

Luke 16:14-31

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[0 : 00] Now what you have this morning is a story from Jesus about a man who goes to hell. And if there's one thing worse, there's something worse than going to hell, here it is.

It is being certain that you're going to heaven and ending up in hell. And the story ends with this man absolutely desperate to get a warning back to his family. And what he wants to say to his family is the main point of the passage, I think.

Here is what Jesus wants to say to us this morning. And the man wants to say to his family, people like us go to hell. People like us go to hell.

And he begs for the chance to tell his five brothers, people like us go to hell. Luke's gospel as we've studied it is full of surprises. It's full of surprises about who is going to heaven and about who is not. There's people who you think they've got no hope at all, and yet they find themselves in. And there's people who you think are going to heaven, and they find themselves out. And that's what we've got today.

[1 : 06] We've got this opposites, this great reversal. Jesus with his coming is not saying, with my coming everybody's going to heaven. He's not saying that. He's saying there's going to be surprises in both clues, the queue going up and the queue going down.

And chapter 15 is the heart of these chapters, the heart of this section. And in chapter 15 we saw that heaven is for people who repent. Heaven is for people who say sorry.

Heaven is for people who turn away from their sin and turn to God. And hell is for people who do not repent. Hell is for relatively good people and relatively bad people who repent.

Hell is for people relatively good, relatively bad, who do not repent. And so we here have one of these great shocks. And it is the story of a made up man. It's a made up story.

It's a made up story with an entirely factual warning. To the group of men that Jesus meets in verse 14. Can you see them? The Pharisees. It's a warning to those people.

[2 : 11] To people like them. To people like them. And people like him go to hell. And I think if you're going to go on listening, I've got to say a little bit about hell, haven't I? And we all know there have been preachers.

Not really today. But there have been preachers, particularly 200 years ago, who exaggerated about hell. And they tried to frighten people emotionally.

With hell, fire, preaching. And because of that, people are really wary, aren't they? They are very, very wary. Maybe you are. Of listening to a preacher talk about hell.

And what's happened is churches have stopped talking about it entirely. But when you come to a passage like the end of Luke 16, what I've got to do, and what you've got to do, is ask yourself, what is my job?

Okay? Do I work for you, as the congregation? And do I have an obligation to tell my clients what it is they want to hear? Or do I work for the Lord Jesus?

[3 : 14] And I have an obligation to tell you what my master wants you to hear. Which one is it? Jesus taught about hell carefully. He taught about hell often. And he taught about hell consistently.

And it was a very important part of his message. And the message of Jesus loses its coherence if you take the doctrine of hell out of it. And you can see actually in the passage, Jesus is not like one of those hellfire preachers shouting his head off.

Jesus is not trying to whip up emotions or exaggerate. He's not doing that. He does twice use the word torment. And he twice uses the word anguish. But there are no descriptions, are there, of devils with pitchforks prancing around.

No sadomasochistic descriptions of torture. There's none of that. He just thinks hell is a real place. And he thinks that physically and mentally it is a dreadful place.

And his warning is frightening. But he wants your brain to be frightened, not just your emotions. So that you'll do something about it. And I think we also need to say here that what Jesus says about hell here is a story.

[4 : 23] It is a story that has been made up. And I think that means that we need to be very careful about taking any of the details in Luke 16 literally. So let me give you an example.

For example, the rest of the Bible doesn't seem likely that people in hell will be having conversations with people in heaven across the divide. That doesn't seem likely. Like the rich man has a conversation with Abraham.

It doesn't seem that is the way that things will be. From the rest of the Bible. But Jesus uses it in this story to make a point. And his point is this. What would somebody in hell want to say?

What would Abraham want to say back to him? So let's listen in on this conversation. So he tells this story about a made up person in picture language. In order to deliver to you and me a real warning about a real place to real people.

And the warning is this. People like you go to hell. And before writing this off as all fashionable or objectionable or horrific. I think we better be sure that Jesus really doesn't know what he's talking about.

[5 : 33] So let's have a look at these three main points. The first one is going to be the longest. It will feel like it goes on forever. But the other two are quicker. The first point is this. You cannot write your own ticket in advance.

