
TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Depending on what you believe about hell, this text could leave you feeling very uncomfortable.

- There are those who believe there is heaven, but not hell.
- There are those who believe that everyone is going to heaven.
 - Yet, here, JESUS is telling us a parable where one person goes to heaven—to be with Abraham—and another goes to hell.

Some may try to dismiss this as “just another story,” but JESUS isn’t telling us something we don’t hear elsewhere in scripture.

- And the danger comes in not taking HIS words as reality because we may find ourselves in the same situation as the rich man.

Frankly, I’d rather not have to look at parables like this one.

- I’d rather not have to think too much about where I’ll spend eternity.
- I’d prefer not to have to wrestle with what might happen to loved ones who don’t believe in the LORD.
 - And I really don’t want to ask myself the questions, “Am I more like the rich man or the poor man?”
 - Because when I too often find myself in the shoes of the rich man, I don’t want to have to face the question, “Is anything I do now too little, too late?”

We know ultimately that it is faith that will determine our eternal outcome.

- It is faith alone that matters.
- Still, this passage also calls us to think about our circumstances and hopefully the circumstances of others we know.

Recognizing the seriousness of our situations can certainly lead to a change of heart.

Consider the rich man.

- He’s sometimes called Dives (dye-vees) from the Latin for “rich man.”
- He’s living the good life: the finest clothes, beautiful surroundings, the best food.
 - But each day he has to step over a beggar called Lazarus.
- While Dives has wealthy friends and family, Lazarus has the stray dogs, who lick his sores.
 - Actually, that’s first century health care because it was believed that this would help to heal wounds.
- Yet Dives doesn’t even look at Lazarus and his miserable life.
 - But am I like Dives when I pass the unhoused person on the corner asking for money and look the other way?
 - Am I like Dives? I hope not.

It’s hard to like the rich man at all.

- And this dislike grows after both he and Lazarus die.

Even in death, Dives expects to be served, and who better than Lazarus?

- Cool water—who is more appropriate to bring it but a beggar?

But it is at this point that Dives finds out the reality of the situation.

- There is no crossing over from heaven to hell, or from hell to heaven.

So, it is now that Dives has a change of heart.

- For the first time, he is concerned about someone besides himself.
 - “What about my brothers?”

Finally, we may feel some compassion for him.

- He sees his brothers facing the same fate.
 - Now he is concerned about their salvation.
 - Now he feels a sense of obligation and urgency.
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How do we feel about those we know who don't know the LORD?

Chim Mandala was the chaplain for Lutheran Maritime Ministry in the port of Long Beach.

- Every time a ship would come in, Chim would rush to get on board.
- He felt an urgency to share the gospel with the seafarers because it might be the only chance for them to hear it—
 - to be saved and avoid an eternity apart from GOD in heaven.

Perhaps we don't feel such urgency because we always expect that there will be another day.

- Chim knew he may never see them again.
 - We, though, feel confident that we will see our friends and loved ones again—that there is still time.
 - But we could be wrong.
 - Today could be their last.
 - Today could be our last.
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My late wife's brother-in-law, Rob, doesn't believe in GOD.

- More than that, he doesn't want to talk about religion.
 - The family would always remind me not to talk about religion when Rob was there or he would leave.

But I still try to reach him.

- When he is going through a struggle with work, I email him and say, "I'm praying for you." One Thanksgiving, Rob took me aside and asked me about the movie, The DaVinci Code, and what it said about JESUS and whether JESUS had descendants.
 - It was an open door and we talked.

I still send him emails or messages on Facebook.

- We talk about cooking, which he loves to do, because it's another bridge into his life.
 - And always I'm thinking, will there be enough time, or will my efforts be too little, too late?

When and how will I be able to share with Rob the love of JESUS?

- When and how can we share with those we love the promise of eternity with GOD?
 - When and how can we share with others the source of hope and the joy of the promise of heaven's true treasure?
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Dives thought he was wealthy.

- Too late he discovered true wealth—the joy of being with those we love in heaven—the hope of being in the presence of GOD.
- The greatest treasure we have is our relationships:
 - relationships with those we love;
 - relationships with friends and co-workers;
 - relationship with GOD.

JESUS spent much of HIS time teach those of HIS day that wealth was not an indication of GOD'S love.

- Generally, people believed that you didn't have wealth and health unless GOD loved you.
 - Joel Osteen and others will tell you the same thing today.

But scripture tells us something different.

- Ultimately, it is faith alone that matters.
- Ultimately, it is faith alone that saves.

The rich man went to hell, not because he was rich, but because of what he did not do.

- Dives did not put his relationship with GOD ahead of his wealth,
 - and, therefore, he did not put his relationship with Lazarus, another of GOD's children ahead of his wealth.

Lazarus did not go to heaven because of anything he did.

- The testimony of scripture tells us that Lazarus went to heaven because of his relationship with GOD, because of his faith
 - And that truly made Lazarus the wealthy one.

True wealth comes in time spent with others, in relationships established and maintained.

- True wealth is found when faith is shared and hope is created.
- True wealth is given to others when the gospel of GOD'S love in JESUS is announced and salvation is offered.

Dives never knew this kind of wealth even though it sat at his gate.

- When he finally did find it, as he thought about the salvation of his brothers, he found that his focus in life had been misdirected.
- Dives realized that the only hope for his brothers was if someone went and told them about GOD'S love and grace.
 - Dives found the true source of wealth and life, both now and for eternity.
 - Unfortunate for Dives, he found that the wealth he had pursued was too little,
 - and that his new desire to be in relationship with GOD came too late.