



***YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!***  
**Summer 2018 Leader Commentary**

**Unit 3: Final Destinations**  
**Session 1: Don't Go There! (see pp. 142-145)**

**The Question:** If I don't go to heaven, where do I go when I die?

**The Point:** Your choices now determine your final destination.

**Background Passage:** Luke 16

**Focal Passage:** Luke 16:19-25,27-28,31

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, "If I don't go to heaven, where do I go when I die?" and drive home this one truth: Your choices now determine your final destination.

**Focus on These Points**

***A Place of Choice***  
***(Luke 16:19-22)***

Earlier in chapter 16, Luke recounted how Jesus focused His ministry and message on basic kingdom principles. But in verse 19, His teaching took a turn, moving from a description of what the kingdom was all about to an emphasis on the alternative for those who chose to reject God's offer of salvation. And, as He often did, Jesus drove the point home with a story. We are not specifically given the identity of the rich man in the story, though tradition has named him "Dives." He apparently had the best of everything. We know that he dressed well since linen was the fabric of choice among the wealthy in the first century. Purple also has been associated with wealth and even royalty. We also see that he ate well since Luke described lavish feasts that seemed to be common occurrences at this man's house. The Greek wording implies that the man enjoyed luxurious benefits each day.

As he sat suffering at the rich man's gate, Lazarus stood in stark contrast to Dives in almost every way. As a beggar, he did not have power or prestige. As an invalid, he was sick and hungry. The phrase "covered with sores" refers to being afflicted with ulcers, a medical condition a doctor like Luke would have known well. The statement that he longed to be fed from the rich man's scraps reminds readers of Jesus' earlier story about the Prodigal Son, who was desperate enough and hungry enough to eat what was given to pigs (Luke 15:16). The fact that dogs licked Lazarus's sores served as further evidence that his condition and situation were pitiful. From the perspective of most people in that day, including Jesus' listeners, Lazarus's quality of life was barely above that of an animal. Note that this is not the same Lazarus who lived in Bethany and was raised from the dead by Jesus in John 11.

Despite all his resources, the rich man apparently never raised a finger to help Lazarus. Instead he chose to focus solely on himself, and that was the problem. As Jesus continued to unravel the story, both men died around the same time. But even then they were treated differently. Lazarus was carried into God's presence, referred to as "Abraham's side." The rich man, however, was simply buried.

### ***A Place of Consequences (Luke 16:23-25)***

Following the deaths of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus' story focused on the afterlife. Most likely, no communication between heaven and hell will be possible in eternity. Likewise, we should not focus on the position of heaven above and hell below. Jesus was warning His listeners to be prepared for the next life by living rightly on earth, not sharing specific locations for our possible destinations.

Luke specifically mentioned thirst and flames as part of the rich man's torture. He had no way to relieve his suffering. In life Lazarus had longed for crumbs from the man's table to satisfy his hunger. Now, the shoe was on the other foot as the rich man longed for a drop of water from Lazarus' fingertips. Along with the physical suffering, the rich man discovered a relational gap that only added to his pain. Despite his pleas for help, Abraham made clear that movement between heaven and Hades was impossible. In many ways the relational suffering in hell creates a much deeper agony than even the flames. Those in hell exist in isolation. They are alone with no hope for connection. Even worse, they are completely separated from the presence of God with no chance of restoration. The word *Hades* (a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Sheol") typically refers to the grave or the place of the dead. (Holman 1113) Old Testament writers used it to describe physical death (Num. 16:30-33; Job 11:8; Ps. 139:8; Jonah 2:2). However, Luke expanded the meaning to include spiritual death as well. While the rich man had physically died, his life did not end there. The torment he experienced in Hades reflects the traditional Christian doctrine of hell as a place of eternal suffering for those who reject God's offer of salvation through Christ.

Dives' circumstances did not substantially change his attitude toward Lazarus—at least not initially. He still harbored an essentially selfish attitude that revolved around his own needs. Jesus emphasized the need for personal preparation for life after death. The rich man had been so busy with his earthly pleasures that he failed to take care of the most important part of his life—eternity. He was not condemned for building wealth. He was condemned for neglecting faith.

### ***A Place of Conviction (Luke 16:27-28,31)***

The rich man eventually understood that his condition was hopeless. All his earthly influence could not change his eternal circumstances. So he began to think about someone other than himself—specifically his family. Dives' hope was that Abraham would send Lazarus back to his family and warn his five brothers about the error of their ways. The Greek word Luke used for *warn* indicates some sort of supernatural act or sign. It also can be translated "witness." Such a miraculous event, the rich man believed, would be enough to convince his brothers to change their current course and escape the consequences of the poor decisions he had made.

But Abraham again rejected the rich man's request. If his brothers refused to heed the warnings of the prophets during their lives, they would not be convinced by the resurrection of someone from the dead. Luke's message is not about the evil of wealth or the privilege of poverty. Instead, he emphasized the reality of hell—and the possibility of avoiding that destination. The story also reminds believers of their task of sharing the message of Christ with those who need to accept Him. While unbelievers will be held responsible for their choices, Christ's followers will be held responsible for their witness.