Luke 16:14-31 // The Rich Man and Lazarus

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Date: 01 November 2026

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[0:00] Our reading this morning is taken from the book of Luke chapter 16 verses 14 to 31 which can be found on page 1050 of the church bibles.

! Luke chapter 16 beginning at verse 14. The Pharisees who loved money heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.
He said to them, you are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.
The law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and everyone is forcing their way into it.
It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the law. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
[1:16] 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.

Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 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 Hades where he was in torment he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in agony in this fire.
But Abraham replied, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things while Lazarus received bad things.
But now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been set in place so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.
[2:43] He answered, Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my family for I have five brothers. Let him warn them so that they will not also come to this place of torment.

Abraham replied, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them. No, Father Abraham, he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.
He said to them, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. This is the word of the Lord.
An outline on the back of the notice sheet to follow as we look at this together. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Heavenly Father, we praise you for your promise that the unfolding of your word gives light.
It imparts understanding. And so we pray that as we reflect on your word now, you will help us to be good hearers of your voice with hearts that are open.
[4:00] For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Great. Well, in Luke chapter 16, Jesus wants us to see life as a great opportunity. And we hate the idea of missing an opportunity, don't we?

On some radio stations, you have this competition, Make Me a Winner. Every Friday afternoon, you can register during the week to be entered for Make Me a Winner with your number.
And every Friday afternoon, they make a call at random to one of the numbers that's been registered. I think they've just changed the rules. But under the rules for a long time, the way it works is, to get the prize money, when your phone rings, live on radio, you have to pick up your phone within five rings and start with the words, Make Me a Winner.
And the amounts of money are eye-watering. At the moment, each week, someone gets the chance to win £800,000, which is about the same as the prize fund on celebrity traitors.

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A life-changing amount of money for yourself. So when one of our kids first heard it being advertised on the radio as we were in the car, she said, Dad, why don't you enter that?
[5:16] Why wouldn't you enter that? You might win. And I explained to them that I couldn't enter. Whatever your views on gambling, if you put them aside for a moment, I could never enter that because can you imagine how it would feel if one week, your number actually came up and your phone rang and you were having a busy afternoon and it just slipped your mind that you'd registered and you answer the phone and you just say, Hello.

And instead of make me a winner. And the money has just slipped through your fingers and it was right there. There's a guy who this happened to who has spoken about this very experience.
He, what happened to him was he actually had just changed phones and his new phone worked in a different way and it rang and he knew what it was and he just fumbled it and he didn't answer it within five rings.
How long would it take you to get over that in your life that you could have had 800,000 pounds and you pressed the wrong button? Well, Jesus wants us to see our lives as a great opportunity.
And the parable he tells today is really punchy because we might think if you see someone living in luxury, they've really made the most of life's opportunities.
[6:39] But Jesus describes a man like that and says he's missed it and there's no way back. He tells the story because of the Pharisees.

They were the respectable people because they were the rule keepers. So when we think of who the Pharisees are in our society today, it's the people all around us who are on the moral high ground.
The people who are looked on as good, great. People respect them and Jesus warns of the Pharisees at his time, they are missing the whole point.
So we see three things that Jesus exposes about the Pharisees and then three things that Jesus reveals about a rich man. So first about the Pharisees, they're on the sheets.
The first thing is they hide the gap between their actions and their hearts. Look with me at verse 15. Jesus' words to them. He says, You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts.
[7:42] What people value highly is detestable in God's sight. That's very striking how strong Jesus' words are there, isn't it? When people value good behavior, even then, what people value, Jesus is saying God finds detestable.

Why would that be? Well, the Pharisees were doing lots of good things, but they did them to earn acceptance, approval, and admiration from the people around them.
And so it is all around us today. People are yearning for acceptance, approval, and admiration from others. So often, when we think about even the really good things that we do, that we've done, until you've had a radical encounter with the grace of God that kind of reshapes your heart and your motivation, we do the good things we do to make ourselves feel good and to make ourselves look good to other people.
If you are hunting for approval from other people in your life, if you're hunting for admiration from other people, one route that you can take is do lots of good things.
Be a doctor. Be a dentist. Maybe not a dentist. Be a nurse. Run marathons for charity. Help the homeless and enjoy the glory.
[9:08] The glory of people saying, you changed my life, doctor. It's marvelous that you did that thing for charity. You're a great person. You can make your life an opportunity to be respected by others around you.

And let's face it, there are much worse things you can do in life. But we shouldn't think that that life choice would make us right with God because he knows our hearts.
He knows why we're doing those things. Then we get the second thing about respectable people. It's that they hide the gap between their standards and God's standards. Jesus points them back to what God's moral law actually asks of you.
If you look at verse 17, he's upholding God's commands. He says, it's easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the law.
That's the Old Testament law he's describing as the law. And the Pharisees thought they were the ones who were upholding it with zeal, with passion. They loved it.

