

Live for Eternity Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. ²⁰ A beggar named Lazarus had been laid at his gate. Lazarus was covered with sores and ²¹ longed to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Besides this, the dogs also came and licked his sores. ²² Eventually the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In hell, where he was in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ He called out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in misery in this flame.'* ²⁵ *"But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in misery. ²⁶ Besides all this, a great chasm has been set in place between us and you, so that those who want to cross from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'* ²⁷ *"He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's home, ²⁸ because I have five brothers—to warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'* ²⁹ *"Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them.'* ³⁰ *"No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'* ³¹ *"Abraham replied to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

It's important to have purpose in life. To know why you're living in this world and what you're living for. Many in our world are clueless when it comes to knowing their purpose in life. So many are living for the moment. So many are living for themselves. Many fail to look past this life and into the next. Many are following a wait and see approach as they consider the end of life. Most people do wonder about life after death. Obviously, no one wishes to have their eternal existence spent in a place of torment which the Bible calls hell. Many deny that hell even exists. "How could a loving God ever send anyone to a place like that?" they say. Everyone is hoping for eternal life in a paradise that is free from all of life's problems.

Before our time is up and we enter eternity, we must be ready to face our Maker. He will decide whether we live forever with him or forever away from him. So we can be certain that we will live forever with our Lord in eternity, we turn our attention to a story our Savior once told. It's a story about a rich man and a poor man. The poor man is named Lazarus. The rich man is never named. With this story we see how important it is to live for eternity. Live knowing this life comes to an end. Live using what God has given us to assure us of eternal life—his saving word.

The story Jesus tells involved two men who lived very different lives. *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. A beggar named Lazarus had been laid at his gate. Lazarus was covered with sores and longed to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Besides this, the dogs also came and licked his sores.* One man in Jesus' story lived in luxury. He didn't have a care in the world. He thoroughly enjoyed life in this world and lived it to the fullest. The other man in Jesus' story had a quality of life that did not compare. He begged for every meal. He spent his days longing for the scraps from the rich man's table. And the only health care he could afford was to have dogs lick the sores that covered his body.

The men lived very different lives. One lived in luxury. The other in misery. But then our Lord tells us how that all changed. *Eventually the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.* We can just imagine how extravagant the rich man's funeral was. Well-wishers probably came from all around to pay their last respects. But there's no mention of a burial for poor Lazarus. Who would have even noticed except his friends who placed him at the rich man's gate? But Jesus tells us how Lazarus had a better death. His death did not just end his miserable life. God sent angels to carry his soul

to Abraham's side. He went to a place where his miserable life was replaced by a glorious one. He went to heaven. But the rich man's life after death was very different. His temporary life of luxury was replaced by eternal torments. Our Lord explains: *"In hell, where he was in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus at his side. He called out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in misery in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in misery. Besides all this, a great chasm has been set in place between us and you, so that those who want to cross from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'"* The rich man was in torment in hellfire. He could find no relief from the suffering. Just a drop of water would bring incredible relief. But there would be none. And there was no escape, not for all eternity. The rich man's life on earth was luxurious. But when eternity arrived, he was trapped in agony. The rich man failed to live for eternity.

How important that we realize our reason for living. We can easily get caught up in the pursuit of wealth that we lose sight of why we're here. Jesus is not telling his story to condemn rich people. There will be rich people in heaven as well as poor people. There will be poor people in hell as well as rich people. Our Lord is condemning those who live only for this life and not for the next. When you enter eternity, it doesn't matter if you lived in plenty or in poverty. This life will end. And we know why it will end. Sin brought death to all. To know where you are going when life ends is vital. When we die, they'll place our bodies in a casket or an urn. But our souls will live on until we are joined with our bodies in eternity. Will eternity be in heaven with all of Abraham's children? Or will you be in hell with the devil and all who rebelled against God in life by rejected the good news of forgiveness in Christ. Will angels be taking us to Abraham's side when we die? Or will we be in torment where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched? That is a very important question for all to consider. If you want to reach heaven for eternity, I suggest that you don't focus on your own life. None of us can measure up to God's standard. We're not holy as God is holy. We haven't lived, thought, and spoken in ways that only please God. When we look in the mirror of God's holy law, we won't find anything in us to escape the fires of hell. That's why we must focus on the One who was rich becoming poor, so we can have eternal riches through his poverty.

