



Catalog No. 1956

Luke 16:14–31

56th Message

Jerry Tu

April 6, 2014

# WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TOMORROW

*SERIES: GOSPEL OF LUKE*

Here we are at the beginning of April with tax season upon us. People say that there are two things you can't avoid in life. One is taxes and the other one is death. Death, and what happens after it, will be the topic of my message today. Last week I preached on facing the loss of a job. This week we examine a parable that portrays death and torment in hell. Losing a job, then death, then hell. I think I may need some counseling after this preaching series!

There is a poem written on a tombstone that says:

“Remember me as you pass by, As you are now, so once was I,  
As I am now, so you will be. Prepare for death and follow me.”<sup>1</sup>

To this epitaph, someone added:

“To follow you, I'm not content, until I know which way you went!”

This is the main issue for us all, isn't it? Which way will we go after death: to heaven or to hell? That's why I entitled my message “Where do you want to go tomorrow?” Where you end up tomorrow depends critically on what you believe in and do today.

Jesus teaches on the eternal destinies beyond death in Luke 16, addressing the Pharisees who ridiculed his message. Jesus had just given the parable of the shrewd manager, ending with an exhortation to “Use Money to Love People”, instead of what the Pharisees do, which is “Love Money and Use People.”

Let's begin in Luke 16:14:

**The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.**

**“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.**

**“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:14-18 ESV)**

These verses present the authority of Jesus and God's Word versus the self-proclaimed authority of the Pharisees. The

Pharisees pride themselves on being impeccable before the letter of the Law, legalistic before the hundreds of human rules and regulations. Their external observance, however, hides the internal condition of their heart, which is hard, unteachable and disobedient to God's commands.

Jesus came to shatter the Pharisees understanding of the Law. God gave Israel the Law and the Prophets (in other words, the Old Testament), but they applied only until Jesus came to give new meaning. Jesus taught, embodied, and exemplified the Law. In many lessons and sermons, Jesus interpreted God's Word in a radical new way, giving true meaning and spirit to God's commandments. This does not mean the Old Testament was wrong or irrelevant. They were then, and even today remain true, fixed, and valid.

So how does the Law apply to us today? It is a mirror showing us how sinful we really are. The Law has always condemned us and it always will; no one can ever be right before God just by following the Law. Rather, the Law serves as a signpost pointing us towards Jesus; it leads us to Christ so that we can be justified by our faith, not by our own works.

Galatians 3:21-24 says:

**Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.**

The Pharisees did not believe Jesus and held on to religious observance of the law, and therefore remained imprisoned in their sin. They thought themselves righteous, and in their arrogance, they denounced and despised the “sinners” and “tax collectors” whom Jesus associated with.

In v. 14-18, Jesus exposes two areas of hypocrisy in the Pharisees: greed for money, and divorce. The Pharisees considered wealth and land ownership a sign of God's blessings, so they sought wealth and felt justified to accumulate it. They used their position to gain privilege and wealth while ignoring the widows, orphans, outcast and needy in society, the very people Jesus came to save. They gave to the Temple, but that was done to impress men, not for God, and God saw right through that hypocrisy. They indeed used people and loved money, instead of the other way around.

On the subject of divorce, God's Word clearly states that He detests divorce (Mal. 2:16). He permitted divorce only because

of man's sinful unrepentant hearts. Many Pharisees, however, have taken God's permission for divorce in certain difficult situations and liberally applied it to virtually any situation, including the wife burning a meal! Jesus is not giving the full biblical teaching on divorce here. Rather, He is confronting the Pharisees in an area where they dodged God's law through man-made loopholes while proclaiming themselves to be righteous.

We are plagued today with the same issues of hypocrisy that Jesus exposes in the Pharisees. The areas of sin may be our love of money or our lax attitudes toward marriage and divorce. But we are prone to other problem areas that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. These include how callously we treat the poor in society, our thought life, lust, or struggle with pornography, our acrimonious relationships with neighbors or unforgiving attitude, or many other areas of our lives. God's holy standard calls us out on all of these areas.

For us the main lesson is that we must not dodge the high standards of God's Word in all aspects of our lives. We must never justify our own sin, even if we claim some biblical loophole, claiming the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit. If we do so, we are mocking Jesus, ridiculing Him just as the Pharisees did.

