

Eternity Begins Suddenly
Luke 16:19-31

In the Book of Hebrews chapter 9 verse 27 we are given the simple, but very profound words of truth that tell us that,

²⁷ it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.
(Hebrews 9:27)

Again, these words are so very, very simple, but oh dear Christian, we cannot help but recognize the very emphatic meaning of them. In these words, we are being told that there surely will come a moment in time, an appointed moment in time, when each of us will breathe our last. And it is then that life for us on this earth will suddenly, but absolutely, come to an end.

And no, we aren't able to delay or in some way prolong that moment, whether by some medical intervention or other hopeful intercession. That special moment in time has been set for each of us since before the foundations of this earth were laid. I love the way our Lord describes that for us in the words of Psalm 139. Listen!

¹³ . . . you created my inmost being.

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:13-16)

Don't you just love these precious words! From the first moment of our conception, as our loving Lord wove us together in our mother's womb until that final moment as we breathe our last it is all by our Lord's loving design and plan.

And did you especially note those last words . . . "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Folks, our Lord has set the exact number of days we will live on this earth, the day we were born and the day we will die, and then we will go to be with Him in heaven for an eternity. And those days are certain and unchangeable.

But then we must also note carefully that there is a warning accompanying these loving words, the warning given to us in Hebrews 9:27 where we are told that then will come “the Judgment”. “Our judgment”.

Over the many times that I have read those words, my mind can't seem to help but imagine the picture of all of us, standing before a judge who is sitting behind a big desk pondering over all the good and the bad things that we have done in this life. And then, after due consideration, rendering a decision as to where we will spend our eternity.

But we know from all the many other scriptures that speak about the judgment of God that that will not be the exact way judgment will take place. That by the time we actually do breathe our last, our judgment as to where we will spend our eternity has already been determined, and that decision will rest upon one truth and one truth alone, “did we receive and have the Lord Jesus as our Savior and Lord, or did we not.”

It really will be as simple as that folks! “Did we receive and have the Lord Jesus as our Savior and Lord, or did we not.”

Here in the scripture passage that we'll study today, the Lord Jesus gives us a brief glimpse and a word picture into that one moment in time, that “appointed time to die”, as it took place in the lives of two very different individuals, one a very poor and sickly man named Lazarus, and a very rich man, whose name we aren't given.

Listen carefully to these words of our Lord, words that are precious to those of us who have received Christ as our Savior, but words that are painful, even terrifying, to those who have not! Listen carefully!

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,

²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table.

Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's Bosom. The rich man also died and was buried,

²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'

²⁶ 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 be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—
²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

³⁰ And he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.(Luke 16:19-31)

Here, in these few words, we are given a very special insight into what we will call the "next things" of our existence before God, a preview of those "next things" that are yet to come as we pass from this life into the next. Because all that we have been reading here really is true.

Your and my existence before God really will not end with our final breath. We truly are eternal beings and our lives will continue on forever and ever.

And in these words, Jesus has given us a special kind of example to tell us what those next things will actually be like.

Some would call this story a parable, but in many ways it is not really a parable. A parable is much more of a similitude, a story that illustrates real things but is not itself necessarily real, stories like those that we have been reading recently, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Parable of the Unrighteous Steward, and on and on.

In contrast, these words tell us a story that is far more real and certain to be. As the Commentator, Matthew Henry words it, this is God pulling back the curtain

of eternity so that we can, for a brief moment, see that which will come to pass for all who live on this earth.

And this preview into those things to come is intended for our good, to help us to see the real and true end of all our efforts, our lifestyles, our pursuits, while we are here in this life, whether those efforts be deemed successful in the eyes of worldly observers or they be failures.

And here, we also find a very strong contrast to some of the other parables, especially to those such as the Parables of the Lost Sheep and of the Prodigal Son. In those parables, we see the mercy of God as He pours out grace upon grace, to seek and to save that which is lost, and as he generously receives sinful men back unto Himself.

But here, in this account about Lazarus and the rich man, along with seeing God's mercy and grace and the future glory of those to whom He would show mercy, here also, in the future misery of the rich man, Jesus also reveals the judgment and the wrath of God upon those who would dare to continue in their sin.

Here also, Jesus dispels some of the accepted traditions of the Hebrew culture of that day, especially the accepted belief that being poor was a form of condemnation from God.

Here, Jesus neither condemns the rich man for being rich, nor the poor man for being poor. That is because there is no sin in either of those conditions. It is only that which a person does with his or her circumstance of life that matters to God.

Note here also, that a name is recorded for the poor man. His name is Lazarus. But in contrast, there is no name recorded for the rich man.

I don't want to infer a truth that is not intended by God, but by the recording of the poor man's name, I am reminded of words found in the Book of Revelation that speak about the recording of a person's name and about a day of judgment and about eternity. Listen! This is Revelation chapter 20 verses 11 through 15.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Did you note the last words of this passage, "anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life is cast into the lake of fire?"

Lazarus is mentioned specifically by name here in our passage, but not so the rich man. That would seem to imply here that by the recording of his name, and by the lack of the recording of the rich man's name, such things might portend the future eternity of each of them.

Lazarus' name was forever inscribed in the Lamb's Book of Life, but not so the rich man.

Folks, this is a powerful and demanding thought. And it is a question that is being placed before you and me today as we consider these words. The question . . . "Is our name, is your name, is my name, even now, written down in the Lamb's Book of Life?"

I sure hope that it is for each one of you. I personally know, with an assurance, that my name is already written there. That is because these scriptures tell us that we can know such things, for sure.

But If you for some reason are unsure as to whether or not your name is written in the "Lamb's Book of Life", you can, and you must make sure of it today, even right at this very moment. Because, just as with Lazarus and with this rich man, eternity can and will begin suddenly and then the opportunity to make choices will also suddenly end.

