

Rich Man, Poor Man
Luke 16:14-31
Pastor John Miller

The Wall Street Journal quoted an anonymous wit years ago who defined money as “an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven and as a universal provider for everything except happiness.” We know that money can’t get us to heaven. We’re going to see that in our parable today. And we know that money can’t buy you happiness. So the stories we’re reading in Luke 16 are all about our relationship to money and wealth. In Luke 16, Jesus is basically teaching on the subject of money and wealth.

Jesus taught three things about wealth. In Luke 16:9, He said that we should make good use of our wealth; that when we die, we may receive everlasting joy. In verse 14, He tells us that we should not be covetous. And in verse 15, He said that wealth is no proof of godliness.

Verse 14 is literally where we would pick up our study. “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money....” Everything in the context deals with these Pharisees, who were religious but were lost and loved money. In verse 13, Jesus had said, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Then He continues in verse 14 by saying that “The Pharisees...also heard all these things, and they derided Him.”

Jesus had just finished, in verse 13, the parable of the unjust steward. He was going to be fired from his stewardship, so he called his master’s creditors in and cut down what they owed his master. He was doing something that was unethical, but it was shrewd and wise on his part from a worldly standpoint. That enabled him to ingratiate himself with the creditors and be prepared for his next job with one of these creditors when he lost his stewardship. We’re all going to die, so we should prepare right now for what happens after we die. So the lesson in this parable is about stewardship of our funds.

And in verse 14, Jesus said the Pharisees were “covetous,” it says in the King James translation. And they “derided” Jesus for this parable. The word “derided” literally means that they “lifted up their noses” and sneered at Him.

Then in verses 15-18, we will be introduced to our text, which is another parable. “And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.’”

Even the great scholars I read in my commentaries admitted that it was a challenge to figure out, especially from verses 16-18, what that has to do with the parables Jesus was teaching.

Why did Jesus mention marriage and divorce? What's going on here? But I don't want to skip over these verses; they're in the Bible. I admit I was tempted to do that, especially when verse 18 mentioned the subject of divorce and then verse 19 goes right into the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. What's one got to do with the other?

In case you're wondering, I did a two-part series on the subject of marriage and divorce, and it's on the website. So I'm not afraid to teach on that subject, but that's not the subject of Luke 16, not the subject of this whole section. Jesus is dealing with our relationship to money and wealth.

Remember that in Luke 15, we had three parables. We had the parable of the lost sheep, of the lost coin and of the lost sons. That section was on salvation. And in Luke 16, we had the parable of the unjust steward, and now we have the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, starting in verse 19. The subject here is how we deal with money and treasures or riches.

Now Jesus is actually speaking to the Pharisees, mentioned in verse 14, who were "covetous" or "lovers of money," and they "derided" Jesus. They thought that if you were rich, it meant you were godly. Conversely, if you were poor, it meant you were wicked and not blessed by God. There are a lot of television preachers who say the same, foolish things, but it's not Biblical.

Our relationship to money is an indication where we are before God. He knows our hearts, whether we're covetous or not or trying to "serve two masters." But it is possible to be rich and to be godly, and it's possible to be poor and be ungodly. And it's also possible to be rich and be ungodly and be poor and be godly. There's no hard-and-fast rule on the issue.

This parable is not about whether or not you have money. It's about how you view your money, how you relate to your money and to your wealth. That is all wrapped up in the story about this rich man and Lazarus.

Notice in verse 15 they "justify [themselves] before men, but God knows [their] hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." The Pharisees put all their emphasis on wealth and being blessed by God by having lots of money and material possessions. God is basically saying to them that isn't the issue. God knows your heart. You can't "serve two masters."

Let me break this down for you. These Pharisees were "lovers of money," verse 14; they were antagonistic, verse 14, because they "derided Him"; they were self-justifying, verse 15; and they were wicked in their hearts, verse 15. As far as "the law and the prophets were until John," verse 16, they rejected the Gospel; they did not press in to it. And as far as the subject of the law passing, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18).

