

Hard Truths for Hard Hearts

Luke 16:14-31

This weekend, the students at WB and some adults went to the apologetics conference. One of the students was there for the first time, and on the first night I asked him what he thought and he said, "It's interesting. There's a lot of topics that people tend to dance around and avoid. These guys aren't avoiding it at all."

We live in a world, where certain topics are "off limits" – or at least, if they are acceptable conversation topics, it's not ok to have convictions that apply to other people and not just you personally.

Jesus doesn't have those categories. Nothing is off limits for him. No matter how hard it might be to hear, or to accept.

Jesus loves us enough to not ignore what we really need to hear.

So, today, Jesus is going to talk about the love of money, and hell.

This is a sobering text – and as Jesus makes very clear... there are eternal realities at stake. Heaven and hell. Eternal joy and comfort, or eternal anguish and torment.

What we see at the heart of all of it is the insidious danger of self-righteous religious hypocrisy.

All of us who have been in church for any amount of time are susceptible to this danger. We know the right words to say. We know how to put on a face. We know how to play the role. And we can even use religious jargon to excuse our lack of love and generosity.

Last week we saw that everything we have been entrusted with is for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. It's not ours. It's all to be used as instruments of his mercy we are to be shrewd disciples with what Jesus entrusts to us.

MPS: Jesus is searching our hearts and putting all our ambitions in perspective so that we might flee to Him and live our lives with eternity in view.

He wants to show us our desperate need of him. So that we might genuinely receive his mercy, be transformed and live for *His mission* before it's too late.

C. S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*:

A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do.

It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is.

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.

The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven.

It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”

In this passage of Scripture Jesus is forcing us to, not only think upon heaven and the glorious that await the redeemed, but also to think upon hell and all the anguish that awaits those who have not trusted in Jesus.

This is a searching and sobering passage. And it is meant to wake us up before it’s too late.

We often talk about warnings being like the “check engine light” on our dashboards. This is more than a check engine light” ... this is a passage of scripture for those who have ignored that flashing light and now the car is smoking and on the verge of irreversible damage.

Jesus is telling us clearly, not to scorn us, but to set us free.. to wake up before it’s too late.

We have to ask ourselves, *what are we really living for and how are we justifying it? When we breathe our last, will what we gave our life to make sense? Will it be worth it in the end?*

What becomes clear in this passage is that how we relate to Jesus will have a direct effect on how we relate to others. If we have received mercy – we will give mercy. On the contrary... if we haven’t received mercy from Jesus... we will live our lives only for ourselves.

So – Jesus is giving us some hard truths today to help us examine ourselves, and he does this in two moves.

First, He gives a searching pronouncement
Second, He tells a sobering story.

Let’s take these one at a time:

1. Searching Pronouncement

V14-15

14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. 15 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.

To back up just a bit – last week we heard Jesus teach on money – and the need to use money evangelistically for the good of others... and not just ourselves. Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and money." This was a problem for the Pharisees, because... as Luke just said – they loved money and the power it could afford *them*.

When someone starts to poke at our idols... the things that grip our hearts – we get defensive. We do what we can to push them away. One of the ways to do that is to mock them. To turn the table. To make the other person feel small so that we feel justified in our sin.

We have an astonishing ability to manipulate and maneuver our way around calling idolatry what it really is.

We protect what we truly love. We protect what we think we truly need

Now we have to ask ourselves, are we, too, lovers of money? Does money rule our hearts? Or does Jesus and His gospel? Do we let Jesus put his finger on our idols and set us free? Or do we recoil and make excuse?

Phillip Ryken, in his commentary, makes some searching comments about this:

when we are anxious about our finances, not trusting God to provide for our needs today and tomorrow, we are in love with money and its power to make us feel more secure;

when we find our thoughts returning again and again to something we are hoping to buy, we are in love with money and its power to get us what we think we want;

when we make employment decisions that are spiritually unwise for ourselves and our families, we are in love with money and our plans for getting more of it;

when we spend more time complaining about what we do not have than rejoicing in what we do have, we are in love with money and depend on our possessions rather than on God to give us contentment and joy;

when it seems difficult or even impossible to give up something we want in order to give a sacrificial gift to Christian work, we are more in love with money than we are with the gospel and what it can do to change the world.¹

Now – before we move on. What's happening in your mind and heart right now?

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, [Luke](#), ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 184.

Are we excusing our lack of generosity and love of money or are we able to be honest? To see it for what it is.

Do we see our need of mercy? Or are we seeking to manipulate and maneuver our way out of conviction?

You see – we’re all a lot more like the Pharisee’s than we wish to admit.

The question is: where do we run with the things that rule our hearts?

Look at v16-18

¹⁶ “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷ But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

¹⁸ “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Self-righteousness is insidious because we can even trick ourselves.

