

The Gospel According to
Luke

“The Abominable Show Man”

Chapter 16:14-31

Introduction

One of the on-line travel services has produced a series of humorous TV ads. Sitting in front of a computer, a person planning their vacation gets an idea for a location; then they take a virtual tour to see what it's really going to be like.

1. In one of the ads, the husband thinks it would be cool to go to a hunting lodge. As he clicks around, he envisions his kids seeing all the mounted heads of the game animals, and they are screaming with horror.
2. In another, the couple are in bed in a tropical jungle location. Their bed has mosquito netting. Once the lights go out, they hear buzzing. Turning on their flashlight reveals hundreds of gigantic bugs swarming them.

The point of the ads is well made: Because you can see ahead of time what your destination will really be like, you can choose where you want to go.

Jesus did something like that in our reading. He gave His listeners a guided tour of Hades. Call it the Gulf Tour if you want, because He mentioned the great **gulf**, or chasm, that separates *paradise* from *punishment*. He showed them, and us, two possible destinations after death so that you can choose where you want to go.

Why would anyone choose to go to punishment in Hades? You choose to go to punishment in Hades by choosing to *not* go to heaven. You can receive Jesus Christ, and His forgiveness of your sins, and be bound for an eternity in Heaven; or you can choose anything else and be on your way to spending eternity first in Hades, then in Hell.

We'll organize our thoughts about Heaven, Hades, and Hell around these two questions: #1 Do You See Yourself As A Convicted Lawbreaker?, and #2 Do You See Jesus As Your Compassionate Lawmaker?

#1 Do You See Yourself
As A Convicted Lawbreaker?
(v14-18)

No one in their right mind would choose Hades and Hell over Heaven. Yet Jesus was warning the Pharisees that they were on their way to eternal punishment. These guys were the religious leaders; they were considered the spiritual giants. How could they miss out on Heaven?

It's really very simple. They thought that they could get to Heaven by keeping God's Law. As we will see, they could not get to Heaven by keeping God's Law, because no one can keep it perfectly.

Luke 16:14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

Jesus had been talking about the proper use of your money. He said that money is a *resource*, not a *reward*. It is an earthly resource to be invested in furthering the Gospel so that you will earn eternal rewards.

The Pharisees *were lovers of money*. They saw it as an earthly reward for their obedience to God's Law. The more you had, the more God must be pleased with you. They would flaunt their money; they were flamboyant. That's why *they derided* Jesus. After all, He was a poor, itinerant minister, whose following was beggars and sinners.

Luke 16:15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

From a human perspective, these guys did seem very spiritual. They tithed faithfully – even counting out ten percent of their spices. They closed their eyes whenever a woman walked by – to show they were

not adulterers. They had God's Word literally tied to their wrists and foreheads – in little boxes called *phylacteries*.

The phylacteries are a great symbol for what Jesus was saying. They kept the Law *on* them; they kept it outwardly. But they did not keep the Law *in* them; they did not keep it inwardly, in their **hearts**. For example: It did no good to close your eyes, if you were still lusting in your heart towards a woman.

This kind of outward show of obedience, with no inward change, might **justify** you before **men**; but God saw it as an abominable hypocrisy.

If no one can keep God's Law perfectly, what's up with it?

Luke 16:16 "The law and the prophets *were* until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

Luke 16:17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

The **law and the prophets** means everything God had said in the Hebrew Scriptures to that point – what we call the Old Testament. The Law is perfect. Not even one **tittle** of it can fail – meaning the smallest punctuation mark. The Hebrew Scriptures were intended to prepare your heart for the coming of the **kingdom of God**. We would say that the intent of the Scriptures was to show you how far short you fell from God's perfect standards so that you would see your need for a Savior. **John** the Baptist came along announcing that the Savior was on earth. He pointed to Jesus as the One Who would save you from your sins. Both John and Jesus proclaimed that the **kingdom** was at hand and open to all those who would receive Jesus as their Savior.

Many common folk were **pressing into** the kingdom by receiving Jesus as their Savior. They understood that they were lawbreakers, but that Jesus was on earth to keep the Law for them. He would take their sin, and give them His righteousness, and they would be justified before God.

Instead of seeing how far short they fell from being perfect; instead of saying they were sinners; the Pharisees kept re-interpreting God's Law in order to be able to keep it.

One example of how they had re-interpreted God's Law was their approach to divorce and remarriage. By the time of Jesus, God's original intention for marriage had been so diluted by the religious leaders that you could divorce your wife for any reason at all. They thought they were keeping God's Law, but were only keeping their own interpretation of it.

That's why Jesus mentions divorce, saying,

Luke 16:18 "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from *her* husband commits adultery.

When you first read this, you think, *Where did that come from? Why is Jesus teaching about divorce in the middle of a talk on Hades?*

He was using their weakened, watered-down re-interpretation of God's Law regarding divorce as an example. It was an example of how they thought they were justified by keeping God's Law, when in reality they were not keeping it at all.

Divorce and remarriage is not our subject, but I should say something, because so many lives are touched by it and this verse may sting. The whole teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage is something like this:

1. God hates divorce and intends marriage to be between one man and one woman for life.
2. Jesus allowed for divorce and remarriage in cases of physical adultery. The offended spouse has the right to remain in the marriage, or to divorce and remarry another believer.
3. The Apostle Paul further clarified the situation by teaching that a believer was free to remarry if abandoned by their unbelieving spouse.

Back to our context: Jesus was rebuking these religious men. They were definitely *not* keeping God's Law – **not even outwardly!** They

were convicted lawbreakers, but they did not see themselves that way. These guys were not headed for Heaven. They were headed for Hades.

