

“Eternity: What Awaits After Death”

Sermon # 4

“Hell: It’s Real and It’s Not Funny”

Luke 16:19-31

We return again today to Luke 16:19-31 to look at two men in death. Death is never a very pleasant subject and perhaps it is our reluctance to discuss it that causes so many of the misconceptions about what happens when we die. For the past three weeks we have been in a Series entitled, Eternity: What Awaits After Death. Last week we looked at the fate of Lazarus in “Heaven Its More Than You Imagine” and today we turn our attention to the Rich Man’s fate in our text in “Hell It’s Real and It’s Not Funny.” Jesus never reveals the rich man’s name, perhaps because it was someone who was well known. This man is sometimes called “Dives” but that is not his name, it is just the Latin word for “rich man.”

A survey commissioned by U.S News and World Report (2000 – Jan 31, 2000 cover story “Hell Hath No Fury” pp. 45-50) reveals that “64% of Americans believe that there is a Hell... what might be surprising is that the poll indicated that more American believe in Hell today than they did in the 1950’s or even 10 years ago.” The debate is not if Hell exists, but what is it, where is it and how long does it last? People have some really crazy ideas about the place we call Hell. Let me just give you a sampling of what some of the cults teach about Hell.

Christian Science, with modern proponents such as John Travola and Tom Cruise, teach that “there is no death.” They believe that “heaven and hell are states of thought, not places. People experience their own heaven or hell right here on earth.”

The Mormons, argue that, “The false doctrine that the punishment to be visited upon erring souls is endless...is ... at once unscriptural, unreasonable, and revolting.”

The Jehovah’s Witnesses, maintain that the wicked are annihilated because “the teaching about a fiery hell can rightly be designated as a ‘teaching of demons.’” [Maurice S. Rawlings, M.D. “To Hell and Back.” (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), pp.81-83.]

So what is Hell? There are today five common views of Hell. First there is Denial: Some hold that there is no such place as Hell. It is only a story to frighten people into doing what the church says. They say that Hell just doesn’t exist. But if there is no Hell there can be no Heaven. In the Bible Jesus has more to say about Hell than he does about Heaven. (Jesus mentioned Hell 56 times in the Gospels and only mentioned Heaven 24 times.)We cannot repudiate Hell without repudiating Christ. If Hell is not as real or as bad as the Bible says, then perhaps Heaven is not real or not as good as the Bible says.

Secondly, some believe that Hell speaks of earthly suffering. This is the belief that Hell is only bad things you go through on earth. Third, there is belief that Hell is annihilation. This is the belief that Hell refers to the final destruction of all evil persons. Fourth, is the belief in restoration this is the belief that everyone will ultimately be saved. But if everyone is going to ultimately make it to Heaven we might as well shut the doors of First Baptist Church and go home. We are wasting our time. But Hell is real and everyone is not going to make it to Heaven.

Fifth, the only model supported by Scripture, is the belief that Hell is real place of unending torment. This is the belief that Hell is a real place of eternal suffering. Sometimes the question is raised "How could a good God send some people to Hell?" I do not have time to cover that question extensively but let me point out the error and inconsistency of the question itself. We don't ask, "How could a good judge send a serial killer to the electric chair?" Why don't we ask that question? The answer is because the judge is not the one responsible for him going to the electric chair, his own evil choices are.

The story that Jesus told in Luke 16 is the story of the lives, deaths and destinies of two men. As both men died and passed through death's portal, an amazing reversal in their situations occurred. The poor man who has little in life died and was carried by the angels into God's presence, his faith is rewarded with eternity in Heaven. The Rich Man who had so much in life, died and a split second later he awoke in a terrifying place called Hell. Through the experiences of this man Jesus gives us a glimpse into Hell. It is brief but powerful enough to destroy many of the misconceptions about Hell.

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. (20) But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, (21) desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. (22) So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' (25) But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. (26) And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' (27) "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, (28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' (29) Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' (30) And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' (31) But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

This morning I want to share three important things that this passage tells us about Hell.

