

What's Next Series

One Moment after Death

Luke 16:19-31

We are in the midst of our What's Next Series. We are studying prophetic Scriptures that are coming to pass just as God promised that they would.

This morning I want to look at the most frequently fulfilled prophecy of all. The one event that God promised would happen, warned everyone to prepare for—and yet it takes almost everyone off guard and by surprise.

That is of course death—and the judgment of God upon all who die in their sins.

Every second two people die somewhere on this planet.

Have you ever thought what happens just one moment after death? So that we would know and be ready Jesus instructs us in His Word. Open with me to John 8: 24.

First, Jesus warns that the very worst thing that could happen to anyone is for them to die in their sins.

John 8:24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

Next, He lets us know that death does not end life, it just changes the location. There is no cessation of conscious existence. Look with me again at II Corinthians 5:6, 8—

2 Corinthians 5:6, 8 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

This morning we will study the final truth Jesus speaks of most frequently. He lets us know that the dead awaken from the momentary rest of death in a very real, very painful, very different place. The first thing that they experience is the inescapable reality that they will now have to live with the results of their choices.

So every second over and over again the prophecy of God's Word happens. People face death alone. People face death in their sins. People face death in horror, pain, and the endless punishment their sins deserve.

That is what many experience—one moment after death. Now listen with me as Jesus told a parable in Luke 12: 16-20. Stand with me as I read these verses.

Then **He spoke a parable** to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! **This night your soul will be required of you**; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

One of the most vivid recollections of my youth took place in the middle of one dark and rainy night in July of 1966. In the pitch black of that night, I awoke with a start--by the seeming pain of being struck in the face.

Something had hit me, and was now sliding down my face and neck.

It was absolutely dark, so dark I could feel it.

I was cold, clammy and so tightly packed in that it was hard to move! And, then above all that there was a brief flash of fear and fright of the unknown. Where was I? What was happening? Why is it so dark? What hit me and was rolling down my face and neck?

Well, as I sat up, my head hit the canvas of the tent, the steady low rumble of my Dad's snoring from soon fully awakened me. And then as I laid back processing all that, I was struck again. A larger cold drop of water hit my face from directly overhead. It ran down my face, then my chin and down my neck.

Then in the dark I understood. I was camping with my dad, it was the middle of the night, and then the awful realization of the inescapable result of a wrong decision I had made.....

I settled back into my cold sleeping bag to lay all night under the persistent drip of cold rain water on my face. Why? I had disobeyed—and now I faced the inescapable consequences of my sin.

Dad had said repeatedly as we set up our tent before the rain had started, "Don't touch the tent once we are inside— it will drip". At ten, my curiosity drove me to test his word. So there in the dark I had waited for him to start his patterned breathing that signaled sleep. Then I did it. I disobeyed him. Just one finger raised in the dark directly over my head was all I did. I touched the tent, and nothing happened—at that moment. So, I went to sleep confident that all was well. Dad was mistaken. I was okay. Until the consequences warned of—became reality that dark night.

As the drops of water rained down on me faster and faster all night long, I faced the horrible reality of the results of disobedience. The deserved pain from negligence and willful disobedience is always hardest to face.

The inescapable reality most humans will face a moment after they die is that they were not prepared for meeting God. They died in their sins. And all who die in their sins face an inescapable eternal punishment.

Now turn with me to Luke 16, as we meet another person who awoke to a horrible reality.

THE PERSONS: A nameless lost rich man and a faceless sick beggar – Lazarus.

THE PLACE: The grave moments after death.

THE PORTRAIT: A foretaste of heaven and hell – of bliss and horror – of paradise and pain – of righteousness and unrighteousness – of comfort and torment.

THE DETAILS: Christ Jesus our Lord here gives a glimpse of the grave thru the door of death!

So many people around us could die this year—unexpectedly and rapidly, and most of them LOST.

They would enter at death the place called the grave, hades, hell, the pit, and sheol. That is a place that has been feared since the earliest times of life on this planet. It is a dark place of endless night, a dreary place of never hope. Most people think about this place more and more the older we get.

