

Hell - The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31 – John MacArthur

The teaching of our Lord Jesus, who said more about hell than He did about heaven, and certainly more about hell than anybody else in Scripture, or everybody else combined in Scripture.

As we talk about what the Bible says about hell, let's open the Scripture to *Luke chapter 16*. And in this chapter, our Lord tells a very familiar story that focuses on hell. It begins in *verse 19 of Luke 16*.

“Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily 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 bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 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, remember that during your life, you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

Contrary to common opinion, hell is also filled with religious people. Now remember that again it is the Pharisees who are drawing the attention of Jesus here. Back in verse 14 it says, *“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and scoffing at Him.”* Again His audience is the Pharisees, the sources of the existing Judaism of the day, and all of those who were the followers of the Pharisees, which was the majority of the population. The Pharisees and all who followed them were in grave danger of being thrown into hell. Jesus had already warned them not to fear men who can only kill the body and after that do nothing more, but to fear God who kills both body and sends the soul to eternal hell. Here is another one of those warning passages to those who are a part of the false religion of apostate Judaism that dominated the people in that time. They were all, you remember, living on the edge of death. They were all living on borrowed time. They were all going to die, and they were not in control of when that was going to happen. And therefore they were all on the brink of eternal hell; they were all on the edge of experiencing the destructive, deadly judgment of God.

Their religion was fraudulent. They were lovers of money and those who justified themselves in the sight of men. They had developed a works-righteousness system, a system of self-justification that worked with men but not with God, who knows your hearts. And what is highly esteemed among men, Jesus said, is detestable in the sight of God, and He's talking about their religion. Hell is for religious people. Most people in the world are religious (in some shape or form); therefore hell is dominated by religious people.

Now the Pharisees believed in divine judgment. For sure they believed in hell, and they also were certain that they were never going to experience either of those things. So our Lord tells them a story that truthfully will

expose them again as many of His stories did. They are like the rich man—self-satisfied, self-indulgent, lovers of money, despisers of the outcasts and rejecters of the truth of the Scripture. They, like the man in the story, want signs, and they keep asking for signs while at the same time rejecting revealed truth.

The story then is both an assault on the false religion of Pharisaic Judaism and another compassionate merciful warning that those who follow this religion will end up under the judgment of God in a place of torment called hell. Now the story again, as we would expect from Jesus, is masterful. It is genius of the highest order just as a story. And as you read this story and read it and read it, it just explodes with nuances of insight. It is a story about contrasts and reversals. It is a story that though told on one occasion in seemingly...in a very brief period of time could take the study of months, if not years, to fully understand.

But think about the contrasts and the reversals that are here. There's a poor man and a rich man. The poor man becomes rich; the rich man becomes horribly poor. There is a poor man on the outside; there is a rich man on the inside. Then there's a poor man on the inside and a rich man on the outside. There's a poor man with no food, a rich man with food, and then there is a poor man at a feast and a rich man who can't even find a drop of water. There's a poor man who has immense needs; there's a rich man who has no needs. And then there is a poor man who has no needs and a rich man who has great needs.

There's a poor man who desires everything because he has nothing. There's a rich man who desires nothing because he has everything. And that is completely reversed, and a poor man who has everything desires nothing, and a rich man who has nothing desires everything. There is a poor man licked by dogs; there's a rich man surrounded by dignitaries. And then there is a poor man surrounded by dignitaries, and a rich man isolated among the worst of dogs. There's a poor man who suffers and a rich man who is satisfied. And then there's a rich man who suffers and a poor man who is satisfied. There's a poor man humiliated, a rich man honored, and then a poor man honored and a rich man humiliated. There's a poor man who wants a crumb; there's a rich man who feasts. And there's a rich man who feasts and a poor man who wants anything, a crumb.