You cannot write your own ticket to heaven in advance. The people who think they go to heaven are there in verse 14. Can you just look at that? Verse 14.

And Jesus describes them in verse 15 which is the key verse. You are those who justify yourselves before men. That in five or six words is why they will be shocked when they find themselves in hell. It's because they think they've got the ticket. They think they've got their ticket in their back pocket. But Jesus says that ticket that you have is written yourself. And it will not work.

You see to justify yourself before men is to get just about everything in life that is important wrong. So the focus on human beings and what they think as the big thing is wrong.

[6 : 35] Whose opinion matters more to you this morning? Human beings? Or should it be God? The Pharisees have got this life sorted. They are really good at looking good.

They're really good at looking good where people can see them. But what people think does matter, does it? It doesn't matter if all your friends think you're going to heaven.

Because God sees them as well, doesn't he? Look at verse 15. God sees their hearts. God knows their heart. And what God sees matters more.

And this idea that you can justify yourself. Well that's wrong as well. Justifying is something that a judge does. And I think it comes built into every human being that we are good at justifying ourselves.

I cycle. I might not cycle very much this winter. But when a cyclist goes into a white van or into a car and there's an accident. You've seen it on the X-Bridge. It happens kind of every five minutes.

[7 : 43] But there's a cyclist goes in and the cyclist falls off. And there's the aftermath. The cyclist gets up on the road. His clothes are ripped. The bike is slightly mangled. And everybody stands there and looks around.

And all the parties justify themselves. I'm a cyclist. All cyclists justify themselves. We know that we're in the right.

No matter what has happened. No matter if we've jumped a red light. The cyclist is always in the right. But actually. Deep inside. If you took the name of the cyclist.

Or the white van driver. And you set up a meeting with a judge. They will know. They will know. That cyclist will know who jumped the red light. That things will not go so well.

The same thing is here. It doesn't matter whether you can justify yourself. What matters is whether the judge will justify you. It doesn't matter whether you think you're in the right. It doesn't matter whether you think you're in the right. What matters is what God thinks.

[8 : 42] What God will say. So let's say next Saturday you want to go and watch England vs Wales at Tokenham. And you wish that you had tickets. It will not be okay, will it?

To take out an A4 from your pad. And write on it. Four seats near the halfway line. Pitch side. Signed Levy. That's not going to work, is it? That will not do.

You turn out at Tokenham next Saturday. You hand in the A4 pad. That A4 sheet. And security will be tight. They'll tell you to clear off. And they won't let you in. Now that is obvious, isn't it? It's not obvious. So why is it that you think that it's so easy to write tickets for heaven? That it will be okay. That you've done them yourself at home and they will let you in.

I would not, and neither would you, let somebody into their house with an admission slip signed by themselves. You wouldn't. The Queen certainly would not let anyone into her house.

[9 : 42] With an admission slip signed by themselves. If you wrote a ticket and said, I'm allowed in, I've written Levy on it. Would that be alright? Why is it that we think God would, why is it we think that God is so easily fooled by self-justification?

I'm in the right. It fools men. But look at verse 15 again. God has got technology that none of your friends do. God knows your heart.

And Jesus gives them two specific areas to examine. He wants them to shift from self-confidence so that they can go to heaven instead.

The two areas are what you do with your money, which is the story of Rich Man and Lazarus. And what you do with the opposite sex, which is why that verse is there in the middle of Luke 16. The Pharisees are moralists.

They self-justify because they think they're good enough to go to heaven. They've done enough to get to heaven. They don't want any bad people in there. And that is why they're so cross, aren't they, in chapter 15 and verse 2.

[10 : 45] Just look there. They grumble. They complain. They're angry. And they say, this man receives sinners and eats with them. Jesus, stop letting all these bad people in. We are the ones that are good enough.

We are the ones that are working hard. These people, they don't, they shouldn't be in. But also, the Pharisees don't want the pass mark raised even higher.

