



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sermon Series: "I Believe." The Nicene Creed
"Heaven and Hell."

☐ **Day #1—Monday, November 24th. Read: Psalm 123; Matthew 6.19-21. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—
What do you Hear and/or See?**

We come to the final confession in the Nicene Creed...

...We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Scripture is clear: One day, human history will end. Life itself will not end, as our eternal future awaits us all! For those who have surrendered to Jesus and have received God's forgiveness and reconciliation, Heaven awaits! Conversely, for those who have rejected God's invitation to a new life, hell is the final destination. However, often our understanding of what heaven (and hell) is can be misunderstood. Sometimes, even believers do not comprehend the promise and hope about heaven. Another factor that could reduce our understanding of heaven is having a comfortable life in a reasonably nice location on earth. Though the earth is a broken place with sickness, sadness, and suffering ("thorns and thistles" in Genesis 3), it is all we know from personal experience. And, there are misconceptions about heaven from movies and artwork that are unappealing and wrong. For example, heaven will not be white and colorless with angels floating on clouds; and we will not have wings! What is Heaven? Consider...

It is Where God Lives and Rules.

Read Psalm 123:1. What does this verse tell us about God's role in heaven?

- How does our perspective about life change when we view God as ruler of heaven?
- Why can't everyone who is good go to heaven?

It is a Real Place.

According to Matthew 6:20, why are we instructed to "store up" treasures in heaven?

- How might the fact that heaven is a real and tangible place help us more readily embrace God's plan for us?
- How many times during a week do you think most people consider their possible afterlife in heaven?

One of the more common questions regarding heaven is, "*Where* is heaven?" And/or, "Why do we *look up* when we talk about heaven?" The quick answer is that we do not know *exactly* where heaven is, at least spatially. What we know is this: It is out of this world! Heaven is not a place on earth regardless of what the songs say! One reason why we typically refer to heaven as "up," is because the ancient Israelites divided the world (top down) into Heaven(s), Earth, Sea, and the Underworld. Additionally, the Bible often describes God as "looking down" upon humankind; for example, Psalm 53:2. What is most important however is that God is involved in the human world even as He exists in heaven!

Consider/Reflect: We are called to serve others in love. As God looks down from heaven, does he see us seeking Him in our actions? Think about a serving opportunity you accepted. What did you learn from these experiences?

☐ **Day #2—Tuesday, November 25th. Read: Luke 16.19-21; 1 Corinthians 1.26-29. —Examine: The Text and its Context.**

The question of the afterlife is often an issue that brings both consolation as well as fear. As Christians, we believe that there is a *real* heaven and a hell. The Bible tells us that heaven and hell are real and Jesus believed that they were as well! One example of this is the parable referred to as, "The Rich Man and Lazarus." Jesus lived in a culture that believed wealth to be a sign of God's blessing because of one's righteousness (and the opposite—to be poor was a sign that one was unrighteous and lacked God's favor). Jesus corrects (again) this flawed theology. Below, is an artistic rendering of the parable, with Lazarus at the rich man's doorstep:



In Jesus' parable, the contrast between the wealth of the rich man and the poverty of Lazarus is vivid, and will highlight the theological *reversal* (the rich are blessed and go to heaven; the poor are cursed and go to hades/hell) that Jesus teaches here. The rich man was "clothed in purple and fine linen, [which would indicate]...a rich, royal woolen cloak worn over a delicate undergarment. The feasting of the rich man and his friends made the gate a promising site for a beggar, Lazarus."¹

This parable is unique; it is the only story Jesus told in which a name is given: Lazarus (not the same Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead). Warren Wiersbe makes the point that since Jesus was using "a personal name for a main character...[this could]... indicate a realistic situation."² Lazarus' name means, "One who God helps." Lazarus had experienced the hardness of life: he was sick and likely unable to walk, as he was "laid" daily at the rich man's house (See also Acts 3:1–2). Again, as Weirby notes, "The only attention he got was from the dogs! The rich man could easily have assisted Lazarus, but he ignored him and went on enjoying his recognition and his riches. Life was comfortable for him and he felt secure."³ What we will ultimately witness is that one's circumstances on earth do not always determine one's eternal future!

Consider/Reflect: As Christians, we believe that our wealth and possessions are God's gifts to us to manage for God's glory and other's good. The danger is when we confuse the *gifts* with the *giver*! Our ultimate hope is not in our "stuff," but in our Heavenly Father!