There are dozens of verses in the Bible that take us through the door of death and let us tour the afterlife. We have toured heaven several times in our prophetic studies. This morning I would like to take you on a tour of the grave--the destination of the vast majority of people that you live with, work with, and see around you in daily life. "You and I, everybody you meet, from the mailman to the guy next to you at work, has an eternal destiny. That destiny is either a joyful existence in the presence of God, or a Christ-less eternity in the place prepared for the devil and his angels. It is a real place."¹

Now walk with me again through Luke 16, Jesus tells of Lazarus and the rich man. Luke 16:19-20:

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

- **Hold on.** Look what is missing. Jesus did NOT say, 'Learn the parable of the rich man' like we read in Luke 12 and in almost all of His other parables. No, He speaks in a different way, He said 'there WAS a certain rich man.' Jesus was speaking of a literal event of which He, as God, had knowledge. Note also that it doesn't say that the rich man was particularly bad. He isn't a notorious sinner—just successful, well fed, well dressed, cautious about strangers, and mortal like us all. His only real problem was that ***he had those common sins that all people have—and he died in them, with them on him as he died.***

Jesus tells us that Lazarus is in the glory of Heaven's waiting room and Dives is in the torment of Hell's waiting room. Again I ask, what can we find was the sin of Dives?

- It wasn't cruelty, the text doesn't say he ordered Lazarus to be carted away from his gate.
- It wasn't hatred, the text doesn't say he locked his garbage cans.

¹ The Omega Letter Intelligence Digest, Vol: 6 Issue: 21 - Friday, February 21, 2003.

- It wasn't murder, the text doesn't say he wounded Lazarus as he drove through the gate.
- It wasn't violence, the text never implies Dives was harming Lazarus at all.

The only sin we can see from God's Word is that Dives seems to never have even noticed Lazarus.

Now continue reading:

Luke 16:22-24 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

Stop again. Here Jesus explains another truth to us. Before the Cross when their Pardon was paid, the righteous dead, like Abraham, Moses, etc, did NOT go directly to heaven, as do Blood-bought Christians of the Church Age. Instead, they went to Paradise. The grave, sheol, hades was at that time divided in two, one a place of comfort, (Abraham's bosom) the other a place of torment, but both located physically in the grave, or hell as it is called in many places.

Note also that the rich man can see Lazarus, that he speaks of literal torment and literal flame. Abraham explains the division of hell, and that Lazarus cannot come to him.

So that is the content of the parable, but I think there is more. If you step back ask yourself, so what made the rich man so bad? Did he harm Lazarus? Did he commit gross moral sin? Was he a murderer, liar, or anything like that?

If we look carefully at these 13 verses we see that every word, every phrase is chosen to communicate such depths of meaning. Jesus contrasts two characters.

First, there is the rich man, usually called *Dives*, which is the Latin for rich. Each new phrase builds a picture of this man. The point Jesus is making is about the luxury in which he lived. His clothing was purple and fine linen. If you remember our series in Exodus you know that is exactly the elements God chose for the robes of the High Priests. In modern terms those robes would cost about \$75,000 to \$100,000. Even today a normal person would never be able to afford a wardrobe in which each outfit would require an average person to spend his entire earnings from 6-8 years of full time labor per outfit!

But Jesus goes on, this Dives or rich man ate a luxury feast every day. In fact, the Greek word Luke uses denotes a gourmet feeding on exotic and costly dishes. And Jesus emphasizes that he did this *every day*. Think of Bible times where normal people felt very fortunate to get to eat meat once in the week. And that was only after laboring for

the other six days. But Dives not only didn't have to work it seems, but he also was feasting. This paints a picture by Christ of indolent self-indulgence.

When Lazarus waited for the crumbs that fell from Dives's table it is another insight into the Biblical world.. In Christ's time most people had no knives, forks or napkins. They usually ate food with their hands. But in very wealthy houses, the rich would clean their hands by wiping them on chunks of bread, which would then be discarded by the servants into the trash.

Now enters Lazarus. He sat by the trash thankfully getting any chunk of used hand cleaner bread.

Consider Lazarus. Because Lazarus is the only character in any of Christ's parables who is given a name we are led to ponder whether this may be a true life account. Lazarus is the Latinization of the Hebrew name Eleazar, which means *God is my help*. So Eleazar or Lazarus was a totally helpless, sick, and starving beggar, covered with ulcerated sores; and so helpless that he was unable to keep the dogs that roamed the street from bothering him.

So life passes for both and the scene in the after life shows a drastic switch in their conditions.

Now look at the account again as the rich man cries out,

Luke 16:27-28 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

Stop here again. Note that the rich man remembers his life on earth. As he will for eternity. He remembers his loved ones, and is conscious of their destiny. He begs Abraham to do something, but Abraham simply tells him that

Luke 16:29-31 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

Now note something in God's Word that is EXTREMELY revealing. It is in the names we find recorded.

