

## **A Testimony of One Surprised to Be in Hell, Part 2**

Luke 16:19-31

42-213

It's the 16th chapter of Luke this morning. We return to the story of the rich man and the poor man, a story that Jesus told to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel. A story with one intention and that is to warn them not to go to hell.

In the modern religions of love and tolerance, in the pseudo-Christianity of our time, the quasi-evangelicalism of our day, there are many subjects to be avoided, many subjects to be removed, some even to be denied. None more eagerly jettisoned than the reality of hell. This truth of eternal punishment to come on those who do not believe the gospel savingly is a painful message to preach. I can give you testimony to that. It is not only a painful message to preach, it is a painful message to hear. It is a painful message to process. It is a painful truth to apply. But it is biblical; and it is biblical because it is true.

Some people think that the idea of hell is cruel, but it's true. Some people think the idea of hell is unfair, but it's true. Some people wonder what kind of God would send people into everlasting punishment. Wonder away. He will, and one of the interesting things about the Bible...and it's true not only with regard to the doctrine of hell but other truths as well, God never is in the position of defending Himself. He defines what is right by His nature. He defines what is right by His work. He defines what is true by saying it. He defines what is just by doing it.

Setting aside those human musings for the moment, it is critical for us to understand the literal reality of hell, and to accept the warning of Scripture. Hell has really disappeared from the vocabulary of many preachers. Hell is denied by many in favor of universal salvation or everlasting nonexistence called soul sleep where people die and just go out of existence forever. That's a popular view among those who call themselves Christians. Hell is denied by many. It is preached by few, because it makes people uncomfortable. That is true. Hell has been reduced to a swear word, used by unbelievers not believers. It has been reduced to a trivial verbal epithet that we sling around when wanting to express our anger. Unbelievers flippantly and frequently tell people to go to hell. And while unbelievers don't seem to have any hesitation to talk about hell and to verbally threaten people with it, at the same time the church is reluctant to warn people not to go to hell, supposedly out of love and compassion and concern and a desire to be acceptable.

So while unbelievers have the word "hell" on their lips frequently, believers have it on theirs rarely; and that is certainly what Satan would want. Trivialize and make nothing but an epithet out of hell, words that you sling around that have no meaning, and silence the church about the truth of it. But it is the fearfulness of hell; it is the horror of hell that is exactly the point of its revelation. The purpose of telling us about hell and describing it with such detail and so repeatedly in the Scripture is to produce in sinners fear, terror, and panic. That's what it's for. It's to contribute to the way in which they anticipate their eternity. It is to frighten them, to horrify them so as to produce a terror of

spending forever there that drives them in the direction of repentance and faith in the gospel.

Now, the leading preacher of hell of all people, the leading preacher of hell ever is the Savior of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. The most references to hell are in the four gospels and they come out of His mouth. It is Jesus who teaches us about hell. Clearly, the epistles are the...the ground in which we will find the clearest foundation for our understanding of hell. Not just there. The writer of Hebrews refers to it. The apostle Peter refers to it. The apostle John refers to it. The apostle Paul refers to it. Even Jude refers to it. All the writers of the New Testament pick up on the issue of hell.

This punishment is defined by the word *aiōnios*, which is the word eternal or everlasting; and there are people who would like to redefine that word *aiōnios* and say, "Well, it doesn't really mean forever." But if you do that with hell, you've just done it with heaven, because the same word is used to describe that. If there is not an everlasting hell, then there is not an everlasting heaven; and I'll go one beyond that. The same word is used to describe God. And so, if there is not an everlasting hell, then there is not an everlasting heaven, nor is there an everlasting God.

It is clear that God is eternal; and, therefore, that heaven is eternal, and so is hell. This is what is on the heart of the Lord Jesus when He talks to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel, and tells them the story in Luke 16:19 to 31. He makes it up as He did His parables. He invents the story. The only difference between this and any other parable is He has a name for one of the characters; and there's a reason for that; but the story really has one purpose. It is to warn of hell. It's a story about a man who was surprised to end up in hell.

