationship of heaven to hell. Look at verse 26. **“And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”** When we study Abraham’s words carefully, we learn that there may be some who want to trade places. Those in hell want to get out to avoid the torment. Those in heaven may miss their loved ones and desire to go and visit them, going to hell to do so. But no one will be able to cross from one side to the

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other. One's eternal destiny is settled at the time of death and it is final and irreversible.

In the third place, those who listen to the word of God will be saved (27-31).

When the former rich man heard Abraham's words, he began to beg that Lazarus go to his father's house on earth so that he might warn his five brothers. He did not want them to come to the place of torment with him. Most likely, he had influenced them to love money and pleasure. So they would face the same destiny as he. He was becoming aware of his poisonous bad influence and his guilt and remorse were growing. He desperately wanted to warn his brothers to repent so that they would not join him in eternal punishment. Some people joke about hell, saying, they don't mind going there, for family and friends will be there. This is foolish. Even a wicked and selfish man wants his loved ones to avoid hell.

Abraham told him, **“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”** Moses refers to the Law of God. Together with the Prophets they make up the Old Testament. So Jesus was telling the man that his family members had the Bible and that if they took its teachings seriously they would find the way to be saved. **How precious the word of God is to our souls! How valuable is the time we spend in Bible study when we combine it with faith that leads to obedience.** Jesus said in John 5:24, **“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”** When we believe and obey the word of God, God gives us eternal life the moment we believe. The rich family in the story had this precious word of life. But they were too busy enjoying pleasures to listen to the word of God.

Knowing this, the former rich man pleaded with Abraham to send someone from the dead to warn them to repent. Abraham said, **“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead”** (31). Some expect that God to warn them with signs before taking their lives. This is presumptuous. God has already given us the Bible which teaches us the way of salvation. We must believe and obey the word of God now. When we do so, we receive eternal life from Christ at that very moment.

Today Jesus challenges us to have a godly value system that guides our decisions in this lifetime. We learn to treasure the word of God, for it gives us eternal salvation. Sometimes it is hard to devote time to Bible study and prayer. However, we must do so. We can get up a little earlier to eat Daily Bread. We can

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go to a quiet place to write a Bible testimony, turning off our electronic devices. Then God will speak to us a message of salvation. We also learn that we should use money for the glory of God and blessing of others. 1 Timothy 6:10 warns us: **“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”** And 1 Timothy 6:17-19 says, **“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Commend them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”** May God bless us to love God, to love God’s word, and to use our money to care for the needy.