

HEAVEN OR HELL AWAITS US

Luke 16:19-31

The Rich Man and Lazarus

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

There are many things that can be drawn out and pondered upon and studied in this passage of Scripture, which was a parable, of which, all of it is the words of Jesus, who was and is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the One True and Living God. We'll be looking at this message in the context of what Jesus was getting at and of whom He was speaking to, but also that there are two stark reminders that Jesus was and is reminding us of, and clarifying for us, and sternly warning us. **1.** The choices that we make in this lifetime, in the here and now, do have consequences, eternal ones even, and that once you pass from this life to the next there is no going back, no altering of the final judgment that we've **brought on ourselves**, and **2.** that there is, literally, a heaven and a hell. Oh no, you may think, not one of those fire and brimstone messages on hell! Yeah, I know. I would much rather just tell people about the great love of God that is in Christ Jesus, my Lord. I'm not a big fan of preaching or speaking on hell. But, unfortunately, hell is real and it awaits many. There is a reason and harsh reality as to why, when Jesus was asked, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" He said to them, "**Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek**

to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13:23-24) It behooves us to remember then another Word that Jesus spoke in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" Yet as the saying goes, there's two sides to every story. With this parable of Jesus there's two perspectives of the characters in this story. Really three if you count Abraham, and four if you count God. But we have two perspectives, one of the rich man who was in hell, and then the other of Lazarus, who was poor and suffered in his time on earth, but was then in the bosom of Abraham-which signified that he was awaiting his resurrection in Christ Jesus. This brings us to the primary point of this message. Are we awaiting our resurrection in Jesus Christ or are we in fear of where we are going because of our lifestyle choices. Many times in my own life I lived in fear, not knowing where I was going because I knew I was living in disobedience to God. "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent (strive) to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble." (1 Peter 2:10) But as Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:34-36) "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1) Are you looking forward to being in the bosom of Jesus or are you looking for ways to gratify yourself in the here and now? Are you doing the will of God, living according to the Spirit, allowing God to "work[s] in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13) Just before Paul said that it is "God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure," he says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." To be as clear as I can be, it is God who is working in us His wisdom, His Righteousness, His Sanctification, and His Redemption, and "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord," as it says in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, but our choices today does determine our outcome tomorrow. The consequences of our choices will be effective in this lifetime and very well can be eternal. After all it is written that we will have to give an account to everything we have said and done in this lifetime. (Matthew 12:36; 2 Corinthians 5:10) May we all choose our path wisely. Amen?

You may say that this was a story about a rich man and then the contrast was the poor man. I'm not rich you may say, and we can all say that in comparing ourselves to who we look at as really being rich, but really the difference is in what Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth

and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." As Jesus said, the first will be last and the last first. Some of the poorest and most wretched of persons in this lifetime will be first. Praise the Lord!

You don't have to be literally rich in the eyes of other people in the world to have your heart in the wrong place. You can look around in your daily adventures and see who's heart is solely on the things of this world and who is looking outside themselves. There's people who are polite and friendly, willing to help out when they see a need, and then there's those who are always looking to satisfy themselves. **Proverbs 15:24** says, "The way of life winds upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell below." Can you see the difference between those who are looking up and those who are spiraling downward? As Jude, the brother of Jesus said, "but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." (**Jude 23**) That fear may be partly being sure they don't drag you down with them as it is when trying to rescue someone who is drowning, but also fearing for their salvation. After Cain slew Able and God asked Cain where his brother was, Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer is yes, we are our brother's keeper. That is where the Apostle Paul said, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (**Hebrews 10:24-25**) And by all appearances, we are getting close, that we are edging ever so near to the very last of days.

This is one of Jesus' most harsh messages. When one is in a situation where it seems necessary to warn someone of the dangers and reality of hell, with myself, I know I have to check my motive. Am I wanting to yell at someone about eternal damnation and hell because of the bitterness, anger, or unforgiveness in my heart or am I truly concerned for that person that they are heading the wrong direction of which there are unspeakable and unimaginable consequences that lay ahead for that person? Do I need to first remove the plank out of my own eye before I try to remove a sliver from someone else's eye? Sadly, as with parents, they many times say something like, "learn from my mistakes, don't do this or that." What is likely the child's response? "Yeah, yeah, you turned out alright. Let me make my own choices." With the rich man and Lazarus, the message here isn't that rich people go to hell and poor people go to heaven. This parable came up because of the reaction of the Pharisees to a previous parable of the unjust steward. It said in **Luke 16:14**, "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him." They derided Him. Jesus, the Son of God. Derided

means to laugh at in scorn; to mock. The parable of the unjust steward which really could be entitled the "wise steward" was in charge of a rich man's goods. He was accused of wasting the rich man's goods and so the rich man called the steward out on it. The steward then settled accounts with many who owed the rich man by having them only pay a fraction of what they owed. The steward was preparing himself so that those people who had owed would give him favor once the steward was officially fired. The rich man commended the steward for his wisdom. Jesus then said, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? (you know we are going to be joint-heirs with Jesus and we are going to reign with Him; are we being faithful in the little stuff we have been given right now, on this earth?) And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." You don't have to be a rich man or a steward of many riches for you to have the love of money. Some of the poorest people I've known have been some of the most selfish and prideful. Yet, I could say the opposite is true too. Some of the poorest people have been the most kind, caring, and giving. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The Pharisees were lovers of money, lovers of themselves and their honored standing in society. So, they mocked Jesus. If they mocked Jesus, the Son of God, we can be sure that there will be some that will mock and sneer at us too. Two weekends in a row Susie and I have had individuals who derided us. **2 Timothy 3:12** says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