There's a poor man who seeks help; a rich man who gives none. Then there's a rich man who seeks help, and a poor man who can't give any. There's a poor man who is a nobody; a rich man who is a somebody. And then there's a poor man who's a somebody and a rich man who is a nobody. The poor man who has a name; a rich man who has no name. There's a poor man who seeks help; a rich man who gives none. There's a rich man who seeks help and a poor man who gives none.

So it goes. A poor man with no dignity in life becomes dignified in death. A rich man with no indignity in life becomes an absolute no one in death. There's a poor man with no hope, a rich man with hope, and then a poor man whose hope is realized though he had none, and a rich man who had all kinds of hope who then has none. It just goes on and on like that. You get the picture.

In the story, Lazarus never speaks. He is silent; he's only there for contrast. He is not the object of the story. The story is not about his experience; it's not about heaven. It is about the rich man's experience in hell. The rich man speaks; the rich man holds conversations with Abraham. He is the main character in the story. And in speaking, the rich man does something the likes of which you cannot find on the pages of Scripture. He gives a personal testimony of what it's like to be in hell. We do have in Scripture an actual personal testimony of what it was like to be in heaven. It's not very helpful; it's *2 Corinthians 12*. The apostle Paul went there, and having been there and come back, he simply said, "Don't know what to say. There are no words; can't describe it. There are some who tell us everything they saw when they went to heaven and came

back. Many, even those who do not believe in a heaven, think, or at least hope, they are going to a better place. But in all of man's history there has never been anyone who has been able to prove that. The only direct acknowledgement of heaven is in the Bible. If you accept that as truth you must also accept that the Bible states there is a requirement to get there.

It is true, the apostle Paul was caught up to the third heaven and came back to speak of things too wonderful to form into words. But there is no occasion in Scripture in which someone goes to hell and comes back. You might say, "Is not this that kind of an occasion?" And I would respond that I'm convinced at this point that this is not an actual historical story, but it is a parable. There would be no reason to consider it anything other than a parable except for one minor detail, and that is the fact that somebody in the story has a name which is a little odd for parables. There are no rules against that, but there are no rules given concerning parables. But all of the elements of the story would lend to the idea that it is a parable. It is introduced, for example, in the way that parables are regularly introduced. "Now there was a certain rich man." That's very typical of the introduction of parables. You see the same introduction at least six times in the gospel of Luke. The style here is clearly that of a parable. It is a story intended to illustrate a spiritual truth, and the main character has no name.

Furthermore, the circumstances are fictional; the circumstances are imaginary. For example, seeing into heaven, seeing into heaven from hell; an imaginary circumstance, talking to Abraham, knowing from hell who is in heaven, having an opportunity somehow to make a plea from hell to somebody in heaven. And so again, there's every reason to think that this is simply a story that Jesus invented to make a spiritual point in which He decides to name one of the characters, and He gives him the name Lazarus, which is such a wonderful choice in actuality because a name Lazarus is a form of Eleazar, which means "the one whom God helps." And certainly in the story Lazarus received the greatest help from God, and that is access to heaven, salvation. And I think he's given a name simply to distinguish him from the non-descript rich man, because no one in hell needs a name. You're no one there, and there are no relationships there. But everyone in heaven has a name.

Well, so much for an overview. The story breaks into three parts: life, death, life after death. Let's go back to verse 19. "*Now there was a certain rich man,*" and by the way, the picture here, He paints these extreme images—they're extreme; they're unforgettable; they're vivid. "*There was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen.*" This is to say that he didn't wear anything but the finest, most expensive garments. Linen would refer to an Egyptian cotton, even still today the finest cotton woven into garments of cotton in the world. This is to show us that the regular, daily habit of this man was to dress to the max. His regular custom was to put himself on display. And he lived life in a lavish way, joyfully living in splendor every day. Every day was a party; every day was a feast; whatever it was he wanted that day, he had the resources to make sure he received it—indulgent splendor daily, not an occasional, lavish, ostentatious event connected to some calendar-important day, but every day—flashy, luxurious, lavish. This is an extremely rich man.

