

**FINAL DESTINATION**  
*The Reality of Heaven & Hell*  
Luke 16:19-31  
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**Misconceptions<sup>1</sup>**

If you mention Heaven to someone they most assuredly will assume they will end up there. If you were to bring up Hell they most likely will deny its existence or describe who *should* be there - and it probably won't be themselves! The topic of Heaven and Hell in our culture will continue to be debated or denied as to their reality or their existence. Heaven and Hell are uncomfortable topics for people to discuss because they presuppose someone will be held accountable for their actions, and their choices in this life have consequences after death.

Just as damaging as the debate over the existence of Heaven and Hell are the misconceptions that fuel one's understanding or description of these places. Descriptions are vague and uncertain, or kept light-hearted and amusing to avoid the reality. *The Far Side* comics created by Glen Larson depict comical scenes that make us chuckle about what we think these places might be like. Even though these comics are meant to be satirical, they do obscure people's reflections about what Heaven and Hell are really like.

Since the Fall in Genesis 3, one of the tactics of Satan has been distort and distract people from thinking too seriously about either place. Satan knows what Heaven is really like because he came from there! He knows that Hell is real because God has prepared for him to be punished there for eternity. So it's no mystery that he would work to keep the truth veiled from unbelieving eyes, and diminish a believer's expectations regarding Heaven or Hell.

As Jesus Christ came proclaiming the gospel and the kingdom of God, He did so by clarifying truth and revealing spiritual realities that truly exist. It isn't a small matter that Jesus taught more about Hell than anyone else in Scripture. Jesus' most common form of communicating these truths was through parables. The Jews were in a position to welcome Jesus as Messiah in order for Him to establish His kingdom. But as Jesus explained the terms of God's kingdom, the people rejected His claims and dismissed His kingdom. Of course this was all a part of the greater plan of God to expand His kingdom to include not just the Jews, but people from all nations. This was a mystery - *not previously known* - to God's people. Jesus utilized parables to explain the features of God's kingdom to those who humbly received Him as Messiah.

**parable** – “a fictitious but true to life story, designed to teach some specific lesson in the spiritual realm, usually concerning the kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>

One of these occasions is found in Luke 16, where Jesus confronted the self-righteous certainty of the Pharisees by describing future realities of life after death. Using this parable Jesus instructs spiritual truths based in true realities. He clarifies common misconceptions about life after death, and confirms the actual places and potential positions of people in the next life.

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<sup>1</sup> Suggested Resources: Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* © 2004 Tyndale House Publishers; Paul Enns, *Heaven Revealed* © 2011 Moody Publishers

<sup>2</sup> Stanley A. Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm*, p.43

As we study this parable, we must keep in mind some key concepts in how parables are to be interpreted. First, parables often explained **mystery**, by revealing a truth not previously known. Second, each parable had a specific message to the different audiences. Those listening to the parables were: tax collectors and sinners, Pharisees, and Jesus' disciples. Each had different reasons for being there, each received different implications of the truth revealed.

### **Guidelines for Interpreting Parables<sup>3</sup>**

- 1) *Discover the problem* – almost invariably found in the context, often at the heart of the preceding discussion
- 2) *Seek the central truth* – it is the primary lesson being taught
- 3) *Relate details to the CT* – details may contribute to the central truth or to the realism of the story
- 4) *Clarify and authenticate the CT* – clear, understandable and consistent with Scripture
- 5) *Discover the intended appeal* – designed to evoke a decision

In studying this parable and teaching about Heaven and Hell, my intent is to excite your affections about Heaven that will motivate you toward holy living. Also, to sober your thinking about Hell so that you will be motivated to evangelize the lost. As we look at the **Context**, the **Contrast**, the **Condition** and the **Closure** of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, remember these two truths: 1) HELL IS WORSE THAN ANYONE WILL IMAGINE; 2) HEAVEN IS ALWAYS BETTER AND WILL BE BETTER THE MORE WE ARE THERE.

## **I. THE CONTEXT [16:9-17]**

<sup>ESV</sup> **LUKE 16:13** *No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." <sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. <sup>15</sup> 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."*

### **SERVING TWO MASTERS**

The occasion for this particular parable came on the heels of Jesus' rebuke toward the attitude of the Pharisees love for money and disregard for the Word of God. After Jesus had remarkably described God's heart in saving the lost (Luk.15), He depicts how disciples are to wisely and faithfully use the means of this world to serve God and receive His reward in the next. Jesus draws a hard line between devotion to God and money, which reveal a person's heart.

At this point the Pharisees scoffed at Jesus for claiming that wealth and God are exclusive from one another. In their theology they believed wealth was synonymous with God's favor, thereby securing prominent positions in heaven. Conversely, poverty and sickness were results of God's punishment on sin, resulting in condemnation to Hades. Jesus rebuked their self-righteousness and self-exalting motives of manipulating the Scriptures to achieve their own good in the sight of others. He exposed their intentions and pronounced judgment on their hearts before God.

