

Time of Grace Ministry
Now Is the Time: Listen!
Luke 16:19-31
October 1, 2017

Pastor Jeremy Mattek

Hello! I'm Pastor Jeremy Mattek for Time of Grace. One of the newest and most popular group outings, as least where I live, is what's called an "escape room." You and your friends are locked inside a room and you are given one hour to figure out how to get out. All the clues that you will need in order to unlock the door are located inside the room and you have 60 minutes to figure out those clues, decipher them, and figure out how to unlock the door so you can escape. And if you escape before the time runs out, well, they give you a nice certificate and they take your picture and everybody's smiling. If you don't escape, well, they still let you out and they let you try again. Regardless, your time is limited.

Today on Time of Grace, Pastor Jeske reminds us that the same thing is true of our lives; we have a limited time on this earth, which means we have limited time to get close to God. Limited time to love our family and friends. Limited time to make a difference. And today, Pastor Jeske tells us how to use that limited time well so that we stay close to God and use our time to bless one another.

Pastor Mark Jeske

When you are in hell, it's permanent; no mulligans, no do-overs, no arguments with the Judge. There is no attorney who can sweet talk you out. There will be no procedural nullifications and you get sprung out on technicalities for there will be none for your Judge knows everything about you, has access to all information, and when you have to stand and look at the Judge – when the entire human race has to look at the Judge – we will know, all of us will know, that he knows. And this is serious business for you and the people in your life; more serious than anything else I know of.

I'd like to invite you to ponder these things with me on a Sunday in the End Times and invite you to turn with me to Luke 16. Now Jesus as God knows everything and yet, he's human so simultaneously, he didn't know anything, which is such a contradiction. I hesitate even to put it out there because I don't want to confuse you and make this even more confusing than it is. But it is one of the amazing puzzles of somebody who's God and man at the same time that he's outside of time and yet, he's inside of time with us where he has a succession of moments like us. Even though as God he has no moments; everything – God lives in an eternal present. It's like everything that ever happened is on a gigantic screen in front of him and he sees everything simultaneously. It's all one to him; it's all happening right now that he can interact in it. Jesus knows everything and yet, he was also learning things one bit at a time.

And I think as he got towards the end of his ministry, he was amazed at two things: That the people who were invited to the feast first, the church people, the nice people, the successful people, business owners and well-respected people with jobs and homes and I would say who cut

their grass, but their yards probably didn't have any grass. But they raked their gravel, maybe is what I could say. Were the ones you'd think – and Jesus thought – most would embrace him; they're the ones who should be ready for me. They've been in the word. They should know about Messiah and when I came and fulfilled every detail, they should have been all over it. Instead, they didn't want me or think they needed me.

What did all of their Bible study do for them if they missed the main event when it was right in front of them? Simultaneously, the people you'd think least likely to pay attention to the coming Savior were the riffraff and the outcasts of society, the tax collectors and prostitutes, the people on the margins of society, the alcoholics and the people who couldn't hold a job, people who were broke, people who were sick, chronically ill, people who were disabled and lame, those were the people who dialed in to the value proposition of the coming of the Son of God. And Jesus, it's like he couldn't get over that and he told six stories in a row about a banquet feast where the original invite list wouldn't even RSVP and he had to send out a second wave of invitations to the riffraff of society; those are the ones. And you know exactly why he told that story. He told about God's restless desire to find everybody – even the marginal ones, even the people who thought of themselves as losers, even the failures of life, even the broken ones – he went after and he told stories of lost things that are precious to God when they're found.

Luke 16 – I'd like to invite you to turn your eyes to verse 19 and it's the famous story of the rich man and a poor, sick, beggar. “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen.” Purple, in those days, was a synonym for wealth. It's the equivalent today of saying, “There was a man who drove a Lamborghini.” Purple was so expensive because they had no synthetic dyes back then that could generate that color. The only way you could get purple dye in the ancient world was from shellfish, small shellfish, that lived in the eastern Mediterranean and maybe each one that you could catch you'd squeeze out and there'd be one little drop of this intense purple. So it was really, really expensive and people who could afford that kind of ridiculously expensive fabric would flaunt it. You had to be royalty to have the kind of coin to buy purple cloth to make your clothes of. There was what he considered a bum begging and his name was Lazarus. Isn't that funny? Jesus doesn't name the rich guy but he invents a name using his friend. Laz – the brother of the women you can see over here in our window – his buddy, Laz, provided the name for the beggar in the story, which is kind of interesting. He didn't use the name Lazarus for the rich guy; he used it for the beggar.

