

October 6, 2019  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Luke  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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## To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 16:19-31.

1. Why do we assume Lazarus trusted God's promises?
2. Where is the "bosom of Abraham" [Abraham's side, ESV] (of course it is on his body, but is that a reference to a spiritual abode for OT saints)?
3. How does Ecclesiastes 2:16 apply to this story?
4. Explain what happens to Christians contrasted to what happens to non-Christians at the moment of death?
5. Is Hades the same thing as the Lake of Fire?
6. What is the important truth, the purpose for which Jesus told the story?

### WRONG EXPECTATIONS Luke 16:19-31

In Charles Dickens' classic tale, *Great Expectations*, we are introduced to an orphan named Philip Pirrip who is endeared to us by the nickname Pip. Throughout the story, Pip is the recipient of financial care and sustenance by an unknown benefactor. As Dickens does so well, the reader is kept in suspense about who the benefactor really is. Most of us readers are convinced it must be the eccentric Miss Havisham who lives in a deteriorating mansion. Surely, she

would have the money to care for Pip. Besides he was brought to her at her request. Who else could it be? To learn in the end that Pip's benefactor was the escaped prisoner Abel Magwitch, who Pip befriended in a dark cemetery when he was seven years old, really takes us by surprise.

Dickens' *Great Expectations* is a classic story of good triumphing over evil. The story Jesus told in our text focuses on the evil that awaits everyone who rejects the good. We cannot imagine how anyone would expect the horrors of hell and not try to avoid it at all costs. Indeed, we can be pretty sure that for a person to suddenly find himself in hell is going to be the worst imaginable unexpected surprise.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is the final illustration Jesus gave to warn the Pharisees that, contrary to their expectations, they were not the ones who were on their way into the Kingdom of God. They were quite sure that because they kept God's Law (that being their imagination), they would be prime candidates for heaven. In reality, it was the penitent sinners and tax collectors who gathered around Jesus who were on their way through the narrow door into heaven. The people who were outcasts in the eyes of the men who loved money were actually the ones who would inherit the Kingdom Jesus offered to the rich people.

This is one of the most pointed and frightening stories about the punishment that awaits all who reject Jesus. Because it is a story, not all of the details can be taken as doctrinal teaching. It is a story. The doctrinal sections of the Bible teach deeper truths about the eternal state. However, even though we have thorough doctrinal teaching about eternity, there is still uncertainty about some matters. Suffice it to say that the Bible has given plenty enough evidence and reason for any sane person to desire to stay out of hell. But, then we are left to wonder why do so many people end up like the rich man of our story? They do not believe God or His Word until it is too late to matter. Hell will be full of people who decided to believe God after it was too late. The purpose of Jesus' story is to convince you to believe God now.

### Contrasts in Life (vv.19-21).

Jesus told this story about a rich man saying, “*There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day*” (v.19). We can see that Jesus did not describe how the man became rich. Apparently that was not an important issue. To the world, how a person gets rich is important. And the world concludes that the rich people are the special people who are to be honored and fawned after. The reality nearly all people refuse to face is that everyone who is wealthy owes their favored status to God who created them, sustains them, and gives them opportunity.

Another reality almost no one acknowledges is that possessing material wealth is not the most honorable position. And even more important is God’s rule about people who truly are blessed with eternal riches as opposed to the passing blessings of life that God also gives. *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth (1 Corinthians 1:26)*. The world as a whole prefers to be clothed in purple and fine garments as opposed to being clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Because he was rich, the rich man feasted every day. He was wealthy. Therefore, this man had everything the world deems worth having. He had at his disposal everything necessary to offer himself passing pleasure. He enjoyed all the passing experiences that his peers considered worthwhile. What he didn’t seem to realize is that everything he had was passing away. What he lacked was God’s permanent grace.

The world, the flesh, and the devil are incredibly deceptive. We all have strong desires of our flesh that cry out to be satisfied. The world and Satan advertise passing possessions, passing experiences, passing investments as the satisfaction for our desires. We buy into these lies, invest our whole lives in passing stuff, but then come to a shocking end as we will see happened to the rich man who “*faired sumptuously.*”

In contrast to the rich man, Jesus told about a poor man (vv.20-21). In this case, we know why the man was poor. He was poor because he was sick. *And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores (v.20)*. This man was in a very unfavorable condition because of his disease. Granted, Jesus did not specifically explain why the man was poor. But common sense

dictates that his poverty was connected with his disease. His sickness was manifested in open, oozing sores, some kind of ulcers.