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<sup>3</sup> Ellisen, pp.53-60

## FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY

The sin of the Pharisees was their love and devotion to money and its controlling directive on their lives. Wealth, whether great or small, is not to be a measuring tool in determining God's favor. The test of personal wealth is about FAITHFULNESS. *How you steward your money in this lifetime has direct correlation to being entrusted with heavenly riches.*

## II. THE CONTRAST [16:19-22]

**LUKE 16:19** *"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried,"*

### THE POOR, RICH MAN

Jesus launches into a parable to paint a portrait of extremes. There is an extremely rich man, contrasted with an extremely poor man. There is an extreme reversal of fates, along with an extreme depiction of finality in life after death. This parable not only startled the disciples thinking about who goes to heaven, it also shocked the Pharisees expectations as to why they would be denied entrance.

Jesus' description of the man's lavish clothing and opulent spending picture someone who flamboyantly flaunted his wealth and was not ashamed. He enjoyed the finest things available and partied to the extreme. This man was the Pharisees hero! His ridiculous wealth and extravagant lifestyle would have suggested extreme favor and blessing from God. *Certainly he would be close with God, like Abraham, in heaven.* But his outward condition did not reflect his inward spiritual reality and standing before God - *"but God knows your hearts"* (16:15).

### THE RICH, POOR MAN

On the opposite end of the spectrum is an undesirable, malnourished, infected cripple who fights to stay alive. Somebody brings him to the gateway of the wealthy man, assuming he might receive some pitiful leftovers from the man's table. He is made even more pathetic by the fact that dogs would come and lick his sores. Dogs were not pets, but filthy scroungers who seemed to have it better than this poor man.

Jesus does something arresting in this parable, He names the poor man LAZARUS (not to be confused with the brother of Martha and Mary, John 11). The rich man would have been recognized as any one of the Pharisees; but a poor man typically had no identity. By naming the poor man Jesus emphasizes value, concern, and personal knowledge by the One True God for someone the Pharisees did not care to acknowledge. His name LAZARUS means *"the one God has helped"*<sup>4</sup> and suggests his faithful relationship to God, despite his physically impoverished condition.

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<sup>4</sup> Λάζαρος, οὐ, ὁ [Heb., prob. 'God has helped'] *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Frederick William Danker with Kathryn Krug, © 2009 by The University of Chicago.

*This isn't any different in our current day. The rich and famous always have names and easily receive the spotlight of attention. Anyone likes to be associated with people of prominence and influence; no one wants to hang out with the gross and destitute. The nameless in our city are those who live along the Arroyo Simi wash, or sit at the curb of the "forbidden driveway" back behind Eggs & Things and Trader Joe's. I see the same men and women sleeping or pushing their carts, but I couldn't tell you their names. Even though this isn't a parable or sermon about homeless ministry in Simi Valley, the same warning against the Pharisees for not recognizing or caring for the poorly destitute - who were literally on their doorstep - when it was within their means to do so, applies. *May the same NOT be true of us.**

The contrast between the two men comes to a climax when Jesus audaciously describes that Lazarus, not the rich man, entered into Paradise and fellowship with Abraham; while the rich man was sent away into Hades to experience torment. This would have dumbfounded everyone who listened, while further infuriating the Pharisees sense of justice.

### **THE HOPE OF HEAVEN<sup>5</sup>**

1. *Heaven is the actual dwelling place of God (Deu.26:15; Mat.6:9), His angels (Luk.2:15; Mat.28:2; Heb.12:22), and from which Christ came and returned to. [Joh.1:32; 6:33; Acts 1:2]*
2. *Heaven is described as a city. [Heb.11:16; 12:22; 13:14; Rev.21:12]*
3. *Heaven is the believer's country of citizenship (Heb.11:16; Phil.3:20), permanent inheritance, unperishing, reserved for us. [1 Pet.1:4]*
4. *Heaven will provide delivery from our sinful human condition (Rom.7:24) replaced with a glorified, resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:20, 48-49; Phil.3:21; 1 Joh.3:2).*
5. *Heaven's central focus is being with Christ. [Phil.1:23]*
6. *In heaven, we will have eternal rewards, permanent possessions and positions of authority. [Mat.6:19-25; 25:20-21; Luk.19:17-19; 1 Cor.3:12-15; 2 Cor.5:9,10]*
7. *In heaven, we will serve God (Rev.7:15) and reign with Jesus Christ (2 Tim.2:12; Rev.3:21; 22:5).*
8. *The new Jerusalem will be the central focus of God's renewed creation. [Rev.21:2]*
9. *In heaven, we'll eat and drink at a table with Christ and the redeemed saints from earth, fellowshiping and rejoicing with them. [Mat.8:11; Luk.22:29, 30; Rev.19:9]*

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<sup>5</sup> Randy Alcorn, [www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org), *What does the Bible say about Heaven?*

### III. THE CONDITION [16:23-26]

**LUKE 16:23** *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.'* <sup>25</sup> *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.* <sup>26</sup> *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."*

#### IRREVERSIBLE CONDITIONS

Death comes to everyone and everyone will stand before God to give an account (Heb.9:27; Rev.20:11). The righteous whose names are found in the Book of Life will be ushered into the presence of God (Rev.20:12; 21:27). Those who are not will be separated into a place of torment, anguish and darkness (Mat.8:12; 13:41; Mar.9:43). At this point in the parable Jesus depicts a conversation across the chasm of Heaven and Hell. Again, Jesus is illustrating the extreme reversal of conditions these men experienced and their fixed position in eternity.

