

Ultimately, It's Fruit-Bearing Faith That Counts!

Lk 16:19-31

26 May 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Two weeks ago, when we studied the parable of the Shrewd Manager,² I said that *that* was one of Jesus' most difficult parables to *interpret correctly!*

Well, this morning's parable is the most difficult one for people to *accept!*

Why?

Because a survey done in the USA among people of all walks of life – and among non-church people *and* church people – has made it clear.³

You see, when in this survey people were asked, "Do you believe in the existence of heaven," the vast majority of people said, "Yes!"

Yet, when they were asked, "Do you believe in the existence of hell," the vast majority said, "No!" Among those who said no, there were even many professing Christians!

And you ask, "But why?"

Well, one answer is that *every fibre of our being recoils in horror* at the idea of hell – hell so vividly displayed in this parable. *Even in our redeemed state, there are times that we desperately wish that Jesus never would have told this story.*⁴

And yet, this is *God's Word* and His Word is *truth!*

So, many a Christian – even I, and I'm sure you, too – have often thought about the existence of hell.

And here is the framework within which we as Christians should direct our thoughts...

Firstly, that our Lord Jesus Himself, while He was on earth, spoke more about *hell* than about *heaven!*

But that's not all, for, you see, *we hear so much more about hell from Jesus, than we do from the Old-Testament prophets or from the New Testament apostles!*⁵

Why is that so?

Well, think about it! Who would know best about hell and eternal punishment after death? Would it not be our Lord *Jesus*? I mean, *He* would know! After all, *He* would know the *reason* why He had to die! He *willingly* laid down His life! Would anyone willingly lay down his life for someone else (or for a whole group of people), if you know it's *for nothing* (it won't achieve anything!!)? See? Who better than *Jesus* knew what the repercussions would be if He did *not* die – if He did not make Himself the atonement sacrifice for His people!? Indeed, Jesus *knew* He would save His people from *something* – and that *that thing* from which He would save them was something *terribly horrific!!* My brother & sister, if you would have to give your life for someone, surely you would want to know the *reason* why you have to do that! You're not going to pour out your precious life for nothing!!?

Is it therefore a wonder that Jesus – *He who had to pay the price* – that He, *more than anyone else*, often warns of the horrors of hell, and graphically so!?

¹ In putting together this sermon (especially some big chunks of its introduction), I have made ample use of the wonderful words of RC Sproul's audio sermon on Lk 16:19-31, words so well-said that I could not keep them away from my congregation. For the sermon of Sproul, please cf.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/rich-man-lazarus/>

² Cf. Lk 16:1-13

³ Cf. Sproul (ibid)

⁴ Cf. Sproul (ibid)

⁵ Cf. Sproul (ibid)

My brother & sister, fact is: there is simply no greater authority on the afterlife and hell, than our Lord Jesus!

So, if you're a Christian, there is simply no other option for you but to affirm the reality of hell! Yet, why is it that we struggle so deeply with the doctrine of hell?

Well, it seems there are at least two reasons...

Firstly, that, out of care, concern and compassion for/with our fellow human beings, we just cannot get happy about it that anyone should go to such a horrible place as hell! So, even you & I (because our sanctification is not yet complete) still have more compassion with our *fellow human sinners* than what we have with *the glory of God!*

Secondly, as RC Sproul says, *we don't really understand who God is! We have hardly a clue about the depth and the breadth and the height of His perfection – of His holiness. And, consequently, we don't have a clue about the sinfulness of sin! O, we're quick to say, 'To err is human; to forgive divine!' We're equally swift to confirm that no-one is perfect, with a shrug of the shoulders – and the unspoken sentiments – that it's not really a big deal! So, the awfulness of sin has really never captured our understanding! What repentance we have before God is shallow at best, as we sugar-coat the offenses we have made, not only against our neighbours, but especially and ultimately against God Himself!*⁶

Well, so far regarding our struggles with the reality of hell! Now, let's get to our Lord's parable!

What is the main idea of this parable?

Well is it not this...?

Churchgoer, do you have a fruit-bearing faith? Yes, does your faith translate into love in action for your neighbour in need? If not, then could it perhaps be that your faith is dead! Have you thought what that might mean for your eternal life?

Our sermon has the following three points...

