

Luke 16B

- Last week we studied the remarkable parable of the unrighteous manager
 - We saw Jesus lecturing the disciples on the true purpose of money and on the way to store up treasure in heaven
 - And then following the teaching, the Pharisees began their usual carping
 - Which prompted Jesus to respond that they were men who justify themselves in the sight of men
 - They made themselves look holy and righteous in how they behaved
 - Yet their true heart was known by God, and He knows they were merely hypocrites
 - They had no true righteousness because they had never confessed their sins and repented
 - And so this chapter continues the pattern we've seen for several chapters now
 - Luke alternates between showing Jesus teaching the disciples how to see the world truly
 - And then contending with the false pretense of the Pharisees and other leaders in Israel
- And so that's where we go next in Chapter 16
 - Jesus transitions smoothly from his topic of money well spent to another illustration to expose the Pharisees true nature to the group

[Luke 16:15](#) And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.

[Luke 16:16](#) ¶ "The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

[Luke 16:17](#) "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

[Luke 16:18](#) ¶ “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.

- I re-read the final verse from last week to help give us some context
 - Jesus is explaining why these evil men are pursuing Him and denying Him and leading so many astray
 - He says they seek to be esteemed with men rather than God by glorifying what men glorify
 - Jesus is using their earlier scoffing at his comments about money as the basis for His accusations here
 - They love money, they love the esteem of men
 - God sees desiring money for the sake of accumulating wealth as detestable
 - And God views any attempt to win the praises of men as detestable
- But then Jesus offers these interesting observation about the Word of God
 - The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John, Jesus says
 - It should be clear to all of us that Jesus is referring to the Law – the Books of Moses – and the books of the Prophets
 - And logically, we could also include the third part of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, which includes the Psalms, Proverbs, Songs of Solomon, prophetic books, historical books, etc.
 - These words of God were proclaimed until John
 - John refers to John the Baptist, whose ministry preceded and announced Jesus own ministry
 - In fact, John the Baptist was the last OT prophet
 - What does Jesus mean that the OT was proclaimed until John?
 - He’s referring to the consummate purpose of those proclamations
 - In other words, Jesus is referring to the very purpose God had in giving men those writings

- He delivered His word through Moses and the prophets so that men might know and understand that God would establish His kingdom on earth
- And more specifically, God's kingdom would come through and by a Messiah, a Savior, a King who would rule the world
- And these books of God's word told the Jewish nation that they would have opportunity to enter into that kingdom
 - Provided they accepted the one Who God would send to inaugurate that kingdom
 - As long as they accepted their Messiah
- And until John's day, the only voice God offered His people to help them recognize the Messiah was His Word
 - But it was more than enough
 - The entire Bible is a testimony to Jesus Christ
 - And to His ministry on earth
 - And to His coming reign on earth
 - Every page of the Bible teaches of Christ
 - Open a page and I can find Jesus on that page
 - He is represented in a variety ways
 - Sometimes he's present on the page as the Angel of the Lord
 - Sometimes he's pictured by the events of a historical individuals like Isaac or Joseph or David
 - Sometimes he represented in the pattern of God's ordinances as is the case in the design and furnishing of the temple
 - Sometimes He's represented in God's commandments as He is in the Sabbath Day or the festivals

- Often He's depicted prophetically in the writings of the prophets or the Psalms
- Sometimes Jesus is represented by the actions of individuals or through historical events, as when Boaz redeems Ruth, or when David invites Mephibosheth to his dining table
- And on and on...
- The entire Bible is a testimony in details great and small to Jesus and Him Crucified and Him Risen and Him ruling
 - And this went on until John's day, Jesus says
 - Because once John came and proclaimed the arrival of the Messiah, the message suddenly changed
 - Rather than tell the nation that God would send a deliverer
 - Rather than saying that the Messiah was a promised future event
 - Now John declared the present reality of that promise
 - The messiah was here
 - And even John's ministry was foretold by those same Prophets, so that there could be no doubt that when it happened, everyone would know it and recognize it
 - So long as they were looking for the kingdom that God was promising – the one foretold in scripture
 - What's more, the Jesus Himself has been proclaiming the kingdom of God Himself
 - And He's been proclaiming it with power and wisdom
 - With miracles and compassion
 - He has met every qualification and his credentials are undeniable
 - He is the perfect fulfillment of all that had been written before concerning Him

