

# The Wrath of God

## The Character of God—part 11

Luke 16:19-31

September 9, 2018

This week, we'll look at the issue of hell, and next Sunday we'll look at the wrath of God. Jesus tells a parable about a man who is in heaven and a man in hell.

### **DAY 1: Introducing the two characters.**

1. This parable falls on the heels of the derision and scoffing of the Pharisees toward Jesus. He tells this parable to try to jolt them out of their spiritual complacency.

*Luke 16:19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.*

2. What's your first impression of the first man in our parable?

3. Jesus describe three things about our first character in the parable.

a. He is rich. (Nothing wrong with being rich. What will he do with his riches?)

b. He is dressed in purple and fine linen. (He shopped at "Nordstrom")

c. He lived in luxury. (His wealth was used for himself, as we'll see)

3. Though the Pharisees are not as rich, Jesus equates the rich man's way of life and thinking about life to the Pharisees.

4. Though you and I may not consider ourselves "rich," wearing purple and fine linen, and living in luxury, compared to the rest of the world, we bear a remarkable resemblance to this man.

*Luke 16:20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

5. What is your first impression of Lazarus, the second man in the parable?

6. What do we learn about Lazarus?

a. He was a cripple. He had to be carried to the gate of the rich man.

b. He was a beggar, perpetually short of food.

c. He had a repugnant disease, "covered with sores."

7. Just the reading of the setting to this parable is like hearing "nails on a chalkboard." There is already a dissonance that make us uncomfortable, and sets us up for the rest of the parable.

## **DAY 2: A man in hell**

1. There are only two ways we can know anything about whether or not there is a heaven or hell:

a. Speculation (what we'd "like" to believe, "wishful" thinking, what people are determined to believe based on their commitment to self and their own world view), or

b. Revelation. The realities of heaven and hell are revealed to us.

2. With Jesus Christ, we have the fullest revelation there is, both from One who has been there, and knows all about both places!

3. As Jesus tells the parable there are a few important things to remember when reading a parable. A parable is told to drive home one central point: in this case, the reality of both heaven and hell, as well as an expose of human nature.

4. Due to the limit of human understanding of heaven and hell, we are limited in what we can grasp about heaven and hell. Much of the language Jesus uses about both heaven and hell is more picturesque in nature, inviting us to extrapolate to something greater than we can picture. It is a mistake to read too much into the details of the parable. They are meant to only illuminate or add color to the central point.

*Luke 16:22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.*

4. Heaven is depicted in this parable as being taken to a land where the great patriarch of the Old Testament greets him in close fellowship.

5. The rich man is buried, and he is in hell.

*Luke 16:23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.*

6. One of the most ludicrous characterizations unbelievers make of God is to say that God "throws" people into hell, inferring that He is doing something completely out of line. In this parable, you will see that the rich man makes absolutely no attempt to leave hell, or even requests to leave, in spite of his torment!

*Luke 16:24 So he (the rich man) called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'*

7. Of all the things the rich man could have asked for, all he can bring himself to ask for is immediate relief from pain. He will not bow his knee or heart to God, even in hell. What's striking is that this is the same way of life and stance that people have in this life: the immediate search for relief from pain, while they maintain their stubborn commitment to self-rule and self-exaltation instead of yielding themselves to God. After a lifetime of living that way, hell matches the natural result and consequence of their determination to their pride and self-will.

### DAY 3: Raw human nature exposed

1. Abraham responds to the rich man's request for immediate relief without any hint of humbling himself, admitting his sinfulness, while even in hell!

*Luke 16:25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.*

2. Abraham's words are along this line. "Immediate relief (and comfort) is what you lived for while on earth. You made it the highest priority, even before living for God and others. Even here, you cling to that same bankrupt purpose."

3. Imagine the things the rich man could have said, if he could "get outside" himself.

a. He doesn't congratulate Lazarus

b. He doesn't humble himself before Lazarus, or admit that he virtually ignored him outside his own private gate every day.

c. He doesn't humble himself to ask forgiveness of Lazarus for his self-centeredness.

d. He doesn't humble himself and ask forgiveness of Abraham or of God for his self-centeredness.

4. All he can do is think about himself as priority #1, with no greater purpose to bless anyone else.

5. Abraham continues speaking to the rich man.

*Luke 16:26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that **those who want** to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*

6. A fascinating twist is revealed about human nature right here!

a. You'd think that for the man in hell, he'd do anything to get out of hell. Yet, Jesus describes people in heaven are the only ones that "want to" cross over to hell, ostensibly to do anything to get their loved ones out of that misery.

b. But Jesus implies that the man in hell, even in his torment, would not want to leave hell if it meant admitting he had been wrong all along, and had to humble himself and give up his commitment to his own well-being as top priority. His pride refuses to bend!

7. What strikes you the most, so far, in this parable?

## **DAY 4: Raw human nature exposed some more**

*Luke 16:27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'*

The rich man is still trying to “work his world.”

2. Think about the request the rich man makes of Abraham.
  - a. He sees Lazarus as still an inferior, no better than an errand boy.
  - b. He still sees himself as the boss, bossing even Abraham!
  - c. His request would mean Lazarus leaving the splendor and wonder of heaven to head back to the comparative wretchedness and pain of his life.
  - d. His pride is in full bloom, as if he knows what ought to be done and what is right to be done.

3. Abraham responds.

*Luke 16:29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'*

4. Does it appear that even an appearance by Lazarus would compel the rich man's brothers to repent of their sin and turn to God?

5. There is something far more potent that should get the attention of anyone who is genuinely willing to listen to truth! What does Abraham recommend for the brothers of the rich man?

6. This brings us back to our original question from DAY 1. How can anyone know the realities of heaven and hell? There are only two meaningful answers:

- (1) Speculation—we can guess, we can wish and hope that heaven and hell, if they do exist, do so on our terms, not God's.
- (2) Revelation—God can reveal what He chooses about heaven and hell to us.

7. No matter what you may “want” heaven to be, or “want” hell to be, neither of your wishes really matter. What matters is: what is real?

8. The rich man is still trying to bend reality to what he wants.

9. The wise and humble man will bend himself to reality.

## DAY 5: Raw human nature exposed, again

1. We get our last two looks at human nature.

*Luke 16:30 "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'*

2. It's hard to imagine how "insane" it is that a man can be in hell(!) and still argue theology as if he not only knows what is true, but knows even better than Abraham!

3. What strikes you about his folly and pride?

4. He insinuates, and virtually blames heaven that had Abraham (or God) just sent a ghost to him, he would have repented!

5. What's even more striking is that the rich man sees no tragic or bitter irony in his arguing about how people can be saved, and saved from hell.

6. The rich man foolishly believes that sinful human nature can be "jolted" out of its sin nature simply by seeing a "ghost" from the past. In spite of the thousands of ways God tried to reach him in his earthly life, the rich man **would not** believe anything or do anything that required him to give up his stubborn commitment to doing things his way.

7. Abraham gives the advice the rich man's brothers would need to heed (and us too!)

*Luke 16:31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

8. Of all the images and people Jesus could have used for heaven, he chose Abraham. Remember, He was speaking to a group of Pharisees, who considered Abraham the father of their faith! Certainly the Pharisees listened to Jesus about as much as the rich man listened to Abraham, but if the Pharisees WOULD listen to Abraham their destiny could be different!

9. What should happen with a human that all his life refuses to bow his knee to God? What should happen to a human being who refuses to see his need of God, and who absolutely refuses to repent? Do you think that person would be happy in heaven? Part of the misery of hell will be that person finally and utterly left to himself in utter and complete disconnection from God, all the goodness God provides for his repentant and grateful children!