



“God and His Word”  
Luke 16:14-31

**Idea:** What one does with the Word of God is a matter of life and death.

**Intro:** The Word of God can change not only a life but an entire lifestyle. Keith Miller shares an incredible story of this glorious transformation in his book, *Edge of Adventure*. In 1787, the British ship named *Bounty*, with Captain Bligh at the helm, set sail from England for the South Seas. The plan was for the crew on board the *Bounty* to create a more habitable environment among the islands by transplanting fruit-bearing and food-bearing trees along with other things. After ten months of voyage, the *Bounty* arrived safely at its destination. Then for six months the officers and the crew gave themselves to the duties placed upon them by the British government.

When the special assignment was completed, the order was given for them to embark again, but the sailors rebelled. They had formed strong attachments with the native girls, and the climate and the ease of island life in the South Seas was much to their liking. The result was mutiny on the *Bounty*, and the sailors placed Captain Bligh and a few loyal men adrift in an open boat. The captain, miraculously, survived the ordeal and was rescued. He eventually arrived home in London to tell his story. An expedition was launched to punish the mutineers, and in due time fourteen of them were captured and paid the penalty under British law.

Nine of the men, however, had migrated to another distant island. There they formed a colony. Perhaps there has never been a more degraded and debauched social life than that of this colony. The men learned to distill whiskey from a native plant, and the whiskey along with other bad habits led to their ruin. Disease and murder took the lives of all the native men and all but one of the white men. The man who survived was named Alexander Smith. He found himself the only man on an island, surrounded by a crowd of women and half-breed children. Alexander Smith found a Bible among the possessions of a dead sailor. The Book was new for him. He had never read it before, so he sat down and read it through. He believed it, and he began to appropriate it. He wanted others to share in the benefits of this book, so he began to teach the women and children what he was learning.

It was twenty years before a ship ever found that island, and when it did, a miniature utopia was discovered. The people were living in decency, prosperity, harmony, and peace. There was nothing of crime, disease, immorality, insanity, or illiteracy. The lone answer for the reason of this miniature slice of heaven on earth was the Bible. By reading, believing, and appropriating the Word of God the people on the island were moved from death to life.

Unfortunately, the society we live in looks more and more like the early days of Alexander Smith’s island life than it does his latter days. It is a debased and depraved society that is fixated on the passions of the flesh with

no care for the things of God. Like Smith and his fellow sailors, the Bible still has a presence, but it is rarely opened and heeded even less. When someone does dare to open and share the Bible's teaching, that person is quickly shouted down and canceled. Should we be surprised, then, to see exponential jumps in crime, disease, immorality, mental health, and senselessness in society?

Thankfully, Ecclesiastes reminds believers that *"there is nothing new under the sun"* (1:9), meaning we can learn how to navigate the waters of today in many ways by looking back in history. The Lord Jesus found Himself in a society that possessed God's Word. Like Alexander Smith, the Pharisees and religious leaders read and believed it. They just refused to appropriate it into their lives. However, by not obeying and appropriating God's Word, they showed that they really did not believe it. Jesus made it His mission to call people to hear and obey God's Word, knowing it was a matter of life and death.

Let's look at the second half of Luke 16 and see what the Gospel writer has to say about God and His Word.

Read Luke 16:14-31.

**Inquiry:** Jesus had been speaking primarily to His disciples, but the Pharisees had been listening. They despised what Jesus was saying. Luke tells us they *"ridiculed him."* The term in the Greek (ἐκμυκτηρίζω) carries the idea of "turning up one's nose." These men loved money, so they, obviously, rejected the message Jesus had just shared with His disciples about money. Rather than loving and serving God, they were devoted to riches and possessions. God's will was nowhere on their radar. As such, the Pharisees made fun of the God who had come to redeem them.

God's Word was present in the lives of these religious leaders. They memorized the Torah. They even went so far as to wear the Word of God on their foreheads. The Word was a big deal to them, but it was only an outward expression. They never allowed the Word to take root in their lives and transform them from the inside out. Today, as we consider Jesus' teaching from this encounter, I want you to see that God's Word is what a person needs more than anything else. It makes the difference between life and death. Let's look at four things about God and His Word.