- Those who had heeded the earlier messages through the Law and Prophets couldn't help but know that Jesus was the one promised
- But then Jesus says something interesting
 - He says that everyone is forcing his way into it
 - Matthew has a similar verse in Chapter 11 that reads this way

[Matt. 11:12](#) "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

[Matt. 11:13](#) "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

- Both Matt and Luke describe a similar situation
 - The kingdom of God is a specific kingdom
 - It has a specific form, and it is offered under specific circumstances to certain people on a certain basis
 - And all those specifics are decided by God Himself
 - It's His kingdom
 - He determines who He invites and who He accepts into it
- And He determined the kingdoms and nature according to His sovereign will
 - And He revealed this will concerning the kingdom through His word and through His son
 - And He issued His invitation through His word, as Jesus said
- But nevertheless, violent men are trying to take it by force
 - Or as Luke words it, men are forcing their way into it
 - Who are these violent men?
 - The Pharisees of course
- The Pharisees wanted to make their own rules for how to approach God and enter His kingdom

- They wanted to come on their own terms
- Like the older son in the prodigal son parable, they demand that the Father award them what they deserve on the basis of their hard work and diligence
 - But they forget that the Father has the sole prerogative to offer His grace and mercy to whom He wishes and on the basis He wishes
 - And Jesus is teaching at this moment the fact that even as He preaches the true kingdom, these violent men are determined to define their own path to God
 - To force their way into the kingdom if it were even possible
 - And they eventually prove His words true, as their violent nature drives them to put Jesus to death at the hands of the Romans
- But then Jesus makes the obvious and yet profound statement putting to rest the issue of who will enter the kingdom
 - Jesus says that it's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of the Law to fail
 - In fact, in Luke 21:33 Jesus says that Heaven and Earth WILL pass away, but Jesus Words – God's words – will never pass away
 - Given How Jesus began this section
 - Talking about the Law and prophets in verse 16
 - And then considering his comment from chapter 21
 - I believe it's fair to say that He's not talking strictly about the Law
 - But rather He's referring to all of God's word, the Law and everything else God has recorded in His Word
 - None of it will fail or be ignored or forgotten

- Thought the Pharisees would like to ignore it and find their own satisfaction, they can't succeed
 - God's word will stand
 - And more to the point, His word regarding the Kingdom and how men may enter it will stand
 - And no one may force themselves into the kingdom on the basis of anything other than an understanding of God's word
 - Not in Pharisee's day
 - Nor in our Day
 - Paul says that Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, in Rom 10:17
 - It is the one divinely appointed way that God will reveal Himself and call men to Himself and welcome them into the kingdom
- And just to prove His point concerning the unchanging and uncompromising quality of God's word, Jesus reminds his audience of the hard truth taken from God's word
 - He cites one simple example on divorce
 - But it was a point on which the Pharisees were particularly vulnerable
 - Jesus states the Biblical truth concerning divorce
 - That is to divorce and remarry is adultery
 - And to marry someone who has been divorced is also adultery
 - The principle here is that marriage is defined by God as one man and woman becoming one flesh
 - To join ourselves to another in a sexual union under virtually any circumstances is a adultery
 - Paul emphasizes this idea at several different points in his letters
 - Now I said virtually any circumstances because Jesus Himself makes an exception for one situation

- Twice in Matt Jesus adds a disclaimer that if the partner commits adultery while in the marriage, then the other partner is free to remarry
- The idea here is that the first partner's act of adultery has already destroyed the marriage covenant leaving the second partner free to remarry if desired
 - Jesus doesn't mention the exception here in order to keep His point before the Pharisees pure and uncomplicated
 - God's law is inviolate and will not change, not even for the whims and desires of men
 - Men like these Pharisees who loved to change God's rules in order to suit their own desires
- In Jesus day the Pharisees had become a law unto themselves
 - And this was never more evident than in the area of divorce
 - The Pharisee had created rules and procedures around divorce
 - And it had become very political
 - They claimed to never allow it because God forbade it
 - But they often granted it
 - Usually would occasionally grant a divorce to a man but they almost never granted it to a woman who requested it
 - And the man who was powerful or wealthy would be far more likely to be granted a divorce from the Pharisees
 - While the common man stood virtually no chance
 - In this way, the Pharisees could both profit from the way they dispensed their largess upon those who could repay them
 - And at the same time they could appear strict and uncompromising to the public when people of no consequence requested divorce