Let me read the story just to have it in your mind again, starting in verse 19. In the normal way that Jesus introduced a parable, He introduces this one. "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily (or joyously) living in splendor every day. And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now, it came about that the poor man died. He was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades (or hell) he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, saw Abraham far away, Lazarus at his side. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' And Abraham said, 'Child (or son), remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house — for I have five brothers — that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"

What an amazing story. The great reversal we called it, a reluctant witness from hell. The purpose of it is in verse 28 — the word "warn." And the main character in the story, the rich man, is the one who says, "Please warn my five brothers lest they also come to this place of torment." That's the message of the story. It's full of reversals and full of contrasts, which we did last week in our first look at it. I won't repeat all that; but just to remind you of the breakdown of the story, real simple: life, death, life

after death.

In verse 19 to 21, we see a description of two people. It is an extreme description; extreme wealth and extreme poverty; extreme indulgence and fulfillment and extreme deprivation. "There was a certain rich man. He habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day." We won't go back to the language, but that language...sum...the sum of that language is this man was filthy rich. He had everything he could've ever wanted and lived it to the max in this life.

On the other hand, verse 20 says, "A certain poor man named Lazarus," which means "the Lord helps." That's why he was given this name. "Certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores." He was laid there, because, obviously, he was dumped there. He was unable to walk, unable to move. He was a beggar who was severely crippled, disabled, dumped there with body covered by oozing sores, no doubt the result of the rubbing of his immobile body. He was starving and hungry, "longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table." I told you that they had a...a system of eating in which they used bread to wipe their hands off and then threw the dirty bread under the table, and the dogs would come and eat it.

He would've eaten that. He would've groveled with the dogs and eaten what only the dogs eat — the filthy bread. Not only did he not have the opportunity to eat the filthy bread with the dogs, but the same dogs in verse 21 were coming and licking his sores as if he were some kind of road kill. This is the worst possible human existence.

That's life. The rich man has it all; the poor man has nothing. The rich man has the best of it; the poor man has the worst of it. Life is as good as it gets for the rich man; it's as bad as it gets for the poor man. But you move from life to death in verse 22. "It came about that the poor man died." Not surprising, diseased, destitute, starving, chewed by filthy dogs. He died. "And he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." Here's the great reversal. Death changes everything, and it changes it completely. It's not surprising that the poor man died. Then there's the final disgrace tucked in there in silence. There wasn't any funeral. Nobody gave a burial to him. The rich man was buried. The poor man wasn't buried. In this story, there's a reason why he wasn't buried. There wasn't any body to bury, because they picked him up intact and hauled him off to heaven, the angels did; but had they not done that, he wouldn't have been buried anyway. He would've been thrown on the dump where all the cursed of humanity would end up.

It's not a surprise that the rich man was buried. It was a surprise that he died. Should've been as healthy as healthy can be with everything that he had — all the resources; but with all his money, all his luxury, all his friends, all his privilege, all his prestige, he couldn't buy another day of life. Riches do not prevent the inevitable death. Even though you give him an honorable funeral, that doesn't stop the reality. These two men lived at opposite extremes. They lived as extremely distant as you can get; and yet they existed close together, for the poor man was at the doorway of the rich man's house; and the rich man treated him with complete indifference. He longed to eat the crumbs; but it doesn't say he ever got any of them.

So riches bought a big funeral for the rich man; and everybody probably came and, inevitably, they would talk about what a great man he was; and all those people who had sucked off of his wealth would've been sorry to see him go. But everything changes after that. Everything changes; and that takes us to the third aspect of the story. We go from life to death. Death is just a transition into life

after death.

Third point, let's pick it up in verse 22. Let's see what happened. "It came about that the poor man died. He was carried away by the angels to (Abraham's side) Abraham's bosom." Don't think of that. That's a strange statement. We don't use the word bosom anymore. It's an old, antiquated word; but some people have sort of picked up that that's some kind of a technical term. You need to know that this is the only place that's ever used in the Bible. It isn't trying to convey some technical term to us. This is just saying that when this despicable outcast died, he went immediately to the side of Abraham; and Abraham, in the Jewish thinking, was the most elevated person who'd ever lived, the...the...the father of the entire Jewish race, and the father of faith and the faithful, the greatest hero in Judaism.

