Some questions on passage Luke 16v19-31 ‘Rich man, poor man’

**Getting started**

1. Today’s passage deals with some weighty topics like Heaven and Hell. What do both these words convey to you? What do they mean to your friends who don’t share your Christian faith?
2. Do note the background of this passage. Jesus has just taught a parable encouraging people to use worldly wealth wisely in the light of eternity (v9) and has the Pharisees who loved money in his sights. We can expect today’s parable to continue this theme..

*Please read Luke 16vv19-31*

**Into the passage**

1. Jesus paints a picture of very different men in vv19-21. Imagine these men in 21st century terms. Are there people you can picture as the ‘pampered selfish rich’ and those who are at other edge of the economic divide? How often do you find the rich care about the poor, and want to do something to help them?

*Jesus is teaching in vv22-27 that there is a future beyond the grave, and it consists of very different destinies for people. There is a Heaven and there is a Hell.*

1. Why do you think that the rich man ended up in Hades (that gateway to Hell)? What did his behaviour to Lazarus reveal his attitude to God’s law, including a duty to ‘love your neighbour’ (Mark 12v28-34)
2. Why do you think the poor man ended up at Abraham’s side at the banquet hosted by God in Heaven? (Clue – think what his name means!)
3. What is implied about Heaven and Hell from Jesus’ teaching in this parable regarding its nature, why people get to one place or another, and whether there’s any possibility of a 2nd chance for those beyond the grave to change destinations?

*The instinct of the rich man in vv27 is a good one (to warn his brothers) but Abraham refuses to send Lazarus to the brothers*

1. What reason does Abraham give for his refusal (v29-31)? What does this teach us about the importance of the Bible?

**Thinking it through**

1. How has this parable sharpened your understanding of Heaven and Hell?
2. Has it made you want to throw yourself afresh upon the mercy of God rather than just relying upon your knowledge of the gospel?
3. Has it brought particular family members and friends to mind to pray for- that they might evade Hell and enter Heaven one day?
4. How might you bring to such friends the Bible, so that they can hear and pay attention to the light shining in a dark place (2 Peter 1v19) and turn to Jesus, the bright morning star?

**Sermon**

~ I wonder how much you think about **the future** (woman looking curious)

~ It’s **natural** for us in January to think how the next 12 months will play out for us…

~ But I wonder whether you ever peer even further into the future and ask yourself (red question mark) what lies **beyond** the grave….

~Today’s parable from Jesus gives us answers, answers we might find unsettling, but which are very important for us to know

So come to it, Luke 16v19, p1050 of Bibles, and let’s see 2 men, 2 destinies, and 5 brothers….

First then, let’s look at the Two men in Jesus’ story, 2 men who are very different indeed.

The first man is phenomenally **wealthy**. He is dressed in the finest of clothing – purple and fine linen, and lives in great luxury each day.

Today, he might look like this – image of rich man- with a Saville Row suit, a Rolex around his wrist, who dines each day at a Michelin starred restaurant before tootling off to his multi million pound home.

A luxurious, self-indulgent life….

The other man was totally different. He’s described as a beggar (image of beggar) , laid – literally thrown at- the gate of the rich man…

* **his** back is covered with sores;
* he **drools** at the castoffs from the rich man’s table;
* his **only friends** appear to be the wild dogs who lick his sores…

You couldn’t have a greater contrast between this rich man and this poor man, and you’d have to have a heart of stone not to feel pity for him…

The obvious question posed by the parable is *Which man would* ***you*** *like to be*?’ and I guess we’d love to be a **rich** man or woman.

But ‘*Be careful what you wish for’* says Jesus. ‘***Be aware*** *of the Two (very different) destinies of these men…’*

As for the **poor man**, v22 tells us that he was carried by the angels of God to rest at Abraham’s side. This image draws on the understanding Jews had of Heaven being like a feast (Image of feast) with God as the ultimate host, but positions of great honour given to faithful servants of God, like Abraham, the father of the Jewish race.

This beggar – says Jesus- is taken from a position of shame at the rich man’s gate, and taken to a place of great honour at Abraham’s side (image of beggar at the feast)..

The **rich man** though has a very different destiny. He is carried **NOT** to the heavenly feast, but to Hades, a place where Jews believed souls cut off from God waited until they received their eternal punishment from God.

In **this** place, people are described as being in torment (23) and agony (24) – a place where fires burn, and occupants are thirsty and miserable. It’s a terrifying picture, and Jesus intended this bleak imagery to convey the misery of ending up in this place.

The rich man looks up and sees the honours being given to Lazarus in Heaven, and begs Abraham to ‘Send Lazarus’ to bring him some relief from his thirst.

Listen then to Abraham’s reply to the rich man in v25-26

‘Son, remember that you received good things, while Lazarus received bad things,

but now he is comforted, and you are in agony.

Between us and you a great chasm has been set in place,

so that those who want to go from here to you cannot,

nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

**What** then does Jesus want people to **grasp** about life beyond the grave? Well, at least 4 things…

(1) There IS a future beyond the grave.

You might think this is an obvious point to make, but by no means do all people believe it. Did you know that at least 50% of the funerals held today at Crematoria have no religious element at all. The focus is almost entirely on the life the person has lived, rather than on any future beyond the grave….

Jesus’ parable insists that there **IS** very definitely a future beyond the grave, and this future will **not** be the same for every person. It is not bland or beige, for (2) There IS a Heaven, and a Hell.