They don't want that. They don't want the standard raised higher either. That is why they're so cross in chapter 16 and verse 14. Because they have a problem. Jesus has just said, doesn't he, the end of verse 13, you cannot love God on money.

But they have a problem because in verse 14, the Pharisees were lovers of money. And they think loving money, that's alright. Don't be too strict, Jesus. Jesus just said, it's only people who don't love money who get into heaven.

And they say, that's too high. Everybody loves money, Jesus. Jesus, you're just you turning. You're you turning all the time. You were too soft on morals in chapter 15.

[11 : 48] And now you've gone too hard in chapter 16. Stop it with the U-turn in. Get a grip and tell us, Jesus, what is really going on. But Jesus hasn't gone soft on morals at all.

He hasn't done a U-turn. What Jesus is teaching is, forgiveness always goes along with high moral standards. And moralism has always gone along with low moral standards.

So if you think men will get to heaven if they get over the pass mark, what you do is the pressure is always on to lower the pass mark. If that's what you think, I'll get into heaven if I reach this certain standard, well, you'll always want to lower the standards.

If it's about moralism, how good we are, then we need to push it down. So that you can jump over it and get in. But if you think that people only get into heaven because they're forgiven, that's the only way in, then you can let anybody in.

And you can keep the pass mark where it belongs. Right up at the top. With the morals that God thinks are important. And that is what verses 16 and 17 are all about.

[12 : 54] Jesus says, yes, you can now get to heaven. Without keeping the law and the prophets. Since John the Baptist came and he announced his message of repentance and forgiveness for sins, it's been clear that any sinful man or woman can force their way in.

The Pharisees taught wrongly, didn't they? That it's keeping the law. But Jesus says, you can get to heaven by being forgiven. But you cannot self-justify keeping every single last thought of the law. If you want to be... If you want... If you want something that you've made yourself. If you think it is by keeping the law, you've got to keep the whole law.

And the good news of the kingdom of God is that it is for people who want to be forgiven. If you want to write your own ticket and say that you are good enough, well then you've got to keep the whole law.

So the question is, how have you treated the members of the opposite sex? And so you come to verse 18. If you want to know what Jesus says more in detail about divorce, you go to Mark 10. [14:04] You'll chat with me later about that. But in Mark 10 it is expanded. And the Pharisees taught, well actually you don't need to be married for life.

Being married for life is just too hard. You can keep away from just grossly mistreating your wife. If you're not happy with the woman that you're married to anymore, by all means divorce her, but do it legally and you're fine.

Sort the paperwork out. There's the pass mark. Jesus says, well okay, you might have got the paperwork right, but you've forgotten the one important thing, that God can see your heart. And in Mark 10 he reminds them of what the divorce laws were. And divorce laws are only needed because sinful people cannot live together with their problems. When you put two sinful people together, there are going to be problems, always.

And sometimes those problems mean that people need a way out. And it's good to have a legal route that protects the wife's interest when that happens. It means she doesn't end up destitute and without property and without the support of her family.

[15:14] But if you've gone down that route of divorce, the one thing that you know for certain, and I think everybody would agree with this, is that you are a sinner. I don't say that from a self-righteous point of view.

Divorce is for sinful people. And we are all sinful people, aren't we? Every single one of us. And you may end up there. But you cannot come out at the end of that route and say, you cannot, can you? Those of you who struggled with this, you cannot come out at the end of that route and say, well I'm a very, very good person. It is redeemable. To know that you're a sinner if you can be forgiven. But if your whole game is about saying and proving I've never done anything wrong, then the Pharisees with their easy divorce laws are just kidding themselves.

People like you, he says, who keep the rules on the inside, on the outside, who have all the right paperwork, go to hell. And then verses 19 to 25, he says, how do you use your money?

[16:22] And they love money. And they think that you can love money and be okay with God. And Jesus tells them a story that is designed to make them wince. There was a rich man, verse 19, can you see him?

And he was very rich. His clothes and his gait would have given that away to the original hearers. But even if we miss those feasts, even if we miss those details, the way that he eats gives it away. He eats sumptuously every day. It's ten course meals every evening. This man is loaded. He has the staff, he has the building, he has the resources to feast sumptuously every day.

