

The rich man and Lazarus

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[0 : 00] Will you turn with me please to Luke's Gospel chapter 16. I want to consider with you this morning the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and to take for our text verses 22 and the first half of 23.

And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried and in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment. And so on. Now if I was asked to give an illustration of what preaching was like I would say it was something like this.

It's like a man going along the road past a railway line and he sees a man sitting down in that railway line having a picnic and he knows from his own experience that it's unsafe to sit in such a place.

And so he would start to try and get him off that railway line. Perhaps he would try and coax him off by the promise of some great treasure that he had. Come and see what I've got you might say.

[1 : 15] Do you not see how happy I am away from the railway line? Do you not see how great it is over here? Sometimes you would plead with the man.

You would say look I don't care what your problem is. No matter what it is I've got someone who can help you. And you try and plead with him to come off that railway line.

And you say I can lead you to the one. And I can point you to one who can help you. And satisfy you more than anything you've got where you are.

But you see when all else fails and the man sits there still unconcerned and perhaps it is the sound of the train whistle is heard in the distance then the preacher or the man who is speaking to the other man on the railway line he would start to describe what's going to happen to the man.

It's a last resort. But he would speak to him and tell him about the consequences of sitting in such a dangerous place.

[2 : 24] Perhaps he would describe what has happened to someone else who has sat there and been killed by an oncoming train. No preachings like that.

Sometimes the preacher tries to bring the person who is without Christ over to the side of Christ by showing just how wonderful and beautiful Christ is.

By holding out the great pleasure of Jesus and saying come and taste and see that the Lord is good. Sometimes the preacher has to plead with men and women.

Plead with them that no matter how desperate their plight and how unworthy they feel and how much problem they have in their life there is one who can help and so they plead with them and try and bring them to Jesus who alone can help.

But sometimes when he's done that and done it unsuccessfully then there is only one course of action left open to him and that is to warn of the danger of a Christless eternity.

[3 : 33] Warn of the danger of continuing in such a state. Now I'm sure I can speak for most preachers. I don't like preaching about these things.

I would much rather spend my time extolling the beauties of Christ. I would much rather spend my time showing you how wonderful Jesus is.

Showing you the greatness and the excitement and the value of the Christian life. I would much rather dwell on the blessings of heaven and of the life to come.

But the scriptures contains this proof. It tells us that if we are without Christ we are already condemned.

And that is perfectly clear. We read in John chapter 3 at verse 18 that there are two categories of people. There are those who believe and who are moved out of the category of condemnation.

[4 : 38] They are no longer condemned. But they are those who do not believe. And God doesn't say that they are moved into the category of condemnation.

He says they are already condemned. Like the man sitting on the railway line. They are already doomed if they do not remove themselves. And this parable teaches us what awaits those who refuse to turn to Jesus Christ.

Those who refuse to repent. Those who stubbornly continue in their unbelief. Now I want at the outset to say that it is a parable.

And for that reason we must temper our language. For that reason we must be careful in what we say. And not go beyond what the scripture says. And I accept that because this is a parable.

That the language is symbolic. But we ought never to delude ourselves into thinking that because the language is symbolic that the reality doesn't exist.

[5 : 47] If I am trying to use symbolism to describe something that's real then I must use something that suggests the reality. That suggests that there is what the reality is like.

And so although we may say that there is no real fire as such like the fire you and I have in our graves we are never to forget that whatever the word means here or whatever Jesus is speaking about there is behind that symbolism some reality that is as fermenting and as real as fire.

Now I want to look then very briefly at what we are taught in this particular parable. And the first thing I want you to notice is this that the soul survives death.

Now that's not a popular teaching today. It's not the kind of teaching that people like to accept. They would rather believe that when the soul dies or when the person dies that's an end of it.

That somehow or other the person is annihilated. That after death there is no more existence.

Some like to believe not so much in annihilation but in some kind of assimilation.

[7 : 14] when the soul dies or when rather when the person dies somehow or other they're caught up into some great cosmic force and they feel nothing and know nothing and are aware of nothing.

