

# OpenTheo

## Luke 16:19 - 16:31



### Gospel of Luke - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg analyzes Luke 16:19-31, where Jesus tells a parable about a wealthy man and a poor man named Lazarus who dies and goes to Abraham's bosom while the wealthy man goes to Hades. Gregg argues that the parable is not meant to be a teaching on the afterlife but rather a commentary on the obstinance of the Jews in rejecting the law and the prophets even after Jesus rose from the dead. He also emphasizes Luke's gospel as being favorable toward the poor and providing strict warnings for the privileged rich.

### Transcript

All right, we're in chapter 16 still of Luke and we have one more portion of that chapter to take at the end and it's a classic. It's a unique passage. Not only is it unique to Luke in the sense that Mark and Matthew do not include it, but it is unique in its contents in ways that make it particularly difficult.

I do not think it's very difficult to get the message of the parable but there are back story issues with reference to Christ using a story like this which are controversial and in some cases the controversy is relevant to some important topics. Not so much the meaning of the parable or the point Jesus is making but other issues of importance and I'll point those out as we go through it. The story is a pretty well-known story to anyone who's read the New Testament and as I said in our last session, this is the only story in the Bible, the only instance in the Bible that I know of that really describes the condition of a sinner post-mortem.

Now remember when we talk about post-mortem, we're not talking about after the judgment day, we're just talking about after death. The judgment day does not occur chronologically until Jesus returns. We know from the book of Revelation that when Jesus returns, there is a judgment that will be resulting in the lake of fire as the place where sinners will be thrown.

This is not talking about that, this is not talking about after the judgment day, this is talking about simply after the man dies as we shall see. So, the condition of the sinner

immediately after death seems to be a factor in this story but really nowhere else in scripture. There are other places in scripture where we do read of Christians after death being absent from the body and present with the Lord, but that's Christians.

So, there's really nothing but this passage to guide us and yet there are problems with this passage that make it questionable whether it even gives us guidance on the matter and we'll talk about those. Let's read the passage. It begins in verse 19.

Jesus said, The man, extremely rich, was obviously callous toward the plight of the poor because the man was at the man's gate. Here's a man who sumptuously eats every day and there's a beggar at his gate who is not eating well at all and just wants crumbs from the table and we're not told whether he very often gets them. Obviously, this poor man and his need was very much in the immediate proximity of the rich man but did not elicit much in the way of sympathy from him.

The fact that the dogs licked the man's wounds may suggest, although it may not, it may suggest that the dogs were more compassionate than the rich man was. Of course, the dogs didn't do it out of compassion probably, although dogs sometimes do that kind of thing out of compassion. Dogs are interesting animals but that's another issue.

The meaning of the dogs is incidental. The disparity of the circumstances of these two people is what is underscored here. Now, we need to understand too that when we talk about a beggar in biblical times, we're talking about a person in different circumstances than maybe we might find people panhandling today.

I'm not saying there aren't people who are legitimately poor who panhandle today. But many of the people that are begging today or who are homeless or whatever are not without any resources available at all. In many cases, they have families they could go back to.

Of course, there's government programs for them. There are some very different circumstances for the average person who is standing at the bottom of a freeway off-ramp and asking for money than a beggar in those days. In those days, as the previous parable indicates, a man would be ashamed to beg.

The man who was being put out of his job in the previous parable of the unjust steward said, I can't dig and I'd be ashamed to beg. It'd be a very shameful thing to beg if you had any other option. But a beggar almost always in biblical times was physically disabled and incapable of doing anything to provide for himself.

He'd also be somebody who had no family who could care for him. There were no government programs, although a poor person was allowed to go through the fields of a farmer and take grain to eat just enough. But that would only be a seasonal provision and a man who was crippled, for example, and could not walk wouldn't be able even to

do that.

A person who was a beggar had exhausted all other possibilities for survival. So this man was genuinely down and out. This man was genuinely unable to help himself.

There was a rich man who could have taken him in and improved his circumstances, but he didn't. And both of them died, we read in verse 22. Now, in a sense, this parable could have ended at this point.

As I mentioned when we went through the story of the prodigal son, when the son came home and was received back with joy, that could have been the end of that parable. Because, well, that would make it like the other parables in the chapter. A person finds a lost sheep, finds a lost coin, a lost son.

The parables all end with the rejoicing of the one who finds that which was lost. And so the parable of the prodigal son could have ended with the son coming home. But instead, Jesus goes further with it and directs his point specifically to the Pharisees and talks about the older brother and his reaction to the son coming home, how different it was from the father's reaction.

So here, the parable comes to a logical end at this point, but Jesus carries it further. And I believe he does so in order to make a specific point about the Pharisees. If the parable ended at this point, it simply is a parable about how a callous and therefore unrighteous rich man, who has all things that he wants in this world, and a poor man who is apparently a righteous man nonetheless, they're in the judgment or in the next life.

