

# life groups

NorthStar Church

AfterLife Wk 2

Is Hell for Real?

The Reality of Hell

Luke 16:19-31

10/09/2016

Main Point

Hell is real and people we know are headed there.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How is hell portrayed in television and movies? Do the depictions of hell ever make it feel like a real place?

Why do you think that the majority of people either do not believe in hell or do not believe that people end up in hell?

Most of the time, hell is portrayed comically if at all. Sometimes you may come upon a demon or Satan, but typically hell is considered a fake world or a comic world. Hell is rarely described as a real place where people go. Writers and thinkers today will deny the existence of hell, and focus on hell being on earth when we do not treat others well. Hell is a very real place that is a consequence of earthly choices.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Luke 16:19-31.

Why do you think Jesus is telling this parable to the Pharisees? What is it about the Pharisees and about Jesus that motivated Him to tell this parable? Refer back to Luke 16:14 for guidance.

What words would you use to describe Lazarus? On the other hand, what words would you use to describe the rich man?

What is suggested by the detail that Lazarus was left at the rich man's gate each day?

The account of the rich man and Lazarus continues the examination of whether money takes priority over God. More than likely, the Pharisees who challenged Jesus and scoffed at His teaching nevertheless remained in the crowd to hear this story. The parable includes many topics such as wealth, poverty, economic disparity, social justice, and the nature of heaven and hell. At its core, the parable has a two-pronged focus: judgment for the proper use of wealth and the sufficiency of the Scriptures.

Have another volunteer READ Luke 16:22-26 again.

How hard may it have been for the rich man to beg for mercy and ask for help? Why did he do so? What is the basis of judgment for these two men? Why did Lazarus go to heaven and the rich man to Hades? This parable insists that Christians must not be like those who only care for their kind and remain ignorant of the plight of the poor. The church has no “good news” if it is not “good news” for the poor. Perhaps the best conclusion, one drawn from this passage’s connection to the parable of the dishonest manager, is that the rich man’s selfish orientation toward money and unconcern for a fellow human being revealed a lack of a relationship with God. The man trusted in himself. Similarly, the poor man’s joyful place in eternity did not come because of his earthly poverty. He must have known God and benefited from that relationship that came about by grace through faith.

Have another volunteer READ Luke 16:27-31 again.

Why did the rich man insist that Abraham send Lazarus to his brothers? What does Abraham’s answer tell us about God’s perspective on this situation?

According to Abraham’s word to the rich man in Hades, how can people learn instructions and warnings about life, repentance, and restoration?

The final section of the account (vv. 27-31) illustrates the importance of making a response to God before it is too late, and the sufficiency of Scripture to communicate the gospel. The conversation between the rich man and Abraham revealed the crucial nature of repentance. If we do not have a relationship with God, we need to turn to Him in repentance and reflect that change of heart in the way we live, including in our attitudes toward and use of money.

Why do you think Jesus opens the parable with a contrast between the rich man and the poor man, and then closes it with a call to hear the word of God? What is the connection between hearing the word of God and moral behavior?

The main point is that the gospel call of the kingdom of God is to hear the word of the Lord and respond to it with repentance and faith. When this is done, the issues of wealth, compassion, and heaven and hell are profoundly affected.

Why do some people postpone making a decision about having a relationship with God until it is too late? Discuss why people need to understand that at the end of life, they will give an account to God for their lives and face irreversible results.

Have another volunteer READ Hebrews 3:14-19.

Why does Jesus require an immediate response?

How does a person’s response to Jesus affect their standing with Him in heaven or hell?

What does this mean for those of us who know his voice and have responded? What should we do?

If you hear the voice of God today, you better respond today because not one of us is promised tomorrow. Not only that, but there is no guarantee you will hear that same voice later. As believers this should cause urgency to share the gospel with others.

## Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do you typically talk about hell? Do you try to avoid the topic? Explain.

Why is hell a motivation for believers to evangelize?

How can you present the beauty of God's grace and the sobering reality of hell to someone?

## Pray

Close in prayer, asking God to constantly remind you of your need for Him. Praise God that we all need Him and those who will not praise Him receive justice. Thank God for being a just God and for showing mercy to all people who follow Him.

