

HEAVENLY COMFORT

THESIS: Listen To Scripture

TEXT: Luke 16:19-31

OPEN: I don't remember who I heard this from, but I certainly understand the saying, "Death doesn't bother me—dying does." In **Luke 16:19-31** let's discover what happens when you die and the comfort in Heaven.

Luke 16:19-21 *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores."*

Historical: The wealthy were known to wear purple cloth. "Along the coast of Tyre there was found a rare shellfish from which a costly purple dye was obtained, each yielding about one drop of it. Woolen garments dyed with it were worn by kings and nobles. The fine linen of Egypt was produced from flax which grew on the banks of the Nile. It was dazzling white, and worth twice its weight in gold. The mention of these garments and a continual banqueting indicates a life of extreme luxury" (J.W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel*, p. 511).

Scripture does not have anything against material goods and money itself. It's the attitude and actions or lack thereof associated with it that matters—how you get and what you do or don't do with it:

- **1 Chronicles 4:10** "Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let Your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request."
- **1 Timothy 6:17-18** "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share."

Scripture warns about the pitfalls of pursuing wealth as one's goal in life.

- **Ecclesiastes 5:10** "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless."
- **Matthew 6:24** "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."
- **1 Timothy 6:6-10** "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

The name Lazarus is a derivative of the Hebrew name Eleazar which means "God has helped." How does the Lord help those who believe in Christ when they die?

Luke 16:22a (NASB) *"The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's arms."*

Luke 16:22a *"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side."*

Historical: The joys of Paradise were conceived of as those of a feast, and the expression “Abraham’s arms, bosom, or side” is taken from the custom of reclining on couches at feasts. As a guest leaned upon his left arm, his neighbor on his left might easily lean on his side. Such a position with respect to the master of the house was one of special honor and indicated great closeness. What higher honor or joy could the Jew conceive of than such fellowship with Abraham, the father of their race? (*The Fourfold Gospel*, p. 512-513).

Revelation 19:6-9 “I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints). Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’”

What happens to the soul immediately upon death for those who are faithful in the Lord?

- **Luke 17:22a** “...the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side.”
- **Luke 23:43** “Jesus answered him, ‘...today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”
- **Romans 8:38-39** “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- **Philippians 1:23** “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far...”

Historical: The Jewish Talmud mentions “Abraham’s side” as the place of blessedness to which the righteous dead go (*NIV Notes*, p. 1604). “Abraham’s bosom” pictures reclining at a banquet where there is comfort and honor as well as freedom from sorrows and sufferings (*Luke 16:25*). “Abraham’s side” is a reference to Paradise.

When surveying the NT—one sees that beliefs about death and afterlife in Biblical times are like today.

*There are those who have no faith in God, so this world is all they live for.

- **1 Corinthians 15:32** “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”

*There are those who believe in purgatory where you can pray or baptize dead unbelievers into Heaven.

- **1 Corinthians 15:29** “Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?”

*There are those who profess faith in God yet do not believe in the afterlife.

- **Acts 23:8** “The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits.”
- **1 Corinthians 15:12** “How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

Do you find it strange that even some members of the Corinthian church during the days of the Apostles did not believe in the resurrection or began to have doubts about it? What makes the difference in one’s eternal abode even if they claim religious affiliation—you know—belief in God?

Luke 16:22b-26 “*The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he 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.’ ²⁵But 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. 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.’”*

What do we learn here regarding the eternal existence whether it be Heaven or hell for someone?

- Heaven is a place of comfort (v25). **Comfort** (Greek: *parakaleo*) means call near, encourage, strengthen, or to invite.
- Heaven is a place of continuance (forever)—“those who want to go from here to you cannot” (v26a).

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 “For the Lord Himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

- Hell is a place of torment—“agony in this fire” (v23-24). **Torment** (Greek: *basanos*) means severe pain or torture.
- Hell is a place of permanence—“a great chasm has been fixed—nor can anyone cross over from there” (v26b).

Revelation 22:14-15 “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

There is no such thing as purgatory in Scripture so therefore it does not exist. The soul does not die with the body either. There is not “nothingness” upon physical death. The story of Lazarus and the rich man teaches us that how we live our life in this world determines our eternal abode—Heaven or hell.

Hebrews 9:26b-28 “But now Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.”

Someone may wonder: “How can a loving God cast anyone into hell?” Well, God did so love the world that He gave up His one and only begotten Son through death on the cross for our sins that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life (*John 3:16*). However, how can a holy and just God allow a sinner into the perfection of Heaven? It goes back to the death of Christ. He died in our place so that justice may be served and, at the same time, God’s mercy extended to repentant and baptized believers (*Acts 22:16*).