But the Bible teaching from the beginning to the end is consistent that the soul survives death. It is absolutely explicit in some passages.

we're told for example that there is going to be a resurrection. If there is no survival of the soul after death then the whole teaching of the scriptures on the resurrection is nothing but utter folly.

If there is no reuniting of the soul and body after death then Christ was telling lies. if there is no life after death then the promise of heaven for Christians and the warnings of God against those who transgress his law are nothing but empty words and meaningless phrases.

The Bible is consistent in its witness that the soul survives death. But this survival is a personal survival.

[8 : 34] In other words when I die the Harry Woods that was is the Harry Woods that is in the eternal state. I don't lose my identity.

I'm still a person and I am still a person either in the realms of heaven or in the blackness of hell. it's personal.

I can't shift my responsibility onto someone else. I can't shirk that responsibility by hoping that somehow or other I'm going to be obliterated as a person even although there's some kind of future existence.

And we see also we can see from this parable that survival is personal. Lazarus is still Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and the rich man is still the rich man in torment.

And we see that teaching in other places in scripture. But you see again that we're taught from this parable that not only does the soul survive death but there is consciousness in that survival.

[9 : 50] we're not going to go into some dream like limbo or existence. We're going into a place where our minds are awake and alert, perhaps alert to things much more than they are ever here.

Certainly that's going to be the case in heaven. The Christian is going to see things and understand things and perceive things that he or she never understood before.

And I believe that that is true also of hell. That in hell there will be an alerted and accentuated consciousness.

You will know of your sins. You will be aware of your guilt. You will know the holiness of God. You will know the awfulness of sin.

You will know the awfulness of a Christless eternity. Because survival after death is a conscious survival. And that is something we ought to stop and think about.

[10:52] And again the scriptures are absolutely clear in this matter. That if I am Harry Woods before I die. If I waken up in hell tomorrow I'm still Harry Woods.

And I still have my mind. And I still have my reasoning capacities. And I still have the consciousness and the conscience that I have here and now. And we also learn from this parable. that this survival after death although it is in a disembodied state for a time. In other words at the death of a man or a woman the soul is separated from the body.

The body is laid in the ground and it rots away and it passes into the dust until the resurrection of all men and women. But this parable teaches us that although our death brings us into a disembodied state that we are still susceptible to pleasure and to pain.

Abraham's bosom was the place of joy and happiness. But the rich man is found in a place of torment and anguish.

[12:04] the second thing I want you to notice is this. That not only does the soul survive death but at death a great separation takes place.

Not all go to the same place. We were singing in Psalm 1 about the man that walketh uprightly. In other words the man whose hope and faith is in Jesus Christ.

He's going to be like a tree that standeth by a river. He's going to flourish. He's going to grow. He's going to yield fruit in his season. But the psalmist says but the wicked are not so.

They're like the chaff blown away by the wind. He speaks of the judgment of God and he says that the wicked will not stand in the judgment of God.

They will be blasted away from his presence by his holiness. I'm sure you're perfectly aware of other texts in the scriptures where it teaches quite clearly that there will be a separation.

[13:12] There's the parable of the wheat and the tares. At the end of the age when the harvest is reaped the tares are gathered into bundles and burned.

You have the sheep and the goats parable of Jesus. One on the right hand the other on the left. you have the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins.

The five wise are in the kingdom of God. The five foolish are outside the kingdom of God and they hear the most awful words that a man or a woman can ever hear.

Depart from me ye cursed. I never knew you. You see the scripture is consistent in that also. That at death a great and real separation takes place between men and women.

And the basis of that separation what is it? Is it some merit in some and demerit in others? Is it some potential holiness in some and lack of that potential holiness in others?

[14:17] No. It is this. Those who believe are not condemned. Those who believe not are condemned already. In the words of John chapter 3 verses 16 to 18 that is the criteria upon which men and women will be separated when they die.

And I want you to notice that this teaching is not isolated teaching. I could point you to various passages. There is Matthew chapter 8 verse 11. There is Matthew 13, 41 to 43.