- This Life
- The Afterlife
- Sufficiency of Scripture

This Life

Our Lord says there was a rich man!

And, by the way Jesus describes this man's status, it is plain that he was not just rich – he was *filthy* rich! You see, he was clothed in purple!⁷ In those days, purple clothing was associated with *kings* and *royals!*

Why?

Well, because it was very expensive to dye linen purple – it involved a whole process to extract enough purple dye from the shellfish in the Mediterranean Sea. Only royals and the very, very rich could afford purple clothing! Even still today, we have in English the expression “*royal purple.*”⁸

Of course, like all rich people of his day, this man also wore fine linen⁹ for his undergarments!

⁶ Cf. Sproul (ibid)

⁷ In Greek, *porphyran* (πορφύραν), a Noun, Feminine Singular Accusative, from *porphyra* (πορφύρα, ας): a reddish-purple cloth dyed with a substance obtained from the murex shellfish—‘purple cloth’ ... (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 73). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁸ Cf. e.g. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.782)

Also cf.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=royal+purple+colour&og=royal+purple&aqs=chrome.2.69i57j0l5.7231j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

⁹ In Greek, *bysson* (βύσσον) a Noun, Feminine Singular Accusative from *byssos* (βύσσοσ, ου f): fine linen (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 72). New York: United Bible Societies).

Now, Jesus was not against someone being wealthy! After all, the Bible knows several wealthy people, like e.g. Abraham and Joseph of Arimathea – and Abraham was even called, “a friend of God!”¹⁰

So, our Lord was not against wealth *per se*, but against the *wrong attitude about your wealth – and the wrong spending of it!*

And that’s what Jesus now continues to describe about this rich man. Says Jesus, “(This man) *was joyously living in splendor every day.*”¹¹

The fact that he lived like this, day by day, *marks him as a show-off – a strutting peacock!*¹² He wanted everybody to know he was rich.

So, what do we see about this rich man?

Well, that he was in love with himself!

No wonder, in his self-love, this rich man did not give the God-desired attention to the unattractive poor soul whom he would see every day when he, with upturned nose, strutted in and out his gate.

You see, our Lord says that, at the rich man’s gate, there was a beggar with a very telling name! Indeed, the beggar had a name, whereas the rich man was just known by “rich man!” The beggar’s name was *Lazarus* – the Greek-English version of the Hebrew name *El-`Azar*,¹³ which means, “God has helped!” – but more about this, later on!

Our text says, *Lazarus was laid*¹⁴ there at the gate! In other words, he himself could not walk there, but people had purposely laid him there in the hope that he, miserable as he was, could capture the attention of the rich man and move him to empathy! Thus, there was a concerted effort to draw the rich man’s attention toward this poor, suffering beggar!

And Lazarus desired to be fed with whatever scraps could come from the rich man’s table!

Jesus does not tell us whether Lazarus did in fact receive any of those desired scraps, for, by all accounts, this rich man did not show the compassion & help which even¹⁵ the street dogs came and showed Lazarus!

You see, it’s a well-known fact that canine saliva can be helpful in cleaning your wounds and even healing them.¹⁶ In the course of my life, I have seen this with nearly every dog I had. You have a wound on your arm or leg? You have dog? Well, if you don’t like your dog licking your wound, then cover it quickly!

So, as for Lazarus, even the *dogs* served him better than a rich *fellow human being!*

Thus, in this life, this was God’s charge against the rich man. “Rich man, your attitude and inaction – yes, your cold ignoring of someone desperately in need of your generosity – has shown Me one clear thing: i.e. whatever faith in Me you claim to have, is fake! Your faith is dead!”

You see, my brother & sister, even the Old Testament is filled with verses in which God commands His people to care for the needy and helpless!¹⁷

¹⁰ Cf. Js 2:23 *and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.*

Also cf. 2 Chr. 20:7, *Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?*

And also Isa. 41:8 *But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend...*

¹¹ The NASB’s rendering of εὐφραίνόμενος καθ’ ἡμέραν λαμπρῶς

¹² Words of Hendriksen (ibid:782)

¹³ In Hebrew, לַאֲזָרָא

¹⁴ In Greek, *ebeblēto* (ἐβέβλητο), a Pluperfect Passive Indicative 3rd Singular of *ballō* (βάλλω), to throw, deposit, put in place.

