

# ***“Where Do We Go When We Die?”***

(PART 2)

Luke 16:19-31

Baxter T. Exum (#1056)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
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## **Introduction:**

This morning I would like for us to go back and conclude our lesson from last week concerning a question that several of our members have brought up over the past few months. As you might remember, several have asked the question: Where do we go when we die? And last Sunday morning, we learned that there are many opinions on this subject (as in all areas of religion). We discovered that 91% of all Americans believe in God, and we also learned that 84% believe that there will be some kind of life after this one. And among those who do believe in an afterlife, most are pretty positive. You might remember that 63% expect to go to heaven, 6% expect to go to Purgatory, 11% expect to go somewhere else, 18% don't know where they're going, and only 1% expect that they will end up in hell.

And so with that in mind, last week we looked at the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, and we learned, first of all (and most importantly) that there will be a life after this one. Last week we looked at a chart outlining the basics concerning what we know from the Scriptures about what will happen when this earthly life is over. **[GRAPHIC FROM WORLD VIDEO BIBLE SCHOOL]** Last week, we learned that during our time on this earth we have the ability to freely choose whether we will be among those who are saved or those who are lost. We can obey the gospel and remain faithful, or we can ignore the word of God and simply drift along. We learned last week that death is defined in the Scriptures as the separation of the soul and body. The body lies down (as if sleeping), but the soul flies away to await either judgment or the final reward of those who are faithful. Last week, someone asked about the idea that the soul **“sleeps”** at the point of death, and since we do not have time to cover that very specific question in detail, some additional information has been placed in the cubbyholes this morning.

Looking now at the middle section, the place of the dead was referred to in the Old Testament as Sheol, it is referred to in the New Testament as Hades. Those who go down the narrow path and enter through the narrow gate will wait for their reward in a place referred to in the Scriptures as Paradise—the good part of Hades. On the other hand, there is also a waiting place in Hades for those who are lost. The word **“Tartarus”** is used only one time in the Bible, and it refers to a place where disobedient angels are being held by God, **“reserved for judgment.”** When we combine all of this, it appears that the rich man was in Tartarus—the waiting place for

those who are lost. We compared Tartarus to being held in the county jail after committing a terrible crime, as we await sentencing where we will ultimately be sent to a much longer sentence in prison. Or, in terms we can understand even better, **"Just wait until your father comes home!"** We know it's bad, but it is about to get a whole lot worse. Looking at the final section, Hell is the word that normally translates the word GEHENNA, referring to the Valley of Hinnom, basically a garbage dump that was always burning on the outskirts of Jerusalem. A horrible place, and a place where the fire will never go out. And then Heaven, of course, is the final reward for those who are saved.

For our study this morning, though, I would invite you to look with me again at the account of what happened to the rich man and Lazarus.

Again, the passage is found in **Luke 16**. In our pew Bibles, the Scripture is found starting on **page 1633**. And as we study the Scriptures this morning, we will go back and consider two more very basic lessons from the rich man and Lazarus concerning what happens when this life is over. If you will, then, please look with me again at **Luke 16:19-31**...

*<sup>19</sup> "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. <sup>20</sup> "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> "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. <sup>23</sup> "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. <sup>24</sup> "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.' <sup>25</sup> "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. <sup>26</sup> '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.' <sup>27</sup> "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' <sup>31</sup> "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.' "*

**II. As we look back over this paragraph, we learn not only that there is a life after this one (as we learned last week), but we discover this morning that THESE TWO MEN WENT TO TWO VERY DIFFERENT PLACES. In other words, THERE WAS A STARK CONTRAST FROM ONE LIFE TO THE NEXT.**

And I know we have already touched on this in at least a small way, but what I would like to emphasize here is that the situations of the rich man and Lazarus were completely reversed in the afterlife. Someone has said that if the rich could hire the poor to die for them, the poor could make a good living. That is a very true statement; however, we know that death does not discriminate between the rich and the poor. Death is very personal and is something that all of us will need to experience on our own. This account, therefore, reminds us that our present social or economic status has no real bearing on our eternal destiny. Wealth and success are no guarantee of a pleasant life after this one. We cannot purchase our way to heaven.