Matthew 13, 49 to 50. Matthew 25, 46. Where it shows the separation of men and women. And that's only from the gospel of Matthew.

And we could go through and we could find references clear and distinct throughout the scriptures. But I want you to notice also that not only does this parable teach us that there will be a separation takes place at death.

But there are only two places into which a man or a woman can go. The first is described in the parable here as Abraham's bosom.

[15:36] Now that may seem a strange description to us. But the Jewish thought it was not a strange description. To be in Abraham's bosom was to be with God. To be in Abraham's bosom was to be in the place of blessedness.

The place of peace. The place of security. To a Jew it was heaven and paradise to be in Abraham's bosom. You remember how Jesus speaks on the cross.

This day shalt thou be with me in paradise. Christ promises in the book of Revelation the heavenly Jerusalem that cometh down out of heaven.

The place where no one who is unfaithful to him will ever find a dwelling. He speaks elsewhere of it being a heavenly kingdom. But the other place is described either as Gehenna or hell.

If you have a modern translation you'll notice that the passage here in verse 23 reads and in Hades he lifted up his eyes being in torment. And I must say a word about that word Hades.

[16:45] In the New Testament Hades may mean the place simply of disembodied spirit.

It may have a neutral connotation. It may simply mean that it is the grave. So that in the Acts of the Apostles the Peter quoting from the Old Testament can speak of Jesus Christ and say thou didst not leave his soul in our version says hell.

But the original says Hades. Now Christ was never in hell. And so we cannot say that he's saying that Jesus or what we can say is that he's teaching that Jesus was in the grave.

But I want you to notice that although there are occasions when the word Hades can mean nothing more than the grave. Generally the word Hades translated hell in our version means just that hell because it is associated with punishment for sin.

And if you want to check that if you don't believe what I'm saying then get a concordance out and look up the references to hell and see how many times those references are coupled with punishment for sin.

[18:07] And so you see then that there are the two places. There is heaven here described as Abraham's bosom and there is hell a place of torment and anguish.

And we're taught also from this passage, this parable, that not only does this separation take place, not only are there two places and two places alone into which a soul can go, but that separation is irreversible.

Once a soul is in heaven, it is permanently and irrevocably in heaven. But by the same token once a soul is in hell, it is permanently and irrevocably in hell.

There is no mercy in hell. It is a place where once a soul is consigned to, that soul is there forever. Now I can't explain in words what forever means. But if you can imagine yourself being in hell and there for countless millions of years and then looking forward and realizing that that time you've spent there is but a point compared with what is yet to be, then that's some idea of what forever is.

[19:37] It is a place where the separation is fixed. It's spoken of here as being a great gulf fixed between the two. Those in heaven who would seek to have mercy upon the damned in hell are not permitted to cross over the gulf.

They're not able to cross over the gulf. And those in hell who are the damned and would cross over and share the bliss of heaven are not able to cross over because there is a great gulf fixed between the two.

But I want to look at what this passage says about the nature of hell. And here is where we must temper speech and keep it within the bounds of scripture.

But even allowing for that I would urge you to think of the awfulness of what Jesus is telling us here. We're told by the rich man that it is a place of torment.

Verse 24 for I am tormented in this flame. And then again we're told that it's a place of anguish.

[20:51] He cried out. He cried out in anguish. A place of torment. A place of anguish. It's described here as torment by flames.

Now I don't know what that means in reality. But I know what it would mean if I was thrown into a fire here and now. And I know that it would be torment. It would be anguish.

So whatever the reality is that underlies that, it must be awful. But notice how else Jesus describes this place. He describes it in Mark's Gospel chapter 9 at verse 48 in these terms.

It is the place where their worm die of naught and their fire is not quenched. death. It is a place of everlasting and eternal pain and torment and destruction.

It is a place of the extreme awfulness. Again, Jesus describes it in Matthew 24 at verse 51 in these terms.

[21:58] It is a place where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. If you were to overhear the cries of the hellish tonight, today, what would you hear?

You would hear weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus again describes it in Matthew 25 at verse 41.

As an everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And he describes it in the same chapter, Matthew 25 at verse 30, as outer darkness.

