

A Glimpse of Hell

Luke 16:19-31

On July 16, 1741, Jonathan Edwards stood before his congregation and preached a message titled, '*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*'. People began to shake under the conviction of their sins. Many fell to the floor, crying out for mercy. That morning, his church encountered God and what has become known as the Great Awakening began to sweep across New England.

It's quite different in most pulpits today some 276 years later.

One preacher wrote,

"Hell, it would seem, has fallen on rather lean times. It used to be that the vast majority of Christians, regardless of denominational affiliation, believed that Hell was a real place where the wicked and the impenitent go when they died. The very thought of the pains and torments of Hell was enough to scare sinners straight.

It used to be that ministers of the Gospel would preach on the horrors of Hell to persuade reprobates to repentance. But not anymore. Most American mainline and so-called Evangelical churches stopped preaching about Hell years ago. Some mainline ministers stopped believing in Hell years before that.

Hell made people uncomfortable. Hell was too 'old-fashioned.' The topic of Hell was bad for the bottom line—attendance and income...."

In this morning's passage, Jesus pulled back the veil between this world and the next and showed us there is an actual Heaven and a very real Hell.

Hebrews 9:27 (NKJV)

Perhaps you've heard the story about the message one man had carved on his tombstone. It said, "*Consider, young man, as you walk by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you soon shall be, so prepare, young man to follow me.*"

That sounds quite profound, but another deep thinker took a knife and scratched a response on the tombstone that read, "*To follow you is not my intent; until I know which way you went!*"

There are only two directions you can go after death. Heaven or Hell and you make that choice in this life not the next.

There are only two options and everyone in this room this morning will end up spending eternity in either Heaven or Hell.

I know people don't like to talk about Hell, and frankly, I don't enjoy preaching on it.

However, because I'm committed to teach the full counsel of God, I am going to preach this powerful passage of scripture about Heaven and Hell.

Luke 16:19-31 (ESV)

Some people see this as just a parable of Jesus, but I agree with other scholars who believe Jesus is describing an actual occurrence.

You see in the 38 parables Jesus told, he never called anyone else by name. Yet in this story, He identifies two of the characters by name, Lazarus and Abraham. I believe there really was a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus and after they died Jesus reported what really happened.

This morning we are going to consider 2 things we as Christians need that we see as we focus on this rich man in Hell. In fact, these are two things every New Testament church needs.

1. In Hell, the rich man looked up... We Need to have a Vision of Heaven

Jesus never revealed the rich man's name, perhaps because he was someone who was well known. He is sometimes called Dives, but that's not his name, it's just the Latin translation of "rich man."

I suspect the rich man had a great funeral in which many dignitaries attended. Speaker after speaker related what a great, wonderful, religious man he was. I think they said he was blessed by God because of all the wealth he enjoyed. I'm sure they reported he had gone on to his reward in Heaven...

But one split second after the rich man died, he got the reality that something wasn't right.

Jesus simply said, "*In Hades, where he was in torment, he lifted up his eyes.*"

Hades is a place where the wicked dead go until the final sentencing to Hell that takes place at the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20. It's kinda like the county jail before the state pen; yet it's a place of torment and agony just like Hell.

Notice two things about the agony of Hell:

- **He saw people in Heaven**

The first thing the rich man noticed was the torment, but the next scary thing he noticed was that he could see into Heaven.

When the beggar Lazarus died, it doesn't say he was buried like the rich man. His body was probably dumped in some garbage pile which was common for the poor. But Jesus said the angels escorted Lazarus soul into the presence of Abraham.

Now if this was a theology class I would tell you Abraham's bosom, or paradise, was where the souls of all the righteous dead went before the cross. After the cross, Jesus took these folks to Heaven. But don't get so distracted by the theological nuances that you miss the point. It's okay to call it Heaven.

To every Jew, being with Abraham was an analogy for Heaven.

People have asked me if we will recognize each other in Heaven. I believe we most certainly will.

The rich man looked up and recognized Lazarus and Abraham. If they can recognize us from Hell, then I think we'll also recognize each other. One of the worst agonies of Hell might not be the flames but the possibility of people in Hell to see those who are in Heaven.

Can you imagine lost husbands seeing their wives in Heaven? Lost children seeing their parents in Heaven? I don't want any part of a place like that.

Like the rich man, we need to lift up our eyes and catch a glimpse of Heaven as well. Heaven is real, and it will be populated with amazing people.

