

2026 Global Ministries Conference
Reconciling the World - Two Men, Two Destinies
Rico Tice
Luke 16:19-39

Well. It's a great joy to be here this morning. I wonder if you can grab your Bible and let's open it up. At the reading we had Luke 16:19-39. And just as you do that, I just want to say, if you're Canadian here this morning, welcome. I hope you've had a nice morning. Lovely to have you here. As we look at the Bible, I'm sure you'll have questions from the passage. And if that's the case, then do feel free to come and ask them. We'd love that to happen. I was on staff with John Stott for seventeen years, so that was an amazing privilege. He got up at ten to five in the morning, slept for half an hour each afternoon. I myself adopted one of those two habits, so that was helpful. Let's look at the Bible now together and let me pray as we come to it.

Our Father God, thank you for the Bible. Please speak clearly to us through it and we dare to pray. As we come this morning to Scripture. We pray that what we learn would be seared into our hearts for eternity. We pray it wouldn't. You wouldn't allow it to be stolen away. Please, Lord, feed our souls. And father, help us to choose the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dad spent thirty eight years in a tobacco multinational. So that was cradle to grave in the same company. And in that time, as I recall, I guess we only had two or three conversations as a family about the dangers of smoking and health. Even when a family friend who smoked heavily died of lung cancer, leaving boys of fourteen and sixteen, we didn't really talk about how that had happened. And to be honest, I never challenged my father about the work he did. I loved him very much. He was a wonderful dad to me, though to be blunt, I think you could say that in his career he killed people and in mine I bury them. I don't know if that would be true. I have to say though, in recent years I felt less guilty about my dad's career. I'm not trying to justify making cigarettes, but you feel less guilty about it. Certainly because of what appears on cigarette packets today. Smoking kills. Smoking when pregnant harms your baby. Now, I reckon that gives people a pretty clear warning in terms of what choice to make as they open up a packet and decide whether to smoke or not. I mean, here's the question do I think this is a trustworthy warning or is it a lie? Is this reality or not? As I decide whether to light up. And just to say, I'd like to just thank my friend Scott very much for this packet, and I'll get it straight back to you after the service. I know that you'll be wanting to nip out to the car park with your daughters and have a quick cigarette, so that'll be lovely.

But I just want to say that actually, we've got this warning here. Ladies and gentlemen, we've got another red hot warning here. They're both warnings. And as we open the scripture this morning and we look at the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to ask you what you made of it, what you make of it. And just to say, when we look at the Lord Jesus, let's remember who he is. This was the first thing that ever struck me about Jesus in the sermon on the Mount. He said, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. And then as he was being judicially murdered, he cried out for his killers. Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. That incredible correlation between life and lip. I take it that this is the most tender hearted man that ever lived. And yet he gives us this warning. Now, why? Well, I think it's because he loves us. So let's look at this passage here. As Scott said, a parable is a literary device for teaching spiritual truths. I don't want to head into medieval literalism here. This isn't meant to be history, but nevertheless, this parable does point to some chilling realities that we ignore.