Christianity is not following a bunch of outward standards. Rather it's a matter of submitting to His authority, right down to the heart. Let's examine our motives and attitudes in our own walk. Are we living a life worthy of our calling? Do we submit to Him in truth, or are we only making a show on the outside? Unless we fully submit to Him, we will not enter the kingdom of God, either in this life or the next.

Jesus now teaches a parable in which he warns the Pharisees that they are in for a rude awakening if they do not repent. Their disregard for God will ultimately land them in torment in hell. Let's read this parable, starting in verse 19.

**There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.**  
(Luke 16:19-21)

The parable begins with the description of the rich man. The only thing we know about him is his external appearance: what he wears, what he eats, where he lives. He represents the lure of materialism, the worship of unrighteous wealth that Jesus warns against. I'm sure you can imagine this kind of "Lifestyle of the Rich and Famous," with huge houses, perfectly manicured lawns, garages filled with gleaming luxury cars, the life of opulence. Their whole life revolves around "what does my mansion look like? what car shall I drive? what iToy shall I buy today?" Love of display and self-indulgence characterizes the rich man. Frankly, we probably wouldn't mind trading places with this rich man just to see what it's like to live with "champagne wishes and caviar dreams."

Now let's examine the poor man. The poor man is wretched, hungry and sick, covered with sores and suffering miserably. The contrast with the rich man could not be more striking. And we've all seen the poor man, haven't we? We may not have noticed him as we go about our business, well-dressed, well-fed. But we see him from the corner of our eyes. He is lying on newspapers on a park bench, next to a shopping cart piled with his possessions. He sleeps on the sidewalk while people walk around or even callously over him. He is in our cities, where the gleaming skyscrapers tower over the poor, whose relatives, if they're lucky, may land a job washing dishes or cleaning rooms in the opulent hotels or office buildings. The thought of swapping places with him even for a day would be terrifying for us to consider.

The most important contrast between these two men is implicit, and that is their relationship with God. The rich man is not given a name, which suggests this rich man has no value and is not a member of God's family. The poor man, on the other hand, has a name. He is named Lazarus, which means "God is my helper." His name suggests he trusts God and has a relationship with Him, even unto death. This difference is what distinguishes the eternal destinies of these two men.

The parable continues:

**The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he 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.'**

**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. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'** (Luke 16:22-26)

The story progresses to the death of these two men and the role-reversal that occurs after death. The rich man, who enjoyed lavish luxury in life, suffers in agony and torment in hell, while Lazarus who endured such pain in life, enjoys peace and comfort at Abraham's side. The pictures of heaven and hell are full of symbols: thirst and anguish, water and flame, the great chasm, etc. I don't want to dwell on what heaven and hell actually look like, or where they're located, or other such questions. The reality of heaven and hell cannot be denied, even though we can spend many hours arguing it. Rather, I'd like to go directly to applications of this story for our lives.

Is this parable a moral tale about riches and poverty? Is it morally wrong to be wealthy? Many of us desire financial success. We have the dream of starting our own social media company and get bought for \$19 billion. Is it wrong to dream big like that? Certainly, for some people, these "dreams" can

consume and enslave them to pursuit of wealth and that may be unhealthy. I would counsel against pouring a whole life into the pursuit of such a dream. However is having money morally bad? Do rich people land in hell? By this parable, you may think that riches will land you in hell. In fact, didn't Jesus say in Matthew 19:24, "... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

By a similar argument, if you're poor like Lazarus, then you'll enter the kingdom of heaven. Didn't Jesus say in Luke 6:20 "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

People feel this way about heaven and hell, that they are to compensate for what happens in this life. It is fitting for a bloated rich man to suffer in hell, for he is receiving his just desserts, and it's right for the poor to go to heaven to compensate for the suffering he had to go through down here. If we think this, then we are quite wrong. The rich man was not in hell simply because he was rich (Abraham was rich, and he is in heaven), any more than Lazarus was in heaven simply because he was poor. Heaven and hell are not compensation for what we go through here. There are rich people in heaven and poor people in hell. Who goes where is determined by something quite different from material status here on earth.

The rich man was a callous, self-indulging, self-righteous person who cared nothing for the needy and poor in society; he stepped over Lazarus every day without giving him a second thought or giving him a scrap from his table. The rich man claimed a relationship to God by addressing Abraham as his father, but he completely disregards God's commandment to love his neighbors. By denying God and scoffing at his commandments, the rich man deserved to be eternally separated from God. Jesus implies this is the fate of the Pharisees in the audience.