We notice, first of all, the rich man, and we notice that the rich man's focus here in this life was always on pleasure. We are told that he was in the habit of dressing in purple, joyously living in splendor every day. We know that purple fabric in the ancient world was extremely expensive. I am told that the fine linen was produced from the flax that grew along the Nile River in Egypt (it had to be imported). It was white and very soft and would have kept the rich man cool in the warm weather. I am told that it was so expensive that normally only kings and queens could afford it, and this man (we are told) lived in this splendor "**every day**." In other words, he did not have any old clothes, but he lived this way every single day. We are then told that the rich man died and was buried.

By way of contrast, we look at Lazarus, and we find that during his earthly life Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate. Apparently, therefore, Lazarus was not able to walk. We also know that he was covered with sores. At the end of **verse 21**, we find that the wild dogs were licking his sores. So, he was out in the street, unprotected. We also know that he was hoping to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Historians tell us that in Jesus' time people would often use old bread to wipe their hands on during a meal. And so if you got some sauce on your fingers, you could take a little tortilla or something and wipe off your fingers. Well, these "**bread napkins**" were then thrown out and were sometimes eaten by the poor. And it was so bad that Lazarus was "**hoping**" for this! On a good day, Lazarus was looking forward to, he was eagerly anticipating, eating these scraps of bread that some other man had wiped his fingers on! You know, we go to a restaurant and see a little speck on our glass, and we may send that glass back—but Lazarus was looking forward to basically eating another man's napkins!

And then, in **verse 22**, we are told that Lazarus died. And I would suggest that very few people would have been surprised to find that Lazarus had died. We notice that there is no reference to a funeral. Unlike the rich man, there is no reference to a burial. As with many of those who were poor in the First Century, we might assume that his body was simply left there in the street, or maybe the body was thrown into

the Valley of Hinnom, or perhaps (in a best-case scenario) the body of Lazarus was given an anonymous burial in a common grave.

Now, if we could put ourselves back into the First Century, and if we could step back and look at the earthly lives of these two men and ask ourselves the question, **“Which one was right with God?”** most people would have picked the rich man—the man who lived in luxury every day. But most people would have been wrong!

Most people look at the outward appearance. Consider the context of this passage. If you look back up a few verses in **Luke 16**, notice what's going on in **verses 14-15**, ***“Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.’”*** In other words, this poor man begging for scraps of food at the rich man's gate was nothing in the eyes of the Pharisees—by their standards, he was a failure. And yet we find here that God is not impressed with our wealth. God is not impressed with our new cars and TV's and all of the gadgets we may have. He is not impressed with our ski lift tags, but He is impressed by what He sees in our hearts!

On the other hand, we can look at Lazarus, and we see his situation, and we are also reminded that knowing God does not excuse us from suffering. Lazarus apparently had a relationship with God, and we know this because when Lazarus died, he was escorted by the angels into the presence of Abraham, into a place of pleasure and relief. We learn here, therefore, that not all of those who are poor or homeless are sinful people. Not all of those who are poor are addicted to drugs or alcohol. There are some legitimate cases where those who are poor or homeless may sincerely need our help. Lazarus was apparently a righteous man, but due to his disability, he was not able to properly care for himself and make a living. And so when Lazarus died and opened up his eyes, he discovered that his suffering and misery had finally ended. In other words, he ended up in a place that was quite different from his earthly experience.

On the other hand, we look at the rich man, and Jesus says that when he died he opened his eyes and found himself in torment. One thing we might not realize is that if we were to look at this in time sequence, all of this took place even before his body was buried. If he was like most rich men in New Testament times, the funeral would have been a huge event, with hired mourners, an elaborate service with all of the prominent people in attendance. His body would have been covered and wrapped up with rare and expensive spices. He would have then been buried very respectfully in his family tomb. In other words, there was absolutely nothing in this man's outward life that would have suggested the terrible future that was waiting for him on the other side of death. In that culture (and even in today's culture), the rich were often considered to be blessed by God. People tend to think that the wealthy must be doing something right, or else God would not allow them to be wealthy. And yet even before his funeral, the Bible says that the rich man was suffering in torment.