Ladies and gentlemen, at our peril. So first of all, there are two men here. And I wonder, as we look down if we can see these two men. So here they are, these two men, and the first man is phenomenally wealthy. Can you see verse nineteen, there was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who feasted sumptuously every day. So he has the best and the most fashionable clothes that money can buy. And not a day passes without some splendid banquet being held. The word gate here is a huge ornamental portico. It's like the gates of Buckingham Palace. It's not a small, tiny gate. It's a vast gate. And I don't know. Look, you'll help me here. Will you help me? In terms of Birmingham, where does he live? Mountain Brook? Does he live at Mountain Brook? And then he goes to school at Crestline. Have I pronounced that right? There's someone who obviously went to the school there. Welcome this morning. Thank you for getting that right. Um, uh, his wife shops at Gus Mayer. Is that correct? And, uh, and, um, of course, he's a member of the Birmingham Country Club, by the way, if you're going there for lunch. Welcome. Lovely to have you here today. And he plays golf. He'll have probably have a few holes there. And of course, he's got a lake house at Lake Martin. Marvelous isn't it? Here it is. And can you see? Material prosperity oozes from this guy. His clothes, his food, his house. And, ladies and gentlemen, I wonder if you can see verse twenty five. Hold on to your seats. Look at verse twenty five. It's fascinating. Do you see what actually he is told by Abraham, the patriarch, in verse twenty five, But Abraham said, child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things. In other words, ladies and gentlemen, this man had not a problem till the day he died, God had lavished his goodness on him. I mean, in the card game of life, if you're dealt two aces and two kings, it's quite hard to play that badly. I'm. I'm nearly sixty. I'm fifty nine. I don't look it because I've got good hair and I've sacrificed my body for my face. But I'm fifty nine and I've got friends from boarding school and actually their life has been an upward trajectory. Nothing's gone wrong. I don't begrudge it. God has lavished his goodness upon them. So that's this man. You know, people sometimes say, oh, they'll become a Christian when something goes wrong. Nothing ever went wrong for this guy. Not that he was fine through Covid, through the recessions, it was all fine. So there he is, this rich man. Now, verse twenty two paints a picture of abject poverty. I mean, it's extreme as the rich man's opulence in its own way. Verse twenty, can we see? At his gate was laid, the word is sprawled. A poor man named Lazarus covered with sores. Can you imagine the sight? Now the word are there, laid again is sprawled, and he's there to face the sneering contempt of passersby. He has no fine clothes. The only thing that covers his back are sores. I was in Delhi once, and I saw a beggar, and there was a huge sore on his foot. I'd imagine a dog may have wanted to lick that raw flesh. Chronic nutrition. And what does he desire to do? Well, he desires to eat the food that fell from the rich man's table. So actually, dinner time, it's the trash bags that he rips open from the rich man's table. And that's when he eats. When the trash gets put out, that's his dinner time. And the only compassion he receives are from these mangy dogs that lick his sores. But there was one thing this poor man had that the rich man didn't have. I wonder if you can see it in verse twenty. Can we see? It's so profound we can easily miss it. The poor man was named Lazarus. He has a name. This is the only time in one of Jesus parables where a figure is given a name. It means you're known. You're significant. If I know your name and the word Eliezer Lazarus in Hebrew means he whom God helps. So Lazarus was known by God and he knew God. Oh, and brothers and sisters, this is the issue. Oh, this is so challenging. He didn't blame God for his misfortune. He didn't harbor bitterness against God. No. As he lay on the pavement, he patiently looked up to God in his trials. And he said, Lord, my hope is in you. His hunger, his homelessness, his sores. They don't sever his relationship with God. He trusts God. I often, I often ask myself why it is I've not suffered in my life. I've have not suffered. Why have I not suffered? Do you know? I don't think God can trust me with suffering. I'm not sure he can trust me. And that's the idolatry of it, isn't it? So often. And there'll be some here this morning like this. Your faith is not in God. Your faith is in your agenda

for God. And if he doesn't keep delivering you what you want like a divine waiter, you'll let it go. That's not Lazarus, though. No, he trusts in God. And of course, the question which emerges of these two men, one incredibly wealthy but with no identity, the other utterly destitute but known by God. The question is, of course, ladies and gentlemen, whom would you rather be of these two? Which one would you rather be? Well, we can only come to the answer of that when we look at the two destinies these men face. And it's an amazing moment now because the Lord Jesus Christ draws back the curtain on eternity. We are now looking into eternity. The Bible says God has put eternity into our hearts. My godfather was killed in a cliff fall when I was sixteen. It, first of all, woke me up to the reality of eternity. And now Jesus pulls back the curtain. And so what have we got here? As we look down, what do we learn about eternity? Well, verse twenty two, as we look down, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. By the way, this isn't a great parable to raise at a dinner party because everyone's dead by the third verse. Honestly, raise this. You'll soon get crossed off the Christmas card list. It's extraordinary. Lazarus dies, Abraham is dead. The rich man dies. But please see what we're being taught here Ladies and gentlemen, is the brevity of life.

As you come this morning, please understand. The Bible says, the Psalm says, your life is like a mist that rises in the morning and the sun comes out and it's gone. Your life is like water that drops into the ground. It goes into the ground. It's gone. Your life is like a dream. You know you wake up from a dream. What was my dream about? You think at breakfast? Oh, I can't remember. The Bible says. As for man, his days are like grass. You flourish like a flower of the field. The wind blows its place. Remembers it no more. It looks so amazing. And it's gone. The Bible says your life is a sigh and it's over. So no wonder the psalmist says, teach us to number. Our days are right that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Life is so short. Have you understood that this came home to me recently, rather chillingly, when a friend of mine sent me this questionnaire, which is in England. It's issued by insurance companies and it's called the Countdown Questionnaire, and are given to work out how long clients will live. So you fill in your date of birth. And then you answer the following questions. Do you smoke? Oh, brother Scott, you've got to stop. Do you smoke? Um. How much? How much do you. Do you exercise regularly? On average, how much do you drink? Do you eat saturated fats? Saturated fats? That's things like cucumbers and tomatoes and Brussels sprouts and cabbage. Don't touch them. They'll kill you. Don't go near saturated fats. Are you overweight? If so, by how much? I was loitering at a service station in England, filling up the car, and there was a weight machine. And so I stood on it and it said. One at a time, please. How many hours of sleep do you get a night? It's okay. As a pastor, I only work one day a week. That's all right. Is there a history of cardiovascular problems in your family? Have you ever been involved in a car accident? Next question. If so, how often are you some sort of psycho that crashes the car regularly Anyway, you answer the countdown calculator and then it gives you your age of death and your date of death. I tell you, I did it. I had a salad for lunch and went for a run. I was in bed by nine thirty, but we never know. We never know when our lives will end. Please hear me. The fragility of life. I've buried nine school friends nine. The fragility of life. Ladies and gentlemen. That's what we're being taught here. But actually, the point here in this passage that is in verse twenty two. But the point here, ladies and gentlemen, is that death is not the end. Jesus crucially teaches us here that our personalities do survive death in a conscious state. So there is life after death. The coffin is not an exit box. And to say that we can live without consequence is, according to Jesus, a fantasy. Because these two men Encounter two very different destinies and are sustained in two very different states. Rico, how do you know? How can you prove that? Well, at the heart of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. So at the heart of our faith is some information, some facts. And the Bible teaches us that Jesus lived and taught. He had a

band of followers. He was tried in a Roman and Jewish court. He was strung up on a cross. They put a spear through his side. They took him off the cross. They certified him as dead. They put him in a tomb, and three days later he was walking around again. Now that is a great hope. But ladies and gentlemen, it's also a great warning. The resurrection warns me that there is a destiny to come, because there's a door marked death, and Jesus has been through it and come back. So what is Lazarus's destiny? What is it like to be at Abraham's side. What does heaven, the new creation feel like? Have you ever thought about that? What does it feel like? Well, in one Corinthians chapter two, verse nine, Paul the apostle describes heaven by saying, what no eye has seen. Now again, this is all guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus. As we look at this, it's not fantasy. Jesus, who came back from the dead, means that that past certainty gives us this hope. What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined. What God has prepared for those who love him. I wonder if you could do this for me for a moment. Could you just think of, please, the best moment of your life? Just look back. When has been the best moment, the moment of most elation? I don't know the giddy elation of falling in love, the most intimate relationship you've known, a couple said to me. We were both holding our little boy when he smiled for the first time. Maybe it's an achievement after decades of effort you've got there. Just take how you felt in that moment and hear this verse. Now I have seen no ear, has heard no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. So take what you felt in that moment. Take it, and multiply its intensity by infinity and its duration by eternity. And that is what it will feel like. Whilst my feelings in this world go up and down according to whether I've had a snicker bar, and if you can see, I've had a few, but not. Not then. Oh, then our feelings. There'll be elation. That's how Lazarus felt at home. Valued. Not sprawled in the gutter.

