



“A Stunning Reversal”
Luke 16: 19-32
October 6, 2019

Good morning, everybody. It is good to be together on this Lord’s Day, gathered in Jesus Name. This morning as we enter into the Gospel of Luke once more, we are going to hear the voice of the Messiah from the Sacred, Animated Word of God. We are going to be in Luke Chapter 16, where we will observe a stunning reversal that is laid before us.

Back in the mid-1980s, I was a kid about eleven-years-old playing baseball for the Major League Division Royals of the East Lakewood Little League. I was the starting catcher for our team. I liked playing that position. The fact of the matter is, I got rather comfortable sitting behind the plate. At times, I became a little bit too comfortable.

I remember on one occasion, my buddy, Ray, was pitching from the mound. Ray had two pitches—a fast ball and a curve ball. I got to signal him from behind the plate. One finger was a fast ball and two fingers was a curve ball. It was pretty simple. However, at one late afternoon game, I was in a really, really silly mood. I was goofing off and kept signaling to Ray with four fingers, and there was no pitch for a four finger signal. Then I would signal with five fingers, and there was no pitch for that either! I could see Ray’s response, rolling his eyes. For some reason, I thought it was hilarious.

Have you ever gotten into a laughing fit, where you just could not stop laughing? So, there we were in the middle of that baseball game, and I could not stop laughing. What was the poor kid up to bat thinking as I was sitting behind him cracking up? Finally, Ray threw a fast ball right down the middle. The batter took a hard swing and the ball glanced off the bat and flew right into my face mask. Thank goodness, I was wearing that mask! That is what the protective gear is for. I was not injured, but my bell was rung! I will never forget what the umpire said right after that. He said, *Well, that shut you up!*

This morning we continue in the Gospel of Luke, following the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in the midst of a portion of Scripture where Jesus dealt with the Pharisees of First Century Israel. They were some of the men of religious leadership there in the land.

Here in this section in Chapters 15 and 16, we opened up seeing how the Pharisees were muttering and grumbling against Jesus because He welcomed notorious sinners and tax collectors to His teaching sessions with open arms.

The Pharisees did not get that. They did not like that, and they grumbled. Noticing this, Jesus shifted His teaching a little and began challenging them about the use of wealth. He knew that they were wealthy men. Jesus told a parable that indicated that we should use our wealth to reach out to people and make friends for the Kingdom.

The teaching of Jesus was strong, and He challenged them in the midst of His parable and His following instruction about their love of money. He just let it rip. He knew that those men had worship for money in their hearts, and that love for money was detestable in God's sight. The Pharisees loved things more than people and they used people to get things, and Jesus began challenging them about their love of money that was so evident in them. With this, things escalated.

The way that it escalated was interesting, because the Pharisees were trying to justify themselves. To deflect the teaching of Jesus, the Pharisees went from murmuring to scoffing. They made fun of Him. They were laughing with each other in a way that others could hear—Ha, ha, ha! Get a load of this guy! Listen to what He is teaching—so, there was a scene of mockery that took place as Jesus was teaching things of vital importance.

As we continue and see what happened next, Jesus delivered a parable that we could only hope and pray wiped the sneer off their self-righteous, self-assured faces. The teaching of Jesus, and often these parables, were delivered like scud missiles, and He intended them to have some pretty explosive affect.

These Pharisees, they were wealthy men and they had this theology that wealth and money and the cumulation of it, was the sign of divine favor upon a person's life. Whereas, if there was somebody who was suffering in some kind of poverty or physical disease, it was a sign of God's chastisement for some sort of undisclosed sin.

These men in their love of wealth, in their hardness of heart, they had very little mercy for the people around them who were suffering. They did not have a kind spirit toward those who were experiencing misery in different ways. So, Jesus delivered this parable to totally disturb the false theology that the Pharisees held to.

Jesus wanted to ring their bells. And I pray that this will be the case wherever it is needed here in our midst as well as Jesus speaks through this parable of grave eternal realities. So, we look at what is written for us as recorded by Luke in Luke Chapter 16 and Verses 19 through 31:

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us’ ²⁷And he said, ‘Then I

beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—²⁸for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

So we have a sobering, and I would say even haunting, parable given to us from Jesus, the so-called *Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*. Here in this section, Jesus employed the rabbinic understanding of Sheol.

Sheol was spoken of as the abode of the dead. The rabbis came to an understanding that this place Sheol, this underworld, had two parts to it. There was a place for the unrighteous dead, a place of torment, and there was a place for the righteous dead, gathered to Father Abraham in the place called Abraham's Bosom.

