

A Journey with Christ the Messiah

Lessons From a Rich Man

Luke 16:19-31

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing a series that I have entitled *A Journey with Christ the Messiah*.

If you could spend 30 seconds in heaven and 30 seconds in hell? Which of the two do you think would give you a greater burden for lost people--the glory and majesty of heaven or seeing and hearing those in agony in hell?

ILLUSTRATION:

A man left an epitaph on his tombstone that read: "Consider, young man, as you walk by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you soon shall be, so prepare, young man to follow me." That sounded pretty profound, but one fellow took a knife and scratched a response on the tombstone that read, "To follow you is not my intent; until I know which way you went!"

There are only two directions you can go after death.

People don't like to talk about hell, and frankly, I don't enjoy preaching on it. But because I'm committed to teach the full council of God, I am going to devote this message to this powerful passage of scripture from Jesus about heaven and hell.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Luke 16:19-31 (NASB)

¹⁹ "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. ²⁰ And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, ²¹ and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. ²² Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five

brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’²⁹ But Abraham *said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’³⁰ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

As we prepare to continue on this journey, let's bow in a word of prayer.

Prayer

In this passage, Jesus pulled back the veil between this world and the next and showed us there is a heaven and a hell. There are only two eternal destinies and everyone in this room will end in spending eternity in either heaven or hell.

Some people call this a parable of Jesus, but I tend to agree with many scholars who believe Jesus is describing an actual event. Of all of the recorded parables Jesus told, He never called anyone by name. In this story, He identifies two of the characters by name, Lazarus and Abraham. I believe there really was a beggar named Lazarus and a rich man who knew him and after they died Jesus reported what happened.

It was real! You've heard of reality TV—this is even better, it's reality Bible. Today I want to focus on the rich man in hell. There are four things the rich man experienced in hell that I would like to point out that we could all benefit from if we were allowed to experience them ourselves by spending just 30 seconds there.

Let's continue the journey!

BODY:

I. LIKE THE RICH MAN, WE NEED A VISION OF HEAVEN.

Jesus never revealed the rich man's name. Perhaps because he was someone who was well known. I suspect the rich man had a great funeral in which many dignitaries attended. Speaker after speaker related what a great, wonderful, religious man he was. He had to have been blessed by God because of all the wealth he enjoyed. I'm sure they reported he had gone on to his reward in heaven.

But one split second after the rich man died, he got the strange feeling something wasn't right. Jesus simply said, **“In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.”** Hades is a place where the wicked go when they die until the final sentencing to hell that takes place at the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20. It's like the county jail before the state pen. It's a place of torment and agony just like hell.

The first thing the rich man noticed was the torment, but the next scary thing he noticed was that he could see into heaven! When the beggar Lazarus had died, it doesn't say he was buried like the rich man. His body may have been dumped in some garbage pile somewhere. But Jesus said the angels escorted his soul into the presence of Abraham.

People often ask me if we will recognize each other in heaven. Based upon what Jesus is telling us here, it appears that we certainly will. The rich man looked up and recognized Lazarus and Abraham. If he could recognize them from hell, then I think we will recognize each other. The fire and flame will be agonizing, but one of the worst agonies of

hell will be the ability of people in hell to see those who are in heaven. Can you imagine lost husbands seeing their wives in heaven? Lost parents seeing their children in heaven?

Like the rich man, we need to lift up our eyes and catch a glimpse of heaven as well. Heaven is real, and it will be populated with people. How do you get to heaven? Not by being good or doing good—nobody is good enough. You don't get to heaven by being religious. The rich man was a religious Jew. He called out to “**father Abraham**” and Abraham even said, “**child, remember**”.

(SONG) Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you—

Being a son of Father Abraham will not get you into heaven. Only by being a child of God can you get into heaven!

A second thing the rich man experienced in hell that we could all benefit from if we were allowed to spend just 30 seconds there would be the desire to get right with God.