It appears that people who were somehow responsible for the man dumped him off at the gate of the rich man’s house. The word translated *laid* more accurately means to cast or throw. Someone simply threw the guy down at the gate and walked off. Which also indicates that the man was invalid or paralyzed in some way. The poor guy was about as bad off as we can imagine in this modern age. No one can explain why some people have it all and others have nothing. Wealth is not an indication of God’s favor even as poverty is not an indication of God’s displeasure.

Granted, according to the wisdom of Proverbs, sloth, irresponsibility, and laziness contribute to poverty. But sometimes the cause is beyond human control. Surely, in this case, the man was not poor because he volunteered to be poor or chose to be poor. What do students plan to do after graduating from Ivy League MBA programs? There is no particular survey that records the goals and ambitions of the graduates from the most prestigious business schools. However, if you have known any of these people, you can be pretty confident that they plan to make a lot of money, maybe plan to secure a significant position, or might even desire to become famous. But you can be quite sure that none of them would say their goal is to become an invalid beggar who sits at a rich man’s gate begging for food.

Because he was poor and invalid, the man was dependant. He “*desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores*” (v.21). We can easily understand how the poor man’s physical condition rendered him wholly dependent on others. He depended on whoever laid him at the gate. He was famished and longed to get a few crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. But in order to get some of the table crumbs, the man would have to compete with the dogs which generally got the stuff that fell on the floor (Matthew 15:27).

To add insult to injury, those dogs came and licked the man’s sores. In that day, dogs were not cute pets but were generally varmints, a public nuisance. Suffice it to say that this man had none of the possessions the world counts worthy. He had nothing permanent—except God’s grace. And that is all that really matters.

The man depended wholly on God's care for survival in life and eternity. Unlike the rich man who depended on his wealth, the poor man depended on God who alone cares for eternal matters. So we are reminded by Jeremiah, *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD"* (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

### **Contrasts after Death (vv.22-26).**

On one hand, both the rich man and the poor man shared the same fate (v.22). *The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried (v.22).*

The poor man died. His death was not a surprise to anyone. Sadly, it is likely that no one mourned for him. The attitude of the neighbors would probably have been, "Good riddance." But God sent His angels for him, a good indication that the man had faith in God.

Likewise, the rich man died. We can be pretty certain that the rich man's death was received quite differently than the folks in town responded to the poor man's death. Surely many townspeople mourned his passing and honored him with a great memorial. We read that he was buried, which probably is a reference to an elaborate burial. Surely people who benefitted from his wealth hated to see him go.

But really there was no difference between the rich man's death and the poor man's death. It was the end of life on earth for both of them. Death is the great equalizer. Solomon concluded, *For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool (Ecclesiastes 2:16)!* The beggar's suffering ceased and the rich man's sumptuous feasting ceased. Both of them moved from the temporal sphere to the eternal. What happened to the two men in Jesus' story is the guaranteed end for all of us.

And the difference between them was eternal (vv.22-26). *The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried (v.22)* At death, the poor man was

immediately at Abraham's side. Jesus probably did not teach that the angels carried the man's body to Abraham. That would be contrary to other clear Bible teaching. Rather, this is a reference to the soul, the eternal part of us. The part of our being that lives forever does not wander about in the desert places like some kind of demon after the body dies. The real us simply resides in these physical bodies during life on earth, and at death, the body no longer has a purpose.

This is the only reference to going to Abraham's side as a place after death. It simply means that Abraham was already in the place where the righteous go after death. All bodies go to the literal, physical grave. But at death all souls go to the abode of the righteous or to the abode of the unrighteous. This story indicates that there is quite a distinction between the two. Therefore, for the follower of Christ to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Paul taught, *So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).*

The picture here, before the resurrection of Christ, is Abraham being in the presence of God and the poor man being in the presence of Abraham. In the poor man's day, the believer's soul went to be where the "father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11) went. To fall asleep in the arms of Jesus is as secure a condition as can be known. To fall asleep at odds with Jesus is the most frightening condition that can be imagined. That is the point Jesus was trying to make to the hypocritical, law-keeping Pharisees.

In contrast to the poor man whose soul the angels carried to the place of the righteous, the rich man was suddenly, unexpectedly in hell. *And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side (v.23).* Much to the rich man's surprise, He was in Hades. Hades is not the same as the lake of fire, the eternal abode of the unrighteous. Hades is the abode of the dead, similar to (but not the same as) Sheol in the Old Testament. The term Hades is never used to describe the place of the righteous after they die.

