

Hell, and How to Get There

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[0 : 00] Great, thanks Ali for reading. And if you could keep your Bibles open at Luke 16, if you're at home, or look up that passage online. And here in church, physically, we've got the passage printed there and an outline on the back as we work our way through that.

When we find passages of the Bible challenging, and I do think this is a really challenging passage, I think it's good to say, it's good not to shy away from that. Often those can be the times when God's most at work in us, if we are willing to listen to him, and he can help change us and reshape the way we think and the way we live in light of his word.

So let's pray and ask for God's help. Let's pray together. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. Well, we're looking at this story that Jesus told, and it is a shocking story. And it's shocking because there's a man in the story who dies and goes to hell.

And he goes to hell even though he was absolutely confident when he was alive that he would go to heaven. So much so that by the time we get to verse 27, he begs that somebody be sent to warn his family.

[1 : 19] He's got five brothers. And he wants them to hear the shock. People like us go to hell. Hell. Even as we set off on that, the reality is to talk about hell in today's climate, even in today's church, I have to cross the pain barrier.

And I guess to listen, you have to cross the pain barrier. There's a lot of confusion around us about hell, not helped by, we perhaps look at pictures from history, from the medieval times, times where there were these elaborate, quite frightening depictions of demons with pitchforks and things.

And in today's culture, people react actually very angrily to hearing the Bible's warning that some people will go to hell, that it's a real place. And the reaction then in our times in churches is either never to mention hell or very rarely to mention it.

But as we'll see later, Jesus has demonstrated, he's got the authority to tell us the truth about life after death.

And he spoke about hell clearly. And so I guess for us, we need to think as we come into a church and we hear a minister or a preacher opening the Bible, do they not have a responsibility before God and before Jesus to speak about it proportionately in the way that Jesus did.

[2 : 47] Jesus spoke about hell urgently. He spoke about it methodically. He spoke about it often. He spoke about it clearly with the intention deliberately that people would take immediate action to make sure that they don't go to hell.

So it's really important for us to see in this life what this rich man discovered in death, that people like him go to hell. Now just to place today's account in the bigger picture of what's going on in Luke's gospel, we're picking up Luke for a new sermon series today, as Jack said, and we're looking at these passages in growth groups as well.

And the section we're in here follows a big headline question that was asked in chapter 13 of Luke's gospel. Somebody said to Jesus in Luke 13, 22, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?

That was the question. And then the chapters around that follow that question, the events and the teaching help answer that question. How does someone get saved?

How many people are going to be saved? That's the section that we're in. And there's good news and there's bad news. The Pharisees that Jesus is addressing here were the religious leaders.

[4 : 04] Christians. And Jesus' teaching about salvation, about heaven and hell, is very shocking for them because it's shocking for anyone with a religious framework.

A framework that thinks you can divide the world into good people and bad people and the good people will go to heaven and the bad people will go to hell. Jesus brings a shockingly different message.

And the bad news with that shock for the religious moralist is to hear that nobody is good enough to get to heaven.

Solzhenitsyn, the Russian writer, said this, if only there were evil people insidiously committing evil deeds and it were only necessary to separate them off from the rest of us and destroy them.

But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. That's the bad news. Religion doesn't save you. The good news is that Jesus proclaims is anybody can get to heaven.

[5 : 07] Anybody at all. In a new way. And that's what Jesus means in verse 16 of our account here when he says, the law and the prophets were proclaimed until John.

That's John the Baptist. So he's talking there about the Old Testament scriptures, about God's truth. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and everyone is forcing their way into it.

So what is the good news of the kingdom of God that's being preached? It's, well, in chapter 15, the chapter before this one, Jesus summarized it with these three incredibly famous stories he told of the lost sheep, the lost son, and the lost coin.

And each time something gets lost in the story, the owner is distressed and searches and finds the thing. And then there's a party. There's a celebration when something that was lost is found.

And Jesus says, in the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

[6 : 09] So how do you get into the kingdom of God? How do you get to heaven? You repent. Repentance is about turning back to God, doing a U-turn in the direction of your life. And sin is rebellion against God.