The poor man died; and, immediately, he's carried away by angels. That's stunning. That is shocking. That is unthinkable; and then he is taken by the angels to the side of Abraham. The angels take his body from the licking mongrels and they take him and place him beside Abraham. First of all, the fact that angels are doing this is a jolt to the Pharisees who are hearing the story, because they view this man as cursed by God. Illness, disease was a curse from God. If you were rich, and you had it all...now, remember you're living in a theocratic environment. You're living in a nation which everybody worships God, basically. They hated idolatries, and they hated idolaters, and they hated the pagans. They hated the Roman invaders and all of that, because they were idolaters; and they were in a theocratic environment. They were in a sacral society where everybody in the society that came into society was part of the religion of the society.

The rich man, being a Jew and being to some degree a religious Jew, would be assumed; and so the assumption then was that he must have been a very devout, very good Jew; because God had rewarded him with this wealth. They...they were into a very definite health, wealth, prosperity kind of religion; and the evidence was this man was the good and godly man whom God had blessed; and that the poor man was a living illustration of what happens when God curses you. That was the...that was the theology of Job's friends, right? Job was in the dilemma he was in. He was paying...paying the price in pain and loss for sin; and they all told him that, because that was the...the prevailing theology.

And so you look at this man; and Jesus paints him as wretched as any human being could be. He has no family. He has no friends. He has no food. He can't walk. He is a beggar. He is in the most horrible condition that ever could be imagined. This is typical of Jesus painting His extremes; and this man would have been, in the minds of the Pharisees, the cursed man; and it would've been evident to them because of his condition.

But the jolt, the stunning, shocking, unthinkable point that Jesus makes is when he dies, instead of it saying, "The garbage collectors came and got his body and threw it in the Valley of Hinnom, so it could burn on the Jerusalem dump," He says, "The angels came and carried him away to the side of Abraham."

Now, we do know in the Bible that angels do minister to the saints. In Matthew 18, it tells us that "their angels," that is the angels that are serving God in the care of believers, always look at the face of God, so they can read His concern for His own children and be dispatched to their aid when necessary. And Hebrews 1:14 says, "Angels are ministering servants sent to minister to the saints." But nothing in the Bible says that angels carry our bodies to heaven. This is just the story Jesus tells.

In fact, when believers die, their spirit goes to heaven, and their body goes where? In the ground, into the crematorium. We don't go to heaven intact, body, soul, and spirit we might say. But in the story, that's what happened for the sake of the point. This man is gathered by the angels and lifted into heaven to the side of Abraham. There's no biblical precedent for that being a normal kind of experience. That's not what's going to happen. We go to funerals. We know the bodies don't go to heaven with the souls.

Here we find this man was a believer, so when he was given a name, "the Lord helps," we know that the Lord helped him in the greatest way the Lord can help. He helped him savingly. This is a believer. This man is not at all cursed. Just the opposite is true. Here is one who somebody might say, even today, is experiencing the...the penalty of God in this life for his wickedness and his sin. Nothing could be further from the truth. Here is a true believer in God who is suffering profoundly and extremely; but even he would have enough to eat until God determined the end to come; because the Lord's people are not going to beg bread until it's time for us to go.

So the shock is this man is in heaven. The next shock is he's not just in heaven, he's taken by the angels to heaven. The next shock is he's not just taken by the angels to heaven, but he's not on the periphery. He's not at the back of the room or the back of the crowd looking over everybody's head and between their heads to see who's sitting up at the main table. He's sitting next to Abraham. Wow. This is just way out there. A...a broadside on their theological assumptions.

They knew where Abraham was, because he was the father of the faithful. They knew Genesis 15:6 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness...counted to him as righteousness." That...that... That truth establishes Abraham, not only as the father of the race physically, but the father of the faithful spiritually. He is the first one of whom it is said he received an imputed righteousness by faith, which is the way salvation always comes.

And so he was their hero racially. He was their hero spiritually. And here goes this man right into the presence of Abraham. By the way, that statement in Genesis 15:6 is repeated by the apostle Paul in Romans 4:3, where it says, Abraham was justified by faith and not by works, because when he believed God, it was imputed to him for righteousness. It's repeated by James in James chapter 2 verse 23, where he quotes exactly the same thing out of Genesis 15:6; and adds: "and Abraham was the friend of God."

So the Jews all believed. They believe today, of course, that Abraham is in heaven; that if there's a hierarchy in heaven, then Abraham's at the top of it. If there's a...a chief seat at the table, at the great messianic banquet in the glories of heaven, Abraham is in that seat. He is the most honored of all people, of all Jews; and the Jews are most honored in their minds of all people. And to take this wretched, stinking, foul beggar and place him at the table beside Abraham is way beyond comprehension for them.

He would've been refused fellowship with any Pharisee. No Pharisee would've gone near that man under any circumstance whatsoever. He was refused even minimal fellowship, even the minutest attention of giving him some crumbs to eat. The religious elite passed by him and never even saw him; and now he is in close, intimate fellowship with the greatest of all Jews, Abraham.

If you go back to the 13th chapter of Luke, Jesus spoke of this same scene earlier and it's not unlike

this very story, because if you look at verse 27, He says, "I don't know where you are from." They will say, you know, "We were eating and drinking in Your presence, and You taught in our streets," and, you know, they're claiming to know Jesus when they get to the judgment. He will say, "I tell you, I do not know where you're from. Depart from Me, all you evildoers." Then He says this in verse 28, "There'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth." You're going to a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. You're going to hell; and you're going to weep; and you're going to gnash your teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac. When you are aware...not literally, see...but when you're aware that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the prophets are in the kingdom of God; but you yourselves are cast out."

One of the tortures of hell is everybody knows they're not in the kingdom of God. They're not where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets are. They're not where Lazarus is. Lazarus...back to Luke 16...went right to the head of the table, right to the feast, right to the side of Abraham. It's reminiscent of John 13:23 where the Last Supper is described, and Jesus is there, and it says, "And John was there by His side."

Close to the host is the place of honor. They all knew it. They all sought the chief seats. They knew what that was about. Close to the host is where you want to be; and when the Pharisee threw a dinner, the closer you were to the Pharisee who threw the dinner, the more the honored person you were; and, here, when you go to heaven, you can't get more honored than to be next to Abraham. Jesus knew that's how they thought, and Jesus is saying the most humiliated man on the face of this earth is the most honored man in heaven, because the Lord helped him. Not because of his works, not because of anything he did, but because the Lord helped him, because he was a believer, because he put his trust in the Lord. Shut out from every table on earth, he is the guest of honor in the table of God.

On the other hand, "The rich man also died," verse 22, "and was buried, and in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." His body was honorably buried, full treatment given to his corpse, but his eternal soul went straight to Hades, straight to Hades. Just to give you a simple understanding of that, that's just a word that refers to hell. In the Old Testament, it's a little broader. In the Old Testament, it's not as defined to us. The progress of revelation begins to unfold it and makes it crystal clear in the New Testament. But Hades is a term used to describe the place of departed souls. The souls of those who die go into Hades. It is, in the Old Testament, not as highly defined as it is in the New; but in the Old Testament, it is contrasted with heaven. It is contrasted with heaven.

Psalms 139:8, "If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol" or Hades "Thou art there." Sheol is the Old Testament equivalent of New Testament Hades. So there you say, "God, if You're in heaven, I'm there. If You're in Hades, I'm there." Thus there is a distinguishing between heaven and Hades. Also, Amos 9:2 makes that distinction. But when you come into the New Testament, then everything becomes crystal clear in the New Testament; because, in the New Testament, Hades clearly refers to hell, with only one exception, and that is Acts chapter 2 verses 27 and 31, which is a quote from Psalm 16; and there it has a vague meaning of just the grave; but that's because it's quoting an Old Testament passage. Every other usage of the word Hades in the New Testament refers to the abode of the damned. It is never, in the New Testament, the abode of the redeemed, of believers. And so it is synonymous then with hell.

