Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Testimony of One Surprised to Be in Hell, Part 3
Scripture: Luke 16:19-31
Code: 42-214

We come in our study of Scripture to a passage that focuses on the fierce and final judgment of God in hell. It's Luke 16, so I invite you to open your Bible to the 16th chapter of Luke. There is nothing to equal the Word of God, obviously. It stands alone. It is the only book that God has ever written. In it, He speaks; and all of it is critical and important, even though some of the subjects of the Scripture are disturbing, troubling, as ought...as they ought to be; and many are avoided as they ought not to be. It behooves us to consider all the Scriptures in all their fullness to understand all that God has said.

The subject of hell is not a popular subject by any means; and, yet, it is a necessary one. It is a compassionate preacher who preaches on hell. It is a loving preacher, a sympathetic preacher who warns people of the horrors of eternal punishment. All of that is true because it was a sympathetic God who revealed hell, and a sympathetic Christ who was the primary preacher of hell. We find Jesus here our teacher in Luke 16:19 through 31, and the lesson is about hell...

No one will ever cease to exist. No one will ever cease to be. All who have ever been born into this world will live forever, either in Heaven or hell. Nowhere else. Upon death, the eternal soul of every person either enters Heaven, the presence of God, or hell, out of the presence of God.

Here is a story told by our Lord, created by our Lord, a fictional tale which He Himself designed as a warning to those who were headed for hell. A reminder that He is the Lord over Heaven, but He is also the Lord over hell; that He is the One who blesses in Heaven; and He is the One who curses in hell. He is the One who made Heaven and the One who made hell. He is the One who brings people to Heaven and sends people to hell; and so He is the One to tell us the truth about it, compassionately, lovingly, mercifully.

The story that He tells is a parable about a man who went to hell, a man who went to hell unintentionally; and the story is addressed to very religious people who were confident that they were headed for Heaven, as are, by the way, most people and surely all religious people. For religion, by it's very its very definition is a path to God, a path to goodness, a path to Heaven. Fair to say that virtually all religious people are religious because they think that'll get them into Heaven. So it is a confidence typically shared by all religious people, and certainly was a confidence possessed by the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel, to whom Jesus is speaking in this account.

In fact, these are not just religious people, but extremely religious people, very devout, fastidious, obsessive in their devotion to their religion and their God. So the story about a man going to hell unintentionally, unexpectedly is jolting. It's supposed to be. It is an unnerving story told to people who are marked by religious confidence, confidence of Heaven; and it is still a jolting and unnerving story to all who share that false confidence of arriving in Heaven, but who will be shocked to wake up in hell. Better to be shocked now than then. To be shocked now is to be given a remedy. To be shocked then is forever, to have no escape.

Hell is shocking. The Words of Jesus are shocking, but it's true, and it's critical that we understand it. In going through this passage, which I've been laboring on in my mind and in my study for a number of weeks now, this is hard material to deal with. There is a deep soberness in the soul. There is a kind of gnawing ache in the heart, in the consideration of looking at the people that pass around the scenes of...of one's life and realize they are headed for the place which Jesus describes. It is sad to think that there are people sitting here in this church this morning who, in the greatest shock they will ever experience, will end up in hell, having thought they were headed for Heaven; but hell is dominated almost totally by people who didn't think they would end up there.

So out of devotion to the revelation of God, and out of devotion to the compassion of Christ, the preacher draws every generation to this powerful story. Lemme read through verse 26 so that you have it in mind. "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linens, 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, and 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 afar away and Lazarus by 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.' But 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.'"

To that point, the story is divided into three parts. Verses 19 to 21 describe the life of these two men at absolute extremes; 180 degrees in opposite directions. The rich man was splendorously rich, habitually dressed in the finest clothes, living lavishly, enjoying every possible benefit that money could bring. In contrast to him was the poor man who had absolutely nothing. Immobile, he had been dropped at the gate of the rich man. He sat there covered in sores, longing to eat the dirty crumbs at the table that were eaten by the dogs, and not receiving even the crumbs instead the dogs coming and licking his sores as if he was some kind of human road kill. Extreme opposites in life.