The poor man Lazarus counts God as his helper, even though he was poor and a beggar, he was a godly man. He did not let pain and suffering drive him away from God. And for that, he was counted righteous because of his faith and dependence on God. Gal 3:6-7 says, "just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." That's who Lazarus was and why he was in heaven.

The point is that going to heaven or hell is not dependent on being poor or rich, on being a pastor or an engineer, running a company or running from the law. Your ultimate destiny rests on your spiritual relationship with God. It depends solely on how you respond to God's invitation to come to Him through Jesus, to accept that the death of Jesus on your behalf has bridged the gap between you and Him. As it says in John 3:16, "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

Now let's read the final scene of this parable starting in v. 27.

And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.' (Luke 16:19-31)

The final scene of the story records the only time the rich man feels something akin to love: concern for his unsaved brothers—he does not want them to suffer torment in hell. Abraham explains that the brothers already have everything they need to know about God through the Scriptures. And even if someone from the dead can return to warn the living, it would make no difference to the brothers, who have rejected God to their own detriment.

The rich man's request illustrates our human desire to see miracles to convince us of what we already ought to know. We ask, "if only God can speak to me directly, or if He performs a miracle, then I'll believe." Or "if only He can answer my questions about this perplexing point, then I'll put my trust in Him." If only, if only... In fact, many people in our Lord's day did see miracles, healings. Yet, few of them were committed to Jesus. And even when Jesus Himself returned from the dead, still men did not believe Him.

No, skeptics abound, and they will not be convinced even if God performed miracles for them. As Abraham says, they have "Moses and the prophets" already and that is sufficient. And we have that and more. We have the Son of God made flesh to dwell among us and to teach us. If this will not convince us, then it is our own refusal that convicts us, just as it has convicted the rich man.

We are drawn into the parable and imagine putting ourselves into the role of each character. Are we like the rich man in our attitude or more like Lazarus? Whose destiny will we have? Who are we?

We are the five remaining brothers. We remain here in this world and we're given the opportunity to respond God's good news. We can continue to reject Him, thinking that we'll take one day at a time, living life for the here and now, and when the next life comes, we'll deal with it at that time. No, my friends, where you'll go *then* is determined by what you do *now*. Where you want to go *tomorrow* depends on what you do *today*. Unless you heed God's word now, there may not be any life to follow. It is that simple.

This parable of heaven and hell really hit home for me. Why? Because I saw my own father as the rich man in this story. Although my dad is not rich or callous towards the poor, he is a very independent man without a spiritual life. He was a diplomat for Taiwan most of his life. After he retired and moved to the US, he continued to work as a social worker for another 20 years, finally retiring at the ripe age of 81 years old.

As a self-made man, he sees no need for a personal relationship with God in his life. Over the years I've poured my heart out to him, pleading with him to accept the free gift of salvation. Just last month, I spent a weekend with him, and we talked about death and what lies beyond. I told him how much it pained me to realize he will spend eternity apart from God, from me, my wife, and his grandchildren.

I shared how easy it would be to accept salvation, to ensure a place for him with God in eternity. My dad responded if only God can adequately answer a few perplexing questions in his mind, if only God can show himself in a tangible way, if only, if only... My dad is 95 years old this year, and the door may not remain open that much longer. I desperately want him to see the foolishness of rejecting salvation and the arrogance of self-sufficiency. I desperately wanted my dad to say "yes" to Jesus now, before it's too late. He answered "no."

My friends, where are you right now in your relationship with God? If you profess to be a Christian, are you living a life worthy of your calling? Perhaps you grew up going to church, but do you have a personal relationship with our Creator God through Jesus Christ? Is your faith on fire, or are you lukewarm?

If you're not yet a Christian, what do you think your destiny will be? What do you know about the gulf of sin that separates you from God? Do you know that He sent his own Son to die on your behalf, that by accepting Him you may be brought into His family? Accepting Christ as your savior will give you a taste of heaven right now, this side of death!

Time is short! Romans 13:11 says, "the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." You do not know when the door will close. Change your ways while there is yet time. Tell your loved ones before the door closes on them. One day, Jesus, the One who rises from the dead, will return, but all who do not believe will be sealed in eternal separation. Which side of that chasm will you be? Where do you want to go tomorrow? What will you do about it today?

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Headstone>, February 22, 2014

© 2014 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino