

Surprised by Hell!

THAT WILL BE THE SURPRISES OF ALL SURPRISES FOR ANY PERSON. And the Word says directly and indirectly that there will be many who did not expect to be there and shocked at where they ended up! As we understand better the way to the gates of hell we can see better how to enter the gates of heaven.

I am writing this to make a serious point. I do not want to present an article with 'feelings' about rules of the do's and don't that send a soul to hell. Also, that we must make a list of rules and walk in fear of them. No, but I want to present some principles that God's Word, from the mouth of Jesus, puts forth. It will be good for us all to look attentively. The Word is very understandable and plain. None of us should be surprised by what is said. But the Bible says 'some' will be very surprised as they raise their eyes in Hell. Let us be attentive now and not live in regret for Eternity.

Lk.16:19-23

Jesus likely aimed this story at rich Sadducee and Pharisees in Jerusalem along with the other elite of the Jewish society. At this time there wasn't a middle class. There was the very rich, and poor and then the very poor. The rich made up much less than ten percent of the society. They were the Pharisees, Sadducee, the Roman electorate (Herod, Pilot and the high priest). Also there were the merchants and government officials with the ruling Hebrew priests that made up this upper class.

The rich controlled the population by land ownership, and with the excessive rent and taxes on their produce, this kept the peasants very oppressed and poor. A writer of the times stated on a visit to Jerusalem, "These Jewish women tend to be very beautiful but there extreme poverty makes them odious and undesirable." This situation made life unbearable and spawned a great deal of hatred for the upper classes. This was the period that Jesus arrived on the scene.

The tax collectors were also a part of the upper class of the society. The artisans were considered poor but were enabled by their professions to live better than the peasants. Jesus was part of this class. The teaching is clear here that Jesus spoke this to the well off and others who lived for the wealth and position of this world. The rich man liked parties and to wear fine clothes..ignoring the situation of those in need around him. He was not a robber or cheat and he hasn't gained his riches illegally. He has simply taken advantage of the economic system. His wealth could have come through hard work also. He was an upright and decent man in the eyes of society, perhaps he was a Sadducee or Pharisee but certainly not feeling he was living wrongfully.

At the edge of his estate was a poor man with a skin disease called Lazarus, the only character named in any of Jesus' stories. According to local customs guests did not use napkins but wiped their sticky hands on chunks of bread. And threw them under the table. The Greek word for beggar is related to the word 'spit'. Lazarus was a spit upon person and despised. The beggar embarrassed the rich man and spoiled the spirit of his party. But the dogs had no favorites. They licked poor Lazzarus's wounds. The dogs symbolized the unsaved, and the Gentile symbolized the outcasts. The rich religious man spit on the beggar in contempt. But the dogs, of all things,... showed compassion. What sarcasm, the dogs had more compassion than the religious rich man.

Then things turn around: The rich man roasts in hell and old 'spit upon Lazarus' is at the right hand of Abraham. He has a place of honor in the congregation of the righteous. The rich man is sizzling in hell begging for a drop of water.

The message is clear. The rich man was blinded by comforts and luxury and refused to open his heart to the poor and needy. Scrumptious feasting and a lavish life-style blinded the rich man. Consumed with the good life, he couldn't see the sores or hear the nearby cries of despair. He was trapped in a society and system that was callous and had no compassion. How much more serious is it for those who have not only

Moses, the prophets but also JESUS in this day and age! Surly Jesus would say to us all, those who have ears hear, listen!

In another parable Jesus warns that riches not only blind us but also control us and boss our life. They dominate and order what we are.

This isn't a story to the poor to just wait around for their reward in the sky and that they are automatically saved. We must be careful that this isn't a story to comfort beggars. This is a warning to us all. The poor also can be arrogant without compassion and live for only themselves. Although, it is harder for them to be this way in their condition.