Now not only was he poor, but he probably was disabled because it says, “They laid a beggar covered with sores by the house.” He was hoping for a handout. He couldn't walk. Some people he knew gave him a break and dragged him over there and parked him that he hoped he could get something from the comings and goings of the rich guy. And not only was he disabled, he's covered with sores and he was too weak to keep the dogs from licking him. He had these weeping sores and he would be annoyed by animals and was too weak to shoo them away. So he's starving and miserable; essentially, he's dying.

“Even the dogs came and licked his sores.” This is pretty sad. Boy, there was terrible poverty back then, wasn't there? You've got a minute? Can I tell you a story? Two weeks ago, I did a wedding – which was all-contained; it wasn't here at the church and then at the hall. They had

the wedding ceremony right at their rented hall downtown; right on the main drag. And it's kind of efficient because you go instantly from the benediction straight to the reception; you don't have to waste time driving around. Everybody was right there.

Well, it was on a Saturday and I stayed as late as I dared but then I figured I better smoke it home because I need to drink a pot of coffee and get ready to go for Sunday, because they were maybe going to sleep in and play the wedding card that they could skip church but you and I had a date that I didn't want to miss. So to save time, I took a short cut to the parking lot and I ducked out the back through the kitchen and I startled a guy in the middle of supper that he was eating from what he found in a dumpster. So frankly, I think we're talking about today, as well. This kind of desperate poverty has always been with the human race. It is everywhere and just as today, in many ways it seems invisible, if I had walked on the normal sidewalks, I'd have never seen that guy or surprised him. But it was a reminder to me how desperate some people are just to survive.

Lazarus wasn't a secret though; he was right in front of this wealthy guy who had preposterously more money than he knew what to do with and was oblivious to the invisible suffering man right in his face; right in front of his house. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side." I hasten to mention it was not his poverty that saved him; there isn't any word in Scripture that says being poor gets you into heaven. There is nothing virtuous about poverty. It's something to struggle with and cope with. It's something to ask God's help to endure. It's something to try and crawl out of. There is no great moral value to poverty; just as there is no great moral value to having wealth and possessions. That is no proof that God likes you any better than somebody making half of what you make or somebody whose balance sheet is one-tenth of yours. Or the fact that you got a plus in front of the numbers on your balance sheet does not make you any better than somebody with a negative number in front of the balance sheet, who in fact – I mean, owes more money he has. It doesn't make you any morally better. It has nothing to do with your worth as a human being. The beggar was saved because he believed in the word of God and believed in his Savior; the Savior promised through the word of God that he had heard.

What his poverty did do for him actually helped him because it rid him of the fantasy that you can have heaven already now. That man knew, "There is no paradise on this earth. This earth is busted, it's broken, it's not working for me. It's a time of suffering and pain. I can't wait to get out of here. And when somebody offers me some gospel hope of something better, I am all over it," and he was ready and believed it and Jesus was thinking this is – these are the people who want me. Remember, he compared himself once to a doctor. He said, "If you think you're fine, I can't help you. I can't do a thing for you if you think you're fine. It's only when you're aware of your own brokenness that my healing would do you any good."

The rich guy also died and he went to hell. Not because he was rich. There is nothing anywhere in Scripture that says money puts you into hell. But it is a ferociously seductive idol to worship because it conveys power. The more money you manage to accumulate, the more ability you have to buy other people's cooperation with what you want. When you have money, people run up to you and offer to hold the door for you. When you walk into a showroom and you've got

snappy clothes on and you're all trimmed and spiffed and look good and you walk in, the salespeople run over to help you. If you would have walked in looking like Laz, they would have had security escort you out the back. But that can go to your head. It can make you sick. The Pharisees imagined that their prosperity was a guarantee of God's favor. In fact, it meant nothing of the sort. God does indeed bless us with money very often but sometimes, he blesses us with poverty. In fact, you should look at your own situation and thank God for every bit of it. When you struggled and suffered, thank God for that because he's awakened within you an awareness of your brokenness. If he has blessed you with prosperity and right now life is fairly easy and you can cover all your bills, thank God for that, too, but be careful that that does not become seductive and make your head crazy and make you start to fantasize that maybe I can have my heaven now.

