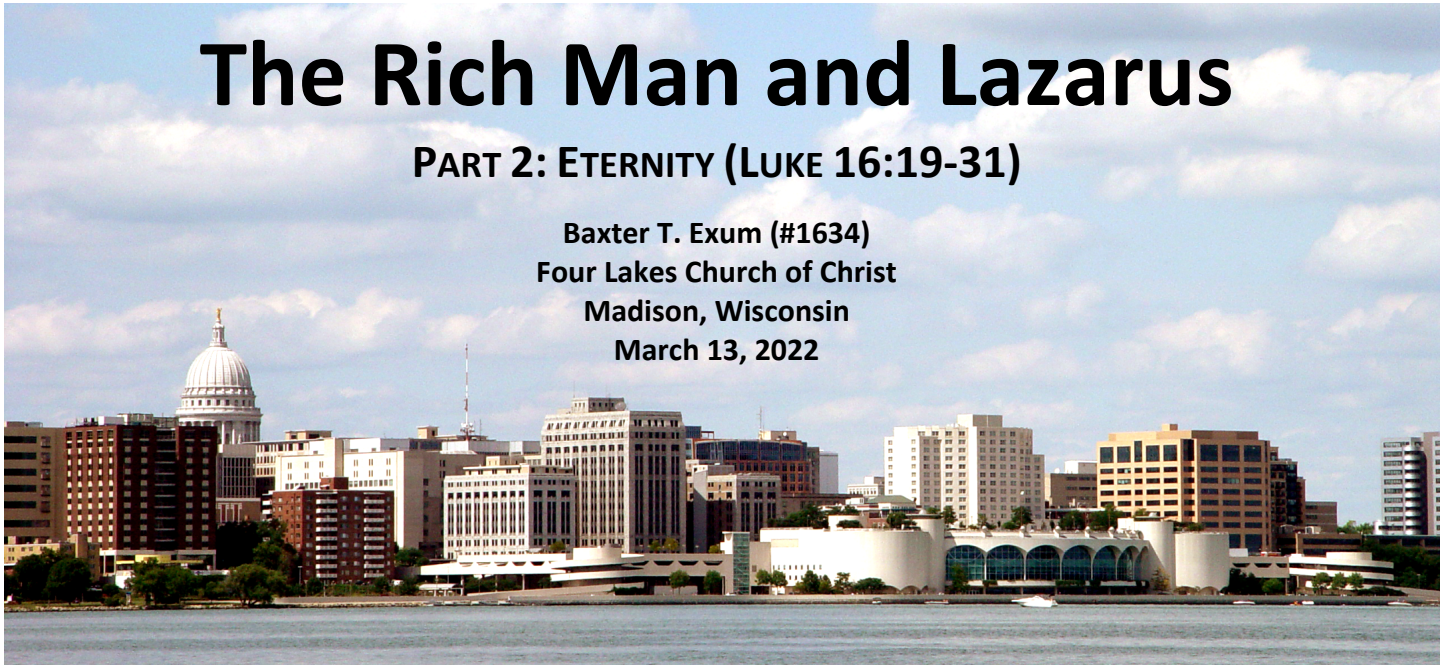


The Rich Man and Lazarus

PART 2: ETERNITY (LUKE 16:19-31)

Baxter T. Exum (#1634)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
March 13, 2022



It is good to be together this morning. We do plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper right after we study the word of God today, so if you do not yet have the elements for the Supper, this would be a great time to get those. And if you are visiting with us, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online. The QR code is on the wall up here, it's on the bulletin, it's on the bulletin board in the entryway, and it can also be found on our website at fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

We are here today to share the good news: We sinned, but the Lord Jesus took our place on the cross. We respond to the good news by obeying it; that is, we turn away from sin, we confess our faith Jesus as the Son of God, and we allow ourselves to be immersed with him, a burial in water, for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and we come up out of the water to live a brand-new life.

As usual, we do have several examples this week. The first comes to us through the Gospel Broadcasting Network. They say that "Jaheim, Tristan, and Joseph were all exchanging emails back and forth with GBN after watching The Authentic Christian Podcast and other GBN programming. They wanted to be baptized the same way as the people in the New Testament were. We connected them to the Richmond Hill church of Christ outside of Savannah, Georgia where they studied [and] were baptized into Christ...." We have the Army and Alaska represented in the picture here, and we are thankful for their example in obeying the gospel down in Georgia.