And he is meant to be an example of what it means to be a lover of money. Somebody who the Pharisees could really look up to. Their culture made the assumption that there are lots of cultures who are around the world.

But if somebody has cash, God must like them. And God must bless them. So this man is rich. He and his family, they all assume that they have a place in heaven.

[17:26] But people like you, which Jesus says, who enjoy their money without any obvious corruption or fraud, go to hell. And in his case, it actually takes the journey to hell before he realises God sees his heart.

So there he is in verse 23, in hell. And that is a surprise to him. But even more than that, when he lifts up his eyes, he sees Abraham afar off and Lazarus at his side, which is an even far greater surprise.

That is the beggar who used to live at my gate, he says. And he assumes, doesn't he, he's got some angle, some capital to spend.

So he asks Lazarus to do him a favour. And that is why in verse 25, Abraham opens up his heart. But Abraham said, child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things.

But now he's comforted here and you are in anguish. All your life good things, all his life bad things. And now God has reversed the accounts. And that isn't saying to you that having money is a sin, it's not.

[18:39] But it is throwing the light back onto what this man did with his money when he was alive. All God has done is swap the places around. You never had a problem with money all those years that you were alive with there being one person in comfort eating very well and then another person

kind of six pieces away from you who had nothing.

You had no problem with that rich man. And all that has happened is the great reversal. And if you want to justify yourself using the law well you better make sure that you've read all of it rich man. It's the same point as divorce. You better make sure that you've read the bits about hospitality. That you've loved your neighbours yourself. You better have read the bits about treating and caring for the sick and the needy and the poor.

This rich man's life it wouldn't be in a headline about bankers or something more scandalous than that. It wouldn't be that. He isn't going to have done a deal on his tax.

This rich man may have even had a wing of a local hospital named after him. He may have devoted lots of time and money to lots of charitable things that people approved of but every day he sat down in purple while a man sat at his gates closed with sores.

[19 : 58] Every day he sat down to stuff his belly and the poor beggar shuddered with longing to even have the crumbs that fell from his table. And he took notice of Lazarus.

He never sent in anything. He even allowed the wild sweet dogs to go after his injuries and lick his sores. God sees your heart. And so you can fool your family or your neighbours but they are the ones who walk over Lazarus on the way to your party.

God can see what you think about money. And God can see in what ways you are using it to help someone in need. Now I think it is easy to apply this today.

Don't get tied up in detail as I have for most of the week. Verse 18 is not Jesus' final word on divorce. Verse 25 is not Jesus' last word on giving.

The big point is this. That people who think they have their own ticket written because they are good enough have no idea how far short of God's standard they fall.

[21 : 09] Because God sees the heart. Everything can be forgiven. Relationship breakdown and meltdown divorce can be forgiven. Greediness can be forgiven.

Callousness hard heartedness can be forgiven. But if you think you are good enough you are never going to ask. You are never going to ask. And that applies to modern moralists doesn't it?

Let's try and tease this out. Both the religious kind and the secular kind. The religious kind are shrinking aren't they?

There aren't so many of them around anymore I want to argue. The religious kind are shrinking. You go to church on Sunday you have very very strong opinions on pretty much everything. There is very very clear blue water between you and sinners.

You are a cut above the average church member let alone anyone else. You are one of the good people who is balanced. but unless you are somebody seeking forgiveness by repenting then Jesus has very hard questions to ask your heart and mine.

[22 : 24] The secular moralist is beginning to take the place of the religious moralist in our society. So just think who would be invited to this kind of rich man's dinner party today.

Who would be at the dinner party with him? They'd be the rich people but they'd be the good rich people with the right opinions on everything. They'd have the right opinions on the agenda that counts today.

Good people who hit all the right moral buttons of their culture. They wouldn't put it so boldly as to say well you should let me into heaven because I recycle. Or you should let me into heaven because I've got the right opinion on all the equality agendas.

I believe in human rights. But I want to say it is the same outward man focused behaviour religion actually as the people Jesus meant.