Their circumstances are reversed and they actually get what they deserve rather than what they could get for themselves in this life. Jesus had said in one of his Beatitudes, you know, woe unto you rich man, for you have your consolation now. And so also here, this rich man, his only sin, by the way, there's no mention here of you didn't accept Jesus as your personal savior.

There's not even any reference here to you neglected the law of Moses. It's that you had a lot of stuff and this beggar didn't, and you didn't do anything for him. So, I mean, how could you complain? The roles are reversed.

Now you get to find out what it was like to be him and he gets to find out what it was like to be you. Things could have turned out differently, we presume, if the rich man had been generous to this man. I remember when Jesus had said earlier in Luke, he said, give alms and all things are clean to you.

Basically, essentially, if you become generous, your heart will be clean. And obviously the rich man would not be tormented in flames after death if his heart was clean. So the story itself has a lesson that needs to go no further than the point we've come to.

But then the parable is extended to make an additional point in verse 27. Then Abraham said, I beg you therefore, excuse me, the rich man said to Abraham, I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him, that is, send Lazarus, to my father's house. For I have five brothers that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.

Now, this interchange makes it very clear that we're not describing a situation after the judgment day. As I said, after the judgment day, the Bible tells us many will be thrown into the lake of fire. We might assume this man is in the lake of fire because he's tormented in flames, and yet it's too early for anyone to be thrown into the lake of fire.

We're told that he is in Hades. The King James Version says hell, which is a poor translation of the word Hades. The Greek is Hades.

The New King James and most modern translations just leave it untranslated, just render it Hades because that's the Greek word. This man is in Hades, but Hades is not the lake of fire. As you find if you look at Revelation 20, you find that death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire.

Hades is different than the lake of fire. Hades exists earlier than the lake of fire, and when the lake of fire becomes an issue, Hades itself is cast into it. This man is in Hades, but he's not in the lake of fire.

We know it because his brothers are still living. His father's house still has five of his brothers living there, so this man has died, but they have not yet died. This is not the end of the world.

This is not after the second coming of Christ. This is just immediately after the man died, and that's why I say this is the only passage in the Bible that addresses that particular circumstance of the death, immediate after death, circumstances of a sinner. And he has some compassion on his brothers.

It's interesting. Some people say that people are so wicked that when they're in hell, they'll just be cursing God, and they'll be in no sense, you know, they'll have no Godward inclinations at all. They'll just be wicked people cursing God and being as evil as can be.

This man could be more evil than he is. Once he finds out that he's not going to receive any relief himself, his compassion for his brothers kicks in. You know, why don't my brothers have to come here? If this is indeed anything like a true story, it would certainly tell us that people in Hades are not necessarily all bad.

This man was bad, bad enough to be in Hades in the flames, but not all bad. He still had some concern for other people than himself and wanted his brothers to escape what he had succumbed to here. And Abram said to him, They have Moses and the prophets.

Let them hear them. That is, Moses and the prophets have made it clear enough what

people ought to do if they want to avoid coming to a place that you've come to. Now, where do Moses and the prophets address the problem this man had and his neglect? Many places.

The prophets and the law all have references to being compassionate to the poor. In fact, the prophets indicate that that's far more important to God than keeping the rituals of the law. God said, I'll have mercy rather than sacrifice.

And so rather than offering animal sacrifices, God would prefer that people have mercy. And many times the prophets exhort Israel to show compassion to the poor and to the widows and the orphans and the beggars and so forth. And so if this man's brothers would heed what the law and the prophets say, they would live a life differently than this man lived and they would escape this particular doom.

That's what Abram says. And the rich man said, no, Father Abram, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent. Now he's saying, yeah, the law and the prophets, that's been around for a long time.

Everybody has that. My brothers aren't particularly paying attention to that, but they'll pay attention if Lazarus comes back to them from the dead. That'll get them.

And Abram's final words, which I take to be the main point of the parable, or of the story, says, 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. Okay, now, I believe the lesson here is just that. There were Jews who were of the faithful remnant who did in fact heed Moses and the prophets.

Those Jews were open to the prophets and they were open to the Messiah. So when Jesus came, they followed him. They became his disciples.

But there was a large percentage of the Jews who already were negligent of the things God had told them through Moses and the prophets. And it should not be thought that people who were so callous to God's concerns and not wishing to follow God any more than that, that they won't be changed even if a man rises from the dead. I believe there's a hint here of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, that if they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, if they're already ignoring what God had to say through the old messengers, they're not going to be impressed even by Jesus rising from the dead.

And this, of course, proved to be true. Many of the Jews still persecuted the church after Jesus rose from the dead. And we see Jesus saying essentially the same thing.

In John chapter 5, Jesus said in John 5, 45, do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.

But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? Now what he's saying is if you were already faithful to God in terms of the old covenant that Moses gave you, you would also be open to me. If you had a heart toward God at all, you would be following what Moses said because you know what God said through Moses. If you don't have a heart for God, even enough to do that, then you're not going to follow me because you need to have a heart for God to follow me.

