

Where will you go when you die?

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[0 : 0 0] We are with the Lord's blessing. I want to reflect on this story that Jesus told of the rich man and Nazareth, beginning at verse 19. There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Nazareth, who was so actually laid at his gate.

In our own community we used to have a games night for youngsters. Children in the high school, we would go and play games in the games hall in the high school for a couple of hours and then have an epilogue after that, just as what Bible talk. And after doing that a number of times, when I was seeking to bring to their attention the importance of being prepared for eternity. I recognised that these youngsters were thinking, well, we're young.

Death's not something I need to consider now. And after that I tried to make our talks more relevant to their situation as youngsters. That being a Christian is actually a far better way to live. Yes, it's got the glorious promise of heaven, but it's for now as well. Life is much better. Followed by the Lord Jesus' name. And then there's the added blessing, the wonderful blessing that our citizenship is in heaven as we were affecting this morning.

But the ultimate destiny of every one of us is that eternal world. There is then nothing more important in your life in your life in life that you know what that destiny is. That is why Jesus brings us this story. It's a very solemn story. But God in his wisdom has recorded it for us and brought us this to our attention tonight. And we pray that the Holy Spirit will be at work to take the truth that Jesus, the Son of God, spoke and apply it to your life and to mine. The first thing then that the parable teaches us is the certainty of death. And that is something that you need to be reminded of. One of my first memories of coming up to Lewis, my wife's from Upper Col in back. And one of my first memories of coming there was how often when I was staying with what was my parents at all, was how often there there would be news of someone's death in the community. Because of the size of the congregation in back, there were all these connections and the community was very much a place where people knew one another, not so similar to your own community here. And so there was frequently news of someone's death.

But that's life, isn't it? Everyone dies. Pick up a local paper and there will always be a notice of death, people who have left this world. And that's what Jesus confronts us with here. These two men, very different men, a very rich man, life was easy, life was great, he lived in luxury every day. But he dies.

[3 : 3 4] And then there's a poor beggar, who's entirely dependent on the generosity of others. And he dies. Doesn't matter how rich you are. Doesn't matter how poor you are. Doesn't matter your circumstances in life. Doesn't matter if you're the most powerful person in the universe, or in the world rather. Doesn't matter if you're just a pauper. You will die. You don't know why, but you will.

But you will. There have been billions of people who have lived in this world. Down through the history of this world. Every single one of them. Except for two we have in scripture, if I did, and you know, have died.

The statistic for cancer that I used to be familiar with was one in three people will develop cancer. Someone recently suggested that it's actually gone up to one in two because people are living longer.

But there's a chance to have died. But there's a chance to have died. But there's a chance to live through life without facing cancer. But the statistics for death is one in one. You are not going to live forever in this world. Death is coming. These are so matters.

But Jesus gives us an insight into what lies beyond that. You and I, just with our physical, with our mental, human intellect, we cannot know what lies beyond this world.

[5 : 12] We have a couple of folk in our own county. One is known locally as the walking witch. A woman who's supposedly got some sort of insight into the spirit world.

There's another person near John Rose that people go and visit to try and make contact with those who have died, those who have gone on into another world.

But we, just with our own human intellect, can't know what lies beyond this world. But here is Jesus giving us that insight. He says the rich man dies and was begged.

His body went into the grave. But then he says he was in Hades. Hades is the realm of the dead. But there he was in torment.

The poor man, whoever, Lazarus, he was in Abraham's bosom. And that's a picture of Lazarus declining besides Abraham.

[6 : 22] In biblical times, when people sat for a meal, or they didn't sit for a meal, they would climb and bend a table. In John's Gospel, when he records the Last Supper, John was lying in Jesus' bosom.

That's how it's described. But he was leaning back against Jesus. He was the closest one to Jesus. And that's the picture here. Lazarus is the closest one to Abraham. He's there enjoying heaven itself.

There has been this division. Now, it's easy to read this superficially and think, well, a rich man he ends up in hell, a poor man goes to hell.

Then it's just about to have to be rich or poor, which decides where you end up. But it's not that way at all. Why is Abraham where he is, in paradise? Because he's the father of the faithful.

He's the man who was commended by God for his faith. Abraham is the great model of faith. He believed God and was credited to him for righteousness.

[7 : 29] So Lazarus has got the same faith. And it's that faith that has been awarded with a place in heaven, in glory, with Abraham, and with all the other people of God.