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, November 26th. Read: Luke 16.22-23. –Explore: The background to this text(s).**

As we mentioned yesterday, there are reversals and contrasts in this parable. Only the poor man (Lazarus) is named; the rich man is given no name! Additionally, Lazarus is "carried by angels to 'Abraham's bosom.'" Aside perhaps from Elijah's remarkable ascension, this is the only place in Scripture that speaks of a convoy of angels carrying a man to heaven."⁴ Was this an echo of Lazarus being "carried" through his earthly life? As far as the rich man, Jesus simply says, "he died and was buried." In a culture where wealth was a sign of God's favor, and gave the wealthy social prominence, Jesus is likely indicating the opposite. The poor man, who had no identity, is given a name and is cared for even in death; the rich man, who would have been known and honored by the community, is nameless and dies alone. As J.A. Martin writes:

Jesus...told the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to show that being rich should not be equated with being

1 *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).
 2 W. Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1996).
 3 Ibid.
 4 Ibid.

righteous. The rich man had everything he wanted. Purple referred to clothes dyed that color, and fine linen was worn for underclothes; both were expensive. A poor man, a crippled beggar named Lazarus, had nothing. One lived in luxury for himself, the other in abject poverty with hunger and poor health (sores)...Lazarus was righteous not because he was poor but because he depended on God.⁵

Upon death, Lazarus found a place of peace and honor at “Abraham’s side.” This description likely indicates the place where God’s “family,” the children of Abraham, exits. It is what we typically refer to as “heaven.” The text uses the word “Hades” to describe the place of torment for the rich man. As D.A. Carson comments:

Hades’ was the abode of the dead in popular Jewish belief, and it is not clear whether Jesus was referring to the time before or after the final judgment. Yet the clear implication is that the fate of the rich man was finally fixed. Although the language is manifestly symbolic when it talks of the poor man being beside Abraham, it speaks of real destinies for people.⁶

Consider/Reflect: “*Hades*, the Greek word often translated “hell,” is used 11 times in the New Testament. The Septuagint used *hadēs* to translate the Hebrew *šē’ōl* (the place of the dead) on 61 occasions. Here *hadēs* refers to the abode of the unsaved dead prior to the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). ‘Abraham’s side’ apparently refers to a place of paradise for Old Testament believers at the time of death (cf. Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:3).”⁷

□ **Day #4--Thursday, November 27th. Read: Luke 16.24-26. -Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus shows us their respective places after death—a terrifying picture, for we see the rich man in hell, crying out to Abraham even for a drop of water. For some reason he seemed to think Lazarus might act the part of a servant and bring him aid, or later visit his relatives. However, all that was past. The beggar was blessed and the rich man tormented.⁸

As Jesus tells this parable, there would be no reason to question that both men were Israelites—they would have been knowledgeable about Judaism generally, and God’s justice and commands to care for the poor specifically. It is telling that even in death, the rich man wanted Lazarus to serve him... “*Father Abraham...send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue*” (v. 24). This reflects the arrogance and pride that was at the root of the rich man’s self-centered world—in a word, sin! Verse 24 has been interpreted as evidence that in Hell there is fire and/or eternal flames, as well as torment. Some commentators suggest that since Jesus is telling a parable, we should not take everything literally. Conversely, some have suggested that Jesus is in fact, describing Hell itself. Scholar R.H. Stein is helpful here:

Should [v.24]...be understood as an actual or symbolic description of the torments of hell (cf. 2 Esdr 8:59; 1 Enoch 22:9)? Since this description is found in a parable, it would not be wise to assume that this is a literal portrayal of hell. Nevertheless, the reality of hell’s horror is so terrible that in the picture even licking water from a fingertip would bring some welcome relief...Flames are frequently associated with the final destiny of the unrighteous.⁹

The bottom line is that here in Luke, and in other parts of Scripture, the Bible is very clear there is a Heaven and a Hell and that both are eternal! To be with God is joy and bliss; to be separated from God would be torment—literally hell!

Today is Thanksgiving. As a country, we thank God for ALL of His good gifts to us! In gratitude to God, we are to use our lives as an offering of praise. An “attitude of gratitude” changes the way we view life in this world. As Christians, we are blessed to be a blessing for others! This is the heart of the Christian life. The Bible tells us that in Heaven, we will be rewarded for the works done in faith and gratitude.