And by rejecting the previous revelation, you're showing that you're not going to be open to the new one either, what you care about, revelations from God. God's given you abundant revelation. You Jews have received what the Gentiles have never received in terms of special revelation from God and you don't appreciate that.

If you believe Moses, you believe me. You don't believe Moses, so how will you believe me? The idea is if you're neglecting the law and the prophets already, obviously you're not going to have any positive response to me like you should. And that is also the statement of Abraham at the end of the parable or the story.

If they don't hear Moses and the prophets, they won't be persuaded even though one rise from the dead. It's interesting, this Lazarus in this story is not the same man that we read about in John's gospel who is named Lazarus. Jesus had a friend named Lazarus and he died also.

The issue of him rising from the dead also comes up but with a different outcome. That Lazarus actually does get raised from the dead. Now the Lazarus that Jesus raised from the dead in John chapter 11 was not a beggar.

He was not this Lazarus. He did not spend his days lying at the gate of a rich man and Jesus didn't raise him from the dead because Abraham was sending Lazarus back to testify to the rich man's five brothers. This is not the same story, not the same Lazarus.

One might wonder why the name Lazarus was even used here because parables don't usually use proper names. In fact, the use of the name Lazarus in this parable is one of the features, probably the main feature that causes many Christians to feel this is not a parable. This is actually a true story.

When Jesus told parables, it was usually like a certain man sowed good seed in his field and while he slept, an enemy came and sowed tares. Or a certain woman put leaven into three measures of dough. Or a certain king made a wedding for his son.

A certain person, not specified by name because it's not really talking about anyone in particular. It's not telling a true story. It's telling a made up story to make a point.

But here we have an actual name. The rich man is not named, although he's traditionally called Dives. Have you ever heard of the story of Dives and the beggar? Dives, if I'm not mistaken, I think is the Latin word for rich man.

And so traditionally it's been called the story of Dives and Lazarus. But the rich man isn't really given a proper name, but Lazarus is. And the presence of a proper name in one of the characters strikes many people as being fairly good evidence that this is not a parable, which do not use proper names, but this is an actual case of a real man who had this name.

There is that possibility. We will consider pros and cons of that possibility in the course of this lecture. Another view is that it is in fact a parable of Jesus.

Like his other parables, it's just unusual in that it has some features that the other parables don't have. For example, none of the other parables present an afterlife scenario. This parable is primarily concerned with things that happen after these men die.

In that respect, if it's a parable of Jesus, it's the only one of them that really deals with that. It's not common for parables to talk about unknown things beyond the grave. Most parables are about very commonplace things that people see all the time.

Farming, making bread, going to weddings, and things like that are very normal, this worldly things. If this is one of Jesus' parables, it's unusual in more than one respect in that it deals with the afterlife and that it names a person. But a parable of Jesus could be unlike others in that respect.

It would be freakish among the parables, but it's not impossible that Jesus is making this story up as a parable. Now, some would say that even if Jesus is making this up as a parable, we should still assume that even if the rich man was not an actual character, and even if Lazarus was not an actual character, it is still descriptive of the way things are with people after they die, that it is a true-to-life kind of scenario. And the argument for this is that all of the parables of Jesus were true-to-life.

Jesus never told a parable that was not a possibility. Farmers really do sow seeds. Women really do put leaven in the dough.

These are true-to-life situations. Even if they're not actual true cases, they are realistic cases. And therefore it is said that if this is a parable of Jesus, it nonetheless must prevent something that's true-to-life, a situation that really does exist for some people, if not for these actual people in the story.

And that sounds like a reasonable suggestion, especially if Jesus is telling the parable in order to reveal facts about the afterlife. Since the parable is mostly about the afterlife, one would think that this may be Jesus' desire to tell us what the afterlife is like for believers and unbelievers. And if that is the purpose of the parable, then we would have to assume that it's a realistic scenario.

Now, is it a parable or is it a true story? I might, before going into that in detail, and we

will, just say that I find it interesting that the Lazarus character is named Lazarus. Though the name Lazarus is a Grecian form of Eleazar, which means something like, God is my help. And the meaning of the name may be significant in that he is named God is my help for the simple reason that no man helped him.

He was a beggar and no man helped him, but God saw his need. God helped him. Not so much helping him out of his poverty, but helped him eternally after he died.

Now, that's perhaps a minor point. It may not even be as significant as one might imagine it. But what's interesting to me is that his name is the same name as the name of Jesus' friend Lazarus.

And yet he's a different man. But what's interesting is in this story, it was contemplated that a man named Lazarus be sent back from the grave. And it was said that wouldn't do any good.

Unbelievers would still be unbelievers, even if Lazarus came back from the grave. In truth, there was a man named Lazarus that came back from the grave in John chapter 11. And it didn't help people.