In Jesus' story it's important to focus on the right person. It's definitely not the rich man. Should we focus on Lazarus? Did he make it to heaven because he lived such a pious life? Or was he there because he already suffered hell with those painful sores that covered his body and his malnourished life that begged for every meal. Instead look to whom he was taken. Angels carried him to Abraham. Abraham was in heaven to welcome Lazarus because of the saving promises God made to him. God promised a Savior from the countless descendants that would come from Abraham. Scripture tells us, *"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Those who believe are children of Abraham*" (Galatians 3:6, 7). The reason God sent angels to carry Lazarus to Abraham in heaven is because he believed in the same Savior God had promised Abraham. So our focus is not on the rich man, nor the poor Lazarus, not even father Abraham. Instead we look to the One telling the story.

The only way for us sinners to enter eternal life with God was for God to enter this life first. God's eternal Son did that when he was born of a woman and born under law. Living under God's law meant he'd have to face the same temptations we face. He'd resist them all and live life with pure thinking, with holy speaking, and with perfect living. And that holiness we get to

share by faith in him. He even endured the curse of God's law for all our sin. Jesus was covered with the filth of mankind's sins. From a cross he'd suffer hell's bitter torments that only the rich man in Jesus' story could understand. Just like the rich man in the story could find no relief from his pain, there was no relief for Jesus as he was forsaken by his heavenly Father and ridiculed by his fellow man. But Jesus was willing to go that cross so poor sinners like us might join him in heaven. Knowing that this life does end, don't look to yourself to find a way to eternal life. Keep looking to Jesus, the only way to the Father. That's how you live for eternity.

So we can live for eternity knowing this life will end, God has given us all that we need. He's given us his saving word. Jesus shows that in his story of the rich man and poor Lazarus.

The rich man realized that was no relief in sight and no escaping the torments of hell. He wanted to warn his family members who were still alive. In the story the rich man begs Abraham, *"Send (Lazarus) to my father's home, because I have five brothers—to warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."* By sending Lazarus back from the dead, the rich man felt he could shock his brothers into realizing their sin and repenting of their ways. But Abraham tells the rich man that his brothers had all that they needed to live for eternity. *"They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them."* God the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write about Abraham in the first five books of the Bible. God's Spirit breathed his word through the other prophets who recorded the rest of the Old Testament. All his brothers needed to do was turn to the Bible and they'd find the way to heaven. But the rich man didn't think that would work. It didn't work for him. Why would it work for his brothers? So he argues, *"No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent."* The rich man saw no need to listen to God's Word while he was living in luxury. He didn't think Scripture would do anything for his brothers either. But send someone back from the dead to warn them, you'd get their attention. But Abraham told him, *"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."* The rich man's brothers needed only to listen to God's word and the Holy Spirit would not only convince them of sin and the eternal dangers of sin. He'd show them their Savior from sin in that same saving word. They simply needed to use God's saving word and they'd be living for eternity.

God's word is all we need for eternal life. God has promised, *"My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"* (Isa. 55:11). The Apostle Paul told Timothy, *"The holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:15). If you want to continue through life with the certainty that you will live forever in heaven, all you need to do is turn to God's Word. That's what everyone needs to do. And we need to do that regularly. Faith comes from hearing the message. But if you're not hearing the message, what's happening to your faith? Someday each one of us will die. And we'll be faced with eternity. Don't you want certainty that we'll spend eternity with our Lord? Then keep turning to God's Word. His Word reminds us of the one person who died for us. He died for all. God's own Son did that for everyone. Because he given his life for all, God forgives all and promises all a home in heaven. That good news is the reason we gather for worship and Bible study. That good news gives us purpose in life. Now we can face death boldly. We know our Savior has removed its sting. We can eagerly look ahead to the day God sends angels to carry us home to heaven.

Use God's word daily. When your life comes to an end, and it will, you will live eternally with your Lord. The only way to reach heaven is through Jesus. Knowing that you live for eternity.