



Message Transcript:

Who can bridge the chasm between hell and heaven?

Main verses:

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this [the parable of the dishonest manager] and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵ He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight."
(Luke 16:14-15)

Main Point:

In the context of teaching the Pharisees about the danger of justifying themselves before God, Jesus told them a story contrasting a selfish and self-justifying rich man with a beggar called Lazarus.

Jesus' story stands out as one of the only in the Bible in which we hear the cry from one who is hell. Are they repentant? Do they long to be in heaven? Or is their highest priority to argue why they should never have found themselves there in the first place?

Intro |

Some of you thought I was pretty cruel getting Bill to preach on the difficult parable of the dishonest manager. Well the next story that Jesus told was even more disturbing than one about a fast-talking, wheeler-dealing manager.

Today, Jesus, tells a story that is totally unique in Scripture. It is the only story where we get to hear the cries of one who is in the midst of the torment of hell.

Now, I'm vividly aware that hell is a highly unpopular subject.

But, it may surprise you to learn that Jesus talked about hell more than he talked about heaven. So, as uncomfortable as it is for us to hear, I feel it is important we listen closely to what Jesus has to say. For one thing is certain, it is a place where none of us want to end up.

Before we dive into the story, we need to remember that Jesus is in the middle of His sermon. Although He was teaching His disciples (16:1), the Pharisees were in earshot.

Remember, last week we heard Bill's awesome reflection on, Jesus' story of the shrewd or dishonest manager. He'd finished by telling the Pharisees, "*You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.*" (Luke 16:15)

The Pharisees believed that wealth was a very clear sign of God's blessing and favour on their life.

We can fall into a similar simplistic view of God's blessings – when all is well, and we're flourishing, it is easy to assume that God is happy with us. We can also assume that our financial wealth translates into spiritual wealth, and that our heavenly bank account is as padded as our earthly bank account.

Jesus cut right into this belief system, telling a story which was designed to reveal how a person is truly justified before God or in other words, how one is granted an entrance into God's glorious presence after they die.

Point 1 | How does our life on earth impact our eternal destination? Those who rely on God's pathway alone, receive his free gift of salvation

Jesus does this by contrasting two extremes of society: the rich from the poor.

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores." (Luke 16:19-21)

So while the rich man wore his Armani suits and dined every night at Doyle's at Watson's Bay, the poor man sat outside his front gate, just beyond the parked Bugatti, covered in sores, dressed in rags, relegated to living amongst the dogs. What we need to notice, however, is that unlike any other story, Jesus gives one of these men a name.

But it is not the rich man who is identified. It is the poor man, who is named Lazarus, which means "the one whom God helps". Now the difference between these two characters becomes clearer. The rich man helped himself and did so with heartless selfishness and greed, all the while being indifferent to the poor man who literally sat at his doorstep.

Then Jesus tells us they both died.

While Lazarus is carried by the angels to Abraham's side (v22), the rich man – to his great shock – finds himself in this terrible nightmare of fiery torment. In hell, he looked up and saw Abraham far away in heaven, with Lazarus by his side (v23). We are supposed to be shocked at this point.

This is the plot twister the pharisees never expected. The one who should have been in heaven is in hell and the one who should have been in hell is in heaven.

In desperation, the rich man calls to Father Abraham, *"have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."* (v24)

So, the rich man is now the beggar. But he still regards Lazarus as someone to wait on his every need. Since, the rich man easily recognises Abraham, and calls him 'Father', he was a religious man – the Pharisees' ears would have been on fire at this stage.

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' (v24-26)

Let's pause for a moment.

Point 2 | Without God's love and compassion there would be no way to traverse from hell to heaven

What is this great chasm that separated these two drastically different eternal dwelling places?

This is the same gulf that Adam and Eve experienced when they were escorted out of God's presence in Eden. The wonderful relationship they had with their loving God was shattered by their sin. In one day, their heaven had turned into a hell hole. While we inwardly ask, 'why couldn't you just forgive them, God? Why send them away from your presence?

It was God's mercy. If they had remained in God's presence, His holiness would have totally consumed them. So, he shielded them from his judgement, until the way across the chasm could be made.

That is why Heaven is described as life **with** God, while Hell is life **without** God.

So, humans – by their own making – were separated from God, which helps us understand the suffering we see in the world – life without God is a downward slide towards hell!

But our God is loving and compassionate. He was not going to allow sin to destroy His relationship with His precious creation forever. So, while for thousands of years, God used the shedding of the blood of innocent animals, over and over He signalled His intention to totally redeem His children.

But a heavy price would have to be paid to bridge this chasm.

