

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 16:19-31... That's Luke 16:19-31 and we are going to be looking today at the story of the Rich man and Lazarus. But we aren't going to read it quite just yet.

If you look with me inside your Bibles - regardless of the version... you will find something rather off-putting about this particular story... Look with me at the header ... and notice - the word "parable" is missing. In contrast, flip back to Luke 15 and you will find that parables are clearly labelled as such...

But this one isn't...

That's because scholars THROUGHOUT church history have been divided as to whether this is a parable or a real story. It has some elements of parabolic literature, but for the most part, it doesn't fit into that category; rather, it reads more like an actual story. For example, names are mentioned... and details into the spiritual realm are provided, both of which are not characteristic of Jewish parables...

I for one, think that this is a REAL story... with some fictional elements mixed in to make a point. We'll come back to that later... but for now, let's read... this rather sober story... of the rich man and Lazarus.

(read Luke 16:19-31)

To truly appreciate this parable... we have to be able to see the constant contrast being made between Lazarus and the rich man.

The story begins by telling us that the rich man was clothed in fine purple linen - the colour of the UPPER-upper class and we are told ...that he FEASTED sumptuously every day...

On the other hand, at HIS GATE... was laid a poor man named Lazarus, who was covered in sores and who DESIRED to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table...

You will be interested to know that the name Lazarus means "one who God helps." Now Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate because he was unable to walk... probably laid there by the village folk so that the rich man might show MERCY to

him. Yet he was shown NONE. And Lazarus.. would spend his days there... just DREAMING of eating the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table...

Now, when I read that.. my mind automatically goes to Matthew 15:27 where it writes
even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

This is a poor poor man.... EVEN DOGS ate the crumbs that fell from their master's table... but LAZARUS... was given nothing...

At this point. I have to pause and point out.... just how twisted and evil organizations like PETA and the Earth Liberation Front are.... We are to steward the earth yes - but that is SUBORDINATE to our taking care of fellow human beings. Kindness toward animals and the environment will NOT save us from God's wrath when He asks us to give an account for why we didn't help the Lazarus' in our lives... we are RICH - we are the rich man in the story.. and we all have Lazarus' in our lives that need to be shown mercy...

MOREOVER, as if Lazarus wasn't pitiable enough.... even the DOGS came and licked his sores...

And so this poor man lived... day by day... until v.22- the poor man died. And... AND! HE was carried to Abraham's side. Or Abraham's bosom.

Now, some people try to get really technical when describing what Abraham's bosom is... but its rather simple...

Abraham's bosom is just a Jewish way of saying that he went to be with Abraham where Abraham was ... And the Jews know one thing for sure - Abraham is NOT in hell. He is in heaven. Abraham is the father of the faithful, he is the friend of God.

AND ... during the Last Supper, the apostle John was said to have leaned on Jesus' bosom... So its as if to say... Lazarus...THIS NOBODY... is dining at the heavenly banquet.. at God's table sitting beside Abraham!

WHAT?! Think with me for a second... REMEMBER how the disciples FOUGHT over who would sit at Jesus' right hand? Well, the Jewish version of that would be who would SIT at Abraham's right hand... And here is THIS NOBODY.. a POOR

POOR MAN.... ASSUMED to be CURSED - and HE is SITTING at the place of honour beside the GREATEST Jewish hero of all time. This isn't a parable guys! It actually happened.

We have to remember that back in the day, people who were SICK and POOR were ASSUMED to be under God's curse... Likewise, people who were RICH, were assumed to be BLESSED by God... Our culture still thinks that way doesn't it? If things go poorly, you are cursed. If things go well, you are blessed.

So this man. Lazarus. who is SUPPOSED to be in HELL - is in heaven.... AND MORE THAN THAT - is LEANING on Abraham's bosom! Every young Jewish boys dream!

Now, the rich man.. also died soon after, and was buried... and surprise surprise... He found himself in hell...