And then comes the great reversal in death. The second movement of the story's in verse 22. "The poor man died, and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side." The Pharisees who heard the story that day would know full well that this is Heaven, because they knew that Abraham was a just man before God and a friend of God and was the most significant of all their ancestors, their great ultimate hero, the father of their nation, and the father of faith; and so they know that the rich man -- that the poor man, rather, who was ignored by the rich man is not ignored by God, who sends His holy angels to lift the man and take him to the most honored place in Heaven, feeding him beside Abraham.

"The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades or hell, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." Poor man goes into the presence of God, the presence of Abraham, in the Heaven of heavens. The rich man goes to hell to be tormented. This is the great reversal. This is the first jolting element of the story. This will cause a stunning reaction, because the Jews believed their theological system was developed to teach them that if you lived a life like this rich man, this was God's blessing; and if you lived a life like this poor man, this was God's curse. They would've expected the rich man to enter into Heaven and be seated next to Abraham. They would've expected the poor man to end up in hell in torment, just a continued extension of the wretchedness that was being heaped upon him by God in life, but just the reverse is true.

And so we come to the third movement in the story from life to death to life after death; and in verses 22 to 26, as you will remember from last time, the focus is on the rich man in hell. Verse 23 says, "In hell, he lifted up his eyes." He became aware. He awakened. He knew exactly where he was, and the question then comes, "What will be the sinner's experience in hell?" Jesus here is demonstrating by this story, the sinners experience in hell. Every sinner's experience in hell, every dweller in hell will experience this; and what is it?

Verse 23, "Being in torment." Verse 24, "Being in agony." Verse 25, again, "Being in agony." And the kind of agony that doesn't end, the kind of agony that has no hope for anything different in the future because of the great chasm fixed. He can never leave nor can anyone ever come to bring him relief. Hell is presented as a place of endless torment, agony, separation, with no hope and no relief.

What is the experience itself? How does the Bible describe it? Well, lemme just give you some insights that come from the teaching of our Lord Himself. In Mark 9:48 hell is described as the place where, "The worm never dies in a fire that is never quenched." The fire, obviously, indicates a tortuous experience; but what does the worm never dying mean? Many of the old commentators through the centuries saw the worm as a reference to conscience, a gnawing, nagging, relentless...guilt pressed upon the soul tortured in hell. The worm that never dies is the relentless accusing conscience of the sinner, keeping up an unending and unmitigated and undiminished torment as it hammers the truth of the sinner's guilt and wretchedness without ceasing.

John Flavel, the Puritan, wrote, "Conscience becomes the whip that must lash the sinner's soul in hell, the seat and center of all torments." And in Revelation 14:11, it says, "The sinner will have no rest day or night." The conscience, fully informed, fully activated, fully aware of sin will release its relentless power to condemn on the sinner, who will be tortured endlessly by guilt.

You remember in Psalm 51:3 when David was reflecting upon the horrors of his sin. He had sinned with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, committed adultery with her, and then sinned further and done so in a devastating way by having her husband, who was a soldier fighting on his behalf, left in the middle of the battle while the soldiers around him retreated, so that he would be killed and, thus, was guilty not only of adultery but murder. But do you remember in reflecting upon that in Psalm 51:3, David said this, "My sin is ever before me." That is a taste of hell. Guilt never goes away. Guilt never will be relieved. The conscience is never silent. It cannot any longer be misinformed by a cultural morality that has perverted and twisted the true sense of what is right and wrong. It cannot be silenced by psychological games that are played or drugs by some kind of medication, so that guilt is not felt. It will be felt. It will be felt relentlessly and, as all who sin feel the weight of guilt for that sin, all the sin of all the life of the sinner will be brought to bear upon that sinner in hell by an ever-accusing conscience that never relents so that the eternal experience of one in hell will be that experience of David, "My sin is ever before me."