In fact, maybe you've been at both places in your life. In fact, I suspect most of you will have stretches in your life where you've been in both places. I have had some times in my life where I had to live really, really small. And those were good times for me. In fact, when God had me in a very small little box, I think is probably when I read the Bible and prayed more intensely than any other time in my whole life. Now I don't worry where my next meal is coming from but I've got to be careful of that, too, so I don't get sloppy and lazy and start fantasizing that my agenda is more important than God's.

So here they are now – now Jesus makes up a few details to embellish the story. For instance, he has a conversation now going on between a man in hell and Father Abraham. He calls on his race-relationship. The rich guy in hell is Jewish and he wants the original Jew, the grand-Jew of them all, Father Abraham, to have mercy. He calls on him, "Father;" he had no use for the word of God during his life. Now he wants pity. He is suffering so intensely that if I could have only a little drop of water on my tongue that would mean so much to me. Abraham replies – and look at the name he calls him, "Oh, you're calling me Father?" "Well, my son," he says across this chasm. "Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things. You had your heaven and you didn't need God's word. Lazarus had bad things. Now he's comforted here and you're in agony. Besides all this, between us and you is a great chasm and it's been fixed," it's locked in, "so that those who want to go from here to you cannot; nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

The rich guy digests this piece of bad news. "Well, then I beg you, father. Send Lazarus to my father's house. I have five brothers. Let him warn them so they will not also come to this place of torment." Jesus is not holding back on describing hell, is he? People who make up their own religion or who morph and cut and paste and edit Christianity to fit their idea of what a religion ought to look like often are very free to take the bits and pieces of Jesus they like and then say, "Well, I'm spiritual. I may not be religious but I'm spiritual and I follow Jesus. I like your prophet, I like Jesus." And they like the parts of Jesus where he's real inoffensive; kind of like a Jewish Mr. Rogers. You just kind of imagine that Jesus is kind of like – you know, just a nice guy in a cardigan sweater and, "Hi, boys and girls! Today, I'm going to talk about the Bible. It's a great book. You're going to like it. Everybody just kind of sit down here. You hungry? A little bread? Would you like a little bread and fish? Sure, you would! It's good. You still hungry? Would you like some more? Have some more bread and have some more fish. Plenty

for everybody. Everybody be nice to each other; I just want you – can't you just like each other and just can't we all get along, boys and girls? Turn the other cheek and be real soft and sweet to everybody?" And that's their idea of Jesus; this kind of weak, nice guy, sort of no threat to anybody and he just sort of is a moral – not even a scold. He's just sort of this guy kind of urging us all to be a little nicer to each other and that is enough for them. They don't want to be religious; they want to be spiritual. They just want to have a nice little vibe.

The fact is, the Son of God is describing what he is going to do to people who are unforgiven in the misery of their sinful brokenness and that included Lazarus. He needed forgiveness of his sins, too, for his mind was not clean and pure, nor was his life. And the fact that he had suffered so much was not the reason he went to heaven. He didn't go to heaven because God had compassion on his suffering. He went to heaven because he was dialed in to his Savior.

So I hold this out to you to think about this, too. God is both angrier than you could ever imagine; beyond your wildest imagination how angry he is over human sin, including yours. He has seen them all. He remembers them all and is angry about every one and you're no better than anybody else. You have no moral superiority over anybody. You're a starving beggar just like me. But Jesus' mercy is also far greater than you can imagine. And you might say, "This is a contradiction. How can he both punish sin and forgive it at the same time?" And I will just say, "Yes, you have expressed it beautifully." Jesus is describing the severity of the wrath of God that is coming down like Sodom and Gomorrah part two. It's going to rain down. We see little bits and pieces of it as warnings, as trailers, like movie trailers, but the reality is going to be bad news and it's final.

As he's telling the story, he wants people to know, as you believe, so you will live. As you live, so you will die. As you die, the condition you're in when you die, you will be judged. And as you are judged, so you will stay. It's final. The guy says, "Send Laz. Send him to my family. They'll listen to him." Abraham said, "Oh, no, no, no. They have Moses and the prophets. They have the Bible. Let them listen to them. Let them read the Bible." "No, Father Abraham!" This is always the way of unbelief. Always arguing. "No, Father Abraham! If someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." And they said, "No, sorry rich guy; you're wrong. If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." And astonishingly enough, right about this time – maybe a little bit later – Lazarus, the real Lazarus, does die and Jesus really does raise him up. And the people who were later going to put Jesus to death, you know what they try to – they try to kill Lazarus again! Someone did rise from the dead and nobody believed him.

