

Jesus on the Afterlife

Luke 16:19-31

Let me begin our examination of this passage by reminding you that this teaching represents a special revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ placed in his eternal word for our admonition. Our Lord spells out in very clear detail what the afterlife is all about. He does so by introducing us to a certain rich man and a beggar by the name of Lazarus. These two men could not be more different. As far as this temporal life is concerned, they lived in two different worlds. On the one hand the rich man moved in his circle of friends enjoying the bounty his riches afforded him. He fared sumptuously and lived in luxury every day. He dressed in the best clothes money could buy and without question enjoyed the many privileges that came with his position in society. This man was, without doubt, considered successful and evidently maintained the same high standard of living until the time of his death. It is obvious that his life was consumed upon himself as he could not so much as see to it that the beggar was cared for in a humane way. Perhaps at first the sight of the beggar at the entrance way to his estate caught his attention. Perhaps the lowly condition of the beggar afflicted with failed health characterized by a body full of sores gripped his heart for a moment. But he was too self-absorbed to care about the needs of this man. He did not care to get involved, after all, he was a very busy man and so the voice of conscience was quickly squelched. My friend, the word of God presents a very penetrating question that is very much a part of this story. The scripture declares, *“he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?!”* As is the case with so many like him, this man proceeded through life with no love of God and no trust in the Savior. And like all other men he could not avoid the day of his death.

Now, the Lord Jesus introduces us to the beggar by name. Lazarus was living at the other end of the economic spectrum. Perhaps his circumstances had not always been so dire. However, the Lord Jesus says that his body was full of sores and the picture we quickly form in our mind is that of a man who is now physically unable to care for his own needs. He must now beg for his daily bread. And so, each day he is laid at the gate of the rich man's home. His days were difficult. He desired to live on the crumbs from the rich man's table. Whether or not he received even the crumbs is questionable, but one thing is for sure. He had to live on the meager donations that someone would give him. In time the dogs would come and lick his sores. This is not a happy picture, but unseen to the natural eye Lazarus possessed something that money cannot buy. He possessed a real, genuine faith in the living God. You see, the Bible does not teach that the poor go to heaven simply because they endured hardships in this life. Far from it! There must be a personal faith in the living God. There must be personal repentance and trust in the mercies of God for salvation. Like the Old Testament patriarch Job, perhaps Lazarus was called upon to go through great trial. And like Job, he had a faith that proved to be true! While Job's fortunes turned, the same was not to be for Lazarus. He finished his race in abject poverty. And it came to pass that the beggar died.

Now we come to the main thing we should clearly see from our Lord's teaching in this passage. Please note carefully that the Son of God clearly teaches that death simply ushers us into our eternal state. Look again at verses 22 and 23 . . .

You need to understand that at the moment of death man's immaterial nature departs the body and proceeds to immediately enter into either heaven or hell. Prior to our Lord's resurrection, those who died in the Lord (like Lazarus) dwelled in Abraham's bosom. This was descriptive of paradise, a place of rest until the Lord Jesus lead captivity captive and took all the saints to heaven following his

resurrection. Today when a believer dies, he or she immediately goes into the presence of the Lord, but please understand that Jesus is teaching us that like this rich man and this beggar we are headed for either heaven or hell. Can you see that?

Look with me again at verse 23 . . . We should notice several things in this verse. First, the rich man was conscious . . . As well, his personality and identity did not change at all . . . Next, he recognized Lazarus and Abraham!

Look now at verse 24 . . . He cried for mercy, but the day of grace is over . . . My friends, the Lord Jesus does not teach that there is a way to escape hell once you are there . . . As we read these verses we cannot help but be struck by the lost condition of this man. In hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments. He longed for relief from the torment illustrated by his longing that Lazarus could come and cool his tongue with just a drop of water from the finger of Lazarus dipped in water . . .

Look at verse 25 . . . The temporal things of this life have no real priority in light of eternity . . . the pleasures of sin are available in this temporal life, but what of eternity? . . .