Let me make just a brief comment here on funerals. Over the past 17 years or so, I have preached a few funerals here and there, and if I am asked for advice (or if I have the opportunity to speak up), my advice has been that a family should in no way feel obligated to go all out on a funeral. Especially if the deceased was a Christian, you don't need the most expensive casket, there is no need to do all of the upgrades. For a Christian, he or she is already in Paradise and doesn't really care what the casket is lined with, and for a non-Christian, it doesn't really matter. There is no need to go deep into debt for something that really means nothing for the one who has passed away. The same reasoning applies to whether the body is buried or cremated—by the time we (as the survivors) even get around to considering that decision on behalf of our departed loved one, he or she is already in Paradise or Tartarus—and the way we dispose of the body does not really matter.

Nevertheless, the rich man dies and is buried (probably with the best funeral that money can buy) and yet the rich man opens his eyes in torment. The flames are so intense, in fact, that the rich man begs Father Abraham to send Lazarus on a mission. In other words, he still has the rich man attitude, "Go make him do something for me!" But the mission was for Lazarus to dip his finger in water, and to come over and cool his tongue. Abraham, however, tells the rich man that the chasm cannot be crossed. How interesting: In life, the chasm between these two men could have been very easily crossed with a kind word or perhaps with an act of love or respect. The rich man could have invited Lazarus into his home for dinner. How long had Lazarus been sitting there at the rich man's gate? We do not know for sure, but we do know that the rich man knew his name. The rich man recognized Lazarus as being the beggar at his gate. These men were so close, but after death, these two men were sent to two very different places, and the chasm could not be crossed. Who is the beggar now?

During his time on the earth, the rich man could have purchased enough water for a lifetime—he could have had that water delivered in golden goblets. But now he is crying out and begging for a single drop! We cannot imagine what eternal torment will be like. I am sure that the rich man was surprised and shocked that he ended up in such a horrible place. But unfortunately, the rich man is not the only person who will be surprised when this life is over. Many people living today will also be surprised.

Perhaps you have heard of the statement that was written on a gravestone, **"Remember, Friend, as you pass by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, soon you shall be. Prepare for death and follow me."** Supposedly, someone had defaced that stone and had added two more lines, **"To follow you, I'm not content, until I know which way you went!"** First of all, then, we learn that there is a life after this one. And secondly, we learn that these two men went in two very different directions. Our present social or financial status gives us no indication of where we will spend eternity, because it very well may be the opposite of what we are experiencing right now.

**III. There is a third lesson for us to consider from Luke 16, and that is: WE ARE THE ONES WHO CHOOSE OUR DESTINATION BY WHETHER WE CHOOSE TO FOLLOW AND OBEY THE WORD OF GOD.**

The rich man, therefore, was a man who had ignored the word of God. We are not told that he committed some kind of horrible crime, and yet just based on the passage we read, I would suggest that this particular rich man had ignored a very important aspect of the Law of Moses. Aren't we familiar with what Jesus said was the second most important commandment under the Old Law? In Matthew 22:39, Jesus quotes from Leviticus 19:18, where the Law said, "***You shall love your neighbor as yourself.***" The rich man had ignored that commandment. Not only that, but there were many instructions in the Old Testament about how important it was to take care of those who were poor. The rich man, though, as he "***...habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day,***" had apparently ignored Lazarus at his gate. In his selfishness, perhaps even distracted by all of his riches, the rich man had ignored and had disobeyed the Law of Moses—that is what led him to this place—he had ignored the word of God.

Now, on its own, this might be a little bit of a leap—to claim that the rich man was in this place of torment because he had failed to follow the Law of Moses. However, we notice near the end of the account, that the rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to give his brothers some kind of miraculous message, so that they would avoid the horrible torment he was in. And in verse 29 the Bible says that Abraham replied to the rich man and said, , "***They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.***" In other words, Abraham was saying, "***If your brothers want to avoid this horrible place, then they must listen to the word of God!***" At this point the rich man seems to panic a little bit, because he knows that his brothers are not following the Law of Moses. The rich man realizes that he is in torment for the same reason his brothers are on the way there—all of them were ignoring the word of God. And so he says (in verse 30), "***No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!***" And at this point Abraham replies, "***If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.***"

I find it so interesting that a man named Lazarus really had been raised from the dead! You may remember that it happened in John 11. Did that resurrection convince the Jewish leaders to follow the word of God? We find the answer to that question in John 12:9-11 where the Bible says that, "***The large crowd of the Jews then learned that [Jesus] was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.***" That is the situation Jesus was dealing with. He raised Lazarus from the dead, and the Jewish leaders were trying to put Lazarus to death! I am convinced that the rich man's family would have been in that group—they would have done the same thing! And so when confronted with the word of God, if we are not convinced by the word itself, then we will not be convinced by a miracle either.

