

God's Way of Salvation



“Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed,
so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot,
nor can those from there pass to us.”

Luke 16:26

After telling the parable of the Unjust Steward, the Lord then describes the reality of what both the just and unjust stewards face in eternity. To do that He tells a story of Lazarus and the rich man. (This is not a parable – no parable gives the actual name of their characters.) His story tells us of a poor man named Lazarus and an unnamed rich man. It is the story of what they experience after death - what they each see and experience. He tells it as a real life warning and example of the eternal consequences of staying in one's sin and rejecting God's offer of forgiveness of sin. Visualize the scene the Lord describes.

The Great Gulf

If you have seen the Grand Canyon you know the tremendous distance between the two sides. No man could possibly leap from one side to the other. The Lord focuses us on a great gulf (chasm) that separates two sides of eternity. The chasm is so great and so deep that it is totally impossible to be crossed. Each side is permanently sealed off from the other.

The Two Sides

The Lord then describes what is on either side of the chasm. On one side of the enormous chasm is a lush, pleasant area - green lush forests, bubbling brooks, soft sunshine. It is an attractive place – all would want to dwell there. The other side is fearful. It is a desolate, barren desert, there is no water, only scorching heat, pain and torment for every one of its residents. No one would desire this place.

The Inhabitants

Next the Lord describes the inhabitants of the two sides. On the pleasant side (called Paradise) the Lord tells us of two of its inhabitants. The first is the poor beggar, Lazarus, and the second is the earthly father of the Jewish nation, Abraham. On the other side the Lord singles out one man – the unnamed rich man. In his life on earth he had it all, riches, food, luxuries. Now after death, he finds himself in the torment – in a place worse than he could ever imagine.

The Despair

The rich man can see Abraham afar off. He calls to him. *“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.”* He asks for just momentary relief from the torment he experiences. There is water in paradise – please just a drop to cool his tongue – even temporary relief would provide some relief and hope that there may be a second drop.

A Decision That Cannot Be Revisited

Abraham responds. *“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.”* Abraham tells the rich man, God has separated you from us. It is impossible to cross between the two sides. You have received the consequences of ignoring, even rejecting God in your lifetime. You made your decision and it cannot be altered. There is no hope for the rich man. The Lord makes this point clearly that we may know there is no hope for the unjust steward or for any person who leaves this life after rejecting the one way that God provided to escape eternal punishment.

The Plea

The rich man does not argue, likely he knows that he rejected God. But he asks for a second thing. *“Send him to my father’s house - for I have five brothers - so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.”* He asks that Lazarus be raised from the dead to go and tell his brothers of the horror of eternity separated from God. Surely his brothers will listen to Lazarus and turn to God.

The Truth

Abraham responds with a telling statement. *“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”* They have the truth of God. Let them believe what God has said in His Word. The rich man argues, pleads. *“No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”* He pleads - they need a messenger, someone who has seen what happens after death and can convince them of the truth of eternity. Abraham tells the rich man the truth that still applies today. *“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”* Miracles will convince no one of eternity, only God’s Word spoken in love and truth.

Today

Today the pleasant side (Christ called it Paradise) is empty. No one dwells there now. It was full in the past but it was emptied two millennia ago. Not one new inhabitant has entered it since. The beauty of paradise can still be seen from Hades but the absence of people sends another stark message. The fact Paradise is now empty confirms to the inhabitants of Hades that God’s Word is true. Jesus is Alive, He is God, He is the only way. Those in Hades know those who once inhabited Paradise are now with their Savior who led all those people into heaven after His resurrection.

The other side (Christ called it Hades) is full and is added to daily. Nothing improves with each new inhabitant. People that are added have the same reaction. Momentary disbelief followed by shock that there is really life after death. Then, almost immediately, anger – this is not what they deserve. Soon anger turns into despair lashing out at the injustice that they feel has been done to them. They vacillate between anger over their fate, fear this is their destination for eternity and a hatred against God who they feel put them there unjustly. Over the years, decades and centuries their despair, their anger never lessens while hopelessness and torment intensify with each passing moment. It never stops.

The View From Hades

In Hades there is no crossway to Paradise. The chasm is great, uncrossable and final. What humans do not believe, that their sin will separate them from a loving, holy God, becomes painfully obvious from the vantage point of Hades. What they cannot see in Hades (it can only be seen by faith in this life) is that the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ spans that gap. The uncrossable becomes crossable in one way, when one accepts by faith the truth of God as revealed in His Holy Word and through the Savior, the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that paid for our sin. The option to accept Christ’s forgiveness of sin, which is available throughout all of a person’s life on earth, is withdrawn after death.

