

## WE BELIEVE IN HELL

Luke 16:19-31

One of the greatest blessings that God gives every one of us is hope. Author John Armstrong said that hope was the balm and lifeblood of the soul. Jeremiah wrote, "Blessed is the man...whose hope is in the Lord (Jer. 17:7). As long as we have hope, as bad as life gets we can still make it, for we believe that one day soon things will be better. I witnessed this truth just this week as I visited with a friend at Children's Hospital in Birmingham. Her daughter is there with a very serious disease, Gillian-Barre Syndrome. She will be in the hospital for months. And when I saw her she was lying limp on her bed, on a respirator to keep her alive. But her mother had hope! She had a smile on her face and said, "I believe that she will be better!" And today she is better. She is off the respirator and her mother is even more encouraged than ever.

But what if you were having your worst day ever, physically, emotionally, and mentally, and you were in so much anguish in all of these areas you were wailing in your misery until you were totally exhausted, but you could not sleep, and you began to wail again, but the worst part of it all was knowing that you would never, ever, get any better? And even death will not put you out of your misery, for you know that you will never die. Well, friends, I've just scratched the surface of what it is like in hell.

The New Testament has much to say about hell, not as much as about heaven, but plenty still. And Paul said in Colossians 1:27-28 that he preached Christ, warning every man...that he might present every man perfect in Christ. He wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "as though God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God". Now, why was Paul warning men, and why was he pleading with them on God's behalf? He goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 6: "Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation". He was pleading with them to be saved and not go to hell.

Today I want to paint for you the most realistic picture of hell that I possibly can. I do not do it to condemn anyone who is here. For we are all guilty sinners; all equally deserving eternal death, and I am saved from that death only by the unmerited grace of God. But I stand here to tell you the truth about the place where you will spend eternity if you never receive God's only Son Jesus Christ as your only means of pardon from sin and your only hope of eternal life. And I stand here to call you to come to Jesus and be assured that you will live in Heaven with him forever and ever and not go to hell.

Turn in your Bibles please to Luke 16:19-31. There are six truths that God would have us to see today about hell. And the first truth is that hell is real. I would think that this is a given with most of us, and hopefully all of us, but it is certainly not with many. The Jehovah Witnesses don't believe in hell, at least the hell that we read about in Scripture. They believe that when you die if you aren't one of the meek who inherit the earth that you just stay dead – you cease to exist – and that is hell for you. The Mormons don't believe in hell, but they have a different spin on it than the Witnesses do. They believe that bad people do go to hell – they just don't stay there. At the last resurrection they will join all of the rest of humanity in heaven – only they have to live in the lowest tier of the Mormon's three tiered heaven. In essence the wicked are God's redheaded stepchildren. And then there are the Christian Scientists, who are neither Christian or scientific. They believe that hell is in your own mind. And then there are a whole host of people that you meet on the street every day who tell you that they believe hell is right here on earth. Like one survey respondent replied when asked if he believed in hell: "Believe in it? Good grief. I've worked there!"

Well, beloved, this person is not alone, for one recent survey indicated that 41% of all Americans now say they do not believe in hell. But if we are going to go with anyone else's opinion, I'd say that it should be the opinion of Jesus. And Jesus says otherwise. Jesus said in John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation". Jesus says there will be a resurrection day one day, and that it will not be for just the righteous, but also the wicked.

Now, we do believe that our bodies are literally coming out of the grave one day at the rapture, right? Certainly we do! There's no doubt about it!! And our bodies will be reunited with our spirits and go to a literal

place called heaven, with gates of pearl and streets of gold, just as we learned last week. Well, beloved, if you affirm Jesus' declaration of the resurrection of the righteous in a literal body to a literal place, but then in the very same verse you deny a resurrection of the wicked in a literal body to a literal place, you totally break the rules for proper interpretation of Scripture. If one resurrection is literal so must be the other. And in Matt. 5:29 Jesus tells us the place to where the wicked's resurrection will be: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell". Beloved, it is impossible to be intellectually honest and spiritualize away the truth of Jesus' words here. If the wicked have a literal body that will be thrown somewhere after death, then wherever it is thrown must be literal also. And Jesus calls that place hell. So friends, don't let the cultists and the skeptics persuade you. According to Jesus, hell is a real place.

