

■ ■ LIFE OF JESUS

September 26, 2021 | *The Rich Man and Lazarus*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

- What relationship is there between our lives now and the lives we will experience in eternity?
- Read Luke 16:19–31.
- Pray that God will use this passage to convince you to live for eternity.

THIS WEEK

■ ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The decisions we make in life determine how we spend eternity.

■ ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Prioritize eternal life over the life you have now.

■ ■ MEDITATE

“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’” (Luke 16:25).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to introduce yourself to the main point of this week’s lesson.

Q: *Have you ever experienced regret?*

Q: *How can we address feelings of regret?*

Regret is perhaps the most painful emotion anyone can endure. It can be unbearable to believe the sorrow you now endure could have been avoided if you had charted a different course in the past. We wish we could be given an opportunity to do things over, but this simply is not how God has orchestrated His creation. We are given one life. Apart from the grace of God shown through Jesus Christ, we must face the consequences of our actions, both now and for eternity.

In Luke 16:19–31, we encounter a man facing regret. This man lived a life of ease and luxury, but after death, he realized he would endure an eternity of torment and sorrow. During his life, he chose to indulge himself and live as if this life were all that mattered. Now, after death, he regretted the decisions he made that led him to this point. He regretted that he failed recognize the connection between his life before and after death. There was nothing he could do after death to change his circumstances or the decisions he had made.

Q: *How can you keep from becoming the rich man we encounter in this passage?*

Q: *How do you deny yourself now for the sake of eternity?*

APPLICATION POINT – There will be several applications drawn from this passage, but you must not miss the main point. What you do in this life matters for eternity. Every Christian recognizes that there is more to reality than the things we can see and touch, but it is easy to live like a materialist. It is easy to live for what brings us joy now at the expense of what will secure our joy for eternity. The only way out of this trap is to consider Jesus Christ, your Savior. Jesus gave up the glory He knew in heaven to secure the eternity of those who would confess Him as Lord. The best hope you have for the greatest joy for all eternity is to follow His example.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This passage shows us the dangers of living only for ourselves. It also shows us that the decisions we make in life carry through eternity. It is easy to go through day-to-day life without considering how the decisions we make reflect the eternity we are headed for.

1. PAVING THE ROAD TO HELL

2. HEAVEN AND HELL

3. RECEIVING REVELATION

GOING DEEPER

+This parable is filled with lessons and implications for our lives. It peers into the greatest depths of reality. We will examine this parable in three sections.

1. PAVING THE ROAD TO HELL

■ LUKE 16:19-21

Q: *What principles did the rich man live by?*

Q: *How would you describe the rich man's attitude toward Lazarus?*

Jesus created a sharp contrast between the characters in this parable. The rich man is identified by his wealth and its luxuries. Purple clothing was expensive in the ancient world and a symbol of great wealth. A feast was something typically reserved for special occasions, but this man indulged his appetite by feasting on a daily basis. Everything we are told about him shows that he lived for the moment. He was not concerned with what the future held.

Lazarus, on the other hand is identified by his poverty and sorrow. Since he was laid at the rich man's gate, we can assume Lazarus had little recourse other than begging for his daily needs. He was covered with sores rather than purple cloth. Even the dogs added to his sorrows by licking his wounds. Lazarus is portrayed as almost sub-human.

Jesus did not tell us specifically why the rich man was destined for an eternity of sorrow or why Lazarus found favor in eternity. The rich man's wealth, by itself, would not condemn him, nor would Lazarus's poverty have proved his righteousness. We certainly may infer that the rich man sinned by ignoring Lazarus at his gate. Rather than using his wealth as a means to help others in need, the rich man instead sought a life of ease and luxury. We know the life this man secured for himself only provided a better time on his way to finding eternal sorrows. Essentially, he lived to pave the road to hell for himself.

❓: *Who do you identify with more in this parable, the rich man or Lazarus?*

❓: *What is the connection between the rich man's wealth and his eternal fate?*

APPLICATION POINT – One of the most perplexing issues in this parable is the relationship between the rich man's wealth and his eternal destiny. We cannot affirm that the rich man was destined for an eternity of sorrows because of his wealth, but it is impossible to completely disregard the connection between his wealth and his fate. At multiple points within the Gospels, we can see that wealth is, almost by nature, deceptive. Great wealth can deceive those who have it into disregarding God and the rest of humanity. At the very least, this parable encourages us to guard ourselves against the deceptiveness of money. Wealth provides an opportunity to meet the needs of others. Whatever amount of money you have in your accounts, you need to always be aware of the needs surrounding you. If you begin to view wealth as a tool to help others, you will likely begin to notice needs right in front of you, unlike the rich man who overlooked Lazarus.