Let me say to all of us, salvation is not a very difficult thing for us to have. We mistakenly think it to be so, but it really is not. It actually is one of the easiest

things we will ever do. Why is that so? It is because the Lord Jesus has already done all of the hard parts for us. He has already suffered all of the cost that it will take for us to be saved.

All we have to do is simply call out to Christ and then surrender our heart over to Him and He will surely receive us. And He will write our name down in His Book of Life. That promise is given to us in Acts 2:21,

²¹ And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.' (Acts 2:21)

And also in Romans 10:13,

¹³ For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Folks, because of these sure words of God, I am confident that if for some reason I do not live through the remainder of this day, I will be immediately transported by angels into paradise with Christ. Why? It is because God promises us that He will do exactly that.

Notice these words in our passage and also take note of the contrast being given between that which takes place with Lazarus and that which takes place with the rich man. Verse 22,

²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's Bosom. The rich man also died and was buried, (Luke 16:22)

The difference given here is somewhat subtle, but it is resoundingly different. Lazarus died and was carried by angels to Abraham's Bosom, but the rich man was simply buried.

Some questions . . . why Abraham and not Christ? Perhaps the reason for Abraham's Bosom representing paradise is because Christ had not yet died and ascended into heaven.

Also, these Jews that Jesus was ministering to with these truths could far better relate to a vision of paradise that pictured their "Father Abraham" waiting to receive them than one of Jesus, the Christ.

And then also note carefully here, the role that was being carried out by angels. Folks, I have no doubt that angels are far more involved in our lives than we can ever imagine. We are told in Hebrews chapter 1, verse 14,

¹⁴ Are they (the angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

God has especially given His angels to those of us who have received His salvation. And they minister to us, each and every moment of every day of our life. And then, when that sudden moment takes place when we breathe our last here in this life, as these words tell us, our angels immediately carry us into paradise where we will be with Christ forever.

Isn't that such a pleasant thought to keep in our minds as we go about the activities of our days? Because we know that death really can come calling at any moment, through a sudden accident or heart attack or some other tragedy. And to have the confident assurance that our angel will be right there with us to carry us the final steps of our way is such a very, very pleasant thought.

But then, not so when contrasted to that of the simple and gloomy words spoken about the rich man. We are told simply that "he died and was buried". How awful! How unceremonious!

Yes, up on the surface of this world he might have had some final fanfare taking place as his friends and family carried him to his grave, perhaps even employing some professional mourners to wail and moan.

But not so that which was taking place beneath the surface of this world. Beginning at that first moment after this rich man breathed his last, flames suddenly began lapping at his skin, bringing immediate and eternal pain and suffering. Eternity does begin so very suddenly!

In the parable of the Prodigal Son we see the gentle, loving grace of God, but here, we are able to see the wrath of God being poured out upon this man and his sin.

This folks is the inevitable end for all those who refuse the mercy and the grace of the Lord Jesus. This is real, more real than anything we could ever imagine.

And we dare not take any chances when it comes to our assurance of salvation.

And neither can we ignore the sure and inevitable future misery of our loved ones who remain unsaved.

One of the penalties being suffered by this rich man is that he could know the eventual end of his loved ones. And here in torment, he cried out for Lazarus to be sent to warn his family members about the sure and wretched end that they too were destined to suffer.

But note that after we leave this life, there is no going back. Everything that has to do with this life will have been finished. No one can go across that "great chasm" that separates heaven from hell and no one can come back to the earth.

As Jesus was telling these Pharisees through the words of this story, any witness that we might hope to have to our loved ones can only be done here, and only now.

Here, Jesus said that this rich man's family had the law and the prophets to warn them of the coming wrath. And yes, our loved ones also not only have the law and the prophets, they also have the gospel given here in these scriptures. But folks listen carefully . . . our loved ones also have us, you and me, to warn them. And we must.

That is why Jesus said words such as, "As my father has sent me, so send I you". "Go ye into all the world and preach this gospel to every nation". And "Go ye and make disciples of all people".

Before we end this study for today, may we revisit this very strong and unmovable position of wrath that is demonstrated by the words of Abraham, the finality of the punishment and suffering that will take place upon those who do not receive salvation while they are still in this life?

These words of Abraham do probably seem to us to be harsh, uncaring and unloving, so unlike the gentle, loving, compassionate and caring Christ we have read so much about in these gospels.

But we must remember that just as God is merciful and compassionate, and does not desire that any should perish, He is also holy. And His holiness requires Him to live by the same laws He has put into place for each of us.

Why? It is because right is truly right and wrong is truly wrong. And for Him to violate the holy and righteous laws He has put into place for us would make Him unholy. And He cannot be unholy. And neither can He permit unholy souls to enter into and live in His presence in the holy eternity of heaven.

And as the words of Ecclesiastes 3 remind us, "there is a time and a season for everything to take place." There is a time for mercy and grace and that time is still at hand. These are still the days that have been given for Jesus and His disciples, you and me, to seek and to save those who are lost.

But as those words of Hebrews 9 remind us, there is also a time for judgment. And that time of judgment will surely come for all of us, and often suddenly so.

I'd like to close our study for today by giving us some of the things that the Lord Jesus has said about that special moment in time when all of us, every soul, will stand before Him the Eternal Judge of all the earth, that moment when we'll all be called to account for the deeds we've done while in this life. Those words in Matthew chapter 25.

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 25:31-34)

And in verse 41

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)

And in verse 46

⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:46)

Oh dear listener, do you not want eternal life, the eternal life that is being offered by the Lord Jesus? If you do, then right now, call out to Him and He will save you. Those words in Romans 10:13,

³ . . . "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Pray with me.