And they took the law of divorce and marriage, verse 18, and turned it on its head. They had a very liberal, broad view of divorce. A man could divorce his wife for every and any cause. They followed the very liberal view of Rabbi Hillel. So they didn't have a commitment to God's Word

and God's grace.

Now in verse 19, Jesus goes right in to the subject of the rich man and Lazarus. This is a very disturbing parable. It is one of the most detailed and complex of any parable Jesus ever uttered. It is the only passage in the Bible that describes the actual thoughts, emotions and words of somebody who is in hell. It is the only passage in the Bible that describes what is going on with somebody who is in hell—what he's feeling, thinking and saying. We're going to be hearing from beyond the grave.

I'm not a big fan of anybody who writes a book that says he died and went to heaven and came back. If anyone knows what happens after we die and what heaven is like, it's Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—that's enough for me. And you can bet that whatever Jesus says is true. And there also are people who say that they went to hell, came back and are telling us their story.

It's totally unscriptural, unbiblical and there is no basis for it at all; you're on very subjective and dangerous ground. The Bible is God's Word; it's objective truth. And God didn't stutter when He spoke; He said what He meant and meant what He said. So we need to base what we believe on the Bible.

"The B-i-b-l-e; yes, that's the book for me.

I stand alone on the Word of God, the B-i-b-l-e."

In this story we see a rich man and a poor man contrasted. It's called "the parable in contrast." It is contrasted in three, main areas: in life, in death and in eternity.

Let's look first at their contrast in life, verses 19-21. It says, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day." If you wore purple, you're rich. It's like saying he has a Rolex watch; he was very affluent. Now here's the contrast. "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate..." the rich man's gate "...desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." So there is this great wealth of the rich man and great poverty of the poor man.

So the first contrast is of the rich man. It says three things about him. First, he was "clothed in purple," wore "fine linen" and ate "sumptuously." He had massive banquets every day, an elaborate time of feasting. He was living in luxury. Purple was the color of royalty. The dye needed to make garments purple was very rare and very expensive. The color came from a shellfish or sea oyster. It took a lot to make the purple dye. In the ancient world, one of the key elements of a person's wealth was his garments. Cost of clothing was a real issue. So the fact this rich man was clothed in purple tells us that this guy was on the Who's Who list of multi-billionaires.

Second, he wore "fine linen." Linen also was very rare and very expensive. It was worn as

underwear beneath the outer tunic. But the average person could not afford linen underwear. Jesus was saying that this guy was so rich, he had the most amazing underwear. The dude's underwear cost more than the house I live in! So he was finely dressed.

And third, it says that he "fared sumptuously every day." It wasn't just occasionally; it was daily. You have to picture a large estate owned by a man with rings on his fingers, wearing beautiful clothes and eating sumptuously.

The contrast to this rich man is the beggar, verses 20-21. "There was a certain rich man"; now there is "a certain beggar named Lazarus." "But there was a certain beggar..." uniquely here, we have the beggar's name "...Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores."

The focus of the parable is not so much the rich man but is this poor beggar. Remember that the Pharisees were covetous. They loved money more than they loved God. Their hearts were not right with God. They didn't believe in Jesus. They had no faith. They lifted up their noses at Him. So Jesus is telling this parable to convey to them that they were living in a very dangerous state.

Lazarus is an abbreviation of the Old Testament name Eleazar, which means "God has helped" or "God is my helper." As you read about this beggar you think, Really?! That's his name?! He was poor, a beggar begging for crumbs and had sores. Very interesting for sure.

There is a big debate among Bible scholars as to whether or not this is a parable or it's an actual story. The truth is that parables are all based in reality; they're not fiction. When Jesus said, "A sower went out to sow" (Luke 8:5), that's true-to-life, consistent with reality. Sowers went out and sowed seeds in their fields. When Jesus said that a man went to a wedding, people went to weddings. When the Bible said a man was beaten by robbers on the way to Jerusalem (Luke 10:30), that happened. So all parables are based in reality.