Look at verse 26 . . . great gulf fixed!! . . . The lost can never remedy their condition! The only time the lost will find any relief is when they are summoned to appear before the Lord at the great white throne judgment described in Revelation chapter 20 . . .

Look at verse 27 and 28 . . . if the lost in hell are concerned, why are we so unconcerned? . . .

Jesus would say today: they have Moses and the prophets and the New Testament and my church! Let them hear them!!

Why Did God Create Hell?

Our question today brings us face to face with the reality of hell. Hell is a very real place. Jesus clearly taught us to avoid hell at all costs. Consider these two passages as prime examples: Matt. 10:28; 22:12-14.

The last book of the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that the eternal abode of all the unrepentant will be in the lake of fire. My friends, hell is a very real place. But why does it exist?

In the first place hell exists because sin is a grave offense of God's absolute holiness. We have a very deficient view of God's holiness. It is our fault, but nonetheless it exists. We are simply quite comfortable with sin. We become hardened to sin to a point that it no longer offends our sensibilities. Not so with the living God who is glorious in holiness! Sin of all kind is hideous, repulsive, and all together unacceptable to His holy sensibilities. He has no fellowship with sin in any way. In fact, hell exists because the offense to His holiness must be dealt with.

And that brings me to my next point. Hell exists as the expression of God's just and holy wrath against all transgression of His holiness. Hell is the Divine retribution for all transgressions that offend the holiness of God. At this point it is worthwhile to point out that the Law of God as contained in the commandments is nothing more than the expression of God's holiness codified in written law. Unfortunately, once the race was awakened to the knowledge of good and evil by the disobedience of the first man Adam it has been the natural course of every man to fall far short of the holiness of God expressed in the Law. Our unholy state has been made painfully clear by the entrance of the Law. We are by virtue of our transgressions held under the sentence of Divine retribution which the Most Holy

shall administer in due time in order to vindicate His just and holy nature. No man can escape accountability to God and in light of the fact that our offenses are real hell has been called into existence to serve as the eternal penitentiary of the damned.

It should be noted that originally hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. Satan has no recourse to repent and find a place of redemption. He was doomed to a lost eternity the day he attempted to lift his hand against the Almighty. Since that fateful day when sin was found in him and he lost his original state of perfect holiness, Satan has been destined for hell. In essence he has but a short time to test mankind. He moves about seeking whom he may devour through his lies and deception. Tragically, a great many will spend eternity in the darkened regions of a lost, groaning world with their father the devil!

And that brings me to my next point. Hell is the eternal abode of the unrepentant, or the wicked. Hell will be populated with those who refuse the love, grace, and mercy of God offered to all through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Hell exists for those who reject the rule of God in their own hearts and refuse to repent. The unrepentant are not fitted for God's heaven. They cannot stand in His holy presence. They are altogether unclean, unholy, and unworthy. They have never been made clean, and holy, and righteous in the sight of God by faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. As such they must hear the dreadful words, "depart from me you that work iniquity, I never knew you."

Some attempt to put God on trial and so they ask the question: why did God create man if He knew many would perish? The answer lies in the heart of God who desires to have a people enjoy His heaven because they chose to love Him of their own volition (or will). In fact, God's heaven is big enough for all to come. But you must come because you love Him (1 John 4:9-10, 19).

Conclusion

Hell is a very real place. It exists because God's holiness will be vindicated. He will put sin out of His sight and deal with it justly in light of His holy nature. In order to escape the wrath of God we must repent and place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our only hope of heaven. Said another way, we must love him!

Four Things You Must Know About Hell

May I ask you a question? Do you appreciate warnings? For example, if your home stood in the path of an on-coming tornado would you appreciate a warning? The truth is, if the authorities knew your life to be at risk due to an approaching tornado and did nothing to warn you the general public would consider that an act of gross neglect.

