

4. The Truth about Hell

Insights into Eternity

Hell: A Subject Not to be Avoided

We come today to study the subject that is mostly avoided by pastors and teachers, and one that we would all rather avoid if possible, that is the topic of Hell. The story is told of C. S. Lewis' listening to a young preacher's sermon on the subject of God's judgment on sin. At the end of his message, the young man said, "If you do not receive Christ as Savior, you will suffer grave eschatological ramifications!" After the service, Lewis asked him the question, "Do you mean that a person who doesn't believe in Christ will go to Hell?" "Precisely," was his response. "Then say so," Lewis replied."¹ Even though we may be uncomfortable in studying it, the topic is of grave importance for all of us.

Some would say, "Can't we just bypass the topic of Hell?" Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher, once said, "Think lightly of Hell, and you will think lightly of the cross. Think little of the sufferings of lost souls, and you will soon think little of the Savior who delivers you from them." It is possible that some people avoid the issue of Hell because they want to view death as the end when it is just the beginning. When we truly understand what is at stake, i.e., what was our destiny without Christ, we will much more appreciate what Christ has done for us at the cross.

As we have already mentioned in this series, there is a great deal of interest today on the topic of life after death and near-death experiences. It is not hard to find a book on the subject. In the first study of this series, we mentioned the book by Doctor Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life*, who researched 150 people's experiences of Near Death Experiences (NDEs). Another doctor, Dr. Maurice Rawlings, in his book, *To Hell and Back*, again researching NDEs, reports that some people experienced Hell, but had the memory of it repressed in a few days' time. He said that, as a general rule, people remember that which is good and forget that which is terrible, and so, if the interview was delayed just a little bit, days, weeks or months later, only the positive experiences will be found.

This author, Dr. Rawlings, tells the story of a young man who recounted his experience to him after an operation to insert a pacemaker into his heart. He told Dr. Rawlings what he saw and experienced, which he considered being hell. He states that he saw a tunnel which led to light, then the tunnel caught fire. He had the sensation of moving fast toward a lake of fire, which looked to him like an oil spill on fire. He saw elongated shadows of people moving back and forth, like animals do that are caged in a zoo. The man called out "Jesus is Lord" and then suddenly, he was aware that he was back in his body.

Dr. Rawlings also gives an account of giving CPR to a patient who had also had a pacemaker installed, and who was in the throes of death. The patient kept coming back, slipping in and out of consciousness and pleaded with Dr. Rawlings to pray for him, as he cried out that he was in hell. Dr. Rawlings did not want to pray for the man because he was not yet a believer himself,

¹ Taken from: <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/Hell.html>

but finally, because of the man's distress, he did give the man a prayer to pray. He asked Jesus Christ to keep him out of hell. The man immediately calmed. He was no longer a screaming lunatic. Dr. Rawlings states that this incident impacted him so much that he gave his life to Christ. Dr. Rawlings is not a theologian or a minister; instead, he is an unbiased doctor who has written the findings of the patients he has resuscitated.

Many people claim to have had near-death experiences, but there is no way that we can know for sure which ones are valid. It is reasonable to assume that, if God allowed Paul to be caught up into the third heaven, and if Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father before he died, then there may be those today who have been permitted to have a glimpse of what lies beyond this life.

Our faith, however, must rest on God's Word and not an experience. After all, there are those who would have us believe that everyone, regardless of their beliefs or regardless of the life they lived, will be welcomed by the brilliant light and ushered into a peaceful eternity. However, this does not agree with Scripture. Jesus personified both love and truth. He did not hold anything back from His disciples.

While we wait for the return of Christ, our job as Christians is to rescue people from Satan's control so that they should not be separated from God for eternity and sent to a place called Hell. Every person is deeply loved by God who does not want any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But what if they don't? What if they die without coming to know Christ? What if they are unresponsive to God's message of love and good news? At the Second Coming of Christ, He will separate the sheep (believers) from the goats (non-believers), and Jesus said twice that the punishment would be for eternity:

⁴¹Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into *the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' ⁴⁴"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶"Then they will go away to *eternal punishment*, but the righteous to *eternal life* (Matthew 25:41-46. Emphasis mine).