Now you've got to understand the Pharisees are listening to this and they're saying to themselves, "Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed this man is," because they were the original inventors of the prosperity gospel. If you're rich, God made you rich. If you're poor, God made you poor. If you're rich, you're blessed. If you're poor, you're cursed. That was the simple theology that they maintained. If anything went wrong in your life, you sinned. So the Pharisees would say, "This is our guy, this is us, for they were lovers of money." It says that, most importantly, in verse 14. And they were good at parading themselves and their flashiness.

So this is a very indulgent, splendorous, luxurious picture of a rich man with whom the Pharisees would identify and conclude that he was blessed by God. On the other hand, in verse 20, a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores. Here the use of poor indicates this guy had nothing, extreme poverty. He is covered with sores. The Greek term for “sores,” interesting enough, *helka*, is the word from which the English word *ulcer* comes. This is basically a guy with oozing lesions all over his body. We would say he’s a very gross guy, filthy, dirty, unkempt and with oozing sores all over his wretched form.

Apparently also he suffered from some crippling disability because the language is explicit here; it says in verse 20, “*He was laid at the gate of the rich man.*” Not a delicate word, *ballo*; it is the Greek word for “throw,” or the Greek word for “dumped.” This is a beggar of the most tragic kind, dumped at the rich man’s gate. By whom? We do not know. Somebody perhaps who had a little bit of compassion, I guess you might think in the imaginary story, if you wanted to fill in some blanks. Somebody at least cared enough to sort him out from all the other beggars who might be at the temple gate and take him out to the large gate at the entrance to this man’s estate, and dump him there to beg from a rich man who had plenty to provide for such a needy person.

And so you meet the two characters that begin the story. The rich man is like the Pharisees, consumed with unrighteous wealth, loving money, serving money, not God, and therefore detestable to God. The rich man in the story gives the poor man no help, absolutely no help. Does he know about him? He’s at his gate; he knows about him every time he goes out, every time he goes in; he’s there. He’s been dumped there; he can’t move. Does he know he has needs? Of course look at the next verse, “*Longing to be fed with the crumbs that were falling from the rich man’s table.*”

You know, this is a really interesting setting. Other times in the New Testament it talks about wanting the crumbs that fall from the table. But I don’t know that you really might understand this without a little bit of a background. Did some reading in Jeremias on the parables, Joachim Jeremias writes on ancient customs. He says that guests at a meal use the broken pieces of bread to wipe their hands. When they were eating, they ate with their hands. And they would be dipping their hands in liquids, oil, olive oil, whatever. And they would take bits and pieces of the bread to absorb that and in a day when they didn’t have napkins, they would wipe their hands with the bits of bread and then throw them under the table to be eaten by the dogs. Dogs hung around the meals in an open home.

The rich man, however, wouldn’t even consider the dirty bread lying on the floor eaten by the dogs to this beggar. The Pharisees would understand that. They would identify with that. The rich man would think this is the curse of God on this man. I want to keep my distance from this man. I don’t want to invade this man and offer any help to this man, because if I do I might be going against the purposes of God. And so he is left there not even to eat the dirty bread that’s thrown under the table.

And to add to that, dogs were coming and licking his sores. This is just the ultimate indignity. We think about dogs, man’s best friend. Really, dogs in this day, New Testament times, were not pets. The worst thing you could call someone was a dog. Now when you call someone a dog in those days, if you were a Gentile dog, you were a cur, a “Pariah-like mongrels that roamed the outskirts of town in search of garbage. These curs have not come to lick the wounds but to abuse him further and to eat at his wounds to add more reason for us to regard him as less than human, unclean through and through, an outcast, cursed by God.”

These dogs are ugly, dirty, diseased mongrel scavengers, chewing at his oozing flesh. This is an insulting humiliation and destitution. He is road kill to the rich man, and nothing more. And the Pharisees can identify with it. Yes sir, he's under the curse of God.