Which brings us to our second question:

#2 Do You See Jesus
As Your Compassionate Lawmaker?
(v19-31)

Hades is not Hell. They are two different places. Hell is a place that was created especially for the devil and his demons – the fallen angels who followed him in his rebellion against God. It is called the Lake of Fire in the Book of the Revelation.

Hades is a different place. It has two areas – a place called Paradise, and a place for punishment. They are separated by an impassable **gulf**.

Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, everyone who died went to Hades. Believers went to Paradise; unbelievers went to punishment. They went there to wait:

1. Believers went there to wait for Jesus to come and take them to Heaven. When Jesus died, the Bible indicates He descended into Hades to lead all the believers in Paradise to Heaven. After He ascended into Heaven, the Bible tells believers who die that they go directly to Heaven, without a layover in Hades.
2. Unbelievers who die still go to punishment in Hades. They will remain there until the end of human history on earth. They will be resurrected from Hades to face the judgment of God. Having rejected Jesus Christ as Savior, they fall short of entering Heaven. They will be cast alive into Hell, the Lake of Fire, to suffer forever for sins that Jesus was willing and able to take upon Himself.

The rich man in this story represents unbelievers, and especially the Pharisees. The poor man, Lazarus, represents all those who were receiving Jesus and **pressing into the kingdom**.

Luke 16:19 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

This guy was the extreme every religious Pharisee was shooting for. He had it all. Purple dye was extremely expensive. Fine linen refers to his undergarments; even his underwear was extreme! He threw a party every day.

Luke 16:20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

Luke 16:21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

Lazarus is the other extreme. It seems he could not really walk, because he had to be laid at the rich man's gate everyday. He had bed sores and boils and other skin eruptions. The rich man's dogs, and other wandering dogs, came and licked his sores. He desired, but never received, even a crumb from the extreme dining table.

On earth, you would want to be the rich man, for sure! He seems to be the one God is blessing. Lazarus must have done something very wrong; he must be a sinner. But that's not how God saw it!

Luke 16:22 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.

Luke 16:23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

The rich man undoubtedly had an extreme funeral on earth. Too bad he was already in punishment. Lazarus had the better procession! God dispatched angels to accompany him to Paradise.

The Paradise area of Hades is also called Abraham's bosom. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people. His bosom indicated Lazarus was in a place of intimacy and comfort. His suffering was ended.

The rich man was in torments.

Luke 16:24 "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.'

Luke 16:25 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.

Luke 16:26 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.'

If you are not a Christian when you die, you will find yourself in **torments**, in Hades. You will be conscious and aware of your history and your future. You will be suffering as you await your final destination and more suffering. There is no way out. The **gulf** is impassable.

Receiving good things in your lifetime is no indication God is blessing you for your obedience. Suffering in your lifetime is no indication God is displeased with you. God looks on the heart; so should we.

A case can be made that the rich man is repentant in Hades. After all, he prays, doesn't he? *Not at all!* **Talking to Abraham is not prayer!** By the way, this is a good example of why not to pray to saints. First of all, praying to saints is an abomination! But, on a practical level, they can't do anything to help you.

Notice what the rich man requests: *He wants Abraham to appoint Lazarus as his servant in Hades!* He sees Lazarus as beneath him. Even in Hades, he still acts according to his nature.

The rich man had rich relatives:

Luke 16:27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,

Luke 16:28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

Again, he treats Lazarus as if he were his servant. He wants Lazarus to be a witness to his **five brothers**. It's good that he's concerned for his brothers; but it's still selfish. Why just his brothers? Why not send Lazarus back to testify to everyone in town? To everyone in Israel?

Luke 16:29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

Luke 16:30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

This last statement by the rich man is a complaint. He was complaining that the Word of God was not sufficient to save him. God should have done more; God should have sent someone back from the **dead**.

People frequently accuse God of being unfair. He hasn't done enough to save them. Oh, yes He has! He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for you. In our case, He has given a greater, fuller, revelation of Himself in the New Testament. The problem is not with God.

Luke 16:31 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.'"

It's interesting to note that Jesus had raised the dead – yet the religious leaders would not **repent**. Towards the end of His ministry, Jesus would raise another man named Lazarus. Instead of being **persuaded** to believe, the religious leaders wanted to kill Lazarus, and they did have Jesus killed.

While we are touching on this subject, let me say this. We do not need signs and wonders and miracles in order for God to save people. If He chooses to have those things follow the teaching and preaching of His Word, that's great. But every few years, Christians seem to get caught-up in a miracle movement. If you believe miracles are necessary, you believe like the rich man in Hades!

The truth is, Jesus has risen from the dead! His resurrection is perhaps the most verifiable event in human history. Yet most people deny it; and a growing number of so-called Christians think it doesn't really matter if Jesus rose from the dead.

Too bad we still, to this day, we still have a tendency to think material wealth is a sign of God's favor. The rich man was rich, but not because God was blessing Him for keeping the Law. Lazarus was poor and suffering, but not because God was judging Him for breaking the Law.

Instead of looking at someone's fine underwear; or looking upon their exposed skin, with its diseases; we should measure ourselves by God's standards. When you do, you see that you fall short as a lawbreakers. You are born a **convicted lawbreaker**, headed for Hades, then Hell.

But you also see that you have a **compassionate Lawmaker**. The very One Who set the standard at perfection, sent His Son to come and keep it for you. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law for every human being ever conceived. Then, on the Cross, He took upon Himself the punishment your sin deserves. If you receive Him as your Savior, you cannot be sent to Hades or Hell; you have a mansion waiting in Heaven.