¹⁵ ἀλλὰ καὶ

¹⁶ Cf. e.g.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=why+do+dogs+lick+human+sores&og=why+do+dogs+lick+people%27s+sores&aqs=chrome.1.69j57j0.18128j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

¹⁷ See e.g. **Dt 14:28-29** “At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. ²⁹ And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with

Take e.g. Mal 3:5, “*Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness... against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.*”

Did you hear the words, “...do not fear Me...”?

How true! He/she who shows no active compassion to those in need – well, such person does not fear (reverence, love) God!!

James says it in another way, “Faith without works is dead!”¹⁸

Well, so far re point 1 – “This Life.”

Here is point 2...

The Afterlife

Jesus says, “The poor man died...”

Now, you would expect to hear at least *something* about his burial – e.g. that they threw his body on a cart, took it to Gehenna, and threw it in that ever-burning rubbish dump just south of Mt Zion!

But that’s not what you hear! Nothing is said about his body, for that’s of no worth compared to what’s happening now!

You see, next, a whole band of angels came and carried Lazarus (i.e. his soul) to heaven – straight to Abraham’s bosom!

Indeed, let’s remember that the Bible sees Abraham as the father not just of all *Jews*, but as the father of all *believers*!¹⁹

Then we hear that the rich man also died! But he was buried, for he had money! And you can only imagine what glossy funeral he had – shining coffin, professional mourners, pomp & glory, and luxury!

But now!?

Well, now everything is reversed!

you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do..”

Dt 15:1-3 “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. ² And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the Lord’s release has been proclaimed. ³ Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release.”

Mic 6:10-11 Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed? Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights?

Mal 3:5 “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.”

Yes, cf. e.g. Deuteronomy 14:28–29; 15:1–3; 7:12; 22:1–2; 23:19; 24:7; 25:13–14; Isaiah 3:14–15; 5:7–8; 10:1–3; 32:6–7; 58:3, 6–7, 10; Jeremiah 5:26–28; 7:5–6; Ezekiel 18:12–18; 33:15; Amos 2:6–8; 5:11–12; 8:4–6; Micah 2:1–2; 3:1–3; 6:10–11; Zechariah 7:9–10; Malachi 3:5.

¹⁸ Cf. Js 2:14-17 (especially v.17) *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (Emphasis mine).*

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Rm 4:16 *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...*

Also Rm 9:8 *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*

You see, the rich man opens his eyes in Hades – a word which generally refers to the place of the dead! But, look! This time, Hades means more than the mere place of the dead – it’s hell, the place of torment!²⁰

And what else do we notice?

Well, that in hell, people are at their full conscience, for the rich man now sees Abraham far off – also Lazarus snugly comforted in Abraham’s bosom (or at his side)!

And, there in hell, it’s hot. So, the rich man is craving for water! And he wants Lazarus to come serve him!! (Still not changed his mindset!)

Then, Abraham answers! And, as he answers, he calls the rich man, “child,”²¹ which means that the rich man was a fellow Jew – i.e. of God’s covenant people, yet not redeemed, for, you see, ***not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel!***²² So, to apply it to our situation – scary thought – it’s like Abraham is speaking to a member of our church family! “Child/Son/Daughter, the situation is now reversed to what it was while you were still on earth!” “There you lived a life of luxury – a heartless & selfish life – thinking just of yourself!” “You gave the *impression* that you belonged to the people of God – yes, you *thought* you had faith in God Triune, but you fooled yourself, for your faith was fake, for it never bore the fruits of compassion and kindness – of reaching out to those in need!” “So, sorry, but you never were in!” “What you have right now is justice!” “Yes, you ask me, Abraham, for mercy, but when you were on earth it looked like you didn’t even know the word mercy!” “So, what you have now is not mercy, but justice!” “What’s more, there’s a great gulf between you & us – a gulf that ***has been fixed,***²³ ***in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us!***”

My brother & sister, what does that mean?

Well, that once you’re in the afterlife, it’s too late; your position is fixed and permanent! There where you are, that’s where you’ll stay forever and ever and ever!

So far re point 2 “The Afterlife!”

Here’s the last point...

Sufficiency of Scripture

Now we hear the rich man beg!