### **1. God knows your heart. (vs. 15)**

The Pharisees were really good at convincing people they were holy men who walked with God. They were good at convincing people they lived to obey God's Word. In fact, they were so successful at convincing the people of Israel that they eventually brought them under the yoke of their traditions. They emphasized their outward show of piety and religiosity. They were so good at this show that they had persuaded themselves. Jesus, however, was not convinced; He could see through their façade and knew their hearts.

Illust: To Jesus, the Pharisees seemed like young children playing hide-and-go-seek. You know how young kids are when they play this game. When you start counting, they scatter and hide in the most obvious places around the house. Little Johnny ducks behind the drapes in the den with his feet showing. Suzie hides behind the bedroom door, and when you walk in the room, she starts giggling. It is obvious where they are hiding, but we play along and act like they are not visible.

The Lord, on the contrary, never plays along with the person who is denying and rejecting His Word. He does not play along because life is not a game. It is serious business, and eternity hangs in the balance. In response to the ridicule of the Pharisees, Jesus said in verse 15, *"You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts."* The Bible tells us that He is the God who sees (Gen 16:13). The author of Hebrews says, *"And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account"* (Heb 4:13). Jesus knew the hearts of the men who ridiculed Him. Likewise, He knows your heart today, and He sees the façade you put up.

He knows who and what it is that you worship. People tend to worship their possessions and live for material things. There may be a spiritual veneer laid over your life, but mark my word, Jesus sees through it to your heart. He knows the real you.

## 2. God's Word speaks to the deepest need of your heart. (vs. 16)

Not only does God see our hearts, but thankfully, He also speaks to them. Jesus said in verse 16, *“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.”* That last phrase can also be translated as *“everyone is forcefully urged into it.”* God has given His Word to mankind so that every person can know and understand both the condemnation of sin and the redemption found exclusively in Jesus Christ. The Law and Prophets were given as a guardian until Christ came (Gal 3:24). John the Baptist, as the last of the Old Testament prophets, announced the arrival of the Kingdom. His announcement in no way annulled the Law. Instead, Jesus' arrival fulfilled it (Matt 5:17-20). The Pharisees prided themselves in their faithful obedience to the Law of Moses, but they failed to receive the Savior of whom Moses wrote.

These religious leaders honored the Lord with their lips, but in their hearts, they lived like everyone else in the world. They rejected John's preaching and allowed him to be killed, even though he was a prophet. They also were rejecting Jesus' preaching. These religiously, pious men were lost and condemned. Into this spiritual darkness and rebellion, God the Son spoke a word. He preached the message of the Kingdom. Jesus said nothing about miracles. He did not say, “Since then the good works of the Kingdom have been performed.” There is no mention of the lame being healed, the blind regaining sight, or the dead being raised. Instead, the full focus is on God's Word coming through the preaching of the Kingdom. This Word speaks to the deepest need of the heart...being made right with God.

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

– Hebrews 4:12

The Pharisees' outward piety was strong. They looked the part. They seemed like men who knew and followed God, but they did not know or follow Him. They were lovers of money and full of pride. Therefore, speaking to surface level things would not have helped the Pharisees' status with God. They did not need to hear a five-steps to a happy life Ted Talk. A behavioral modification module was not going to do them any good. Their problems were much deeper. It was a matter of the heart. Their hearts were in rebellion against God.

Just like these spiritual leaders, each of us possess a heart that is in rebellion against God. We can dress ourselves up and makes ourselves look good on the outside, but the fact remains that the heart is *“deceitful above all things and desperately sick”* (Jer 17:9). It is here that God's Word goes to work, surgically cutting through the layers of duplicity all the way down to the heart till we see ourselves juxtaposed over and against Jesus. Then, like Isaiah, through the Word of God, we see the King and our response is *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips...”* (Is 6:5).

The deepest need in the Pharisees' hearts was to be redeemed by Jesus Christ. The message delivered by Moses, John, Jesus, and later on through the apostles all forcefully urge us to consider the gracious message of the Kingdom. God wants to transform our lives, which will subsequently transform our lifestyles.

