

Luke 16:19-31

I'm sure you are all familiar with "before and after" pictures. They generally crop up with each new weight-loss plan, or with the latest medicine against acne. One picture shows the person **before** they entered the program, and the other **after** they have completed it. The results are usually quite **dramatic**, thus encouraging **you** to **try** whatever it is they are selling. Jesus isn't selling **anything** in our text, but He does make a "before and after" **comparison** of two men. He first of all shows us these men **before** the day of their death, and then He compares them a second time **after** they have died. Let's look at our text once more to examine **why** Jesus gave us this comparison of two men - **Before And After The Door To Eternity**.

Our text begins, *"There was a **rich** man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, and lived in **luxury** every day. At his gate was laid a **beggar** named Lazarus, covered with **sores**, and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table."* The words of our text are most generally considered to be a **parable** - an earthly story with a heavenly meaning - but it might **not** be. Jesus nowhere **mentions** that this story is a parable, so the possibility exists that it is a **historic**, factual account - a story which goes beyond the grave, and which Jesus is able to relate to us only because He is the omniscient, all-knowing, Son of God.

Parable or **not**, Jesus speaks first of a **rich** man. He appears to be much like any **other** rich man in Jesus' day. It is very likely that he was connected with **royalty**, for we are told that he was dressed in **purple** and fine linen. The fact that he lived in **luxury** every day might make us **envious** of him at first. After all, how often haven't we thought about how nice it would be if we never again had to worry about **financial** matters? Have you ever read about some successful individual with a high-paying salary - perhaps one of those premier professional ball players - and caught yourself saying, "It sure must be **nice** - over \$100 million dollars just to play a game. He's really got it **made!**"

But Jesus shows us that even though the man in our text was **rich**, he **didn't** have it made. Riches are a **gift** from God, and along with **every** gift comes a certain amount of **responsibility**. The LORD had laid a part of **this** man's responsibility at his **gate** - in the form of poor **Lazarus**. Perhaps the man who had **carried** Lazarus there had **nothing** to offer Lazarus, except for his strong **arms**. But the **rich** man had **plenty**, and he was expected to **share** his over-abundance of wealth with those who were less fortunate. Lazarus must have been a **pitiful** sight. His body was covered with **sores**, and his face and limbs were no doubt **emaciated** from lack of food. He would have been happy to get the **crumbs** which fell off from that rich man's table -

anything to ease his hunger. But we see that the only **relief** he received was from the **dogs**, who came and licked his open sores, thus helping them to heal.

I'm sure we would all say that Lazarus deserved **better**. **He** would have been content to receive **crumbs** - would **we**? **He** didn't **complain** about his painful sores and loathsome body - would **we**? **He** had to be **carried** from place to place just so he could **beg** for food - would **we** be satisfied with that kind of a life? I don't think **I** would be, and yet God tells us, "*Be **content** with what you **have**.*" **Things** fill our lives, but God says, "Things aren't **important**." We can't tell what a person's **spiritual** state is like by looking at the **things** he possesses. We can't say that God loves a rich man so **much**, just because God has blessed him with so many **things**. Nor can we tell that a rich man loves **God**, because God has given him so much. Those reactions don't always **follow**. Just look at the rich man in our text. How did Jesus describe him? He was a **prominent** citizen, with seemingly not a care in the world. But did it strike you, that in spite of the prominence which this man enjoyed, Jesus didn't even give him a **name**? Perhaps he really **wasn't** so important after all! Let's look back at the words of Jesus. He said, "*The time came when the **beggar** died and the angels carried him to **Abraham's side**. The rich man **also** died and was **buried**. In **hell**, where he was in **torment**, he looked up and saw Abraham **far away**, with Lazarus by his side.*" The rich man had been cast into **hell**. Why? Was it because of the unmerciful way he had treated Lazarus? Heaven **forbid**! If that were the case, we would **all** be rejected from heaven. Is God saying that we dare not **enjoy** life, or we will **pay** for it later? Of course not! We only need to look at the lives of Abraham, or King Solomon, or any of the **other** rich believers found in the Bible to know that this is **not** true.