## Commentary

Luke 16:19-31

16:19. With no transition statement, Luke introduced the parable of the poor man and Lazarus. Parallel to the rich landowner in verse 1, the central character of this parable is a rich man enjoying the most luxurious life possible. His dress and his food set him apart from Jesus' disciples and from the ordinary Jewish citizen. Here was the man the Pharisees wanted to be.

16:20-21. Lazarus, the other character in the story, represents the opposite side of the social ladder. He owned nothing, but Jesus honored him with a name, while the rich man remained anonymous. Lazarus was clothed with sores. He lived not in a gated mansion but on the street beside the rich man's gate, and he depended to live on. He himself seemed to offer nourishment for the wild dogs that licked his sores. The rich man had the opportunity to do all Jesus had commanded. He could invite the sick to his banquet table. He could show his generosity in using his material resources for kingdom purposes. He could restore a lost man who was basically dead to life and join in heaven's joy. He did not have far to search for this lost sheep. He could even sell all his possessions in his dedication to kingdom living. But not this man. He ignored Lazarus and went about his luxurious life.

16:22-23. Inevitably, the poor Lazarus died, perhaps from his illness, perhaps from malnutrition. The self-righteous and self-centered rich man certainly had some responsibility in his death. One day death also visited the rich man. Dying is the only thing the two men hold in common in the story. The difference Jesus emphasized was what happened after death. Lazarus died and went with the angels to heaven. Not only was he in heaven; he was positioned right next to Abraham, the father of Jewish faith (Gen. 12–17). Nothing better could happen to a Jew after death. The rich man went where his master—money—took him, to Hades, the place of torment. From there somehow he could see Abraham—and what a shocking discovery. There beside Abraham, he saw Lazarus, the one he had been unable to see all those years at his gate.

16:24. The rich man was tormented even more than poor Lazarus had been as the dogs licked his sores and the rich man ignored him. In desperation he called to Abraham for help. He addressed him as father, indicating that he considered himself to be of the seed of Abraham and thus deserving of help from Abraham and from the God of Abraham. He cried for mercy, even when mercy meant having poor, unclean, filthy Lazarus come to his rescue, although he had never helped Lazarus. A fingertip of cool water would mean a lot in the horrible flaming torment he suffered.

16:25. Abraham could communicate from his eternal abode to that of the rich man. He continued the family terminology, acknowledging the man as a son of Abraham. The rich man needed a history lesson. In life he had enjoyed all the luxuries. Lazarus, on the other hand, enjoyed no luxuries, only bad things. Now the situation

was reversed. Lazarus received the comfort he had begged for all those years. But the rich man had slipped from the comfortable life to pure agony. Yes, those expecting to be first were last, and those who expected to be last were now first, right beside Abraham. This verse is an application of the principle in 13:30. The rich man had been “first” in this life, having enjoyed many good things, but was now “last,” referring to his agony in the afterlife. By contrast, Lazarus had been “last” during his earthly existence (vv. 20-21), but now was “first” (eternally comforted).

16:26. An eternal reality needed explaining. Abraham might be able to communicate with the man in torment, but he could not come to him. A great chasm separated them. There is no description of the chasm, no location geographically—just the reality: You cannot get there from here. You are where you are going to stay, just as we are. Torment is your eternal reward, just as heavenly comfort belongs to Lazarus forever.

16:27-29. Not being able to improve his own lot, the rich man finally showed concern for the eternal destiny of his five brothers. The phrase Moses and the prophets is another way of referring to the entire Old Testament. Abraham pointed him to the Pharisees’ favorite source of authority. They already had the books of Moses—the law and the prophets, which is the rest of Scripture. They give them all the information they need. They need to listen to them. Such a warning implies that the rich man had the same authorities his brothers did, but they refused to listen to them. Obeying Scripture should lead them away from torment and to the eternal kingdom.

16:30-31. The irony here is that Luke, writing from a time after Jesus’ resurrection, knew that very few people would be persuaded to repent even through witnessing the miracle of someone rising from the dead (Lazarus or Jesus). They must listen with “ears to hear” to the message of salvation in the Scriptures.