

The Bible Is The Only Reliable Revelation About The Future Life..

Text: Luke 16:19-31

Suggested Hymns:

265, 273, 304, 320, 264

- 1) Because It Discloses The True Nature Of Conditions In The Future Life.
- 2) Because It Teaches The Correct Attitude Towards The Life To Come.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 16:19-31, ¹⁹ *“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ “But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ “desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.*

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. ²³ “And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 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.’*

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. 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.’*

²⁷ *“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ ‘for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ “Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ “And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 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.’” (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The average person has a special interest in the future. Perhaps most people have a strong inclination, a leaning to discover something about the condition, or state, of the soul after it leaves the body in death.

Even those people who are otherwise irreligious and churchless often show a strange fondness for occupying their minds with speculations, suppositions, and conjectures about the hereafter.

To satisfy this craving of knowing something about the future life, most people use means of their own selection. Poets have given rein to their imagination, depicting in vivid terms and extravagant language what their fancy dictated concerning the mysteries of the future world.

Papers and magazines have a singular slant to entertain their readers with articles delving into the life that is to come, claiming the ability to fathom the depths of the "unknown." Much is written and read on this subject to gratify the incessant desire and hankering of the human heart and mind along these lines.

Even a church, falsely called so, has been organised which pretends to put her devotees in direct and personal communication and touch with departed spirits. The strange fact, that the Spiritualists are finding so many adherents in all lands is, among other things, an evidence of man's interest in the future life.

Needless to say that all these and many other expedients are absolutely unsatisfactory and inadequate. No sufficient results are obtained by resorting to such means. A groping in the dark. Effusions of morbid minds. Blind leaders of the blind.

Human reason, with its intellectual powers ever so highly developed by education, study, and research, does not know anything about the future life. The faculties of the human mind, of natural man, are limited on this subject just as much as in other spiritual things, neither does he know them.

Here the question arises: Can anything certain, reliable, be known about the hereafter? Is it knowable? Or shall we sink into the abyss of agnosticism, that sad state of mind which declares all things pertaining to the soul, things which cannot be grasped with the hands, are "unknown and unknowable"?

Thanks be to God, we need not sneeringly ask with the Pilates of the present age, “*What is truth?*” Thanks be to God, we have a “*more sure Word of Prophecy*” than these “*cunningly devised fables.*”¹ Such a sure and reliable Word of Prophecy we have in the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday.

Here Jesus Himself speaks, the Mouth of Truth, who knows the past as well as the present and the future, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Here He draws aside the veil permitting a glimpse into the future life. Though but a short lesson, yet it is sufficient; all needed details are given. And what Jesus spoke He has caused to be laid down in writing, so that we may have a reliable foundation upon which to build our belief in the future existence.

No uncertain terms are used. A positive truth is exhibited here. Doubts and unsettled opinions are dispelled. We have here a sure foundation-stone to build our hopes upon.

Let us, then, learn this most necessary lesson that *the Bible is the Only Reliable Revelation about the Future Life*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

**1. The Bible Is The Only Reliable Revelation About The Future Life
Because It Discloses The True Nature Of Conditions
In The Future Life.**

The story of our text is well known to every reader of the Bible. We need not enlarge upon the details and branch out into matters of secondary importance. The scope of this text, the aim and purpose, is a revelation about the future.

In the first place let us look at its nature, character, and conditions.

The number of places.

There are only two. ‘No more, no less.’ The words of our Lord used here are very clear and explicit. There are no uncertain, doubtful, or ambiguous statements, leaving our minds to fluctuate and waver, or admit different interpretations.

Not more than two places. No intermediate state. Not the slightest indication is to be found here in any word, that souls after leaving the body must first be cleansed, purged, or purified, from the dross and slags of sin which are not as yet removed.

No Roman purgatory, neither a state which has been called a “Protestant purgatory,” i.e., a condition in which souls after death are dormant, torpid, neither suffering any pain nor partaking of any bliss.

Nor are there fewer than two places. There is not only one place in the hereafter. Frequently the vague notion is found that “*you just have to die to get to heaven.*” Dying in itself does not bring to heaven. Death alone has no saving qualities. We read in Proverbs 11:7, ⁷ *When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, And the hope of the unjust perishes.* .