And then, like last week, we have more good news from Ukraine, with the first of these coming from a Ukrainian woman who was baptized after fleeing to Poland. This comes to us from Jeff Abrams, who says, "Good news from Warsaw Poland, as on this International Women's Day (this past Tuesday)... our dear friend Polina becomes a true Woman of God. Our freshly washed sister has given us some desperately needed good news in these dark times." We rejoice with Polina this morning!

And then there were two more baptized somewhere in Ukraine this week as well. We have Dennis on the left and Anna on the right. Dennis is married to a woman baptized several years ago, and his wife says, "We are now one family. God is so good!" So again, some great news during a dark time in Ukraine. They say, "God can turn times of great tragedy into times of rejoicing! Praise God!" Amen to that! I love the baptistery, by the way. Also, I don't know whether you can see this, but I love the "Stranger Things" t-shirt worn by the man standing on the

left. We are thankful for good news, and we invite you to follow the example set by these new brothers and sisters this week. Please get in touch if we can help in any way.

This morning, we return to a request that has come in from several of our members over the last year: What happens when we die? As we just briefly mentioned last week, unless the Lord returns first, all of us will die. And not only that, but until that time comes, all of us will continue to lose our loved ones to death. And so, we wonder, and we want to know: What happens when we die?

Last week, then, we started answering that question by looking to Jesus, and specifically, by looking at what Jesus said concerning the rich man and Lazarus. This morning, we return to this passage, found in Luke 16. I would encourage you, then, to be turning with me to Luke 16 (p. 1633).

Last week, we focused on verses 19-24, where Jesus makes a CONTRAST between these two men, in life and in death. In life, the rich man lived in luxury as Lazarus suffered in hunger and misery at the rich man's gate, but in death, the contrast is flipped as Lazarus is escorted by the angels into the presence of Abraham, while the rich man finds himself in absolute torment. So, we have a contrast in life and also in death.

This week, I'd like for us to go back to the text in Luke 16, this time focusing on the ETERNAL aspect of what the Lord describes for us. The eternal part comes in verses 25-26. We will re-read the whole passage in just a moment, but before we do, I'd like to do just a brief overview of the afterlife based on a number of passages, and then when we go back to Luke 16 in just a bit, perhaps we can keep the visual in mind.

Several years ago, we looked at this illustration first made by someone down at World Video Bible School, and I did get their permission to share it again, because I think it does a pretty good job summarizing a fairly complex combination of passages. On the left side, we have the earth, representing this life. Contrary to what the image seems to indicate, I don't think everyone in South America is lost, and I don't think you have to live in Mexico or Central America to go to heaven. That is not what this graphic is teaching. My dad always said, "There is no such thing as a perfect illustration." Amen! But the image illustrates that in this life we have a choice, don't we? Here in this life, we start heading in one of two very different directions. Here on earth, though, is a time for choosing. Here on earth, we have the ability to go back and forth. I might compare it to what is sometimes described as "open enrollment." Many of us are familiar with the concept. There is a time toward the end of the year when we have an open window for making a choice about our health insurance. But, the window is not open permanently. We have to choose before the deadline. Spiritually, that time is right now, and the window remains open either until we die or until the Lord returns, whichever comes first.

On the chart, then, we come to "death." The artist has illustrated this with the **"narrow gate"** and the **"wide gate,"** going back to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:13-14. A vast majority are heading down that wide path leading to destruction, but a **"few"** are being saved. And at the point of death, that choice becomes permanent.

That middle circle, then, represents what happens immediately after death. Death is a time of separation, a separation of the body and the soul. We learn from James 2:26 that, **"...the body without the spirit is dead."** That's what death is, the separation of the body and the spirit. According to Ecclesiastes 12:7, at that point, **"...the spirit will return to God who gave it."** Or, as Moses says in Psalm 90:10, **"As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone, and we fly away."** In other words, the body may die, but the spirit leaves, we **"fly away."** The spirit and the body do not "sleep" together, but there is a separation at the moment of death. So, the body stays here,

while the soul (or the spirit) continues to live on in eternity. I would label all of this middle circle as being “hades.” Hades is simply “the place of the dead.” Hades is a Greek concept, while the Old Testament refers to this place as *“Sheol,”* or the place of the dead. You might remember Job speaking of God’s power over death in Job 14:13-14, where Job speaks to God and says, *“Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath returns to you, that you would set a limit for me and remember me! If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my struggle I will wait until my change comes.”* Sheol, then, is a Hebrew word simply referring to the place of the dead. It is a place of waiting.