That is the torture of hell. Daniel 12:2 describes it another way. It says, "There will be shame and everlasting contempt. Shame and everlasting contempt." That is, the sinner will feel shame. Shame. Self-hate. No relief from the shame of a life of sin and rejection of the truth of God. Everlasting contempt is such a strong term. Everlasting contempt, the word contempt is in the Hebrew loathsome, wretched. This...this is the experience of torture in hell. It is a soul fully aware of his or her sin with a relentlessly accusing conscience, hammering without relief for one moment. The guilt of that sinner producing shame and everlasting self-hate and loathing.

That is why, in the story, the rich man doesn't say, "How did I get here?" The rich man doesn't say, "Did somebody make a mistake?" The rich man doesn't say, "Am I not in the wrong place?" The only thing that he asks for on his behalf is just a little relief. Hell, as I told you last time, is not remedial. It is purely punitive. In fact, as we shall see, the people who suffer there curse God...They don't get any better. This man is not asking God to somehow reevaluate his sentence. He is now filled with everlasting contempt for himself and his own wretchedness and never will he be given any relief from anybody else in hell, because they're all suffering from the same contempt and accusation and self-hate; and there is nothing there but misery on all fronts.

This understanding of the worm that does not die is drawn from Isaiah 66, where the Bible says, "Mankind will bow down before Me looking into the future. They shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me, for their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be

quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind." This is the destiny of the ungodly. Eternal shame, contempt, and unrelieved guilt.

When Jude 7 talks about eternal fire, it's this kind of fire of torment. It's not talking about what we would know as a physical fire which consumes. This is a fire that doesn't consume. Another way that this is described in Matthew chapter 8 verse 12; and we don't have time to consider all the texts; but there are a few distinctives that are repeated. Matthew 8:12 says, "These sons of the Kingdom...that is Jews who should have entered into the Kingdom of Heaven, but refused Christ; and therefore forfeited the Kingdom...these sons of the Kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness. Into the outer darkness." It's a picture of abandonment. It's a picture of banishment. It's a picture of being thrown outside, away from God, away from all that is good, away from comfort, away from tranquility, away from anything that brings relief.

Matthew 22:13, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness." Always pictured as darkness, which is to say that there's no real communion. There's no fellowship. There's no coming together of people. They are all in a black darkness with unrelieved guilt being pressed upon them by a relentless and accusing conscience. This loneliness, this banishment, this isolation is further described in Revelation chapter 14 verse 10. It says, "They will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." Amazing statement. As I said, the Lord is the Lord of Heaven. He's also the Lord of hell. Unaffected by the evil of hell, the Lord of hell will make sure that the punishment is carried out; and He will employ His holy angels to do the same. "And the smoke coming from this torment...Revelation 14:11...goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day and night." Again, emphasizing that this is forever.

Revelation 20:10..."The lake of fire and brimstone, there they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." It is this torment that leads to what is described a number of times by our Lord Jesus, Matthew 8:12, Matthew 13 verses 42, and I think it's verse 50. It's also in Matthew 22 verse 13, 24 verse 51, 25 verse 30, and in Luke 13:28. This phrase, "Weeping and wailing and gnashing or grinding of teeth." This is the gnawing of agony associated with this kind of abandonment, isolation, and torture by an accusing conscience.

Jonathan Edwards, considering this, wrote, "For the unrighteous and the righteous, eternity will be spent in the immediate presence of God. God will be the hell of the one, and God will be the Heaven of the other." A horrible, horrible existence.

Now, that leads us to the final section of the parable and crucial question. What took the rich man to hell? What takes anybody to hell? That is the ultimate question. It is a question that needs a careful, thoughtful answer. It has to be considered with some precision, and so I want you to think it through with me, just in a sort of introductory way today, and next time I...I want us to really come to grips with it.

