

Text: Luke 16:19-31 (Pew Bible pg.1036)

Title: “Sixty Seconds After You Die”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – This past week Vietnam War veteran Commander Jeremiah Denton died. Commander Denton was captured and tortured as a prisoner of war by the North Vietnamese. They wanted to use Commander Denton in their propaganda by interviewing him in a television broadcast that was sent around the world. His captors tried to get him to falsely confess that American forces were involved in certain war crimes. Commander Denton refused to cooperate. What he did do was to send a signal to the rest of the world. On camera, pretending to be blinded by the spotlights, he began blinking in what seemed to be random spasms. What he was doing was blinking out a message with his eyes, in the old Morse Code, a one-word message ... “T-O-R-T-U-R-E.” It was the first confirmation that American prisoners of war were being subjected to atrocities during the Vietnam War.

Well one day Jesus told a story about a man who died and tried to get a message back to the people he knew on earth. Let’s open our Bibles to Luke 16:19. As we think about heaven, we must know that there are eternal consequences to how we live our lives today. Here Jesus is teaching about the proper attitude about money. In Luke 16:13 Jesus says that you cannot serve God and money at the same time. Jesus specifically has in mind the Pharisees who, according to v.15, loved money and rejected the teaching of Jesus. You see, how we use our money in this life is just one indication of whether we are truly worshipping and serving the Lord, or if we are purely in it for ourselves. So when Jesus begins to tell this story in vv.19-31 he is teaching that there are eternal consequences for the way we live our lives. We will experience those consequences in one of two places, heaven or hell. **Read Luke 16:19-31.**

Let me say from the start that Jesus is not teaching that the rich man is in hell because he was rich and that Lazarus is in heaven because he was poor. Nowhere does Jesus or the Bible teach that. In fact, Abraham is mentioned here as being in heaven, and he was one of the wealthiest people in the Bible. Rather, what determines what we experience the minute we die is our response to the revealed truth of God’s Word. We just read it. The rich man in the story wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn the rich man’s brothers.

Luke 16:29 - “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

Luke 16:30 - “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

Luke 16:31 - “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

Abraham told the man, “All they need to know about making sure they escape hell and gain heaven when they die is already recorded in the Scriptures. They must repent and believe the truth God has revealed. And we know that from the Gospel:

Romans 10:9 - That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And from the moment that we do that we have eternal life and when we die we'll spend eternity with Jesus in heaven. So I want us to think together this morning about what happens after you die ... “Sixty Seconds After You Die.” Sixty seconds after you die you will experience...

1. CONTINUITY

You don't lose your identity when you die. Who you are in your last sixty seconds in this life is who you are in the first sixty seconds in the next life. Death doesn't change that. The spirit that is you now is what goes to heaven or to hell. It's not like you can be one person in this life and someone totally different in the next.

Now in v.1 we're introduced to the rich man.

Luke 16:19 - “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

On the surface there's seems to be nothing wrong with the way this rich man lives his life. But when we dig a little deeper we see that there is something terribly wrong with his life.

Luke 16:20 - At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores

Luke 16:21 - and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

So this rich man lives in opulence every day ... not just on special occasions ... *every* day. Meanwhile sitting at the gate of this man's mansion is beggar. He's probably crippled due to his sores because it says that he was laid at the gate by some of his friends or family. Lazarus longed to just have some of the food that fell off the rich man's table. Dogs came and licked his sores. And this grotesque scene is played out on the front porch of this rich man's house. So this man loved Money more than he loved God; because if he loved and served God he would have used his money to help Lazarus.

Well, the rich man dies and is buried, and the next thing we see of him is...

Luke 16:23 - In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

The thing I want you to see is that there is continuity here. Sixty seconds after he died the rich man experienced the consequences of the way he had lived his life on earth. This man lived a selfish, unrepentant life and sixty seconds after he died he was *immediately* aware that he lived the wrong way. There's continuity.

On the other hand, there's the beggar Lazarus.

Luke 16:22 - “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side.

Now we’re not told specifically that Lazarus was a believer. But we may safely infer that he had done what Abraham in the story said had to be done ... to believe the truth revealed in Scripture and repent. That’s why he is carried “to Abraham’s side,” which is the same as heaven.

You choose your destiny in this life and the consequences of that choice continue on for eternity in either heaven or hell. Which will it be for you?

There’s even some indication here in Jesus’ story that there is awareness of the life that we leave behind ... at least for the man in hell.

Luke 16:27 - “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house,

Luke 16:28 - for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

The man knows that his brothers back on earth are on the same road he was on before he died. He knows that if they continue on that road, they will end up where he is. So he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them not to keep on the path of unrighteous living.

Note: The time to tell your friends about Jesus is now. Once you die and go to heaven and experience what an incredible thing it is to be in God’s presence, you can’t get word to your loved ones who don’t know Jesus. And if you are in hell sixty seconds after you die, there’s no way you can warn others. The time to tell your friends about Jesus is now. The time to invite them to church to hear the truth is now.

But this story teaches us something else about what believers can expect sixty seconds after they die:

2. COMFORT

Luke 16:22a - “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side.