THIS is the great reversal that Jesus is casting here..

How can a man, who in this world, has so little, who is so desperate... who appears to be SO cursed... become the guest of honour in heaven? And how does the rich man... who has SO MUCH... who is so PROSPEROUS.. who appears to be SO BLESSED... find himself in HELL...? The answer? Jesus. Your attitude toward Jesus determines EVERYTHING.

And Jesus is telling this story as an INDICTMENT against the Pharisees simplistic theology - that if you suffer in life, you are CURSED by God.. That somehow, if you don't have food on the table, you are POOR... without a job and suffering from a disease... YOU MUST SURELY be cursed and headed for hell... BUT that if you are PROSPEROUS, than you are SURELY blessed by God. NO!

And its not just the Pharisees that Jesus is speaking to here... He is also ADDRESSING verse 14... lovers of MONEY and those who want to be justified and exalted before men ... He is reminding us that what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God... and that which is seen as FOOLISH and WEAK... is treasured in God's eyes...

And so this rich man... is in HELL and being in torment... literally, it reads torments... not one, not two.. but all manner of torments coming at him from all sides... the torments that Jesus described as an eternal darkness.... of eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Being in TORMENTS.... He lifts his eyes... and sees far off in the distance... Abraham with Lazarus at his side...

Now for the sake of illustration - the tormented rich man is allowed to look out of hell into heaven - across that infinite CHASM... but in reality, souls in hell have no access to heaven... and the gates of heaven have no intrusion from the eyes of those in hell...

BUT Jesus utilizes a FICTIONAL dialogue between this rich man and Abraham... in order to TEACH us GREAT truths about heaven and hell.

Verse 24. And he, that is the rich man, 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..."

Have mercy on me.... and send Lazarus down here so he may dip his finger in water and bring me some relief...

That verse we just read is VERY VERY revealing... It shows us a glimpse into the horrors of hell... And its not just mainly about HELLFIRE. You see, the rich man is so ingrained with the notion that he is superior to Lazarus, that even though he is in hell, he thinks Lazarus is still his servant..

And so, the rich man begs for mercy to be shown to him by the very one to whom he refused to show mercy!!

Which says this about hell. And its horrifying... Hell is not remedial. It does not correct you NOR does it FIX you. There is no REPENTANCE there.. because there is no Spirit of God to convict you of sin.... HELL only punishes you... for eternity... Hell is PUNITIVE... not corrective.

And it goes on to say... send Lazarus down here so he may dip his finger in water and bring me some relief...

That's scary.... obviously this is a metaphor... but its a good indication of the horrors of hell because he doesn't say - could you send Lazarus over with a bucket

of water? No. Instead, the rich man says - I just want a drip off the tip of his finger.... What this tells us is that SUFFERING of the damned is SO PROFOUND that one tiny drop of relief would mean the world to them... but their is none. There is no relief. Not even for a moment...The sinner begs for all eternity for just one tiny drop of relief YET none will be given...

Indeed, none can be given... because there exists an unsurpassable CHASM between heaven and hell that cannot be crossed...

There was once no crumbs for the poor man, now there is no drop of relief for the rich man....

Verse. 25.... But Abraham said... CHILD ... note this. Child.. HE doesn't say you SINNER... He doesn't say you HYPOCRITE.. He says child... Its showing us the compassionate heart that Jesus has toward the sinner... which is the reason why He is telling the story to begin with - TO WARN THEM! To WARN US ... this is clearly a warning.. and yet there is LOVE and KINDNESS mingled into the WARNING... CHILD....

While you lived, you received good things... MARK THAT... THE RICH MAN RECEIVED GOOD THINGS... FOR THERE IS ONE GOD - that is the FATHER of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, WHO GIVES US ALL THINGS richly to enjoy...

FROM WHICH WE ARE TO GIVE Him honour and praise and glory ...