Hence it is one of two — and only two — places to which a soul on leaving the body must pass.

There is an immediate passage from the present to the future. The text is clear on this point. Note the rapid succession of words. Both men are at once transferred to their respective places after death.

To show that this is immediate listen to Luke 23:43, ⁴³ *And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* And Revelation 14:13, ¹³ *Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’* And Hebrews 9:27, ²⁷ *And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.*

The character of these two places.

The words of the Lord here are just as clear as elsewhere in Scripture. Both places are described in short, concise, compact terms— “heaven and hell.” No quibbling about either word.

“*Heaven*” is the place of the “*fullness of joy.*”² It is called “Abraham’s bosom” to indicate the one true faith which brings us to heaven. Abraham believed the word of the Lord, and “*He counted it to him for righteousness.*”³ Gathered in a haven of safety and rest. Union and unity with all children of Abraham, the father of the faithful.

Moreover, “*the Father’s bosom.*”⁴ In the immediate presence of God, seeing Him “*as He is,*”⁵ is the highest degree of bliss. It is also the end of faith. Moses was not permitted to see the face of God.⁶ Paul was “*caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter.*”⁷

In heaven the poorest Lazarus can enjoy seeing God and find words eloquently to sing the praises of the Triune God together with the thousand-voiced angelic choirs and all the other saints.

“Now he is comforted.” Everything pleasant is included in this phrase. Freedom from all ravages caused by sin on body and soul. Relief from want, poverty, exposure, and sickness.⁸ Trials, temptations, and enticements are overcome; no more inclination to sin. A complete fulfilment of the Seventh Petition, ***“But deliver us from evil.”*** Human eyes have not seen the glories which God has prepared for those who love Him, but He has caused His Spirit to reveal them and have them laid down in writing.⁹

But there is also another place in the future life. It is revealed in our text and elsewhere in the Bible. We must not turn away from what is told to us about it, ghastly as it is. Avoiding to speak about hell is avoiding a duty. The Bible which speaks of heaven also speaks of hell, and of salvation and of damnation.

“Hell,” is the place of “torments” (note the plural torments). Human language fails to give an adequate description. Intense pain of body and soul. Excruciating suffering, agony, torture, within and without. Shame, contempt, unrelenting hatred of one another. Eternal death, yet consciousness.

The rich man is aware of his sad plight. He knows where he is. He remembers, thinks, and speaks. His conscience is awakened as we read in Isaiah 66:24, ²⁴ ***“And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”***

There is a feeling of guilt and remorse, but a remorse that avails him nothing. Utterly forsaken, abandoned, by God. Hosea 4:6 will have come true. ⁶ ***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*** Seeing only the wrathful, but never getting a glimpse of the gracious face of God. They are struck out from the book of the living.

There is no need of speculating where hell may be located or to inquire with subtleties about the physical qualities and peculiarities and possibilities of hell-fire. The various descriptions given in the Bible about hell are not to be

discussed in a sceptical manner, but they are intended as warnings to stay away from this place of torments. How carefully should a flippant and blasphemous use of this most awful word be avoided!

Duration of the future existence.

The duration is eternal. While this word is not used here, nevertheless it is evident from the whole text that future life is unlimited. The entire structure of the story, the course of thought, and the general purpose of the dialogue between Abraham and the rich man prove this to be an established fact.

That the bliss of heaven is endless no one doubts. But as far as the everlasting duration of hell is concerned, there are many people who dispute and deny it. Books are written, tracts are sent free of charge to any one who wants them, and talks are broadcast to disprove this unpleasant fact.

But Scripture is profuse in setting forth the truth of an everlasting punishment as we read before in Isa. 66:24. Also Matthew 25:41, *“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”* And 2 Thessalonians 1:9, *“These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”*

Neither is there a final annihilation of the lost, as some erroneously imagine. They believe that bodies and souls, after having been in torment for a long while, are at last utterly destroyed, reduced to nothing, put out of existence. But that would be a relief, a distant, and faint hope.