Luke 16:25 - Lazarus ... is comforted here...

Let me remind you that what we’re seeing here is what we call the “present heaven.” We’re looking at heaven and hell as it is in this present age before Christ returns and establishes the new heaven and the new earth. It’s unimaginable what things will be like when Christ makes all things new ... our new glorified bodies inhabiting a new glorified, renewed earth. But until then, when we die we still get the best part of heaven ... comfort in the presence of our Heavenly Father.

Listen to how King David talked about his assurance of heaven:

Psalm 16:11 - You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Remember that heaven is God's dwelling place. He is infinite in His goodness, beauty, love and power. How could His home be anything less than absolutely thrilling? Heaven is a place where there is great rejoicing, for example when a sinner repents there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels in heaven. It will be a happy place.

Sometimes even as believers hopelessness can set in and we think that all our tomorrows will be just like today. But our hope in Christ encourages us that while we may suffer in this life, sixty seconds after we die we'll know incredible comfort.

Romans 8:18 - I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Contrast that with what the unbelieving rich man experiences after death ... agony and torment.

Luke 16:23a - In hell, where he was in torment...

Luke 16:24 - So he called to him, '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.'

Surveys reveal that most Americans believe in heaven, but most don't believe in hell. Many people cannot reconcile in their minds how a loving God could condemn some people to hell while others get to go to heaven.

Let me explain it this way: God is a holy and just God and He must punish sin. You could never call God good if He was holy and didn't punish sin. His goodness demands that He sets Himself against all that is evil. But the Bible also tells us that God is loving, and wants us to spend eternity with Him in heaven. The only way that these two amazing qualities of God could be reconciled is that God would allow His own Son Jesus Christ to take the punishment for our sins. That way God's holiness and His love could be satisfied.

The fact is that *all of us* deserve to be judged and sentenced to separation from God for eternity in hell ... all of us.

Romans 3:23 - All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

But God in His love made a way for us to escape hell.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And that gift is received by putting your trust in Jesus Christ.

Sixty seconds after you die if you are in hell, it's all on you. You never put your trust in Christ and your sins are all on you. But sixty seconds after you die if you are in heaven, it's all on Him. Your sins were placed on the account of Jesus and He paid it all.

So if you're a believer sixty seconds after you die you'll know incredible comfort in the presence of the Lord. But also you will experience ...

3. COMPANY

Luke 16:22a - "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.

But for the rich man...

Luke 16:23 - In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

Abraham represents all the people of faith ... he's the father of faith. He's in heaven, far away from the torment of hell, and with him are the saints of all the ages. And so there's the indication that we will know other people in heaven. If we know Abraham we will also know our loved ones and friends who are there. What a great reunion that will be.

The imagery here is of an ancient eastern banquet where people didn't sit in chairs around a table, but rather they had cushions on the floor. And they would sort of lay on their sides, propped up by their elbows. So if you were sitting next to someone you might be right up close to their side. And so Lazarus is pictured being that close to Abraham, and all the saints of the ages.

On the other hand, the rich man appears to be alone. Certainly he is far from the presence of God. And he seems to be alone.

Luke 16:26 - 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.'

The essence of heaven is the presence of God; the essence of hell is separation from God and the company of the righteous.

I hear people joking about hell like, "Well, me and my buddies we're going to bust hell wide open, but we're going to have a wild time together." Hell ain't no joke! It's the loneliest place you can imagine.

But sixty seconds after they die, believers will find themselves in the company of the righteous of all the ages, but most importantly in the company of God Himself. But there's something else we find in the first sixty seconds after we die.

4. COMMENDATION

Luke 16:24 - So he called to him, ‘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.’

Luke 16:25 - “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.

What a great reversal! So Lazarus is comforted as commendation for the way he lived his life on earth. And the rich man is condemned because of the way he lived his life on earth. He loved Money more than He loved God. He never repented and turned to God, and he gets not commendation but condemnation.

Hebrews 9:27 - Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Some judgment is immediate, just like the judgment of the rich man and Lazarus. They each immediately were either condemned or commended. But the Bible teaches that after Christ returns there’s the “judgment seat of Christ” for believers and the “Great White Throne Judgment” for non-believers. We’ll talk more about this later in the series, but again, sixty seconds after we die we will experience either commendation or condemnation as the consequence of the choices we made in this life. But thanks be to God, believers never have to fear condemnation.

Romans 8:1 - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION – Years ago I heard the story of a woman who was diagnosed with a terminal illness. She called her pastor to discuss her funeral plans. They talked about the songs she wanted sung at her funeral and the Scriptures she would like to have read. They discussed a few more details then she said, “Pastor, there’s one more thing. I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand. She knew the pastor was a bit surprised by her request so she explained her request. She said, “You know all through the years of my life I’ve been to all kinds of functions where we ate ... at home, at banquets and parties. And I was always happy when someone came around to collect our plates and they said to keep my fork. When they said that I knew that something more, something better was coming ... dessert. So pastor, when people come by my casket at my funeral and see the fork in my right hand you tell them what it means. Tell them to get ready; the best is yet to come.”