It’s no secret that the Pharisee’s knew the Law and the Prophets – that is, the OT, cover to cover.

The problem was – they didn’t know *how to read it*. Or what it was supposed to do.

They read the law... and rather than letting the law read them, they used it to compare themselves to others.

You see this In Luke 18 – Jesus tells a story of a Pharisee and tax collector who both go into the temple to pray. You hear the Pharisee pray:

“God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.”

It’s a scary thing when we read the bible and we start thinking about all the other people who don’t measure up but we are blind to the fact that we are in desperate need of grace.

Friends – if you’re more concerned with the sin of others and more preoccupied with your own righteous deeds – you’re in grave danger.

The Law and the Prophets are meant to show us our sin and need of a Savior – and give us the promises of the One to come!

It's been said that the law is like a GPS: A GPS can tell you where you are... where you're supposed to be... how to get there... where you're off track... etc.... But it has no ability whatsoever to actually get you from A-B. From where we are to where we need to be.

The Law says "Be holy, for God is holy." That should devastate us.

The Law and Prophets also say that there is coming a day when the King will return and make all things right. That should excite us.

V16 says that the era of the Law and Prophets was until John the Baptist... now the gospel of the kingdom is preached! The king has come. The Savior has come.

And everyone is forcing their way into it.

Those who know their need of a Savior are fleeing to Jesus. Sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes and the unclean. They are doing whatever it takes to get in on this good news.

And so should it be with us too. We ought to be just as zealous today for the kingdom as the day we first believed.

One of the tell-tale signs that we are seeking to justify ourselves and are in the danger of religious self-righteousness is if we have lost our zeal for Jesus. If we've forgotten how much we actually need him. If we think that we are basically ok... because, let's be honest... at least we aren't like *those other people*.

Self-righteousness is so insidious. I mean not only are the "morally upright in danger of it." But we can even be self-righteous towards the self-righteous.

The gospel should level all of us and put each of us on level playing ground. All of us are in desperate need of the daily, saving grace of the gospel.

Now Jesus brings divorce and remarriage into the conversation and that seems odd. And this isn't a sermon about marriage so I'm not going to spend much time on this. But essentially what's going on here is Jesus is using this law as an example of a way that the Pharisee's have twisted the Word of God in order to justify themselves.. rather than letting the word of God reveal their sin and cause them to fly to Him for salvation, they interpreted the scriptures in such a way that justified their sin.

They wanted to be able to divorce their wives for any reason and still feel like they were right with God. So Jesus, puts his finger on this specific law showing them how far short they fall.

Jesus is giving a searching pronouncement. He is showing us all clearly that we need mercy from him.

He will lovingly put his finger on the idols that rule our hearts and the question we must ask is “Will we flee to Jesus for mercy, or will we continue to justify ourselves so that we can hold onto the things that we love.”

Now Jesus moves into telling a story that illustrates the danger we are in if Jesus doesn’t rule our hearts.

What Jesus is doing with this story is showing us that what or who rules our hearts is revealed in how we relate to others.

Let’s look at v19 and following and listen to Jesus’:

2. Sobering Story

This is meant to snap us out of the illusion of the pursuing “the good life” of “living the dream” no matter the cost.

In this story we see 2 people, and 2 places. Let’s walk through it.

First, look with me at v19-21. We see **two people**:

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

These two people couldn’t be more different.

First, there is the rich man.

As one commentator said, “he is described in excessive, even outrageous terms.”

This rich man – he has all the nicest things. The nicest clothes. He never wears the same outfits twice. He is dressed like a king. Whatever he wants he gets it. This guy has the nicest clothing from head to toe.

He feasted like a king. He ate *sumptuously every day*. Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Now don’t get me wrong, I’m all for a feast. I love celebrating with a good meal. God created steak ... because He’s a good God.

But this man was over the top. Every day. Every meal was top shelf. The wine never stopped flowing. He got what he wanted when he wanted it how he wanted it.

Notice that he had a gate at his house. He had a big house on property. He was king of his own castle..

Interestingly, later in this story we will see him call Abraham “father” indicating that he was a religious man too.

He probably thought that God had blessed his life, because of all the material goods he had.

He had everything the world had to offer.

This is the influencer that the world admires.

This is the celebrity that the world envies.

But his heart was clearly far from God.

An old friend of mine – his name was Zion.. he and his dad were skateboarders who were evangelists. They were like these gnarly dudes who loved Jesus.

I remember years ago Lil Wayne started to skateboard and somehow my buddy Zion got invited to go to his house and skate with Lil Wayne on in his private skate park.

Zion ended up sharing the gospel with Lil Wayne, telling him about Jesus... Lil Wayne responded, "Oh yeah, I'm a Christian.. me and Jesus are tight."

If you know anything about Lil Wayne you know for certain this man lives for one person and one person one. And it certainly isn't Jesus.

