Sermon Series: Things to Come
Sermon Title: Departing this World

Text: Luke 16:19-31 -- "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Introduction: Last week we started a new preaching series called **THINGS TO COME**. For the next couple of months, we're going to be looking at what we can expect to happen in the end times according to the Scriptures. In our first message, we looked at what signs will precede the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ from **Matthew 24:3-9**. They include the **sign of deception (there will be false messiahs who will lead many astray), the sign of disputes (wars and rumors of wars, nation will rise against nation), the sign of devastation (famines, earthquakes) and the sign of discrimination (they will deliver you up to tribulation and many of you will be put to death and you will be hated by all on account of my name)**. To be fair, these signs that our Lord shared with His followers are ACTUAL SIGNS OF THE TRIBULATION, a seven-year period of great suffering and pain in the world that precedes the Lord's return. It makes sense, however, to think that there will be similar precursor events taking place in the world leading up to the tribulation that only differ from those to come in terms of their intensity. The Lord compares them to the suffering a mother feels at the beginning of birth pains with those of childbirth.

Today, I want to look at what happens when someone dies because that is what is going to happen to each of us unless the Lord returns in our lifetimes to rapture His church. The more we understand God's plan for our exit from this world as believers, the less fear we have in facing it. **The Bible describes death, not as a DESTINATION, but as a JOURNEY to someplace else**. But a lot of unbelievers don't see it that way. For them, it's the end of everything, the cessation of being. **Author Adam Gollner**, details the current efforts to remedy the problem of death in an article entitled, "**The Immortality Financiers: The Billionaires Who Want to Live Forever**". At the cutting edge of this effort, we find some of the world's richest individuals. Gollner writes, "***There's something about amassing more money than you can ever possibly use that naturally makes you hunger for ways to stay alive longer—if not forever***." For example, **Larry Ellison is the CEO of Oracle Corporation** and the sixth-richest person in the world. Ellison contributes more than **$40 million each year to the cause**. IT IS SAID THAT HE VIEWS DEATH AS JUST ANOTHER KIND OF CORPORATE OPPONENT HE CAN OUTFOX. Ellison has set up a foundation dedicated to ending mortality, or at least to "understanding lifespan development processes and age-related diseases and disabilities." Ellison says, "***Death makes me very angry. It doesn't make any sense to me. Death has never made any sense to me. How can a person be there and then just vanish; just not be there***?" Gollner concludes that for people like Larry Ellison, death may not make any sense, but they hope it can be defeated. Sadly, what unbelievers don't seem to understand is that, according to the Bible, death has ALREADY BEEN DEFEATED through the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:54-58 -- "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power (strength) of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**). This truth gives believers everywhere hope when facing our eventual demise and for that we're very grateful.

Before we get to our text in **Luke 16**, let's take a look at three different descriptions of death from the Bible. In each case, death means SEPARATION, but the question is, "**Separation from what**?"

- **Physical death** – THE SEPARATION OF THE SOUL AND THE SPIRIT FROM THE BODY. That's what James is talking about when he says the body apart from the spirit is dead (**James 2:26**). The MATERIAL BODY turns to dust while the IMMATERIAL PART OF US passes on to eternity.

- **Spiritual death** – THE SEPARATION OF THE SOUL FROM GOD. **Romans 6:23** says, "**the wages of sin is death** (separation from God)." Everyone of us comes into the world physically alive and spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins (**Ephesians 2:1**).
- **The Second Death** – THE SEPARATION OF YOUR SOUL FROM GOD FOREVER. This is the death we all want to avoid. Listen to this from **Revelation 20:13-15 -- And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire**.

Now, keeping this last picture of death in mind, I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to **Luke 16:19**. Here Jesus tells a parable to help us understand more about what happens after we've taken our last breath. He's addressing the time after we die physically, but before the Lord returns. Theologians call it the INTERMEDIATE STATE. We know that it cannot be referring to the final judgment because there are still people living on the earth that the rich man in this parable wants to warn. If it were referring to the final judgment, everyone would be standing before the Lord to receive His judgment and there would be no one left on the earth. Now, let's look at the parable together. ***There are some obvious differences in this passage between the Rich Man and Lazarus***.