II. LIKE THE RICH MAN, WE NEED THE DESIRE TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD.

For the rich man it was now too late to prepare for death. He had already died and he no longer had the opportunity to get right with God. Now he wishes he could in every way! In verse 25 Abraham said, “**child remember...**” I believe those are two of the scariest words that will ever be heard in hell. People in hell will carry their memories with them. I believe a person in hell will remember every gospel message they ever heard. They will remember every time someone tried to give them a booklet explaining how to become a Christian.

Life is tough by itself, and sometimes people wish they could erase their memories like they erase a video tape. That's why so many people commit suicide: they want to erase the memories. There is no Alzheimer's in hell. Everyone will have a crystal-clear memory. Hell will be a place of eternal remembrance and regret.

ILLUSTRATION:

Have you ever bought something on a whim and later regretted it? It's called “buyer's remorse.” Fortunately, you can take a lot of things back for a refund or an exchange.

But, in hell there will be what I call “invitation remorse.” It won't be over something you did, but it will be remorse over something you didn't do: **accepting Jesus!** If you are here today without Jesus and you die in your sins, you will recall these exact words I'm speaking now. You will remember standing up in a few minutes and hearing the Spirit of God say to you, “Come just as you are...” And if you reject Jesus' free offer of eternal life you will regret it forever.

God loves you and He doesn't want anyone to go to hell. Hell was never intended for human habitation. Jesus said...

Matthew 25:41 (NASB)

⁴¹ “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

Hell was designed for Satan and his angels, not people. But because of our sinfulness, we are all born with a reservation for hell. When we repent of our sins and are born again, He forgives us and cancels our reservation in hell, and makes a new reservation for us in heaven. God loves you so much that Jesus died so you wouldn't spend eternity in hell.

A third thing the rich man experienced in hell that we could all benefit from if we were allowed to spend just 30 seconds there would be hearing the voices there.

III. WE NEED TO HEAR THE VOICES OF TORMENT FROM HELL.

Did you realize there is prayer in hell? The rich man cried out to Abraham and lifted his petition to heaven. But his prayers were unanswered. Notice his two cries to heaven:

1. A cry of personal agony: **“Have mercy on me!!!”**

The rich man's first thought was of himself and his needs. That should be no surprise, because one of the prerequisites for hell is to spend all your life thinking only of yourself and your needs. When he recognized the torment of hell, he cried out for Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water to touch his tongue. He was in agony in the fire. That's an interesting point about the afterlife. We will be equipped with spirit bodies that possess a sense of pain or pleasure. Lazarus had a finger and the rich man had a tongue.

I believe the thirst the rich man had was the same thirst everyone has in this life—it's a thirst for God. This thirst cannot be satisfied with anything this world has to offer. Only Jesus can satisfy this thirst. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well...

John 4:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

This thirst for God only becomes more intense and agonizing in hell.

People in our culture have made hell a joke. They think hell is going to be a place of fun, and frolicking with your friends.

ILLUSTRATION:

In a speech to the National Press Club, Ted Turner said, “Heaven is going to be a mighty slender place. And most of the people I know in life aren't going to be there. There are a few notable exceptions and I'll miss them. [Laughter] Remember, heaven is going to be perfect. And I don't really want to be there!..Those of us that go to hell, which will be most of us in this room; most journalists are certainly going there. [Laughter] But, when we get to hell we'll have a chance to make things better because hell is supposed to be a mess. And heaven is perfect. Who wants to go to a place that's perfect? Boring. Boring.” [Laughter]

Hell is a place of outer darkness, and eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's a place of darkness, isolation, and eternal frustration. Remember, this is not some weird prophet seeing a vision of the afterlife; this is the Lord Jesus Himself speaking plainly about what hell is like.

Abraham reported this thirst for God and the physical agony that could not be relieved in verse 26. "There is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us."

After death, it's too late to change your eternal destination. So his prayer for relief was unanswered.

A fourth thing the rich man experienced in hell that we could all benefit from if we were allowed to spend just 30 seconds there would be the urgency to tell others about the torment of hell.

This is the main point of this message! We need the urgency to tell others!

IV. WE NEED TO EXPERIENCE THE URGENCY TO TELL OTHERS.

After Abraham's reply, the rich man realizes there is no hope for himself so his thoughts turn to his family. He had five brothers, and they were all like him: religious but lost. So he says in verses 27 and 28, "Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."

