

The Bible is a book of truth. The Bible does not address just one side of an issue — The Bible speaks to both sides of an issue. For example, the Bible addresses good AND evil, God’s love AND God’s anger, mercy AND judgment, heaven AND hell. Most surprising regarding the truth about heaven and hell is that Jesus talked about it more than any other biblical author. And even more surprising is that he talked about hell and everlasting punishment **twice as much** as He spoke about heaven and eternal life. Jesus addressed hell and everlasting punishment more than all the apostles, prophets, and evangelists in Scripture combined.

Jesus often illustrated truth by telling a story – a parable. So this morning, please give your attention to Jesus’ parable in Luke 16:19-31, as you consider your date with destiny.

19) There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every day. 20) But a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, was lying at his gate. 21) He longed to be filled with what fell from the rich man’s table, but instead the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22) One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23) And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. 24) *“Father Abraham!”* he called out, *“Have mercy 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 flame!”* 25) *“Son,”* Abraham said, *“remember that during your life you received your good things, just as Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, while you are in agony. 26 Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to pass over from here to you cannot; neither can those from there cross over to us.”* 27) *“Father,”* he said, *“then I beg you to send him to my father’s house — 28) because I have five brothers — to warn them, so they won’t also come to this place of torment”* 29) But Abraham said, *“They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.”* 30) *“No, father Abraham,”* he said. *“But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.”* 31) But he told him, *“If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.”*

The longer I live, the more people amaze me. **We live in a generation of incredible choices, and at the same time we live in one of the most procrastinating generations.** We put off until tomorrow what should be serious consideration today. Every time I conduct a funeral, I’m faithful to tell the truth about life and death, knowing full well that seated in front of me are family and friends who will leave that moment, and dismiss or postpone any consideration of

their own destiny. What a risky mistake. **We live also in a generation of chance.** Especially in our part of the world, casinos are full of people willing to take chances with their hard-earned money. The Louisiana Lottery is one of the most successful of all state lotteries. Not surprising. And in a generation of gambling procrastinators and dealers of chance, it is disappointing, yet not surprising, that more and more people attempt to make a deal with their destiny. In the Luke 16 parable, Jesus declared the truth about destiny.

1. **Heaven or Hell – Destiny’s Only Choices.** The Bible presents two and only two choices of eternal destination – heaven or hell. A word study is necessary. *Abraham’s bosom*, used only this one time in the New Testament, references the Talmud, or Jewish commentary on rabbinic law. In the Talmud, Abraham’s bosom was a synonym for heaven. This parable of the rich man and Lazarus involved a lengthy conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees, the legalistic keepers of the law. *Abraham’s bosom* for them referenced heaven. Jesus could just as well used the word *paradise*, to which he declared to the criminal crucified next to him, “*Today you will be with me in paradise.*” The other term that bears our attention is *Hades* – the New Testament Greek equivalent to the Old Testament Hebrew word *sheol*, which described the place of the dead or departed souls. Jesus could have used *gehenna*, the Greek word for *hell*, instead of *hades*, but remember the context – he’s conversing with Jewish Pharisees, who would immediately make the connection between *hades* and *hell*.

Alongside the context, notice immediately the contrast. **Heaven, according to Jesus, is a place of eternal peace.** Consider the description of Lazarus’ condition in verse 25: in his life Lazarus received *bad things*, but now he is *comforted* – all of the turmoil, neglect, and trauma of his earthly existence has now been replaced with comfort, peace, and plenty in his heavenly existence. In graphic contrast, the rich man was enduring *agony* and *torment*. **Hell, according to Jesus, is a place of eternal agony.** In verse 23, Jesus defined the rich man’s condition as *torment*. Agony and torment – these words define excruciating pain, emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual agony and torment – the exact opposite of his enjoyable, extravagant earthly lifestyle.

Jesus is certainly not suggesting here that rich people are destined for hell and poor people are destined for heaven. Our destination depends on a decision of faith to trust in Jesus Christ or a decision of neglect to reject Jesus Christ.

Examine everything Jesus ever said about life and death, and He defined only two choices — heaven or hell. Listen to some of His words:

John 5:28-29 — *Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.*

Matthew 5:29 — *If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into [gehenna] hell.*

Matthew 25:41 -- After painting a verbal picture of the last judgment at which the Lord will divide people as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats, Jesus affirmed to the wicked, “*Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*”

Heaven or Hell – Destiny’s Only Two Choices.