And Jesus says to us this morning but he also says to the cultural moralists of our day what do you do with your money? And how do you treat the opposite sex? God sees your heart.

[23 : 33] So you cannot write your own ticket. That's the second thing and the longest thing. The second thing is this you cannot do deals later. Now I think you've got to reserve some admiration for the rich man. He's really tenacious.

He's had a very bad day isn't he? He dies he's buried and then contrary to all his expectations he wakes up to find himself in hell. It's a very bad day.

But look at him. He's not lost the ability to cut a deal has he? He's a trader. He could work in the city and he has three separate goals at doing a deal with Abraham.

He will not give up. So he uses every single bit of negotiating skill he's got. Verse 23 he's dead he's in hell he sees Lazarus and generally he thinks bingo.

Here is somebody that I know on the inside. In fact there's two people verse 24 he scratches his link to Abraham doesn't he? So what we've got is somebody who used to live on my street and somebody I'm descended from and he thinks I've got a way out there must be some kind of deal we can do is that how we negotiate Abraham and he asks the poor man Lazarus to do something because in his world that's the way it's always been isn't it?

[24 : 53] And Lazarus has always longed for a tiny scrap of food but the rich man now longs for a tiny drop of water so surely we can do a deal Abraham there are many many people out there maybe you you're very used to getting your own way in life you pull every string you're willing to do any deal you want to get what you want but men and women who are self made in life tend to assume that it's going to work like that after death there's always been a deal to be done I've always been able to do so and God will be the same so look at verse 26 Abraham says and besides all this between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not do so and none may cross from there to us it's too late there are no deals and if you are without forgiveness and repentance in this life then you'll be without them in the next life and by the time you meet your maker it will be too late and thinking about this passage

I wonder if any of the people that I count as my friends believe that quite a lot of my friends believe in God but none of them show any urgency some of them are interested in what happens after they die but none of them show any urgency about what will happen when they die it's for some of them they've got a point one problem they think they're good enough that they'll be fine they think their hearts will stay secret and all the things that's in their hearts will stay secret but for most of them I think it's a point two problem death will be something that you'll face when you come to it death is a great adventure as somebody once said to me in an intensive care ward it's not just young people is it that think they've got a long time until they die and I think most of us think well once we're dead there'll be a lot of time to sort it out afterwards there'll be a way to cut a deal there'll be a second chance but verse 26 says to you no there's a great chasm that is fixed and specifically there will be no travel from heaven to hell not even with a drop of water and there will be certainly no travel from hell to heaven and none from heaven to hell it is the fact that we will all die and for us our time is running out that makes this urgent it makes it urgent to get forgiveness from Jesus and that should be the most urgent thing that we can think of you cannot cut a deal all that matters is whether you've repented in life or not that is what will matter riches in life may be one reason why it's such a surprise for this group do you see they've been able to do deals all their life and if that is you then you're more likely to assume that you're going to be able to do a deal in the future the Christian gospel is all about second chances isn't it wonderfully it is isn't it and that is why there is forgiveness that's why people like the lost son who stuffed up life completely will be in heaven and I suppose you could imagine a world where there goes on being second chances and third chances and fourth chances after you've died but Jesus says very very clearly that is not the way it is get it sorted now before you die because there are no second chances third point very quickly you have everything you need now and you may think this is a very miserable sermon your ticket might not work if it's homemade and you won't be able to do deals later but actually in verses 27 to 31 the man tries a second time with another deal and it is miserable for him because he does not get what he wants Abraham says no twice but if you can listen for five more minutes more five minutes more you get what he asks for five minutes that's what I'm asking for you are about to get what this man asks for which means you have everything you need to know you see verse 27 he is the great deal maker but the moment he's been knocked back immediately he's after his second best well we can't do that deal let's do the second one and what he wants is something for his brothers look at verse 27 for I have five brothers verse 27 then I beg you father send him to my father's house for I have five brothers I have five brothers so that he may warn them lest they also come into this place of torment he wants something for his brothers it's really clear thinking he's caring about his family it's a strong attempt to do a deal send Lazarus because my five brothers they are in exactly the same position as I am they are moral enough they are rich enough they are thought of well enough and yet they have no idea they have no idea that they're going to be in hell so please Abraham send Lazarus to my brothers I wonder what you think a dead person would say it's a huge industry in that isn't it the spiritualist church on Uxbridge road I cycled past it in despair that they managed to build it spiritualism is big business isn't it have you wondered what a dead person would want to say to you well here it is look at verse 28 for I have five brothers so that he may warn them lest they also come into this place of torment everybody you know who has died regardless of