Well, some people believe, but there are still people who wouldn't believe. There are still people who plotted even to kill Lazarus to stifle the evidence. So, in a sense, although this isn't talking about the same case, the use of the name Lazarus might even throw some, I don't know, maybe some abstract significance on that story of Lazarus who really was raised.

That in his case, as in the contemplated case in the parable, people still remained unbelievers even after they saw him rise from the dead. But I think the statement, though one should rise from the dead, at the end is referring to Jesus ultimately. Not that he is Lazarus, but it's a principle.

If they don't listen to Lazarus, or they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen to someone who rises from the dead either. And that, I think, is the main point of the parable. I don't think the main point of the parable is to discuss the afterlife.

The afterlife scene is being used to make the point that it's making about the Jews rejecting Jesus, and they do so because they already were rejecting Moses and the prophets. The scenario of the afterlife is perhaps incidental to the point, and it may not even be that Jesus is trying to give us any particular information about the afterlife. And this is particularly a realistic suggestion when we consider the following.

The picture of the afterlife that Jesus presents in this story is one that conforms with Greek mythology. It does not conform with anything in the scriptures elsewhere. The Old Testament did not reveal anything about the afterlife, nothing specific.



Hades, which Jesus mentions here, is a Greek word. In the Old Testament, the nearest equivalent to Hades was the Hebrew word Sheol. In the Old Testament, the Bible speaks about the dead going to Sheol.

Both the good and the bad went to Sheol. David spoke about when he died, he would go to Sheol in his psalms. And the wicked would go to Sheol.

Sheol, however, was simply the place of the dead. It did not, in the Old Testament times, specifically refer to any conscious afterlife experience. Sheol was often equivalent to the grave.

The dead go into the grave. They're buried. They're dead.

They're put out of sight. On the other hand, there were some poetic passages in the Old Testament, like Isaiah 14, which talks about the king of Babylon being brought down to Sheol. It says, those who see you down there will say, is this the man who shook kingdoms and so forth? It does kind of represent the shades, as they'd be called.

We might say the souls of those in Sheol. Usually in Greek mythology, they were called the shades. What's left of the dead, any kind of consciousness they have, rising up and greeting the king of Babylon as he comes down to Sheol.

This imagery, however, is in a poem. And it's not necessarily a teaching device about what really goes on after death. So the Jews didn't have, in the Old Testament, any clear teaching or, frankly, any clear ideas about what happens to people after they die.

Because the law and the prophets pretty much left that unaddressed. So where did this idea of Hades with two compartments come from? Well, the Egyptians had that idea. The Greek word Hades came from Greek mythology.

Hades was a place in Greek mythology where the dead went. And according to the Greek myths, there were two compartments there. One for the good folks and one for the bad folks.

The one for the good folks might be characterized by gardens and pleasantness and rivers and so forth. The place for the bad folks was always a river of fire or a lake of fire of some kind. The wicked went to the fiery part of Hades and the righteous to the pleasant part of Hades.

This idea was found in Egyptian mythology, in pre-Christian times, and in Greek mythology. Of course, Egypt was influenced by Greek mythology because in the time of Alexander the Great, the Greek, he conquered Egypt. And when he died, the Ptolemies, who were Greeks, ruled Egypt for hundreds of years.

And the Jews, many of them were in Egypt. A great number of Jews were in Alexandria,

Egypt. It had a huge Jewish population.

And it had Egyptian slash Grecian culture. And so the Greek ideas of Hades were in Egypt, but they were also in other Grecian lands. Some scholars think this idea of a divided Hades into two compartments comes originally from Egyptian mythology, going back to the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

Others think it's strictly a Greek idea, which the Egyptians borrowed. But whatever the case may be, it is a pagan idea. Now, it did come into Judaism through these sources, through the Greek and Egyptian sources, because many of the Jews in the intertestamental period, having no word from their prophets, having no word from the law and the prophets about such matters, were not content to be ignorant, but they decided to speculate.

And they imbibed ideas from the cultures around them. They were in the Grecian world. They were in the Egyptian world.

They were in the Persian world, where Zoroastrianism was. It definitely had an influence on their thinking. The rabbis, therefore, in the intertestamental period, most of whom lived among the Gentiles, picked up on Gentile ideas about the afterlife.

And in the second century before Christ, a Jewish writer, identifying himself as Enoch, which was not who he really was, wrote a book called First Enoch. And in that book, as anyone can tell from reading it, he presents a Hades of this sort, apparently borrowing from Greek ideas and bringing them into a Jewish religious context. Enoch's book influenced rabbis a great deal so that by the time of Jesus, many of the rabbis had adopted this idea of a Hades with two compartments.

Now, so far, so good. We see that this idea of Hades with two compartments did not come from the inspired scriptures of the Old Testament. It came into Judaism, along with other traditions of the rabbis, which Jesus warned against.