But the question is whether or not this is a true story Jesus knew about; that there actually was this beggar, Lazarus, and this particular rich man. The reason we wonder about that is because in no other parable did Jesus ever name an individual, which would indicate that this may not be a parable, although it's given in parabolic form. He gave an actual poor man, who He named, and gave an actual rich man, who He didn't name, because the focus is on Lazarus.

Lazarus, Abraham and Moses. So it is unique as a parable. But those who say it's a parable, often say so, because they want to deny the reality of life after death. They want to deny that the soul is conscious after death. They teach the doctrine of "soul sleep." Seventh Day Adventists believe that when you die, you no longer exist; you go to sleep. At the resurrection, you'll be risen up and come back alive then.

The soul does not sleep, because it doesn't have a body. I sleep because I have a body. If I were just a soul, I wouldn't need to sleep. The Bible teaches there is consciousness and

awareness after we die and beyond the grave.

So then what do I believe? I tend to believe our text is an actual story, but I don't reject the possibility that it's a parable. And I have no problem with it being a parable, because all parables are based on reality. There is reality, a meaning behind the parable. So what it's teaching is still real; there is a heaven and there is a hell, and there is life after death, the wicked go to hell, they are in torment and there is no way to escape. The things we learn about beyond the grave are very graphic and clear in this story.

Now notice what it says about this poor man, in verses 20-21. It says he was "laid at [the rich man's] gate." The rich man must have had a big estate to have a gate. And the word "gate" here means "big, beautiful, ornate, massive gate." And the fact that the poor man was laid there indicates that he was crippled and couldn't walk.

They didn't have social programs at that time like we have today in which the government takes care of people. So what they did was take poor people like Lazarus to rich people's houses and set them down at the entrance of the house. When the rich people came and went, they could give the poor alms, food and other help. This beggar was so poor and infirmed that he had to be laid at the rich man's gate. He was sick and probably couldn't walk. It says he was "full of sores" and "the dogs came and licked his sores."

These were not domesticated house pets you would buy expensive food for. They were either scavenger dogs or watch dogs. The dogs were the only way this poor man received attention or sympathy. So to look at Lazarus, we see he was homeless, sick, starving and helpless.

What a stark contrast; we have a poor man and a rich man. There is a contrast of flamboyant wealth or riches versus abject poverty and rags.

Jesus is not teaching here that the rich man was condemned because he was rich or that the poor man was blessed because he was poor. It is true that riches can be a problem. The Bible says, "It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven....It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." How ludicrous that would be. So the disciples asked Him, "Who then can be saved?" Then Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:23-26). So sometimes it's hard for the rich to enter the kingdom.

The main point is that a person's earthly wealth is not an indication of their state before God. A person's material possessions and physical condition is not the issue of their relationship before God. So if you see someone who is poor, it doesn't mean they are wicked. It doesn't mean they are righteous either. Our relationship to God has nothing to do with how many possessions or how much money we have.

If you didn't know the story, at this point, which of the two men would you rather be? In the natural realm, in the worldly realm, wouldn't we all prefer to be the rich man?

By the way, when they ate in those days, they didn't have napkins or paper towels; they used bread to sop up the food on their hands and then discarded the bread on the floor for the dogs. Or they would put it in the trash, and the dogs would eat it out of the trash.

But when the veil is pulled back and we see what happens to these two men after they die, what happens beyond the grave, your opinion of who you want to be might change.

Actually or spiritually, the rich man was poor, and the poor man was rich. Remember that God looks on the heart. "What is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." It's all about your values and how you look at life and people.

Are you rich before God?

Now we move from the contrast in life to the contrast in death, verse 22. The King James translation says, "And it came to pass...." That is one of Luke's favorite expressions. Luke uses that 22 times in Luke and Acts. It is used once in Mark and not at all in Matthew. And we don't know how long it took to come to pass. "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." We don't learn that the rich man went to hell until verse 23.

