

Joke: An elementary teacher, a CEO, and lawyer die and go to heaven. . .

St. Peter meets them at the pearly gates and explains that to get in they each have to answer one question correctly.

The teacher goes first. St. Peter says "What was the name of the famous ship that sank after striking an iceberg in 1912?"

"The Titanic!" The teacher replied

"Right, off you go." The teacher runs through the gates and the CEO goes up next.

St. Peter asks, "How many people were on board?"

The CEO thinks for a second, "Oh! I know that one! 2,208 on board and 712 survived!"

"Right, off you go." The CEO runs through the gates.

St. Peter takes a look at the lawyer and goes, "Name them."

Week 5

A Look at the Life to Come

Here we are in the last week of our Significant series. We will be looking at the last part of Luke 16.

I'm sure you have heard the phrase there's two things that you can count on and that is death and taxes. Truth is you might be able to cheat on your taxes but if the Lord tarries and your not translated

out of here like Elijah. Changes are you probably won't cheat out death.

Even if the Lord comes back before you and I pass from this life one thing is for certain you and I will go on to the next.

And truth is there is one of two places you and I will be. Either in the presence of the Savior or away from His presence.

Someday each of us are going to enter the next life.

It's one of the few things you can bank on.

The message today is not so much where you will spend your eternity, but more on what are you willing to do, so that others you know can have the opportunity to end up in the next life in the presence of the Savior for their eternity.

For the past four weeks, we've been walking through a section of Scripture from Luke that I believe is full of so much insight into how much Jesus cares for us.

With this our last week of our study in Luke 16, I think there is a compelling reason for us to invest our life's in helping others reach the right side of eternity.

If you're here today or listening online, wondering what God and the afterlife are all about, welcome this is a great day for that. And if you're already a follower of Jesus, and maybe you've wondered what motivates God to do what he's done, this is a good day for that as well.

In Luke 16, Jesus finishes up what, must have been a long day of teaching as it covers three full chapters, that's the same number of chapters taken up by his Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount came within weeks of the beginning of his ministry, and this teaching in Luke takes place within weeks of his death and resurrection.

I think the last story in this teaching segment that Jesus is sharing, the one we're about to walk through, reveals as much about what motivated Jesus as any story he ever told.

In Luke 16 he tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

It's a short story, told in two brief scenes: scene one focuses on this life, the one you and I are living right now, and scene two the after life.

In scene one, we meet two of the four main characters of the story. We meet the rich man and we meet Lazarus.

We know that the story is primarily about the rich man because Jesus tells us so in the opening verse. He starts by saying. . .

Luke 16:19 (NIV): 19 "There was a rich man. . .

Then he tells us how lavishly this rich guy dressed, and lived every day.

Luke 16:19 (NIV):. . . who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

This rich man is not the hero in the story, honestly, he isn't even a very nice guy. He's a callused, old fart who thinks about very few people besides himself.

We can see that because of the way he treats the second character in the story, a guy who is dropped off at his front gate named Lazarus.

In Hebrew, the name Lazarus means “he whom God helps.”

Luke 16:20–21 (NIV): At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

Lazarus is absolutely dependent upon God and he knows it. He’s in a bad place physically; there are sores all over his body, he has some sort of disease we are not told exactly what that might be.

Day after day, Lazarus is at the rich guy’s front gate, and day after day, he’s ignored and allowed to suffer without so much as a prayer or a crumb of bread.

In the story, Jesus says Lazarus was “longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table”

When you hear that, what do you imagine? Maybe your thinking a table fashioned out of oak, or mahogany or even cherry, sitting off the ground, and surrounded by expensive one of a kind chairs with artwork all around.

But remember, Jesus is telling this story to first century Palestinians, so the image in his mind and the image in their minds is far different than a twenty-first century dining room.

When Jesus said those words, everyone in his audience had a picture of a Middle Eastern banquet, with guests, servants, and onlookers watching and waiting for the after-dinner entertainment.