Friends, there is no alternative. There's being in paradise in heaven with Abraham or there's hell in torment.

death. Your destiny is one of these.

Death is coming. I feel very uncomfortable saying these things. But these are the words of Lord Jesus who is speaking to those in his own time who are going to die.

And he's left us his truth for us to reflect on the seriousness of these matters. Doesn't matter how young you are, doesn't matter how old you are, you're going to be this word.

[8 : 41] You're either going to be with Abraham, with the faithful, with those who believed, or you're going to be in torment. which leads us on to reflect secondly on the hopelessness of hell.

The absolute hopelessness of hell. Look at verse 23. The rich man being in torments and Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom.

Verse 25, But Abraham said, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he's 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.

It's important that we remember this is a story. This is not a literal description of the next world. For instance, the rich man speaks about asking Lazarus to put a drop of water on his finger to cool his tongue.

[10 : 01] The rich man is a spirit whose body's in the ground he doesn't have a tongue. But this is a picture that Jesus is painting of the awfulness of hell itself.

And it's a place of absolute hopelessness. Can you imagine how much relief one drop of water would bring to this man in the fire of hell?

Virtually nothing. But he is so desperate that he wants even that tiny mercy to relieve his son. But Abraham says, no.

That can't happen. The destiny of these people has been fixed and it's fixed forever. There is no hope in hell.

It's perhaps a phrase that was used in a very offhand way. There's no hope in hell. There isn't a hope in hell of something happening.

[11 : 13] It's an accurate description of the hopelessness of hell itself. There is no possibility of there being any change to this man's circumstance.

Forever. You ever try thinking about forever? I can't get my head ridden. Just existing forever and ever and ever and ever and ever.

That's the glorious prospect of God's people. But that's the awful hopelessness of those in hell. There is no chance, no hope of any relief forever.

I remember someone recently saying to me that this world is the nearest Christians will ever get to hell. If you're following the Lord Jesus, if you've been redeemed and saved by him, then the difficulties, the pains, the troubles, the suffering that you experience, that's the nearest you'll ever get to hell.

Because the moment you leave this world, all that will be gone. Forever. You will never again feel pain. You'll never again be upset by anything. There will never be anything difficult or harmful.

[12 : 45] Forever. So what you experience in this world, as a consequence of God's curse on this world, this world is under God's curse, and Christians have to face difficulties and troubles and trials.

But that's as close as you'll ever get to experience the judgment of God in hell. Because the moment you leave this world, that's gone. But the other side of that is, this is as close to heaven as the unbelieving will ever get.

because the moment you leave this world, if you leave this world unbelieving, unrepentant, you will never experience another good thing.

Forever. Your last breath will be the last good thing that you ever, ever experience.

these are awful things to have to say.

[14 : 03] But it's added our love and concern for you that we preach these things. things. We want you to be saved. We want you to be rescued from hell.

We want you to know the glories of heaven. So hell is an absolutely hopeless place forever.

God's love and let's go on from there and reflect on the uselessness of pedigree, having the right breeding.

this rich man in hell, how is he addressed Abraham? Verse 24, father Abraham.

Abraham responds in verse 25, son. And again in verse 27, the rich man said, I beg you therefore father.

[15 : 05] Now he wasn't his mutual father, but he was addressing Abraham as the father of the Jewish nation. And here's the rich man saying, I'm a Jew.

I'm descended from you, Abraham. I'm one of God's people. Surely you'll have mercy on me. Surely you'll do something good for me. Something to relieve the awfulness of the torment I'm suffering here.

But you see, simply belonging to the Jewish nation, simply belonging to the people who are privileged, to have the truth of God. Didn't save him.

That's not enough. Just having the right connections. It's not enough to be in a churchy environment, to be in a godly nation even.

and the same is true today. We're not Jews, we're not descended from Abraham, but you can't rely on a Christian pedigree, a Christian heritage to say, well, that's enough to get me to heaven.

[16 : 19] I have Christian years. I've been going to church all my life. I've been going from time to time, perhaps. I have a good life, not as bad as so and so.

I'm from church. But that's not enough. Just because you have been blessed with these opportunities in life, just because you have that pedigree, that inheritance, that doesn't say what this man will act was a trust in God.

Abraham was a man of faith. God had taken him out one night and he said, look at the stars. Abraham looks up and God says, can you count them?