From the vantage point of Hades all one can see is the chasm, there is no bridge, no cross, no hope.



The Two Destinations

The two sides of the chasm represent the great separation of all people that God says occurs after death. Holy must be separated from unholy. They cannot reside together.

Hades

God never intended man to be sentenced to hell. It was created for Satan and the demons that followed his rebellion to God. God created man to live with him and enjoy his fellowship and goodness forever.

Man sinned however. In the Garden of Eden he believed Satan's lie that God is not good. He rebelled against the one commandment God had warned him - that disobedience would bring death. Sin brought physical death of the body but it also brought spiritual death – separation of man's soul from the God who loves him and the paradise He had created for man.

The Dilemma

Man's sin presented God with a dilemma. God loves mankind and wants his fellowship but God is holy and cannot allow sin into His presence. Thus God's justice requires man's debt be paid but His love desires man's fellowship. That is a dilemma only God could solve.

The Solution

God solved the dilemma in an amazing way. Man owed a debt he could not pay. God could pay the debt but He was not man. Therefore God became man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. As man, Christ lived a perfect life, He was without sin, on this earth. At the end of His life He died on Calvary's cross, not for sin He committed, but for the sin man committed. The debt of man was paid through Jesus Christ. The evidence this was done is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Once every sin of every person who ever lived was paid for, Jesus was raised from the dead. This is the distinction of Christianity and every other religion – we serve a risen Savior!

The Offer Accepted Only By Faith

As a result of what Christ did on Calvary's cross, forgiveness of sin is offered to every person. This offer is exclusive. There is no other way to have one's sins forgiven than through the payment made by Christ on Calvary's cross. His cross provides the one pathway across the great chasm between Hades and God. His bridge, Christ's offer of salvation, is only available in this life. God gives man one lifetime to decide if he will accept Christ's salvation or reject it.

"For You are not a God who wills lawlessness, Nor shall the evildoer dwell with You." Psalm 5:5

"Be holy as I am holy." I Peter 1:16

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23

"There is none righteous, no not one." Romans 3:10

"For the wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23

"The soul that sins, it shall surely die." Ezekiel 18:20

"I will by no means clear the guilty." Exodus 34:7

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." John 3:16-17

"Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Romans 10:13

The Bridge Across the Chasm

What Jesus Christ Taught

About Finding Peace with God

God's gift of salvation is not by man's good works. God said without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. The plan of salvation God offers to man is clear.

1. **Accept the truth of God that man is a sinner**

If people feel they are worthy in their own right to inherit heaven or if they believe their works are sufficient to pay the debt that they owe God, they demean God's word, His justice and the price His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, paid to satisfy God's justice. This is what the Lord says in the beatitudes. Blessed is he who is poor in spirit and who mourns over his sin against God and others. If one is not humbled by his sin and that he deserves God's punishment for that sin, he cannot be saved.

2. Desire to repent of one's sin Salvation is not given so one can continue in their sin. The Bible teaches repentance which is turning from one's sin to God's commandments. Man will not live the same way in the future. Repentance is turning from sin to God. If one does not repent of his sin, he cannot be saved.

3. Acknowledge who Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ is God who was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, died and shed His blood in payment for our sin on Calvary's cross and who is alive forever and is coming back to establish His kingdom on this earth. If one does not confess the Lord Jesus for who God's word says He is, that person cannot be saved.

4. **Accept the Lord's gift of salvation in humility**

This is what the Lord says in the beatitudes. Blessed is he who is poor in spirit and who mourns over his sin. Humility means one acknowledges to God that he is what God says – a sinner who deserves separation from God forever. This is the cry of the thief on the cross to the Lord Jesus Christ, "God be merciful to me a sinner". God's gift of forgiveness of sin must be accepted personally.

5. Accept God's forgiveness by faith One accepts God's gift by faith – believing that what God says in His word, the Bible, is true. He tells the truth about our sin, about the punishment we owe for our sin, about who Jesus is and the payment He made for our sin and about His willingness to forgive us and make us a member of His family when we repent and accept Jesus Christ as Lord. Faith is believing God is truth.

There is no other way.

Christ said, "I am THE way, THE truth and THE Life, NO MAN comes to the father but by me" John 14:6.
The cross of Jesus Christ is the only bridge across the chasm from what we deserve to what God offers us.

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." I John 1:8

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Acts 3:12

"If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."
Romans 10:9

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:17

"For by grace are you saved through faith, and not of yourself; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."
Ephesians 2:8-9

"But as many as received Him to them He gave the power to become the sons of God." John 1:12