Do you know that both rich people and poor people die? The Bible says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). It also says, "What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?" (Psalm 89:48). The Bible says it's better to go to a funeral than to go to a wedding. A funeral testifies to us where you're going to go after death. You too will die.

That's why people like to avoid the subject of death; we try to paint it as beautiful as we can. Even when we do an open casket at a funeral, people say, "Wow! He looks so good!" They have the finest clothes on, the good hairdo and makeup. I can't tell you all the silly things people say at funerals. "Wow! They look great!"

They're dead! What does it matter how they look? Where did they go?! That's what's important! Did they go to heaven or to hell?! We're all going to go to the grave. If the Lord tarries long enough, everyone living will die. The statistics on death are quite impressive; 10 out of every 10 people will die.

So you're not ready to live until you're ready to die. Are you ready to die? Do you know where you're going when you die? Proverbs 22:2 says, "The rich and the poor have this in common, the Lord is the maker of them all." Death is the great equalizer. Death is universal. Life is brief.

Contrast their burials, in verse 22. It says that Lazarus "died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom." That's awesome! His pallbearers were angels! "The rich man also died and was buried."

In those days, the poor would receive a common grave. Their bodies were thrown in the Valley

of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where they threw their trash to be burned along with the bodies. We get our word “Gehenna” from this, which is the Greek, New Testament word for “hell.” So they had no formal burial. When the poor man died, his body was just thrown into a common grave and discarded. The poor man’s body was just thrown away, but his soul was carried away by angels to Abraham’s bosom.

When the rich man died, no doubt it was on TV, and the funeral was attended by various dignitaries. Everybody must have talked about it for weeks and months. Everyone shed a tear; the rich man’s gone. It must have been a very big, elaborate funeral.

There are three kinds of death. There is spiritual death, which means we are separated from God. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). We’re all dead spiritually. The etymology of the word “death” is “separation.” There is also physical death, when the soul and spirit, the immaterial part of us, separates from our physical body. James 2:26 says, “For as the body without the spirit is dead...” the body is without the soul when a person dies. And there is eternal death. If you die without Christ, if you die without believing, receiving and trusting in Him and having His righteousness imputed to you by faith, then you will be separated from God in hell for all eternity. You don’t want that to happen.

So death is not the end; it’s the beginning of the after-life, the eternal state. For a Christian, death is a friend, not a foe. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:1, 8, “If our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens....To be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord.” That’s the hope of the believer—and only the believer.

The rich man had money, but he didn’t have hope beyond the grave. He put all his marbles in earthly things, so he had nothing beyond the grave.

The Bible also tells us that at the death of a believer, we are in the presence of the Lord (Philippians 1:21). Paul said, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” He wanted to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Death for Lazarus was a blessing; death for the rich man was a great tragedy. How do we know? Our third division will tell us, which is the contrast in eternity, verses 23-31. “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. And being in torments...” this word appears four times in our text “...in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

The rich man knew who Lazarus was, because the beggar was laid at his gate, but the rich man did nothing to alleviate his suffering, poverty or hunger. Now again, that wasn’t why he was in hell; he was in hell because he didn’t believe, his heart wasn’t right with God. Only seconds after death, he is in hell.

The word “hell” here is the word “Hades.” In the Old Testament, it’s the Hebrew word “Sheol.” It

is sometimes translated “grave” or “death.” So the rich man is in Hades, a place that all dead people—the righteous and the unrighteous—went to before Jesus died, was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. It had two compartments; one side was the place of torment, which we think of as hell, and the other side was a place of comfort, which is called “Abraham’s bosom,” a figure of speech for “Paradise.” So this is a picture of the after-life before the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 20:13-15 says, “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Those who were in the suffering, torment side of Hades where the rich man went are going to be resurrected at the great, white throne judgment of Christ. The books will be opened, their names will not be found in the Book of Life, so they were cast into the lake of fire, the second death, or what we call “Gehenna” or “eternal hell.”