- And amidst this kind of abuse and hypocrisy, Jesus says plainly that everyone who divorces commits adultery
 - Not just some, but all
 - And He wants to make the larger point, that God’s word is not subject to men’s manipulations or whims or evil desires
 - What is true in God’s word will remain true forever no matter how much we may wish it were otherwise and no matter how much we might try to change it to suit our desires
- And then Jesus moves directly into a fascinating story – some say parable – further illustrating His point

[Luke 16:19](#) ¶ “Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.

[Luke 16:20](#) “And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, [Luke 16:21](#) and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

- This story begins very much in the style of a parable
 - It begins with the Greek article *de*
 - Suggesting that this story is connected to the previous topic or thought
 - And it features a classic parable figure
 - A rich man living the quintessential privileged life
 - But the story quickly takes an unexpected turn
 - The next character is named with a first name
 - The name of the man is Lazarus, which is the Greek form of Eliezer, which means God is Help
 - If this is a parable, this would be the only one where Jesus names one of the characters
 - This fact raises the possibility that this story isn’t to be seen strictly as a parable

- While it may also be true that the events of this story are fictionalized and therefore it's not strictly speaking a literally historical event
- It's also likely that this isn't a completely imagined scenario either
 - In other words, what we see happening here is a fictional account but it is representative of what actually happens in death
 - That the events of this story are more than mere fable intended to teach a spiritual truth
 - They are also a reasonably accurate portrayal of how God holds the dead for their day of judgment
- So looking at the details, we see the rich man living the life of luxury
 - The details of the parable make clear his wealth is very great
 - He dresses "habitually" in purple and fine linen
 - Purple dye was very expensive
 - Enough to make purple robes required tremendous wealth
 - Wearing them habitually, was absurd wealth
 - While Lazarus is suffering and hungry
 - His suffering accentuated by the dogs licking his sores
- Then the story continues...

[Luke 16:22](#) "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

[Luke 16:23](#) "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

[Luke 16:24](#) "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

[Luke 16:25](#) "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'

[Luke 16:26](#) 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.'

- Both men die, though one is carried by angels and the other is just buried
 - So immediately the distinctions between the two begin to reverse
 - With the rich man now unfavored and the poor man favored
 - Then we find them in Hades
 - Hades is the name the Bible gives to the place where God holds all the souls of the departed unbelievers who await resurrection and judgment before the Great White Throne
 - Hades is part of a larger place the OT calls Sheol
 - Sheol is the place all souls went during the time before Christ's resurrection – both believer and unbeliever
 - For example, Jacob himself declares that he expects to go to Sheol in Gen 37:35
 - The reason men went to Sheol in the days before Christ was due to the need for Christ to be resurrected first
 - This required two places
 - Hades
 - Abraham's Bosom (comfort)
- So, in this story, Jesus uses real places and uses them in a consistent manner
 - So it lends support to the idea that this is more than a parable
 - Now why would the rich man be in torment and poor man not?
 - Is being rich automatically bad?
 - Is being poor automatically righteous before God?
 - Well, the lives of these two men, particularly the rich man, suggest the reason

- The rich man showed no compassion for the poor man, though he obviously knew his name
- He recognized him
- But he did nothing to aid his circumstances, though it would have taken very little to make a big difference
 - This callousness and absence of love reveals a hard, selfish heart
 - And this heart is the man's problem
 - He is an unrepentant sinner due judgment
- From the circumstances of the story we could only conclude as well that the poor man was a man of faith
 - Suggesting among other things that God perfectly willing to leave a faithful follower in destitute circumstances should it be suitable to His eternal purpose
 - We need to be careful anytime we make conclusions about what God's is prepared to do to support our lifestyles
 - Likewise, we need to remember James' teaching that