## 3. God's Word sets boundaries for what is right and wrong. (vs. 17-18)

The deceitfulness of our hearts will lead us to think that we know better than God or that it is okay to “improve” on what He has declared. It is here that we need to remind ourselves that nothing God has ever said has an expiration date. Heaven and earth will pass away before one little dot of the Law is changed (vs. 17), which means it will never change.

How in the world does verse 18 fit this discussion? It seems sort of random to throw a statement in about divorce when previous topics have been about money and the Kingdom. Well, remember the idea of stewardship runs throughout Luke 16. Jesus views marriage as a stewardship. He has taught extensively about marriage throughout His earthly ministry, pointing back to all that the Law and the Prophets had said about it. He calls the Jewish people back to the holiness of marriage as defined in the Law.

Among the Jews, there was great debate over marriage. Some rabbis during this time supported divorce for offenses as minor as a woman burning her husband’s food or the husband simply finding her displeasing in some way. Truthfully, sinful humanity has had a low view of marriage from the time Adam blamed Eve for eating the fruit down to our day. We have no-fault divorces today.

Jesus speaks into this culture to remind them and us today that His people are to rightly steward their possessions as well as their relationships. God’s Word alone sets the boundaries of what is right and wrong. Pragmatism and preference are never to be determining factors when it comes to stewarding things God has placed in our hands. God is the standard of righteousness. Man is totally depraved, and as such cannot help but transgress the boundaries God has set in place. Therefore, His people are to seek out guidance from God’s Word and His Spirit to do what is right in all matters of life. God’s Word teaches us how to have transformed lifestyles, but we first need a transformed life.

#### **4. God’s Word is necessary for salvation. (vs. 31)**

Jesus shared a story that contrasted the lives of two men. One man was rich. He is anonymous and only referred to as *“a rich man.”* This man lived like a king, being dressed in purple and the finest linen. He feasted each day. The poor man is named Lazarus, which means “God has helped.” He was covered in oozing sores and had nothing to eat. People cast him outside of the rich man’s gate each day so he could beg for scraps from his table. Both men died and were carried to their respective destinations. Lazarus was carried to Abraham’s side, a reference to heaven. There he enjoyed the blessings of his heritage. The rich man was buried, and his spirit was taken to Hades, a place of torment and judgment. There he experienced the horror of his heritage.

The point of Jesus’ story was not to teach that wealth is bad and poverty is good. Wealth is amoral. It does not lead people to eternal destruction. Likewise, poverty does not secure a person’s position in heaven. This point is made in the second half of the story. The rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers so that they would be warned of the danger of Hades. Abraham, however, tells the rich man that his brothers have the warning of Moses and the Prophets. Seeing a man resurrected from the dead is not enough for salvation. God’s Word alone is necessary and enough to transform a life. It is in the Bible that we learn of God, sin’s condemnation, and redemption through Jesus. In it we learn that it is by grace through faith that sinners are saved from the condemnation of sin (Eph 2:8). This faith comes from hearing the Word (Rom 10:17).

**Conclusion:** Alexander Smith and his fellow sailors lived debased and depraved lives. The Bible was present among them, but it was rarely, if ever, opened. It was heeded even less. Through a set of terrible circumstances, Smith came to the end of himself. Sin had destroyed everything he thought was good in his life. Discovering the Bible among the belongings of a dead friend was God’s good and gracious gift to a sinner.

Alexander Smith opened that Bible and began to read. The words on the pages came alive and spoke to the deepest need in his life. He began to understand that sin had wrecked and broken him, but he found hope in Jesus Christ who could fix the brokenness. Smith believed the message of the gospel. The women and children on the island also believed. They listened and put into practice the teaching of the Bible, which transformed not only their eternal destination but also their lifestyle. Crime, disease, immorality, insanity, and illiteracy were replaced with decency, prosperity, harmony, and peace. By reading, believing, and appropriating the Word of God the people on the island were moved from death to life. Therefore, as we ponder Jesus' words, we recognize the power of God's Word to change a life. You see, what one does with the Word of God is a matter of life and death.