And then an event happens to both of them that changes everything—death. Verse 22, *“It came about that the poor man died.”* At that point, if there was a breath that Jesus might have taken before He continued the sentence, they would have said, “Knew it. God's curse is now complete. He's dead, gone to hell.” But Jesus said, *“The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom.”* What!?! This is the shocker; this is the bomb that explodes in the middle of their minds. It's not surprising that a diseased, destitute, starving man chewed by dogs—filthy, diseased dogs—would then endure the final end of death. By the way, nothing is said about a funeral; nothing is said about a burial. There wouldn't have been any if he was near Jerusalem. His body would have been taken by some who perhaps were the garbage collectors of the city and dumped in Gehenna, an ever-burning trash dump of Jerusalem, which is the symbol of hell. He would have been burned like garbage. No funeral because he would have been viewed by all as cursed by God and unworthy of a funeral. But there was something better than a funeral—he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

“And the rich man also died and was buried.” He had a funeral. Sure, this is the rich man. He's respected. He's honored. He's surrounded by people who lift him up, give him due respect. The rich man died, as all men do, and a proper funeral is held for him, while the poor man is simply dumped on the garbage heap.

Now in the thinking of the Pharisees, this is an open/shut deal, that the poor man goes to hell, the rich man goes to heaven. But the shock in the story is that the angels carry away the poor man into Abraham's bosom. And that introduces us to life after death. What happens to the rich man? Verse 23, *“In Hades...”* What!?! *“In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.”* This is a complete stunner. This is the absolute opposite of what they would have expected. This is the great reversal of everything. And I gave you the contrast and their reversal in the little list I went down with you, and now it happens. The poor man dies, carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom—language that expresses the fact that God sends His holy angels to gather one of His own into glory. This is terribly upsetting to their comfortable, simplistic theology that if you suffer in life, you are cursed by God. And if you're rich, you're blessed by God.

What does it mean to be taken to Abraham's bosom? I know in the past people have gotten real technical about that, that this is some technical title for a special place. I don't think it's a technical term at all. It's the only time it's ever used in the Bible, and it's kind of an odd term. A better way to understand it, if you sort of take it out of its ancient sense, is he went where Abraham was - to be with Abraham. That's all it means. The poor man was taken to the place where Abraham is.

Now the Jews know one thing for sure. Abraham is not in...What?...hell; that they know. Abraham is the father of faith. Abraham is the father of the faithful, Genesis 15. Abraham is the friend of God. They know where Abraham is, and Abraham is in heaven. Abraham is not in hell. And what happened is this man assumed to be cursed goes right to the place where Abraham is. And the idea of saying Abraham's bosom, or Abraham's chest, or Abraham's presence is to say that he went to be with Abraham in intimate, personal fellowship with Abraham.

This is not minimal concession to the poor man, to give him a remote place in heaven. This is to take him and make him a close companion/friend, fellowshipping with the greatest of all Jewish heroes, Abraham. When the Jews wanted to defend their privilege, when they wanted to defend their uniqueness,

when they wanted to defend their place with God and their hope and their promise, they would say, “We are the children of Abraham.” He went to sit close to the host. He went to a feast with Abraham and became the guest of honor. This is another one of those outrageous stories that just blasts the sensibilities and the theology of the Pharisees. How can a man in this world who has so little, who was so bad, who was so desperate, who appears to be so cursed, become the guest of honor in heaven at the salvation banquet? He’s like John—you remember—in the Upper Room, the Passover, the final Passover, resting, reclining on the chest of Jesus. He has gone to the highest place of privilege. This is extreme reversal.