[James 2:15](#) If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, [James 2:16](#) and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? [James 2:17](#) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

- There are other interesting details here to consider
 - They can see one another
 - The unbeliever is in constant torment
 - We need to keep this fact at least in the back of our minds
 - When we have opportunity to witness the gospel, let your mind consider the penalty due to someone who refuses to believe
 - Let that be your motivation for why you push through shame, conflict and rejection

- That's the true measure of love
 - How much worse was the torment for those who now see what they could have had by faith!
 - Then the dialog begins
 - And among other things we learn that no one can cross
 - It's interesting, because it suggests that even if someone were so motivated as to want to help, they can't
 - The chasm suggests that such a desire might exist
- But then we get to the point of the story

[Luke 16:27](#) "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—

[Luke 16:28](#) for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

[Luke 16:29](#) "But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

[Luke 16:30](#) "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'

[Luke 16:31](#) "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

- Then the rich man has another idea
 - If he can't save himself, perhaps he can be of help to those he left behind
 - He says, please send Lazarus back to warn my family
 - Why Lazarus?
 - Presumably they knew him
 - They would recognize him
 - Yet they knew he died
 - And knowing that he died and was walking around again, they would immediately recognize supernatural power at work
 - And then whatever Lazarus said, they would heed

- It seems sensible
- Abraham responds that these brothers already have the Law and Prophets
 - Here we go again talking about God's gracious provision of His word
 - These brothers were Jewish, obviously
 - Because they had the Word given to their fathers
 - They had the most complete record possible to explain God's character, nature, and expectations
 - They had a complete record to warn them of judgment, to exhort them to Godly living through faithful obedience
 - They could know God's expectations and the results for failing to heed His word
 - They need only consult the Book
 - But this man knows His family all too well
 - After all, they are probably just like him
 - They know where the word of God is
 - On a shelf gathering dust somewhere
 - They hear it on the Sabbath
 - They probably memorized it as youth like everyone else did
 - There's nothing very exciting there, nothing to get their attention
 - Certainly nothing as revolutionary as a man walking around having come back to life
 - That's something to get their attention
- O the rich man says no Father Abraham, send Lazarus back from the dead
 - That will convince them
 - Why?

- Because it's spectacular
- Because it's convincing
- Because it doesn't depend on faith

[Rom. 8:24](#) For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who **hopes** for what he *already* sees?

- In other words, to convince someone through spectacular events, through displays of power and other manifestations is not faith
 - It may accompany faith, but if it's necessary in order to prompt agreement, it's not faith
 - It's simply self-evident
 - And God's word says faith is required for entry into the kingdom
- So Abraham responds
 - If they aren't going to accept the kingdom on the basis of faith in God's word, then they will never accept it
 - And they won't accept it even if they see someone who has risen from the dead
 - There are really two messages here
- First, the simple truth is that you stir faith in the heart of a man through proof
 - Whether human proof or even supernatural miracles
 - The human heart is so depraved and closed to the truth that it will not be open to the truth unless and until God Himself opens the heart to hear the word
 - Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2)
 - God brings men the gift of faith (Eph 2:8)
 - No one may come to Christ unless the Father would first draw them
 - This rich man's family would either be convinced on the basis of God's word, having been quickened to its truth by the work, of the Holy Spirit

- Or they will remain dead to the message
- But there's a second message here
 - The Pharisee themselves, who are the audience for this story, are in view here
 - They have had the law and the prophets their whole lives
 - And they study it and preach it
 - Though they don't live it
 - And they are forcing themselves into the kingdom on their own basis
 - Hoping that they can enter on their own terms
- To this point, they have witnessed supernatural act after supernatural act performed by Jesus
 - And yet none of it has changed their minds
- And one day they will be witnesses to a resurrected man, to Christ Himself risen
 - But even that won't change their minds, incredible as it seems
 - Only God's word has that Power
 - Because God Himself has declared that His Son is His word, and He has determined that His word is the one means by which men will be saved