One traveler, who toured that area of the world, wrote this description of how evening banquets at rich peoples’ houses went in 1894:

...entertainment is a public affair. The gateway of the court, and the door. . .stand open. . .A long, low table, or more often merely the great wooden dishes, are placed along the center of the room, and low couches on either side, on which the guests, placed in order of their rank, recline, leaning on their left elbow, with their feet turned away from the table.

Servants stand behind the couches. . .Behind the servants the loungers of the village crowd in, nor are they thought obtrusive in so doing. (H.B. Tristram, 1894)

Get the picture?

This is how Middle Eastern feasts went for centuries. The eaters reclined at a slightly raised table, waited on by servants, and watched by peasants who were allowed into the home to enjoy the entertainment that would come after dinner.

Lazarus, sores and all, is one of those loungers in the background. He's called by Jesus, "a beggar."

I think it's rather significant that Jesus gives this beggar a name? If you study all of Jesus' parables, you'll discover that this is the only one in which he gives a proper name to one of the characters in his story.

For that reason, and because Luke doesn't mention that this is a story or a parable, some have suggested that what Jesus is telling here may be an actual story of two real people. We can't be certain of that but. . .

Whatever the case, that's scene one. It ends with Lazarus dying and being carried to heaven, and the rich man dying and going in the opposite direction. Lazarus is in the presence of God, the rich man is separated from the presence of God.

Scene two is in the afterlife. This is where the two other characters in the story are introduced, and where it becomes clear why Jesus told this story.

The third character in the story is introduced at the beginning of the scene. It's Abraham, remember him the spiritual father of the Jewish nation.

The angels drop off Lazarus at Abraham's side, literally right up next to his chest. This is a wonderful picture because what Jesus is describing here is another banquet, only this is a banquet that Lazarus has been invited to.

At this banquet, he's not an onlooker in the background and he's not a servant waiting tables; he's an honored guest, seated right next to Abraham.

Look at in verse 22. . .

Luke 16:22 (NIV): 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

When Jesus says, "the angels carried him to Abraham's side," what everyone pictured was Abraham reclining at the table. And remember who is Abraham? He's the spiritual head of his clan. If people recline around the table in order of their rank, where is Abraham reclining? Pretty much at the head of the table. They don't get more important than him.

And if Lazarus is right next to Abraham, what does it say about how the host of the banquet feels about him? He's about as special as it gets.

Here's a picture to grasp: Jesus is telling the story of a guy who, in this life, rarely, if ever, got treated well. He didn't get breaks, he didn't get opportunities, and he didn't get honors or recognition. All throughout his life, he had sores, and only front gates to lean on.

But in the next life? He got the seat right between the arms of Abraham.

That's the picture of Lazarus' afterlife; he's at the great banquet beside Father Abraham.

In contrast to that, where does the rich man wind up? Hell.

His callused heart, self-sufficient, and unresponsiveness to God get him delivered to the place of his own making and choosing. All of his life, he's lived as if he didn't need God. All of his life, he's put God at arms-length.

In essence, he had said, "I don't want you in my life. I want to be my own lord, my own god."

So in the afterlife, God grants his wish.

Hell exists, it's place where we are separated from God.

But here's the good news. . .it was not created for us.

But there are people who choose to exclude God from their lives nonetheless who may live in an eternity without God, not that God desires that, because He doesn't.

John 3:16–17 (NIV): For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

I know that God isn't everywhere-obvious in this life. (Talk a little bit about that).

But, He is everywhere-present in spite of it not always being obvious.

Just look at the stars or consider what it must have taken to design and engineer a flower and you would have to admit that the creator of this universe is unique, wonderful, and full of beauty and ability.

As a matter of fact. . .

Psalm 19:1–4 (NIV): The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. 3 They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

In heaven, He's everywhere-present and, in hell, he is deliberately absent and far off, why?

Because God respects the choices of those who have chosen to be against him, that is what the rich man has done.

But hear this church, He loves them just the same, that's why he came.

But the rich man never really thought about the consequences of his choice. He never consciously verbalized to himself that pushing God away throughout his life on earth would mean he would spend eternity without him.

He's surprised when he finds himself in this place. According to Jesus' words, he is in torment and agony. This is where the point of the story begins to take shape.