It came into Judaism through Enoch and through rabbis bringing a syncretistic mixture of Gentile and Jewish ideas. Now, so in the time of Jesus, Hades was pictured by the Jews, who were, of course, taught by the rabbis, who were influenced by the Greeks and the Egyptians. They were taught this image of Hades.

And in the writings of the Talmud, which represent the rabbinic teachings of the time of Jesus and afterwards, Hades is depicted this way by Jewish writers. In fact, there are a number of stories in the Talmud that are not very dissimilar from this one that Jesus tells. They actually have stories in the Talmud about poor righteous men and ungodly rich men who die and find their circumstances reversed in Hades.

In other words, this picture that Jesus paints, at least up to verse 26, where I said it would be a fairly natural end to the parable if Jesus didn't want to add this other

application. That story up to verse 26 resembles quite a few rabbinic stories that were already probably being told. That is, Jesus is telling a story that was like a number of stories that the rabbis were telling in his own time.

Because of this, many evangelical scholars today believe, because they have found these stories in the Talmud, that Jesus was not, first of all, telling a true story, nor was he even telling a typical parable of his own, but he was adapting a rabbinic parable. It is addressed against the Pharisees, and they themselves told stories like this, and so he was taking one of their own stories, not a story of his making, not a story of a true case, but he was simply turning upon the Pharisees one of their own stories in order to make an additional application against them in the latter part that he added at the end. Now, that is entirely possible.

We don't know that it's the case, but I'll tell you, the more I've read on it, the more it seems to me that this is the case, that since the rabbis were telling stories like this, Jesus may have been borrowing something from their own playbook. We know he did this kind of thing because earlier when they said that he was casting out demons by Beelzebub, he just responded, well, if Beelzebub is, if I'm doing this by Beelzebub, then Satan's kingdom is divided. He acted as if Beelzebub's a real character, a real person.

In the Jewish tradition, Beelzebub was the prince of the demons. Jesus just ran with that. Oh, okay, you say I'm doing this by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.

Well, okay, if Beelzebub, the prince of the demons, is doing this through me, then he certainly is working against himself. Satan is casting out Satan. He just kind of took him at face value and responded on their own terms.

This doesn't mean that Jesus really believed that there's a prince of the demons named Beelzebub. Beelzebub is actually a corruption of the word Beelzebul. One of the Canaanite gods was called Beelzebul, which means Baal the prince.

But the Jews prior to Jesus' time, out of their contempt for idolatry and false gods, had renamed Baal the prince instead of Beelzebul. They called him Beelzebub. Slightly different, but it means Lord of the flies, which was intended to be an insulting characterization of this pagan god.

They did this kind of thing from time to time. There's quite a few names of Jewish characters in the Old Testament whose name included the word Baal, like Ish-baal and Mephibaal. These were sons of Saul and Jonathan.

The Jews, when they came to Egypt, had a more pious state of mind that they weren't tolerating the name of Baal, even in the names of their people. Jewish historians later referred to Ish-baal as Ish-bosheth and Mephibaal as Mephibosheth. Bosheth means shame.

So Ish-bosheth, Ish-baal means man of Baal. But Ish-bosheth means man of shame. But because of their hatred for the word Baal, they decided to substitute the word bosheth to make it sort of an insult on Baal.

Likewise, Baal-zebal means Baal the prince. But the Jews had started calling him Beel-zebub, lord of the flies, just a way of showing their hatred for idolatry and for the pagan gods. Now, in the Jewish tradition, this Beel-zebub had morphed into not just a god that the pagans worshipped, but into the very prince of the demons.

And the reason to believe that this was a correct view, it was a morphing of tradition about a Canaanite god that the rabbis came up with. And remember, Jesus always warned against the traditions of the rabbis and the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees, which was simply a repetition of the rabbinic teachings. Jesus didn't have great respect for these things.

And he probably didn't believe there was really a prince of the demons named Beel-zebub. But since they did, he just ran with it. He said, okay, let's take your suggestion and see how much sense that makes.

Likewise, Jesus might or might not have agreed that Hades is in two compartments, like the rabbis were saying. But he might have used a story of theirs anyway to make a point entirely separate from what happens to people after they die. In other words, if he was teaching what happens after people die, if that's his issue here, if that's what this story is about, well, then we'd have to take it that the rabbis were right because Jesus is confirming what they had only guessed at in exact detail.

And this seems strange to me because God did not reveal to Moses or the prophets, his inspired spokesman, but if Jesus is saying this is an accurate picture, then he's essentially saying the rabbis figured it out. In fact, the Greeks and the Egyptians figured it out before the rabbis did. What God withheld from the law, from Moses and the prophets, he allowed the pagans to figure out correctly.

And that this pagan idea had come into rabbinic teaching and now is part of Israel's folklore. If Jesus said, and that's really the way it is. If he's confirming this, then he's confirming something very counterintuitive, namely that the pagans figured out what really happens to people after they die, even though God never told his own people about that.