If you can count them, that's how many descendants you will have. And God says to the secret course, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Abraham simply took God at his word. Now Abraham at that point had no children at all. And yet he believed faith. If God says it, it's true.

[17 : 39] That's the faith that this man lacked. He knew about God. He was a Jewish man. He knew about the temple. He may have attained it.

Nothing to suggest he was a politically bad man. He was certainly an uncompassionate man. He didn't care for us as he should have been.

But he wasn't bad. But he had never believed the truth of God. In those well-known words of John 3, verse 16, God says that he loved this world so much that he sent his one and only son so that whoever believes should not perish.

There's faith. this man did not believe. You believe in God's one and only son.

You will not perish. You'll have everlasting life. But John goes on after that to say, he who believes in him is not condemned, but he who did not believe is condemned already, because he's not believed in the name of the only son God.

[18 : 58] But if you've not believed tonight, you're condemned by God. He warns us because he wants you to change, to believe, to escape that condemnation, to have everlasting life.

The uselessness then of this man's pregnant, just being a Jew, just having able to have us as far, as far as it was not enough. Just having Christian parents, just being a churchy person, it's not enough.

What God requires of you and me is simple things, that's all, anything else. Take God and his words. Believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Believe he died on the cross for your sin.

Believe that he rose again for your justification, that you be declared righteous. Believe that he said when he says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Eventually let's go on from there and consider the sufficiency of scripture.

This man expresses a concern for his brothers, his five brothers, and he wants Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn him.

[20 : 22] But Abraham says, no, they don't need that. They've got Moses, they've got the prophets, they've got the old text and scriptures, they've got the truth of God. With a rich man, verse 30, he says, no, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

Notice the man in hell recognises that repentance is what's required. Turning away from sin, going God's way instead of going your own way.

Doing it about turning life. God's way instead of going to save people from hell. If they do not hear Moses, if they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead.

God through Abraham is saying, the truth of God is enough. Even if there was a miraculous resurrection like this, even if someone came back from the dead to speak the truth to them, if they hadn't believed already, if they hadn't believed on the scriptures they have, then they wouldn't believe even that.

Perhaps you may think that's hard to believe. Surely if someone came back from the dead, would you believe if someone rose from the dead? Well, it happens.

[21 : 54] The most glorious miracle that the Lord Jesus ever performed was the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead for four days. The body was sinking. Jesus goes to that tomb.

He thanks God for having answered his prayer, and he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, and Lazarus comes out of the tomb. Well, I believe, what's the response of those who hear and saw, witnessed someone returning from the dead?

Some of them didn't believe, but not everyone. some of them were not even convinced by that. Instead, they go and report to Jesus' enemies what he's done.

They said, you've got to get rid of this man. You've got to stop him doing these things. Friends, you have got the word of God in front of you tonight.

You're familiar with these things, I expect. if you are not going to believe what God has spoken in his word, even if God did some incredible miracle, you still wouldn't believe.

[23 : 19] If you are continuing to harden yourself against the truth of God, you see, you will be different from the way, going out of this door, out of that door, you will be different from the person who came in.

Either you will be more open, more receptive to the truth of God. Or if you refuse to believe these things, you'll be hardening yourself against it.

It will be even more difficult next time you come and hear the gospel to believe. You're having this privilege, you're having this opportunity.

The scriptures are sufficient. The truth of God is sufficient. The privilege you have is sufficient for you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

If you're not going to believe this, nothing is going to change. You have the choice.

[24 : 26] Do you believe it? Do you accept it? Do you recognize the need of a savior? Or do you say, leave it for another day?

What just came to mind when I mentioned you meant to another day was the story of D.L. Moody. I think it was Moody. He was preaching in Chicago before a great fire.

and he had been urging people to, or presenting Jesus Christ and finished his sermon by saying, next Lord's day, we'll consider what accepting Jesus Christ evolves.

and he deeply regret it, having done that, because the great fire came to Chicago, destroyed the church, and many of the congregation pitched and never saw the next son.

Friends, don't put it up. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Tonight, tomorrow's not guaranteed.

[25 : 44] One final thought, and that is the compassion of Jesus. When you think of this story, it's a pretty shocking story.

So often in scripture, fire is used to describe the wrath of God against sin. Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by fire and burning sulfur. The fire of God falling on Korah and his followers in the wilderness.