2. **Death is the Great Equalizer!** In this parable, Jesus rotated three dimensions of death as the great equalizer. **Death is the great equalizer because it visits everyone.** *There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every day. But a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, was left at his gate. He longed to be filled with what fell from the rich man’s table, but instead the dogs would come and lick his sores.*” Most of us have never seen someone so wretched as Lazarus - revolting to look at and unbearable to smell. In a few words Jesus pictured him in such poor condition that only the dogs gave him attention. The rich man, however, lived lavishly – wealth, fine clothes, extravagant lifestyle. The implication: he had everything money could buy, and the money to buy it. But, the time came when BOTH of them died. Many issues of life are uncertain, but death is not one of them. Death visits everyone. Hebrews 9:27 says, “*It is appointed for people to die once – and after this, judgment.*” John Donne defined death as “*the great leveler.*”

Death is the great equalizer because it separates spirit from body. In

every generation, including ours, many believe that death is the end — that when a person dies, there is no more existence. But Jesus disagreed. Who will you believe? I’ll take my chances with Jesus. Lazarus died, and after he died, the angels carried him to Abraham’s side, where he lived in eternal comfort. The same thing happened to the rich man that happened to Lazarus. He died – his spirit separated from his body, – *And being in torment...* No imagining or spiritualizing – he was alive and he was feeling all of it. Don’t think that death brings an end to life. Death only separates spirit from body.

Death is the great equalizer because it is only the beginning of eternal existence. In his agony and torment, the rich man called to Abraham, “*Father Abraham....have mercy 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 flame.*” But Abraham replied, “*Son, remember that during your life you received your good things, just as Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, while you are in agony.*” [24] Death ends earthly existence, but it doesn’t end – death is only the beginning of eternal existence. These words right here refute and disclaim the false doctrines

of “soul sleep” and “purgatory.” I really believe that if the soul sleeps when we die, Jesus would have said that both of these two men died, and their soul slept until a certain time when God awakened them. I really believe that if purgatory were real, Jesus would have said that both of these men died and immediately were sent to purgatory. The only problem with soul sleep and purgatory is that neither of them exist in the Bible. Jesus said that Lazarus died, and IMMEDIATELY was carried to Abraham’s side. Jesus said that the rich man died and IMMEDIATELY woke up in hell. There is no intermediate state of existence. It’s either “*absent from the body, and immediately present with the Lord in heaven*” or “*absent from the body, and immediately in the torment and agony of hell.*”

3. **No second chances after death.** Again, Jesus’ words are crystal clear. **Heaven and Hell both describe forever.** The rich man was in such agony that he begged for Lazarus to come and dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue. He wasn’t begging for a drink of water — just a drop of water. Not possible. There are no more solemn words that verse 26 — “*Besides all this, a great chasm (a gaping opening deep and wide) has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to pass over from here to you cannot: neither can those from there cross over to us.*” At death, destiny for both the saved and the lost is permanently set and eternally fixed. After we die, all of us are alive and conscious, and our eternal condition has been irrevocably determined.

There are no atheists in hell. The minute they landed there, they became believers. In fact, this rich man became such a believer that he begged to have Lazarus sent back from the dead to speak to his five brothers that they would not join him there in hell. [27] It didn’t take the rich man long to believe in a literal hell. C.S. Lewis saw a gravestone inscription that read, “Here lies an atheist — all dressed up and no place to go.” Lewis responded, “I bet he wishes that were so!”

Because there are no second chances after death, repentance is urgent. Jesus spoke candidly about the rich man’s brothers — “*If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.*” [31] Nothing I could say or add this morning to make it any more urgent. Jesus declared that life tends to harden us, and it becomes more improbable that a person will believe the longer they put it off. I am keenly aware that there are in this audience those who have put off a decision about their destiny. May I beg you — don’t put it off any longer. The longer you resist, the harder it will be. And the time will come when you may never have another chance.

Don’t Be Caught Dead Without Jesus! I don’t believe in magic. I don’t believe in genies who grant wishes. But if I could have one wish granted, it would be that every Christian could get a glimpse of hell. If we could just see hell for five

minutes, it would change us from passive, inactive, unconcerned Christians into passionate, powerful, zealous evangelists. No longer could we speak so lightly of hell. No longer could we live as though everybody was on their way to heaven. No longer could we rest easy when so many of our neighbors, friends, and families are on their way to eternal death. Hell is a real place, a place of emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual torment, not because I believe it, but because Jesus said so. The only opportunity you have to choose your destiny is BEFORE you die!