* **Heaven** is a place of perfection and feasting and joy, as we enjoy an eternal future with God and his people…
* **Hell** (to which the Hades of our parable is the gateway) is a place where its occupants are conscious of being separated from God, and began to experience God’s righteous judgment upon our lives.

Heaven and Hell, and there are **no** other alternatives Jesus mentions, are **realities** that God wants us to be aware of, and live in the light of….

(3) Our choices in this world determine our future destination.

Whether we end up in Heaven or Hell depends upon the life choices we make **here on earth**. The first Gladiator film contains this line ‘*What we do in life echoes in eternity’,* and Jesus would agree with this, and underline it a number of times. Realise that the choices we humans make MATTER, matter a very great deal, for they determine where we will spend the rest of eternity.

(4) There is NO possibility, after death, of changing our destination

Some people think that we don’t need to worry too much about choosing to go God’s way now, for there’ll be a 2nd chance for us human beings, beyond the grave to determine where we will spend eternity.

I’m sure we can all feel the attraction of this possibility, especially if we have lots of people we love who have no time for God in this life

But I have to say that I find **no grounds for confidence** that a 2nd chance remains for people who reject God from this parable. Indeed, the very opposite is true. The rich man cannot leave Hades for Heaven, nor can Lazarus enter Hades even to bring relief. ‘*There is a chasm between the 2 places which makes changing places impossible’*, says Jesus

In the light of the seriousness of this teaching we have to ask, then ‘What made the rich man end up in Hell?’

It **can’t** simply be because he was rich, and we can say that with confidence since Abraham was in Heaven, and he was a fabulously wealthy man!

Wealth in itself, like poverty, does not guarantee Heaven or Hell….

The issue with this rich man is that the way he **used** his wealth revealed him to be someone who spurned God’s holy law

Jesus was once asked to summarise the heart of the Old Testament, how God wanted his people to live, and he put it this way ….

(Image of 2 stone tablets of law, next to one another)

* In terms of God, we are to **‘**Love the Lord your God**’**
* In terms of other people , we are to **‘**Love your neighbour as yourself’

Lazarus was the rich man’s neighbour, and yet he didn’t care about him and his needs one little bit. He felt he could ignore him quite safely, and devote all his time and energies to pampering his own bodily appetites

Almost certainly this parable was directed initially at the Pharisees, who knew the OT law of God inside out, and yet because of their love of money, **didn’t** love their neighbours as they should, and sneered against Jesus’ teaching…

*‘That’s a dangerous position to take’*, warns Jesus, for simply **knowing** what God’s law says will **not** enable us to enter Heaven and avoid Hell. God can see our actions, our desires. He can see into our hearts, and make right judgments . That’s why this selfish rich man ended up in Hell.

~ What about the poor man, then? (Image on LHS ofpoor beggar)**.** Why did he end up at the Heavenly banquet with Father Abraham?Was it simply because he was poor? Well, no there is one thing that gives us a clue about what made this poor man appropriate for Heaven, and this is revealed in his name. He was called ‘Lazarus’, and that means ‘The LORD is my helper’.

Lazarus had thrown himself - in all his earthly trials and needs - on the grace of God, looking to God to **help him** through this life, and into the future. His **name** reveals his **dependence upon God**, and that is so different from the proud, selfish, indulgent rich man, and shows why he was carried to Heaven by the angels….

*‘Which are you?’* Jesus asks us, as we look into the spiritual mirror:-

* Are you like the rich man, who knows the Scriptures but doesn’t obey them? OR
* Are you like the poor man, who looks up to God, throws yourself on God’s rich mercy and generosity, and takes him as your helper?

‘*Heaven or hell depends upon your answer’*, says Jesus to us….

Well let’s finish by glancing at the Five brothers in v27 onwards. The rich man does perhaps the first unselfish thing in his life when he begs Abraham to ‘Send Lazarus to my brothers’. He wants his brothers to be warned about the reality of Heaven and Hell, and the need to choose the right path in life now.

 Abraham says ‘No’, since the brothers already have the word of God contained in the OT to guide them ‘Let them listen to Moses and the prophets’. he says.

The rich man tries again, emphasising the impact that the risen Lazarus could have on his brothers (30) -‘Let someone from the dead go to them. Then, they will repent’

But Abraham is not persuaded by the rich man’s case (31)

‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced, even if someone rises from the dead.’

Jesus is teaching here that people’s **response to God** is ultimately **revealed** by the way they respond to **God’s word**. If they won’t trust and obey what God has already revealed about himself, his ways and the way people can be saved, then they are highly unlikely to respond even from a man who has been raised from the dead….

The **truth** of what Jesus is saying is shown in John’s gospel when a real man, interestingly also called Lazarus, was raised from the dead by Jesus, and that didn’t cause a flowering of faith in many of Jesus’ enemies. Indeed, it only made them want to kill Lazarus, and plot to kill Jesus himself!

We’ve seen the truth of what Jesus says here time and time again in Church. It’s why we long to get people to read the Bible, (image of the Bible) because we know that as they do that, it is so often the cause of God opening their spiritual eyes, and receiving Jesus personally.

It’s why we want each one of us in Church, to study the lifegiving truths of the Bible, and then to pass them onto others, for we are now in an even more privileged position than the crowds listening to Jesus that day , for we now have a full, indeed complete Bible, one that shows how the promises of God in the Old Testament have been wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus.

Because the Bible makes us wise for salvation, we should pay the closest attention to it

As the apostle Peter helpfully put it

‘And we have the word of the prophets made more certain,

And you will do well to pay attention to it,

As to a light shining in a dark place,

Until the day dawns,

And the morning star rises in your heart.

[Prayer]