

Parables of Jesus #6
Rich Man & Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

10.23.2016

BIG Idea: The passion of your heart is the trajectory of your soul for eternity.

INTRODUCTION

- Today is a hard topic. Hell is a weighty subject. And this text is the only Scripture in the bible where we hear from an individual in hell. Is the point of Jesus to freak us out about hell? Is he simply trying to scare people or is something else going on here?
- This parable talks about hell but is not meant to fill out a full biblical understanding of hell. If you want to explore the biblical doctrine of hell a little more? I did a message on March 20 of this year called "*How can God be filled with love and wrath at the same time?*" I argue that we all actually WANT hell to exist. I'm not going to repeat that stuff here. You can go back on our website and listen to that. We'll try to post the link on social media this week. It will help fill out some background for understanding what Jesus is talking about in our text today.
- Jesus talked about heaven and hell more than anyone in Scripture. It is important and whatever conceptions or hell are or what you think the Bible says or doesn't say, I want to challenge us to LISTEN well to Jesus today. Let him shape our understanding of hell.
- How do we understand this parable? Is it just a simple reversal? Is this parable fundamentally about God's judgment on the rich and favor for the poor? It is not that simple since we see righteous rich people in Scripture like Job in the Old Testament and the woman Lydia in the New Testament who was a wealthy dealer in purple fabric and opened her nice home up for the church to meet regularly.
- On the flipside, is this text telling us that all poor are going to end up in heaven? Again, its not that simple. While we do see God has a heart for the poor, in the book of Proverbs being poor is sometimes connected with just being lazy and God rejects the foolish lazy person who's poor because of it.
- So, what is Jesus trying to tell us here? This parable is connected with something Jesus said just a few verses earlier...
- Look back at 16:13 *No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."*
- Jesus is talking about what we are passionate about in life. What it is that we think the most about, dream the most about, and put most of our time and energy toward. That is our master and that is what we are passionate about in the way we live our lives.
- BIG Idea for today: The passion of your heart in this life is the trajectory of your soul in eternity.** We will see this as we look at the status of the two men, their surprising reversal after death, and the seeds of hell in our world.

1. The status of the two men in life

- Let's look at how Jesus describes the two men in life. They are described in sharp contrast.
THE RICH MAN – really, really rich!
- The verb tense used indicates that the rich man dressed himself (middle tense) *every day* in purple robes. He had other clothing. But purple cloth was extremely expensive, and only the truly wealthy could afford it. This man wanted to ensure that everyone knew he had money.
- Each day he was overpowered with the impulse to drive his "rep his wealth." In short he was a "clothes horse" with an inner need to constantly remind everyone of his wealth.

- Jesus said, the rich man also wore “fine linen.” The word in Greek refers to quality Egyptian cotton used for the best underwear. There is light humor here. This man not only had expensive outer robes, but in case anyone was interested, he also wore fine quality underwear.
- In addition to his Armani suits and fancy underwear, Jesus said the rich man feasted sumptuously every day. This means he *did not, therefore, observe the sabbath*. His servants were never given a day of rest, and thereby he publicly violated the Ten Commandments every week. His self-indulgent lifestyle was more important to him than the law of God. The injustice he inflicted on his staff meant nothing to him.
- This man had money... it was his passion in life because his money served HIM and allowed him to be self-absorbed. Now, before we move on, I want us to not put ourselves above the rich man. We ALL have something besides God that we are passionate about. I want you to just think about that before we move on... is it your money? A skill or strength in your life? Is it your looks or your job? Maybe its just your personality? Just think about that and how it serves YOU.

LAZARUS –

- Poor man who sick and incapable of looking after himself. The fact that he begged meant he had no family to help him. The fact that he ended up in front of the rich man’s gate meant he was so sick he couldn’t even beg in the village square like most poor people.
- In that culture when you got so bad that you couldn’t take care of yourself or even beg in traditional ways, the traditional practice in a village was to take the beggar to the home of the wealthiest of people in the village. The social duty of that person was to use their extra resources to help the person. Not only was it a social duty there was the general responsibility of alms giving that was laid on all Jews of that time. Being at the gate of the rich man was the last best hope for a poor man who was very sick.
- And he would sit there with his sores all over his body and the dogs would come over and lick his sores. All the while he would observe the scraps that this rich man would throw out and would dream of eating them.
- A Significant note about this character – this poor man is the only character in any of Jesus’ parables to receive a name. And this is tied to Jesus’ focus. The rich man thought he was important but Jesus thought the poor man was important so he gave him a name.
- Lazarus –means “the one whom God helps.” And in this name we get a clue as to the difference between the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man helped himself and did so with heartless selfishness and greed, all the while being indifferent to the poor man literally at his doorstep.
- These are the lives of the two characters at the center of Jesus parable. Then Jesus tells us they both died.