Jesus pictured the rich man in Hades suffering incomprehensible anguish. Jesus pictured him as *being in torment*

(v.23). *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"* (v.24). This is a physical metaphor to describe a spiritual condition. The man does not have a literal body at this point and, therefore, no tongue. Yet Jesus pictured him as suffering unimaginable pain from flames. Though not in the lake of fire, he was experiencing a prelude to eternal suffering.

Not surprisingly, the man begged for mercy. *And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus"* (v.24). Did the man show mercy to Lazarus and others like him? In life, did the man ask God to show mercy on him because of his sin against God? To beg for mercy is to ask that we do not get what we deserve. He learned the frightening truth that eternal destiny is cast in life. *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"* (v.25).

Remembering what happened in life will probably be the worst part of Hades. Knowing that people you knew in life are in heaven while you suffer in hell will be unbearable. How would it feel to learn that there are no changes after death. *"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"* (v.26).

The choice of eternal abode is made in this passing life. Once the soul leaves the body at death, there is no possibility of change of address. The eternal chasm is fixed and will not be altered. There is no possible means to leave Hades and get to God's presence. Being on the other side of the chasm, separated completely from God's common grace, will also be more excruciating than we can imagine.

### **Sufficient Warning (vv.27-31).**

Surely, verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight express the desire of every one of hell's residents. The rich man wanted warnings to be sent to his brothers. *And he said, "Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house – for I have five brothers – so that he may warn them"* (vv.27-28). Oh, but that cannot happen. Abraham told the rich man (this is the story part that is not necessarily doctrinal) that

it was impossible for Lazarus to go from God's presence to the flames of Hades. "Okay, but would it be possible for Lazarus go back to earth and warn friends and families?" the man wondered.

That request might cause us to wonder how well the rich man got along with his siblings on earth. If he loved them dearly, he would desire for them to avoid his condition at all costs. Even if they were at odds and fought like siblings, the rich man would do anything to keep them from Hades. The story reveals that this man's chief desire, after learning there was no relief possible for himself, was to keep others out of hell. He longed for a messenger to warn them, *"Lest they also come into this place of torment"* (v.28b).

Abraham laid down the only hope for the living to escape Hades. He told the man that God has already offered sufficient warning. *But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them"* (v.29). Putting these words into Abraham's mouth in the story, Jesus referred to the Old Testament writings. We almost never preach salvation sermons from the Old Testament. But Jesus assured the Pharisees that there was enough in their Bible to convince them to have faith in the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

What great privilege we and our peers have as we can read the precise and direct teaching of the New Testament also. There are so many invitations in the Bible to believe in the finished work of Jesus, to confess sin, to repent, and to ask for forgiveness.

There are so many graphic descriptions of hell to make sinners want to avoid it. Jesus taught, *"In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out"* (Luke 13:28). He also taught, *"The sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 8:12). He warned, *"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire"* (Matthew 3:12). Paul warned sinners, *They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might* (2 Thessalonians 1:9). John saw in the Revelation, *And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name*

(Revelation 14:11). How much more warning does the living sinner need?

Jesus taught in the story, that the miracle of a messenger rising from the dead is not as useful to convince sinners as the Bible is. The rich man requested Abraham to do a miracle. *And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent" (v.30).* Abraham replied that Scripture is sufficient to prevent eternal disaster. *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" (v.31).*

The rich man, being a Jew, had the Law and Prophets at his disposal. God spoke through His Word to him, but he refused to listen. God continued to speak to the man's brothers, but would they listen to God? Nothing in life is more powerful to convince sinners to repent than the Bible. Therefore, we need to stop apologizing for the Bible and declare it plainly as the sinner's only hope to escape the terrors of hell.

This picture of suffering in Hades is so gruesome, so extreme that most people choose to ignore it by relegating it to the realm of make believe. We honestly cannot imagine what it would be like to suffer excruciating pain of fire unceasingly. It is such an extreme idea that some thinkers have concluded that the concepts of hell, Hades, and the lake of fire simply picture a complete annihilation. While it is true that we do not determine doctrine based on one parable, at the same time, this story compared to all the other statements Jesus made about the eternal abode of the unrighteous forces us to accept the horrendous reality of the final state of those who refuse to embrace Jesus and His redemptive work as the payment for their offense against God.

Sin against God is very serious business. Every person is born in that offensive condition. Only faith in Christ that leads to confession of sin, repentance of sin, and forgiveness of sin will place your eternal soul in heaven with Christ and not in hell with Satan and all the unrighteous sinners.