

09/25/2022

16th S. a. Pentecost *Luke 16:19-31*
ILC/FELC/ZLC Pastor Huber

“Oh, the PLACE(S) You’ll Go!!!”

I’m not alone in **doing** this, but I have a default **gift** I occasionally give to high school or college graduates. It’s Dr. Suess’ book, *Oh, the PLACES You’ll Go!*...a whimsical, optimistic travelog of **places** your life’s journey might take you. But out of the 38 parables Jesus taught, no other parable than today’s from Luke 16 makes it **clearer** that the end of life’s journey will **ultimately** take you to **one** of only **TWO** places you can go—either **HEAVEN** or **HELL**.

Through the years, I’ve enjoyed reading **epitaphs**. Perhaps you’ve heard the story about the **epitaph** one man left on his **tombstone**. It said, *“Consider, young man, as you walk by, as you are **now**, so once was I. As I am **now**, you soon shall be, so **prepare**, young man to follow **me**.”* Although that sounded pretty **profound**, somebody still took a **knife** to it and scratched a **response** on the tombstone that read, *“To follow you is not my **intent**; until I know which way you **went!**”* Again, there are only two different **PLACES** you **can** go after death. Jesus assured His disciples with these words before His departure back into heaven: *“I go to prepare a **PLACE** for you.”* The appointed Gospel lesson for this morning helps us get a better understanding of how we **GET** to that **PLACE**.

In this morning’s parable of the **rich man** and **Lazarus**, Jesus pulled back the veil between **this** world and the **next**, clearly revealing that, *“Yes, Virginia, there really **IS** a heaven **AND** a hell.”* The King James translation names the rich man “dives” (Latin for “rich”), but Jesus doesn’t actually give this character a name. However, He **does** give the **begger** the name **Lazarus** (meaning *“God furnishes **help**”*), the only parable in which Jesus gives a **name** to a character, which is why some preachers still argue about whether this is a **made up** parable or Jesus was talking about a real **incident**.

You heard this story read to you earlier, but if your short-term memory is evaporating into the ether like **mine**, here’s a little summary: An extremely rich man, dressed to the **nines** and living in the lap of **luxury**, was throwing sumptuous **dinner parties DAILY**, while a destitute beggar named **Lazarus**, covered with oozing **sores**, lay at the rich man’s gate vying with the **street dogs** for the **discarded bread scraps** the table guests **tossed** after using them like **napkins** to wipe their greasy faces.

As it happened, both men **died**, but while angels carried the soul of Lazarus to Abraham's bosom (**heaven**), the rich man found himself sizzling in Hades (**hell**) as he arrogantly looks up to ask "Father Abraham" to command Lazarus to run an **errand** for him by making Lazarus dip the end of his own finger in some **water** and come **down to hell** to cool the rich man's toasty tongue. But Abraham basically reminds him that "the first shall be **last** and the last **first**". In the same split second, **death** has now brought about a **role reversal**, and it's **Lazarus'** turn to be comforted. Besides, there's a huge **chasm** between heaven and hell that doesn't **allow** crossing over for any takeout deliveries.

So **next**, the rich man asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his **five brothers** before they end up in hell, as **well!** But Abraham **rejects** the request, reminding him that they **already** have the **Scriptures** to warn them, and if they reject **God's own Word**, than it wouldn't do any good for the appearance of some **zombie** at the door to try to **scare** the hell **OUT** of them.

So then, what kinds of things can we **learn** from this parable of Jesus as we travel through **OUR** life's journey also hoping to find **OUR "place"** in God's plan not only for **THIS** life but also for our place in the **life to COME**? What we can **learn**? For **ONE** thing, we learn the heaven and hell spoken of by Jesus are **real places**—one place to **seek** and the other to **avoid at all costs!**

A few weeks ago, I attended the Amador Band concert in Pine Grove where, among many other delightful selections, they played a montage of songs from Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story" that included my favorite song, "**Somewhere**". Part of the simple lyrics say, "*There's a **PLACE** for us, Somewhere a **PLACE** for us, Someday, Somewhere, We'll find a new way of **living**, We'll find a way of **forgiving**, Somewhere, Somehow, Someday, **SomeWHERE.***"

Frankly, the vast majority of people in our world **treat the places** of heaven **AND** hell in their life's journey merely as **concepts** that are "somewhere, out there" but not literal **realities**. But **Scripture** assures us that each **IS** a tangible **PLACE** people **WILL** one day **be consigned to**—**ONE** to where redeemed and forgiven sinners can **rejoice** in the constant presence of God's peace and joy. And the **OTHER** a **PLACE** where God and the hope of salvation **will never again be present**, simply because—**rich OR poor**—they didn't think they **NEEDED** God!