Consider/Reflect: Despite our best intentions, we all fall prey to our sinful nature, putting us squarely in the position of being imperfect. Heaven is a perfect place, because God is perfect. To bridge the gap between imperfect humanity and a perfect God, there is Jesus. God also promised that all people would be judged in fairness and righteousness, therefore there will be a place for the just and the unjust, which is heaven and hell. How can you show your appreciation to God for the knowledge that no matter what happens in this life, He will balance the scales in eternity?

5 J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

6 D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, and G.J. Wenham (Eds.). *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

7 Walvoord, et al. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

8 Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*

9 R.H. Stein. *Luke* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

□ **Day #5— Friday, November 28th. Read: Luke 16.26. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

In the Nicene Creed, we confess that we will be resurrected to eternal life. What this I infers is that we will have *physical bodies in Heaven!* (Just as Jesus had a physical body after Easter). In the parable, the rich man's physicality is reflected in his physical pain and thirst! Conversely, Lazarus rests his now healed body in paradise!

The subject of the afterlife is a very popular subject among believers and unbelievers. At some point everyone wonders what happens after our life on earth is finished. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10 that nothing we see or possess in this world will last forever. The only things that will last forever are the things that are *not seen*. Listed below are five realities of life with related Bible verses. It is important to understand these realities in order to know what happens after we die. Take some time to reflect on these today and/or in the days to come:

- God made you to love you and wants your love back. (*Jeremiah 31:3*)
- You were made to last forever. (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*)
- God has prepared two eternal places. (*John 14:2-3, Matthew 25:34, Matthew 25:41*)
- You choose where you will spend eternity. (*Deuteronomy 11:26-28, Deuteronomy 30:15-19*)
- There is no second chance after you die. (*Matthew 25:46*)

Consider/Reflect: The primary misconception that some people have is that God *sends* people to hell. On the contrary, people *choose* to go there by rejecting the free gift of salvation made available through Jesus Christ. Since it is a choice and there is no second chance, it is extremely important to determine your destiny now. We are not guaranteed tomorrow, or even the next hour.

□ **Day #6-Saturday, November 29th. Read: Luke 16.27-31; Texts Below.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

The rich man seemingly begins to think beyond himself—what about his brothers? Again, as I mentioned earlier, we can assume that both men in the parable were Jews—people who knew the God revealed in the Old Testament. The rich man asks *Father* Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers about the consequences of their choices. However, as Larson and Ogilvie note, the issue is not ignorance but obedience:

Anyone familiar with the Old Testament has missed the message if he is not prompted to care for a beggar at the gate. It really seems that the rich man's concern about his brothers is a form of self-justification. We assume he is saying, "If I had had more light, I would have acted differently." Jesus makes it clear he had enough light and yet missed the obvious truth.¹⁰

Why Does Hell Exist? Because...

Evil and Sin Exist: After the fall as recorded in Genesis 3, sin continued to increase (See Genesis 6:5-6). There is little question that evil and sin exists in our world. We can pick up a newspaper, listen to the news on T.V. or just be with the general public and witness this reality! Hell also exists because...

God is Holy and Just: Psalm 15:1-2 tells us the kind of person who can dwell with God. Contrast the description of humanity in Genesis 6:5-6 with the requirements to dwell with God.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. As we have explored, God will judge the world. This divine judgment will usher in "*the life of the world to come.*"

Read 1 John 5:11-13. Who should *know* they have eternal life? In Scripture, "to believe" is defined as active trust in Jesus—who He is and what He has done. Believing as accepting something as factual is not always the same as Biblical faith. In other words, we can *acknowledge* (believe) that a man named Jesus existed in the first-century, but that is different from *trusting* Jesus. We trust in Jesus as *the way, the truth, and the life*...now and forever!

Consider/Reflect: "The rich man is hopeful but misjudges the stubbornness of human nature...Another Lazarus (Jn 11) did return from the dead. But not all witnesses were moved (Jn 11:45–53). Repentance and faith are wrought through the Word of God, not dramatic experiences. "The reason some are not saved is as follows: They do not listen to God's Word at all, but willfully despise it, plug their ears, and harden their hearts. In this way they block the ordinary way [Luke 16:29–31] for the Holy Spirit so He cannot perform His work in them. Or, when they have heard God's Word, they make light of it again and ignore it. But their wickedness is responsible for this 'that they perish', not God or His election'" (*Formula of Concord Epitome XI 12*).¹¹

¹⁰ B. Larson and L.J. Ogilvie. *Luke* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1983).

¹¹ Quoted in, *The Lutheran Study Bible*.