Self-deception runs deep. When we have the worlds goods, and know a few religious traditions we can easily fool ourselves that we are ok with Jesus when in reality we are far from God.

When we have genuinely seen our need for Jesus and have received His mercy, we will stop living for ourselves and seek to extend mercy to those around us.

This wasn't the case for the rich man in Luke 16.

There was a poor man at his gate, every day. He never helped him out. Never took care of him. In fact, the dogs took better care of him than he did.

Now – the point isn't that being rich is inherently bad. But riches make an awful master. Money and materials are easy counterfeits to trick us from knowing our need of a Savior.

Our goal can't be to get rich, our goal needs to be to know and love Jesus and live on his mission.

The poor man couldn't be more different than the rich man. If the rich man had the all the worlds goods, this poor man had none of the worlds goods.

He was immobile. He had to be carried around. He was ill. He was hungry. He couldn't care for himself and no one else would either.

And yet – this poor man has something that the rich man doesn't.

He has a name.

His name is Lazarus. Which means, "God is my helper."

Now – if we were to look at this man's life, it would be easy to think that God had abandoned him.

Circumstances can be deceiving.

You see – the circumstances that we go through don't determine the love that God has for us.

Some of you are going through some unspeakable suffering right now. And you're asking, "Where is God?" Why isn't He helping me?

Lazarus, knew those wrestles as well.

Jesus himself knows what that's like. On the cross Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The hardships that we go through don't determine the love that God has for us. As we will see, looking to God, and not ourselves, as our helper will be so worth it in the end.

So we have two people in this story who couldn't be more different from one another. However, despite all their differences... they both have something in common.

V22 – They both die.

"Only one life, will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

We have two people in this story... and now we see, **two places.**

We all know this. We all of us have an appointment with death. And when we die – it will be revealed where our hope truly lies.

V22 – **The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.**

His whole life he probably wrestled with the question, "How in the world is God my helper?" But the moment he breathed his last – all doubts were undone.

He who suffered his whole life was immediately comforted by divine messengers.

He who was begging for scraps from the table, found himself a seat at the eternal feast in the kingdom of God, alongside Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He who was covered in sores, was now clothed with perfection.

He who was cared for by dogs, was immediately cared for by His Savior.

In the twinkling of an eye all his sorrows were undone. All his suffering was no more. All that was sad was becoming untrue. Everything was worth it in the end.

Christian – what you are suffering now is not the end of the story. This light, momentary affliction is preparing a weight of glory beyond all comparison. Hold on. Help is on the way. Don't lose hope. It'll all be worth it in the end.

But not so for the rich man, who lived only for himself and showed no mercy. He finds himself in hell. His lavish life... is suddenly undone. It's over. All the joy is gone. He finds himself in torment.

Jesus is holding up before us a graphic picture and causing us to look at the realities of hell: Read v22-31 with me:

The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And 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.' ²⁵ But 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. ²⁶ And 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.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ 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.' "

Now – as uncomfortable and unpopular as it is: we need to slow down and consider what Jesus is teaching us about hell: we see 5 realities about hell in this section... let's walk through these.

1. Hell is a real place of torment and anguish

Now – this is hard, because we all probably know people who have died apart from Jesus. It should cause us to weep. And tremble. But we can't ignore it or explain it away simply because it makes us uncomfortable. What we can recognize is that Jesus loves us enough to tell us what's at stake.

Jesus speaks of hell as 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, and that those who reject him also go there (Matthew 25:41)

It's the place where the 'worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:48)

In our text it's the place of torment and anguish (Lk 16:22,28)

In the book of Revelation we are told that those who reject Jesus will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger and be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev 14:10)

Friends –there have always been people who have tried to explain away the reality of hell. We simply can't take Jesus seriously and deny the reality of hell.

One of the saddest lies that so many of us have believed and some of us still do believe is that heaven will be boring, while hell will essentially just be a massive party where all the rebels are joined together finally free from all restrictions.

There is Nothing further from the truth.

There will not be one drop of joy in hell. All the joys we have experienced on earth will be a distant memory.

There will never be a belly laugh again.

No song will captivate your imagination.

Every friendship you've ever experienced will be turned into rivals.

Every beautiful starry night will only be darkness and emptiness.

Every ounce of joy you have ever experienced will forever be forgotten.

There will be no peace.

No love

No companionship.

Only strife

Only hatred

Only rivalry

Only loneliness

Hell is a real place of torment and anguish.

2. Hell is inescapable and eternal.

V26: **And 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 are no second chances once we die.. There is no changing of our minds. There is no opportunity to be forgiven by Jesus once we die.

It will never end. It will be like a nightmare that you never wake up from. A sad song that doesn't end. A painful moment with no hope of relief.

Day after day

Week after week

Month after month

Year after year

Never ending.