But I want us to see something else about hell. Hell is not only a real place; it is also a place of torment. Four times in our text we read the word "torment". Beloved, hell is horrific! Now, we need to clarify something at this point. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the word "hell" appears only in the KJV. In every other translation you have the word Hades. Hades is simply the grave, the place of the dead, and that is the literal translation of the Greek word that Jesus used. But there is not a consensus among conservative scholars as to who occupied Hades in Jesus' day. Some say that there were two compartments in Hades before Jesus' resurrection, one for the wicked and one for the righteous. Others say no, that Hades only held the wicked and that the righteous dead were in Heaven. But two things are clear from Scripture about Hades. One, Hades is not the final dwelling place of the wicked. It was only a temporary holding place until the Great White Throne judgment. And the other thing that is clear is that Hades was still a place of fire. The rich man cried out in v. 24, "I am tormented in this flame".

Now, you may find it interesting that although 59% of the American population believes in hell, only 32% believe that hell is a place of physical torment. Why do you think that this is so? It is simple. Most people cannot fathom that God would ever condemn anyone to such unspeakable punishment. After all, God is love, and God is a forgiving God! Well, friends, let me share with you why a loving and forgiving God allows people to go to hell.

First of all, we must know that God never intended for any man to go to hell. Jesus says in Matt. 25:41 that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. Have you ever wondered why there was no plan of salvation for the devil and all of the demons that serve him? I cannot be dogmatic, but I think that I know. We know from Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that Satan was actually created as an angel that worshipped and served God. His name was Lucifer, and he was most likely the leader of the heavenly hosts that sang praises to God. He was most likely more up close and personal and intimate with God than any created being. He knew firsthand the glory and majesty and love and righteousness of God. NO ONE was more blessed in the entire universe than Lucifer.

But we all know what happened. Lucifer decided that He wanted to be like God, that He wanted to usurp part of the glory that only belonged to God. And so he rebelled against God, and he did it without any temptation at all, without any evil influence whatsoever. And he led a whole host of angels to rebel with him, and they were almost as guilty as he. But they all sinned against so much light that it was the highest act of treason against God that was possible. Words can never describe the hideous, heinous nature of the Lucifer-led rebellion. It was so bad there simply could be no forgiveness, so God prepared a place of punishment to fit the nature of the crime; he prepared for Lucifer and all of his minions the place of torment called hell.

Think of it this way. All of us have heard of crimes from time to time that were so bad that righteous anger began to boil over in our soul and we've thought something like this: "They ought to throw that jerk into the coldest, darkest, dirtiest prison in America and throw away the key". Well, friends, that's God's attitude toward the high crime of Lucifer. And that's what will happen to him one day, except it won't be cold! He will be cast into the prison of a fiery hell.

Now, this hell, this future home of Satan is a different place than Hades and has a different Greek name, Geenna. Geenna describes a garbage dump in the first century just outside of Jerusalem. The dump was infested with maggots and there was a never-ending fire that burned there. Sometimes the bodies of

criminals were dumped in Geenna, and some speculate that even Lazarus' body was dumped there when he died. But Geenna is the word that Jesus uses at least five times in the gospels to describe hell (Matt. 5:22; 13:41-42; 18:8-9; 25:41; Mark 9:44), and the people knew exactly what He meant. He was describing hell with the illustration of a literal place with literal fire.

Hell is also the place that John mentions five times in the book of Revelation as the lake of fire and brimstone. But could this be literal as well, a lake of fire and brimstone? Surely not, many say. But friends, we have an illustration of such a lake, just like we have the illustration of the burning garbage dump. For what better describes the lake of fire than the pool of liquid lava in the core of the earth, that we see occasionally as it erupts and flows down a mountain side in a spectacular volcano? But friends, it really doesn't matter that to many the torments of hell make no sense. For neither does the Trinity, and neither does the Virgin Birth, and neither does the substitutionary death of Christ make sense to the natural mind. But we know that each one of these is true. And even so is the Bible's clear teaching of a literal, burning hell.