Elijah, up on a mountain where his enemies came against him and called them fire from heaven. Pictures that God paints through the writings of Peter, about how Jesus is coming back in blazing fire to consume his enemies.

This is a horrible, shocking picture that Jesus is painting. Why would the most gentle, loving, gracious, compassionate man who's ever walked this earth tell such a shocking story?

thing. Just prior to this, he's been speaking about the possibility of serving two masters.

[27 : 15] You can't serve God and money. And some of those who heard him speak were Pharisees who loved money. And he mocked him. They divided what he was saying.

They sneered at him. And it's in that context Jesus tells this parable. He was not trying to get his own back. It was out of his compassion for these people.

He was confronting them with the reality of the eternal world. That if they go on serving money, if they go on seeking their pleasures in the things of this world, if they fail to believe in him and to trust in God for salvation, then they only know it was this rich man in torment in hell.

It was the compassion of Jesus for these men. The Pharisees, the religious leaders of the time were the arch enemies of Jesus. Not from Jesus' side.

But they hated him. it was Jesus' compassion that motivated him to tell the story. Because unless people are awakened to their need and their danger, they're not going to do anything about it.

[28 : 38] If there's nothing after death, if you're just like the animals, you're born, you live, you die, that's it, then you don't need to worry about anything.

But if these things are true, and they are, then you need to be awakened to your need.

When I was at the manse last night and Andrew and Deborah got an open fire there, it reminded me of my own experience as a teenager.

when I was awakened to the fact that I was a sinner on the road to hell, and I used to come home from church to the manse and helms there where we had an open fire, and I would look into the fire and think, that's where I'm heading.

I'm a sinner, and I'm destined for hell. I used to go up to my bedroom, get down my knees and ask Jesus to forgive me.

[29 : 48] that went on for some time. Until, God's goodness, I had to go to a missionary conference in Broda.

The rest of the family was going, mum and dad were going to be away. There was no alternative. I had to go. I would have been like 14 or 15 at the time. And I still remember for the first time ever, someone asked me, are you a Christian?

In fact, we were sitting at the dinner table, the lunch table, and someone suggested that you say whether you're a Christian or not, and when you became a Christian. And I remember shriveling up inside and thinking, I'm going to have to say I'm not a Christian.

But that was ministering in Helmsdale. I was equitably churchy. I assumed that people thought I was a Christian. But the first time I was asked to own up publicly.

No, I'm not a Christian. In the subsequent 24 hours, there were two more occasions.

[31 : 06] I always asked, are you a Christian? And I had to say, no. What would you say to that? Are you a Christian? Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Are you saying to your citizenship in heaven? Later on, on a Sunday night, we were in a home, and David Patterson, who had been ministering for, he was there.

I knew David, and he was asking me about school, whether I attended the scripture union, and I just wrote down and blurted out, I don't think I'm a Christian.

God had been preparing me for that. I couldn't have said it. I'm sure I would not have said it had I not been challenged three times before that, in maybe this 24 hours or so. David asked me about to go next door, and he explained the gospel very simply to me.

and he prayed for me. And I got him christened. My life was transformed. My heart was filled with joy, and I knew that hell was no longer my destiny.

[32 : 27] Jesus spoke this awful story to awaken you, so that you recognise the danger you are in. You may say, well, a God of love would surely not send people to such an awful place.

He's a God of justice. He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. A God of love would not allow people to go to hell without an opportunity to repent.

Friends, you've got that opportunity. That's why Jesus gave you this time, to give you the opportunity to repent.

Life will be far better in this world to be free of your guilt, to be free of the burden of sin. Andrew was telling me just last night about his own conversion, and how that burden just fell off.

to know that God loves you, and that love's going to continue forever. Life's not going to be simple, it's not going to be straightforward, it's not going to be free of trouble for the rest of your days in this world.

[33 : 34] that you have the absolute certainty of God's love through this world, and then when you leave this world through death, or this, the Lord Jesus returns in your lifetime.

You'll be taken to be with Abraham, to be with Jesus, to be with all the saints who have been made perfect, and none of the suffering, the trouble, the hardship, the difficulty, that you experience on here, on earth, will ever be experienced, ever again.

Men, are you a Christian? You're going to die. Are you confident that you'll be with Abraham, with Lazarus, with all those who have trusted in Jesus Christ?

Don't go home unless you're sure you're Christian. Speak to Angus, speak to me, speak to one of the elders.

Don't rest until you know you're safe. Let's pray.