First, Hell is a Place of Misery vv. 23-24

The rich man is said to be in “torment” (v. 23). He begged for even the smallest amount of water to relieve his suffering (v. 24). He says of himself in verse twenty-four, “I am tormented in this flame.” In verse twenty-five Abraham uses the word “tormented” to describe the man’s condition in Hell. In verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight the rich man begs to warn his family about this place so “they will not come to this place of torment.”

This is not the only place where the Bible uses such graphic language to describe Hell. In Matthew 25:30 Jesus describes Hell as a place of “... outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The story is told of an evangelist who was

exhorting people to flee from the wrath to come. “I warn you,” he thundered, “that there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!” Suddenly an old woman in the gallery stood up and said, “Sir,” she shouted, “I have no teeth!” To which he replied, “Madam, teeth will be provided!”

Liberal scholars have telling us for decades that what the Bible says about Hell is only symbolic. William Evans in his classic book “The Great Doctrines of the Bible” says, “Is the fire spoken of literal fire? It is an accepted law of language that a figure of speech is less intense than the reality. If “fire” is merely a figurative expression, it must stand for some great reality, and if the reality is more intense than the figure, what an awful thing the punishment symbolized by fire must be.” [William Evans. The Great Doctrines of the Bible. (Chicago: Moody, 1974) p. 262]

When Jesus describes Hell as a place of “outer darkness” (Matt 25:30) it has been hard for me to imagine, because as a place of fire why is there no light, that is until I was reading about individuals who worked in the deep mines far underground. There it is total darkness but also insufferable heat, heat so extreme that it can be tolerated for a few minutes at time. At a depth of only 3 kilometers the temperature in these mines is 70°Celsius or 158°Fahrenheit. It is possible to have unending heat and total darkness.

In verse twenty-four the Rich Man begged for even for even the smallest amount of water to relieve his suffering. I think it worth consideration that the thirst that the Rich Man has is the same thirst that everyone in this life has – it’s a thirst for God. This thirst cannot be satisfied with anything the world has to offer. Only the Lord can satisfy this thirst. Jesus said in John 7:37, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” The thirst for God only becomes more intense and agonizing in Hell.

Erwin Lutzer points out, “the most sobering thought that could ever cross our minds is the fact that the rich man in hell (hades) ...has not yet received the drop of water for which he so desperately longed.” [Erwin W. Lutzer. “One Minute After You Die.” (Chicago: Moody, 1997) p. 115]

Hell is not only a Place of Misery it is also...

Secondly, Hell is a Place of Memory v.25

Beyond the fact that Hell is a place of conscious misery we also see that it is a place of memory and profound regret. In verse twenty-five Abraham said, "Son remember..." those two words convey one of the most horrifying aspects of Hell, that of memory. Erwin Lutzer, pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago in his book "One Minute After You Die" he says that Hell is, "... a region of deprivation, and unending regret. There, with all their memories and feeling fully intact, images of their life on earth will return to haunt them. They will think back to their friends, family and relatives; they will brood over opportunities they squandered and intuitively know that their future is both hopeless and unending. For them death will be far worse than they imagined." [Lutzer. p. 10]

In our text the mind of the Rich man fills with images of poor Lazarus lying by his door with stray dogs licking his wounds. He remembers those who tried to tell him about God. He recalls sermons he heard. He remembers those who warned him about the coming judgment. Memories come swimming out of the oblivion. There is no torment greater than an accusing memory. It is impossible to forget when you're in Hell. The rich man could not take his money, but he did take his memory.

There is no way out for him. You cannot get out of hell! When you're there, you're there forever. Some teach that you can work your way out of hell. That would certainly be a wonderful thing but IT ISN'T TRUE. You can't get a transfer! You can't work your way out of it. There is no crossing over.

Abraham explains to the rich man that there is of "great chasm" between heaven and hell. In other words, there is no hope of crossing over from one place to another. His destiny is eternally set. There is no hope of escape or relief. Hell is not like a prison where you might be paroled, pardoned, or simply "do your time" and be released. Hell is forever and inescapable. There are no second chances! God will not change his mind. This great chasm is "fixed", i.e. it is unalterable. The story makes clear that those who go to Hell are without hope as their fate is forever sealed. In Hell it is too late to pray, it is too late to change your life, and it is too late to repent.

