

Family Worship Booklet



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day, and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

Friday – Luke 16:19-31 – Questions and questions, when the answer is clear.

The rich man, aware that nothing can be done for him, turns his attention to those he has left behind. The door is shut on Lazarus bringing him any relief, but is it shut on Lazarus being sent back to earth to warn the rich man's five brothers? Are we seeing in this question a hint of love that we haven't seen before in the rich man? No, there is no love in hell. What concerns the rich man, again, arises solely out of self-interest. He was probably the eldest in the family and therefore had the privilege, as the firstborn, of setting a godly example to his siblings. A privilege he knows he has wantonly squandered. He knows the example he had set before them was marked by empty words and gestures, lacking in any meaningful love and care. Now in hell, his failures in this were coming back to haunt him. Thoughts of what would happen to them, and how it could in some sense be traced back to him, disturbed him greatly. Was he thinking of what it would be like having his brother look into his eyes and say, 'why did you not show us a better path?' Whatever was going on in his head had very little to do with saving his five brothers, and a lot, if not everything, to do with saving himself more torment.

Think about what it will be like; for parents who have nurtured and trained their children for hell. Teachers who have taught children to despise the things of God. Elders who have ruled to appease man and negate the work of God in people's lives. Ministers who have maligned and abused the truth of God's Word in the hearing of hell-bound men and women. It doesn't bear thinking about.

Abraham's answer is simple and clear; hell is not a place where one's requests are granted. The miracle that is salvation is granted only on earth and only through the power of God's Word.

Seeing the writing on the wall, the rich man tries to persist by expressing precisely the same mantra as so many unbelievers, and sadly professing believers, do today – if only someone from heaven would come back and tell us how real it is, then we would all believe. Give us signs and wonders, and we will believe it is the cry. You can read Jesus' response to that in Matthew 12:39 and 16:4. Paul also speaks to that in 1 Corinthians 1:22. It is all nonsense. God has given His Word, and sent the Holy Spirit to renew minds and regenerate hearts to receive it. When that seed of the gospel is implanted, it takes root and brings forth life (Romans 10:17.) Nothing else can and will do that.

Thursday – Luke 16:19-26 – Hell a reality.

As we come to these three exchanges between the rich man in hell and Abraham in heaven, remember what I said on Tuesday about this not being a literal, real exchange, but one that Jesus is imagining, because there can be no communication between those in hell and heaven, and vice versa.

The rich man in hades, Gehenna in the Greek. It's a word derived from the Hebrew 'Ge Hinnom,' meaning 'valley of Hinnom'. This was an actual historical valley located to the southwest of Jerusalem, where children were burned as sacrifices to the Ammonite god Moloch. For the Jews, this was a place of terrible torment, one which the Pharisees would have been all too aware of, without having to use their imaginations.

The rich man lifts his eyes and sees Abraham and Lazarus, we read 'afar off'. He then utters what seems like a prayer, but those who use this as an example of prayer being offered to a saint haven't a leg to stand on, because prayer can only be offered to God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And to those who think that this speaks of the possibility of prayer being offered from hell, it won't happen; this is a parable. There will be no opportunity to pray in Hell. Let's call it a request. There is neither a hint of contrition nor remorse in this request. The rich man says nothing about his failure to care for Lazarus during his life. Lazarus is simply an accessory to be used for his benefit. As in life, so in eternity, the rich man's attitude is wholly self-serving; he only wanted relief from his punishment. It is remarkable, but it is the way it will be. In hell, the godless will be consumed with themselves, just as they were during their life; the difference will be that while their memories of failure and regret on earth were occasional, in hell, they will be an ever-present reality, and will only serve to intensify the unrelenting agony of their daily pain and grief.

Abraham's response may be tender in recognizing the covenant sonship of the rich man, but it is to the point. First, he reminds the rich man that there is a reason why he is in hell. His god on earth had been his 'good things', and that god had failed him, as it failed all who trust in it. Second, there is no way his condition can be addressed, and it will never be reversed. There is, and there will be, no relief in hell. Those sent to hell are in an eternally unalterable and irreversible condition and place, for the chasm between heaven and hell is fixed. Integral to Abraham's imagined response is a statement and recognition of the harshness of Lazarus' life on earth, and the blessedness of his life now in heaven. He is comforted, feasting at Abraham's side.

Q1. What does the rich man do? What does he not do?

Q2. What two things does Abraham tell the rich man?

Monday – Luke 16:18 – Can Christians divorce and remarry?

This one verse, in which Jesus is addressing the Pharisees' abuse of the Old Testament divorce laws (Deuteronomy 24:1ff), has caused a lot of issues among Christians since the Divorce laws in Canada were changed in 1968.

Reading it as a single verse, it is very clear, isn't it? Jesus says that remarriage after divorce is not allowed on the basis that it will result in the sin of adultery. So, how could a Christian think that remarriage after divorce could in any sense be acceptable? However, a Christian may not only believe that marriage after divorce is acceptable, but they can approve of it in certain cases. How is that possible? Because the teaching of the Bible about divorce does not apply to everyone in the same way. Let me explain; in this verse, Jesus is speaking about two Christians, whereas in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, Paul teaches about divorce in a marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever. And note how Paul presents it; he writes, "to the rest, I say (I, not the Lord) that" That doesn't mean that he is saying this is his position, not Jesus'. No, he is making it clear that what he is saying about divorce, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, is different from what Jesus said, because he and Jesus are talking about a different composition of parties.