So to get to heaven, to get into the kingdom of God, one recognizes, admits our sin, that we've lived our life in rebellion against God, rejecting Him in the way we've lived, and turning from that in our hearts, seeking forgiveness from God.

The good news of the kingdom of God is anyone who does that is received gladly by God. But some people don't accept that they need to repent. So we come to our first point this morning.

You can see it there on the sheets or on the screens. You can't write out your own ticket to heaven. The Pharisees are sneering at Jesus in verse 14.

And he, they sneer at Him because they think as long as they look good on the outside to other people, then they are righteous. They are going to be approved of and good enough.

[7 : 14] And in verse 15, Jesus says, 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.

So you can't write your own ticket to heaven because it's God's approval that matters and God sees our hearts. He sees what's going on on the inside. And the religious moralists trying to write their own ticket to heaven, they're acting as though they could keep God's moral law of the Old Testament.

And they thought that Jesus' message of grace for any sinner who repents, acceptance, was undermining the moral commands of God. But Jesus urges them that by His message He's the one actually upholding the moral law of God because He's showing how hard it is to keep it.

So in verse 17, He says to them, it's easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the law. The problem is He's raising the bar, He's demonstrating to the Pharisees that they can't keep the moral law of God.

And Jesus picks out two examples for them that should expose to them that they're sinful so that they repent and seek forgiveness. And 2,000 years later, there are examples that work very effectively for us because He picks the way we handle money and think about money and our sexual purity.

[8 : 40] So if we look at sexual purity, He speaks about that in verse 18. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Under the Old Testament law, there were provisions under the law given to Moses by God for the people. There were provisions allowing for divorce. But what Jesus is saying there to the people is you could be divorced and get all the paperwork right but still be a sinner, still have a sinful heart.

And as we read that, we're not to feel that divorce or adultery are particularly worse sins than anything else. If you're here and you're a divorced person as a number of people in our church family are, please don't feel that your sin is being singled out, that you're being looked down on by anyone here because the key point in this section of Luke's Gospel is not about divorce and remarriage.

The key point is about people being unwilling to admit their sin. For any of us, if we can admit that we've sinned in our hearts, Jesus can help us. He can save us.

If we won't admit that we're sinful, he can't help us. We're all in the same boat. And for them, divorce was where Jesus could expose that because they could use the law at that time culturally to hide away their sinful hearts.

[10 : 10] And for us today, when we think about sexual purity, we might think about how you could be somebody who looks sexually pure because you don't sleep around, but at home you watch pornography in secret and God sees your heart and other people don't see that.

It's the principle that the Lord sees the heart. The other issue that Jesus picks up on is money and he spends more time on that. He says in verse 13, you cannot serve both God and money.

Luke helps us in verse 14 by explaining the Pharisees loved money and then he tells this story. So look at how he describes the man in the story, verse 19, the man who gets it all wrong.

Verse 19, there was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. Linen was what you wore underneath your clothes. So this is the guy with Armani underwear, he can afford designer pants and he can eat a banquet feast every night in his house and he does that apparently with a clean conscience despite the need outside.

Look at verse 20. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus who was covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table.

[11 : 29] Now even the stray dogs feel sorry for this man, they come and lick his sores but the rich man is unmoved by Lazarus' needs and Jesus is not teaching here that rich people automatically go to hell and poor people automatically go to heaven.

In fact, Abraham in this story is in heaven and Abraham was a wealthy man but as Jesus has just been teaching earlier in the chapter that we looked at some time ago here, what you do with your money tells a story about what you really love in your heart.

Your money tells a story about what you love and if this rich man had loved God with all of his heart as the law requires, how could he not have seen Lazarus in need and remembered the commands of God to care for the needy?

So when they die, there's this great reversal. Lazarus, the beggar, dies and the angels carry him to Abraham's side. He must have repented and trusted God and then the rich man dies and to his shock, he finds himself in Hades in torment.

And the point for the Pharisees is stop trying to write your own ticket to heaven. We know that's true in everyday life, don't we? I remember once queuing to buy a ticket for a cup final.

[12 : 54] My football team, Middlesbrough, don't get to cup finals very often and it happened in my lifetime. I was 17 and so I went to queue for a ticket. Now I know that ages me because today, of course, tickets would be online and they'd go in minutes but you had to queue physically for this.