In Jesus' parable, Lazarus and the rich man **both** die, but this is where the similarity ends, because **one** goes to **heaven**—placed there comfortably for **eternity**—the hunger is **ended**, the sores are **healed**, and the tears have all been **dried**. But as for the **other**, **his** misery is just **beginning!** The luxurious comfort he knew on **earth** is only a fading memory in the midst of his agony and suffering in hell. And now **he's**

the one longing for **relief**—symbolized by his request for even a chilled droplet of water on the tip of his tongue.

The interesting thing about this parable to **ME** is that it doesn't specifically tell us **WHY** one went to heaven and the other to hell. We're left to interpret that for ourselves. Could it be that the rich man went to hell simply for being **RICH**? And that Lazarus went to heaven simply because he was **POOR**? **Obviously**, there's much more to it than **that!**

At the end of their respective lives, the rich man's hands were **full** and the poor man's hands were **empty**. In other words, the rich man was clinging to his own **wealth, power, and prosperity**, and he had need of **nothing**. He was **self-sufficient** and perhaps thought he was **invincible**. It's kind of like that famous story about Muhammed Ali when he was at the height of his boxing career. He was on a commercial airline, and upon take-off, the flight attendant asked Ali to put on his **seat belt**, but Ali refused. *"The plane will not take off until you put on your seat belt,"* the flight attendant warned. Ali stood up and shouted, *"I am **Superman**, and **Superman** don't need no seat belt!"* To which the attendant responded with her best double-negative, *"But **Superman** don't need no **plane**, **neither!**"*

So the rich man in the parable saw that **his** hands were **full** and thought he had need of anything he couldn't obtain with his own two hands. But the **poor man's hands** were **empty**: no **house**, no **money**, no **titles... nothing**. *"Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling."* The poor man had need of **everything**... leaving his hands empty and wide open to gratefully receive the gift only **GOD** could give him: the gift of **GRACE**. **That's why** one went to heaven, and the other **DIDN'T**. Not because **WEALTH** automatically imbues the ridiculously rich with **righteousness** anymore than **POVERTY** imbues the poor with spiritual **worthiness**. It's all about the willingness to receive God's **GRACE**.

When we come before God, we can come clinging to all our worldly stuff—to our car keys, house keys, Visa Card, college degrees, and professional **titles**...leaving our hands & arms hands quite **full**...but our hearts quite **empty**...**OR** we can come to God without **anything**...humble, broken, needy...and **repentant**...ready to receive—not what Father **Abraham** but only what the **Heavenly** Father can give us through His Only Son, Jesus Christ—the absolutely free gift of **salvation!**

Even In Jesus' day people like the Pharisees made the mistake of thinking **wealth** was connected to **goodness** and God's blessing! Therefore, **wealthy** people were rich because they were **good**, while poor people lived in **poverty** because they were **bad**, and thus out of God's favor. But your net worth has nothing to do with your **worth**

in the eyes of a God Whom we're told, *"Desires that **all** people—rich OR poor—would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."*

Riches don't guarantee **RIGHTEOUSNESS**. There's nothing wrong with being wealthy, as long as you acknowledge God as the **source** of your wealth and use those resources to His glory. But it's obvious this rich man in the parable was a self-made, self-centered person whose sin wasn't in being **wealthy**, but in ignoring the needs of people like Lazarus who was begging at his doorstep every day. That's why, once when Jesus was invited to a party by a rich man, he said to him in Luke 14:12-14, *"When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

