

“Eternity: What Awaits After Death”

Sermon # 2

“One Minute After You Die”

Luke 16:19-31

When I began this series I had no idea how personal it was going to become. I really had a difficult time deciding whether or not I could preach today, and especially on the announced subject. In fact I only made up my mind to do so yesterday. Even now I cannot promise you that I can do so with out tears. Some of you may not be aware that last Sunday our precious little granddaughter, Aubrey went on to Heaven after just over 24 hours of life. On behalf of the Scott and Nikki, and Scott and Lisa, and Debbie and myself I want to thank each of you for your kind expressions of love and sympathy, they mean more than I can express.

Over the years of serving as your pastor I have tried to not constantly refer to my family and the circumstances of our lives. I am at heart a very private person. I hope you will forgive me this one lapse this morning. I had thought I understood at least on an intellectual basis what grief was after all I have lost my sister, my father-in-law, my father, then my best friend and then mother. But when little Aubrey died, not only did a part of my dreams die but my faith was severely tested. I was no longer a pastor comforting the grieving. I was a father who had no answers for the hurt for his family and a grandfather grieving his own loss.

I knew what I believed about eternity, but did I really believe it. The eighteen inches from my head to my heart now seemed an incredible distance. So this morning I want to speak to you from my heart on the subject, “One Minute After You Die.”

Erwin Lutzer, pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago in his book “One Minute After You Die” he says, “One minute after you slip behind the parted curtain you will either be enjoying a personal welcome from Christ or catching your first glimpse of gloom as you have never known it. Either way, your future will be irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable... those who find themselves in heaven will be surrounded with friends whom they have known on earth... Every description of heaven they have heard will pale in the light of reality. All this, forever.

Others – indeed many others - will be shrouded in darkness, a region of deprivation, and unending regret. There, with all their memories and feeling fully intact, images of their life on earth will return to haunt them. They will think back to their friends, family and relatives; they will brood over opportunities they squandered and intuitively know that their future is both hopeless and unending. For them death will be far worse than they imagined.

And so while relatives and friends plan your funeral – deciding on a casket, a burial plot, and who the pallbearers will be – you will be more alive than you have ever been. You will either see God on His throne surrounded by His angels and redeemed humanity, or you will be

feel an indescribable weight of guilt and abandonment. There is no destination midway between these two extremes; just gladness and gloom.” [Erwin W. Lutzer. “One Minute After You Die.” (Chicago: Moody, 1997) pp. 9-10]

This morning we are going to look at the question, “What Is The First Thing That Will Happen To Us After We Die?” As I stated in the first message in this series, the Bible is the only trustworthy source about life after death. I will take that one step further and state that Jesus is the only one qualified to speak authoritatively about death and the afterlife. Turn with me to Luke 16 as we examine a story that will take us the next two weeks to complete. Here in Luke 16 beginning in verse nineteen we find the story of Rich man and Lazarus. Jesus tells a story that gives us a glimpse into life on the other side of death. This story is unique to the Book of Luke and is the only one where we find these characters. I have come to believe that what we have before us today is not a parable but rather I believe this story to be a real report of the fate of two very real men.

Three things you will discover one minute after you die.

“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.’”

First, One Minute After You Die All Earthly Prosperity or Earthly Suffering is Ended. (vv. 19-21)

“The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen, the beggar in rags; the rich man lived in a stately mansion; the beggar was laid by sympathetic friends at the gate of the mansion; the rich man had a healthy, well-nourished body, the beggar was full of sores; the rich man fared sumptuously every day, the beggar lived on crumbs from his table; the rich man had physicians to care for him, dogs licked the sores of Lazarus.” [Herbert Lockyer. “All the Parables of the Bible.” (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1963) p. 293]

There is a huge contrast being drawn here between the life of the Rich Man and Lazarus. These two men have nothing in common during their lives.

The Rich Man is extremely wealthy. His wardrobe consists of only the finest clothes that money could buy. He also had a large home. The fact that he had a gate (v. 20) would likely make his home some type of mansion. The Rich man lived in luxury everyday, which tells us that he was flamboyant and flashy with his wealth.

The Rich Man is assumed to be healthy because there is no mention of any kind of physical problems. Like many today he is living his life without ever thinking about what will happen when life comes to an end. It is an irony that it is the Rich Man who remains the unknown in this story. His name is not mentioned for a specific reason, he is not in a relationship with God.

Lazarus lived an extremely different life. He was poor beyond our ability to truly understand. Lazarus was very sick, being unable to work Lazarus was forced to become a beggar, because he had no means to support himself. He was dependent each day on what the good will of others or he would have had nothing to eat that day. We are told that he was so hungry that he was willing to eat the burnt, broken and discarded pieces of bread from the rich man's table.

Yet Lazarus was blessed in one key way, he apparently knew God. The name Lazarus means "God is my helper." There is a direct connection between his name and the result of his eternity.