We preachers could be guilty of much worse. One of the great responsibilities of ministry is to warn lost men and women of the impending judgment of Almighty God. The Lord speaks to this issue in the book of Ezekiel where we read: *"When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand."*

The Apostle Paul certainly felt the weight of this responsibility. In Acts chapter 20 we read: *"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."* As Paul preached the gospel of Jesus Christ he constantly warned those to whom he ministered. He warned them to repent and flee the wrath of God to come. He said to this same group of people, *"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men."*

Likewise every minister of the gospel must warn the lost to repent lest they perish everlastingly. Failure to warn the lost is the worst kind of neglect. (pause)

Certainly the Son of God spoke clearly on this subject. Those who read the words of the Savior contained in Holy writ will soon be gripped by his powerful warnings concerning the wrath to come. My friend, you need to be of serious mind. You need to bring forth fruit that demonstrates a heart of repentance. You must have a salvation experience. There must be a turning to God in humble repentance. There must be the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You desperately need to be saved.

The Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost. In John 5:34 he said, “. . . *these things I say, that ye might be saved.*” Again in John chapter 10 the Lord Jesus said, “*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved . . .*” Speaking of his mission the Lord Jesus said, “*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*”

Every one of you will spend eternity either in heaven or in a place called hell. Consider the following contrast of the two.

In heaven there is joy unending; in hell there is constant grief of mind . . . in heaven there is sweet fellowship (family circles will be reunited and a whole new world of fellowship among the redeemed will blossom where all relationships are marked by graciousness and kindness); in hell those who perish everlastingly will be gripped by an unending loneliness . . . in heaven there will be joyful laughter and smiles; in hell only weeping . . . in heaven there is the sound of singing; in hell there is the sound of wailing . . . heaven is filled with the light of His glory, but hell is the place of outer darkness . . . heaven is a place of contentment; hell is a place of distress where the soul longs for just a moment of rest . . . heaven is a place of

safety where no harm can ever come and no storm will ever darken the sky; hell is a place of destruction—one eternal storm that the soul can never escape . . . heaven is filled with the presence and goodness of God; hell is devoid of God’s presence and is a world without a single comfort.

In the next few minutes I want to share four things everyone needs to know about hell. I trust you will listen closely.

The first thing you need to know about hell is that it is a real place. Hell is just as real as heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14: *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”*

Jesus clearly speaks here of a “broad way” that leads to destruction. Elsewhere Jesus said that we should not fear those who can take our temporal life, rather he said we should fear God that can destroy both soul and body in hell. In the gospels Jesus speaks of hell as a place of “everlasting fire” and everlasting punishment. My friend, the reality of hell should never be taken lightly. It is not something to joke about. It is real. You need to resolve here and now that you are not going to spend eternity there. With purpose and singleness of mind you need to forsake whatever stands between you and the Savior. Get off of the broad way that is leading to destruction and travel the narrow road that leads to life.

The next thing you need to know about hell is that real people are going there. Every man is now a creature of eternity. While the endless drum beat of eternity goes on and on you will experience a conscious existence in either the bliss of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, or you will languish in the grip of the second death in a place where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Jesus described the plight of the lost rich man in Luke chapter 16. His

teaching there certainly means that real people will either be comforted upon departing this life, or they will open their eyes in a place of everlasting torment. Wake up my friend! Many of you are but a heartbeat away from this place of destruction.

The next thing you need to know about hell is that it is an expression of God's Divine wrath. Unfortunately, a great many place God on trial and find fault with Him for creating a place of everlasting punishment. However, I must warn you today that God is not on trial—rather you are. And if you refuse God's call to a place of repentance where He can pour out His mercy and grace upon you, then you will die in your sins. You will be lost. You must then face the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment and receive full retribution under the Law. Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? Indeed he will! You will face the Divine wrath of God leveled against your sin and your open defiance of His will. You will face the full weight of God's holy and just wrath against every offense reckoned against His holiness. You will face the consequences of refusing his offer of salvation through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every generation has its notorious blasphemers who impugn the character of God as they struggle with the concept of an eternal hell. They falsely accuse God of unfair judgment and excessive harshness. But the same crowd would have the head of a local judge who refused to lock-up hardened murderers for life. Isn't it strange that we cry out for justice now, but when the unrepentant are compelled to face God at the end of this life they find fault with Him for administering justice and properly condemning them to their place in hell. My friend, you must wake up to the fact that we are dealing with eternal verities here. Do not make the mistake of supposing your sins do not offend the holiness of God. Sin uncovered by the blood of Christ will separate you from God in eternity. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is time to flee the wrath to come.

