

“Don’t Be Misled”

November 22, 2020

Luke 16:14-31

I. Introduction

When Jesus came to earth, much of Judaism, including many of the religious leaders, had been corrupted by pride, man’s teachings, and the culture of the day. In spite of their strict religious practices, the religious leaders loved money and cultivated values that were godless. As Jesus implied in [Luke 16:13](#), their master wasn’t God, it was money. They professed to trust God, but they measured life by wealth and possessions, the same as the unbelieving worldly crowd: *he who dies with the most toys wins*. With their lips, they honored the Lord; but with their wealth, they lived like the world. In [Isaiah 29:13](#) God said, “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”

Wealth was deemed as proof of God’s approval and those that had it could purchase their salvation by giving more alms—the more alms one could give, the more sacrifices and offerings one could offer would earn enough divine favor to gain entrance into heaven. It was this reliance on wealth that led Jesus to say to the rich ruler in [Luke 18:24-25](#), “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” As a corollary, in the Pharisees’ minds and teachings, the lack of wealth was proof of God’s disapproval.

Initially, the religious leaders had been curious about Jesus and His teachings. They had even invited Him into their homes to learn more about Him. But as He continued to preach against their false religion and instead spent time with the sinners and outcasts, the animosity and hostility of the Pharisees toward Christ increased. [Luke 15:2](#) says, “The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” They saw Jesus’ associating with the riffraff of Jewish society as proof that He was not sent from God. In today’s Scripture, they moved beyond grumbling to scoffing and sneering at Jesus just as the Old Testament had predicted would be done to the Messiah. [Isaiah 53:3](#) says, “He was despised and

rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” So, Jesus turned back to them and addressed their wrong values—they were misled.

II. Don't Be Misled

A. God looks at the heart. Turning from His disciples to the sneering Pharisees, Jesus said, “**You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts.**” Pharisaic Judaism was a system of works righteousness, of self-justification, of trying to make oneself acceptable to God through doing good works, keeping certain legal standards, and performing religious rituals and ceremonies. They may fool men, but they didn't fool God. As God told Samuel in **1 Samuel 16:7**, “**Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**” **Turn to Matthew 23:27-28.**

They had missed and ignored the truth found in the Old Testament. **Habakkuk 2:4** says, “**The enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.**” In **Hosea 6:6** God said, “**For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.**” **Micah 6:8** says, “**He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**” God looks at the heart. This is what Jesus had taught earlier in Mark—**turn to Mark 7:20-23.**

God not only knew what was in their hearts but disapproved of it: “**What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.**” God finds all false forms of religion that are admired by man to be detestable, i.e., something that stinks; that is abominable, disgusting, and revolting. The world's religious wisdom is mere foolishness in God's sight—**1 Corinthians 1:20** says, “**Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?**”

B. The Messiah has come. Jesus said, “**The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John.**” The Old Testament age, the age of promise, concluded with the ministry of John the Baptist, the last of the Old

Testament prophets. In addition, John was the 1st representative of the New Testament era of fulfillment of the Law. He not only predicted the Messiah's appearance, but he also announced Him—in [John 1:34](#) he said, **"I have seen, and I testify that this is the Son of God."** The Messiah has come. Now, **"The good news—the Gospel—of the kingdom of God is being preached."** The Pharisees prided themselves in their faithful obedience to the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets, but they didn't receive or even recognized the Savior of whom Moses and the prophets had written.

The Pharisees may have been deaf to, even opposed to the preaching of the Gospel, but others, including the tax collectors, sinners, and outcasts were **"forcing their way into it."** In spite of the Pharisees' resistance and even putting barriers in the people's way, multitudes were coming to hear Jesus and were accepting His call to enter the Kingdom of God. The Messiah has come.

C. God's Law still stands. Jesus assured His listeners that He wasn't replacing the Law, **"It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law."** God's Law still stands. In [Matthew 5:17](#) Jesus said, **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."** If the Pharisees had truly believed that God's promises would be fulfilled, they would have recognized and welcomed Jesus as the Messiah. Instead they rejected Him. For that matter, they didn't uphold the law's unchanging moral standards either as Jesus showed in His example about divorce.

The Old Testament taught that **"anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."** In their teachings, the Pharisees didn't condone adultery, but they so twisted Moses' teaching in [Deuteronomy 24:1-4](#) about the right of divorce on the grounds of one's wife doing **"something indecent"** (NIV) or having some **"uncleanness"** (NKJ) that they justified divorce and remarriage. Since adultery was punished by stoning, this was something else that a woman did that her husband might find shameful or indecent. The majority interpreted this in the broadest possible terms—it came to mean whatever a man decided he did not like about his wife, e.g., being

a poor cook, being disrespectful to her husband or her mother-in-law, being less beautiful than another woman. Jesus used this one example to expose the Pharisees' blatant hypocrisy. Despite their professed devotion to the Law, they were in fact violators of it. God's Law still stands regardless of their faithlessness.