The rich man and Lazarus lived totally different lives, but they had one thing in common they both died. Yet, death is not the end of existence, both Lazarus and the rich man died. At the point of physical death, the body ceases to function, but the soul and spirit of man continue to live on. At death the invisible part of who we are moves out of the body and enters into a new existence. In 2 Corinthians 5 the Bible compares this body of ours to a tent. This tent gets old and we groan as we experience pain and suffering. The longer we live the more tattered and feeble this tent becomes.

I love a story told about the former president of the United States John Quincy Adams, and have used it many times at funerals. When he was eighty years of age he was met by a friend who shook his trembling hand and said, "Good Morning, How is John Quincy Adams today?" The retired chief executive looked at him for a moment and said, "John Quincy Adams himself is quite well, sir, quite well. But the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering upon its foundations. Time and the seasons have almost destroyed it. Its roof is pretty worn out. Its walls are much shattered, and it crumbles with every wind. The old tenement is becoming almost uninhabitable, and I think that John Quincy Adams will have to move out soon. But he himself is well, sir, quite well." It was not long afterwards that he had his second and final stroke and John Quincy Adams moved from his shaky tenement as he called it into his home not made with hands.

In our text both men died and death changed everything. For Lazarus life had held suffering and pain but his pain and suffering were ended. For the Rich man life had been a time of abundance and ease, this too was ended.

All that we are told about the beggar death is that “he died.” Nothing is said about his burial. And the fact that we are not told of his burial leads us to believe that when Lazarus died his body was probably carted away to the city dump and burned along with the trash. The rich man also died. And although we are not told so, we can imagine that he was given a glorious sent off, the finest funeral that money could buy. He would have likely had a large funeral with the best of preparations in regards to the spices, anointments and linens used to prepare his body, a nice tomb to lay his body in. That sounds much like our own day, “How many people have prepared for their funeral without preparing to die?”

The Rich Man may have considered himself a religious man; he may have been faithful to the synagogue and may even have given lots of money to religious causes. The revelation of where each man ended up after death would have astonished Jesus’ original audience and shattered their long held assumptions about wealth being a sign of Gods’ favor and blessings. The rich man had lived without God in this world, so he would live without Him in the next. But not only did the rich man having no share with God, and thus lose God – forever, he lost even those things which had in this life.

Not only One Minute After You Die Will All Earthly Prosperity or Earthly Suffering be Ended but....

Second, One Minute After You Die Your Eternity Will Begin! (vv. 22-23)

Since there is such confusion today about what happens at death I believe that we need a brief explanation of the nature of death in relation to eternity. Death takes place when the spirit leaves the body (James 2:26). But death is not the end; it is the beginning of a whole new existence in another world.

Charles Swindoll puts this way, “When people die, only their bodies go into the grave. At the funeral it is merely the physical shell we see lying in the casket. The real person, the soul/spirit, has already departed to either a place of torment or a place of comfort, depending on the person’s spiritual condition.” [Charles Swindoll. *The Consummation of Something Miraculous: A Study of Luke 16:19-24:53*. Bible Study Guide. (Insight for Living, 1995) p. 2.]

When both of these men die, there is no pause in the action. There is no break in the narrative. There is no lapse of time. In fact, it would seem that the moment that these men die they instantaneously experience their eternal positions. In verse twenty-two we read, "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried."

As both men died and passed through the death's portal an amazing reversal occurred. The beggar died and angels carried him into God's presence. Jesus tells us that as soon as Lazarus died the angels came and took him to the place where Abraham's was. The New King James refers to this as "Abraham's bosom," which is simply a way of saying that he went to Heaven. It would seem clear that there is no waiting period for him to enter eternity. This is reinforced when Paul writes in the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord..... (8) We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." At death the body dies but the soul and spirit live on.

Lazarus was a man who had a relationship with God. When he died he was escorted by the angels into the presence of God. It would clearly seem that there was no waiting period for him to enter eternity. Lazarus lived on after he died. Death was not the end for him and there was a life that was waiting for him to enter. Lazarus moved on after he died because the angels came and took him to heaven. Lazarus carried on his new life with the comfort of heaven.

The rich man also died but no angels carried him into God's presence, a split second after he died he woke up in a terrifying place called Hell.

Not only does One Minute After You Die Your Eternity Will Begin but ...

Third, One Minute After You Die Your Eternity Will Be Set Forever. (vv. 24-31)

The story tells us that there are two destinations for the soul at death; one a place of comfort and the other a place of torment. It is not my purpose at this time to deal at length with the fate that awaited each of these two men at death we will do that in the next two messages. Sufficient for this morning is the knowledge that we acknowledge that after we die we will all wake to an eternity somewhere and once our lives are over here there will be no opportunity to change our destiny.

In verse twenty-six we the Rich man is told, "... 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."

Conclusion

"What is Going to Happen To You When You Die?"

Do you know for sure where you are going to spend eternity, for it is certain that you will spend eternity somewhere? Don't be content with "I Think So" or "I Hope So." This is too important a question to allow this kind of response. The Bible says in 1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.." The Bible says you can know for certain you have eternal life. Right now, in this place, you can turn from your sins and place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ and be saved. You can leave this place today, knowing that you have a place in heaven.