For example, in Luke 10:15, "You, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven. You will be brought down to Hades!" So Hades is a synonym for hell. It is the opposite of heaven. That's almost reminiscent of Psalm 139 and verse 8. I could take time; and I'm not going to do that; but if you

march through the New Testament, find every usage of Hades, it will always refer to the place of the doomed and the damned. It is the Gehenna of the New Testament. Gehenna is a word referring to the Valley of Hinnom, the city dump that was burning all the time. It became a metaphor for hell — the never, ever extinguished fire. The fiery hell of Matthew 5:22 that Jesus spoke about. The hell of Matthew 5:29 and Matthew 5:30, and there are many other references to it. We'll look at some of them next time.

New Testament Hades is synonymous with Gehenna, and Gehenna was the metaphor for hell, the dump at the Valley of Hinnom where all the garbage and refuse was thrown, and where even the cursed humanity would be thrown. Criminals were thrown to be consumed in an undiminished flame. That's where the rich man ended up. It says, "He lifted up his eyes." That's simply the idea of awareness and awakening, sensing, being made aware, being conscious. There is no soul sleep. He's not asleep. He didn't go out of existence. There's no purgatory. It's not a mild, purging fire. He awakens to the full reality that he is in Hades. There's no waiting period. There's no gap time. Just as to be absent from the body for a believer is to be present from the Lord, so for a non-believer to be absent from the body is to be out of the presence of the Lord and in eternal hell. From the very beginning, he has a full awareness of exactly where he is. He is in hell, and he knows it. He is one of those Jesus described in Luke 6:25 as "laughing now, but mourning and weeping then." He knows where he is. He's experiencing the reality of hell.

And how do you describe hell? Conscious torment. Being in torment, plural, torments, torments, torments. A believer who dies is immediately in the conscious fellowship and joys of the heavenly experience. Lazarus immediately at Abraham's side, at the glorious table in heaven of heavens. The damned immediately in the conscious experience of pain, torment, torture. And that these two are where they are and experiencing what they are is the point of the story. This is how it really is. This is how it really is.

The conversation opens up our understanding even further. Verse 23: "He saw Abraham far away. He saw Abraham far away and Lazarus at his side." For the sake of the story, the tormented man in this...this sort of fantasy story, for the sake of the story, this fantasy story about a very real experience, the man is allowed to see out of hell into heaven, which we know in reality can't happen, because verse 26 says, "There's a great gulf fixed." Nobody in hell could see into heaven, because nobody in hell would ever know the heavenly experience. Nobody in hell is omniscient, so they wouldn't be able to see in heaven, look around till they found Abraham. They wouldn't know who Abraham was. Nobody in hell can have a conversation with somebody in heaven; but for the sake of the story, to make a point, because it does reveal the essence of the suffering in hell...

Everything in the experience of a person in hell is confined to hell. Everything in the experience of a person in heaven is confined to heaven; but for the sake of the story, the man in hell sees Abraham. People in hell do not have normally that kind of vision, obviously. But for the sake of the story, he sees Abraham; and...and it is Abraham; and he knows it's Abraham; and...and he sees...Lazarus beside him. "And he cried out." This is a scream, trying to cross this great gulf, and he says, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I'm in agony in this flame." This is just profoundly revealing. "Father Abraham." He's pleading as a Jew. He knows that his lineage is from Abraham. The Jews celebrated that. They are the children of Abraham. They said that again and again and again. They used that as an argument against Jesus to validate their supposed legitimacy before God. God could make children of Abraham out of rocks if He wanted to.

The tormented rich man then, in saying that, expresses his situation. He needs help, and he can only plead race. He can only plead that he's a Jew. Isn't that good for something? And what he needs is mercy. What does that tell you? That the man not only was in hell, but knew that's where he belonged. This would be the first time this man ever asked for mercy. Those kind of legalistic Jews don't ask for mercy. Pharisees aren't looking for mercy. They're assuming that God is...approve... approvingly content with them because of their works. They've earned their righteousness.

One thing about hell, you get a fully active conscience. I'm not going to develop all that. You get a fully active conscience, so that the true wretchedness of who you are is completely dominant in your thinking. All that illusion about how good you are, all those illusions about your self-worth and...and your basic, innate goodness gone. There is a full realization of the sinner's wretchedness in hell. A fully informed, acutely aware and sensitive conscience becomes the tormenter. He doesn't say, "How did I end up here?" That question's never asked in hell. He doesn't say, "Did I really deserve this?" He doesn't say, "Don't you think this is a little extreme?" He doesn't say any of that.