Here in this portion of Scripture, Jesus understood, and He employed that concept of Sheol to deliver a very sobering message to the Pharisees of First Century Israel and to all of us who have ears to hear.

There are some discussions and good biblical debates among even evangelical scholars as to Sheol actually having two compartments in Old Testament times up to the atonement, or whether there was the place of unrighteous dead or the Father's House depicted in Psalm 23.

I will leave that debate aside at this point. I just want for us to enter into the imagery that Jesus employed. I want for us to see what Jesus had to say here, because Jesus used the picture in this text to portray for us real and true and everlasting realities—that when people die, there is a place of great blessing and comfort, and there is a place of justice and there is a place of torment.

There is a heaven. There is a hell. Scripture is absolutely emphatic about these things. Jesus presented this imagery that our hearts might be sobered in view of these things; that we do not rest on any kind of false assurance like the Pharisees of Israel did.

I want to take our time to do our best to enter into the picture that King Jesus is presenting to us. Then, at the end, we will draw some implications for our hearts and for our lives. This parable, though it has the only character in a parable of Jesus that received a name, and that is Lazarus.

What we find on closer look is that in this parable, the emphasis lies on the experience of the rich man. We see here in this text that this rich man experienced a great reversal with Lazarus upon his death. Then, he made a plea for himself in this place called Hades. The rich man also made a plea for his brothers.

That is how it comes to us, so take a look and see what is here for us.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

1. The rich man's stunning reversal (16:19-24)

The story opens by presenting to us a very, very wealthy man. He is clothed in purple and in fine linen, feasting sumptuously every day as he strutted around his compound like a king.

Understand here, that this is not a judgment against wealth. It is not a sin to have money, and it is not even a sin to have a lot of money. Later on in this very parable, Abraham himself appeared and we know by studying Abraham's life in the book of Genesis that Abraham was a very, very wealthy man who was right with God.

You can also think about Job, the righteous man of the Old Testament. He was considered to be the wealthiest man on earth by some. You can look into the New Testament and can see Joseph of Arimathea, who handled his wealth in a sanctified way. You can think of Lydia of Philippi. These were all wealthy people who had hearts of grace and generosity, even with all the material things that they had.

So for all the warning that Luke Chapter 16 gives to us about getting too close to money and loving it with our hearts, having it is not a sin. We can be good stewards of it, and we can be those who work hard, who earn an income, and who provides wealth for our families, and who are generous to the purposes of God on this earth.

But this man that Jesus presented here, he was not a man of wise and kind generosity. He was not even a man of modest understated elegance. Rather, he was man who had to make extravagant displays of all that he had.

Jesus pointed out that he was wearing purple garments. Purple garments were extremely rare in that day. They were made from the dye of the little mollusks called *Murex*. The dye was so rare and so hard to come by that virtually only people of royalty would be able to wear purple garments. In addition to that, not only does this parable comment on his purple outerwear, it even mentions the quality of his fine underwear.

We see that this man feasted sumptuously every single day of his life. That language of the *sumptuous feast* is the exact Greek language that is used in *The Parable of the Prodigal Son* when the father said, *Let's have a celebration. Let's throw a party.*

This rich man had for himself a fattened calf for every day of the week, having his party, having his fine dining experience, and living in his gated property with his impressive gates to keep people out. Here is the rich man.

In stark contrast, in Verse 20, we read of the man Lazarus. He was a poor man. The rich man lived in luxury. Lazarus was in abject poverty. He did not have a penny to his name. He was destitute and reduced to begging.

It would seem that not only was he weak and feeble, he was feeble to the point of debilitation. He was not mobile. He could not get around for himself. Did you notice the passive language

that is used in Verse 20? He did not place himself at the gate of the rich man. Others placed him there. They laid him there, hoping that he would find mercy from the house of the rich man.

We look at the details here, and we see that not only was Lazarus physically weak, but he was also sick. This is indicated by the ulcerated sores that absolutely covered his body, which the dogs of the street came to lick, Jesus said.

Understand that in our society, a statement like that might make us think of the wonderful domesticated creatures that we invite into our homes to become family members. I am a dog lover! Dogs are so much better than cats, let's just admit it! I love dogs.

Some have even recognized a kind of compassionate awareness that our dogs can have in understanding the injuries of their masters, seeking to come and even soothe and clean their wounds. It is a touching picture. I love my dog and I would probably love your dog too if I could spend some time with him.