2. The surprising reversal

- The situation of the two men’s lives is utterly reversed as they pass into eternity. Now, before we get to the specifics on each, notice one thing: both of these men’s souls continue on after death. Jesus doesn’t want us to misunderstand. Both of them continue. They just continue in different places.
- Hebrews 9:27 “*Man is destined to die once, and after that face judgment.*”

LAZARUS – HEAVEN

- Jesus describes him as being carried away to Abraham’s side. Now, this doesn’t sound like heaven to most of us, right? This is a cultural picture. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people. Among the Jews no one was more revered or more respected than Abraham. He was God’s friend. And so in eternity he was WITH God.

- So, for a Jewish person, Abraham was in God's presence. To be with him was HUGE, but to recline at table with him (which was how they ate together in Jesus' time) would have been the highest honor conceivable. This image, of reclining at the table, feasting with Abraham is in contrast to when the rich man sat at the table and Lazarus to eat his scraps.

RICH MAN - HELL

- What is hell like? Well, it the rich man does refer to being in flame and other places in the New Testament the imagery of fire is used but that is not the weight in the text. Suffice it to say the flame imagery for hell is meant to convey the worst pain imaginable. Is there anything worse than burning yourself?
- Hell is pictured as an horrific eternal state and the NT uses several different analogies. Biblical descriptions (most on the mouth of Jesus) – eternal torment, eternal fire, eternal separation, eternal destruction, unquenchable fire, lake of fire, outer darkness, where the worm does not die, there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- Jesus uses the words "torment" and "anguish" in this parable, helping us to feel the weight. Part of this torment was not simply the objective suffering but the conscious awareness of heaven. The rich man can SEE Lazarus in heaven.
- The rich man doesn't seem to understand what is happening ore more accurately doesn't want to admit what's happening and why. He is suffering. He is in torment but he can't get why. You see, **"Hell is the surprising conclusion of "the good life" lived without God.** The rich man had lived his life for himself and not for God. His passion in life wasn't God and his kingdom but himself and his own kingdom.
- This brings us to our final point from this parable. Jesus shows us the seeds of hell are in this world and we see it through the rich man in hell.

3. The seeds of hell in our world

- Jesus tells this parable to help us to see that the passion of our heart in this life is the trajectory of our soul for eternity. Scripture holds up the idea that every human soul will go on forever. And it is integrally connected with the passion of our souls and lives in THIS world.
- The passions of the rich man's heart in life became his after he died. It is as if God said, to the man, "you live a self-centered life on earth, now you have yourself in eternity with none of my presence and none of my common grace."
- Define Hell - "the trajectory of a soul, living a self-absorbed, self-centered life, going on and on forever, removed from God's common grace and under his active wrath."** (Keller, Lewis and Mason) Common grace is what most people enjoy in this world whether they are a Christian or not – life, breath, health, the warmth of a sunny day, friendships, delight of good food, love of friend, laughter, kindness of another person.

3 Seeds – all connected.

SEED 1 - We love something more than God.

- 16:13-15 *No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*
- We all have a central Master to our lives. And Jesus says that what we as human beings value as ultimate is an abomination to God. When we love something more than God we make that thing our "highest good" in life.
- Abraham told the rich man, *"remember that you in your lifetime received your good things.."*