Look at verses 27 to 31, because this concluding conversation crafted by our Lord, it is a fictional rich man. It is a fictional Abraham. Our Lord is inventing this dialogue to convey an answer to our question, "What took the rich man to hell? What takes anyone to hell? What took him there, and what will take his five brothers there, and what will take you there?"

Verse 27, "He said...the rich man did...'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house...that is, Lazarus...for I have five brothers -- that he may warn them, lest they also come to the 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.'"

The dialogue gives us the answer to our question; but, before we look at the answer to the question, I want you to consider several possibilities. Why do people go to hell? What sends them there? Why did the rich man end up in hell? What happened? There are number of latent possibilities in the thinking of the Pharisees and the thinking of religious people and thinking of people through all history, including today. Lemme suggest some possibility. No. 1, we'll just use a lot of S's so you can remember them easily. Stock, stock or race or family or nation. Was it because he was not of the right stock? That could be. The Jews, remember, were convinced that hell was made for Gentiles and Heaven was for Jews; and if you were a Jew and you were a...a son of Abraham, by virtue of that, you were headed for Heaven. Your Abrahamic ancestry was all you needed.

Was this...was this character in the story somehow a Gentile? Was...was he an outsider? Was he a non-Jew?...Because Jews were guaranteed Heaven. I mean the Apostle Paul, when he lists his credentials in Philippians chapter 3, and says, "What was I banking on? What did I put in my account that was credited to me that was gonna get me into Heaven? I was a Jew. I was circumcised the eighth day. I was born to the tribe of Benjamin. I was zealous for the traditions, fastidious regarding the law. It was my Judaism that got me in." But having met Christ, you remember, he said he counted all that manure...But the Pharisees didn't.

In John chapter 8, they're having a discussion with Jesus; and they are just shocked at Jesus indicting them; and they keep saying to Him, "We are Abraham's children. We are Abraham's children. This is our right and our heritage."...And Paul would agree, they were physically the children of Abraham. They were the ones, according to Romans 9, that had the doctrine and the covenants and the promises and the adoption and the Messiah and the law and the prophets, and they were the covenant people of God. They thought that was enough. So maybe this guy's a Gentile. That would make it all make sense. If he's a Gentile, it all makes sense; but no. No, not at all, because the rich man says to him in verse 24, "Father Abraham." He says it again in verse 27, "I beg you, father," speaking to Abraham, not God.

He says it again in verse 30, "No, father Abraham," and the Lord has that repeated three times just to make sure they know the He is designing here a Jewish man. He was of the right stock. He was a Jew in hell...inescapably so. Pleading racial connection as leverage, even for a drip of water's relief, was pointless. It won't keep you out of hell. It won't get you relief when you get there just because you're a Jew, a part of the seed of Abraham. So it wasn't that he was the wrong stock, and he was sent to hell because he didn't belong to the right race. Listen, being a Jew doesn't guarantee Heaven anymore than being a non-Jew guarantees hell. Those aren't the issues. It's not about race...

"Well," you say then, if you're thinking like the Jews were thinking that day, "what...what sent him to hell? If he's a Jew, that's a real problem for us that he ends up in hell. That's... and he's...I mean we could understand some Jew ending up in hell. Maybe like the poor beggar, because he's so foul and so evidently under the curse of God that hell would just be an extension of that...But generally speaking, Jews were going to Heaven."

So maybe there's a second option. It wasn't his stock that got him into hell, it was his substance. He was damned, because he was rich. He was damned, because he was so rich, "Habitually dressed in purple, fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day." He was just way over the top, lavish lifestyle and wealth. Maybe it was the splendor of his...of his self-indulgence. Maybe it was the extent of his wealth that sent him to hell. He could've saved himself if he had...if he'd been poor, or if he'd a made himself poor by giving everything away.

