

Sermon – Luke 16.19-31 (Trinity 1 – 2024)

Heaven and Hell

Let us pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, we beseech You so to rule and govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not, like the rich man, hear Your Word in vain, and become so devoted to things temporal that we forget things eternal; but that we readily and according to our ability serve those who are in need, and not defile ourselves with carousing and pride; in trial and misfortune keep us from despair, and grant us to put our trust wholly in Your fatherly help and grace, so that in faith and Christian patience we may overcome all things; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹⁹ "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

²⁰ "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

²¹ "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

²³ "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ "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.'

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.'

²⁶ '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.'

²⁷ "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,

²⁸ 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹ "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

³⁰ "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

³¹ "But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed,

One question that always accompanies this text is whether Jesus is portraying a historic event here or is telling a parable. Usually the gospel writer led the parable with words like, "He spoke a parable to them..." or begin the parable itself with words like, "The kingdom of heaven is like...". You do not have either of those in this account. Furthermore, parables don't name any of the people in the story. But here we have a man named "Lazarus." However, the account begins, "There was a certain rich man," and this is similar to some parables, though this language isn't exclusively used for parables. Also, there are strange things in this account. Could the rich man in reality see Lazarus at Abraham's bosom? Could there be conversation between those in heaven and hell?

It is not clear. And Luther said that it is not necessary to determine whether it is history or a parable. It doesn't affect the truths that we can glean from this text. There are several things we can take from it, but today we'll consider first the clear teachings about heaven and hell.

First, there is a heaven and hell. Hell is a place of torment. It is described as a place of torment four times in the text. There is anguish in the flames. The rich man pleaded for even a drop of water to cool his tongue and give him just a moment of relief from the torment. But there is no relief possible. There is no hope of any relief in hell. There is no hope of any end to it or any escape. Jesus called hell "Gehenna." This was the name of a valley south of Jerusalem, where trash and sewage was dumped. There the maggots would crawl, and fires would burn the refuse. Jesus used this repulsive place as a picture of hell, where, He said, "**the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched**" (Mk 9:48). So, there, too, we see hell as a place where torment continues without end.

The worst part of hell is the spiritual torment. They are forever separated from the love of God. They must instead, forever endure, the just wrath of God in full knowledge of their guilt and shame.

Hell is real. And perhaps we would rather not think about it, but we must. And we must acknowledge the fact that many people are there and many will continue going to this place of torment. People we know, even people we love will be going there.

But heaven is real, too. And we know this, not because some have claimed to have been there and have returned. We know this because the Bible tells us. To be in Abraham's bosom means to be in heaven. There Lazarus is comforted. There he has eternal rest from all his troubles he endured on earth. This is "Paradise" as Jesus told the believing thief on the cross next to Him. In heaven is perfect joy, peace, and happiness. We can't imagine how

wonderful it is, because it is so different than our experience on earth. There will no longer be sin or the sinful flesh to contend with. There will be no more sorrow, sadness, nor trouble. Christ dwells in the midst of the people, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

So who goes where? Those who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin are going to heaven. Those who do not believe are going to hell. Jesus in our text puts it in terms of whether one receives God's Word or not. Let's look at that a little bit.

Notice in our text that Jesus doesn't focus so much on the faith of Lazarus. He focuses more on the spiritual condition of rich man and his sin. The reason for this is because the Pharisees were there scoffing at Jesus. Jesus had been preaching against the love of money. And the Pharisees loved their money. So we had a confrontation here and Jesus spoke this story about the rich man and Lazarus.

The rich man worshipped Mammon. He worshiped his riches. It is not wrong to have riches, since God blessed Abraham and David and other with much riches. The problem is making money one's god. He idolized his wealth and the rich clothing and feasts that he was able to enjoy because of it. His idolatry also showed itself in his greed and lack of love toward Lazarus who was in need. Lazarus was laid at his gate, and seeing his poverty on a regular basis surely would be an inconvenience to the love of this rich man's wealth. Yet instead of repenting of his sin, letting go of the grip of his idol, and giving aid to poor Lazarus, he dulled his conscience. He hardened his heart.

Really, he refused to listen to Moses and the Prophets. He refused to repent of his idolatry. He refused to believe in the mercy of God who had blessed Him so greatly. He placed his faith in those things that do not last, and in the end he was left with nothing, except the unending torment in flames.

There was salvation for him--it was in Moses and the Prophets, but he would not listen. It was too late for him, but he wanted his brothers to be warned lest they also go to the place of torment, but Jesus made the point, using the words of Abraham, saying, "**They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.**" In the Word of God, there their salvation lies. There is the truth of God's mercy in the Messiah, which forgives sins and delivers man from the place of torment and gives life eternal at Abraham's bosom.

But Lazarus is the one who goes to heaven. He goes, not because he deserves it because he suffered so. How many unbelievers suffer greatly in life, and think that in death, they will find relief that they deserve. However, they will find more terrible suffering, because of

their unbelief. Lazarus goes to heaven, because he heeded the Word of God. He believed in the Lord God, and the promises of the Messiah. Though he suffered greatly on earth, he believed. As the Psalmist said, **“I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living”** (Ps 27:13). And trusting in that goodness of the LORD, he saw it in the land of the living—in heaven.

Dear believers, we and everyone on the face of this planet deserve the never-ending torment of hell because of our sin. There is no such thing as a small sin, is there!? But Moses and the Prophets and the Apostles, they testify of Christ, our Savior. Hear them and repent of your damnable sins—those lustful thoughts, those harsh words, and those deeds you failed to do in love for your neighbor. Repent and believe the good news of your Savior. Trusting their Word—really God’s Word, since God moved them to write the words they wrote—trusting their Word is to trust in Jesus. Jesus, true God and true man, has answered for your sins by His death. He has taken them all away and has clothed you in His perfect righteousness. Through Jesus alone, you go to the Father in heaven. Because of Jesus, you are heirs of life in heaven. There you and all who believed in the Lord like Abraham, will be with the Lord, and He will wipe away all your tears. If there will be any tears, they will be tears of joy!

It is through this gracious Word of God’s mercy, life, and salvation that we and those of the world are spared from hell, and are given heaven. May God preserve the ministry of this Word among us for the salvation of our souls, and may He strengthen us, the Church, who have this saving Word, to bring it out to the world for the salvation of souls. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.