Do you know, the first funeral of a young man I took was a guy called Stuart Spencer. He was thirty. He'd done a PhD. He was very, very bright, really intelligent man. He was dying of leukemia. He asked me to speak at his service. I was twenty seven, and I went to see him three days before he died. And suddenly I blurted out. It was a hopeless comment. I just suddenly blurted out. I suddenly said, Stuart, what's it like to die? Not a great question. And he looked at me and he immediately said, Rico, Christ is risen! Stuart, what's it like to die? Rico? Christ has risen! I'll never forget the moment. It was amazing. So that is Lazarus, and that's his future. But, you know, we also have to look at the rich man's destiny. Do you see his fate? As we look down? Verse twenty three. Can we look at it together as we look down? And in Hades. how? Being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 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 the flame. What do we learn about his fate?

Ladies and gentlemen, the Lord Jesus Christ, the most tender hearted man that ever lived, solemnly warns us here that there is a place called hell. To say that there is no hell, as a recent Archbishop of York said, is to say that there are times when Jesus was telling the truth and times when he was lying. I have here the funeral card of my best friend from school and my father at their services, which I took. I talked about the hope of a day of reunion of the new creation. How can you possibly be believable on that and not take seriously what Jesus says here? I can't have one or the other that just has no integrity. You see, the Christian faith is being saved from hell through the cross for heaven. So Jesus bore the condemnation we deserve. The wages of sin is death. He took the wages in our place. He bore our sin. He paid our debt. He endured our penalty. He died our death to save us from hell. At the heart of the Christian faith. We're being saved from hell through the cross for heaven. That's why he had to come.

After we'd lived in, Chile, where I got my stupid name. And by the way, it is Rico Tice, not Tico Rice. It's Rico Tice. But after Chile, we went to Africa. We lived in Uganda and in Zaire, where my dad grew tobacco. And I was a five year old in Africa. And as a little five year old, there was no kids TV, there were no screens, and I had hobbies. And my two favorite hobbies were stamp collecting and butterflies. And both are amazing in Africa, the stamps and butterflies. And for that hobby you needed one of these, a magnifying glass. But I soon found, as a five year old in Africa that making little things bigger was not the only thing a magnifying glass could do. I found that if you took one of these into the midday sun, the possibilities were endless. I found that you could set a light, a leaf, or a piece of newspaper, or even the gardener's hut. And best of all, I found if you held your twin sister down, you could scare the living daylights out of her with one of these. That was before I thought of ordination into the Church of England. You see, you can take a magnifying glass and focus the rays of the sun into such a sharp point of intensity that it burns things. Ladies and gentlemen, I wonder if this morning you could imagine a massive magnifying glass the size of this room, the size of this room, and through it our past. Not the sun's rays, but God's righteous anger at the hatred, the venom, the envy, the gossip, the pockets of lust, the godlessness in my heart. I'm not even talking about yours. But imagine all God's righteous anger. And it's a good thing, that anger. Because how I treat you and how you treat me and how we treat the world matters to God. But imagine all that anger comes down, down, down until it hits one man at one point in history so that he cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He is forsaken for me. And that is how I'm saved from hell through the cross. for heaven, but that there is a place called hell. There is no doubt, and it's guaranteed by the resurrection.

Secondly, it is a place of suffering. So the rich man says, do we see in verse twenty four he says in verse twenty four, I in agony, in anguish, in this flame. I mean, what would this look like on camera? It's desperate. And surely what we learn here is the seriousness of the sin. It is so serious what has happened? I mean, it's not an issue of being rich. The Bible. It's fine to be rich, but the Bible says don't be hard hearted. And what's staggering is this rich man knows Lazarus's name. He knows that he's ripping open the bin liners, but he never helps him. He's been given all these resources, and he hardens his heart. He hardens his heart. And he says, my life is about my goals, my aims for self-fulfillment. God has given me all these gifts, but he will have nothing to do. And I wonder if you can see the devastating, the devastating word that sums up what this rich man has done wrong. Can you see it in verse twenty five? Have a look down at verse twenty five. Here is the warning for all of us. But Abraham said, child, remember, remember how you lived, how you ignored me, how you ignored the beggar at the gate and God will not be mocked. The Bible says nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. And then we come to the heart of sin. Do we see it as we look down? Verse twenty seven he said, then I beg you, father, send to him to my father's house five brothers, so that he may warn them that they also may not come to this place of torment. But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to let them hear them. You see, they had Bibles. These boys. He'd been given a Bible by the Gideons. His granny had given him another Bible. And the message of the Bible is about rescue. So when Jesus was on the Emmaus Road after the resurrection, he's risen from the dead. He's walking along, he says. And beginning with the prophets we read and beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. So the message of the Bible is a message of rescue. The Bible is there so that you can be saved from hell through the Christ cross for heaven. And this man goes, do you see? As we look down, it's fascinating. He says, do we see verse thirty? And he said, no, Father Abraham. But if someone from the dead goes to them, they'll repent. The man goes, look, look. They won't listen to the Bible. What they need is a massive supernatural experience and then they'll