The rich man's request is inappropriately absurd to think he could receive mercy from the very person he was merciless toward. Abraham, the Jewish patriarch and father of those who are made righteous by faith, explains the reason for each man's condition. Each man made his choice while living on earth; each man received their just reward based on the expression of their faith while on earth. The rich man lived with a false understanding as to the consequences of his lifestyle on earth. Lazarus earthly suffering was temporary compared to the eternal joy he now experienced in Heaven. Each man's choices relating to faith and God's Word is what determined their eternal condition.

#### IMPASSIBLE POSITIONS

Along with the accounting for their life on earth, their positions opposite the extreme chasm made it impossible to cross sides. It doesn't seem likely Jesus is describing the possibility of people seeing each other between Heaven and Hell. The hypothetical conversation between these characters is meant to emphasize the final position of life after death. Once you cross the river of death, you cannot return nor can you change sides. *There are no second chance opportunities in the next life, because the opportunities to receive or reject the gospel are meant for this lifetime.* Just as Jesus passionately and compassionately warned all people, you and I are to pursue and persuade others with the truth of the gospel and the reality of Heaven and Hell. *Your uncomfortable conversation with someone now about this truth cannot compare to the unquenchable anguish they will experience for eternity.*

#### **THE REALITY OF HELL<sup>6</sup>**

1. *Hell is a literal place which Jesus graphically described.* [Psa.11:4-6; Mat.10:28; 13:40-42; 25:46; Mar.9:43, 44).
2. *Hell is a place of punishment designed for Satan and fallen angels.* [Mat.25:41-46; Rev.20:10]
3. *Hell will include people who do not accept God's gift of Jesus Christ.* [Rev.20:12-15]
4. *Hell is a horrible place of suffering and everlasting destruction.* [Mat.13:41,42; 2 Ths.1:9]
5. *Because God is just, Hell will not be the same for everyone.* [Mat.11:20-24; Luk.20:45-47, Rom.2:3-5]

<sup>6</sup> Randy Alcorn, [www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org), *What about Hell?*

#### IV. THE CLOSURE [16:27-31]

**LUKE 16:27** *And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house - <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers - so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> 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.'"*

##### FINAL REALITY

Jesus doesn't end the hypothetical conversation at this point. Instead He drives home the basis for this truth. He further highlights the audacity of the rich man to suggest God's Word is deficient to explain these matters of salvation. It is a warning to the Pharisees' multiple requests of Jesus to further prove His claims by other supernatural means.

The rich doesn't really display remorse or compassion for his family. He accepts his position, but back-handedly blames God for not providing sufficient information about the reality of his condition. He continues to hold to his false thinking that some other supernatural phenomena is needed to awaken others to the reality of Hell - *like sending Lazarus back from the dead!*

I enjoy Charles Dickens', *A Christmas Carol*. My family makes it a regular tradition to watch it performed at the Glendale Center Theater. I am always moved by the story of repentance and restoration of a man who wasted his life on the love of money, only to finish his life with generosity and kindness. There is a major theological flaw in Charles Dickens' story (probably more than one!), and it is the character of Jacob Marley. Jacob Marley is the character the rich man would have liked to send back. Jacob Marley is the one who awakens Ebenezer Scrooge to the future consequence of his lifestyle by providing him the chance to repent of his ways. Jacob Marley cannot return, nor can he persuade someone to change.

##### SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

The final point Jesus drives home in this parable is the sufficiency of Scripture to either convince someone of Heaven or condemn someone to Hell. The whole of the Old Testament points toward the Messiah and salvation in Jesus Christ, which the Pharisees rejected (Jesus explained this to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:25-27). Neither would they be convinced by the resurrection of either Lazarus (John 11) or Jesus Christ! Miraculous signs and wonders were meant to highlight the truth God had already revealed. Faith is supported by the weight of the sufficiency of Scripture. Salvation is revealed in the Word of God, and that Word is Jesus Christ.

Heaven and Hell are real because God is real, holy, just and true. Jesus Christ is the real way of salvation to Heaven with God; He is likewise the stumbling block of offense on the road to Hell. May we be thrilled to live holy lives with the hope of Heaven awaiting us; and may we be soberly motivated to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ because of the reality of Hell.

*"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:13-17)*