The Lord often talked about Hell, and He devoted several of His parables to the subject of heaven, hell, eternal judgment, and eternal rewards. If it were essential for Him to tell His disciples about such things, then we need to give serious attention to the subject of eternity and what the Bible teaches about heaven and hell. We must also remember that Satan is a deceiver, the father of lies, and is called an angel of light. Some of the near-death stories may glorify God, and they could be true. However, our faith rests in God and His Word. It stands to reason that Satan would seek to counterfeit true accounts that give glory to God to dupe some into believing that all roads lead to God.

Is Death the State of Annihilation?

Some say that Hell is a place where a person who rejects God's free pardon for sin is annihilated. The word annihilation means "to reduce to utter ruin or nonexistence; to destroy utterly." Three times in the passage above, though, Jesus used the same Greek word to describe the bliss of His followers, i.e., the word *aiōnios*, which means "Eternal, perpetual. When referring to eternal life, it means the life which is God's and, hence, not affected by the limitation of time."² That does not sound like annihilation. It is the clear teaching of Jesus that someone who rejects the gospel and continues in his sin, at the end of his life, will suffer eternal punishment.

Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin, leader of Russia from 1922-1953, accompanied her father at death's door and said that she would never sit alongside an unbeliever who was dying again. She said that he went into Hell kicking and screaming. **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** (Hebrews 10:31). Voltaire was said to have died crying out in torment, as was King Charles the ninth of France, David Hume, and Thomas Paine. Speaking for those who do know God, C.M. Ward said, "No Christian has ever been known to recant on his deathbed."

1) Why would a loving God send anyone to Hell? How bad does a person have to be to be sent to Hell? Is there a line that a person crosses?

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe **stands condemned already because he has not believed** in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16-18).

The creator God has established the way to salvation. The situation is that the entire human race is in the same boat. We have all fallen short of God's ideal for living. None of us can say we have never sinned. If you have only sinned once, then it is enough to make you a sinner. We all suffer from the same disease. Sin is what eternally separates us from God. James puts it this way, **"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it"** (James 2:10). If there could have been another way for God to get you to heaven, apart from sending His Son to die a cruel and torturous death, don't you think He would have taken it? He has given Man the gift of free will, but His justice demands that rebellion has to be penalized. A holy God cannot allow sin to be in His presence: **"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing"** (Habakkuk 1:13). So, He honors the choices that a rebel who refuses to repent has made.

In God's love for the human race, He has initiated a rescue plan. The Son of God would take on human form and be a substitute to take the place of guilty man, taking the punishment upon Himself. In that way, His justice would be satisfied, and He can reach out in love to save all who will turn their lives over to Him and walk in obedience to Him. When we repent and receive Christ, the Spirit of God gives us the power to live for Christ. We also hold the answer for others, and the Holy Spirit provides us with the strength and boldness to speak to people about God's rescue plan for the human race. We damage Satan's kingdom when we talk about the truth of

² Key Word Study Bible, New Lexical Study Aids, AMG Publishers, page 1580.

God's Word, and release precious people from his control. The Church today is on the attack, breaking down every defense that the enemy has raised against the kingdom of God. The gates of Hades (Hell) will not overcome the Church (Matthew 16:18). But who are those who will go to Hell?

But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Revelation 21:8).

The verse above teaches that people who are cowards, people who are liars, and those who are unbelievers in Christ, at the second resurrection, will be sent to a lake that burns with fire and brimstone. I do not know whether the lake is a literal lake of fire, or if the lake of fire is a figurative picture of a state of being. I do not care to find out! Either way, what we do know about the lake of fire is that it is a place that will be full of torment and destruction. The Bible also describes Hell as a place of eternal darkness (Jude 1:13). We have a choice to be consumed by the Light or by the Darkness. We will embrace one or the other for eternity.

Think about the nature of light and darkness. Light promotes health and well being. Plants need light to survive. Light exposes, and it also nourishes and promotes life. It illuminates. Darkness covers and hides. It is an absence of light. Psychologists tell us that prolonged darkness can cause depression and other maladies. It is not healthy for people to live with an absence of light. The lake of fire will be a place of darkness.

Today, it is considered unpopular to even talk about such a place of darkness. Who would deserve to go there? Let me ask you this: How many murders does it take to be a murderer? One! How many lies does it take to be a liar? One! How many sins does it take to be a sinner? One! We are all in need of a Savior, and there is none other than Jesus who can save you from your sin and its penalty.

