

## 55. Jesus Taught About the Consequences of Unbelief

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to be led by the love of Jesus instead of trying to misuse the law to cover our sins. We saw that the Pharisees had rejected the Old Testament Law and so it was impossible for them to realize that Jesus was the One who came to fulfill the Old Testament. That day Jesus was talking both to His disciples and also to the Pharisees. In our topic today, we see that Jesus went on to give a warning to the Pharisees about the consequences of unbelief. This was a real warning to those who chose to reject Jesus.

We saw in the last topic that the Pharisees thought that riches were a sign of the blessing of God. Jesus made it clear that the Pharisees had made their riches their idol and that their idol was an abomination to God. As a result, Jesus went on to tell about the death of a beggar who believed God and a rich man who trusted his riches. Luke 16:19-22 says, ““There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.”” Since Jesus used the name of Lazarus, this was an event that happened and not a parable.

We learn several things about this rich man. First, he was clothed in purple. Purple dye was very expensive and so it was considered the color of kings and of the very rich. Second, fine linen was a very costly and soft material made from Egyptian flax and was either white or yellow in color. Third, he rejoiced daily as he ate expensive foods. In contrast, we also learn several things about Lazarus. First, he was a beggar. Second, his body was covered with open sores. Third, he was laid at the gate of the rich man. Fourth, he lacked food and was left to eat the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Fifth, the dogs came and licked the open sores on his body.

The fact that the beggar had to eat food scraps, had open sores and had those sores licked by the dogs caused the Pharisees to consider the man unclean and one who would never be accepted by God. The Pharisees considered riches a sign of God's approval of a person and so they expected a rich man to have a special place in the kingdom of God. The Pharisees received a real surprise as Jesus continued to tell what happened to the two men. We see that the two men had one thing in common. They both died. Because Lazarus had his faith in God, he was taken by the angels and given a place of honor close to Abraham. This probably came as a great shock to the Pharisees; they expected to hear that he would be rejected by God. The rich man also died and was buried.

Then, Jesus went on to explain what happened to the rich man when he died. Luke 16:23-26 says, ““And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”” But Abraham said, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this,

between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.””” Because the Pharisees thought that God honored the rich, they expected the rich man to receive a place of great honor in heaven when he died.

Hades is the Greek word that was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the Hebrew word “Sheol”, which meant the place of the dead in the Old Testament. Here, we see that the rich man was in torment in Hades. We learn several things about the condition of those who have not placed their faith in Jesus from these verses. First, the rich man was immediately in torment (great pain and suffering). Second, the rich man could see. Third, the rich man could cry aloud. Fourth, the rich man said that the physical torment was due to flames. Fifth, the rich man felt great thirst. Sixth, the rich man could remember the past. Seventh, the rich man was so thirsty that he would have been willing to receive just a drop of water from the finger of Lazarus to cool his tongue.

We also see that by telling what happened to the rich man Jesus explained several things about all those who die without placing their faith in Him. First, there is conscious existence after death for all unbelievers. Second, there is a real hell. Third, there is no second chance for forgiveness after death. Fourth, we will see in the next group of verses that those in hell cannot communicate with those who are still living on the earth. Fifth, the rich man did cry and ask Abraham to have mercy on him.

We also learn several things from the answer of Abraham. Abraham called the rich man, son. This suddenly told the Pharisees that just being a descendent of Abraham would not give them eternal life. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” When a person personally receives Jesus, God gives them the right to be the children of God because they have believed and placed their faith in Jesus. However, this also means that God has no grandchildren. A person cannot receive eternal life just by being a descendent of Abraham or someone else who had true faith.

The words of Abraham also reminded the Pharisees that the good things they had on earth would not help them after death. The rich man had been able to enjoy an easy life with all of the things earthly riches could buy while he was here on this earth. In contrast, Lazarus had experienced evil things on this earth. This was also a reminder that the rich man had shown no compassion for Lazarus, even though Lazarus had been laid at his door, where the rich man saw him every day as he passed by him. Proverbs 12:10 says, “A righteous *man* regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked *are* cruel.” In this verse, we see that a righteous man shows kindness even to his animals. In contrast, the wicked are cruel, even when they claim to show mercy. Finally, Jesus said that there is a great gulf fixed so that no one can pass from the bosom of Abraham to the place of torment. The word translated “gulf” means *a gaping opening or separation*. This gulf is impossible for anyone to cross.

The former rich man then made one other request. Luke 16:27-31 says, “Then he said, “I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him 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.” Abraham said to him, “They

have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” And he said, “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” 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.”” Suddenly, the man had a great concern for his family who were still alive on the earth. He did not want any of his family to join him in the place of torment. This is a key answer to share with someone when they say they will have their friends in hell with them.

The former rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his family about the coming judgment they also faced. Here, we see that the man became concerned for his family, but it was too late for him to do anything to help his family. Hebrews 9:27-28 say, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” The man knew that judgment had come and so he could not go back to warn his family. However, he asked if Lazarus could go to warn them about coming judgment.

Abraham replied to the man in torment that his family had Moses and the prophets to warn them. This meant that they had the Old Testament, which gave plenty of warning about the judgment that faces all those who reject God and the salvation which He promised to provide. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Then, Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” These verses and many others make it very clear that the heart is filled with evil and that our own efforts are worthless. The Pharisees had read the Old Testament many times, but were still depending on their own efforts, instead of coming to God in faith. In fact, Jesus knew that the Pharisees who were listening to Him that day would also reject the words of the former rich man.

The former rich man said, “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” Abraham answered the former rich man, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.” The time was coming close when Jesus, Himself, would be condemned to death. He knew that He would rise from the dead and that the religious leaders would pay the soldiers to lie and say that the body of Jesus had been stolen. Matthew 28:11-13 says, “Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them, “His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.”’” Most of the Pharisees did not believe the message of the resurrection of Jesus, but denied it instead.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain clearly what the Word of God teaches about the resurrection of Jesus. Like the Pharisees, all people must choose to accept the Word of God and believe in Jesus or reject the Word. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to use the Word of God to warn others.