

INTRODUCTION

I enjoy teaching. When I was still in school some twenty years ago I taught a lab class several times. I loved the interaction with students to learn together. It was rewarding to see students' eyes illuminated to show body language of "Ah ha! I got it!" One fun thing in teaching is to give out exam. It is final time and I know many of the students among us would disagree with that. The school gave us teaching assistants much freedom in grading scores. I remember one year in the fall I gave my students a quiz in the format of matching. The answers from "A" all the way down were all there on one side of the exam paper. All they had to do was to match those answers with the right questions. The holiday season was near and so I gave them a freebie. After all the answers were filled out, the letters in the answers put together would read "Happy Thanksgiving." Even if a student did not study for the test, he could still manage to get 100 if he was observant enough. Therefore, one by one I could see some students beaming smile on their faces, while others scratched their heads till they turned in their papers. In every exam there are students who choose to spend time on their preparation and thus get good grades. But there are also people who do not prepare and end up failing. Luke 16:19-31 is a parable that describes the latter group of people. If a student fails a test there may be ways to make up for it. However, it is not the case in spiritual matter. In the parable Jesus told us that the decision we make in this life will lead to an eternal outcome. The context tells us that the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders at that time, were among Jesus' audiences. Jesus used the parable to convict the Pharisees because they loved money and they enjoyed their prestige. Even though they had a lot of knowledge about God they had no love for God. Compare to the Pharisees what do you embrace as something with everlasting value? You will be blessed by God if your value aligns with His.

EXPLANATION

1. 不能逃避的結果 Unavoidable Consequence

The first lesson we can learn from this parable is that we have the same and unavoidable consequence ahead of us. Every human being will eventually face death. In the parable there is a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. **Verse 22** tells us: The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. Rich or poor, sooner or later we all have to deal with the unavoidable consequence of death. We will examine in detail later about why the two persons ended up in different places. But for now let us understand from the Bible why there is death. God's Word tells us that death is a result of our sin. **Romans 5:12** reads: Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. Many of you should know that the "one man" refers to Adam. He disobeyed God and ate a fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As a result, death entered the world as a curse. Since we are all descendants of Adam one day we will all die. No one can predict how long he can live. The author of **Ecclesiastes**, Solomon, told us in **3:1-2** of his book that: 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and

a time to uproot. But who is the mastermind that controls the timing for everything? Continue to read **verse 11**: He (referring to God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. It is our sovereign God who causes things to take place to accomplish His plan. It is God who numbers our days. Since we will all face the unavoidable consequence of death we have to make wise planning. Jesus told another parable in **Luke 12** about an imprudent landlord. He had a great harvest, but he did not have enough space to store his grains. He decided to demolish his barns and build bigger ones. His heart was filled with joy as he looked forward to the many years to enjoy his wealth. God commented on the spiritual condition of this landlord in **verses 20-21**: 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ 21 “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” The world may think that he was a smart guy for hoarding treasure. However, he was a fool in God’s sight because he planned nothing for his soul. This world tells us to focus on the here and now. It is not unusual for entrepreneurs to put making money on a higher priority over family relationship and their own health. In October of this year, founder and CEO of an app called Chunyu Doctor, Rui Zhang, died of heart attack at an age of 44. Mr. Zhang required his employees to follow a so-called “996 working schedule” – 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 6 days a week. In June, the company successfully raised over 1 billion Chinese Yuan. What happened after the sudden death of Zhang? The co-founder of the company took over, and the business went on. Later a person who is familiar with the situation wrote in her Weibo blog: “This is a group of people who are surrounded by envious looks from outsiders, who appear at forums and under the spotlight bearing the fine title of entrepreneurs, but do not have a moment of peace in their hearts.” Zhang is a snapshot of people who only plan for this life. Dear friends: do you have peace in your heart? More importantly, do you have peace with God? I am not a pessimist but a realist. Can you be so sure that you will have many tomorrows ahead of you? God is our Creator. You can only find peace when you have an eternal relationship with Him.

2. 無可推卸的責任 Undeniable Cause

This parable tells us that we all have to face the unavoidable consequence of death. In the story, after the death of the rich man and Lazarus they ended up in different places. The rich man was condemned by God due to an undeniable cause. **Verse 23** tells us where the rich man was: In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. The rich man was in hell, while Lazarus was by the side of Abraham. The word “side” means “bosom,” as the Chinese Union Version renders it. Remember the target audiences of this parable were the Jews. In their traditional belief after a righteous person dies he will end up in heaven to be with Abraham, their forefather. While Lazarus was resting in Abraham’s embrace the rich man was sent to hell. The transliteration of the word “hell” from its Greek form is “Hades.” In extra-Biblical literature of Jesus’ time people described Hades as the place where all the people who passed away would go, waiting for the final judgment from God to determine if they would go to heaven or the eternal hell. However, in the Bible Hades always refers to the destiny for people who do not know God. Since we are studying a parable we should not dig out details in the story to formulate our theology about hell. But we can clearly see that Jesus was using this parable to contrast the two opposing outcomes after death, blessing versus torment.

