

Preparing for Eternity Luke 16:19-31

Introduction

Scholars disagree on whether the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke Chapter 16 is a parable or a real-life example. But whether Jesus was just using a hypothetical situation or drawing upon an actual event, the point of the teaching remains the same. Namely, how we live our lives now is shaping us for life in eternity.

These verses picture the relationship between our life and actions in this present world, compared to our final and irrevocable position in the eternal realm. Jesus also indirectly rules out the teaching that death is annihilation and that we cease to exist at death, as well as mortalism or what some call "soul sleep." Jesus reveals that even in death, there is conscious existence.

From this passage comes a wealth of insight into the life of the hereafter. There are as many teachings about the afterlife as there are religions and then some. And depending on your hermeneutical approach, even biblical passages can be interpreted differently. Personally, I prefer the literal approach to scripture. I take the Bible to mean what it says literally. If a passage is obviously symbolic, then I look for the literal meaning.

So before we dive into our text, let's take a few moments to examine some of the biblical terms and ideas about life after death.

Explanation:

- First of all, Sheol, or Hades (as it was called in the O.T.), was a place of waiting described here as two compartments separated by a great gulf. One was called Abraham's Bosom and the place of torment. (Paradise vs. Purgatory)
- Satan's Domain is as the Prince and power of the air, and he is sometimes called the god of this world.
- Hell or Gehenna is called the Lake of Fire the Book of Revelation, and in Matthew 25:41, Jesus says, "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:'" (Matthew 25:41)
- Hell was prepared for Satan and his angels. Satan will never rule in Hell; he will be Hell's greatest victim.
- Christ's sacrifice Eph. 4 (Now this, "HE ASCENDED"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:9-10)
- At the Resurrection of Jesus – saints in Abraham's Bosom were resurrected. Matthew 27:52 "and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His Resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. (Matthew

27:52-53)

- It seems that now, instead of going to Abraham's Bosom, a believer's spirit goes directly to heaven to be with the Lord if Paul is correct to say In 2 Corinthians 5:8, "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8)
- That would mean the spirit of a saint now is carried by the angels into Heaven.
- The Spirit and the Body will be re-united at the Rapture (if you're still alive at the coming of Christ) or the Resurrection (if you've died before the return of Christ).
- And at that time, we will receive a glorified body.

Now, obviously, I haven't died to verify the veracity of these things, so, as Dr. Hill sometimes says, "This is one way to look at it." So with this background, let's see what our text has to say about all of this, beginning with Luke 16 verse 19, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. (Luke 16:19)

I. A View of This Life

The rich man is unnamed, but "Dives" is the word meaning rich man, and some bible scholars regard it as his proper name. So, rather than call him the unnamed rich man, I'm just going to call him Dives. Dives was what we would call "well off" and maybe even a "fat cat." He had it all. But he was also a greedy man and couldn't care less about the needs of others. He was more interested in was his fine-looking wardrobe and his big bank account than being humanitarian and helping others. Dives was a guy who knew how to make an impression.

Luke 16:20 says, " But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. (Luke 16:20-21)

Interestingly, the name "Lazarus" means "God helped." The Bible teaches that God helps the poor. Lazarus didn't have much in the way of worldly goods. But one thing he did have was the consolation of God in his heart, and in the end, that would make all the difference.

Lazarus represents the human need at its lowest ebb, and it was the meeting of this need that the Pharisees resented and withstood. Lazarus could very well have been a representative person for all those who stood for the social strata that had no hope but to rely on the favor of those more fortunate.

Impoverished people have a more difficult time providing for the essentials of life. The cost of food, medications, and examinations were probably just too expensive for Lazarus to get the kind of care he really needed. Unfortunately, Lazarus' condition worsened each day until the open sores on his body began to affect his physical condition drastically, and his health began to deteriorate rapidly.

And while the rich man fared sumptuously and had plenty, yet he refused to help the poor and withheld from Lazarus even a scrap of food. The only ones who seemed interested in Lazarus' condition were the dogs, which was like adding insult to injury. In Eastern culture, a dog was considered the lowest of creatures. If someone called you a dog, it was not meant as a compliment. I'm not sure if these hounds were moved with pity or just looking for their next meal.

But one thing is certain; Dives wasn't going to do anything to help poor old Lazarus. But then what happens? Luke 16:22 says, "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died and was buried."

II. The Future is Uncertain

Both men died. Lazarus was carried into Abraham's bosom, but it just says the rich man was buried. They probably buried Lazarus with very little social notice and with nothing to mark his resting place.

But there was probably a huge funeral procession, complete with professional mourners and eulogies for Dives. As rich as he was, he probably had an ornate and very expensive casket and burial plot. Did the angels come to carry away the rich man's body? Hardly. But there was probably much ado about the body of Dives.

Illustration: Casket Room - Have you ever been in a casket room?

- Over here, we have a basic 16 gauge casket with a lovely satin lining.
- And here we have a hand-rubbed Mahogany casket with a stunning velvet lining.
- Now over here, we have a beautiful bronze-plated casket.
- And some prefer our hand-crafted solid oak casket.
- Did I mention that our heavy gauge steel caskets come in 16 different colors?
- And then there's my all-time favorite; the time capsule casket with a 999-year money-back guarantee.