I think also you could do things at the time but it was so unusual for Middlesbrough to get to cup final. It hadn't worked out a different way to sell the tickets. So I bunked off college that day and I queued for 11 hours to get my ticket for the cup final.

We lost. But the thing is it never occurred to me in all that time queuing to think I'll just go home and I'll get a piece of paper and I'll write out Wembley Stadium West End Lower Row 10 just by the touchline seat 76 and get on a coach to London and hand that in.

Just would never occur to me to do that. Just as it would be pretty pointless to go to Bray Head to Snow Factor and say to the people at the entrance I haven't got any money with me but you know on the way here I was really kind to an elderly person I helped them out crossing the road could you let me in?

It's just not how life works that we can approach admission with our own rules of how we get in. And yet that's what the Pharisees had done that's what the morally religious person does when it comes to getting to heaven.

[14 : 23] The Pharisees had lowered the bar of God's standards for themselves and so they were offended by Jesus on two counts they were offended to hear that people they looked down on could be welcomed into heaven if they turned back to God and they were offended that Jesus was saying to them you need to repent as well.

And folks isn't the same problem all around us today? That actually most people around us still believe in God and yet they have absolutely no fear of meeting God because they think if there really is a God if it turns out there is a God then by my own moral goodness measured by my standards or the standards of Scotland today I'm sure God will let me into heaven.

I do my recycling I've bought a hybrid car I shop ethically I vote for the right political party the one my friends think is right I support refugees rights I support women's rights I've got my name on a brick in the science centre I gave a donation I'm a patron and God looks at our hearts and what he sees in our hearts amidst the good things is self-centredness rejection of him and he promises us we might look like we enjoy a life today blessed by God indeed many of us do globally speaking we're rich we're like the rich man but if we won't repent a shocking and terrible reversal is coming as the global poor will be welcomed into heaven in their droves as they repent and seek forgiveness from Jesus and people in Scotland around us will not be there if they don't repent so that's our first point you can't write out your own ticket to heaven and the reason why we can't afford to get that wrong is the second point you can't do any deals after death so we catch up with the rich man and you realise he must have worked in sales he must have been an estate agent or something because the rest of the story is him trying to do a deal with Abraham who he can speak to and as we look at that we must remember

Jesus is making up a story here and we're not to sort of press all the details and think this is everything about this story is true to the reality because Jesus is making a point with the way he tells the story so from looking at the rest of the Bible it doesn't look as though people in hell are going to be able to speak to people in heaven at all but Jesus is just using those details to teach us important things to warn us about hell and the first deal that the rich man tries to strike is could you make hell a bit more comfortable verse 23 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 but Abraham says no and then look at verse 26 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 so what are the key warnings there that hell is really awful today if we hear hell mentioned it's sometimes described as though it's the fun place they say there's a heaven for those who will wait some say it's better but I say it ain't

I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints the sinners are much more fun well Jesus says there won't be any fun in hell or we hear about hell and it's described in terms that are nothing to be afraid of it's just kind of life that's a bit like the things that are a bit annoying about life today in hell there's a big hotel where the bar just closed and the windows never open no phone so you can't call home and the TV works but the clicker is broken and Jesus speaks about hell as though he's saying to us wake up this is real and ignoring it as a whole culture will not make it go away it is coming and it will be terrible and as well as being awful there is no way out once you're there did you see that that those who want to cross over from there cannot cross to us and just thinking about that

[19:09] I just wonder if any of my non-Christian mates have grasped that Jesus said this my fear is that they haven't grasped that we're just so used to thinking it'll be alright we'll do a deal when I die I'll find out what things are like and I'll sort it out then we're used to there being a negotiation we're used to U-turns aren't we I was thinking a bit like the exams debacle we had last month the algorithm the unfair algorithm you know it was exposed as not being fair the government said this is the system we're not going to change it there were protests there were placards and the government made a U-turn but when we come to God's judgment day and God exposes our hearts nothing will be unfair about his judgment so there will be no right to appeal as our hearts are laid bare nobody will be thinking I should be in heaven I deserve that and Jesus is saying if you die without having repented and sought forgiveness from God through Jesus it will be too late there will be no chance after death to change your mind there's no deal making so that should mean that we weigh up where we stand with Jesus today with great urgency a friend of Kathy and mine that we knew from London who lived in France he died a fortnight ago he's about our age he died in a climbing accident in France he was climbing with his boys he left behind his wife and his kids and we were reflecting as we heard the news that when we lived in London and we knew