So I'm thinking it's a strange thing for Jesus to tell a story like this unless he's simply accommodating a story that was already told, not intending for anyone to think it a true story and not even meaning to confirm the scenario that's in it, but only retelling a story the rabbis told and putting a tag on the end that makes the point he wants to make about the rich man saying, please send Lazarus back. Now, if this is so, then of course the story of Lazarus and the rich man ceases to be really any kind of an authority about

the afterlife if that's not what Jesus meant it to be. And what I've just suggested is that Jesus didn't intend it to be a teaching about the afterlife, but a teaching about something entirely different, about the obstinance of the Jews who are rejecting law and the prophets would continue to be obstinate even after Jesus rose from the dead.

And this story simply becomes the avenue through whom he delivers this message. Now, all I can say is I don't have any ax to grind about it. I always grew up thinking that this is a parable for the reasons I gave.

Because Lazarus is mentioned by name, Jesus doesn't generally mention people by name in his parables, so I figured it's different than a parable, therefore it's true. And Jesus doesn't say it's a parable, but of course we have to realize that many times Jesus' parables are not introduced by saying it's a parable. For example, the parable of the unjust steward earlier in this chapter, in other words, we know that when he says there was a certain rich man in verse 1, he's beginning a parable.

When he says there's a certain rich man in verse 19, there's this good reason to believe it's beginning to be a parable, but it may not be one of his normal parables. It may be the adaptation of a rabbinic parable to which he's going to put a spin on the end to make a jab at their obstinacy. If this is so, then we approach the parable with entirely different assumptions about its usefulness in telling us anything about the afterlife.

And since it's the only place in the Bible that even addresses the subject of the afterlife for unbelievers, if we lose it as a testimony to that, then we have nothing in the Bible telling us anything about unbelievers' state in the afterlife. So some people may wish to retain it only for that reason, but we have to be careful about our reasons for retaining a traditional idea. It's true that many times a passage has become the only source of information on a subject we want information about.

And if we find out that it may not in fact be a source of that kind of information, we may almost emotionally react to that and say, well, that's okay. I don't think it'll hurt anyone. I don't think it'll hurt anyone to take that approach.

But just as an honest person, I think I have to say I suspect that Jesus is not teaching about the afterlife and that the scenario he describes is more from Greek and Egyptian sources coming to Israel through the rabbis and he's employing that. Now, would that be misleading? Some people say that's misleading. If this isn't really Jesus is giving the wrong impression, he's perpetrating an error that the rabbis were teaching and he's not critiquing it.

He's not correcting it. Well, it's hard to put ourselves exactly in the mindset of the people back then, but I think it's very possible that the rabbis themselves, when they told stories like this, were indicating not that this is a true story. The rabbis told stories to illustrate principles too.

To illustrate an effect. To illustrate a point. And we know that Paul, for example, in some of his writings, quoted from Greek poets and Greek philosophers to make a point, even though he was not authorizing those Greek philosophers to be prophets of God or speaking under inspiration, but there was something he could exploit what they had to say.

Modern preachers sometimes do similar things. And the example I think of is one that struck me when I was young, how that pastor that I was sitting under used to take a story from either the Iliad or the Odyssey, from Greek mythology, about Ulysses and how he desired to hear the song of the sirens and to survive. However, nobody did hear the song of the sirens and survive simply because the siren song was irresistible.

No man could resist it and they lived on an island surrounded by jagged rocks and every sailor that was drawn to the island because of their singing, his ship was broken up on the rocks and he perished. So the song of the sirens is something that is irresistibly attractive but deadly. So it makes a very good analogy for sin or temptation at least.

Now, in Greek mythology, there are two people who did hear the song of the sirens and successfully survived it. Ulysses was one and Orpheus the musician was another. Ulysses survived by binding himself or making his crew bind him to the posts of the ship and he required all the other sailors to have wax in their ears so they could not be allured by the song of the siren.

They couldn't hear it but he could hear it. He knew that he would not be able to resist it but if he was tied to the mast of his ship, there's no way that he could kill himself by turning the ship in and his sailors wouldn't hear even if he cried out to them and ordered them to go. There was wax in their ears so he managed to get by.

He managed to hear the song of the sirens and then eventually the ship sailed beyond the range of it and the sailors could unbind him to the mast of the ship. Orpheus who was a skilled musician also wanted to hear the song of the sirens and when he came near the island of the sirens, their song began to waft over the waves and began to draw the ship and the people on the ship toward it but Orpheus took out his instrument and he played a more beautiful song than the song of the sirens so that his crew resisted the temptation of the sirens and were enamored and so they survived also. Now that's a great, both of those are great stories.

They're mythology, everyone knows their mythology. My pastor used to tell the story to point out that there's two different ways that people deal with temptation and sin. One is to bind themselves to their legalism and although everything in them is crying out to do the sinful thing they just don't allow it.