So, what **was** it that made the **difference** then? Why was **Lazarus** taken into **heaven**? Was it because he had **accepted** his lot in life without **complaining**, and was **satisfied** with what he had? If we look more closely at the **name** which Jesus gave in our text for **heaven**, I'm sure the answer to **all** these questions will become **clearer**. Jesus said that the angels carried Lazarus to **Abraham's side**. Abraham is the father of all **believers**, therefore, the difference between heaven and hell is **believing** or **not** believing - and that must be determined **before** we pass through **death** - the **door** to eternity.

Whether we are rich or poor, godly or ungodly, **all** must meet with **death**. In the Old Testament Job said, "*One man dies in full **vigor**, completely secure and at ease, his body well nourished, his bones rich with marrow. Another man dies in **bitterness** of soul, never having enjoyed anything good. Side by side they lie in the **dust**, and worms cover them **both**.*" **Death** causes a **separation** for **all** people. The

difference is that **after** passing through the door to eternity, **unbelievers** will be separated from all **good**, while the **believers** will be separated from all **evil**. And so we have the **first comparison** which Jesus made of the rich man and Lazarus. **Before** the day of his death, the rich man did **not** believe in Jesus as his Savior, but Lazarus **did**.

Now let's compare the rich man and Lazarus **after** their deaths had taken place. It doesn't take long to see that their roles were somewhat **reversed**. The rich man was in **anguish**, begging Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve **his** suffering. He didn't want **much** - he would have been satisfied with just a single drop of water to cool his tongue. Suddenly he was a **changed** man. He was **satisfied** with very **little**, he referred to **Abraham** as his **father**, and he was **concerned** about the welfare of his **family** - all **wonderful** changes, but unfortunately, they came too **late**. If these changes in the rich man's heart had taken place in **time** they would have done some **good**, but the rich man had passed his **deadline**. He had already gone through the door to **eternity**. His time of grace was **over**. How **frustrating** it will be for those who end up in hell. They will all **know** and **believe** that Jesus was **their** Savior too, but because they were all **unbelievers** at the time of their **death**, they will spend all eternity in hell. Jesus had earlier described the **anguish** of hell in **this** way. *"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out."* This is by far the most severe **punishment** which hell can offer - complete separation from the love of **God**.

On the other hand, Lazarus, the poor beggar whose name lives on to this day because he was a faithful **believer**, was experiencing complete joy and bliss in **heaven**. Jesus put it **this** way, *"Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted."* He had **rest** for his tired body - rest and **comfort** which far **surpass** the hunger and pain which he had experienced on the **earth**.

And lest **we** forget the way to heaven, Jesus re-emphasizes it at the **end** of His story. The rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back to the earth, in order to warn his unbelieving **brothers** about what was in store for them. But when Abraham said that they had God's **Word** to warn them the rich man wanted **more**. "God's Word is too **plain**," he argued. "I didn't listen to it, and neither will **they**. But if Lazarus came back from the **dead** - **that** would be another story. They would **recognize** him, and they would **listen** to him." But Abraham said, "It won't **work**. If they don't listen to **Moses** and the **Prophets**, they won't be convinced even if someone rises from the **dead**." And what Abraham said was proven to be **true** again and again. A messenger from the dead could say **no more** than what is said in

Scripture, nor could he say it with any more **authority**. An excellent case in point is that when **Jesus Himself** rose from the dead, those who had previously rejected His **Word**, **still** did not believe.

By God's gracious providence, we still **have** God's holy Word to read and study here on the earth. We have the testimony of the **Apostles** and **Prophets** - the Old and New Testaments - the word of prophecy made more certain. We don't **need** fancy gimmicks, or neon signs pointing out the way to heaven. We have the complete story of God's love for us in the plain, simple words of the **Bible**. **Nothing** is more powerful, and nothing **else** will lead us through the door to eternity into everlasting **life** in heaven, where God will greet **all** of His believing children with a hearty **Welcome Home**, dear child, **Welcome Home**. Amen.