Edward and we knew this group of friends we basically lived as though we were going to live forever we never talked about death we never thought about death and yet since that time already which isn't that long ago for me one guy lost his wife very suddenly to a cardiac arrest two women have lost their lives to cancer and left behind husbands with children and Ed was a fit and healthy guy who just was on a climbing wall and the apparatus gave way and he plunged to his death death can be very unexpected and what Jesus is saying here is you can't wait till you've died to settle your accounts with God you'll plunge into eternity unprepared if you think you can do a deal there so folks it's a very bleak warning so far isn't it but there is a positive ending to the story for us because the rich man now tries to make a different deal and even though he doesn't get what he asks for this morning we do so that's our third point you have everything you need now just have a look with me at verse 27 he answered then I beg you father

Abraham 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 see what he's saying my family are rich like me and morally respectable like me could you just warn them what do you think a dead person would say if they could speak to you if spiritual mediums really could summon the dead what would they say from this story Jesus is saying they'd want to urge you repent and seek forgiveness from God and the answer from Abraham is they already have a warning verse 29 Abraham replied they have Moses and the prophets let them listen to them the Bible is all that we need then in verse 30 the rich man wants his family to get a more persuasive warning verse 30 no father Abraham but if someone from the dead goes to them they will repent he thinks that they just need persuading it's about evidence and he said to him verse 31 if they do not listen to

Moses and the prophets they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead do you see what he's saying if the promises and the warnings of the Bible are not enough to move our hearts to repentance then our minds are already made up you had Moses and the law on being generous and helping the poor and you had Lazarus sitting at your gate every day how did it not occur to you that you might need forgiveness from God you had what you needed and the point for Jesus original hearers and for us this morning is that we have everything we need to make sure we don't end up like the rich man in hell we've got Bibles everywhere haven't we we've got them all around us on our bookshelves in our hotel drawers online we've got Bible based ministry in church and when we just listen to God's revealed will the Bible it tells you everything we need to know to avoid hell and get into the kingdom of

God it holds God's standards before us to show us God is there and we have a problem with him so that we can repent and believe the good news and go to be in God's kingdom and incredibly as well we've got what the rich man longed for for his family he was sure what would change their mind would be a dead man coming back and we're told this warning this morning by a man who really did die and really is alive again because on the third day he came back from the dead so that Jesus showed us that death is not the end and Jesus showed us he's the only man who can speak with proven authority about what awaits us on the other side of death we can speculate and speculate but when Jesus speaks to us about life after death the guessing games can stop because he is alive now having died and he is the man at the heart of what he describes in verse 16 as the good news of the kingdom of

[25 : 32] God that's being preached because he is the good king the saving king who's come out to find us and it shows us if we put our trust in him we can force our way into his kingdom that's what he wants us to do to let nothing get in the way force your way in because he came to seek and save the lost and unlike Lazarus there who died because like all of us he's a sinner who died Jesus the only reason he did die was to suffer in our place the hell our sin deserves so that we can be welcomed by him into his kingdom so what we must do is admit our sin and turn from it and seek forgiveness but it's all that we have to do because we have a great saviour once dead now alive and a God who longs for us to do that he urges us force your way into the kingdom just by trusting him and if you've never done that before or you're aware that you've drifted from it you can do that today you can do it now today will be a great day to do that to secure your future in the kingdom of

God let's pray together gracious God and loving heavenly father we praise you for the words of Jesus that he was willing to warn us in our generation and the Pharisees then with great courage so that we would take action and not go to hell so please father would everyone who's heard these words this morning at home online or here in the room force their way into your kingdom by turning to you and seeking forgiveness today we ask in Jesus name amen to you can stop for a time on beat again and going to Diseases■■■■