But our concept of canine is emphatically not the picture that is here in this text. In the pages of Scripture, dogs are spoken of in a derogatory sense repeatedly, so that the imagery of the rich man with his companions the dogs is similar to the prodigal son with his companions the pigs

These dogs were wild, ravenous, feral animals that stalked the streets of ancient Israel. They were scavengers. Understand that these dogs were not coming to help Lazarus. Rather, they were coming to satisfy their taste for blood and flesh by licking this man's sores, also rendering him ceremonially unclean under Jewish law in the process.

Jesus presented this picture to us and the point is that the rich man could not have cared less. He left Lazarus to the dogs. His attitude was: I don't care if the whole neighborhood thinks I have something to offer him. He is not my problem.

All this is indicated by the fact that Lazarus was left out on the other side of the rich man's fence. The dogs were probably also coming to consume the rich man's scraps of garbage, and Lazarus longed to eat some of that as well.

We continue in the story, and get into Verses 22 and 23 where we see that the great turnaround came as both of these men passed into eternity. It was a great reversal when death claimed them both.

In Verse 22 we read that the poor man died and instead of being carried by the village custodians to the outskirts of town for a humble burial, Lazarus was carried by angels to Abraham's side. Whoosh! The angels rushed in and ushered him to the Old Testament Patriarch, Abraham the man of faith.

We read that Abraham was the first among many in the Old Testament justified by his faith in God. In Genesis Chapter 15, God established His covenant with Abraham. And it says in Genesis 15:6 that Abraham believed the Lord. Abraham trusted the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Through faith, Abraham was given the gift of a right standing with God.

It would be evident to us that in the midst of all of the suffering of Lazarus, he was simply trusting God with the information that he had from God. And there he was, ushered into the community of faith as he passed on from this life. Death for him was a graduation, wasn't it? Why do the Jefferson's come to mind? *I'm moving on up.* Lazarus moved on up.

Then we read that the rich man died. He died suddenly too. He was buried and the rich man woke up in Hades. He found himself in the place of the unrighteous dead. The first thing that he noticed was that he was experiencing great discomfort, perhaps even for the first time in his existence. The rich man was there in a condition of discomfort and of anguish and even torment. That is the language that is used here in this text.

As the story unfolds, we see that there is a physical aspect to his suffering. It says that he was totally dehydrated. His tongue was parched as the result of being close to a flame that he was consigned to. There was the physical aspect of his torment.

Then there was the emotional aspect of his torment as well, as he was thinking about certain members of his family back on earth. He knew that they were not right with God. This was bearing down on his mind. The rich man was in that place called Hades, the place of the unrighteous dead, and Jesus pictured him in a place where he was suffering.

We continue and see that Jesus indicates to us the rich man's increased awareness of his surroundings. It says in the text that he lifted up his eyes and way off in the distance, he recognized people and was able to discern Abraham and somebody else with him in a position of great honor and comfort. He perceived that it was Lazarus that was with Abraham. He had that awareness.

From here, we see that this man's dialogue with Abraham began. First, the rich man issued forth a plea for himself. Then he made a request for the sake of his family members. We continue, and first we see:

2 The rich man's plea for himself (16:25-27)

Verse 24:

²⁴And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

Something that struck me as I was pondering this is that the rich man's character in Hades was much the same as his character was when he was on the earth. Do you detect the condescending view of Lazarus that he had throughout this text?

All throughout his life, as far as we know Lazarus experienced a life of pain. For all of his misfortune, he was finally in a place of relief, in a place of rest, in a place of honor, in a place of consolation.

Yet, the rich man repeatedly requested to send Lazarus, send Lazarus, send Lazarus. The grammar of the underlying Greek indicates this ongoing request. He was willing that Lazarus be sent from his place of comfort across the chasm with water to the place of suffering to elevate *his* needs. He still deemed himself to be in a position where he was giving out orders.

Then we see Abraham's reply in Verse 25:

²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us'

There was a request and there was a reply. What was the request of the rich man? What did he cry out for? Mercy! He said, *Have mercy on me*. This is such a sight to behold, because all throughout the years of his comforted and elevated life on earth living in great luxury and extravagance, the word *mercy* did not even seem to be in the rich man's vocabulary.

You wonder if he even knew the definition of the word in his life. He did not show a shred of mercy to a man that was in need at his dumpster every day. It would be evident that he was not a man who never cast himself on the mercy of God, because those who cast themselves on the mercy of God are, in turn, able to show mercy to those around them who are in need.