But the question remains, why do some human beings go to a place that was prepared for the devil and his angels? I'll tell you. Because you and I and every other human being have committed the same rebellious act of treason against God as did the devil. Romans 5:12 tells us that in some mysterious way that we do not fully understand, every one of Adam's seed participated with him in his fall into sin in the Garden of Eden, and we can't blame Adam for our sin. Each and every one of us turned away from a loving, holy God and went our own way, just like Adam, and just like Lucifer. And to rebel against the authority of such a great and wonderful God ranks right below Lucifer in the nth degree of wickedness.

In Adam we have all shaken our fist in the face of God and declared, "I will not have You rule over me! You, the God Who has so clearly revealed Yourself to me through the glory of Your Creation. You, Who sets the course of every star in the universe. You, who commands the winds and the waves and they obey You. You, Who commanded the birds to feed Elijah, and Who commanded the teeming drought of fish to fill the nets of the disciples, and Who stopped the mouths of the hungry lions when they would have devoured Your servant Daniel. You, Who out of all the hundreds of thousands of creatures on the earth have made man alone in Your own image, and Who handcrafted me uniquely while I was still in my mother's womb. You Who preordained a perfect plan for my life and have never treated me with anything but goodness and mercy, as the Bible says, 'The Lord is good to all, His tender mercies are over all His works'. You, Who provide for my every need daily, down to the air that I breathe. I will not have You rule over me. I am the master of my own fate, the captain of my own soul". So that's the reason that God allows men to go to hell. Every one of us have rebelled against God's rightful authority over our lives, just like Lucifer, and we all deserve Lucifer's exact same punishment, the torments of hell.

So we have seen that hell is a real place, and that it is a place of torment. But there is another truth about hell we see in our text, and that is, hell is a place of prayer. You would not normally think of people praying in hell, would you? But I can assure you that they are. That's what the rich man did. He did not pray to God, but to Abraham. But he prayed for relief from the awful thirst of hell. But there was only one problem with his prayer. As Harry Ironside said, he started praying on the wrong side of the tomb, where his prayer went up in smoke.

Friends, I do not know of anything more pathetic than being in a place of praying where there is no hope of answered prayer. But that is where some men have found themselves in history. The men of Noah's day scoffed and ridiculed him for 120 years as he built the ark and called upon them to repent and get right with God. But when the floodgates of heaven opened and the earth burst forth with torrents from below and they started to drown by the hundreds, can't you just see them banging on the door of the ark and pleading with Noah, "We're sorry we didn't listen to you! Please let us in!" But their cries were in vain. Listen to the God's word to Jeremiah concerning Israel in Jeremiah 11:10-11:

"They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers. Therefore thus says the

LORD: "Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them".

John writes that one day in the Tribulation Period that the kings of the earth, and great men, and rich and mighty men, and military commanders, and every slave and every free man will call out to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Rev. 6:15-16) But their cries, too, will be in vain. And in all three of these instances the result was judgment and death.

But all of these unanswered prayers have to do with the temporal, with this life. What's infinitely worse is prayers that are unanswered throughout all eternity. God speaks about such prayers in Proverbs 1:24-32, and these are some of the most chilling words in all of Scripture as He describes the prayers of those in hell. Friend, if you are lost today without Jesus Christ, I warn you, don't be like the rich man and start to pray on the wrong side of the tomb; for you will be praying in the place of unanswered prayers.

But there is another truth that we must see about hell this morning. It is not only a place of prayer, but it is also a place of memory. After the rich man had called to Abraham to send Lazarus with just one drop of water for his scorching tongue, look at Abraham's reply. "Son, remember..." What a wonderful thing can be our memories! All of us can look back on certain parts of our lives with sweet, precious memories. If you are saved your most precious memory is of the day that Jesus Christ came knocking at the door of your heart and you turned from your sins and opened the door and received Him as your Savior and Lord. And you have other precious memories of your childhood, teenage, and adult years.