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[10:09] And they had hundreds of rules and regulations derived from the Old Testament law. But Jesus is warning them to be right with God. You would need to keep every single command if that's the route you've chosen.

So he exposes for them their spiritual problem by giving them a specific, an area where they need forgiveness from God. It's how they treat people of the opposite sex.
If you look at verse 18, he says, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery. And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. So the reason he's rubbing their noses in that command is that the Pharisees had made divorce and remarriage more permissible than God's word does.
Across the New Testament, you can find places where there is a much more thorough and careful treatment of God's teaching on marriage and divorce.
Matthew chapter 19 would be an example. 1 Corinthians 7 is an example. But here, what Jesus is doing is just bringing the Pharisees face to face with a command from God that they were breaking.
[11:22] Why? Not to condemn them, but to call them to himself. If you think that you can keep God's commands perfectly on your own, you don't think you need Jesus.

But if you hear the commands of God's word and they drive you to despair, you feel conviction that you've not lived up to these standards, you fall short, well then you realize I need a different way to be made right with God and you become much more interested in what Jesus is offering.
So that's to say if you're here today and you hear that verse, verse 18, and what Jesus is saying there and you feel very uncomfortable because you think, well marriage and relationships, that's one of the areas of my life where I've fallen short of God's design, I've not followed God's design, then you're in the right place here because Jesus is exposing this about you and me not to condemn you, but to call you.
Not to make you feel unwelcome in church, but on the contrary, to welcome you. So in verse 16 he reminds us that's the very news that he's come with.
Verse 16, have a look with me. He says, the law and the prophets were proclaimed until John, that's John the Baptist. So he's describing that the Old Testament news, word of God and then he says, since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and everyone is forcing their way into it.
[12:56] Now that last clause is quite difficult to translate. This everyone is forcing their way into it. If you take it the way the NIV does here, our translations, the picture is, if you imagine there was like a large out-of-town electrical store with iPhones and laptops and TVs and they announce, we're closing down, we're going to give everything away for free, just come along.

What would we see? We'd see people forcing their way into the door to get their hands on the free stuff, people coming in in their droves and that's this picture Jesus is giving of the good news of the kingdom is being proclaimed and people are forcing their way in.
I think a better translation of that verse is that of those words is Jesus saying everyone is being urgently invited into it because what we're seeing in this section of Luke's gospel is Jesus is urgently inviting all kinds of people, broken people, sinful people, come without cost back to God and be forgiven but either way it's that picture of the free offer of a fresh start with God.
That's the opportunity. Who is streaming in? Who is forcing their way in? It's all the people who know I've messed up with God, I need a fresh start.
Who is staying on the outside? The respectable people. Why? They are blinded by other people's approval of them so they don't think they need what Jesus is offering.
[14:32] And we see the same thing all around us today that I'm sure many of us will know people who think something like this. Even if there is a God, even if the God you, Christian, believe in is real, why would I need Jesus?

I work hard at my job, I'm volunteering to coach at my kids' sports club, I look after my elderly parents, I'm on the parent council at school, I do sponsored half marathons for charity, I remember my sister's birthday, I bike to work, I recycle, if you're telling me I need to do more, do me a favor. I'm a good person, I'm doing it right. And so we see the third thing about respectable people, they sneer at Jesus' call to mission.
So have a look at verse 14. what started this section. Verse 14, the Pharisees who loved money heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

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Well what have they heard? In chapter 15 Jesus tells three parables that communicate that what delights God in heaven is when lost sinners turn back to him, when the lost are found.
[15:46] And then we heard last week from the first half of chapter 16 Jesus urges disciples line up your money behind that mission. That's what it means to be shrewd with your money.

Give it so that people hear about Jesus and God in heaven can rejoice as they turn back. But if you're someone who thinks that you can be good enough for God on your own, the idea that your Christian friend or family member would be giving their hard-earned money so that more people get the opportunity to hear about Jesus is pathetic.
It's pathetic. What a waste. How foolish. And folks, Luke records this to prepare us for an experience that we will have all around us today if we line up our lives behind God's mission of making Jesus known.
that when people who are in the same kind of income category or wealth category or job category as you see your lifestyle looking different to theirs, if they pick up that the reason you live more simply than them is because you're giving money so that Jesus can be made known, they will sneer at you.
They'll sneer. Respectable people, the people on the moral high ground, they sneer at Jesus and if you spend your time and use your talents and give your money to make Jesus known, they'll sneer at you.
[17:23] And Luke wants us to know that if that happens and when that happens, we don't give up. We double down on the mission Jesus has given us and the parable he tells the Pharisees shows you why.