On the other hand, the rich man is in Hades; he’s lifting up his eyes, and he is in torment. The poor man died and went to heaven—follow this—and is fully conscious of where he is and who he’s with. It’s not soul sleep; this is not some kind of slow awakening. He’s there; he’s with Abraham. Same thing is true of the man, the rich man—he’s in Hades. In the New Testament, without going into a whole lot about Hades, in the New Testament, Hades always appears as the abode of the damned, never of believers. The only general use of Hades is a couple of times in the book of Acts where it’s referring to an Old Testament usage of the word, and the Old Testament is more general. In the New Testament, Hades appears always to refer to the abode of the damned, never the place of believers. It, therefore, is a synonym for hell and sometimes translations will say Hades, and sometimes they’ll say hell. And that is correct. It is synonymous with Gehenna. The rich man had it all in life, goes to hell. He’s there immediately. There’s no transition place; there’s no waiting place; there’s no limbo; there’s no nothing—he’s in hell. Then this very important phrase, “*He lifted up his eyes.*” What does that mean? Awakening, sensing, aware, conscious, immediate consciousness of hell. There’s no Purgatory, folks; there’s no waiting place. He died; he went to hell; and he was instantaneously aware of it.

And what was his experience? “*Being in torment,*” literally “torments,” plural; not one but many, coming at him from every conceivable angle—a fully informed conscience now without restraint, without mitigation, accusing him of every evil ever committed, every act of the rejection of the truth ever committed, and that accusation would go at full force for the rest of eternity. The torments Jesus described as darkness and fire and weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The believer who dies is immediately in the conscious fellowship and joys of the heavenly experience. The damned are immediately in the conscious experience of torture.

And then our Lord crafts an imaginary conversation. It comes, beginning in verse 23, “*When the rich man saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.*” That’s why we say this is a fictional story. People in hell can’t see people in heaven. But for the sake of illustration, the tormented rich man is, in the story, allowed to look out of hell into heaven, across that impassable gulf for the sake of the point. Though in reality, souls in hell have no access to heaven; souls in heaven have no intrusion from the eyes of those in hell. It is purely a parable. But for the sake of illustration, to help us understand that he understands what he’s going through, and he’s allowed in the story to understand what Lazarus is experiencing, and he cried out and said, “*Father Abraham, have mercy on me.*”

You see, this father Abraham thing, they would all identify with. Wait a minute, I’m a Jew; I’m a child of Abraham; you’re my father. Consistent with that is obligation—they would understand that, like all Jews, especially the Pharisees. He assumes Abraham to be his father and himself to be a child of Abraham. And he knows that Abraham is a model of hospitality, *Genesis 18*, and so pleads both in the story to the hospitality of Abraham, as well as to the responsibility of Abraham to take care of one of his children. Have mercy on me. Interesting. The merciless one now wants mercy. He requests for himself from Abraham what he was never willing to give to the man who requested it from him.

And this is really bizarre. “*Have mercy and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I’m in agony in this flame.*” Listen, this man is so ingrained with the idea that he is superior to Lazarus that even though he’s in hell and Lazarus is in heaven, he thinks Lazarus is still his servant. “*Send Lazarus.*” He requests mercy to be brought to him by the very one to whom he refused to show mercy. He still thinks lowlives like Lazarus are supposed to serve him, even in hell. Which is to say this about hell, it is not remedial. It doesn’t correct you; it doesn’t fix you; it only punishes you. Send Lazarus? Lazarus once needed and wanted what the rich man had. Now the rich man needs and wants what Lazarus had. The rich man wouldn’t give it, and Lazarus can’t.

There’s no repentance here. There’s no remorse here. There’s no seeking forgiveness. There’s no humility here. Again, hell is not remedial; it doesn’t fix you; it confirms you; it crystalizes into permanency the wretchedness of the sinner, without relief or mitigation forever. He still sees himself as one to be served by the lowly. “*Send him down here that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue.*”