Lazarus and Dives both had a destiny to keep that went beyond the grave. That's the message that Jesus is trying to get across in this story. Where will you spend eternity! Will you, like Lazarus, be born into the presence of God by the holy angels; or will you follow the selfish and wicked ways of the Dives and find your soul facing the eternal torments of Hades?

There is no limbo. Jesus says the ultimate destiny for every one of us is either Heaven or Hell. Each of us is making that decision by the lives we're living right now. Verse 23 says, "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." (Luke 16:23)

Obviously, eyes are something more than the physical organs of the body because Dives physical eyes were buried in the grave. Nor was the torment physical suffering, for Dives' physical sense organs were in his dead body, buried in the

earth. Some teachers who just won't admit to a literal hell want to interpret this and other passages to mean that Hell is not a real place but simply an illustration of bad experiences and unfulfilled desires.

Jesus teaches that the spirit man can feel, think, talk, and hear in the same way that the physical body can. It's what the Apostle Paul refers to when he talks about the "inner man" - The Spirit man in contrast to the physical man.

Unfortunately, Dives was a truly lost man. He had a sinful heart. He had no spiritual connection with God. His mind was consumed with pride and worldliness. And he pampered his physical body with sumptuous foods and lavish clothing. However, he made no preparations for his life in eternity.

What was his response when he winds up in Hades? Luke 16:24 says, "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'" (Luke 16:24)

Many of those, who heard Jesus teach, based their hopes concerning the afterlife upon their racial descent from Abraham. Many people think they will get to Heaven because of their family background, charitable works, or social position. But the New Testament truth is they will probably end up just like ol' Dives. Dives was a typical Pharisee or Sadducee, and even in hades, he clung to the delusion that ancestry gave a person standing and privilege.

In Matthew 7, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Ironically, once, Lazarus desired crumbs from Dive's table but died a beggar. But now Dives desires a drop of water at Lazarus's hand. Look at Abraham's response in verse 25, "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'" (Luke 16:25-26)

III. Too Late for Choices

There were two reasons Dive's request couldn't be answered. It was not that Lazarus and Abraham were unwilling to help Dives, but facts bound them. First of all, they were not permitted to interfere with the law of retribution that God had ordained. And secondly, Lazarus and Dives were separated by an un-passable gulf.

What Jesus teaches here is that the life hereafter is based upon the issues and choices we make in this present life. What was Dives' response? In verse 27, "Then he said, 'I beg you, therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'" (Luke 16:27-28)

If Dives couldn't get help for himself, he finally thinks of the family he left behind with such a poor example. Now that it's too late, he wants Lazarus to go and try to convince them not to come to this terrible place of torment. I heard a sermon once on seven things found in hell that every believer needs to have:

1. A sense of the Mercy of God.
2. A conviction that Hell is real.
3. A consciousness of prayer.
4. A compassion for the lost.
5. A confidence in a believer's testimony.
6. A belief in the Resurrection.
7. A realization of the need for repentance.

You don't want to wait until you get to eternity before you realize just how important it is to be right with God. In verse 29, "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'" (Luke 16:29)

Abraham gives us a perfect challenge for believing and preaching from the Old Testament! God designed the law and the prophecies to awaken our conscience and to arrest the sinful course that leads to everlasting torment. And preachers need to preach the whole Bible. People won't be helped much by a social gospel. The church needs to preach the eternal saving grace of Jesus Christ!

But Dives doesn't give up. In verse 30, he says, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'" (Luke 16:30)

Really? Did that work for Mary and Martha's brother, Lazarus? No. The Jews wanted to kill him again because he believed in Christ. Dives' understanding of repentance is distorted. The faith of God is what saves us, not the personal experience of others. It was just this kind of faulty logic that had sent Dives to Hades in the first place. Paul says in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."

Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation, not an encounter with an angel or a spirit or any other kind of being. Paul tells the Galatians, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8)

All the psychic powers and seances with demon spirits won't prepare your soul for Heaven. It's faith in Jesus Christ that makes the difference in our eternal destiny.

Abraham tell Dives in verse 31, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' (Luke 16:31 NKJV)

Moses and the prophets have much to say about the mercy of God. And had Dives and his five brothers heeded God's law they would also have learned of his great mercy when it counted. If Dives had relied upon the scriptures, he would have known that Deuteronomy 10:12, says, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13 NKJV)

The prophet Micah wrote, "He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 NKJV)

Even if Lazarus came back as a ghost from the dead, it wouldn't convince Dives brothers to walk with God.

Conclusion

Now the message of this parable is not that it's wrong to be rich, or that is a sure sign of spirituality to be poor. God measures our lives by the yardstick of love and compassion. God didn't save Lazarus because he desired crumbs and didn't get them; he saved him because he cared more for the fellowship of God than this world. On the other hand, Dives cared only for the worldly goods of this life, what he could wear, and what he could eat. And he spent every waking moment living only to satisfy the physical senses.

And when his body was worn out, he was a spiritual pauper on the threshold of eternity. The greatest mistake Dives made, and so many people make, is to completely ignore the Word of God and totally disregard the fellowship of true believers. What we do in this life really matters! How we live our lives now is preparing us for our life in eternity. So make a decision to let God into your life each day. Accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as sufficient to save you. And realize that this life is the proving grounds for where we will spend eternity.

So make the right decision.