But while hell is pure confrontation, relentlessly, of one's wretchedness by the conscience, and while he knew he was there as all people in hell do, because that's where they deserve to go, and there's nobody in hell saying, "Isn't this over the top? Is this really fair? Isn't this cruel?" at the same time hell is not remedial. It's punitive. Doesn't fix anybody. It doesn't purge anybody. It doesn't make anybody better. It has no remedial function. It is pure punishment. This man was the same man. "Send Lazarus." Wow, what a strange thing to say. He still saw Lazarus as somebody that was so low that, if anybody was going to leave heaven to come to hell, it should be Lazarus. Amazing!

I mean isn't there somebody up there that you could send down here? I mean he's not saying, "Father Abraham, would you come?" That would be beneath his dignity; but he looks in his own mind at the person he would consider to be the most wretched person who ever got into heaven, and he picks him, and it's Lazarus. That'll tell you that hell didn't remediate him. He viewed Lazarus exactly the way he always did; and he also thought somebody that lowly ought to serve him. He never got heaven's assessment of Lazarus, because people in hell don't have heaven's assessment of anything.

And by the way, nobody's going to actually, in hell, have a conversation with anybody in heaven; nor is anybody in Heaven going to have a conversation with anybody in hell. That would mitigate hell and pollute heaven. But for the sake of the story it's powerful stuff, powerful stuff. He's there. He knows he belongs there. The only connection he's got is a racial connection. He knows Abraham is his father racially. He also knows Abraham to be a man of great hospitality. Genesis 18:1 to 5 shows the story of Abraham's great hospitality. Maybe he can play on that. "Have mercy on me." He's not asking anything from God. Sometimes people think that when you go to hell, all of a sudden you want to love God and serve God. No, there's no interest in God, no interest in Christ. The merciless one now wants mercy, and he wants the mercy at the hands of the one to whom he was merciless.

Hell is not remediate. Doesn't fix you. Doesn't change you. It's punitive. So he requests to receive what he needs from a man to whom he would never give what that man needed. Amazingly, he wants mercy to be brought to him by the one to whom he showed no mercy, because, in his mind, he's the most dispensable person in heaven. "Send Lazarus." Lazarus once was in need, wanted what the rich man had. Now the rich man is in need, wants what Lazarus has. There's no repentance here. There's no remorse here. There's no humility in hell. There's no brokenness in hell. All he

wants is one thing. He's not asking to get out. His conscience would never release him from that. He knows he can't. He knows he doesn't deserve it. He only wants one thing. "Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame." Couldn't you send him to give me just a little relief?

That's what he's asking for. He's tortured. The metaphor is thirst and water, but the point is relief. He wouldn't give Lazarus a crumb, but he wants Lazarus to give him a drip. "Dip your finger in water, drip it on my tongue." Minimal. Any tiny, small bit of relief dripping off the end of Lazarus' finger. He's not asking for a barrel, not asking for a bucket. He's not asking for the heavenly pipeline to be extended to hell, so there's a constant flow. The souls of the damned know they're doomed to suffer. They know they are suffering justly. All they ask for in the lips of this man are small moments of relief in this eternal, unending horror. "I am in agony," *odunaō*, to be in great pain. "I am in great pain." Real water's not going to sooth the eternally tortured soul. That's not the point. The message is the desperation for just the smallest moment of relief. This is consistent with the image of hell.

You read the New Testament, you read even the Old Testament, Isaiah 66:24 talks about the fires of hell. You go through the New Testament. We'll look at a little more next time. The gospels and the writers of the New Testament describe hell as a fiery place, and its fire is the fire of torture and torment. It's also described as darkness, outer darkness, like being lost in the most infinite corner of space under horrible torture and pain, a place of weeping, wailing, teeth-grinding agony.

This is how hell is described and so he pleads for all that you could expect to get if you could get anything, just a moment's relief. "But Abraham said, "Child," some compassion in the heart of Jesus to have Abraham say that, son, reminiscent of the father in the 15th chapter in verse 31 who said that to the prodigal hypocrite that the one that stayed home when he said, "Son." "Son, remember during your life you received your good things; likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he's being comforted here, and you are in agony."