It is true that it's very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom. Jesus said that. Very hard, and Jesus also said in Matthew 11:5, "That the poor have the Gospel preached to them." And Paul said, "That God saves the lowly and the nobodies and the outcasts and the nothings," 1 Corinthians 1. Even James weighs in on this in James chapter 2, "Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom?"...

Maybe the Kingdom is for poor people only, and rich people can't get in. Well, Jesus said, "It's difficult for rich people to get in," but He also followed up that by saying, "With God all things are...what?...are possible." Money can be a barrier... and, by the way, riches can't be the issue anyway; because when Lazarus died and went to Heaven, he went to Abraham's side; and Genesis 13:2 says this, "Abraham was very rich." That wasn't the issue. Money can get in the way. You can trust in riches and down to hell you go, as the Old Testament says; but it's not your riches that are gonna send you there; and God has allowed many people who are headed for Heaven to be rich like Abraham.

You say, "Well, if it's not his stock, that he's a Jew; and it's not his substance, maybe it's that he was secular. Maybe... maybe he went to hell because he was a traditional Jew." Sort of social Jew, racial Jew, but not religious. Maybe he was a very secular Jew, and I've met many of them, agnostic Jews who don't know what they believe except they're glad they're Jewish. It's kind of a wonderful thing. It's

a wonderful ethnicity. It's a great heritage. Maybe he was irreligious. Maybe he was a rejecter of...of God. Maybe he was an agnostic, one who didn't know.

No, no, as a matter of fact, that's not true at all. In fact, he was a fairly sophisticated theologian. Just how religious he is is pretty clear. First of all, he and his brothers were familiar with Moses and the Prophets. That little phrase refers to the Old Testament Scripture. It is called the Law and the Prophets, the Law, or Moses and the Prophets. That is a term describing the Old Testament that was used by the Jews. So he says, "'I beg you, father...verse 27...send him my father's house -- for I have five brothers.' And Abraham says, 'They have Moses and the Prophets.'" The family was aware of the Old Testament. They had the Old Testament.

Furthermore, they not only had the Old Testament, but it says in verse 30 that he pleads with father Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead, "so that they will repent!"...And, of course, as verse 28 says, "Not come to this place of torment." No, he had a pretty good theology. He had the Old Testament...He believed in repentance. He believed in repentance. If you believe in repentance, you have to believe in sin. If you believe in sin, you have to believe in law. If you believe in law, you have to believe in a law giver. This is a believer in God...in God who is holy, in God who reflects His holiness in His holy law, in God who defines the violation of that law as sin, and God who requires repentance. He's a good theologian, and now that he's in hell, his hamarteology, his doctrine of sin has been perfected. He's not irreligious. He is a believer in repentance, which makes him a believer in sin, which makes him a believer in the law, which makes him a believer in righteousness, which makes him a believer in God. Very religious.

He's not even a Sadducee who denied angels and denied the resurrection...He is a typical Jewish religious man who got his theology pretty good. He's a believer in God. And this, see, makes him the perfect model of the person who ends up in hell shocked. You say, "Well, okay, if he's not secular, if that's not the issue, and it's not because of his wealth, and it's not because of his being outside the covenant people, maybe he's in hell because of his sin. Maybe it's sin. Specific, really bad ones, severe ones."

Remember, we were talking on one of the television programs one night. One of the rabbis said, "There is a hell, but God would never send anybody there." And in the little break in between, the question is posed, "Well, how about Hitler? How about Hitler? Wouldn't he go there?" "Well, yeah, he might go there. Yeah." And, you know, "What about Stalin who killed more Jews than Hitler killed?" And I mean you can go on and on. There's...and...and then the discussion is, "Yeah, there...if there's a hell, then there's a hell for those kind of people who do these really heinous, horrendous, massive kinds of sins. So that's why he's in hell. He's in hell because of heinous crimes."

