



**14/11/21** Two minutes of silence was observed  
**Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus** by Ben M.

### **Reading Luke 16:19-31**

Our topic was raised by the Lord Jesus himself in Luke 16:31 "They do not listen to Moses and the Prophets. So they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." We are thinking about the importance of listening to the prophets. In the last sixteen books of the Old Testament prophets were speaking for God in dark days. God speaks in the darkness. He spoke through the prophets of a brighter day. Sometimes people speak of hope when they have no reason for hope. These books are called the Major and the Minor Prophets. The Major Prophets are not more important than the Minor Prophets but generally speaking they are longer; Daniel being the exception. They are all equally inspired and equally useful for us.

**Speaking in Dark Days:** The four Major Prophets are: Isaiah, preaching 700 years before Christ, who asks of Judah, 'Have you not seen what has happened to Israel? What makes you think that if you ignore the prophets that something different is going to happen to you?' God has loved and defended them but they turned on him out of a sheer rebelliousness of spirit. Then several decades later came Jeremiah who also wrote Lamentations. Younger, but living at the same time as Jeremiah are Ezekiel and the youngest, Daniel. God raised up these great men in very dark and difficult days. Jeremiah describes Judah. Their rebellion became so sharp that God expelled them from his land. Lamentations stands at the centre of these five books as a lament that describes what it was like to be expelled from the land of promise. It describes absolute devastation and the sound of bitter weeping. Ezekiel like Daniel was among the exiles. (Ez. 1:1) The reality is that even good people get caught up in the midst of all the devastation.

The twelve Minor Prophets are not in chronological order but they are all living about the same time, going through the same experiences. The first four are Jonah, Amos, Hosea and Micah who prophesied before 722BC. These four are warning the ten northern tribes that judgement is coming by way of the Assyrians. Jonah was sent to preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, the very people who would destroy Israel. God pacifies the Assyrians so Israel is given more time to repent. But in spite of the long list of prophets sent to warn them they harden their hearts and the captivity comes in 722BC. The prophets say, "Come let us return to the Lord". They plead, "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in mercy."

Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Obadiah live before the exile of Judah to Babylon. Nahum is a mirror to Jonah. He is captive in Nineveh and can see judgement coming on the Assyrians from Babylon. As Nineveh is overthrown Judah is given more time to repent. The message is, 'You don't have to fear the Assyrians. You must fear God to be saved'. But they don't listen. Zephaniah pleads with them and promises that if they repent God will "rejoice over them with singing." 'He will be delighted to have you back.' Habakkuk is saying, 'though the sheepfold is empty and there is no bud on the olive branch, although the people will not return to God, nevertheless I, Zephaniah, will rejoice in the Lord'. The nation will not turn but Zephaniah will remain faithful through all the hard times that are coming. Obadiah sees the beginning of the Babylonian invasion and the people of Judah running to Edom for help. Edom slaughters them and like the Babylonians comes under the same judgement of God. Everyone eventually falls under the same judgement of God.

**Brighter days ahead:** Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Joel all come back from exile and preach a greater king than David. Christ is coming! At your lowest point

never think that God is not able to come in power and glory to do wonderful things. Is that not what is seen in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus?

**Reason to Hope:** The books of the Bible can be divided into four big blocks: Moses, Wisdom Literature, the Prophets and the New Testament. Each block is like a box that fits inside the one before it. The big box containing all the things Moses said contains a box of the wisdom of God. Solomon does not add to what Moses said but intensifies our understanding of what God has already said. Inside is the wisdom box is one containing the prophets. It says the same but is more dense and detailed. The verse in Genesis, "the seed of the woman shall crush his head" becomes clearer. As you take the lid off the box of the prophets you have a box containing the gospel: "the Pearl of Great Price". Christ has always been there in Moses, the wisdom writings, the prophets but we see him more perfectly as we get to the point in history when he actually appears. When we are reading the prophets we are ever so close to Jesus. There are nearly 1,000 references and quotes from the prophets in the New Testament. The New testament writers are saying that all those things the prophets were saying has happened to us. All those nations were judged and now we will be judged by the Romans if we do not receive the promised king of whom the prophets have been speaking. "the government shall be upon his shoulder:" (Isaiah 9:6.) "I will restore David's fallen tent." (Amos 9:11 & Acts 15:16) and "your compassions never fail. Great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23) We sing 'Great is your faithfulness' because everything that was prophesied has come to pass. Or Ezekiel 36:26. "I will put a new spirit in my people." How many times do we read in the New Testament, "Thus it was fulfilled"? Jonah three days and three nights in the belly of the fish as Christ was three days and three night in the grave. Out of you Bethlehem will come a ruler. Christ came died and rose just as the prophets said. Zechariah 2:10/John19:37), "They will look on him whom they pierced"

I remember Ben Slatter standing here talking about food. He said that there is a French saying that the first and most important ingredient in a good meal is hunger. Without an appetite the best food goes to waste. In the same sense the prophets deepen and whet our appetites for Christ. Like the man in the parable; if you neglect the prophets you will not appreciate the bright hope of the gospel even though Christ is risen from the dead. You won't understand Mark's excitement in chapter 1. He has been stirred up by centuries of expectation through the prophets. "I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way" (Mark 1:2) John offered baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. What is offered through Jesus Christ is forgiveness for the whole, peace and harmony with God, Everyone was excited when John the Baptist appeared because the Messiah was about to come.

When we speak of the Messiah the people don't pile into the streets with a sense of hope and expectation wanting to hear about this great Saviour. There is no appetite. The prophets were preaching the gospel in dark days. And that's what we have to do. We need faith to believe that Jesus is this Son whom the prophets spoke about. They got excited when they heard John but their rejection of Jesus was so terribly costly. A few years later Jerusalem was completely destroyed, the temple razed to the ground and the people dispersed through the world to endure misery, hardship and suffering. And that's not the worst of it. Going back to the parable the worst of it is what happens afterwards when they realise too late that they had not been listening to what God was saying through his servants. What would become of us if we reject God's Son? What will become of this world if it continues with its rejection of God's Son? That's the worst of it. Which would you rather be: the rich man who didn't believe the prophets or the poor man who did?