How do you get to Heaven?

Not by being good or doing good—nobody is good enough. You don't get to Heaven by being religious. The rich man was a devout Jew. He called out to "Father Abraham" and Abraham even referred to him as, "son/child."

Only by being a child of God can you get into Heaven!

Another agony of Hell was:

- **He could remember his life on earth.**

In (vs.25) Abraham said, "Son remember..."

I believe those are two of the scariest words that will ever be heard in Hell.

People in Hell will carry their memories of this life with them. I believe a person in Hell will remember every gospel message they ever heard. They will remember every time someone tried to explain the love of Christ and how to become a Christian.

This life is tough and sometimes people wish they could erase their memories like they delete a picture on their phone. That's why so many people commit suicide: they want to erase the memories and feelings.

There is no Memory issues in hell. Everyone will have a crystal-clear memory. Hell will be a place of eternal remembrance and regret.

Have you ever bought something on a whim and later regretted it? It's called "buyer's remorse." Fortunately, today you can take a lot of things back for a refund or an exchange. In Hell there will be "invitation remorse." It won't be over something you did, but it will be remorse over something you didn't do: accept Jesus offer of forgiveness and redemption.

If you are here today without Jesus and you die in your sins, you will recall my exact words this morning. You will remember me saying; "if you reject Jesus' free offer of eternal life you will regret if forever."

God loves you and He doesn't want you to go to Hell. He sent Jesus to pay your penalty because He wants you in Heaven.

Hell was never intended for human habitation.

Matthew 25:41 (ESV)

Hell was designed for Satan and his demons, not people. But because of our sinfulness, we are all born with a destination for Hell.

When we repent of our sins and come to Jesus, He forgives us and changes our destination from Hell to Heaven.

John 3:16-18 (ESV)

God loves you so much that Jesus died so you wouldn't spend eternity in Hell.

So, the first thing we need is a Vision of Heaven. There is another thing we need, that we see from this man.

2. In Hell, the rich man cried out...We need to hear the warning cries of the damned.

The rich man cried out to Abraham and lifted his petition to Heaven. Notice his two cries to Heaven:

- **A cry of personal agony: "HELP ME!!!!"**

The rich man's first thought was of himself and his needs.

That should be no surprise, because one of the prerequisites for ending up in Hell is to spend all your life thinking only of yourself and your needs. When he recognized the torment of Hell, he cried out for Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water to touch his tongue. He was in agony in the fire, crying for just a moment of relief.

I believe the thirst the rich man had was actually a thirst for the presence of God.

This thirst cannot be satisfied with anything the world has to offer. Only Jesus can satisfy this thirst.

John 7:37-39 (ESV)

This thirst for God only becomes more intense and agonizing in Hell.

People in our culture have made Hell a joke. They think Hell is going to be a place of fun, and frolicking with your friends.

In a speech to the National Press Club, Ted Turner said, *“Heaven is going to be a mighty slender place. And most of the people I know in life aren’t going to be there. There are a few notable exceptions and I’ll miss them. [Laughter] Remember, Heaven is going to be perfect. And I don’t really want to be there...Those of us that go to Hell, which will be most of us in this room; most journalists are certainly going there. [Laughter] But, when we get to Hell we’ll have a chance to make things better because Hell is supposed to be a mess. And Heaven is perfect. Who wants to go to a place that’s perfect? Boring. Boring.”* [Laughter]

Turner told Dallas Morning News that *“Christianity is a religion for losers. I don’t want anybody dying for me. I’ve had a few drinks and a few girlfriends and if that’s gonna put me in Hell, then so be it.”*

Hell won’t be a party but rather it is a place of continual weeping and gnashing of teeth. It’s a place of darkness, isolation, and eternal frustration and torment.

Remember, in this passage it is not some prophet seeing a vision of the afterlife; this is the Lord Jesus Himself speaking plainly about what Hell is like.

Abraham said this thirst for God and the physical agony could not be relieved. There is a great void that is fixed permanently between Heaven and Hell and no person can cross it. After death, it’s too late to change your eternal destination.

So this man’s cry for relief was unanswered.

But the main point of this message is in the next cry of the rich man.

- **A cry of concern for his family: “WARN THEM”**

After Abraham’s reply, the rich man realizes there is no hope for himself so his thoughts turn to his family. He had five brothers, and they were all like him: religious but lost. Once reality struck then suddenly, the rich man in Hell develops a missionary spirit. He expresses a concern for the lost people in his family.