As I understand it, there is a division in Hades, indicated on the image up here as a division between Paradise and Torment. In Luke 16, the Paradise side of this is described as *“Abraham’s bosom.”* The torment side doesn’t really have a formal name, but the place seems to be described very briefly in 2 Peter 2:4, where Peter says, *“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.”* The word translated as *“hell”* in this passage is only used here and goes back to the word TARTAROS. And we note, in that context, it is not permanent. God put these rebellious angels in this place, into these pits of darkness, where they are *“reserved for judgment.”* So, judgment is still coming. It’s obviously not a perfect illustration, but I might compare this to the county jail. There are some people who are guilty, they know they are guilty, the judge knows they are guilty, the jury knows they are guilty, everybody knows they are guilty, but they haven’t yet been sentenced. And from jail, once they face the judge for sentencing, they will be transferred to prison – and there are certainly some similarities between jail and prison. Again, it’s not a perfect illustration, but I hope it helps. Both jail and prison have bars and narrow windows, both have guards and bad food, both are punishment, but one is temporary, while the other is permanent. This would be the difference between this place of torment in Hades and hell itself.

In this same category of “hades,” we also have “Paradise” (on the top). This is where those who are saved go when they die. This is where Lazarus is. We think of Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43, *“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”* And as with the comparison between Tartaros and Hell, Paradise and Heaven are also similar (in that they are places of rest and reward), but Paradise is temporary while heaven is permanent. There are similarities between Paradise and Heaven. In Revelation 2:7, for example, we read about the tree of life being found in Paradise, and in Revelation 22:2, we have the tree of life being found in Heaven. There is some overlap. God is there, it is a place of peace and rest, it is a place of reunion, and so on. But, Paradise is where we go immediately at the point of death, but only until the judgment, when we go to heaven. It may not be critical here, but my understanding is that when the saved die, they don’t go to heaven. Of course, when people speak of their loved ones being in heaven or celebrating a “heavenly birthday,” I generally don’t object, “Oh no, they’re not!” but instead I think we need to have a bit of humility here. There are many things we do not understand. Nevertheless, we know that Paradise is in Hades, because Jesus (after his death on the cross) fulfills a prophecy from Psalm 16:10 that God would not abandon his soul to Sheol. When Peter quotes this passage in Acts 2:27, applying it to Jesus, he uses the word *“hades,”* indicating that hades and Sheol are the same. Jesus would not be abandoned in hades, indicating that he would come back from the dead.

Now, at this point, the King James Version of the Bible really throws us for a loop, because 400 years ago the translators for some reason decided to translate the Greek word *“hades”* into English as *“hell.”* So, if you look in the KJV at Acts 2:47, you find a reference to the soul of Christ not being abandoned in *“hell.”* That is an inaccurate translation of *“hades,”* and it has led to some serious misunderstandings through the years. In what is commonly referred to as the Apostles’ Creed, for example, the creed says that Jesus “...was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell.” But no, Jesus did not go to hell for three days! Yes, he went to Hades, but Hades is not hell. Hades is the place of the dead, and the good side of Hades is Paradise (which is where he

said he would meet up with the thief on the cross later that day). Back to our chart: Please notice the **“great fixed gulf,”** indicated by that green band right there in the middle. This comes from the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus. We will get back to that in just a moment. But from there, we have the Judgment Day, where the saved receive their eternal reward, and the lost continue on in eternal punishment.

This is the overview; so, with this in mind, let’s go back to Luke 16:19-31, the words of Jesus,

¹⁹ “Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. ²⁰ And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, ²¹ and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. ²² Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’

²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’

²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

So, we’ve already looked at the CONTRAST in verses 19-21, so let’s continue this week by focusing on the ETERNAL part of this (in verses 25-26). And then, we hope to wrap it up next week by looking at the rich man’s special request and Abraham’s answer (in verses 27-31). This morning, though, I want us to focus on the ETERNAL aspect of this passage.