²⁰ In Greek, *Haidēs* (ἄδης, ου m): a place or abode of the dead, including both the righteous and the unrighteous (in most contexts ἄδης is equivalent to the Hebrew term Sheol)—‘the world of the dead, Hades.’ οὔτε ἐγκατελείφθη εἰς ἄδην ‘he was not abandoned in the world of the dead’ Ac 2:31. There are several problems involved in rendering ἄδης as ‘world of the dead,’ since in some languages this may be interpreted as suggesting that there are two different earths, one for the living and another for the dead. In such cases, ἄδης may be more satisfactorily rendered as ‘where the dead are’ or ‘where the dead remain.’ In Lk 16:23 ἄδης obviously involves torment and punishment. These aspects are important supplementary features of the word ἄδης but are not integral elements of the meaning. In Lk 16:23, however, it may be appropriate to use a term which is equivalent to Greek γέεννα meaning ‘hell’ (see 1.21). It is indeed possible that in addressing a GrecoRoman audience Luke would have used ἄδης in a context implying punishment and torment, since this was a typical Greco-Roman view of the next world. But since Luke also uses γέεννα, as in Lk 12:5, it is possible that the choice of ἄδης in Lk 16:23 reflects Luke’s intent to emphasize the fact that ἄδης includes both the unrighteous and the righteous (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 5). New York: United Bible Societies).

²¹ In Greek, *teknon* (τέκνον, ου n): child, offspring.

²² Cf. Rm 9:6, ***But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel...***

²³ ἐστήρικται – a Perfect Passive Indicative 3rd Person Singular of **στηρίζω**^b: to put or place something firmly in a location—‘to cause to be fixed, to establish in a place.’ μεταξύ ἡμῶν ... χάσμα μέγα ἐστήρικται ‘there is a great chasm fixed ... between us’ Lk 16:26 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 726). New York: United Bible Societies).

Fancy that! In this life, it was Lazarus who begged – and begged in vain!
Now the rich man says (v.27-28), “***Then I beg²⁴ you, father, to send him (Lazarus) to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.***”²⁵ “I wouldn’t wish this place on anybody else!”

Well, Abraham replies, and what he replies is as much as: “You want Lazarus to be sent?”
“Excuse me, don’t they have Moses and the prophets!”

My brother & sister, if Paul had said these words, he would have added, “Don’t they have Jesus...?”

Indeed, if they have Moses, the prophets, and Jesus (OT & NT), why would they believe this beggar who comes from the dead!?

Remember? What did the Jews do with another man who was also called Lazarus? Yes, how did they react to Lazarus, brother of Martha & Mary, whom Jesus brought back from the dead after he had been four days in the afterlife?

Well they did not believe him! In fact, they wanted to kill that Lazarus!²⁶

And what did they do with Jesus Himself, who rose from the dead and is THE authority of life after death!? They refused to believe Him, too!²⁷

So, what does Abraham say?

Well, to you & me he says, “You have Moses and the prophets – all of the Old Testament – and you have Jesus!” “You have all of the Old- and New Testament!” “These Scriptures are sufficient to bring you to faith and equip you for life!” “If you don’t believe them, then nothing will persuade you – not even if yet another person would come back from the dead!”

My brother & sister, I have seen beautiful things in the Reformed Church Wainuiomata! I have seen people’s faith (their love for Christ) being translated into kind & compassionate deeds!

So, perhaps this sermon’s message was mostly directed at myself!

But this morning, we have ordained a brother in the office of deacon! And look, is not the theme of this morning’s sermon a *diaconal* theme? – a theme which says, “Faith without works is dead!”?

My brother & sister, this message is not just for the deacons, but for every Christian, because every Christian has a diaconal calling from the Lord, i.e. to have a faith that is seen in works to those who are in need – whatever need – be it financial, or in counselling, or to encourage, or sharing Scripture, or in praying together!

I pray that you & I will forever be moved to such care!

AMEN (2498 words excluding footnotes)

²⁴ Ἐρωτῶ Present Active Indicative 1st Person Singular of ἐρωτάω, to ask, request, beg.

²⁵ Emphasis mine

²⁶ Cf. Jn 12:9-11 (especially v.10) ***When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus*** (Emphasis mine).

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Mt 28:11-15 ***While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. ¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³ and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.***