Endless misery. With no hope of escape.

3. We become the worst version of ourselves in hell

V24 **And 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**

Notice how the rich man still thinks he can boss Lazarus around. What arrogance. Notice that he is still full of selfishness. He is perfectly willing for Lazarus to suffer the removal of bliss so that he can have just a single moment of relief.

Friends – I don't know about you, but there are times in my life when I am acutely aware of how hopelessly sinful I am. And if it wasn't for the moment-by-moment restraining grace of God I would be unleashed into all sorts of ungodliness.

If it wasn't for the restraining grace of God... all our anger would end in murder.

All our lust would end in rape and adultery.

All the seeds of our sin would sprout into full blossom and the world would be utter chaos all the time.

Friends – in hell... all the restraining grace of God will be removed and will be found to be far worse than we could ever imagine.

Consumed by rage 24/7

Consumed by greed and selfishness

Consumed by hatred.

There will be no pause that thinks, "Hmm this might be a bad idea."

Everyone will only be out for themselves.

God created humans to have dominion over the beasts... One of the sad realities of sin, is that the more we are consumed by our sin the more we actually become like the beasts.

We will devour, destroy, deceive.

Friends – in hell... everyone is completely beastly.

4. Hell will be full of regret.

V:27-28 – **27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— I have five brothers – so that Lazarus may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'**

Those in hell will realize all the relationships that they wasted. They will suddenly realize how trivial our companionships were in light of eternity.

All the opportunities we punted on.

The only hint of compassion that the rich man feels still in hell – only adds to his sense of regret and remorse.

There is nothing he can do about his aching for those still alive who don't know Jesus.

He will finally see clearly the consequences – and feel it deeply in his bones... but not be able to do anything about.

It will be like those dreams where you see danger coming, but you can't run. You're feet are stuck to the ground. You're helpless. Only fear. Only regret.

But you'll never wake up and have a sign of relief.

Friends: Hell is a real place full of anguish and torment.

Hell is eternal and inescapable.

Hell will reveal the worse in us.

Hell will be full of regret.

5. Hell is avoidable –

V31 – **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."**

Or – to say it another way. *If they hear Moses and the Prophets... we will be convinced and escape the wrath to come.*

By the way – what did Jesus do when he actually did rise from the dead?

Luke 24:27 says that he taught a bible study to some of his disciples. ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ²

Friends – the answer to our plight is found in the good news of Jesus.

Friends – the good news of the gospel is not that we have to rescue ourselves out of hell. But that Jesus came into the world on a rescue mission for sinners and sufferers like us.

The problem isn't with the gospel. The problem is with us not seeing our need for the gospel.

Towards the end of Luke's gospel we see Jesus being crucified. All around him people were mocking him, and scoffing at him. Just like the Pharisees were ridiculing Jesus in our passage today.

And two criminals on either side of Jesus are being crucified next to him. It says that one of them "Railed at Jesus" – He's mocking Jesus, while he is himself is utterly hopeless. How sad.

But then the other criminal – something changes. He responds. "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done thing wrong."

This is a miracle. The man on the cross saw that he deserved to be condemned. He saw that he deserved the punishment. He saw his sin for what it really was.

He looks at Jesus and says, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." To which Jesus responds, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Friends – we don't have to suffer the condemnation we deserve. Jesus is holding out to all of us hope. Real hope. Eternal hope.

On the cross Jesus took the punishment you and I deserve, so that we would never have to. On the cross Jesus became sin in our place so that we would receive His reward.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 24:27.

If you're here and you're not a Christian – would you admit your need for a Savior and come to Jesus? Would you trust in Him? If you want to talk about what that looks like – we would be so happy to talk with you today before you leave.

What about those of us who are Christians? How should we respond to this?

It should fuel compassionate, urgent evangelism. We have the best news in the world to tell those who are unknowingly on their way to hell. Not only does the gospel rescue us out of the condemnation we deserve... but the gospel brings us to Jesus – the One who *actually satisfies our greatest longings and desires*.

Now – rather than just hitting the streets and telling random people (you can do that if you want) I find it better to evangelize those that you have an opportunity to walk with over the long haul.

1. Location – Where do you live?
2. Vocation -Where do you work / go to school?
3. Recreation – Where you spend your other time regularly?
3. Start praying for those people you interact with regularly. Build intentional relationships with people for the sake of the gospel. We don't want to hide the fact that we are followers of Jesus. Look for opportunities to share little glimpse that Jesus matters and makes a difference in your life.
4. We want to have strong enough relationships with those in our lives so that when their idols fail them, we can offer them the true hope of the gospel.

Jesus is telling this story to the Pharisees because he is holding out real hope and love to them. *He's inviting us into this story*. There are many people that Jesus purchased on the cross, who don't yet know it. We have the joy of telling them the good news of a God who saves.