GOD IS RICH TOWARD US SO THAT WE CAN BE RICH TOWARD GOD AND TOWARD ONE ANOTHER . But this man, having received GOOD THINGS... simply indulged himself.... and built bigger barns to store his wealth... Eat drink and be merry...

...And in this life, Lazarus received bad things... MARK THAT. Lazarus RECEIVED bad things...

It happens.. The ungodly can die filthy rich.. and the godly can die in filth...

But that is not the end of the story... verse 25. BUT is comforted HERE... and you are in anguish...

What Lazarus was temporarily. the rich man is ETERNALLY. On the other hand, what the RICH MAN was temporarily... dressed in royal colours...dining like a king... so Lazarus has ALL of that AND MORE in HEAVEN.. !

And Abraham goes on to say... what you could HAVE provided for Lazarus - a few crumbs of bread... He CANNOT PROVIDE for you... because between us and you is a great chasm.. set fast - which cannot be crossed... so that no one can come from there to here and no one can go from here to there... Not only is there no REPENTANCE... NO relief... but there is also NO HOPE in hell.

This is why the BIBLE URGES us - WHILE IT IS YET TODAY! WHILE THERE IS STILL HOPE - REPENT , CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD AND BE SAVED...

The story continues. Ok. The rich man knows his fate is fixed.. so he has one final request... verse 27... ok I have accepted my fate... Then I beg you... send Lazarus to my fathers house... I have 5 brothers... that he may warn them lest they also come to this place of torment...

And Abraham replies...

They have Moses and the Prophets - in other words, they have the Bible... the Word of God to warn them...

But the rich man says... no... no... They won't listen to that... They don't take the Bible seriously... they don't read their Bibles... But if SOMEONE from the dead were to go, they would listen.. and they would repent!

But Abraham said.... now get this... this is crucial... If they do not heed the Word of God.... neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead...

And rise He did. Jesus DIED on the cross for our SINS.. and then He rose on the third day, appeared to his disciples and many others... before ascending to heaven... But the people persisted in their unbelief. WHY? BECAUSE... the HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS our heart of SIN PRIMARILY through His Word. If the Word of God is not enough to convict you of sin, NOTHING will... Not even rising from the dead.

And so, I'll end with one simple practical piece of application. Are you reading your Bibles? Do not assume that you will enter heaven if you are not reading your Bibles... Reading the Bible does not EARN us the RIGHT to enter heaven... But we sure as heck cannot enter heaven without it.

"It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The most important thing you can do today is to carefully, prayerfully,,, read the Word... and with that,

Lets pray.

As we prepare our hearts for worship, let me read for you from Psalm 119... its the longest chapter in the Bible.... so I won't be reading all of it... Maybe one day I will hahaha but for now, let me read select verse for you... and then we will pray...

Psalm 119

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.
With my whole heart I see you; let me not wander from your commandments.
For I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.
I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in
your statutes; I will not forget your word.
Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. My soul is
consumed with longing for your rules at all times.
I cling to your testimonies, O LORD; let me not be put to shame!
I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!
Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!
Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.
GREAT PEACE have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble

(119:9-11, 15-16, 18, 20, 31-32, 36-37, 165)

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ.. for who He is FOR US and what He has done FOR us... And we also thank you Lord, for the precious gift of your WORD... We thank you for revealing Yourself to us THROUGH Your Word.. and for GIVING us A LIVING HOPE and PROMISE that is FOUNDED upon your UNCHANGING word. Lord, incline our hearts to your testimonies... and not to selfish gain.. turn our eyes away from spending our time looking at WORTHLESS things... and give us life according to your ways.. And we PRAY Lord, now that you would OPEN our eyes.. that as we WORSHIP.. as we SING and pray and sit under the ministry of the Word that OUR EYES MIGHT be opened to BEHOLD your beauty and majesty, this morning.. we do pray - in the name of our Lord Jesus, amen.