In the classic book "Dante's Inferno" Hell is described in graphic detail and with great imagination. Much of the book is based on conjecture not Scripture as to what Hell might be like. But there is one thing in the book that is in full agreement with the Scriptures. Near the beginning of the book the main character in the story sees a sign at the entrance to Hell with says: "Abandoned hope all you who enter here." This much is certainly true. There is no hope after this life is over. Your destiny is eternally set.

A tragedy greater than the one being described is hard to imagine. To miss the opportunity for something good is bad. To miss the greatest opportunity of all – the chance to go to heaven is terrible. But to miss it forever, and know that you have missed it forever, seems

almost unbearable. Surely one of the most fearful horrors of Hell is the undying memory of what could have been!

Hell is not only a place of Memory but it also ...

Third, Hell is a Place of Mourning vv. 27-31

“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, (28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ (29) Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ (30) And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ (31) But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

We don’t see the rich man reveling in fellowship with his friends. He is very much alone. He did not say, “I’m glad my brothers are going to be joining me here. We are going to have a wonderful time together.”

Hell will not be at all like it is often characterized, as a giant lounge where between drinks people can recount their escapades on Earth.

Ted Turner, founder of Turner Broadcasting, seems to be speaking for this attitude in a speech to the National Press Club, in it Turner said, “Heaven is going to be a mighty slender place. And most of the people I know in life aren’t going to be there. There are a few notable exceptions and I’ll miss them. [Laughter] Remember, heaven is going to be perfect. And I don’t really want to be there...Those of us that go to hell, which will be most of us in this room; most journalists are certainly going there. [Laughter] But, when we get to hell we’ll have a chance to make things better because hell is supposed to be a mess. And heaven is perfect. Who wants to go to a place that’s perfect? Boring. Boring.” [Laughter]” [Quote Taken from David Dykes. “What In Hell Do We Need.” [www. sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com) (Luke 16:19-31)]

Someone needs to warn people about the danger they are in.

Conclusion

Let me summarize what we can learn about the afterlife from Luke 16.

1. The dead are still alive. Both Lazarus and the rich man survived their own funerals. We think this is the land of the living but it’s really not. This is the land of the dying. When we die, we wake up to spend eternity in either Heaven or Hell.
2. The dead retain their personalities and their essential character. Lazarus is still Lazarus and the rich man is still the rich man. Even in Hell the rich man could see, hear, feel, recognize, remember, speak, reflect, plead, suffer, and think ahead. There was only one thing he couldn’t

do. He couldn't get out.

3. Death marks the final separation between the saved and the lost. Once in Heaven, always in Heaven; once in Hell, always in Hell. No one can pass from one place to another.

4. Hell is real but you don't have to go! Hell can be avoided if a person listens to God's word and repents.

I have told the story before how one day, when Vice President Calvin Coolidge was presiding over the Senate, one Senator angrily told another to go "straight to hell". The offended Senator complained to Coolidge as presiding officer, and the Vice President looked up from the book he had been leafing through while listening to the debate and wittily replied. "I've been looking through the rule book," he said. "You don't have to go." [Crossroads, Issue No. 7, p. 16.]

The truth is that God loves you and He doesn't want you to go to hell. Hell was never intended for human habitation. Jesus said in Matthew 25:41, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Hell was designed for Satan and his demons, not people. As C.S Lewis summarizes, "Any man may choose eternal death. Those who choose it will have it... There are only two kinds of people in the end; those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' or those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell choose it." [C.S. Lewis. "The Great Divorce." (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1973) p. 75]

We often hear people say, "How can a God of love allow any of his creatures to suffer unending misery?" The answer is because God loves us so much he respects our decisions. He loves us, but he does not force His love on us. To force love on someone who does not want it is an offense. He allows us to decide. He loves us, he encourages our response to His love, he even pursues us, and urges us but He will not force us, because He loves us enough to allow us to make our own decisions.