There was a difference in how the two men lived (**Luke 16:19-21 -- There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores**). **ONE WAS EXCESSIVE, THE OTHER EXPENDABLE**. Like the Pharisees, the rich man ignored opportunities to use his wealth to bless others. It's not that he was mean, or he would not have permitted Lazarus to beg at his gate. Rather he was **SELF-CONSUMED**. He chose to dress himself in the finest clothes while living in the lap of luxury, and all the while ignoring the needs of the less fortunate. Contrast him with Lazarus, whose name means "**God is the helper**." He was hungry and covered with sores which the dogs licked, yet no one offered to come to his aid. He was deemed expendable by everyone else. ***Having no other place to turn but to God, he made the right choice***.

There was a difference in how they died (**Luke 16:22**-- **The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried)**. **ONE WAS DISCARDED, THE OTHER WAS MOURNED**. In the first century, when a beggar died, the body was thrown on top of a rubbish pile that burned continually. The rich man

received a proper burial from his family, who were likely just as wealthy and just as lost as he was. In both cases, for the beggar and for the rich man, their physical deaths meant that there was no returning to their lives on earth (barring a miracle of God). The Bible indicates this when it says, "**It is appointed that men may die and after this comes judgment"** (**Hebrews 9:27**). There is no provision for coming back to this world but only going on to judgment. So, in the parable, these two men die with NO HOPE IN ONCE CASE AND NO DESIRE ON THE OTHER to return to life on earth. DEATH, after all, IS FINAL. (**Review: Difference in how they lived and died.**)

There was a difference in how they fared after dying (**Luke 16:23 -- and in Hades, being in torment, the rich man lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side**). **ONE WAS COMFORTED, THE OTHER CONDEMNED**. Now, having come from eternity, there was no one more qualified than Jesus TO DRAW BACK THE VEIL AND ALLOW US A GLIMPSE INTO THE UNSEEN WORLD. With divine knowledge, He could speak with authority about the future.

- **This is what He said about Lazarus**. Jesus said the angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's side (bosom) as the "**father of the faithful**." The implication, of course, is that Lazarus was of the same spiritual stock as Abraham. ***He trusted in God and therefore was comforted***. **Kenneth Wuest's translation** really captures the meaning well. It says Lazarus was REFRESHED AND CHEERED. When a believer dies, he goes immediately into heaven and to the presence of God (**See 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23**). There is no other place a believer would rather be than in heaven where THERE IS NO SIN TO CORRUPT AND DEATH TO DESTROY. There is only the joy and gladness of being with the Lord (**In thy presence is fulness of joy – Psalm 16:11**). In this parable we're told that Lazarus' eternal destiny is set in stone. Not that he would want to cross over to Hades, but he cannot because a great chasm separates them (**Luke 16:26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us'). The Bible does not give us a lot of information about this intermediate state where we exist prior to the Lord's second coming. Perhaps it's because if we knew what it was really like, we'd try to get there sooner.**
- **This is what He said about the rich man**. He did not fare well at all. *Christ used the word "hades," which is the Greek word for "hell" in speaking of his destination*. ***It is the place of the dead that will eventually give place to the Lake of Fire*** (**See Revelation 20:14**) as the final destination of all those who die outside of Christ. **It is a state of CONSCIOUS EXISTENCE where people have the continued use of their faculties**. In

fact, that's what makes it so terrible, as there is great personal awareness of one's own suffering. ***What does our Lord say about it***?