Here are the stern words of the Bible; terrible, but true, as we read in Revelation 14:11, *“And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”* Upon the gates of hell are written these glaring words: *Let all who enter here leave all hope behind!*

Such, then, is the presentation of our text regarding future life. But it does not end there. To know something about the future life is only half the lesson. It would be vain to look toward the future without making preparations to escape from hell and gain heaven.

Hence the Bible also teaches the only correct attitude toward the future life.

2. The Bible Is The Only Reliable Revelation About The Future Life Because It Teaches The Correct Attitude Towards The Life To Come.

The rich man took a wrong attitude. First, by ignoring the future, never giving eternity a thought. Not that he was a criminal, a bad man, in the accepted sense of the word. On the contrary, he seems to have been a hearty, friendly, congenial and well meaning person. But life to him meant nothing beyond the gratification of worldly desires, lusts and greed. He regarded life as a round of pleasure, a rush from one enjoyment to the other. Finally all sense for spiritual things became ruined and decayed. No taste and no time for things pertaining to the soul! He lives only for the present.

What a picture of our present-day pleasure-mad generation in its misuse of the riches and prosperity showered down by the Giver of all gifts! A sure sign of the approaching Judgment Day, like in the days before the Flood.¹⁰ Whoever reads, let him understand!

Another wrong attitude the rich man took with regard to the future was in having his own notions about being saved. He prescribes a way of his own fabrication and invention. He obstinately insists upon having his own way. Stubbornly he continues to contradict, *'No, father Abraham.'* He knows things better than Abraham, who had walked in faith before God and by so doing had obtained the end of faith.

Living your own life is a wrong attitude to the future and ends in eternal perdition. Let us be warned by the example of the rich man. — But we are quick to ask: what is the only correct attitude to take toward the future?

This important question is fully answered in our text by Abraham, *'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them'* and *'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'*

This is a short, comprehensive, definite, understandable rule to obtain eternal life.

“Moses and the Prophets” are to be heard, not as ghosts and phantoms risen from the dead, but in the living words they have written, moved by the Holy Spirit, which are able to make us wise unto salvation.

“Moses and the Prophets,” are the sum total of the Word of God, the Law and the Gospel. All Scripture, not certain pet doctrines; the whole counsel of God are for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction.

“Moses and the Prophets” must be heard, not only had. Heard, not with the organ of hearing only, but with the mind, and the heart. An effective hearing, a hearing producing results. Heard, not for entertainment, or as a pastime, but for eternity. Heard, not occasionally, but richly. This hearing to be first in importance and first as to time devoted to it. It is the one thing needful.

Conversely, ***‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’*** Salvation as well as deliverance from the torments of hell is comprised in the Word of God. No other way is known to man. There is no salvation in any other thing or person than Christ. The Word is the means of grace, together with the Sacraments. A messenger from the dead could not proclaim more important truths than those revealed in the Bible.

This information is final. Here Abraham ends his instruction. Nothing else is to be said.

So let us heed the solemn lesson of today’s Gospel. We all stand in need of exhortation to take the right attitude toward the hereafter. Eternity is drawing nearer every day.

What folly not to prepare for it; to walk the broad path and expect to enter in at the strait gate. To live the life of a worldling and expect to be gathered into Abraham’s bosom! Let us be warned by the example of the rich man.

Let there be an earnest appeal for the faithful use of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. Do not expect God to adopt any other means for your salvation; supernatural revelations, extraordinary signs and miracles. He has limited us to His revealed Word as laid down in the Bible.

Let us cultivate a close acquaintance with it. Hear, read, and meditate. Do not resist the pleadings of the Holy Spirit, who works through and in the Word.

Fervently pray for His enlightening influence to keep you in the one true faith, so that you may finally, with all believers, be taken into Abraham's bosom; for the Word of God is the power unto salvation to every one who believes. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Pet. 19, 15

² Psa. 16:11

³ Gen. 15:6

⁴ John 1:18

⁵ 1 John 3:2

⁶ Ex. 33

⁷ 2 Cor. 12:4

⁸ Rev. 21:4

⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:9-10

¹⁰ Matthew 24:37