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Luke 16

“Choosing Sides”

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Have you ever wondered what happened to righteous people of the Old Testament when they died? Where did their spirits go, if Heaven wasn't opened until after Jesus died on the cross? Where is Hell located, and is it really a place of unending suffering? Where did Jesus' spirit go for the three days he was dead? The answers to all of these questions are found in the account Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus.¹

Unlike the last few studies, which dealt with parables Jesus told, this story is about two very real people. Jesus is God, and as such he has insight into an actual story with actual people, which is why he speaks so matter-of-factly about two people who died and are spending eternity in two extremely different places: Abraham's Side ([Luke 16:22](#)) and Torment ([Luke 16:23, 28](#)).

The rich man in Torment was in such agony that he begged Abraham (Yes, *that* Abraham!) to send a warning to his five brothers so they would never personally know the eternal punishment he was experiencing. Abraham answered the rich man by saying that his five brothers had the Scriptures, meaning that they already had the Word of God, and that's all they need to recognize God's warning of judgment for unbelievers. The rich man said, "No, what they really need is for Lazarus to rise from the dead and go back to warn them, then they'd believe." His thought process included the idea that a man coming back from the dead would be pretty convincing! Abraham replied, "*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*" ([Luke 16:31](#))

In addition to the answers to these abovementioned questions, Jesus makes other important points in this story, which will be the focus of this study. First, it's the power of Scripture more than any other spectacular spiritual manifestation or spectacular experience that convicts and converts the human heart. Second, there is an eternal destiny every person will face for the decisions they make in this lifetime.

¹ This is not the same Lazarus who was a friend of Jesus, whom Jesus raised from the dead.

Where Did The Spirits of Old Testament People Go?

1. The spirits of the righteous and the unrighteous went to the same place, which was divided by a great chasm.
2. The righteous went to Abrahams Side, and the unrighteous went to Torment.
3. Because the entire place is called Hell,² even though it's divided into two parts, there is a common misunderstanding regarding the reality that there was eternal suffering and comfort there.
4. Even though the righteous went to Hell, so to speak, they were escorted to a place of comfort by angels! ([Luke 16:22, 25](#))
5. The righteous people were those who had obeyed God and followed the sacrificial system of the Old Testament.
6. The rich man did not go to a place of torment simply because he was rich; he went there because he rejected God.
7. This is the same place Jesus referred to when he told the thief on the cross *“today you will be with me in Paradise.”* ([Luke 23:43](#))
8. It is technically correct to say that when Jesus died he went to Hell, since Hades was the name for the entire place, however, Jesus went to the Paradise (Abraham's bosom – KJV) side.

Why Did Jesus Go To Paradise?

9. Jesus went to Paradise because all of the righteous people who had died under the Old Testament system still needed a Savior to get to Heaven.
10. These righteous people were only temporarily made righteous, and they couldn't get to heaven, because the Savior had not come into the world yet.
11. Paradise was not heaven; it was a temporary place for the righteous until Jesus could proclaim his finished work to them!
12. [First Peter 3:18–20](#) says, *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”*

² Jesus used the word Hell in [Luke 16:23](#). The Greek word is *Hades* and the Hebrew word is *Sheol*.

13. It is critical to a proper understanding of this text to know that the Greek word *kerusso* (NIV – preached) means to announce, not evangelize, and the word Greek word (NIV – prison) means a guarded or isolated place, not a jail or penitentiary.
14. Jesus announced to both sides that He is the Savior, the one the righteous had been looking to by faith; and the unrighteous had rejected to their peril.
15. **Ephesians 4:7–9** says, *‘But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)’*
16. Paradise is empty today, because the person who believes in Jesus as Lord and Savior goes directly to Heaven to be in the presence of the Lord. (**Philippians 1:20-24** and **2 Corinthians 2:5-8**)

Where Is Hell Located?

17. **Matthew 12:40** says, *“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”*
18. David wrote in **Psalms 139:7–8**, *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths [Sheol], you are there.”*
19. Today, Torment, a place of outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, is still occupied and is a place that every person who has rejected the gift of salvation goes.
20. **Mark 9:48** tells us that it is a place of perpetual fire that torments but does not consume, a place of inescapable agony.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Luke 16:19–31** to provide an overview of today’s study.
3. Review the outlines above re: Old Testament believers, Jesus going to Hell, etc.
 - a. Prior to this teaching, did you have a clear understanding of what happened to Old Testament believers when they died?
 - b. Do you think the Bible makes it clear that Hell is in the center of the earth?
 - c. Do you think some people would consider this to be bad science?

4. Read and discuss The Apostles' Creed, paying specific attention to the reference to Jesus descending into hell.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;

He descended into hell.

The third day He arose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

Amen.

5. Why do you think people are sold on the idea that a “spectacular spiritual manifestation or experience” has more power to impact people than the Bible?
- Do you think it's true that many churches have bought into this thinking today?
 - Are there churches you're familiar with that invest very little time in teaching/preaching the Bible?
 - What sort of life-change takes place in worship services where the Bible is not the main focus?
 - Do you think the Bible convicts and converts the human heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit?
 - Allow the people in your group to share their experiences regarding the impact and power of the Word of God in their lives.
6. Spend time talking about the reference Pastor Gary made regarding a popular question skeptics ask: “How can a loving God allow people to suffer in Hell?”
- Discuss Pastor Gary's personal experience with a man who concerned himself with a similar question: “How could a loving God allow people to die in the flood?” Pastor Gary's response was to suggest that this man asked the wrong question.
 - Read [2 Peter 2:4–6](#), which indicates that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, which means that he, for what some calculate to be about 100 years, pleaded with people to get on the Ark and be saved, only to be mocked by all those who refused to believe.
 - The real question is: “Why would God be so gracious to provide an Ark for ungodly people and why would those people stubbornly reject God's gift of grace?”
 - It's more than a rhetorical question to ask, “Why would anyone reject God's love and grace, demonstrated in the finished work of Jesus, and choose Hell instead?”
7. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: thank God for the power of the Scriptures to convict and convert the lost, helping them to realize that there is an eternal destiny for everyone, which will be based on decisions made in this life; rejoice over the fact that even in death, they will not be alone, because angels will carry them into the presence of the Lord; pray for the unsaved and ask the Lord to use them in the process of evangelism.