believe it. So, like Scrooge in A Christmas Carol, if they get a huge experience, they'll believe it and see the reply. Do you see, verse thirty one, he said to him, if they don't hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. Why is that? Why won't they be convinced? Because Christian faith is not believing something in spite of the evidence. Christian faith is believing something in spite of the consequences. God has given you all the evidence you need to believe. He's given you the Bible. He's given you the death of Jesus. And the Bible says, if you don't believe these things, it's not an intellectual decision. It's a moral decision. It's suppressing the truth. I look back at my boarding school cohort. They know it's true. They just don't want it. It's too inconvenient. They won't repent even if they hear Moses and the prophets.

So as we close. Ladies and gentlemen, who are we in the parable? Who are we as we close? Can we look down? Can we see? We're all in verse twenty eight. Do you see verse twenty eight. Let's see ourselves. Here's our walk on past part. For I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment. We're like the brothers, and our destinies are still to be determined. And the question is, what will we do with the message of Jesus? What will we do with the death of Jesus? For hell is a real place. Over the gates of hell are written the words, too late, it's too late. There's a time when the mercy runs out. There's no mercy left. And hell is an opportunity forfeited. I was waddling around Regent's Park on a run back in London, and I went past a car that said, Paras don't die. They just regroup in hell. And I thought, that is not true. Because friendship, comradeship, these are God's gifts. And when he withdraws himself, he withdraws his gifts. Hell is torment. Hell is to be utterly alone. It's a desperate thing. And what's interesting here as we come to a missions conference is, of course, they believe in evangelism. Not just in heaven, but in hell. This man is in hell, and he's desperate for his brothers to be warned. Have you ever thought about this? Osama bin laden. The day that he died, he finds himself in hell. And his great longing from then on. is that his loved ones meet a Christian missionary who tells them the gospel. That's his great longing from hell. They long for their loved ones to be rescued, that they may not come to this place. It's a sobering thought. And here's another sobering thought as we as we finish. Does God know your name? He knew Lazarus's name. But does he know your name? That's the great question here. As you stand before God and he asks you, did you know me? Did you have your sin forgiven? Have you attended to the cross? And I'm on my knees this morning saying, please, the resurrection of Jesus proves this is true. Please don't be hard hearted by it like this rich fool. Don't be hard hearted. Open your heart to the rescue of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And amazingly, we can do that by praying a prayer because he's done all the work. Here's a prayer as we close.

Lord God, I'm so sorry that in many ways I've been like this rich man taking your gifts and ignoring you, the giver. Most of all, I'm sorry for ignoring your son's death for me. Please forgive me. And please send your Holy Spirit into my life and help me to live with Jesus as my master. Oh, it be a great day to pray that prayer a wonderful day. So I'm going to say it phrase by phrase now as we close. And if it's right for you, why not echo it in your own heart? So let me pray it now. And if you know that he died for you, if you know that but you've not attended to this, then this is the most important moment in your life. Let's pray together. Let's pray. So please say it after me, phrase by phrase.

Lord God, I'm so sorry that in many ways I've been like this rich man taking your gifts and ignoring you, the giver. Most of all, I'm sorry for ignoring your son's death for me. Please forgive me. And please send your Holy Spirit into my life and help me to live with Jesus as my master.

Amen.

If you've prayed that prayer, I've got a little booklet here. I'd love to meet you at the back afterwards and give it to you. So please come and see me. We'd love to take your name so we can support you. Thank you so much for listening.