Really. Do you know that in this story it doesn't say anything about him morally. Doesn't say he did anything. It says he...he should've done something that he didn't do, but it certainly doesn't say he did

anything evil. Jesus purposely doesn't describe that. Of course, we're all sinful; and any sin deserves hell. That is a true understanding of the Bible. But for most people, the assumption is that you go to hell because you're really horrendous. You're really bad...and most people think, "I'm...I'm better than I am bad. I'm more good than I am evil. I do more good things than I do bad things, and it's really...I'm going to Heaven." That...that's universally what people think, especially if they're religious, and most people are.

And, furthermore, the guy in the story prospers. He's got this big estate. He's got big feasts going on, which assumes he's got people coming. He's got a burial of honor at the end, and so this is not some horrendous sinner. This is...just a guy like other people, only very, very rich. So there's not any catalogue of iniquities that has consigned this man to hell.

Well, there's one other possibility that I can think of. Maybe he's in hell because he didn't...give his money to the poor guy. That could send you to hell. After all, Jesus in Matthew 19 said, "Sell everything you have." Remember the rich young ruler? "Sell everything you have, and give your money to the poor." That's what Jesus told him to do; and, of course, he wouldn't do it. Maybe that's the deal. He was self-indulgent to the degree that he had a lack, an utter lack of compassion, love, care, concern, sympathy, kindness, whatever word you want, toward this guy who was sitting at his gate. He did, and so did his five brothers.

This is another reason why Jesus gives him a name in the story, because it's critical to the story that everybody know who he is. Because even when he asked, "Couldn't Lazarus please come back, and then tell my brothers, warn my brothers of the afterlife?" The only way that that would work would be if they knew who Lazarus was. And, again, he has a name because it needs to be that everybody knew him in the family. The rich man who's dead knew him. The five brothers knew him, and if he goes back, they'll know him, and they'll know that it's the one who was at the door who died, and who disappeared, and now he's back; and they'll repent. So they all knew him, and they all ignored him, all six of 'em paid no attention to him. They loved money, and they loved to consume it on themselves. They were anything but generous. They had no interest in the poor, and the Old Testament is loaded with instruction about that. They were like the priest and the Levite of Luke 10 who saw the man stripped and beaten on the road to Jericho and walked right on by and paid no attention to him whatsoever. That kind of attitude was typical of the Jewish leaders of Israel, and this rich man and his brothers were a perfect fit for that.

You know, we're...we're sneaking up on the issue here. Sin will send you to hell. Your race won't. The amount of money you have won't...but being secular and ignoring God, that'll send you to hell, and sin will send you to hell, and selfishness is a sin, and that sin alone would send you to hell. So there...we're starting to get to the truth here. Sin sends every person to hell who goes there, and selfishness is at the heart of all sin, 'cause all sin is self-asserting above God. But in the end... even for all of us who are sinful and all of us who are selfish, we're not all going to hell. So that's half the

truth, but not all of it...because if the man had given crumbs, let's say, to the beggar, if he'd had somebody sweep up the crumbs under the table and kick the dogs away and take the crumbs out, or if he'd given the man a meal off the table, or if he'd picked the man up, brought him in the house, put him in his room, washed him, clothed him, and made him a part of the family, would...would that save him?

Are we saved by philanthropy? Are we saved by charity? Are we saved by generosity? Are we saved by compassion? Are we saved by works...which we do? Even acts of kindness and generosity and sympathy and philanthropy. Well, Romans 2 says we'll be judged by our works, sure. We'll be judged by our works. James says the same thing. We're gonna be judged by our works. Jesus even said, "By their fruit you will know them." We can be judged by our works, but we can't be saved by our works. Very important distinction.

Ephesians chapter 2, critical passage in this regard, says this. "For by grace you have been saved through faith that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast, for we are His workmanship." The only work that saves you is God's work in regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is all of divine grace, not of works. But we are His workmanship created by God in Christ Jesus for good works. We're not saved by good works. We're saved to good works. We're not saved by doing good works. We're saved so that we can do good works...