Now let us explore the question about why the two men had different destinies. Was the rich man being thrown into hell because he was rich, and Lazarus being led to heaven because he was poor all his life? I said at the beginning that Jesus told this parable to warn the Pharisees against their love of money. This rich man ended up in hell because he loved his money and pleasure but did not love God. We see a hint from verse 30 when the rich man asked Abraham to bring Lazarus back to life and send him to his five brothers to urge them to repent, lest they might receive the torment of hell like him. The rich man was in hell because he did not repent of his sins. A Jew does not go to heaven because of his lineage as Abraham's descendant, but because of his relationship with God. John the Baptist warned the Jews who came to him in [Luke 3:8-9](#) that: 8 "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." An eternal relationship with God should be reflected in good work. The parable tells us that Lazarus was a frequent visitor at the rich man's home. This wealthy guy had many opportunities, not to mention abundant resource, to show mercy to Lazarus. But he was unmoved by Lazarus' dire condition. Let us be clear that there is nothing wrong with money. After all, Abraham himself was a very wealthy man in his time. The problem is not having wealth but the using of it. [James 1:27](#) puts it this way: Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. The central theme of the book of James is to put one's faith of God into daily practice. Therefore, the rich man was condemned because he failed in this undeniable cause to show compassion to his Jewish neighbor. In [Matthew 25](#) Jesus told another parable where He depicted Himself as a righteous King to declare judgment to the wicked. He said in verses [41-43](#): 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'" The righteous judge could not see any sign of compassion in the people he condemned. Indeed we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. However, the Bible tells us that we will be judged by our deeds. Our behaviors will verify if we have an eternal relationship with the Lord. The difference is not whether you get a 50 or 80 on helping people. But the difference is between zero and one. If you say you have the Lord in your heart then naturally you will show Christ-like love to others.

3. 有待決定的選擇 Undecided Choice

The decision we make in this life will lead to an eternal outcome. Because of sin we will all face an unavoidable consequence of death. God will judge the sinners by an undeniable cause. The third thing we can learn from this parable is that while we are still in this life we face an undecided choice. In other words, from our human perspective we can choose whether or not to accept Christ. The rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to life to testify for him because of the reason he said in [verse 28](#): for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment. Naturally, he did not want his family members to end up in a place of suffering. What followed was a back and forth discussion about his request. In Abraham's reply he explained that it would not need such a dramatic miracle to convince people. Let us look at [verse 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.” What are “Moses and the Prophets?” Those are the five books of the Law and the prophetic books in the Old Testament. In essence, Abraham was saying that the Bible itself can testify about Jesus. There was no need to bring a person back to life. Actually, in John 11 Jesus caused a person to rise from the dead, who happened to have the same name Lazarus. Granted, it was a common name at that time, and there is no direct evidence to prove that he was the same Lazarus in this parable. The passage tells us that many people believed in Jesus because of that great miracle. How did the religious leaders react? Did they believe in Jesus too because they witnessed a resurrection? No! **John 11:53** tells us: So from that day on they plotted to take his (referring to Jesus) life. Also **John 12:10-11** read: 10 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him. The religious leaders felt their fame was threatened because many people turned to follow Jesus, so much so that they wanted to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.

Going back to the parable. This rich man could not change his eternal destiny after death. A person has to repent and put his trust in Jesus while he is still alive. The author of the book of **Hebrews** said in **3:12-13** this way: 12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. The author used the example of the Israelites’ rebellion in the wilderness to encourage his fellow Jewish brothers that they had to stand firm in their faith for Christ. The Israelites clearly saw the wonderful work of God. He led them out of Egypt, protected, fed and guided them in the wilderness wandering. God also spoke to them through Moses. Despite all those evidences of God’s presence and faithfulness they still chose to disobey God. Therefore, they perished in the wilderness and could not enter the Promised Land. God uses the Israelites as an example to illustrate that sinners will go to hell because they rebel against God. God plea to the Israelites in **Ezekiel 33:11** this way: “Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’” The same message is for our gospel friends – turn back while you still have the opportunity. God is patiently waiting for you to turn back. When you depart from this world, or when Jesus comes back, whichever happens first it will be too late. While you still have “today” you can make a choice. Many people question why a God of love would be so cruel to throw people into hell. The truth is, if a person does not love God in this life it would be an eternal torture to force him to love God in eternity. The whole Bible testifies about our Lord. Jesus died for your sins on the cross. If you receive Him as your Savior and Lord by faith, you will be saved. But salvation is not just about escaping the eternal punishment of hell. It is about living for Jesus and glorifying Him through what we do in this life. If we love Him in this life we would be eager to love Him more in eternity.

CONCLUSION

The decision we make in this life will lead to an eternal outcome. According to the Bible hell is real, just like heaven is real. When we leave this world we will end up in one of those two places. If there is a third possibility God would have told us so. No one likes to think about hell. But since it is in the Bible we have to face the truth. The good news among the bad news is that Jesus Christ has prepared the only way of salvation for you. Come to Him and put your trust in Him!