

What Will it Take to Persuade You?

Luke 16:16-31

Series: The Journey to Jerusalem (Luke, Fall 2019)

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Worship: Resurrected Lord

Key Sentence: God has done everything He can to persuade you to turn to Him.

Outline:

I. (Parentheses: Related thoughts) (Luke 16:16-18)

II. A Clear Choice: Heaven or Hell (Luke 16:19-26)

III. Clear Evidence: The Bible and the Resurrection (Luke 16:27-31)

Luke 16:16-31 “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. ¹⁸“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’

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What Will it Take to Persuade You? Luke 16:16-31

“If I could have just lived when Jesus lived, if I could have just seen him, listened to him, watched him perform miracles, if I could have just touched him, like Thomas did, then I could believe, with no qualms at all.” Have you ever said something like that? I have. I think all of us at times want “just one more thing,” one conclusive proof that will set to rest for our doubts and fears.

Throughout the Bible we find people looking for just one more little piece of proof. Think of Gideon, who first put the sheepskin out, and said "let it be wet in the morning and the ground dry." And it was. Then he put it out again. "Let it be dry in the morning and the ground wet." And it was. In the New Testament, we find people often test Jesus, looking for proof he was Messiah. No matter what miracle he did, they always wanted more. A classic example is John 6. Jesus feeds the five thousand. The next day they come to him and say: “Now what miraculous sign will you do, that we may see it and believe?” Even Thomas doubted right up to the point he put his hand in the Lord's side. So the question becomes what does it take to persuade somebody? What evidence will make us believe? That’s the Jesus addresses in today’s main text. It’s the beautiful parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31. Jesus teaches is that God has done everything he can to persuade you to turn to him.

Before we get to the parable, we need to look at three verses Luke places just before the parable. They summarize teaching that Jesus gives more fully elsewhere, teaching Luke mentions but does not elaborate here. Luke 16:16-18 *“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. ¹⁸Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”*

Verse 16 may be a concluding thought to the previous section, addressed to the Pharisees. In verse 14 the Pharisees were offended by Jesus’ teaching that you cannot serve both God and mammon, money, possessions. In verse 15 Jesus said “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” In verse 16 he tells them part of the problem is they are hung up on the law. They refuse to embrace the good news of the kingdom Jesus is inaugurating. “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.”

That last phrase is probably a vivid way of saying everyone is seeking it, presumably except the Pharisees. He then goes on in verse 17 to say that the problem is not with the Law. “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.” This is a summary of teaching he gives in the Sermon on the Mount. “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. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” The Law will not be abolished. Instead Jesus will fulfill it, on our behalf, as it turns out. But he does not fulfill the extensions of the law the scribes and Pharisees had added. Instead, as seen in the Sermon on the Mount, he place the keeping of the law at the heart level, and he’s just said that God knows their hearts about money.

Finally, in verse 18, Luke summarizes Jesus’ teaching about marriage and divorce. “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.” Honestly, I don’t know why this is here, unless it’s either (a) that Jesus gave this kind of teaching during this interlude in Luke’s account, or (b) that the Pharisees were guilty of these kinds of marriage sins. Jesus insists that divorce isn’t a trivial thing. To initiate a divorce and then to remarry is the same as committing adultery. Humanly justified divorces are not legitimate. But the summary misses some details Jesus gives elsewhere. In the Sermon on the Mount he says “everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” That exception is important. Sexual sin is a legitimate grounds for divorce. Much more could be said on this subject, but Luke does not go into detail here. Let me just say that every time the elders of Trinity are asked this question in a specific circumstance we look into it with open Bibles and prayerful hearts to discern how to apply all the teaching.

After these verses we come to the main parable for today, which shows us that God has done everything he can to persuade you to turn to Him. Luke 16:19-31. *“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’*

²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Jesus shows eternal realities by the story of these two men. If God has done all he can to persuade us to repent, then we notice first that one of the ways he uses is to give a clear choice, between heaven and hell. Lazarus represents those who trust in the grace of God, and are taken by God into heaven. On earth he is a poor man. The few words Jesus uses manage to capture the most abject poverty. He lies at the rich man's gate. He doesn't even have strength to get up. He's covered with sores. He longs to eat scraps that fall from the rich man's table but doesn't even get those. He's so miserable he can't even keep the dogs off him. They come and lick his open wounds. So, his earthly lot is miserable. No one looking at him would say that God cared for him at all.