We also learn **another** very important thing from Jesus' parable that I want to spend the remaining moments of our time on, and it comes to us right out of **HELL**, compliments of the rich man who, while toasting over an open fire, finally starts to think about someone besides **himself!** Suddenly, the rich man in hell becomes a wannabe soul winner. He develops a **missionary spirit**, expressing a concern for the lost people in his family, his five **brothers**. But it was too late. As it says in Heb. 9:27, **"Man is appointed once to die and then the judgment."** There's no "do-overs" in hell. It's too bad he didn't have that same fear of hell **before** he died! As we heard earlier in the story, his request to send Lazarus to them was **denied**, but it raises an issue you and I who are still on **this** side of eternity need to grabble with a little more seriously while we **DO** have opportunity. The question **IS:** Are the souls in **hell** more concerned about evangelism than you and I are???

I admit that I've always been a victim of an anomaly I call **"missionary ambivalence"**. Like the actor looking at the lines in her script and calling out to the director, *"What's my motivation?"*, I often ask myself if I'm **PRIMARILY** motivated to share the Gospel with others who don't yet know Jesus as their only Lord and Savior because I want them to escape the unending agony of **HELL** OR is it because I want them to experience the everlasting joy of **HEAVEN**? The obvious answer is that the motivation needs to be **BOTH**, but does one carry a little more weight than the other?

As I prepared this message I was powerfully convicted, because I believe dead people in hell have a heavier burden for people without Christ than I do! Sometimes I get so involved in spending time with believers and enjoying fellowship with them I forget there are people all around us who are going to hell. Hoq about you?

So let's play "what if" for a moment. What if God offered to let you spend either **30 seconds in heaven** or **30 seconds in hell** today. Which would you choose? This isn't **forever**; it's just a thirty second visit. Which location do you think would make you not only a stronger, more mature follower of **Christ** but even moreso, a better **witness** of Christ to others? Seeing the glory and majesty of heaven would probably make you a stronger Christian. But would it give you a greater burden for lost people? I'll be honest: If God gave me the option of letting every member of our church spend 30 seconds in **heaven** or 30 seconds in **hell**, I think I would ask God to let all of us spend just 30 seconds in **hell**, because those of us who know the Lord are going to spend eternity in heaven **anyway**.

However, I think that 30 seconds in **hell** would change us for the rest of our lives. If we could see the **agony** and hear those **voices**—maybe voices from some of our own **relatives**?—I think we'd come back and be the most evangelistic Christians on earth. And people **in** hell can't help but be concerned for lost people they cared about who are headed **for** hell.

When's the last time you **WEPT** for the lost as you **PRAYED** for the lost? Wouldn't it be something if you and I had the same sacrificial heart that **MOSES** had in Exodus 32 where it says, "*So Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if **not**, then blot **ME** out of the book You have written."*

Wouldn't it be something if you and I would care so much for the people headed for hell that we would pray to God like St. Paul in Rom. 9 who says, "*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that **I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel...Brothers, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved***"?

CONCLUSION

Please note that Jesus told people the story about the rich man and Lazarus while He was en route to **Jerusalem**. And He was well-aware of the sacrificial **PLACE** that He was headed to as part of His messianic mission to redeem and save sinners just like **us** from a hellish nightmare.

So, my fellow-redeemed, the bottom line for us is **this**: Rich **OR** poor, God **CARES** about "*the places we will go*", but especially about the **FINAL** place we go, so He sent His only Son to lead us in the **right direction** by simply following those directions **FOR** us...and He did it "to the **LETTER**" ...the letter of the **LAW**, fulfilling it **PERFECTLY** when we **COULDN'T**, dying on a cross **WE** should have died on, and

then, even going to that place called **HELL** for us...not to **SUFFER** but to announce His **VICTORY** over death by then **RISING** from the grave on Easter morning so that one day, believers like you and I who trust totally in what **Christ** did for us will **ALSO** rise from the dead with renewed bodies to join our souls in that **PLACE** He says He's already **prepared** for us in **HEAVEN**...the **PLACE** God's redeemed people call "**HOME**".

*"Oh, the **PLACE** that we will go!"*

In our Savior's Name, Amen!