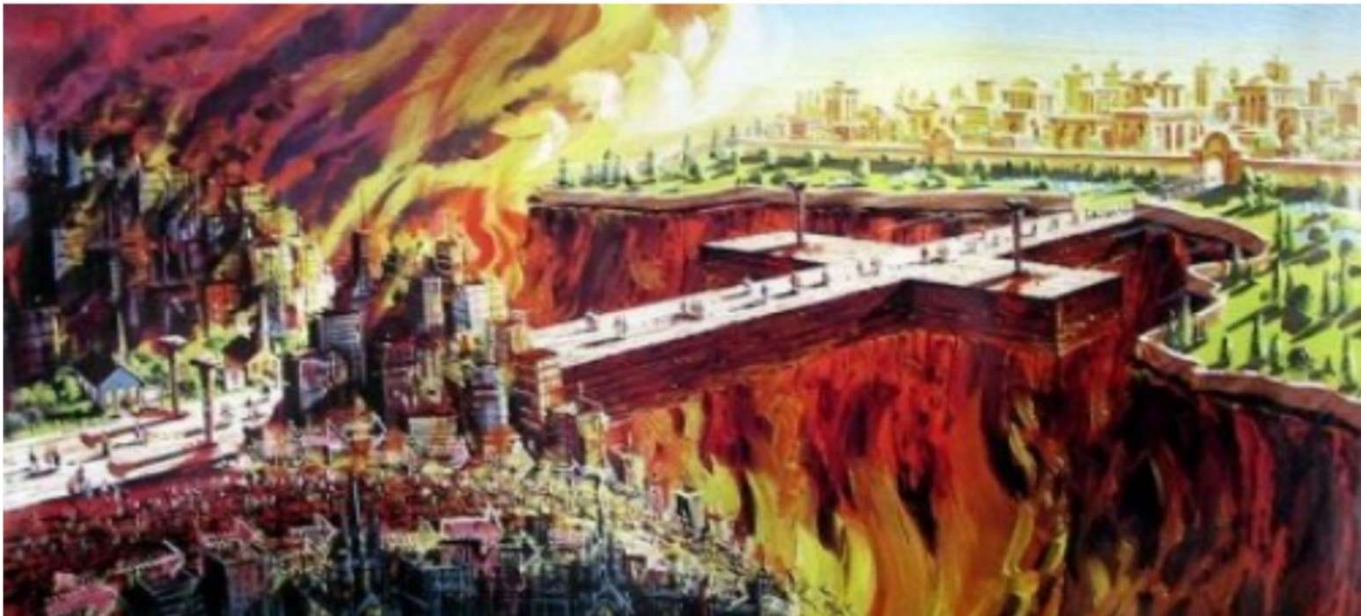
Point 3 | God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The only way to cross the chasm between hell and heaven, is through Jesus Christ.

So determined was God to make way for people to be reconciled to Him, that He sent His only Son. When Jesus Christ, who was truly God and truly human, lay down his life for humanity on the cross, He made two remarkable statements:

When Jesus cried on the cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"* (Matthew 27:46), we hear the devastation of sin's curse – even the beloved Son was separated from His Father God. When the sins of the world were placed on His shoulders He was in the same position as the rich man in Hell, He was in torment, and He too asked for a drink! (John 19:28)

But when Jesus cried, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34) Jesus revealed how God's grace and mercy would bridge the enormous gulf that stood between us and God.

Jesus went to the hell of the cross so we wouldn't have to! By placing Himself on the altar of God's judgment, the one and only way to cross the chasm was revealed.



God the Father through God the Son restored our relationship by crossing that divide – it's a done deal, the way is open, it's a free gift.

Now here is the inconceivable part. As hard as it is to believe, it seems there will be some - who like this rich man, refuse the free gift of salvation and rely on themselves to cross this vast chasm.

Some of course will live their lives denying the chasm even exists.

But as Jesus and the rich man teach us, it's foolish to live in denial.

After failing to get any reprieve for his constant thirst, the rich man makes another desperate plea to Abraham,

'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

Is he repentant for the life he had lived? Is he pleading for forgiveness?

No, he now demands that Lazarus become his messenger.

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' (v27-29)

Abraham was reminding him that the message of salvation through faith was even preached through Moses and the Prophets (Galatians 2:15-17).

"No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

It seems the rich man knew his brothers would not listen to the prophets, nor take their warnings seriously. He felt they needed something more spectacular to convince them.

But Abraham answered, *"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."* (v30)

Of course, when we read this we know that Jesus did rise from the dead; yet many did not believe then.

Application | Will you have the courage to share the wonderful gift of salvation you have received with others?

But even during Jesus' ministry, (and I don't think this is a coincidence) a man named Lazarus also came back from the dead (John 11:38-44) but the religious leaders did not believe him. In fact, they tried to kill him (John 12:9-10).

So, what is the pathway over the gulf of hell that exists between us and God?

It starts with our recognition that we have no way to bridge the chasm ourselves.

Only then, our eyes will be open to see the cross that our Saviour laid down with his life.

And may we have the courage to tell others about the bridge to eternal life we have found.