Living godly in Christ Jesus is two-fold as Jesus pointed out, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." First we are to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Why? Because He first loved us. **Romans 5:8** says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." And we were created for God's pleasure and purpose. (**Revelation 4:11; Colossians 1:16**) And He is God Almighty. Jesus says in **Revelation 1:8** "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." He is worthy of our praise, glory, and honor. Is He not? He gave us life in the here and now and He promises us that better and much greater

things await us on the other side. Will we follow the rich man's example, storing up treasures on earth, chasing after the pleasures of this earth? The Apostle John wrote in **1 John 2:15-17**, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; **but he who does the will of God abides forever.**"

What goes along with that really is in drinking and drugs. Once again, ""The way of life winds upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell below." In our choices, are we looking upwards or downwards? "I just like to have a few beers every now and again. I just want to have a smoke of this or that to relax." I gave those same responses in the past and the only direction it was leading me is downward. God cannot be mocked. God's ways cannot be mocked. He is a Righteous and Holy God and is jealous for His people. Drinking and drugs is an opening for evil. It leads to lowered inhibitions, making bad decisions, and ultimately can lead to death, even spiritual death. We've seen it on more than one occasion. One moment they are with us praising God and the next they are dead of an overdose. I am not and will not stand in judging anyone for those choices but I must, as a child of the Most High God, warn my brothers and sisters in Christ to the pitfalls that are there, waiting for us to make a wrong step. Satan, the enemy of our souls is out to steal, kill, and destroy. (**John 10:10**)

"The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.'" You may be thinking I'm being a little too dramatic or over the top. Hey listen. We all have to personally stand before God and give account for our lives. How one lives their life and the decisions that one makes is entirely up to each of us. I am not here to cast judgment, but what we see and what we know from God's Word gives me reason to give a somber warning. And one thing more I can add is that when we are a stumbling block to other brothers and sisters in Christ, then woe unto us. **Ephesians 5:18** says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." Other translations replace dissipation with debauchery. Debauchery is defined as "extreme indulgence in bodily pleasures and especially sexual pleasures." Alcohol and other drugs is an opening to evil that leads a spiral down to death. God's will for us is to be filled with the Spirit not with wine, alcohol, or other drugs that alter the mind. If we're not doing the will of God, then essentially we are disobeying God. "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and

does not do it, to him it is sin." (**James 4:17**) If anyone wants to defend those lifestyle choices, I won't even discuss it with them. I will just say, "amen, so be it-but I seek to be filled with the Spirit-that is what pleases God." I am not implying that I am better than anyone. I believe that God pulled me out of the flames and I look to do the same for others, and what we see is very concerning. On the positive side of this message is that when we are filled by the Spirit we are sure to bear much fruit, which is to the glory of God. **Romans 12:1-2** says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." You ever get those times where you feel blessed knowing you're in the will of God?

But this parable of Jesus' is about a rich man and a poor man-one being in hell and the other being in heaven, or the bosom of Abraham. Whether your lot in life is in being poor or whether you're financially doing ok the message is the same to all, that God is calling us to abide in His Righteousness. **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." God knows what we are in need of. God knows our pain and struggles. He says to cast all your care upon Him for He cares for you. (**1 Peter 5:7**) What I'm saying then brothers and sisters in Christ, please, please, please, go to God with what troubles you, not the bottle or the pipe, or whatever other means you usually seek to escape the griefs and despair of this world. God's promise is this, in **Philippians 4:6-7**, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." And guaranteed, in Christ Jesus we can and will overcome! God is a Righteous and Holy God and He is preparing us for His eternal kingdom to...live eternally in His Holiness and Righteousness. That is just the way it is because that is who God is. He wants His children to dwell in His Perfection, His Glory, His Goodness. When we try and fill that place in us that is meant for Him filling us with His Spirit it leads only to a dissipation, a lessening of who God intends for us to be. We are to be His light, shining His light, not following in the ways and example of a drunkard or a drug addict.

Yes, there are many times where it seems the thing to do, to go and load up on substances that take us out of our time of suffering and pain. I'm talking about recreational use not for chronic pain. Let this be between you and God Almighty. If you take a prescription for something, if after you've taken to the Lord in prayer and you believe it's what God is providing, then by all means do so. You

alone will have to stand before God one day. But with that being said, we all have to suffer on this wretched earth, some moreso than others. He's going to make it up to us, that's His promise. God wants to be our Comforter, through the Holy Spirit He gives to those who obey Him (**Acts 5:32**). He wants to be our Strength, our Rock, our Fortress, and Deliverer, our Shield, our Salvation, and our Stronghold (**Psalms 18**), to where we say as King David said, "Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The Lord is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him. The Lord is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of His anointed. Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; Shepherd them also, and bear them up forever." (**Psalms 28:6-9**) May our heart's desire be to please God, honor God, and in the fruit that we bear may He get all the glory.

In closing I'd like to pray the prayer given to Aaron the priest to bless the people of God, "The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." (**Numbers 6:24-26**)