2. HEAVEN AND HELL

❏ LUKE 16:22-26

❓: *What factors should limit the conclusions we draw from this passage concerning heaven and hell?*

❓: *Why is it difficult to speak with certainty concerning what heaven will be like?*

Christians are rightly curious to know what heaven will be like. We know heaven is where we will see God clearly and glorify Him forever. It is the place where our greatest hopes and joys will come true. I think there is a nearly equal curiosity concerning the nature of hell. We must be cautious, however, of drawing firm conclusions concerning the nature of heaven and hell from Luke 16:19–31. We have to accept the limitations of the genre Jesus chose to employ. As we have seen, Jesus used parables to illustrate His teaching, but in doing so He created a storied world that does not always align with the way things are. We should assume the same principle is at work in this parable. There is no reason to think, based on this parable, that those in heaven and hell will be able to see one another or converse back and forth in the manner we see here.

We also have to accept the limitations inherent within the concept of “progressive revelation,” which acknowledges that God did not fully reveal everything about Himself at a single point in human history. God revealed some of Himself and His plan to our earliest ancestors. He expected them to live faithfully according to the revelation He gave them. At various points throughout human history, God revealed more of Himself and His plan to us. One of the key areas of progressive revelation is what we know about heaven, hell, and the afterlife. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people had an incomplete understanding of the afterlife. They clearly believed in the continuation of the human soul after death, but they did not necessarily think of “heaven” and “hell” as separate realities dividing those who were saved and those who were not. God had not revealed this to them in the way He has to us in the New Testament. When Jesus addressed His audience with this parable, He presented heaven and hell in categories they would have clearly understood, given what God had revealed to them. For example, today, when we read the word “Hades” in Luke 16:23, we usually associate this word with hell, but notice that the rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham were all apparently in Hades in this parable. “Hades” was just a way of referring to the afterlife. In Hades, the eternal fate of these characters is distinguished by the great chasm separating them. Those on the side of the rich man would suffer for eternity while those on the side of Abraham and Lazarus enjoyed a paradisiacal experience. This portrayal of heaven and hell is consistent with what has been revealed to us in the rest of the New Testament but not completely congruent. Before drawing conclusions about heaven and hell from this passage, we have to allow for the medium by which Jesus was teaching and for His accommodation to what had been revealed to those He was teaching.

Q: *What are the implications of progressive revelation for us?*

Q: *Why should we be thankful there is still more to know about God?*

APPLICATION POINT – Progressive revelation has multiple implications for us. We still live with the reality of progressive revelation today. God has revealed everything we need to know concerning salvation in Jesus Christ, but beyond this, there is an unlimited extent to which we do not yet understand God, His creation, or His plan for

us. This should make us both cautious of thinking we know more than we do and eager for the day we will know God even more fully than we do now. We must also be content with what God has revealed of Himself. We may speculate on matters God has not revealed, but we must do so with humility, ready to acknowledge our limitations in these matters. We must also not use progressive revelation as an excuse to disregard what God has clearly revealed in Scripture. The idea behind progressive revelation is not that God behaves one way in one era only to turn the tables at a later time. God's character always remains consistent. What He has revealed to us builds on the foundation laid in previous eras.

Q: *What can we infer from this parable about heaven and hell?*

Q: *How are Lazarus and the rich man contrasted in these verses?*

The contrast between Lazarus and the rich man continues in the afterlife, but the tables are turned. In life, the rich man lived in ease and luxury. Now the rich man was in agony, his life of ease and luxury a distant memory. In life, Lazarus suffered. Now, he was comforted. In life, Lazarus longed for only a small portion of what the rich man had. Now, the rich man yearned for only a drop of the water available to Lazarus. Notice, however, that things are not completely inversed. Their lives on earth came to an end, but their eternal state will not. The rich man could not find solace in knowing he experienced good during his earthly life. The rich man would spend eternity in agony, and Lazarus would spend eternity finding comfort.

Q: *Why should you seek joy in the life to come, even at the expense of luxury and ease?*

Q: *How are you seeking eternal life over life on earth?*

APPLICATION POINT – Sixteenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal devised what became known as Pascal's Wager, which is an argument for why people should believe in God. The basic premise of Pascal's Wager is that if we live as though God exists, and He does indeed exist, we have gained heaven. If He does not exist, we have lost nothing. If, on the other hand, we live as though God does not exist and He really does exist, we have gained

hell and punishment and have lost heaven and bliss. Pascal reasoned that a person would be foolish to forego the possibility of eternal happiness when there was no greater alternative to be gained. Pascal's Wager faces some difficulties philosophically and theologically, but his thinking does help draw the application of Jesus's parable into focus. A person would be foolish to prioritize what could be gained in this life at the expense of losing what is offered in eternal life. Organize your worldview to prioritize eternal life. Doing so may mean giving up some long-held dreams. You may have to give up things you feel entitled to. But what you give up cannot compare with what you have to gain.

Q: *How did the rich man view Abraham?*

Q: *How did the rich man view Lazarus?*

Although the rich man was suffering, his new situation did not create any humility or even a resignation that he had received what he deserved. He still referred to Abraham as his father even though Abraham was far off and separated by an immense chasm. The rich man was not a spiritual son of Abraham. Furthermore, the rich man behaved as though Lazarus's only role was to serve others. He adjured Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve his anguish, as if Lazarus were Abraham's servant and had no greater obligation than to serve him by relieving his anguish. He still prioritized himself over Lazarus. He believed he deserved mercy even though he showed none to Lazarus in life. The rich man would not see past his own gate in life, but now failed to notice the great chasm separating him from Lazarus.