Shows you why you have to double down. Let's get into it now. Three things Jesus reveals about a rich man. We're going to see it's about opportunity. The opportunity that he overlooks and that he loses and that we must see.
So first of all, the opportunity he overlooked. Let me read again verses 19 to 21. 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. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.
So we don't hear very much, do we, about these two men. There's not a lot of detail. We do know the parable cannot be saying rich people go to hell, poor people go to heaven. It's as simple as that.
[18:28] Abraham was a rich man. In Luke 19, Jesus saves Zacchaeus who is a very wealthy man. But what we do see from Zacchaeus is that when rich people receive God's free, undeserved grace to them from Jesus, it transforms them into radical generosity.

So when we see this rich man here, the fact that he overlooks the obvious needs of a beggar at his gate, it implies he is a man who has not experienced the transformation that God's grace inevitably brings to your life.
So what we see instead is this is a man focused on himself, on the here and now, and on money. In verse 19, he dresses in designer suits and his boxer shorts are 100% Egyptian cotton.
He is enjoying comfort day and night. And all we're told is that he lived in luxury every day. And when you feel you've hit the jackpot in this life, how easy it is to focus on the here and now.
Just to keep your gaze on what you can see. I think of a Christian friend whose neighbor in a nice suburb said to him, all your talk about heaven, why bother worrying about heaven when we've got heaven here?
[19:55] Another friend who was taken on a golf course by his friend and the guy said to him, this is the Garden of Eden. The poor man is having an absolute shocker.

Verse 20, he's lying at this gate to beg. He's so needy, verse 21, he pictures the leftovers at the rich man's dinner table that they're kind of feeding to the golden retriever down under the table or the stuff the kids are just dropping on the floor and he's thinking if you could just put that stuff off the floor onto a plate and bring it out to me, that would make my week.
He's covered with sores and the dogs come and lick his sores. I've never had a dog. So it's the only reason I learned from someone who owns a dog that dogs do this, don't they? Apparently, they lick sores, they lick wounds.
So in our picture of Lazarus, it's showing us his humiliation. He's out on the street with scavenger dogs and it's as though even the dogs feel sorry for this guy and want to help but not the rich man.

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But here's the question, why does Jesus tell us his name? He tells us the name of the poor man which is very unusual in a parable and he doesn't tell us the name of the rich man.
[21:15] Well, the poor man is known by God. He has a name given to him by God. He has a lasting identity but the rich man, his money is all there is to him and that's the opportunity the rich man has overlooked.

His neglect of Lazarus is just a symptom of the real problem that the man never took the time to consider the things of first importance in his life.
The things of eternity. Where do you stand with God who's given you all of this? And the disturbing thing about all this is that the rich man would have looked like a man who has made the most of life's opportunities, wouldn't he?
He has made it. There's a man who can. Wouldn't everyone have said that about him? By living for himself and living for now and living for money he is enjoying the lifestyle that is the Glasgow dream.
The dream many people around us have for their kids. If only they can grow up and enjoy life like this rich man does. He looks like a stellar success and Lazarus is the one whose life looks like a disaster.
[22:27] How have you ended up there Lazarus? So that's our first point the opportunity he overlooked that the rich man overlooked and then the window of opportunity closes.

That's our second point the opportunity he lost. In verse 22 Jesus says the time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.
The rich man also died and was buried. That's the first difference we see there about what happens when they die is what happens on earth when they die. The rich man gets a burial.
You see that? Because if you were poor in those days you couldn't afford a burial. So it invites us to reflect on their contrasting funerals and think about what that would look like today at Lazarus' cremation service maybe there was nobody at all who came along.
But for the rich man there was a grand service at the cathedral an obituary in the times a banquet at the city chambers with speeches about how brilliant he had been.
[23:33] everyone's paying their respects they put a blue plaque outside the house where he grew up but for Lazarus the honour comes next. God sends his angels to lift Lazarus and carry him to paradise to Abraham's side to the place where eternal pleasures are enjoyed in the presence of God.