Abraham is Abraham. Lazarus the beggar, is Lazarus. But the rich man has no name.

He has his memories, he has his awareness of his surroundings, he knows the hopelessness of the situation and the only thing he wants more than a drink of water is to save his five brothers. But HE HAS NO NAME!

Why is that so important? Because he doesn't need one. Nobody will ever speak it again. There is no reprieve, no visitors, no hope and no need for a name. To all intents and purposes, he is dead, although eternally aware of it.

He faced eternal, conscious, perpetual, lonely torment, being forever dead, yet alive. He was inescapably remembering the time when he could have escaped the torment.

That is what awaits the mailman, or the guy next to you, or your friends or relatives of whom we say, "I'll talk to him when the time is right" or when he says, "I'll think about it. Maybe tomorrow."

Then God says, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

These are the last days.

The Rapture is coming, the Tribulation is almost upon us, the King is coming! But He isn't here yet. And there are plenty of people alive today who won't be here then, either. ²

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To Dives the Rich Man, this poor, dying beggar was just another clump of the landscape.

To Dives the Rich Man, it was "perfectly natural and inevitable that Lazarus should lie in pain and hunger while he wallowed in luxury. As someone said, It was not what Dives did that got him into heaven; it was what he did not do that got him into hell."

So let me emphasize this, Jesus paints us an unforgettable picture. In it we see a man who could look on the world's suffering and desperate needs and simply never feel the conviction of God.

This Rich Man would look at a fellow human who was starving and deathly ill, and do nothing about it.

² The Omega Letter Intelligence Digest, Vol: 6 Issue: 21 - Friday, February 21, 2003.

So Jesus paints the punishment of those who never noticed. When God's Word is not received, Christ's compassion is also absent.

But why was the part added that Jesus told about refusing to send a warning to Dive's family? Could it be Jesus is saying that to those who are exposed to God's Word and yet when they see the pain, sorrow, and dying of this world, and it moves them to no feeling and to no action, nothing will change them?

The terrible warning of the sin of Dives is not that he did wrong things, but that he did nothing³.

What happened to him? The word of God was never received, it never pierced the heart. When God's Word is received the life begins to change.

Self-centeredness begins to die

Self-indulgence begins to be disciplined away

Self-sacrifice begins to be pursued

Compassion, kindness, caring, and love take root and grow.

WHAT'S THE GOOD NEWS?

Jesus Christ died for sinners – All who receive Him are forgiven of all their sins – All who are forgiven receive eternal life!

Sing – Prayer – "God Forgave My Sins"

NOTE these Laws of Death For Lost & Saved

THE DETAILS: Start in v. 22 as - No less a reporter than the Lord of Truth. Christ Jesus here gives a glimpse of the grave thru the door of death! Note these laws of death for lost and saved. His points were:

1. PERMANENCE v.22 Only the body dies, not the soul; Righteous go to bliss; Lost go to torments v.22
2. CONSCIOUSNESS v. 23 In the grave we are conscious, we can see and remember or recognize people even ones we never met. Intuitive recognition of Abraham who died 20 centuries before rich man and Lazarus. v.23
3. SIGHT: They can see "far off" - long distances and have recognition of those they knew in their lifetime "saw Lazarus" v.23.
4. COMMUNICATION: They can speak v.23
5. SENSATION: They can feel their body's physical desires are still present v.24 like "Thirst"

³ Adapted from Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1975.

6. PAINFULNESS v. 24 In the grave the lost can still experience pain. Note the vivid contrast "that tongue that never lacked on earth calls for that hand that was unheeded at his gate..."
7. MEMORY v. 25 In the grave events from Earthly life may be recalled. Memory seems to be unimpaired.
8. HOPELESSNESS v. 26 In the grave there is no escape. "Great chasm" eternally beyond help "none can pass"
9. HORROR v. 27 In the grave the occupants of the torment want no one else to come it is so bad. Reality of constant torment only drove him to have others flee. [Recent punk rocker said wanted to go to Hell with friends and fun].
10. ISOLATION: No communication from the lost dead to living allowed, the dead have no influence in spirit world v.27
11. QUALIFICATION: Word of God determines the destiny of all, the rest passes away. v.29 Supernatural not always convince [note Christ's miracle and apostles and prophets only confirmed faith - never produces...]
12. INTUITION v. 29 Abraham seems to know the events after his life 2166 BC, including Moses 1446 BC and the prophets. Abraham knew history after his death [died 20 cent. B.C.] Knew Moses and prophets 600-1200 years after death.
13. FINALITY: No one goes back! v.31