There is a Heaven to gain and a hell to avoid. Are you living like it? By the way, what does make the difference between Heaven and hell? Do you know the answer?

For someone to reject their pardon from sin that comes through believing in Jesus—they are self-condemned to eternity in hell. If one chooses not to believe in God through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior before they die then the opposite of God and eternal life in Heaven is eternal darkness and torment in hell.

If one does not want to come to Christ in this life then the only other place for them remaining upon death is what’s opposite of God and that’s damnation in the lake of fire—plus it’s the due punishment for their crimes of sin. God will not force Himself on anyone. Jesus is the only name

given by which we must be saved (*Acts 4:12*). Jesus says He is “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (*John 14:6*).

Only Jesus was ordained of the Heavenly Father and fulfilled the prophecies to pay the penalty for mankind’s sins thus providing the means of pardon through His death (1 Timothy 2:5-6). God resurrected Him from the dead and exalted Him above every name so that those who believe and are baptized shall be saved.

What is salvation? Ultimately, it’s the forgiveness of sins. The Lord speaks through the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:38 who proclaims “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Salvation is not based on good works—we’re saved to do good works which happens when we follow Christ and His Word (*Ephesians 2:8-10*). Live like you’re going to Heaven.

Luke 16:27-31 “***The rich man answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house,²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’²⁹ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’³⁰ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’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.’***”

What is Abraham talking about when he says, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets”? “Moses and the Prophets” was a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. They spoke about the coming of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul proclaimed to a skeptical crowd in *Acts 26:22b-23* “I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to His own people and the Gentiles.”

What tips us off that this rich man had a religious affiliation? It was his cry for mercy to Abraham: “*Father Abraham*” and that Abraham refers to him as “son.” The man in torment was an Israelite by heritage but, not by heart. Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven” (*Mtt 7:21*). Also, **1 Corinthians 7:19** “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.” **Galatians 6:15** adds “what counts is a new creation.”

The death of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us of our own mortality. King Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 7:2** “For death is the destiny of every person...” Sooner or later, everyone is going to die unless Jesus comes back. Scripture says, “Death came to all because all sinned” (*Rom 5:12*) and that “the wages of sin is death” (*Rom 6:23*).

Funerals, cemeteries, graves, and tombstones bear witness to the simple, but profound fact that “death is the destiny of every man.” However, it doesn’t have to end that way. There’s hope beyond the grave in the Lord. Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies...” (*John 11:25*).

Insight from John W. Wade: “Death stalks the back alleys and the shacks, but it also haunts the boulevards and the mansions. Death was no relief to the rich man. It cast him into the bowels of hell. In his desperate situation, the man looked up and saw Lazarus in the company of Abraham. He asked: ‘Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue,’ he pleaded. Abraham stated two reasons why he could not permit this. First of all, the rich man didn’t deserve it. Secondly, a great chasm over which none could cross. Death settles some things with awful

finality. After that, man's eternal destiny is fixed and no one can change it. Abraham rejected the rich man's plea to have Lazarus warn his brothers. Abraham rejected his plea because the brothers already had Moses and the prophets, that is, the writing of these men (the Old Testament). The rich man protested that the testimony of Scripture was inadequate to bring conviction. If one should come back from the dead, he thought, the testimony of a resurrected man would bring conviction. Once more Abraham rejected his argument. Men who will not believe the Scriptures are not inclined to believe the testimony of one returned from the grave (*Dear Theophilus: Two Letters from Luke*, p. 131-132).

Some people may think that if only Noah's ark could be discovered and brought down from the mountain; if the Shroud of Turin (purported burial cloth of Christ) could be proven authentic; or if the Ark of the Covenant could be found, more people would believe God's Word. Surely—more miracles would do it, right?

However, Abraham has news for you—if they do not believe God's Word, they will not be convinced if someone comes back from the dead. What an indictment that was and is for those who refuse to believe in Jesus who has risen from the dead, just as Scripture said. However, it's a glorious and eternal blessing (reward) for those who do!

The problem for the rich man is that he did not listen to and follow the Scripture (i.e. "Moses and the Prophets") and thus he got what he and his sins deserved—eternal torment in the flames of hell.

The word from Heaven is that the gospel—God's Word—is sufficient on the matters of life and death, Heaven and hell. *1 Corinthians 1:18* states: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The Apostle proudly proclaims in *Romans 1:16* "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." He adds in *Romans 10:17* that "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."

CLOSE: Let's listen to Scripture and follow it so we may in the future and forever experience Heavenly comfort.