So even if you give all your money away, even if you're divesting yourself of your fortune for the sake of the poor, even if you're the ultimate philanthropist, that's not gonna get you to Heaven...because salvation is not by works. So it really, in the end, was not his selfishness that sent him to hell, as if he had turned that around and been generous. That alone would have bought him Heaven. And, again, I say sin and selfishness are only a part of the truth; but in all honesty, many people live in that zone of half-truth. Because they're not like the rich man, because they're kind, because they're generous, because they give to the poor, because they don't sin in heinous ways, they think they're gonna go to Heaven...

But Heaven is not earned by charity, nor is hell gained by the lack of it...People end up in hell not for any of these reasons. People end up in hell for one reason, and it comes clear to us in verses 27 to 31. I'm just gonna introduce it to you, and I want you to think about this. We're gonna dig into this most profound conversation next time. You would expect a conversation that Jesus fabricated to be almost infinite in its meaning, and this one is; but here's the key.

Verse 29, "They have Moses and the Prophets." Verse 31, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded. Let them hear them." The reason people go to hell is because they do not listen to the Scripture. They do not listen to the Scripture, for the Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, is the way to Heaven. It isn't through your works. There's truth in the fact that

your sin will send you to hell. It will. There's truth in the fact that your selfishness will send you to hell; but being only a minimal sinner and being generous will not get you to Heaven. It, too, will send you to hell.

The only way you get to Heaven is through listening to the way of salvation presented in the Scripture. Here represented by the phrase, "Moses and the Prophets," which was a Jewish expression referring to the Old Testament. That brings up a very interesting, really interesting question. Is there enough in the Old Testament for a Jew living then before Jesus' death and before His resurrection to be saved? How were people saved? Romans 10:9 and 10, "If you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved."

Fine, that's on this side of it. What if Jesus hadn't died? What if He hadn't arisen? How...and you couldn't believe in His death and resurrection, because it hadn't happened. Then what? Well, lemme give you one hint. The word repent in verse 30. The word repent. You know, this man in hell is a better theologian than a lotta so-called evangelicals that I've had to deal with. He understood the essence of what it was to repent. That's the heart and soul of it, repentance, repentance, repentance. And the message of the Old Testament was crystal clear on the need for the sinner to repent, and it told him exactly where he needed to turn in his repentance to receive forgiveness and salvation. It's all in the Scripture in the Old Testament, and then comes into its glorious fulfillment and fruition in the New Testament. This conversation, which we'll discuss next time, will lead us to this critical and rich understanding. Bow your head with me, if you will.

The realities, Father, of eternal damnation, eternal hell, eternal punishment are frightening and rightly so. Threatening, terrifying. But, Lord, this is for the good of the sinner, that he might, indeed, be terrified...Knowing the terror of the Lord is important for the sinner and the saint, for us to carry the message of the Gospel faithfully to those who are all around us perishing. And we thank You, Lord, that You have revealed to us in Your Word the...the way to be delivered from hell, the way to escape. It's not a matter of our race. It's not a matter of our having little, and we don't earn it by suffering and being deprived in this life. It's not a matter of just being religious, having even a very refined theology. Heaven is not gonna come to us because we've sinned less than others, and it's not gonna come to us because we're less selfish than others. Heaven is gonna be our eternal experience, because we have believed the Scripture. That we need to turn from our sin, repent, and put our trust in a gracious, merciful God who has provided a sacrifice for sin for those who turn to Him. And may many sinners turn, even today, and receive the salvation that You mercifully offer. Father, would You seal these things to our hearts, give us a new sense of the soberness of these realities, and may You be honored as we worship You with thanksgiving for such deliverance, and as we continue to proclaim the glorious saving Gospel of Christ, which alone can rescue men and women from this terrible eternal judgment. And we thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 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).