Suddenly, the rich man in hell becomes a wannabe soul winner. He develops a missionary spirit. He expresses a concern for the lost people in his family. It's too bad he didn't have that same fear of hell before he died!

There is a powerful warning here for every person who has not yet trusted Jesus to save them from their sins and hell. Abraham gives an astonishing reply to the rich man's prayer. He says his brothers have the Bible (the Law and the Prophets) that's all they need to miss hell. If they will just read it and believe it, they can be saved from hell. But the rich man insists that if a dead man could go back and talk to his brothers, then they would turn from their sins and they would repent. By the way, the rich man in hell knew how to be saved, to repent; he just never got around to repenting himself. I'm convinced thousands of people know how to be saved; they've just never done it. So he wants Lazarus to go back and warn his brothers to stay away from hell. When they see a man from the grave warning them, he is certain that they will repent.

I tend to agree with the rich man don't you? Imagine that I'm not a Christian and somebody knocks on my door some evening. When I open the door, I'm shocked to see an old boy whose funeral I attended a few weeks earlier standing there. He says, "I've come to talk to you about Jesus, can I come in?" After my initial shock I say, "Of **corpse** you can come in." The man begins to say, "I've just come back from heaven to especially warn you that there is a hell because your older brother is there now. He asked me to come warn you not to come to that place. You need to repent of your sins and be born again so you can be made righteous through Christ and avoid the eternal torments of hell."

Wouldn't that scare you into submission?

But Abraham said, "If they don't believe God's Word, they won't believe if someone rises from the dead." A few weeks after He told this story to the Jews, Jesus was resurrected—and some still scoffed and rejected Him. Today, it's not much different. People have the Bible and Jesus has risen from the dead—and many still reject Him. I'm sharing the Word of God with you today, and I'm proclaiming that Jesus is alive. If that's not enough for

you to want to miss hell, you wouldn't repent if a corpse came knocking on your door in person.

In hell, people there have a constant, chronic concern for lost people who are still alive and are headed for hell. And that's something that we need, a fervent, compassionate concern for people around us who are lost.

As I prepared this message I was powerfully convicted because I believe dead people in hell have a heavier burden for people without Christ than I do. Sometimes I get so involved in spending time with believers and enjoying fellowship with them I forget there are people all around us who are going to hell. Could you pray, "God, you can send me to hell if it would mean that every person in Greenwood would go to heaven?"

Actually, it's not even possible for me to be cut off from Christ, but do I have that kind of burden? Will you join me as we ask God to give us that same kind of burden?

CONCLUSION:

Let's play "what if" for a moment. What if God offered to let you spend 30 seconds in heaven or 30 seconds in hell today, which would you choose? This is not forever; it's just a thirty second visit. Which location do you think would make you a stronger, more mature follower of Christ? Seeing the glory and majesty of heaven would probably make you a stronger Christian. But would it give you a greater burden for lost people? I think that 30 seconds in hell would change us for the rest of our lives. If we could see the agony and hear those voices we would come back and be the most evangelistic Christians on earth. People in hell are concerned for lost people who are headed for hell. That is a desire and urgency that we need.

ILLUSTRATION:

A minister reported that he was in a Lowe's store when an announcement came over the public address system. It said, "Attention employees and shoppers, we have a code Adam. There is a three-year-old boy with dark blonde hair wearing a light blue shirt who has disappeared. Please help us look for him." The entire store went on alert. Of course, we were all afraid someone had abducted him. There was a sense of urgency and purpose as we all forgot about shopping and started searching. The police who were called were positioned at the doors. For the next few minutes, both the shoppers and the employees fanned out across the store looking in every good hiding spot. After about ten minutes the announcement was made, "Cancel Code Adam, the little boy has been found." Then something happened at Lowe's that he had never experienced before: There were cheers and applause that could be heard from all parts of the store—there were smiles everywhere. He learned from one of the employees the little boy had just crawled behind one of the large displays.

Wouldn't it be great if all Christians had the same kind of urgency and unity to go out into their communities and to search out those lost boys and girls and men and women who are headed toward an eternity without Christ?

He is Lord!