- I. **And I’d like for us to start in verse 25, where we find that this next phase of both men’s lives is clearly tied (in some way) to the way they lived in this life; in other words, we are looking at some ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES in this passage.**

In verse 25, Abraham responds to the rich man’s request to send Lazarus to come dip his finger in water and to put that finger on his tongue, and the response is, **“Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.”** I hope we realize that we only have a small part of the picture here. Lazarus is saved, not merely because he is poor, and the rich man is lost, not just because he is rich, but there obviously has to be more to it. Remember the context: The Pharisees who heard this for the first time were **“lovers of money”** (back in verse 14). So, that seems to be the issue here. I would also note that Abraham addresses the rich man as his **“child.”** There is a sense of family here; however, Abraham is still not able to fix this. The time for crossing over, the time for

changing behavior has already passed. And so, it certainly seems to me that the rich man is suffering the consequences for the way he had lived his life. He's being punished – not for being rich, but perhaps for how he treated the poor. And I say this because Abraham mentions Lazarus. To me, then, Lazarus is relevant here. And he's relevant in this scenario, because the rich man most likely had to practically step over him to get inside his mansion. Remember: The rich man seems to know Lazarus by name. These two men know each other! And so, there is a REASON for the contrast in life and death that we noted last week. This is not random, but this contrast is a CONSEQUENCE, an eternal consequence. As I see it, the rich man is suffering because he had misused his riches in this life. I wouldn't swear my soul on this – maybe he's suffering in torment because he's a murderer or an adulterer or a thief – but because of the contrast in this passage, it sure seems as if the use of his wealth is the real issue here, ***"Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony."*** This is the reason for his suffering. His suffering is not random, but his suffering is a consequence – the consequence of self-centered and arrogant selfish living!

The rich man had apparently ignored God's law in this matter. We think of Deuteronomy 15:7-8, where God said, ***"If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks."*** Did the rich man freely open his hand to Lazarus at his gate? Apparently not. Instead, he seems to have hardened his heart, just as God warned him not to do, and there are some consequences for that. On the other hand, we have many passages promising blessings on those who are generous to the poor. In Proverbs 14:21, ***"He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor."*** Is the rich man happy at this point? No! Or, we might think of Proverbs 22:9, where Solomon says, ***"He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor."*** The rich man certainly doesn't strike me as being ***"generous."*** If you remember from last week: Lazarus wasn't eating the scraps from the rich man's table, but he was ***"longing to be fed"*** with those scraps. We never saw any actual feeding going on in this passage. Or, we might also think of Proverbs 21:13, where Solomon says, ***"He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered."*** And isn't that exactly what's going on here in Luke 16? The rich man has apparently shut his ear to the cry of the poor, and now, God is refusing to answer. It is too late. These are some eternal consequences. After death, it is too late to change. The time for "open enrollment" has come to an end.

Before we move on from this, I would remind us again that both the saved and the lost live on in some form after this life on earth is over. And not only that, but it certainly seems as if we will be able to remember. The rich man can remember (for eternity) that he chose this path. That's what Abraham is suggesting here, ***"Child, remember."*** For eternity, we will be able to think back to choices we made in this life.

Before we move on, I would also note that although we tend to focus on the suffering in this passage, let's not forget that Lazarus' suffering has come to an end, and so, there are some eternal consequences in a good sense. Lazarus is being ***"comforted"*** in the next life. In Revelation 21:4, John says that as we enter the heavenly city, God ***"...will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*** As I see it, some of us will be crying when we show up to the next life – perhaps due to the pain of disease or death, maybe due to the pain of separation, but the Lord has promised to wipe the tears from our eyes. Death, then, brings some eternal consequences, either comfort or torment. And I should also note that the consequences are delayed, aren't they? For most of his life, the rich man probably thought he was getting away with it; but, ***"the wages of sin is death"*** (Romans 6:23), and (in Galatians 6:7-8), ***"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man***

sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.” On the other hand, for most of his life, Lazarus very easily could have been discouraged, “How long, oh Lord?” But, as Paul continues (in Galatians 6), ***“...the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*** The way we live now has some eternal consequences.

- II. This leads us to verse 26, where we are introduced to the GREAT CHASM, and in terms of eternity, the idea here is that there is no crossing over, in either direction, forever – it is an ETERNAL SEPARATION.