Q: *Why do people who are caught in sin struggle to see a way out?*

Q: *How can you protect yourself from the delusion caused by sin?*

APPLICATION – The rich man's behavior after death shows the distorting effect sin has on us. Living in sin makes us delusional. We cannot see God's world for what it really is. Furthermore, we cannot cure sin's delusion on our own. The nature of delusion means that even when we think we are outside of the influence of sin, we may only be

deceiving ourselves. We need a standard or rule to help us see when and where our lives have become unaligned with God's righteousness. God gave us this rule in the form of His Word. Unfortunately, when we see something in God's Word we do not like, many of us seek a reason to ignore it. Instead, seek to mold your life to the rule provided for us in Scripture. When you encounter something in the Bible that challenges how you want to live or think, do not immediately assume the Bible cannot mean what you do not want it to mean. It is always okay to seek a clearer understanding of Scripture, but we need to be wary of trying to mold Scripture to fit our expectations.

3. RECEIVING REVELATION

■ LUKE 16:27-31

Q: *Who did the rich man show concern for?*

Q: *What does "Moses and the Prophets" refer to?*

After realizing nothing can be done for him, the rich man finally showed some concern for others. He begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them of the coming sorrow. The rich man's attitude of superiority still remained. He still viewed Lazarus as a servant. Furthermore, rather than interceding for the poor and needy, he interceded for his brothers, who were apparently just as callous as he was. Abraham countered his requests by saying his brothers had Moses and the Prophets. This is a shortened way of referring to the Old Testament. Abraham's reply shows that the brothers had all they needed to repent in faith. The rich man, however, did not believe the Scriptures were enough to induce faith in his brothers. A messenger from the dead who testified to the realities of life after death might just do the trick.

Q: *Have you ever wanted to view a miracle to validate your faith?*

Q: *How can you verify the teachings of Scripture?*

APPLICATION – The rich man’s assumption about his brothers continues to resonate with us. There have certainly been times in my life when I have thought I would believe more if only I had some type of validation of my faith, but God has provided me, and everyone else, with everything we need to put our faith fully in Him and to live out our faith consistently before others. We even have more of God’s revelation than Abraham referred to in this parable. We have the New Testament as well as the Old. We do not need a further sign from God to believe in Him more. What we need to do is dive into the witness He has given us and pay attention to how it testifies to the truth of our faith. When we allow the Bible to transform the way we think and the way we live, the validity of our faith becomes clearer and clearer. Don’t look for miracles to validate your belief. Look at the transforming power of God’s Word.

Q: *Why would the rich man’s brothers refuse to repent?*

Q: *How do these verses echo Jesus’s own ministry?*

The rich man knew his brothers were in need, but he misdiagnosed their problem. He thought their problem was a lack of evidence. The real problem was that their hearts were too hard. Abraham responded to the rich man’s request for more evidence by stating that even if someone were to come back from the dead and warn them, they still would not believe. No amount of evidence will ever mend a hardened heart. It is difficult not to see the connection between this parable and Jesus’s own ministry. Jesus would soon be crucified and raised from the dead, but many from His own people still refused to believe in Him. The words of Abraham in Jesus’s parable portend what would be the case among the Jewish people soon after the resurrection and many others since.

Q: *How can you protect yourself from a hardened heart?*

Q: *How can you help others with a hard heart see the beauty of Jesus Christ?*

APPLICATION – The most effective way to ward off a hardened heart is prayer. If you are consistently praying for the truths of the gospel to be made evident in your life, God will make your heart receptive to Him. If you know someone whose heart has been hardened to the gospel, consistent intercessory prayer is the best antidote you have

for them. You certainly want to be ready to share the gospel and respond to their objections, but a hard heart can ultimately only be cured by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit works with our prayers to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ. Choose one person you know who is hardened to the gospel, and pray for God to change his heart.

NEXT STEPS

The decisions we make in life will echo for eternity. The most important decision anyone can ever make is to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If you are a Christian, the next most important decision you can make is to leverage your life for the gospel. Select one practice you know would help you spiritually and commit to making it a habit over the next two months. Find a way to keep a record of your commitment and how you are doing. Perhaps you need to ward off the devastating effects of materialism in your life. Commit to tithing or giving to missions on a weekly basis. Perhaps you know your prayer life is not where it should be. Find a five-minute period during the day to pray. What you do now matters. You do not want to reach eternity and wish you had done more to love and serve Christ on earth.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-God, help me not to live for today but for eternity.

-Lord Jesus, affirm in my heart that heaven and hell are real.

-Holy Spirit, keep my heart from being hardened to God and His calling on my life.

-God, thank you for the life-giving power of your Word.