"Son," in a racial sense, you are a descendent of Abraham, but it didn't keep you out of hell. You've had your good things, your good things. You sucked up all common grace you could find. Yeah, you lived high on the providences of God. You had all the material luxuries, all the pleasures and treasures of earth. You had the temporary, passing, material, selfish comforts. You had ease. You had happiness. You had it all. You had it all in life. You had your good things. "Likewise Lazarus, bad things." Doesn't say "his bad things." Wasn't what he sought. It wasn't what he chose. But in the midst of his suffering, obviously, the implication is this man would've sought God and looked to the next life in hope and sought salvation and received it. "Everything's now changed. He's being comforted here, and you are in agony. He's being comforted by saints like Abraham. He's being comforted by angels. He's being comforted in the presence of God, and you are in agony, a fire that burns forever, but never consumes. A fire that burns forever, but never purifies. A fire that burns forever in an everlasting darkness that only punishes. What Lazarus was, you are: miserable. What you did not provide Lazarus, he cannot provide you: relief. And you're where you are, and Lazarus is where he is, and that's how it is. Furthermore, verse 26, "besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed." Fixed, *stērizō*, to set fast.

Literally, the passage, "There has been fixed and stands firmly and permanently a great chasm in order that, *hopōs*, so that, for the purpose of, "that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us." This is how it is and it will never change. No one in hell will ever go to heaven, and no one in heaven will ever visit hell. A chasm is

there, *hopōs*, for the very purpose of keeping the tormented in the place of torment, and keeping the blessed in the place of blessing.

It cannot ever, ever change; and no relief of any kind; and the ongoing, everlasting torment that you're there and you know that you deserve it. You know, sooner or later, folks, you have to view people with this in mind. If that doesn't motivate you to preach the gospel, to proclaim the gospel, and for some of you to believe the gospel, don't be a fool. What fool would sacrifice the future for some sins in this brief present? Eternal damnation is what Scripture proclaims. No relief, no escape. Why did that rich man go there? Why? How is it that you might go there? How is it that most people go there? And the answer is in the last part of the story, which we'll look at next week: because they did not believe what God revealed here.

In closing, the apostle Paul said this, 2 Thessalonians 1, "That God will deal out retribution (judgment) to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power," those who do not know God because they do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. There's only one way to heaven, and that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in His death and resurrection, to repent of your sin, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your only Redeemer and Savior in the Lord, is to be saved from hell. That is the message of Christianity. That is the only message of Christianity; and if you leave that message out, then that's not the Christian message.

Father, we come to the end of the service, but really to the beginning of the application of these foreboding and frightening realities. We have people we know well, very well who are headed for hell. It's just an agonizing reality. It is an agonizing burden to bear. We have relatives, spouses, children, parents, those around us associated with us in our work, in our school, and our communities. Lord, it's just really an overwhelming thing to think about, heart-crushing reality. And even You weep as Jesus wept over Jerusalem. We just pray that You'll energize us with the gospel. First of all, that You will save some sinners even now right here, that there will be some who are literally terrified by the reality of everlasting torment, without even the smallest drop of relief; knowing also that the more exposed they are to the gospel, the severer the punishment will be as Hebrews 10 says. How much severer punishment is the one going to be worthy of who has trampled underfoot the new covenant, the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are degrees of hell, for sure, and the greatest and most severe punishment will come on those who, knowing the gospel rejected it. So, Lord, helps us to all run to the cross and the safety of forgiveness that comes to those who confess Jesus as Lord, and help us to be diligent in the proclamation of this gospel to those we know and love; and we thank You, Lord, for revealing this to us. How important it is to warn us. May we warn our children and all that we know of the real character of eternal hell. And may we also live grateful, who have been saved, that we have been delivered from it and will be ushered one day to Abraham's side and the side of the prophets and the patriarchs, and the side of other believers through all the centuries who will gather around Your throne to be blessed forever. We pray these prayers for Your glory in the name of Christ. Amen.

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).