As Abraham says (in verse 26), ***“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.”*** What comes after this life is eternal and inescapable. This isn’t like jail or prison where there is a chance of escape, or where we might be released on appeal, or where we might get out early for good behavior. No, this continues on forever, with no crossing over. And one thing I noticed this time that I might have missed in the past, is how Abraham points out ***“that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able.”*** What in the world is that about? Why is that even mentioned here? Why would anyone even consider crossing over from the good place to the bad place? We aren’t told, but I’m guessing that some of the good-hearted people in paradise might be the kind who would be willing to go provide relief. These are people who would have crossed a great chasm in this life to help someone in need. But Abraham says that they ***“will not be able.”*** It is impossible to cross over, in either direction. There is no relief, no reincarnation, and as I just briefly mentioned last week, no purgatory. Abraham doesn’t say, “Well, rich man, just work it off. A few more years, and you can cross over.” Nothing like that at all.

Purgatory, of course, is a doctrine completely made up by the Catholic Church. They literally say that in their own material. As they describe it, purgatory is the process of purification that’s needed to enter the joy of heaven. So, you suffer for a while, and then they let you in. Some of you know that years ago we had an elderly Catholic neighbor down in Janesville. We were pretty close to the woman and helped her out here and there as we could. She was the reason we had a “no smoking” sign in the church bathroom (but that’s another story). She never married and lived with her elderly brother. He passed away, and several months after his funeral, our elderly neighbor friend came over and met me in our backyard almost crying. She said, “Baxter, I just got a letter from the church saying that Bob is suffering in Purgatory, and that if I want to shorten the length of his suffering, that I need to send them \$500 to sponsor a Mass that will get him out of Purgatory. What do I do? What do I do?” At that point, I am beyond angry, that a so-called religious group would shake down a poor old woman, terrorizing her with a threat like that. But it was eye-opening as to why they would invent a doctrine like that. Money! Nevertheless, this isn’t an option here in Luke 16. Father Abraham says nothing about a \$500 mass. The separation is permanent.

In life, the chasm could have been crossed so easily – a kind word, inviting Lazarus into his home, a place to stay, a good meal – the gap grew wider and wider every time the Rich Man stepped over Lazarus at his gate – but at the point of death, that chasm becomes absolutely impossible to cross. And so, when we think about it that way, we realize that the “great chasm” (for us, right now) is really a gap between the way we are living and how God tells us to live in scripture. Here in this life, that gap can be crossed; not so in the next. This is why the prophets would say things like, ***“Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near”*** (Isaiah 55:6), because there is a time coming when God will NOT be near. The time to cross that gap is now. Otherwise, there will be an eternal separation.

Conclusion:

I haven't mentioned it until now, but we've been looking at a picture of the Grand Canyon up here. I believe this was taken from the north rim of the Grand Canyon on Wednesday afternoon, July 25, 2012 (almost ten years ago). We were visiting my sister-in-law in Fort Collins, so we came down from the northeast, from Colorado, and we started by visiting the north rim, at Bright Angel Point, one of the most terrifying hikes I've ever been on, mainly because I was with my family. The stakes were high. We actually walked out on the point into the canyon, with sheer drop-offs on both sides at times. At one point, my wife was hugging the cliff face, and a little kid scooted past her and said, "It's okay, lady!" He knew that it was not okay! But it was truly awesome to look out over that canyon from the north rim and to see the south rim miles upon miles out there in the distance. Well, when we got back in the car, we left the north rim, and we started heading for the south rim.

If you have been there, you know that it is a long drive. We drove and drove, and then we drove some more. And this is a deserted area. After a number of miles, we got to the Historic Navajo Bridge, many miles upstream, where the road actually crosses what will become the Grand Canyon. And then we drove some more, and we drove and we drove, and we finally got to the south rim right around sunset that night. And that night, looking out over that canyon, we took a moment to read the account of the rich man and Lazarus. And I reminded my family that when this life is over, we do not want to be separated like that, with some of us over here and some of us over there. We made a decision that night that we would do everything in our power to end up together, on the right side (the paradise side) of that great chasm, when this life is over. And I would invite you to make that same decision this morning. What is coming next will continue on for eternity, with no crossing over. It is important that we end up on the right side. God has made it possible, but we are the ones who make the choice. If I can help in any way, please pull me aside.

Before Clayton leads us in a song to prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for sending Jesus to tell us about the life that's coming after this one. We are thankful for the warning, and we are thankful for the encouragement. You are the God of both the living and the dead, and we trust that you want what is best for us. This morning, we pray that we would make choices in this life that honor you, and we pray that all of us here today will find ourselves together with each other in Paradise when this life is over.

We pray for Charles this morning, that you would comfort him concerning the loss of his brother. We pray for peace in this world. We pray that all of us might be able to live each day in a way that we can look back with no regrets.

We ask all of this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com