My friends, only the word of God can transform an unbeliever to a believer. What Father Abraham told this very sad rich guy, a guy saying, "You idiot," over and over and over to himself, 100,000 times a day, is something you and I need to know right now and that it's the word of God that's the only thing that can transform an unbelieving heart to a believing heart.

So I leave you with two charges today. This is a really big deal. First of all, this is you; this is your life. Right now is the time to repent of your sins. Get rid of all your arrogance, pride, all your bragging rights, all the things that you think should have set you apart and made you better

than anybody else. You and I are all starving beggars and we need food, the gospel food, from the master; the bread of life, Jesus Christ. We all are in this together and we all need him. But I also want to celebrate with you that Jesus himself went through everything the rich guy was and on his cross as he was dying himself, Jesus went through what that rich guy was going through. In fact, right down to the drink. Jesus intentionally refused even a drop of water on his tongue to experience the wrath of God to the full and at the end, as he was probably minutes or even seconds away from dying, he said, "Now I'm thirsty." And when that sponge was touched to his dying lips, it was not to ease his suffering but to fulfill what Scripture had said. And then at the very end, he gave up the ghost. He gave up his life and died in order to give his life to you and to me.

And it's my great joy to announce to you that through Jesus, you have the forgiveness of all your sins right now. And you and I have it not only to believe, but we have it to share. And here's my second and final charge to you: There are people in your life right now who are pretty murky on these concepts. And you are God's instrument – since nobody's coming back from the dead to wake them up – then you do it. Saving the world is an enormous, impossible task. So today, I challenge you to pick one; just one person in your life that you know is probably on his way to join the rich guy in the everlasting wrath, the unending changeless wrath of a holy God. And you can't change that person's mind and you can't believe for them but what you can do is give them a shot. Him or her. You can tell her these things. That there is wrath of God coming and it might be today; we might not make it to our beds tonight because today just might be the day. So now is the time. And I want you to feel some urgency about this because our lives are short and time is short. The Bible calls it – we're living in the last days and the end times. Take that seriously and treat it like that and in the context you have with people – you don't have to nag, you don't have to bore people with going on and on and on – just tell them once straight up: "We're all sinners but our Lord Jesus has bought you and given you the forgiveness of your sins and those who believe it, have it." Say it and mean it for yourself and for people that you know. And the word will take it from there.

With joy, we depart for our fatherland. And there we shall walk in endless joy. Amen.

Pastor Jeremy Mattek

There's a cave in Mexico that was discovered only about 17 years ago. It's called the Crystal Cave because inside the cave they discovered a lot of crystal. The cave is about the size of a football field and inside there are large crystals; some as long as 36 feet, some as round as large silos that you would see on a Wisconsin farm, which makes the value of crystal what it is, it's a pretty valuable place. But you can't get too attached to it. There's something about the cave you should know before you get in and that is that the temperature inside that cave is 136 degrees, which means you can only spend about 30 minutes in the cave before the heat would burn you alive. Don't get too attached to it!

Today, Pastor Jeske reminded us that the same is true of our lives. There are a lot of beautiful things in our lives but we can't get too attached to them. Our time with them is going to come to an end and so he encouraged us to spend our time listening to the word of God because in that

word we hear of a Jesus, a Savior, who did not run away from the heat of the whip and nails and thorns and a cross because what his heart was most attached to was you and giving you a future in heaven to look forward to, no matter what it cost him.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father in Heaven, on this day on which we reflect on our lives and the short time that we have, we thank you for the many gifts you have given us in life. You fill our lives with so many blessings - the blessings of togetherness with family and friends, the joys of being able to live in your wonderful creation and enjoy all the many different beautiful aspects of it. We also take this time to repent of all the times that our hearts have attached themselves to things in this world with more energy that we've attached ourselves to you, to our Savior, to the gift of heaven. We thank you for your gracious forgiveness that we get to live with right now; for the knowledge that it is ours for the truth that it is certain. And we thank you for the precious gift of a future to look forward to that can never be ripped away from us for any reason.

Thank you for these precious truths and thank you for the time we have to help others see them, as well. We think of family, our friends, our coworkers, who may not know Jesus, who may not know heaven, who may be walking through life feeling weak and discouraged. But you've given us the tools to give them hope and joy and confidence and to apply forgiveness. Help us to do this, Father in heaven. Open our eyes so that we see the opportunities. Open our hearts so that we step into them very, very quickly. And give us the words to speak so that more and more souls might live on earth in the limited time that we have with the certainty of our beautiful eternity. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

I'm Pastor Jeremy Mattek for Time of Grace and it all starts now.