The haughty, the arrogant and the rich find it difficult to stoop in humility and acknowledge dependency on God. But they can have the false feeling of security that they will not be lost because their riches has given them position in religious groups and the honor of men. Their hearts live on pride and self-righteousness and look down on others of a humble status. Jesus stated that such men would not inherit eternal life. In other words... they will be surprised at what they do inherit. Please do not misunderstand me as I want to emphasize you don't have to be rich to be proud, arrogant and self-righteous, desiring the approval of man over God. But it comes easier for those who are addicted to comfort, pleasure and self-dependency to lose out in Hell. That is why Jesus spoke so many times against riches and chose a manger in a stall instead of a castle and an earthly throne.

If He had given into the temptation of satan and thrown Himself down from the temple and saved by angels or floated to the ground, this would have been seen by the elite religious rulers and also this would have been the sign to make Him one of them. Jesus would have had all the fame and riches and comfort of a great earthly king. But He chose humility and the suffering of the cross. An example to all who do not want to be surprised in eternity. That's why He did what He did.

Matthew 11:6

Blessed are those who take no offense in Jesus' position on this subject. Condemned are those who do, as there is no middle road.

The rich young ruler asked Jesus, "What must I do to have eternal life?". He frequented the synagogue and knew the scriptures. Jesus looked upon him and loved him. "Young man your riches are controlling your life, not God..." was Jesus' reply, "... and you forfeit eternal life because of this." Many find themselves in this battle even today. Many bow their knee to the god of materialism all the time asking, "What must I do to have eternal life", with no intention of changing. At times, even thinking God is blessing.

Zacchaeus is also presented right after him in Luke 19. Both men are part of the rich and powerful elite. One chooses life and the other death. The rich young ruler, if he never repented and changed, was probably shocked when he lifted his eyes in hell as he had obeyed all the commandments from his youth. He was very religious and had a hunger for the will of God but it wasn't enough hunger to bring him into obedience. Many are in that position today.

When Jesus shared how hard it was for the rich to enter heaven in Luke 18:24 the response was predictable. Maybe some are asking the same question right now as they read this article. "Then who can be saved"? Even the disciples had a hard time with Jesus' words. Jesus said, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." He wasn't saying that He would drag the rich miraculously through the Kingdom's gate and save them by this statement. But rather He was saying God's grace could even free rich people from wealth's demonic grip. Even rich people can turn around as Zacchaeus. Any thing is possible when people turn their lives over to God's reign.

Zacchaeus chose life and he acted upon it. In Luke 19:9 Jesus said, "Today SALVATION has come to your house." Jesus shows, literally, that what is impossible with man is very easy with God. In other words this man will not be surprised by hell. I am sure he's happy now because of his choice. If only all of

us could see the end of the story of our life. I know we would choose differently today many principles we are living for.

Jesus condemns those to hell "who devour widows houses and for the sake of appearance make long prayers. Mk.12:40 Attachment to wealth can compete with and unseat the rule of God in our lives and we become blind and cannot see or be sensitive to the needs around us. We only see self and what we possess and want. With all this we can still keep an appearance of righteousness but without true worth in eternity. A real surprise is waiting for many.

Compassion and generosity are always the traits of those saved from hell. The religious leaders promoted injustice. They oppressed the masses and took from the widow to the point of stealing their homes through deceit and accumulated great riches through this trickery. All the while feeling that they would be the first to eat at Abraham's table in eternity. However, Jesus said, "You will not even be able to attend and the prostitutes will enter before you." Surprised by Hell!

That's why the riches of this life are called by Jesus 'deceptive'. We think we are in the right and all the time being deceived to our true position before God. We must take a position and cultivate a spirit of compassion in whatever we do. To let generosity be the rule of our life and be known by all as a compassionate and generous person. We will have no surprises at the end of our journey here on earth if that is the fruit of our life. Our behavior is the real test. Jesus calls for attitude changes that produce action. Our words must line up with our lives. We can always deceive others but there is one who cannot be deceived. (2 Cor. 7:1) Let us purify our selves out of reverence of a Holy God who will judge the living and dead. Rv.11:18,20:12

I don't want to be surprised. I want to be expectant! To live in eternity with a family of those who are compassionate, loving and generous. An those who love God more than anything else and desire to be with others who feel the same way. I can't wait! Looking forward to seeing you there! Love, Clark