Within moments of entering this godless destination, the rich guy is in agony. And within minutes, he begins a dialogue with Abraham about fixing what's gone wrong.

He sees Abraham up in heaven, so he shouts. . .

Luke 16:24 (NIV): So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

Question: why doesn't he talk directly to Lazarus? Why doesn't he just say, "Lazarus, old buddy, can you help me out?"

I think it might be because he still sees himself as superior to Lazarus. He still thinks that social class and standing have some merit. He still thinks of Lazarus as a servant and not much more.

And why does he address Abraham as "Father Abraham?" I don't know for sure. It could be it's just a term of respect, but here's what I think: I think this rich guy never imagined that his afterlife destination was the place that he ended up at.

I think he thought, "I'm a good guy. I'm from an affluent family. I have lots of friends. I don't cheat on my wife, shortchange the waiter, or cheat on my income taxes. I'm basically a good guy. Certainly, I'm a likable guy. That should be enough for God to say welcome."

Maybe he also thought, "even if my social status doesn't get me in, I'm a descendant of Abraham, so I have a good lineage, surely I'll make it based on who I'm related to."

So he calls out, “FATHER, Abraham.” In other words, “It’s me, your descendant. Have mercy on me. I shouldn’t be down here. Maybe you can fix this.”

And how does Abraham reply?

“I can’t. I wish I could, but I can’t. There’s a huge, immovable chasm between where I am and where you are. You made some decisions on earth, and those decisions are final now.”

This starts this formerly-rich man thinking. It’s at this point that the climax of the story takes place.

Remember what happened In the movie How the Grinch Stole Christmas when the Grinch looked at the little girl and finally thought about the value of a person for the first time? Remember how his heart was six sizes too small? What happens? His heart starts growing.

Look at this next line from this formerly rich guy:

Luke 16:28 (NIV): for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

Let me ask you a question: Ready? How long has this guy been in place when he says this?

We don’t know for certain maybe five minutes, maybe an hour, not too much time has passed for sure.

But look what he did. . .

What’s the rich guy asking for in this request?

He’s asking for the salvation of those he loves.

This self-centered, self-sufficient, rich guy turns into an evangelist.

Here's what we need to observe from this story:

1. According to Jesus, our location in eternity is not based on social standing or lineage. It's based on grace.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV): For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Unlike the shrewd manager from last week, who bet everything on the reputation of the master, this rich guy bet everything on himself—his social status and his background. The results were not what he expected.

What he didn't know was what the apostle Paul later went around telling everyone who would listen. Wherever he went, Paul would explain that God. . .

Titus 3:4–7 (NIV): But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

His grace. His willingness to grant forgiveness to anyone honest enough to admit that they are not God, but that they need God in their lives they need a Savior.

That was probably a lot easier for Lazarus to do than for the rich guy because all his life Lazarus had to depend on others. He knew what humility was. He wasn't too proud to beg for forgiveness. And

God not only granted it, which alone would be mercy, but he gave him far more than just forgiveness. He gave him grace. So instead of just getting into heaven, he gets a seat at the right hand of Abraham.

Instead of getting what he deserves, he gets forgiven. And instead of just getting forgiven, he gets blessed by one of the best seats in the house.

Surely that shows us that the last shall be first.

The second thing you can't miss in the story was the permanency of the afterlife. Abraham says, "We can't cross over. There's a gapping chasm fixed between us and no one can get across."

There is no purgatory.

This is why prophet after prophet in the Old Testament would say things like, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6).

2 Corinthians 6 says,

2 Corinthians 6:2 (NIV): For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Now is the time of God's favor

When this life passes, we get to live forever with the consequences of our choice.

Here's a third observation it's one we've already talked about:

Five minutes separated from God's presence turned this self-sufficient, I don't need a Savior into an evangelist.

Now I'm not so certain that Hell is everything we have been raised all our life to believe. I do believe it's a place where God has withdrawn His blessings and presence from.

2 Thessalonians 1:8–10 (NIV): He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

There is a devil he's not some character wearing red pajamas carrying a pitchfork. But he is out to kill, steal, and destroy.

John 10:10 (NIV): The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

I have come so what. . .?

Back to our story. . .