They're bound by their rules and by their laws like Ulysses bound to the master of the ship but others have tuned into a sweeter song than that of, which seduces people to sin

and that is Christ himself. When you turn your eyes upon Jesus the things of the earth grow strangely dim by comparison that Christ is much more attractive when people are more in love with Christ than they are with sin then the song of the siren doesn't draw them in because they're more drawn to Christ out of love for him. I always thought that was a great sermon illustration but nobody including the preacher was suggesting that these stories really ever happened.

That there ever was a man named Orpheus who is actually one of the gods in Greek mythology or a man named Ulysses or there was an island of the sirens. None of those stories are true and no one is pretending that they are. Probably even the Greeks didn't believe they were true.

The Greeks who wrote them probably knew they were mythology and certainly we know that. The point is if you had a recorded sermon of a pastor using that story as I've just explained it somebody listening to that sermon a hundred years from now might say wow back in the 21st century people believed there really was an island of the sirens because this preacher told that story and used it as an illustration. You see, the original listeners might well have known he's not using that as a true story.

You see, this is just part of our Jewish folklore. It's similar to if a preacher today would say so this guy dies and of course he meets St. Peter at the pearly gates and St. Peter says why should I let you in and blah blah blah blah blah. A sermon illustration might start with something like that and everyone would know the Bible doesn't say a thing about pearly gates or St. Peter meeting people when they meet there.

That's religious folklore. There's nothing really dangerous about it. There's nothing particularly true about it.

It's just something that's come into our culture. People talk about meeting Peter at the pearly gates when they talk about dying and wanting to go to heaven. A preacher who would employ that imagery would not be lying.

He would not be affirming that that's really what happens to people when they die. Everyone including himself would be expected to know this is religious folklore but it's useful to make the point I want to make. Therefore there's nothing dishonest about using mythology or folklore as a sermon illustration and Jesus may have been doing that in this case especially if this story was well known to the Jews as a rabbinic tale.

Not necessarily a true case. Not even necessarily a correct representation of the way things are on the other side. More just a familiar scenario that they'd often heard about and they took it as folklore or mythology but still were familiar with it and could relate to what Jesus was saying.

If this is the case with Jesus telling the story then of course we have no reason to use it

as any kind of a description of what really happens to people after they die. And frankly just the hearing of that suggestion begins to terrify certain Christians who have insisted that this story is necessary to inform us about such things. But if it does in fact inform us about such things then Jesus isn't the first to tell us about it.

The Greek writers and the Egyptian writers were the first to talk about it this way. And I'm among those who thinks probably Jesus was telling a known tale but did not expect any of his listeners to assume it to be a true tale or even a true to life tale. Just a familiar scenario which he could use for a story in order to make the point he made which really his point had almost nothing at all to do with the afterlife.

The afterlife is simply an incidental to the story that allows for this particular conversation to take place. By the way in the story Abraham said to the man when the man said you know send him to our house to my father's house and so forth. Abraham tells the man in verse 26 besides all this between us and you there is a gulf a great gulf fixed so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot nor can those from there pass to us.

If this reflects anything true about the afterlife it certainly makes it sound like the way things are when you die is final. Some people are in Abraham's bosom some are in Hades in the flames and there's no passing between. This passage is sometimes used in debate against any suggestions that there's a possibility of repentance and salvation for those who've gone to hell because it's made very clear even if people wanted to they can't pass from one compartment to the other of Hades.

Now that is perhaps a good argument against universal reconciliation and any idea of repentance and hell. It might well work but it might also not work because first of all this is not talking about the lake of fire this is not talking about after the judgment day this is talking about a different circumstance. One could argue I suppose if they wished although there'd be no way of proving one way or the other that in Hades people can't make this kind of passage but after they've seen God after they've you know been judged and sent to the lake of fire maybe there's maybe it's different there.

I'm not saying this is so I'm just saying that logically it's it's not possible to argue from this passage anything specific about the lake of fire because this is not about that. Furthermore as I said this is very possibly not even a true scenario at all but one that is simply employed by Jesus to make a point and if that is so then what is the point here? Obviously a picture is drawn of a man who's made his decisions already before he died and when the roles are reversed he's stuck with them at least until the judgment day. He's going to be tormented in those flames.

Now that's not necessarily something we can affirm with certainty unless Jesus is affirming it as factual and that is of course what is disputed. So there remain actually three possibilities. One is that Jesus is telling a real story about real people in which case



we can figure this is the way things are with one exception.

If this is the way things are then something has indeed changed since the time Jesus told the story. That is that Jesus has died and risen again. The story was told before that point and if the case is of real people then these are people who lived and died before Jesus died and therefore it could be said at the very most to be a description of circumstances before the death and resurrection of Christ.

What might have changed otherwise can be possibly deduced from other things. For example it says in Hebrews chapter 10 that through Jesus' death He has provided a new and living way into heaven itself. In fact in Hebrews 9 it makes it clear that before Jesus died the way into heaven was not possible even for the righteous.