- **Hell is a place OF TERRIBLE AGONY** (**Luke 16:24-25 -- And the rich man called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame"**). In this passage, the Lord used the word "**TORMENT**" (which means "**to physically torture**") to describe the suffering experienced by the rich man in hell. The rich man's request for a drop of water to cool himself is denied. He will have to suffer the fire that cannot be extinguished (**See Mark 9:43**). **Charles Spurgeon** said, "There is a real fire in hell as truly as you have a real body...a fire exactly like that which we have on earth except this: it will not consume you though it will torture you. You have seen asbestos lying amidst red hot coals, but not consumed. So, your body will be prepared by God in such a way that it will burn forever...With your nerves laid raw by searing flame, yet never desensitized for all its raging fury...you will cry out for the mercy of death, but it shall never come."
- **Hell is a place of UNWANTED MEMORIES** (**Luke 16:25 -- Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things**). Those in hell will have to live with the unwanted memories of opportunities wasted (**Matthew 25:44-45 – When did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison and did not help you? I tell you truth … whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me**). Each will remind them of God's justice in their suffering.
- **Hell is a place of INCONSOLABLE GRIEF** (**Luke 16:25 – but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish**). The word translated as "**anguish**" means to grieve. It is the sorrow one experiences having realized that the opportunity for salvation has passed by. All that is left is to suffer the physical anguish of regret. THERE IS NO REPRIEVE FROM THE PAIN OF HELL!
- **Hell is a place from which you CANNOT ESCAPE** (**Luke 16:26 -- And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'**). In response to a request for relief from the unquenchable fire, Abraham says, "Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." **By an irrevocable decree God established a vast impassable abyss between the two states and the occupants of each.** The time for deciding the issue of his eternal destiny had passed for the rich man (**See John 1:10-12**). He had rejected Christ and received the condemnation of God. The worst part about hell is that it is forever.

On earth, when suffering came to the rich man, he intuitively realized that sooner or later relief would come. Not so in hell. As the flames introduced unspeakable pain, he refused to permit himself to consider the thought that hell is eternal. He begged for mercy. Only when he heard Abraham's response did the reality of his situation sink in. After he suffered for 10,000 years he would not have reduced by one second the amount of time for which he will endure hell. Hell is forever. There is no escape!

- **Hell is a place from which NO WARNING MAY COME** (**Luke 16:27-31 -- 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"** Conscious now of his doom, the rich man requests that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers. He could not bear the thought of his next family reunion taking place in hell. But Abraham explains that Lazarus would not be successful if he did return. "**They have Moses and the Prophets**," Abraham explained. "**Let them listen to them**." Nothing spectacular can have any effect upon the lives of men, if the Word of God is not believed and obeyed. When a different Lazarus was raised from the dead, what effect did his resurrection have on the wealthy, self-indulgent Pharisees? They tried to kill him (**See John 12:9-11**). When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, what was their response? They were unchanged in their attitude toward Christ and in fact plotted to squelch the report (**See Matthew 28:11-15**) and put to death His followers (**See Acts 9:1-2**). The Word of God is enough (**See Hebrews 4:12**). (Review: Hell is a place of terrible agony, unwanted memories, inconsolable grief, from which you cannot escape and from which no warning may come.)

Conclusion: Let me contrast for you by way of two different illustrations the difference between the experience of the believer and the unbeliever when it comes to DEATH AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE. **THIS MIGHT DESCRIBE THE BELIEVER'S JOURNEY TO HEAVEN:** A boy of twelve told his mother that he was afraid to die. His mother thought about it for a moment and then said, "**Do you remember when you were very small and you used to fall asleep on the couch and wake up in your bed? You went to sleep and woke up right where you wanted to be safe and sound because your father carried you there in the night. That's what it's like to die**." HERE'S DEATH FROM THE UNBELIEVER'S

PERSPECTIVE: Several years ago, a book was published, entitled ***Beyond Death's Door*** by **Dr. Maurice Rawlings**. Dr. Rawlings, a specialist in Internal Medicine and Cardiovascular Disease, resuscitated many people who had been clinically dead. Dr. Rawlings, a devout atheist, "considered all religion "hocus-pocus" and death nothing more than a painless extinction". But something happened in 1977 that brought a dramatic change in the life of Dr. Rawlings! He was resuscitating a man, terrified and screaming — descending down into the flames of Hell: "***Each time he regained heartbeat and respiration, the patient screamed, "I am in hell!" He was terrified and pleaded with me to help him. I was scared to death. . . Then I noticed a genuinely alarmed look on his face. He had a terrified look worse than the expression seen in death! This patient had a grotesque grimace expressing sheer horror! His pupils were dilated, and he was perspiring and trembling — he looked as if his hair was "on end." Then still another strange thing happened. He said, "Don't you understand? I am in hell. . . Don't let me go back to hell!" The man was serious, and it finally occurred to me that he was indeed in trouble. He was in a panic like I had never seen before***." Dr. Rawlings said, no one, who could have heard his screams and saw the look of terror on his face could doubt for a single minute that he was actually in a place called hell. Such a place exists and Jesus warned people to order their lives in such a way as to avoid it!