III. The Rich Man and Lazarus

A. A contrast in life Jesus then gave a story warning of what would happen to them if they continued in their false self-righteous religion. It's a story of contrasts between two men; a rich man, who is sometimes called *Dives* which is Latin for *rich*, and a beggar named Lazarus—a contrast in life. (This is NOT the Lazarus Jesus raised from the dead in [John 11:43-44](#)). The rich man could afford to wear expensive clothes daily. His lifestyle was a lavish one of self-indulgence and a self-gratifying lifestyle. He was definitely among "*the rich and famous*," and other people admired and envied him. The rich man had everything.

On the other hand, the beggar, Lazarus, was sick and possibly crippled, because he was "**laid**" at the rich man's gate. The only attention he got was from the feral dogs who "**licked his sores.**" Adding to his misery, Lazarus was starving, "**longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table.**" The poor man had nothing. The rich man didn't use any part of his wealth to help Lazarus. He treated the poor, suffering man as if he were already dead. Perhaps he thought that providing a place for the man was ministry enough.

B. A contrast in death The extreme contrast between the two men in life continued in death. The poor man died, diseased, destitute, and starving. There was no burial, funeral, or earthly honor in death—his body would have been thrown onto the dump with those of the rest of society's outcasts. But honor came from heaven as "**the angels carried him to Abraham's side.**" "**The rich man also died**" but unlike Lazarus, he "**was buried**" and no doubt would have had an elaborate funeral. All of his resources could not buy him another day; his riches didn't prevent his death. Sadly, no angels arrived to carry him to heaven.

C. A contrast in eternity The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus in life continued through the transition of death and was magnified to the extreme in eternity. The word translated *hell* in [Luke 16:23](#) in many translations should really be the Greek word *hades*. It is the temporary realm of the dead as they await

judgment. The permanent place of punishment for the lost is hell, “the lake of fire.” In Revelation 20:10-15, one day, death will give up the bodies, and hades will give up the souls and the lost will stand before Christ in judgment and “Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

From Jesus’ description, it would seem that hades had two sections: a paradise portion called “Abraham’s side or bosom” and a punishment portion. It is believed by many theologians that Jesus emptied the paradise part of hades when He rose from the dead and returned to the Father (Ephesians 4:8-10). Unlike in Jesus’ story, there is no indication in the rest of Scripture that souls in heaven can communicate with people in hades or, for that matter, with people on earth.

Because the Pharisees believed that disease and poverty signified God’s curse on a person, they would have been more than a little shocked that angels would minister to such a person as Lazarus and take him to Abraham’s side. Similarly, they would have been just as shocked that hades was the final eternal resting place of the rich man. Just like the coming “lake of fire,” this section of hades is also a place of torment. The rich man became a beggar as he begged, “Father Abraham have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue.”

Abraham’s reply dashed his hopes. The rich man had lived for the “good things” of earth and had experienced abundant earthly blessings—he already had his reward (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16). The rich man had determined his own destiny by leaving God out of his life and now there was a “great chasm” which no one can “cross over.” Death permanently fixes everyone’s destiny; no one will escape hell, nor will anyone in heaven visit hell. There is no hope or relief for hell’s inhabitants,

The rich man prayed for his brothers, “I have five brothers. Let him, i.e., Lazarus, warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” Abraham said that “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.” When the rich man asked for a sign to be sent, Abraham said, “If they do not listen to

Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” Another man named Lazarus did come back from the dead and some wanted to kill him! Turn to John 12:9-11.

Luke doesn't tell us how the covetous, money-loving Pharisees responded to this story or to Jesus' teachings. They certainly knew Moses and the Prophets, and this meant even greater responsibility and greater condemnation—the last half of Luke 12:48 says, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

IV. Conclusion

The Pharisees had God's Word, but they let “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” along with “the love of the world” (1 John 2:15-16) twist and distort what God said. They ignored the fact that God looks at the heart and not at what they said and did. Because they spent most of their time trying to earn their salvation, impress the common people, and fill their bank accounts, they had little time to study God's Word. So, when the Messiah did arrive, they didn't recognize Him—they were too busy doing their own thing. Because the times and the world were changing, they felt that they needed to change the interpretation of God's Word and adjust with the times, but God's Word doesn't change. In their blindness and conceitedness, they planned for the short-term but ignored eternity. They were misled.

It's easy to look down at the Pharisees, but we need to be on guard, or we will follow in their steps. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:15, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” This isn't addressed to just the pastor or the leaders of the church, this is addressed to every Christian. Everyone needs to study this Book, so they won't be misled by a smooth talker, someone who seems to have all the answers, or by a culture that says to “Get with the times.”

James wrote in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” As you study, as you are tempted or coerced by the world, ask God for wisdom and strength. Contrary to our culture, there is still only one way to be saved

from an eternity in hell—in [John 14:6](#) Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The world may come up with a plethora of ways to be successful, but God’s Word says in [Deuteronomy 10:12](#), “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Let me close with Joshua’s words from [Joshua 24:15](#), “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”