That’s a very interesting statement—metaphoric, obviously. There’s no water in hell, and H₂O couldn’t relieve the torment of hell anyway because it’s not a physical thirst. It’s metaphoric, but it’s a good indication of the horrors of hell because he doesn’t say, “Could you send Lazarus down with a bucket? Is there a hose in heaven that you could just kind of, you know, roll over the edge and gravity might send down a constant stream to hell?” It’s not that. “I just want a drip off the tip of his finger, not a bucket, not a barrel, not a pipeline.” The souls of the damned suffer so profoundly that one tiny drop of relief would mean everything to them. But it never comes. I am in agony in this flame. *Odunao* is the Greek verb, “to be in great pain.” Real water can’t soothe an eternally tortured soul. But this is the terrifying image of hell. No relief and the sinner forever and ever and ever, never pleading for one tiny drop of relief, wants no crumbs for the poor man and now no drops for the rich man.

Abraham responds. Jesus puts words in the imaginary Abraham. Abraham said, “*Child.*” I don’t think Jesus could resist that, “child.” Yes, in the genetic sense, in the genealogical sense, in the racial sense, you are a child of Mine. You are a son, a descendant. But I also think there’s just that note of compassion that’s always in the heart of Jesus, which is the reason He’s telling them a story—to warn them. “*Remember, during your life you received your good things.*” What’s that? Common grace, providence. The world is full of riches; don’t mistake it, folks. The world is full of riches. When God created the planet, He didn’t create a brown bag. This world is loaded with wealth. It’s staggering to see how wealthy the world is. Where do you think that comes from? All of it comes out of this planet, all of it, because the Creator put it there. And He gave us all things richly to enjoy from which to give Him honor and praise and glory and to get a foretaste of heaven’s splendor—and the lavishness of God and His love of shining, blazing, beautiful things and tender, delicate, glorious things, and everything in between. He gave us a taste of glory from which, when we enjoy these things, we can then give Him glory and begin to taste the flavors of our eternal joys. But this man, having received those providences, simply indulged himself. And like the earlier man Jesus talked about, built bigger barns to store his stuff. And follow the eat, drink, and be merry line—you had your stuff; you received your good things; and in this life Lazarus, bad things. Yeah, life can be like that. The unregenerate can die filthy rich and the regenerate can die filthy poor. It’s true. (*See Psalm 73-NLT*)

You can enjoy all the providences of God—all the common grace components of a generous, gracious God. What a hell, to be without any of that forever. For all of that is connected to God. And when God is not there, none of that’s there either. You had your opportunity. Instead of going from blessing and providence to faith in God, you went to self-indulgence. On the other hand, the poor man, he had nothing. I don’t know what his story was; there was no story because he’s a fictional character. But you could fill in the blanks.

How do you get to that point? How do you get like that? Probably physical disability would be what would be assumed; dumped, plopped there. If you were physically disabled in that world, it was tough. Lazarus had his hard life, but now—underline that, folks—but now, different world. He's being comforted here; you are in agony. He is comforted because the angels brought him here, and he's in the fellowship of the Father of the faithful—and you are in agony.

What Lazarus was temporally, you are eternally—miserable. What you did not provide for Lazarus when you could have, he cannot provide for you. And it's never, ever going to change—never. Verse 26, “Besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed (*sterizo*, “set fast”). In the tense that it's in, “there has been fixed and it will stand forever, permanently.” There is this chasm set which cannot be crossed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and none may cross over from there to us; mark it, folks. ***When you're in hell, you will never go to heaven. When you're in heaven, you will never go to hell. It's forever fixed, set. No relief, no hope.*** Read it carefully. There is a great chasm fixed. The Greek says *hopos*, “so that” no one can go the other way.