The Bible says elsewhere that it's a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. What is gnashing of teeth is?

It's the sound of deep regret when you say, "Why didn't I listen? Why was I so stubborn? Why did I hold God at arms-length all my life?"

Five minutes into this place, this ardent anti-God guy starts pleading that someone go and share the truth with his brothers because he didn't want anyone he loved to join him there.

And what's Abraham's response to this?

Luke 16:29 (NIV): 29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

In other words, they have the teachings from the Old Testament. They have what Moses who wrote the first five books and what the prophets said.

The formerly-rich guy thinks that's not enough. So he says. . .

Luke 16:30 (NIV): 30 " 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

Once again the response from Abraham. . .

Luke 16:31 (NIV): 31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

If you recall I mentioned that there were four characters in this story?

Here's where the fourth one gets introduced. I think the fourth person in the story is Jesus.

He's only a few weeks away from going to the Cross, he knows it. He also knows he's going to rise from the dead and offer salvation to every person who is courageous enough to trust him and what he did for them by going to the Cross.

He's also very aware that some will reject him.

I can imagine him being sad as he ends the story. Not sad because of having to go to the cross as a matter of fact the author of Hebrews tells us. . .

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV): fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For the what. . . joy.

The cross was not joyful. But knowing that mankind was going to be offered the opportunity to come into right standing with God again because of the cross made it all worth while.

Hear this church. Heaven sent it's best to reconcile us back to the Father. That makes you extremely valuable to Him.

Jesus sad maybe weeping. I mean think about what's happened.

He's starts out at the home of a Pharisee. He heals a guy with dropsy, and some are ready to crucify Him there.

Then he tells them the story of the great banquet, that party in heaven.

He goes on to tell them the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons.

Then he turns to his disciples, who have been patiently listening from behind him, and he tells them the story of the shrewd manager who bet everything he had on the reputation of the master.

He finishes the session telling another story. This story focuses not on this life, but on the life to come.

And this one reminds us that grace is available to the least attractive of beggars, who will be welcomed into heaven by the likes of Abraham if they'll only accept God's grace.

I think Jesus' teaching is to both sets of people in this last story.

I think he's telling the Pharisees, Don't think your own merits or the fact that you are a descendant of Abraham are going to get you in.

You need to trust in me.

I'm going to die but in three days be lifted out of the grave. I am substituting my life for yours on the cross. Taking your sins upon myself so that you can be set free from the law of sin and death.

You just need to trust in My grace.

And then to the disciples he's saying, "And fellas, you need to know how important this all is. In a few days I'm going to give my life as a sacrifice. I'm going to die and I'm going to rise from the dead. Why?

Because there's one of two places where you will spend eternity. Either with me or without me and so I'm giving all those who will trust in me the opportunity to choose abundant life and eternal life with me by going to the cross.

But, even if I rise from the dead, some won't believe. They're going to need someone like you to teach them what God says about eternity and how to get there.

They're going to need someone like you to give them Moses and the Prophets."

So, if you're listening today, and don't know Christ it's time to trust Him for your salvation, not yourself.

I've used this Scripture once but it bears repeating. . .

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV): For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

The church really only has one goal. That's to help people come to know Christ and grow in Christ. We call that transformation — people coming into a relationship with Christ and growing to be more like Christ.

There is only one product to make that happen: and that's you.

You who are willing to share the gospel with those that don't know Him so that they can encounter Him. Why would you want anyone to spend an eternity outside of the presence of God?

What kind of actions does it take to change lives?

Serving, praying, giving.

When you pray, God hears and answers.
When you give, then ministry can take place.

All those are necessary and good, but that's not all.

There's one more piece to the puzzle.

John 13:34–35 (NIV): 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

See if we are all mean, and grouchy, acting like everyone else type of people you will never have the influence to help others encounter Jesus through your life.

Only a certain kind of people can influence transformation.

There are the ones who are growing — people who themselves are experiencing His transforming power in their lives because they are walking in union with the Lord.

That's my challenge for each of you. Be a growing people who serve, pray, and give to see transformation happen in ourselves, as we invite others to join us, so that they can encounter the God that's in us.

Prayer