Now take these descriptions. Allow for the symbolism, yes, but let them sink in. And Jesus is saying to us that hell is a place of torment and anguish, where there is a never-dying worm, fire, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, where there is the devil and his angels in a fire prepared for them, and where there is outer darkness.

But you might ask, well, what constitutes this torment? If these are symbols, what constitutes the torment of hell? Well, initially I think there's psychological torment, and ultimately there will be both

psychological and physical torment, torment.

[23 : 29] A disembodied spirit obviously cannot feel physical pain, but after the resurrection, when all bodies and souls are reunited, then there will be both psychological torment, and there will be physical torment.

There will be anguish, there will be pain, there will be the despair, that no matter what you do, or what you try, you will be there forever, ever, and ever, and ever, there is the deprivation of all blessedness.

Now, we don't appreciate that today, but you and I live under the mercy of God. Sin is not allowed to break out in our lives, and reach its ultimate goal, which is death.

God restrains our sin. God restrains sin in society. God is merciful to us. He gives us blessings, he gives us health, he gives us strength, he gives us soundness of mind, he gives us the blessings of the sun shining on us, the blessings of good food and clothing.

Well, in hell there will be the withdrawal of all blessedness. There will be no such thing as common grace in hell. There will be a complete separation from everything that is good.

[24 : 50] God will remove from us all mercy. But there's going to be social torment too. You see, hell is the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

It is a godless, it is a demonic, it is a satanic environment, it is an inhuman place, and yet that place is the place where those who reject Christ will spend eternity.

in such an environment. It's a place where your conscience will be rebuking.

That may be the reality that underlies the symbolism of the never-dying worm. The conscience like a worm knowing a way, going over the sins that we committed it again and again and again, telling us that it's our own fault that we're here, telling us that God is just in consigning us to this place, telling us that if only we could have done differently, we would have done differently to avoid this place, knowing conscience.

and it's a place where sin reigns unchecked. Sin has the dominion in hell and whatever sin aims at, it achieves in hell.

[26 : 22] But it is in hell sin going to its uttermost, no restraining power of God, nothing to stop the depravity, nothing to stop the eternal and ongoing degeneration.

Now we might think that well once you've sunk into hell there can be no worsening of that hell, and yet the devil himself in revelation is described as being thrown into the bottomless pit.

Satan is forever falling, and his demons are ever falling with him, and in company with Satan and his angels that are the lost, the damned.

A progressive and ever increasing torment. That is what hell is. And I want you to remember that these words are spoken by Jesus.

These words are spoken by Christ who gave his life for sinners. These words are spoken by him who is characterized as love manifest in the flesh.

[27 : 42] And what is so seldom realized is this, that Jesus in the gospel speaks more of hell than he does of heaven. If you go through and look at the narrative, and if you add up the number of times where he speaks of this place of everlasting and unremitting torment, you'll find that he speaks of it more often than he does about the paradise of heaven.

Now Jesus bore no will to sinners. He loved sinners. Indeed he still loves sinners. I bear no will to anyone in this room today.

and yet I relate to you the words of Jesus that without Christ this is your lot. This is where you will spend eternity.

There will be no release, there will be no lessening of what you are enduring. If you are outside of Christ then all that Christ suffered on Calvary for the sake of his people will be yours throughout eternity for the sake of your own sin.

I want to close this morning by reminding you that this parable also teaches us that those who are in hell are without excuse. There is no man, woman or child in hell today that is not there fairly.

[29 : 20] That is not there having rebelled against the light and the mercy of God. God is fair and God is just.

There is no person there who did not have some degree of revelation and clear teaching about the character and the existence of God.

God. You see, hell is a penal place. It's a place where people are punished and they're punished because of sin. And yet every one of us here have heard the offer time and time again that God has

made to deal with our sin.

sin. He has offered Jesus Christ as the substitute for sinners. He has pleaded with you through the gospels.

He has said that at the moment there is a bridge across the gulf between your damnation and your salvation and that bridge is Christ.

[30 : 31] but when you pass into death there is no more bridge but the great gulf is fixed. And we today are more answerable than this rich man.

He pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus as though a miracle would help his brothers. He was so concerned that they too would not share this place of torment.

And so he speaks to Abraham and Abraham says look they have Moses and the prophets. No master Abraham, no lord Abraham he says but if one should rise from the dead they would repent. And Abraham says even if one should rise from the dead they won't repent, they won't believe. Abraham's telling the rich man that the revelation of God in Moses and the prophets was enough to lead these men to repentance.

And that even if a man rose from the dead and some great and astounding miracle was worked in their sight, they wouldn't believe. Now you and I live in a day when the miracle has been wrought.

[31 : 54] Jesus Christ is risen. He has come back from death. He has told in his own words and shown by his resurrection that every word he spoke about that awful place is true.

You see how do we know Jesus was telling the truth about these things? We know because he said that if I'm not raised from the dead then I'm a liar.

Well he was raised from the dead and he's not a liar. And that means that every single thing that is spoken of concerning the awfulness of hell has been vindicated by Jesus.

So you and I today have less excuse if we had any at all than this rich man. and the evidence of the scriptures is sufficient.

You might say well if only somebody could prove to me this thing or that thing. If only God would work a miracle in my life I would believe. You would hear exactly the same words.

[33 : 09] You have Moses and the prophets. You have the Old Testament and you have the New Testament. You have the resurrection of Jesus Christ. these are sufficient.

There is not one of us today if we end up in that place of torment and say that we didn't know. Not one of us. We stand under the clear light of the gospel of God.

God. Now friend this will be the outcome of your life if you reject Jesus and refuse to repent.

It's not a maybe. It's not the preacher's own ideas. It's not philosophical speculation. These are the words of God.

God. If the man on the railway line continued to have his picnic even although he was in possession of a railway timetable that told him that in five minutes the express was coming through.

[34 : 26] wouldn't you say that that man had all the information he could have and all the opportunity that a human person could give to another human person to escape for his life.

Well you have all the opportunity and you have every piece of information that is divinely possible to give. my words to you this morning would be this.

If you do not have a saving interest in Jesus Christ firstly consider that Jesus whose words are true and faithful says that without him this is going to be your eternal law.

But secondly consider that today you can call upon the name of the Lord. You can seek the Lord.

And at this moment in time and so long as you've got the breath to breathe your fate isn't sealed.

You can turn to the Lord and seek salvation. but remember the precarious position that you're in.

[35 : 49] Jonathan Edwards in preaching a most powerful sermon entitled The Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God portrayed the Christian or rather portrayed the man without Christ as a man who was walking over the pit of hell on floorboards that were rotten through.

And it was only the grace of God that was keeping that whole fabric from collapsing. And yet it was an unmerited grace.

It was an uncovenanted grace. He also likens the sinner without Christ to a little spider dangling on its web in the hand of God who finds that spider contemptible because of a sin.

sin. And God speaks very clearly about how he abhorred sin. He cannot bear sin in his sight. Now if you are without Christ today, you're living on borrowed time.

And it is only by the long suffering of God that you have not been cast into the pit of hell of hell where Jesus says, is your lot for rejecting him.

[37 : 12] Now will you not see that? And will you not close in with Christ? And will you not make sure that when that great separation comes, be it in 20 years time or tomorrow, that you'll know exactly where you're going because you've closed in with Christ?

Well, I plead with you. I preach that which is untasteful to me in order that you might be saved. May the Lord enable you, if you're without Jesus, to see the reality of a lost eternity and to flee to Christ.

Let us pray. Lord God, we pray that thy words would not go unheeded this day. that each one of us might consider the reality of our faith and examine ourselves in the light of scripture, and that we might flee from the wrath to come, and not be like those who treasure up wrath unto the day of wrath.

[38 : 47] But when that day comes, that great dam of wrath will break and pour down upon us, with all the fury of a God whose mercy has been rejected and whose Christ has been trampled underfoot.

Oh Lord, we pray that every single one of us here might think seriously about our eternal state and about our relationship to Christ.

We ask these things for Jesus sake. Amen.