Here in this text, now that the rich man has come to the place of judgment, what we find is that his plea for mercy is met with the response of justice. That is the essence of Abraham's response in Verse 25. Justice is what was being experienced by the rich man then. The measure that he used with others on this earth was then the measure that was being used upon him.

To make matters worse for the rich man, Abraham pointed out that there was a massive chasm that had been fixed, fixed with a purpose. Notice the phrase *in order that*. It was to keep the righteous in their place, and the wicked in their place. It is irreversible.

It would have been easier for crippled Lazarus to climb over the ornate and impressive gate of the rich man on earth, that it would have been to for the rich man to cross that gulf that had been fixed. None of this man's wealth was with him then, that he might resource or finance some kind of a bridge. This was the rich man's plea, and this is how it was answered.

Before we continue, brothers and sisters, what we need to notice here is that once a person is in the eternal state, that state is irreversible. When a person is in the glory of Heaven, nothing is going to be able to draw them out. When a person enters into the judgment of hell, there will not be another chance past the time of this life to be brought into the glory of Heaven.

Today is the day of salvation! Now is the time to respond to the invitation of Jesus Christ to be saved, knowing that when your body stops, that opportunity ends.

Perceiving that he would receive no relief from Abraham or Lazarus for himself, now the rich man came to his second concern—that of his household. As we continue, we see:

3. The rich man's request for his brothers (16:28-31)

Verse 27:

²⁷And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—²⁸for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

At the beginning of this story, it was Lazarus that was doing the begging. Now it is the rich man. He was concerned for his five brothers. He did not want them to come where he was, so he said to send Lazarus. Send Lazarus, please send Lazarus.

Abraham replied, *Lazarus? Why would I send Lazarus? They have Moses. They have the Prophets. They have Jeremiah. They have Isaiah. They have all these men who pointed out the sin of the human heart and the need to cast themselves upon the mercy of God. It is repeatedly there in the words of the Prophets.*

When Abraham said that they have Moses and the Prophets, the rich man emphatically said no! Not Moses and not the Prophets. Perhaps this man perceived that they were not men who honored or took seriously the Word of the Lord, so he said to send back Lazarus. The rich man thought that perhaps his brothers recognizing Lazarus from the dead, would believe in the light of a supernatural event such as that.

Then firmly and finally, even prophetically, through the character of Abraham, I wonder if we can hear the voice of the Messiah ringing forth in the final word? Verse 32:

³¹He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Truer words have never been spoken for they came from the heart of Christ Jesus Himself, who would know. Christ knew that the cross was looming. Christ knew that His body would be wrapped, and would be placed in the grave into the third day with the tomb being sealed.

Christ knew that on the third day the grave would burst open and be left empty. Christ knew the unbelief of the Pharisees that He was speaking to, was such that they would even still persist in a state of unbelief because of the darkness and the sin of their hearts. What a stunning statement that Jesus gave.

And there we see the nature of unbelief, the moral aspect of it. A person can be given even a clear and obvious sign from the hand of God, but if there is darkness in their heart and a love for sin and self-rule that they hold onto, even a clear sign from the hand of God will not convert their

hearts. Jesus said that they had the Law and the Prophets. The Law of the Lord that revives the soul, as men and women humble themselves under its message delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So we have this heavy parable. Does anybody else feel it? I've been feeling it all week, brothers and sisters. While there is so many implications that we can focus on as we think about what Jesus has delivered here, there are two of them that I want for us to come away with.

We could talk about the brevity of life, how this life and all its comforts are going to be over very, very quickly and we better have our eyes on eternity and the One who said, *I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.*

We could talk about the nature of unbelief as I have already touched upon. Is it intellectual? Is it experiential or is there something moral about unbelief that cherishes darkness? We could talk about the sufficiency of Scripture. Paul said, *I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.*

These are things we could draw from this portion of Scripture, but there are two that I want for us to have ringing in our ears as we finish. One is:

1. The reality of hell

Hell exists. Jesus, the Authority, spoke of it time and time again. The Apostles that came after Him spoke of by His Spirit time and time again. Hell is real. It is depicted in the pages of the Bible as an actual place in the same way that Los Angeles, California, Denver, Colorado, Portland, Oregon, are places. Hell is a place that exists. It is a place of pure, perfect, righteous, measured retribution for sin from the hand of God. It is there.