But friend, I declare to you that there are no precious memories in hell. If you go to hell your memory will be perhaps your greatest curse. You will remember every single opportunity that you ever had to turn from the broad way of destruction to the narrow way of eternal life. You'll remember every sermon you've ever heard calling you to Christ. You'll remember every time you heard the gospel call through a television or radio preacher. You'll remember every time you felt the Holy Spirit's conviction through the example or words of a godly friend, calling you to turn your life over to Jesus. You'll remember, and you will despise yourself and you will cry out in anguish, "Why, oh why was I so self-centered, so consumed with the pleasures of this life, and why didn't I do what I knew that I needed to do?!" And forever and ever you'll be tormented by your memories.

But that is not all we need to see about hell today. Hell is a place of torment, of prayer, and of memory, and hell is also a place of concern. Now, this surprises us a little, just like hell being a place of prayer. But in hell the rich man changed from a man of absolutely no concern for the welfare of others to being a man of great concern. We read that after Abraham informed the rich man that for Lazarus to come to him was impossible, he asked if Abraham would send Lazarus as a witness to his brothers, lest they should also go to hell. But Abraham said to him that that wouldn't happen either. That his brothers already had a witness and that was Moses and the prophets, which was the Old Testament.

Now, beloved, we can learn two important things here. One is there will be no partying in hell. How many times have you heard someone say, or have heard that someone has said, "Why, I'm not afraid of going to hell. That's where all my buddies are going to be. We'll just get together and party for eternity". Well, whoever heard of such a ridiculous thing as that! Have you ever heard of anyone having a party in a burning house? And Jesus said that hell was a place of outer darkness, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In hell you can't see your hand in front of your face. And contrary to wanting his brothers to join him in hell, the rich man begged that they be warned not to join him.

But there's another lesson that we can learn here. And that is, don't wait for God to produce some miracle for you before you give your life to Christ. The rich man said to Abraham, "My brothers need a miracle to believe. They need someone to come back to them from the dead". But Abraham said, "No, they don't. If they will not believe what God has already said in His Word, they won't believe even if someone comes to them who has been raised from the dead". You may be thinking, "Hey, that wouldn't be the case with me". Well, I beg to differ. In fact, God proves it in His Word. We read in John 12 that many had come to the Passover feast to see Jesus' friend Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. So everyone around knew about Lazarus' resurrection. What a miracle! You would think that that would

spawn faith in even the hardest of hearts. But John 12:10 says, "But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also". They said, "We can't just kill Jesus, we've got to get rid of Lazarus, too". Even a resurrection from the dead would not melt their cold, calloused hearts toward the Son of God.

Friend, if you are without Christ, God has already done everything He needs to do in order for you to be saved. He has sent His Son to die on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. He has raised Him from the dead. And He has given you a perfect account of it in His perfect, infallible Word. And if you will not simply believe this miracle He has already done and revealed to you in His Word, another one will not convince you, either. So don't flit away another moment and gamble with your eternal soul. Just take God at His Word and come to Jesus today!

There is a final truth about hell that God would have you to know. Hell is not only a place of concern, but hell is a place of no escape. When the rich man called out to Abraham to send Lazarus to him, Abraham replied that there was a great gulf between the two, and no one could cross in either direction. Friend, if the door slams shut behind you in hell, it will be shut forever and ever. We've alluded to this truth already. But do not for one moment buy into the Roman Catholic idea of purgatory, where your suffering is only temporary until you've been purged from your unforgiven sins, and then heaven's gates will be opened to you. And don't buy into the Mormon idea of proxy baptism, where someone is baptized for you after you are dead to wash your sins away. Friends, when your heart beats its final beat your destiny is sealed for all eternity. You are either rejoicing in heaven, or you are suffering in hell.

I want to close with a word to any of you who are still asking the question why a loving God would send anyone to hell. And I say to you, that's the wrong question. The question is not, why would a loving God send anyone to hell. The right question is why would a righteous God receive anyone into Heaven? As we have seen, none of us deserve to go there. If we go to hell we will get exactly what we deserve, that which is our just due. So why would God not just let us get what we deserve? Only one reason; "For God so loved the world.....". Friend, are you here today, and you know that you are still in your sins, that you've never told God you are sorry for your sins, turned from them as best as you knew how, and trusted God's only Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive you and take you to heaven when you die? If you have not, today Jesus says to you from the book of Revelation, "Come! ...Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely!" (Rev. 22:17). Don't go to hell. Come to Jesus today!