Consider the Lord's own resurrection. When the Lord came back from the dead, did everyone fall down at His feet in respectful obedience? No, they did not—in fact, some were very upset. And so we find that a miracle will not convince certain people—but the most important thing to learn from this passage is that we must follow the word of God.

### Conclusion:

Over the past two weeks we have looked at the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:

- We have learned, first of all (last week), that there is a life after this one.
- We have learned this morning that these two men went to two very different places—that there was a stark contrast from one life to the next.
- And we have learned that the choice concerning where we will spend eternity is completely up to us—that our eternal destiny is determined by whether we choose to follow the word of God.

We realize that this message is not popular, and yet we also understand the value of a warning. The picture on the wall back here is a rather graphic illustration, and yet it is a warning that most of us have already seen. Maybe you do not recognize it, but it is a warning that most of us probably have in our own homes. Have you seen this before? This is a picture from the laundry room in our house—it is a picture from the front of our water heater. The warning is that this is an appliance that is not to be messed with. It is a warning that we are not to store a can of gasoline next to the water heater, and I would suggest that this is a valuable warning. I am not going to get upset at the government for insisting that I be warned about this particular danger, and the reason is: I don't want that to happen to me!



In the same way, God's word is a warning. It is a warning that is not to be ignored. As we noted last week, as we live here on this earth, we can freely move between those who are saved and those who are lost—it is completely up to us as to whether we will choose the narrow path that leads to life or choose the wide path that leads to destruction. There are some tough choices that need to be made. If someone is married and has a girlfriend on the side, that needs to stop. If two unmarried adults are living together in an intimate relationship, that also needs to stop. And I know rent is high in Madison, and it may seem like that is the only option, but the word of God contains a warning, and it is a warning that is not to be ignored. Maybe your struggle is with alcohol. Maybe your struggle is with lying, or putting school work ahead of your commitment to the Lord's church, or with being a coward—not speaking up when you need to speak up. There again, the Bible has a warning. In Revelation 21:8, the Bible says that, *"...for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and sexually immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and*

***brimstone, which is the second death.***” That is a warning that is not to be ignored.

I remember that years ago one of my friends wondered about this, and I remember him posing the question: What if God somehow made us pre-pay for our sins? And if you think about it (at least in a sense), we are living on credit here in this life. We commit sins, knowing that some day we will need to pay the price. So many times today, people get in trouble with their finances, because they enjoy the pleasure of spending now and they put the thought of paying it back out of their minds completely. But thinking about our sins, what if we had to do the suffering first? What if we had to pay up front? What if we had to suffer a few minutes in torment for a few minutes of sinful pleasure? I know it is not a perfect illustration, but how many of us could do it? Could we hold one finger in the flame of a candle for one minute, if we could then get a free pass at adultery, or stealing, or lying, or any other sin? How many of us would say that it would be worth it to suffer first and then sin? Very few, if any, would ever make that choice. And yet when we sin we are saying that it is worth it to sin now and suffer later.

The good news this morning, though, is that God is on our side and has given us the warning with confidence that we will be willing to make a change. In **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, the apostle Paul said, ***“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”*** The good news is that if we have sinned in the past, even if we are sinning right now, God allows us to start over. In response to the death of His Son on the cross, He offers us the opportunity to have our sins washed away. We must first step away from sin, we must then allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, and then we need to stick with it even to the point of death.

I am thankful for the questions that led to this morning’s lesson. If you are already a Christian but have stepped away from God in the past and would like to come back, we would invite you to let us know about your decision so that we can pray about it together. If you have a prayer request, you can write it down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, if you are ready to be baptized, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)