what they believed in life in death they have met the God who made them they have been exposed to the person who knows their hearts and has been cracked open and to a man and a woman they would say to you this morning be warned be warned and be forgiven that is what dead people would say he can't go the man can't go but he wants

Lazarus to go and Abraham says no but it's not a vindictive no he says there's no need for him to go and it would do no good look at verse 29 but Abraham said they have Moses and the prophets let them hear them Moses and the prophets that was the whole bible in Jesus' day even the books before John the Baptist would let you know that you are not moral enough that though you are maybe moral and though you are maybe rich you are not good enough but the rich man is desperate look at verse 30 he says that's not true father Abraham that is not true this is what would make them to repent send them a dead man and then they listen and Abraham says no again he says their lack of repentance is not because they don't know that they need it even looking at their money and their treatment of the opposite sex would be enough to make them realize that they need to be forgiven they know that there's a problem but it's because they have a heart problem that they won't believe and Moses and the prophets are enough to meet that need the bible [32 : 32] Abraham says is certain and it's powerful and if they have Moses and the prophets they have everything they need do you see he's implying that he's been treated unfairly listening in verses 27 and 28 the rich man is saying it wasn't clear enough it was never big enough you didn't send me a dead person and Abraham says but you had the bible you had the bible what more do you want you had Moses on money and poverty and you had Lazarus at your gate and you stepped over him every day and it never occurred to you that you may need forgiveness from God and if you're not going to listen to those two things nothing else will shake you it's not that God is making things difficult but it's look how much trouble God has gone to to make it easy you've had 1500 years rich man of Abraham law and prophets pointing out that you cannot keep the law it cannot be done it cannot be done and you have messenger after messenger saying God is a forgiving

God and a loving God and he will receive back anybody who is humble enough to ask him for forgiveness and again how easy for us just by the standards there are Bibles everywhere aren't there and you have everything you need to know in this book do you get the dreadful end of the story the dreadful end of the story is that the brothers have got a Bible in their house and he knows that his brothers aren't going to pick it up and read it they're like him they're going to ignore it you can change the story for yourself can't you you've just got to pick it up and read it and find out what forgiveness is all about but there's more let me finish with this there's more because we actually have what the rich man asked for don't we he has said let my brothers hear the warning voice of a dead man and you can hear his voice you can hear what the rich man would say in Jesus' story and actually Abraham offers us something even better even if someone should rise from the dead well the words of Jesus are the words of somebody who died and was risen from the dead they killed Jesus but he came back to me and he proved Jesus knows what he's talking about with life and death you often hear I often hear nobody knows what happens after death nobody's ever come back but that is the point somebody did Jesus knows what he's talking about and when Jesus came most of them did what Abraham suggests they were no more convinced by the living presence of a man that they've killed than they've been by Moses and the prophets which means in reality not in the story they go into the situation of this man they die they are buried and they go into the shock of realising they are in hell not heaven they realise they cannot do a deal that everyone they care about and everyone they've taught that it'll be all okay in the end is in the same place but actually wonderfully when

Jesus rose again there are some people who forced their way in in the language of verse 16 can you see that forgiveness is offered and if forgiveness is an offer for people who repent then get out of my way I'm going to force my way in I'm going to repent my heart is in a miserable stage and that is something that I want I want to be forgiven so the only question is which of these groups are you in will you rely on your homemade ticket will you rely on doing a deal after you're dead or will you take hold of the offer that is available and brutally force your way in by repenting what will you do today if you hear his voice pardon not your heart let's pray Thank you.