The place of torment the rich man went to is a temporary abode until he is resurrected, judged and will be thrown into the lake of fire or Gehenna. It is an eternal state of suffering and separation from God. So this rich man died and was in hell, in Hades, verse 23. In the torment of hell, the rich man “saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

Make no mistake about it, hell was not made by God for man. Hell was made for the devil and his fallen angels. And God doesn’t send anyone to hell; you decide where you will be going by what you do with Jesus Christ. You can believe and be saved, or you can reject Him and be damned. God’s not going to force you to go to heaven if you don’t want to. If you want to go to heaven, you can go to heaven, and you can know you are going to heaven by believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. But if you reject the truth, you spurn His love, then you have no one to blame for your eternal state of being lost than yourself, which is part of the agony and anguish of hell. What a sad, tragic thing!

When Jesus died on the Cross, it says in Ephesians 4:8, “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” At first He descended into the lower parts of the earth and “led captivity captive.” So it seems to be the case—I can’t be dogmatic about this—that Jesus went down to Hades and spoke to those who were in “Abraham’s bosom,” declared his finished work on the Cross and took those who were waiting in faith to heaven with Him to Paradise.

Remember when the thief died on the Cross before Jesus died, He told the thief, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). But when a believer dies now, after the death of Christ, we don’t have to go to Abraham’s bosom; our soul and spirit go immediately to heaven to be with the Lord. Abraham’s bosom has been vacated. But if you die without Christ, you go to where the rich man is, waiting for the great, white throne judgment in Revelation 20:12-13, when you will be resurrected and judged for your sins.

So "Abraham's bosom" is a picture of the place where the faithful went that is also sometimes called "Paradise." They went there to wait for Christ to come and redeem them by His blood shed on the Cross.

Jesus actually said that there are two gates and two roads that lead to those two gates, which lead to two destinies. Matthew 7:13-14 says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." So you're either on the narrow road or the broad road. You go through either the narrow gate or the broad gate. You're on your way either to life or to destruction. So this is the contrast of the two men in eternity.

Seconds after Lazarus died, faith became sight, and everything he believed came to pass. And the rich man also died, but everything changed. What a shocker! Can you imagine the joy and ecstasy that Lazarus felt when he died and angels came to take him to Abraham's bosom?! Can you imagine what was horror and shock at the reversal of what the rich man had believed now that he had died and had life beyond the grave?! What a shock! Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom and the rich man was in torment.

Now the rich man came to understand things that he didn't believe in life. He came to believe in God, heaven and hell. There are no atheists in hell. The minute an atheist dies, he is no longer an atheist. They come to believe in God, in heaven and in hell. They know it's all real.

The rich man also came to believe in prayer. He began to pray in hell for himself. Verses 24-26 say, "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.'" Here's the word "tormented" again. "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'"

The narrative stops in verse 23, and now we see this dialogue going on between the rich man and Abraham. So the rich man now believed in prayer, and he cried out to Abraham. Then he prayed for himself. The rich man now was the beggar. And the beggar now was the rich man.

The rich man prayed in the wrong place, verse 23; he was in hell. And he prayed to the wrong person; he prayed to Abraham. He prayed at the wrong time; he should have prayed before he died. So he prayed at the wrong time, in the wrong place and to the wrong person.

I want to give you some facts about hell from this story. Verse 24 says that he was "tormented" in the flame. Hell is a place of torment. The soul does not sleep; it is consciously awake. In verse 25, we see that it is a place of memories. Abraham said to the rich man, "Son, remember." And he calls to "Father Abraham," which indicates the rich man was a Jew. So as a fellow Jew, he didn't know why he would be in hell.

Jews actually believed that no Jew would go to hell; only Gentiles went to hell and were made to fuel the fires of hell. Abraham would stop any Jew from going to hell. So the rich man was in shock because of being in hell.

It's interesting too that the rich man thought that Lazarus was his servant; he wanted Lazarus to serve him. He would not even give him crumbs from his table in life, but now he wanted Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue because of his torment in the flames.