Here in Luke 16:18, Jesus says, and Paul would have agreed with him, that divorce is not acceptable where two Christians are involved. And in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says that where an unbeliever divorces a Christian, it is permissible for the Christian to remarry. Note this approach of Paul's is not unique to marriage. Elsewhere in the Bible, the relationship between two believers is treated differently from that of the relationship between a believer and an unbeliever. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5, how a believer is to treat a sinning believer is different from how they treat a sinning unbeliever. In 1 Corinthians 6, there is a clear difference between what a believer can do in terms of the law with another believer, and what they can do with an unbeliever.

The governing principle is that it should always be possible to make peace with brothers and sisters in Christ. In Matthew 18, Christ gives us specific directions for how that should be pursued. Still, it is not always possible to achieve a peaceful relationship with unbelievers, even though we are required to do all we can to seek that peace (Romans 12:18).

So, it is permissible for a Christian who has divorced against their desire, by their unbelieving spouse, to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:27,28).

Q1. In what context was Jesus talking about divorce?

Q2. In what context was Paul talking about divorce?

Q3. Is it permissible for a divorced Christian to remarry, and if so, when?

Tuesday – Luke 16:19-23 – Two men in very different life circumstances.

We saw last week that Jesus' statement that no one can serve both God and a materially driven lifestyle drew ridicule from the Pharisees (vv 13-14) because they were lovers of money. So, despite all their talk about God and their obsession with living perfectly obedient lives, the reality is that they were devoted to their gods of accumulating personal wealth and prestige.

This parable we come to today is all about Jesus driving home the reality of the imminent danger that these men are in. It makes clear that God's judgment of sinners is perfect and final, and that the gospel is the sole and sufficient means for calling sinners to repentance and saving faith.

This parable is unique because it is the only passage in the Bible that presents the potential thinking of the unconverted after their death. We must remember, though, that parables are stories and not history. People cannot see into hell from heaven, and there can be no conversations between the two places. God has fixed a great chasm that separates them, and it is of such magnitude that it can never be crossed.

The Lord Jesus describes two men to us who live very contrasting lives. One who has all he could wish for in life, phenomenal material possessions and a luxurious lifestyle, and another man who has absolutely nothing in material terms and is in a terrible physically destitute state. The unnamed rich man is glorying in his riches and living out his selfish-heart desires, regardless of any thought for God or man. The other man is a poverty-stricken individual whose life is marked by humble submission and honest desire. Interestingly, he is named. I say interestingly because he is the only character in a parable to be so. Jesus calls him Lazarus, the Latinized version of the Hebrew name 'Eleazar', which means, 'God helps'. The fact that he is named is a clear sign that he is known and loved by God. His name is a mark of one who is a true sheep of the Lord.

The huge material gulf in their lives is nothing compared to the gulf between them in spiritual blessings and, ultimately, eternal matters. In these days of the entertainment-based, health, wealth, and prosperity gospel, this is a good reminder that wealth is not a mark of God's favour, and poverty is not a mark of God's displeasure.

Both men die. The rich man's feasting days were at an end, as were Lazarus' days of want and destitution. No matter how wealthy or poor we are, our one short life will one day end; we will die. "All go to one place. All are from dust and to dust, all will return." (Ecclesiastes 1:19).

Q1. Why is this parable unique?

Q2. What are the differences between the two men in the parable?

Wednesday – Luke 16:19-23 – Lazarus goes to heaven, the rich man to hell.

Lazarus is a believer, and his soul is instantly taken to be with the Lord at the moment of his death. At last, he has peace from all the physical pain and difficulties of his life. This is comforting, isn't it? None of us know the hour nor the day of our death, but to know that when it comes, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory, and their bodies being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection." Answer 37.

Of course, Lazarus' presence in heaven has nothing to do with his having been poor during his life on earth. Poverty is not a virtue. No one is saved because of material circumstances in life. Salvation from one's spiritual poverty and destitution is always, without exception, by grace through faith, regardless of one's material possessions. Lazarus would have known and openly confessed, amid his harrowing experiences.

The rich man, a child of Abraham, a covenant child of God, and a professed believer in God, also dies. He was probably a decent, upstanding member of the synagogue and community to most people. Someone who had worked hard for what he had and spent it as he pleased. His soul, though, is not accompanied into the presence of Abraham and the other departed saints in heaven. Why? Because he was rich? No, Abraham himself was an extraordinarily rich man (Genesis 3:2). The rich man was in hell because he was unregenerate and, as such, utterly bereft of the love of God in his life. Who knows, he may have been a considerable donor to local charities, but as for real care for others, care engendered by God's love, he knew nothing of that, nor did he want to know anything about it (James 5:5). The presence of Lazarus on his doorstep merely shone a light on the truth about his godless, loveless heart. We can't mask who we are from God. He has His ways and means of revealing the reality of who we truly are, and they never fail to do so.

Jesus is confronting his hearers with the reality of there being only two eternal destinations. Something we should always be motivated by, to thank God for our salvation and pray for the salvation of others.

Q1. Where does Lazarus go when he dies and why?

Q2. Where does the rich man go when he dies and why?