Well, the rich man in the story is not finished. He has general compassion for his own family. He knows his fate is fixed, eternal agony. But he has one more request, verse 27. He said, “*Then* [and the word “then” means “okay,” a transition away from that] this is where I will be forever.” No hope—“*Then I beg you, father* [not God; father Abraham in the conversation] *send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them lest they also come to this place of torment.*”

You know, I guess you could say if the guy had any redeeming value, that was it. He cared about his brothers. I like that about him; it's good that he did. And he knew that his brothers were like him. He was in hell and they were coming. This request is really kind of a complaint. He still has a condescending attitude toward Lazarus because—get it again—“send him.” If you won't send him to me to bring water, send him to my brothers. Again I remind you, hell is not remedial; it is punitive. He still treated Lazarus with disdain even though he knew him to be in the presence of Abraham, and carried there by the angels of God. But he does care about his family. And he knew they were in the same path he was in. We can assume that the Pharisees would be hearing this as a man who is religious and blessed by God, and therefore had religious brothers who were into Judaism and Pharisaic Judaism. But they were going to end up in hell just like he did, and he knew it because they weren't aware of what hell was like, and so they weren't concerned to avoid it.

So what he says is, “Look, my brothers don't have enough information about hell. That's the problem. They don't have enough information about hell. If I knew what I now know, I wouldn't come here. So could you please send Lazarus to tell them what's here so they won't come, for I have five brothers and want him to go and warn them that they might not come to this place of torment?” No words of repentance here, impossible in hell. No Holy Spirit. But Jesus creates a fictional concern to get the point of the whole story: Why do people go to hell? Why did the rich man go to hell? Why? And why would his brothers go to hell?

Here comes the answer. Verse 29, “Abraham said, *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.*” You know what their problem was? They didn't listen to...What? They didn't listen to Scripture. They didn't listen to the Word of God. “They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them”—*akouo*, from which we get *acoustic*; “listen, heed, understand.” This is exactly what they would not do. Jesus said that again and again; *Matthew 13:13 to 17*, “*You hear but you do not understand.*” They had Moses and the Prophets; that was enough. What...that simply refers to the Old Testament. What could they have learned from the Old Testament? Everything they needed to know about the nature of

the all-holy Creator and Law-giver and Judge, the eternal and true God. From the Old Testament they would have had ample and sufficient information about their own sinfulness and need for repentance. They would have had truth concerning salvation by grace alone through faith alone, and justification comes by grace through faith. They would have known that God offers complete forgiveness of sin and escape from judgment and wrath and condemnation. They would have understood even from the Old Testament that alien righteousness coming from God is imputed to those who put their trust in Him. They would have understood from the Old Testament that substitution is the way God deals with sin. And they would have understood if they had believed the Old Testament that there was coming a sacrifice and coming a Messiah, and coming a Savior who would crush the head of Satan, who would provide redemption for His people, who would be the suffering Substitute, who would then establish His throne and bring all the unconditional promises to Abraham and David to Israel and the world.

Finally, they would have understood that they had to repent and believe. They would have understood the need for total abandonment, forsaking all other hopes, all other rights, all other gods, all sin and self-reliance, and have come to a true and living God. And if they had truly believed Moses and the prophets, they would have known that Jesus was that promised Messiah. So he says, *“Let them hear the Scripture.”* If they do not hear the Scripture, there’s no hope. Salvation comes by hearing the Word.

Gets a little argumentative. But he said, *“No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”* Really? “Father Abraham, you’re wrong. They don’t have what they need. Scripture’s not enough. Scripture’s not sufficient. They had Moses and the Prophets; I had Moses and the Prophets. I’m in hell.” The Pharisees had Moses and the Prophets and they were headed for hell, and that was the point of telling them the story. But if someone will rise from the dead—a powerful sign which again indicates that in the minds of the people listening to the story, the brothers also knew Lazarus, and if Lazarus, whom they knew to be that wretched beggar comes back, they’ll recognize the same guy who was there by the gate, and he can tell them he’s been to hell and back and warn them, and certainly they’ll avoid hell.