- The seeds of hell in this world exist in our hearts. We are born with sinful hearts wanting what WE want...and we don't want God. We want his stuff but we don't want him. We want his blessings but not his presence. We want him to serve us but we can't fathom submitting to him.
- Whatever you are most tempted to love more than God IS the seed of hell in your heart. Is it your pleasure? Is it your success? Is it your spouse? Is it your money? Is it your looks? Imagine the thing that holds you in bondage most. Think of the most broken part of your soul or personality that longs to be first, to be selfish, to be the center. That part which is greedy, is hung up on your looks or your position. If God has granted you the grace to see, you have observed how ugly it really is and how it is ever desiring to grow and take over your life.
- So imagine your most selfish moment, your most prideful point, your most greedy situation, the moment of your greatest angry outburst, or the time lust just exploded in your life. Imagine now that feeling being fully unleashed and unrestrained. The guards pop off and your soul just opens up and your soul begins swelling with passion for that. Now, imagine that going on forever with no room for anything else. It consumes us and the sickest thing is it is what we want.
- CS Lewis: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no hell."
- Jesus tells that whatever we love in this life more than God can send us to hell.
- "*And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.*" -Matthew 18:8-9
- God is not an idolater... he's not going to let you worship something or someone else your entire life, giving the passion of your soul to it, and then just welcome you in to heaven to experience eternal life and joy with him. He's not going to let you belittle his name with your life on earth and then experience everlasting pleasure with him in heaven. To do so would be to demean his value and his worth.
- Loving anyone or anything more than God is the seed of hell in the human heart and it will either be uprooted by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ or it will grow to consume you eternally.

SEED 2 - We have no desire to repent

- The rich man doesn't seem to get why he is in hell and doesn't recognize the way he had treated Lazarus in his lifetime. Rather than doing what we might expect by confessing his sin and asking Lazarus to forgive him, the rich man doesn't even talk to Lazarus directly!!! Instead, he treats him like he's still a beggar at his gate and addresses Abraham instead.
- "Hey can you have him bring me some water to cool my tongue?" In other words, "Can Lazarus SERVE ME, please?????" Notice the focus. Abraham explains that can't happen. So the man tries again, "Well if Lazarus can't come serve me can he go serve my brothers by telling them about where they are headed?" Abraham says "Your brothers have the Bible. They have everything they need to believe and change their ways."
- The last comment by the rich man is actually a slight back handed comment at Abraham, "No, Abraham, if a man rises from the dead they will believe." In other words, "The Bible is not enough. I didn't have enough information!" He's rebuking father Abraham
- There is no sign of sorrow on the rich man's part. No sign of repentance. Why? Because he still loved himself. His money was gone but the thing he loved the most was still there... himself.

And while he hated being there, he couldn't bring himself to turn on his self-worship and repent.

- BOOK OF Revelation – on multiple occasions it describes the judgment of God being poured out on those who reject God and love sin.
- Rev 16:9 *"They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory."*
- WHY won't they repent??? They don't hate their sin...they LOVE it. They hate God for hating their sin and for judging them for it. It's like drunk driver who gets caught over and over again. He's not sorry for driving drunk... he's sorry he gets caught for it and he hates the police who bust him. He complains about how inconvenient it is and how much it costs him to go to court. But he doesn't repent.
- D.A. Carson – *"Hell is not filled with people who are deeply sorry for their sins. It is filled with people who for all eternity still shake their puny fist in the face of God almighty in an endless existence of evil, and corruption, and shame, and the wrath of God."*

SEED 3 - We reject our need for the Gospel

- The rich man's last request to Abraham is to send Lazarus to his brothers... *if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'*
- This man thought that it wasn't enough to have Moses and the Prophets but Jesus says that was enough. For those who want to have eternal life the witness of Scripture is enough and for those who WANT their sin more than God, not even a resurrection will convince them.
- Jesus is very clearly pointing to his own resurrection here. He is saying, "people who want hell will not even be convinced when I come back." 1 Cor talks about those who think the gospel is foolishness. Its moronic.
- So some will hear the gospel and come to believe it for eternal life. Others will hear the gospel and will reject it as irrelevant, unnecessary or just dumb.
- "The same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay." DL Moody

CONCLUSION

- IF this is how we understand hell, then the gospel is not about an escape plan for hell but REPLACING the suicidal, self-destructive desires of your heart for sinful things with a new love for God. He does that by forgiving us and cleansing us of those sins through the cross.
- Remember Lazarus –means "the one whom God helps." The gospel is God helping humanity in the most profound sense imaginable. For the person God helps through Jesus, heaven awaits but for the one who wants to live a self-centered life, their best is right here and now. In eternity, there will be no more money, no more pleasure, no more extravagant foods, only the sinful self-absorption of their soul going on forever.

- PERSONAL WEIGHT... I feel for this message. We need to pause, reflect, pray, and seek God...

COMMUNION

PEOPLE IN BACK TO PRAY WITH YOU

***Unless otherwise notes, all verses are taken from the *English Standard Version*, copyright 2000, Crossway Books; material used from D.A. Carson sermon "The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus;" Tim Keller sermon "The Parable of the Beggar: On Hell" (7.17.1994)