It says for example in Hebrews 9.7 But into the second part of the tabernacle the high priest went alone once a year. Of course he is talking about the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Not without blood which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance.

Verse 8 The Holy Spirit indicating this that the way into the holiest of all and this would mean heaven in this case was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was yet standing. Now that is the way into heaven into the very presence of God the holiest of all was not a way that was revealed in the time of the Old Covenant. But it says in Hebrews 10 verse 19 Therefore brethren having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus and this would mean heaven the presence of God at the very least by a new and living way which he consecrated for us through the veil that is his flesh and having a high priest over the house of God which Jesus became after he ascended let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

So we can draw near to God now we can there is a new and living way into the very presence of God this suggests that under the Old Covenant though people might die righteous they would not have access directly into the holiest of all into the presence of God. But we do read in Ephesians chapter 4 about Jesus and his ascension. It says in Ephesians 4.8 Therefore he says when he ascended on high he led captivity captive now many modern translations render he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men and it says now this he ascended what does it mean but that he first descended to the lower parts of the earth he who descended is also the one who ascended far above the heavens that he might fill all things.

Now what is meant by Jesus descending to the lower parts of the earth is not explained. Many people think he went down to Hades and that that's the lower parts of the earth although there are other possibilities for example in Psalm 139 David spoke of when he was born when he was formed in his mother's womb in the lower parts of the earth he obviously was not talking about Hades when he talked about the lower parts of the earth he was talking about in the most the lowliest part of the earth is in the womb of a person

who has the least privilege I suppose I mean a baby in the womb doesn't have any privileges yet it's a lowly place and David uses the term the lower place of the earth to speak of his mother's womb where he was formed therefore it says that Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth it might be talking about his incarnation might be talking about him being born possibly or it might be referring to him going to Hades as some say in any case when it says he ascended on high that means when he went back to heaven after his death and resurrection he ascended to heaven and he quotes here from the psalm which is psalm 68 18 it says when he ascended on high he led a host of captives now many have understood this to mean that those who had died in faith like Abraham like Lazarus in the story like everybody who died righteous before Jesus died and rose again all those people were captives Peter seems to refer to people who have died as spirits in prison in 1 Peter 3 19 they are captives in Hades perhaps this is how some understand it but when Jesus ascended he led that host of captives out of their captivity and to heaven with him on the basis of this verse and this particular interpretation of that verse many feel that until Jesus came the circumstances of the dead were as he describes them in the story of Lazarus from the rich man wicked people went to the flames of Hades righteous people went to Abram's bosom a place in Hades that was comfortable and not a place of torment but that was before Jesus came when he died and rose again and ascended he then it is thought took those who were in Abram's bosom all those who were in the more desirable part of Hades and took them with him to heaven so that they are now in heaven not in Abram's bosom and that we when we die go directly to heaven to be absent from the body Paul equated to being present with the Lord not present with Abraham in Hades so this is the way most evangelicals understand the way things to be this understanding is based on a certain understanding of Ephesians 4 which can be understood a little differently but we won't get into that and on obviously a taking of the story of Lazarus from the rich man as something of a true example of what circumstances were like for people righteous and unrighteous people after death in Hades as you can see there are things that would raise questions about this interpretation of these things and therefore it may not be that it's exactly as we think though I don't see how it would make a bit of difference to us in the way we live our lives if Hades is precisely the way Jesus described here fine that doesn't change the way we live our lives one thing this story would certainly affirm is that when you die there is a reckoning there is there is something beyond this life at the very least to answer for the deeds you did in this life and even if this story isn't used to teach that many other places in scripture are so I think there's probably two lessons in this story one probably the one even the Pharisees would recognize and agree with namely that a man who's rich and unrighteous in this life will be in worse condition in the next life than a person who's poor and righteous and the man is in Hades for the simple reason that he was callous toward the poor there was a poor man at his gate he didn't help him instead he lived in luxury himself and cared nothing for the poor and this actually ties in with much of the teaching of Jesus in Luke many emphases in Luke in Luke's gospel in the teaching of Jesus that he represents is favorable toward the poor and provides strict

warnings for those who are privileged and rich and so the first part of the parable up to verse 26 would probably give that message and it's one that Jesus would certainly agree with though he then adds this tag on the end just like he added a tag at the end of the parable of the prodigal son which was directed specifically I think toward the obstinate Pharisees and the fact that he had accused them before that they don't even obey Moses and they are like this man's brothers they are doomed to this fate too if they don't change but they have enough information in Moses and the prophets to lead them to change and if they're ignoring that they're not going to benefit even from the new thing God's going to do raising Jesus from the dead and bringing the kingdom of God in, they will reject that as well. So we leave many questions unanswered and we have a number of suggestions but certainty on some of these points is elusive but I've shared what I think is likely to be true but there's also these other possibilities.

Alright, so we'll consider that that's all we have time or even ability to say about this particular parable. Alright, thanks for We'll see you next time. God bless.