Well, the problem is you can’t avoid hell just by not wanting to go there anyway. You have to avoid hell by following the path of salvation revealed in Moses and the Prophets. He said to him, verse 31, *“If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.”* Was that true? Who rose from the dead? Jesus. Did they believe? No, no, no. In fact, in an interesting divine coincidence, Jesus raised a man from the dead by the name of Lazarus. The rulers knew it, and it was what motivated them in part to execute Jesus. We don’t want to go to hell. He warned, and religion won’t protect you—only the truth, the gospel truth, the saving truth, the salvation truth revealed on the pages of Scripture completed in the New Testament through the work of Christ will rescue you from hell and take you escorted by the angels into the full fellowship of all the saints, including Abraham and all faith.

Our Father, we are thrilled to in a very humble way and inadequate way—sit at the feet of Jesus this morning and hear Him speak about heaven and hell. He is our teacher, our beloved teacher. What can we say? We are like that beggar—destitute, wretched, stinking, oozing sores, wicked, sinful, unworthy, undeserving, needy. But with You we have a name, and with You we have an identity. We even have a name that no man knows that will be given to us when we enter Your presence. Your special name for us because we belong to You. We may not have anything in this world; we’ll have everything in the world to come. How I pray, Father, that You will by Your powerful, overwhelming grace capture the heart of any straggler here, any rich man, any self-indulgent, self-satisfied person who thinks that by being good or religious or having good thoughts about Jesus, he may escape hell. May each know that only through belief in the full glory of the gospel of Christ can we escape hell and experience heaven. And, Lord, give us passion in our

hearts to rescue the perishing, to care for the dying, to snatch them in pity from the grave and hell, like brands from the burning. Give us a passion, an evangelistic passion for our families and our classmates, and our cities, our world. Use us, Lord, as humble instruments to gather Your own. We rejoice in such, the privilege of which we are undeserving. And, Lord, do a work in every heart today of salvation, of a new level of gratitude and thanksgiving and overwhelming praise and joy for having been guaranteed the promise of heaven, and a fresh devotion to proclaim the warnings that our dear Savior faithfully proclaimed, even to His worst enemies—those who killed him. Use us, Lord, for Your glorious work. Help us in some way to be useful as You populate heaven. And we thank You in our Savior's name. Amen.

Genesis 18:1-8 (*The LORD appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground. "My lord," he said, "if it pleases you, stop here for a while. Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. And since you've honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey." "All right," they said. "Do as you have said." So Abraham ran back to the tent and said to Sarah, "Hurry! Get three large measures of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread." Then Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it. When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served it to the men. As they ate, Abraham waited on them in the shade of the trees.*)

Matthew 13:13-17, (*Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it).*

**** Psalm 73 - A Psalm of Asaph**

From "THE BOOK" A special version of the Living Bible.

Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure.

"...But as for me, I came so close to stumbling. My feet were slipping and I was almost gone. For I was envious of the prosperity of the proud and wicked. Yes, all through life their road is smooth! They grow sleek and fat. They aren't always in trouble and plagued with problems like everyone else, so their pride sparkles like a jeweled necklace, and their clothing is woven of cruelty! These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for! They scoff at God and threaten His people. How proudly they speak! They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut through the earth. And so God's people are dismayed and confused, and drink it all in. "Does God realize what is going on?" they ask. "Look at these men of arrogance; they never have to lift a finger – theirs is a life of ease; and all the time their riches multiply. "Have I been wasting my time? Why take the trouble to be pure? All I get out of it is trouble and woe – every day and all day long! - If I had really said that, I would have been a traitor to Your people. Yet it is so hard to explain it – this prosperity of those who hate (or ignore) the Lord. Then one day I went into God's sanctuary to meditate, and thought about the future of these evil men. What a slippery path they are on – suddenly God will send them sliding over the edge of the cliff down to their destruction: an instant end to all their happiness, an eternity of terror. Their present life is only a dream! They will awaken to the truth as one awakens from a dream of things that never really were!" Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. I was so foolish and ignorant— I must have seemed like a senseless animal to You. Yet I still belong to You; You hold my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. Whom have I in heaven but You? I desire You more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever. Those who desert Him will perish, for You destroy those who abandon You. But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things You do.