There is a notion of hell that has been popularized in the society that we live in. This notion of hell I would say is both somehow tame and defiant at the same time. There is a concept of the place that the Bible calls *the lake of fire and the outer darkness.*

I'm guessing that this notion even preceded AcDc in their song *Highway to Hell*, but it is the attitude that says, *Okay, so hell exists. You know what? I would rather just go there and have a party with my friends. I would rather go there than be with a bunch of self-righteous Christians, floating around on some clouds and strumming a harp. No thanks!*

The irony is that there is no such thing as a self-righteous Christian. There are lots of self-righteous religious people. But if you are self-righteous inside your heart, you have pride that thinks you can make yourself right before God by your own righteousness, and you are not getting it. You are a sinner who needs grace. Every Christian is a humbled sinner, not a self-righteous person.

But Jesus was very clear in this text that this rich man's party was when he was on earth. When he came into the afterlife, the party was done and none of his party friends were there with him. We need to take this in, and we need to be sobered by what is here given to us by Jesus Christ.

The reality of hell is one reality that we need to take to heart. We also need to take to heart:

2. The glory of grace

The suffering that we see depicted in this parable is the suffering that is and will be experienced in eternal hell by those who deny Jesus Christ and fail to respond to the Gospel. That is the truth.

But, brothers and sisters, understand that the suffering depicted in this parable was experienced somewhere else as well. The righteous retribution that we see taking place in the story that Jesus told, it took place in another place. We remember what happened just outside the city walls of Jerusalem.

We remember how on that day darkness covered the noonday sun on that Passover weekend in Israel. We remember that there was rugged splintery wooden cross and upon that cross was nailed the Lamb of God, making atonement for sinners like us, experiencing the very suffering that we see depicted here in this portion of Scripture.

That suffering was prophetically depicted in the 22nd Psalm. In that Psalm we read how that person was experiencing anguish as well. He was so physically pulverized and exhausted and dehydrated, that his tongue was sticking to the roof of his mouth. This is a picture of the Messiah.

Not only does it depict the physical suffering, but also the spiritual suffering. In Psalm 22, the suffering one cries out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* The very cry of dereliction that came from the Messiah from the cross when the perfect, holy, loving, righteous Father turned His face of fellowship and intimacy away. Instead, the Father poured out upon the Messiah wave after wave after wave after wave of righteous wrath that human sin deserves.

We read these things and what we find out is that every sin is serious. Listen to me, God experiences righteous indignation that far exceeds anything that we experience, and we experience righteous indignation. It just takes dramatic examples to get righteous indignation stirred up in us.

When we think about a child being abused in the worst of ways, something gets stirred up inside of us and we say that that needs to be punished. That is righteous indignation. God experiences that, and He experiences wrath against sin. The thing is for us is that we need really dramatic examples to get stirred up because we are all fallen sinners ourselves.

All sin offends the holiness of God, but His heart is still filled with Fatherly love and concern that people be saved. So, how can this love and this justice, this mercy and this pure holiness, be satisfied? The cross of Jesus Christ is the answer!

Our sin was imputed to Him. All the horrors of sin were placed in and upon Christ, and He received from the hand of God the righteous price that all sin deserved. Whenever there is

humility and a humble and contrite heart that says I am a great sinner and I need a Savior, looking to the cross and Jesus, their sin is taken away.

They are forgiven and they are delivered from the judgement that is depicted in this parable that has been set before our very eyes by King Jesus, the loving Lord Himself. Let us take this to heart and perceive the glory of grace. Look to the cross and see the One who died for all our dishonesty, for our self-centeredness, for all our stinginess, for all our indifference, for all our complacency, for all our transgression. Jesus suffered and died as a Lamb of grace. This reminds us of the greatness of grace.

In conclusion, I think that Jesus wants to remove from us one burden and add another. He wants to remove from us the burden of our iniquities and any attempt that we would try to strive, as if we could, to earn our righteousness before God. Jesus says, *I take your sin*.

But then Jesus wants to give another burden and place it upon us. It is the burden for the lost. It is the burden that comes for the people that will go to hell, that we might overcome our reluctance to speak with people about the things that they probably in their sin don't want to hear about anyway. And that we would have the boldness and the grace to think about these things.

In closing, the great reversal is that Jesus took our sin on the cross that we might become the righteousness and the pure and holy before God, not on the merit of anything in us, but on the basis of His gift of grace given through faith.

Let's close in a word of prayer.