But his name, Lazarus, means "God Helps." Normally we don't put much weight on what a name means in the New Testament but we have to pay a little attention to this one, because it's the only time Jesus ever names an ordinary person in a parable. And God's help is what we see in his life. Verse 22: "The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side." Again, vivid imagery. We've seen several times as we've studied Luke that Jesus portrays the future kingdom as a great feast, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The participants at a feast recline at the table, so the person at your right hand reclines into your chest. Lazarus is taken into heaven, to this great feast, and is given the seat at the right hand of Abraham. Though despised and outcast upon the earth, he is given a place of honor in heaven. That's one side of the choice. Not earthly wealth, not earthly fame, not earthly honor, but heavenly joy for the one God helps. In our small group last week we studied Psalm 23:5 "He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies." I kept insisting that the table, the feast, is a metaphor for all the good things God gives us spiritually. But it's not entirely a metaphor. In that day we will enjoy not only spiritual fulfillment, but physical fulfillment of God's plan as well.

The rich man, on the other hand, represents those who fail to repent, and end up separated from God, in torment, in hell. He was a very rich man. He dressed in purple and fine linen. He had a party every day and enjoyed himself in splendor. But the time came when the rich man also died, and goes to torment in Hell, in Hades or Gehenna. But why was the rich man there? Did the rich man go to hell because he was rich, and the poor man to heaven because he was poor? No, though Jesus did intentionally contrast these things. In that day it would have been expected that the rich man was righteous and would go to heaven, while the poor man was afflicted by God for some sin, and would go to hell. Jesus reverses that. Being rich does not mean being righteous.

Well, did the rich man go to punishment because he did not take care of Lazarus? Yes. And no. I mean, we are punished for our sins, and among the sins of the rich man was his lack of care for poor Lazarus. As we read Scripture we know that indifference and injustice toward the poor and needy neighbor is sin. It This is seen in Deuteronomy 15, which concludes “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’” Proverbs 14:21 “It is a sin to despise one’s neighbor, but blessed is the one who is kind to the needy.” Even Mary’s song in Luke 1 says “he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” The rich man should have cared for Lazarus. But if he’d done it out of duty, or legalism, or anything other than a changed heart, it would not have changed the result.

Why did the rich man go to eternal torment? The clear answer is found in verse 30, The rich man, now talking to Abraham about his brothers says “if someone from the dead goes to them they will repent.” They will repent. That was the key that the rich man lacked. Repent is this strong Greek word, *metanoia*, to change one’s mind, taken from an even stronger Hebrew word, *shuv*, to turn back to God, to return to God, to place oneself under God. The reason the rich man ended up in torment is that he sinned and then refused to turn to God. He refused to acknowledge God as creator and Lord and redeemer from sin. He did not place his faith and trust in God. So the choice is clear: Repent and place faith in God and his messiah, and go to eternal joy, or refuse to repent and remain sinfully self-centered and self-serving, and go to eternal torment.

It's a clear choice. And the contrast between heaven and hell is also clear in these next few verses. Verse 23: “and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.” Hell is a place of torment, though I doubt you can see heaven from there. That image, and the ability to converse with Abraham are included to make the story vivid.

Verse 24 “And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’” Again, the uniform teaching of the New Testament is that the agony of hell, is like the agony of being in a fire. This is a parable, but Jesus uses the same terms and stronger in his plain teaching. Hell may not be a literal fire, but as one commentator said, don't take comfort from that, because if fire is the closest human equivalent, hell is even worse.

Verse 25 “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.’” Jesus elsewhere said of those who pretended to be good in front of men, that they had already received their reward. It may be that the rich unrighteous person remains rich, because that is the reward he has chosen and deserves, never acknowledging what a rotten trade his earthly riches are for a tormented eternity. Verse 26 “’And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’” There is no traffic between heaven and hell. There is a great chasm between them. And it may be, in part, that the chasm itself is the source of the torment. Isaiah says “Your sins have separated you from God,” and it may be that the most painful thing of all for a created being is to be separated from the creator, to have this great chasm between you and God forever. You might compare to the sad, painful situation of having a loved one die while there was conflict between you, angry words that had not been reconciled. You would be tormented forever by the inability to fix that. Though I doubt that in hell even that torment will make you turn to God.

There is heaven, there is hell, and Jesus makes these choices perfectly clear. God does everything he can to persuade you to repent now, and that includes giving you a clear understanding of your choices. Then in the last few verses we are shown that there is clear evidence, clear testimony on which to base our decision. Our choice between heaven and hell is based on the clear evidence of the word of God and the resurrection of Jesus. Listen to verses 27-31 again. ²⁷*He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house, ²⁸for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*

The dialogue between Abraham and the rich man continues. The rich man turns his attention to his brothers who are apparently also living in sinful unrepentance on the earth. What will it take to persuade them to repent? The rich man has the first suggestion. He says “send Lazarus to warn them.” He knows that they need something radical to wake them up. And if Lazarus comes back from death to tell them about their future judgement, he feels like this may get their attention and their repentance. But Abraham gives a stunning answer, which we need to take seriously “They have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them.” In other words they have the Bible as testimony. When Jesus says Moses and the Prophets, he’s referring to the whole Old Testament. They had, and we have, the Scripture. Jesus says this ought to be enough to bring them to repentance. God has done everything he can to persuade you to turn to him: and much of it is expressed in this book. The Bible is the history of his dealing with his people. It's the revelation of his character and nature. It's the truth of his laws, standards and judgements, It's the story of his love, care and concern.