And it raises the question for us well whose approval do you most want for your life? Would you rather have a wonderful funeral where people are going to turn out and say great things about you and they're going to speak with great admiration about the life that you lived so well and then on the other side of death the Lord Jesus say I never knew you depart from me or would you rather have a funeral that nobody is there for but on the other side a big hearted welcome from Jesus who says well done good and faithful servant because Jesus pulls no punches about what's next for the rich man verse 23 in Hades that's the realm of the dead in Hades where he was in torment he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side so he called to him father Abraham have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I'm in agony in this fire it's sobering isn't it to see that
Jesus is so clear that hell is real we mustn't believe the person the friend the parent or the bishop who tells us that we don't need to believe in hell they only believe in the good place and who doesn't know as much as Jesus does about all of this we have this thing in our culture don't we where people live their lives without any reference to God and then they die and people say they're with God now as though that would make any sense for someone who's chosen in this life not to be with God to push God away that they would now spend their future with him at his side well the words Jesus uses of the rich man's future are very sobering aren't they torment agony and then he gives us I don't think we can push the details of the parable too literally he gives us this kind of thought experiment that the rich man can see Lazarus and Abraham and their experience as he endures his and isn't it remarkable that the rich man thinks that the status he enjoyed in this life carries over that he still has some kind of prestige so did you notice he never speaks to Lazarus only to great Abraham there's a man on his level and he thinks that Lazarus is like a skivvy and he says can you can you send him to come and serve me and ease my pain how blinded we can be when we make it in this world it makes us feel entitled when people approve of us and want to listen to us and the rich man still thinks like that and Abraham has to set him straight look at verse 26

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Abraham says son remember that in your lifetime you received your good things while Lazarus received bad things but now he is comforted here and you are in agony and besides all this between us and you a great chasm has been set in place so that those who want to go from here to you cannot nor could anyone cross over from there to us in other words the key point Jesus wants us to grasp is the window of opportunity closes when you die he gives us no grounds for thinking that after people die the unrepentant are going to have another chance to settle their accounts with the living God and let's notice as well that the rich man still doesn't ask to get brought to God significantly I think that one way of viewing hell is that it's what we've chosen if we've made the prayer of our life not thy will be done but my will be done
I'm the captain of my faith hell is your freely chosen godless identity forever so for Lazarus who humbly trusted God and for the rich man who lived for himself in the here and now there is this spectacular reversal such that it now does not make any difference how much money the rich man had and how much approval the rich man had forever that's the opportunity the rich man lost but the conversation goes on and crucially it brings our third point the opportunity for you and me the rich man he wants people who are still alive to reshape their choices in light of what he is now experiencing so verse 27 he says to Abraham I beg you father send Lazarus to my family for I have five brothers let him warn them so that they will not also come to this place of torment again you see he thinks that
[29:01] Lazarus is this skivvy who can just go and do that he has no conception of what God has now made Lazarus as he has exalted him but it's not a runner this idea of send him to warn my brothers so look at verse 29 Abraham says of the brothers they have Moses and the prophets let them listen to them they've got God's word in the Bible that's what they need to listen to that's all they need and the rich man pleads please give them more verse 30 no father Abraham he said but if someone from the dead goes to them they will repent and the sobering truth is it won't make any difference verse 31 have a look Jesus sorry Abraham said to the rich man he said to him if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead and I think this one verse has massive implications for ministry by the way for church ministry when I was a ministry trainee a friend of mine who was a minister took me to this verse and said he thinks this verse should shape our whole conviction about what we're aiming for with church activity and ministry and how we make disciples faced with a world around us that doesn't believe in Jesus we're not to think that the answer is more power miracles more signs and wonders then people will believe people demand more evidence but the truth is very often more evidence would not make them turn back to God and Jesus is saying to us through this parable

God's word in the Bible gives us everything we need to avoid hell to understand the opportunities we have in this life but the rich man wouldn't listen he was deaf to the poor man at his gate he was deaf also to God's word and today the question for us is what are you doing with the opportunity that God has given to you the writer J.C. Ryle who was once our bishop here at St. Silas he wrote this about this parable it is not more evidence that is needed it is making use of what has been said he went on this is going to destroy a thousand souls waiting for something you don't have while neglecting something you do have and as we hear Jesus say verse 31 they won't believe they won't be convinced even if someone rises from the dead you can imagine him with a glint in his eye can't you because of course as we hear him say that to us we're hearing his words from a man who really has risen from the dead and he is urging us don't choose respectability from others for your life admit your spiritual poverty and run into God's kingdom through me
God has provided everything needed for us to be saved his son and the revelation of his son in his word what will you do with your life will you seize the opportunity let's pray together just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word heavenly father we praise you that you are holy that your moral standards are perfect and that you are all knowing and all just and that you see our hearts so father mindful that our choices about Jesus now will determine our future forever help us to guard our hearts against a desire to forsake
Jesus for what the world could offer us whether it's respect wealth approval help us instead to come to Jesus empty handed and to stay with him and even when others sneer at him would you grant that we live our lives on the mission to make him known we ask in Jesus name amen for what I will do for what I will know that we can see in him maybe what I will here

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