There is indication in this story, which is a frightening thought, that even in hell, people won't change. Whatever they were in life; they'll be in eternity. In Revelation 22:11, when there is the final state, it says, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." There is no changing. So he was still bossing Lazarus around; he wanted Lazarus to cool his tongue.

So hell is a place of torment, of memories—"But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.'" And it is a permanent place, verse 26. You can't miss this: Abraham said to the rich man, "There is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us." Basically he was saying that "We can't come to you, and you can't come to us."

This is teaching that once you die and once you are in hell, you will have no escape. You can't change your place. There is no Purgatory taught in the Bible. There is no purging of our sins, so eventually we'll get to heaven. Once you are in hell, you are in hell for all eternity. In death, your eternity is fixed. Someone said, "Better to beg bread on earth than to beg water in hell."

Notice that the rich man also prayed for his brothers, verses 27-31. He first prayed for himself, and now he prayed for his brothers. So he got evangelistic; he wanted his brothers to hear. "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father...' speaking of Abraham "...that you would send him..." that is, Lazarus "...to my father's house..." so all of a sudden he's burdened for his family "...for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'" Four times the word "torment" was used. "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham...' he's now arguing with Abraham in hell "...but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 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.'" The rich man was praying for his brothers. He wanted his brothers to hear the message.

The Bible makes it clear, in verses 29-31, that people must hear God's Word. The Bible says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). They wouldn't be persuaded, even by someone coming back from the dead. Luke knew that Jesus would rise from the dead, and yet they wouldn't believe Him.

And there was another man named Lazarus, in John's Gospel, who was raised from the dead

by Jesus. He came back from the dead, but people didn't believe in Jesus because of the raising of Lazarus. Rather they wanted to kill Lazarus, because he was evidence of the power of God working through Christ. So miracles, in and of themselves, are no guarantee that a person will come to faith in Jesus Christ. It takes faith in the Word of God, repenting and believing in the Son of God.

Now what did they have? They had "Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." But we have more today than "Moses and the prophets"; we have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and we have the entire New Testament. We have the witness of God in His Word.

Nothing could be done for this rich man; it was hopeless. He missed his opportunity; he failed to repent. God had spoken to him in so many ways before his death. God had given him wealth. Wealth is the goodness of God meant to lead you to repentance. God had given him a witness in the beggar Lazarus and in Lazarus' death; this Scripture indicates that Lazarus had died first.

If you go to a funeral, or someone you know dies, God is trying to tell you, "Wake up! Get ready to die!" That's why we need to think about our own deaths. "Where will I go when I die? Am I ready to die?"

Another witness God had given the rich man is the Scriptures—Moses and the prophets. He no doubt went to the synagogue and heard the Word of the Lord.

It's interesting that there is a great irony in this story. Jesus' listeners and Luke's readers—including us—hear the testimony of one from the dead, which the brothers in the story were denied. How about that?! The very thing they were denied, we were given. Here we are hearing from the rich man that he is tormented in hell. Don't go there! We are hearing from Jesus that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

Trust in Him, believe in Him, put your faith in Him. Believe in Jesus Christ. It was too late for the rich man, but it's not too late for you. The rich man died and went to hell, not because he was rich. He went to hell because he was an unbeliever. The poor man died and went to heaven, not because he was poor. He went to heaven because he believed and trusted in God. The Bible says, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). It's so very important.

God made you, God loves you. Sin separates us from God. Jesus died for you on the Cross. You must believe in Him, trust in Him, repent and put your faith in Jesus Christ. There's only one way to get to heaven when you die; that's taking the hand of Jesus Christ.

I believe what Jesus told us in this story actually took place. It's for certain that it's a reality. There are only two places to go when you die: heaven or hell. Your destination depends upon your relationship to Jesus Christ. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Maybe God had you hear this message today. Flee from your sins. Flee from your covetousness. Flee from hell to the Savior.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you're not sure you're a child of God—maybe you don't know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you've never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. I pray that You'll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We'd like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we'd like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, “I prayed to accept Christ.” We'll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.