There is a powerful warning here for every person who has not yet trusted Jesus to save them from their sins and Hell.

Abraham gives an astonishing reply to the rich man’s pleas. He says his brothers have the Bible (the Law) and the Prophets, that’s all they need to escape Hell. If they will just read it and believe it and let it change them, they can be saved from Hell.

But the rich man insists that if a dead man could go back and talk to his brothers, then they would turn from their sins and they would repent.

Notice, the rich man in Hell knew how to be saved, to repent; he just never got around to repenting himself. I personally know people who know how to be saved; they've just never done it. So, the man wants Lazarus to go back and warn his brothers to repent and stay away from Hell. When they see a man from the grave warning them, he is certain that they will repent.

I would tend to agree with the rich man, wouldn't you?

Imagine that I'm not a Christian and somebody knocks on my door some evening. When I open the door, I'm shocked to see a friend whose funeral I attended a few weeks earlier standing there. I think that would literally scare the Hell out of me or scare me out of Hell.

Yet Abraham said, *"If they don't believe God's Word, or the Prophets, they won't even believe if someone rises from the dead."* In fact, just few weeks after He told this story to the Jews, Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected and some still scoffed and rejected Him.

Today, it's not much different.

People have the Bible and Jesus has risen from the dead and many still reject Him. I'm sharing the Word of God with you today, and I'm proclaiming that Jesus is alive. If that's not enough for you to want to miss Hell, you wouldn't repent even if a corpse came knocking on your door.

The one thing that stands out in this passage to me is the concern the rich man had for his brothers. In Hell, people have a constant concern for lost people who are still alive and are headed for Hell. That's something that we as Christians need, a fervent, compassionate concern for people around us who are headed toward Hell.

Do you have a burden for people headed for Hell?

Have you shed any tears over lost people in your family or circle of friends?

Have you stayed up all night praying for the salvation of a lost loved one who is headed for Hell?

I have prayed that God would give me the same kind of burden for the lost that Paul expressed in Romans.

Romans 9:2-3 (ESV)

Romans 10:1 (ESV)

Paul said he was constantly anguishing over the fact his Jewish brothers were not saved. His burden was so heavy he said he would be willing to forfeit his own salvation if it would result in the salvation of his brothers.

As I prepared this message I was powerfully convicted because I believe dead people in Hell have a heavier burden for people without Christ than I sometimes do.

Could you pray, *“God, you can send me to Hell if it would mean that every person in my family would go to Heaven?”*

I wondered if I could honestly pray, *“Lord, I’m willing to die and go to Hell if it would mean the salvation of every other person in Glendale.”*

While it’s not even possible for me to be cut off from Christ, but do I have that kind of burden? Church will you join me and ask God to give us the same kind of burden that Paul had?

Let’s play “what if” for a moment.

What if God offered to let you spend 30 seconds in Heaven or 30 seconds in Hell today, which would you choose?

Which location do you think would make you a stronger, more mature follower of Christ? Seeing the glory and majesty of Heaven would probably make you a stronger Christian. But would it give you a greater burden for lost people?

If God gave me the option of letting every member of our church spend 30 seconds in Heaven or 30 seconds in Hell, well let’s hope the dry heat of Arizona has prepared you a little. I would ask God to let all of us spend just 30 seconds in Hell. Because those of us who know the Lord are going to spend eternity in Heaven, but I think that 30 seconds in Hell would change us for the rest of our earthly lives.

If we could see the agony and hear those voices, we would come back and be the most evangelistic Christians on earth.

Charles Spurgeon pastored Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Spurgeon said, *“If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”*

We need a fresh vision of Heaven, and we need to have the same urgent concern for people headed toward Hell as someone already there.

Today I don’t want to miss an opportunity for anyone here to choose to miss Hell, but even better, to accept Jesus and the fullness of joy He gives.

As everyone bows their heads, if you realize that you need this change of destination and want this life of peace and the promise of Heaven, lift your hand as an act of requesting Jesus forgiveness.

Pray with me, *“Dear Jesus, I realize I am a sinner and destined to Hell. I am sorry for my sins and living in my own selfish desires. Please forgive me and take over the direction of my life. I want to experience your love and forgiveness here in this life and forever with You in Heaven. Jesus, I want to be an example for you that others can see and also can become saved. Thank You, Jesus, for paying for my sin and making me one of your children. Amen”*

Luke 15:10 (ESV)