It is time to enter the ark of safety while the door is still open. In Christ you will be delivered from the wrath of God to come.

And finally, the fourth thing you need to know about hell is this: *there is no hope there*. Think about that. There is no hope of salvation or deliverance once confined there. Those who face the sentence of the second death will be tormented day and night forever and ever with no remedy for their lost condition.

Lost! How horrible is this word! Lost! Let the thought grip your heart and do a mighty work in you: lost with no hope, no joy, no comfort, and no relationship with God. No light of hope will ever shine in the eternal darkness that engulfs the realm of the doomed.

I close with a story shared by a gentleman named H. G. Bosch. He writes:

“There is a certain horror about absolute darkness that throws a chill over the human soul, for man was made to live in the light! Heaven is always depicted as a place of eternal brightness where there is “no night.” The psalmist, however, declares that the wicked shall “never see light”; and Jesus warns that they shall be cast into “outer darkness.”

What a horror of blackness that will be when each doomed soul is curtailed off from every other in an eternity of utter loneliness! Recently, I was in a cave in Kentucky. When we had gone deep into the bowels of the earth through many winding passages, the guide suddenly turned off all the lights and said, “I alone know the way out. If I were to leave you in this dark chamber, you would probably never make your way to the surface. Those who have been lost in this cavern have become insane inside of a week from the oppressive loneliness and the maddening, incessant drip of water from the roof. Be quiet for a moment and “feel the darkness.”

I remember my youngster clutching my arm. Soon terror began to edge its way into all of our hearts. After about thirty seconds, someone in the party could endure the ordeal no longer and whimpered piteously, "Turn on the light! I'm going crazy NOW!" The guide laughed, but none of us will ever forget that eerie experience. I thought of the "outer darkness" of an eternal Hell and shuddered!

Friend, will you escape the eternal darkness of Hell? In order to escape you must believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a moment will you allow me to take you by the hand and lead you to a hill called Calvary. And as we approach the scene unfolding there you will notice three crosses in the distance. Upon the middle cross the man Christ Jesus is dying. Mockers at the foot of the cross slam him with mean spirited words: "he saved others, but himself he cannot save." They were unknowingly right on both counts. Jesus Christ is the Savior and during his public ministry he forgave sin saving those who came to place their trust in him. But if he chooses to come down from the cross there will be no salvation for His elect. Indeed, in order to save others he cannot save himself.

Suddenly at high noon Mount Calvary is engulfed in darkness and for three hours the sun refused to shine. During the agony of those hours unseen to the natural eye the Lamb of God bore our sins in his body on the tree. In those hours of darkness his soul was made an offering for sin and there by the grace of God he tasted death for every man. Hear him as his soul experiences the full wrath of God upon our sin: "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me!" My friend, the Son of God went down into the valley of death and died for you. He experienced the darkness of your hell so that you could go free. Jesus paid it all! Hear me! Christ died for you. And through his death God has placed a road block on the road to hell. If you perish in a

devil's hell you must climb over the cross the get there. You must trod underfoot the blood of the Son of God to get there. God so loved you and I that He came to earth in the person of His only begotten Son to satisfy His holy wrath against your sin and mine. He purchased your redemption with his own blood and He now offers you the free gift of eternal life if you will repent.

But hear me! If you reject His offer of pardon, if you reject the call of His Spirit to surrender to Christ, then there is nothing left for you but a fearful day of judgment and the darkness of eternal separation from the presence of the Lord.