The Bible is superb evidence, of the love of God and his desire to see us turn to him in repentance, and live lives that please him. Scripture itself shows that this is true. Do you remember the story of King Josiah? During his reign in Israel they were cleaning out the temple, and they found in the debris the book of the Law, probably Deuteronomy. And when they took it and read it to the king, he tore his robes and repented. A great revival followed as Israel reinstated the celebration of Passover. The Word of God is evidence to change lives. Consider what Paul says to Timothy. “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Scripture is able to make you wise for salvation through faith. The brothers of the rich man had the Scripture Not the entire Scripture we have, but the entire Old Testament. Jesus says let them listen to this Scripture.

A few years later Peter described the transfiguration of Christ, and said “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” But, he says, now, “we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” We have the Scripture, he says, and “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Listen to that word. It can shine God’s light into your dark hearts. But the rich man knows his own heart - he had Moses and the Prophets, and his heart was hardened to them. He says “no,” meaning no, that won't do it for my brothers, just like it didn't do it for me.

He pins his hope on their response, their repentance if someone comes to them from the dead, if someone is resurrected. But Jesus concludes the parable by saying “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” Can you hear the tone of wistfulness, even sadness in Jesus' voice as he says this? He knows he's going to Jerusalem. He knows he's going to die and be raised to life on the third day. He knows he is going to pay the penalty for sin for any who believes in him. Yet he also knows that some will look at the evidence provided by the resurrection, especially those whose testimony to the Resurrection is the New Testament Scriptures, and not believe. Even when I rise from the dead, some will not believe.

But don't miss this: God has done everything he can to persuade you to turn to him. Moses and the Prophets should have been enough. Yet Jesus chooses to go to Jerusalem to give us not just the evidence of the Word, but to add the sure, clear testimony of his resurrection, one of the most well documented events in human history. For many this has been the crucial knowledge they needed in order to turn their hearts to God. Over and over agnostics and atheists have set out to disprove the resurrection and have instead come to faith. More than any other act of God, it seems, this is the truth, the miracle that dispels doubt.

So, for example, Lew Wallace, a civil war general, investigated the resurrection, came to faith and went on to write *Ben Hur*. Frank Morrison, wrote a classic book called *Who Moved the Stone*. He started his research extremely skeptical convinced a resurrection was impossible. He ended his research in repentance and turning to Jesus as Lord. Simon Greenleaf, perhaps the most eminent scholar of legal evidence of his generation came to faith while writing *The Testimonies of the Four Evangelists*. J Warner Wallace, a Los Angeles homicide detective did the investigation and wrote *Cold Case Christianity*. Lee Strobel, a journalist wrote *The Case for Christ*. In each of these cases, and others that I could cite, the investigation of the evidence for the resurrection led to the conversion of the skeptical author, or strengthened their faith.

We've looked at the strength of this evidence many times over the years. I encourage you, if you have never done so personally, to study that evidence. I've put a one-sheet bibliography on the back table listing these books and others.

Jesus has given us near absolute proof in his death and resurrection, and in the Scriptural record of it. We wouldn't have had this more proof than this even if we had walked with him. He is who he says he is. He does what he says he will do. He rose from the dead for many reasons, but one of them was as proof. In the same way, when he died on that cross, he died for our sins, to rescue us from rebellion against God, from meaningless lives, from hell and torment.

Is this not enough to cause us to rejoice? Is this not enough to cause us to repent? We have the clear choice - heaven that he has won for us, or hell that we deserve. We have the clear evidence. We have the word of God, with its powerful testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What will it take to persuade you? Are you persuaded that Jesus Christ died for your sins? Are you persuaded that he rose from the dead to give you new life? If you are persuaded, then you need to turn to him, to repent, to trust in him and give him your life. Have you done that yet? Will you not do it now?

All who've been persuaded of this need to worship him. One of the most thrilling and terrifying passages in all Scripture is Matthew 28:16-17. It says that after the resurrection: "the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him they worshiped him: but some doubted." They worshiped him - but some doubted." Isn't that incredible? The risen Lord, in the flesh, standing before them, and yet some doubted. They will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.

But if we are convinced, then we get to come to him this morning and do what the convinced ones did: they worshiped him. This Jesus who shows himself in the resurrection, this Jesus who is revealed by the Bible, is the same Jesus who died to save us from hell and bring us to heaven. And as we think about his death and resurrection during our time of communion this morning, we ought to be like those who saw the resurrected Lord, believed, and worshiped.