The way to God is first to realize our need for a Savior. Paul the Apostle puts it this way, “There is no one righteous, not even one...there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12). Paul says that no one will be declared righteous by keeping a system of works (The law, verse 20). He states that righteousness apart from the law has been made known, i.e., the substitutionary death of Christ for you and in place of you. This righteousness is imparted to you when you repent (turn away from sin and turn to Christ) of your sin and receive the person of Jesus Christ to sit on the throne room of your life. The gift of God's righteousness is the only way out of going to a place of torment (Acts 4:12). When you do this, your name is written in the book of life (Revelation 21:27), a record book of all those who have turned their lives over to Christ and received Him into their lives to forgive their sin. Those whose name is not found in the book will be tormented in the lake of fire:

And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15).

He also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Revelation 14:10-11, Emphasis mine).

The Unsaved will be Judged According to the Light they have Received.

I believe that there are different degrees of punishment in that awful place. Chuck Swindoll has something to say about the degrees of punishment in Hell:

There will always be some who will not have as much divine input as others. Because that is true, I believe there will be degrees of eternal punishment. Before you pick up stones to stone me, look closely at the words of Jesus:

⁴⁷That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48).

Let's understand that no one without Christ spends eternity in heaven. But the *specifics* of how God handles those who are without Christ because they heard so little might very well be answered by the idea of degrees of punishment. But we do know for sure that heaven will not be their home.³

2) Do you think that the degree of influence one has on earth has any bearing on their eternity?

The greater the influence one has, the greater the accountability and responsibility for that influence. Some people are on television who are role models for our young, yet they are living immoral lives. They will be judged more strictly due to their influence over many. Don't be quick to jump into positions of influence over others. Jesus said for us to take the plank out of our own eyes so that we can take the sliver out of other people's eyes (Matthew 7:3-5). Every one of us who are Christians is already in a position of influence, especially if you are known in your neighborhood or workplace as a Christian. People are watching you that they may see how you live your life. Their eternity depends on their response to the message of Christ that can be read from what you say and what you do. We are all teaching to a certain degree, but we are not all teachers. For a teacher, it is crucial to live a life honoring to God:

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly (James 3:1).

³ Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, Published by Multnomah Press, 1987. Page 324.

At the judgment, Christian leaders will be judged more strictly due to the amount of light that they have received and their influential position. Even those who are without Christ, the higher their influence rises, so does the level of accountability. It makes sense that just as there would be different levels of reward for the righteous, there will be differing levels of punishment for those in Hell as well.

Let's look now at a passage of Scripture that Jesus taught concerning two individuals that died and where they found themselves. The Lord does not tell us that this is a parable. It is also significant that one of the two is named, which is not typical for a parable. The reason he used the name Lazarus was that it was the beggar's name. My viewpoint is that Jesus is telling us of a situation that is real.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' ²⁵"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' ²⁷"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ³⁰" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead' (Luke 16:19-31 Emphasis mine).

Before we venture into the passage, it may be helpful for us to examine what the Bible teaches concerning where the spirit and soul of these two men went when they died. *Hell* and *Abraham's side* are words in the passage used to describe the two different states in which these men found themselves. The Greek word *Hades* (Sheol in the Old Testament) is the word translated as Hell. Hades is found ten times in the New Testament. Jesus told us that, while His body was in the tomb, He would be in the heart of the Earth:

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).

When Christ died, He went to a place that He said was situated at the heart of the Earth. Paul, the apostle, also wrote about the location of departed spirits saying that it was located under the Earth, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the

earth (Philippians 2:10). Hades is generally believed by many to be a spiritual, not a physical, place in the Earth that was/is composed of two separate compartments. One side is named after the father of the faithful and is called Abraham's side (NIV), or Abraham's bosom (KJV), and symbolizes closeness to the heart of a person. Another word used for the righteous side is paradise. Jesus used this term when he talked to the believing thief crucified with him: "**Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise'**" (Luke 23:43 **Emphasis mine**). This paradise could not be heaven because Jesus, on the day of His resurrection, told Mary Magdalene: "**Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father**" (John 20:17). These Scriptures also bear witness to the fact that, when Christ died, His spirit descended to Hades, where He wrenched the keys of death and Hell (Hades) from Satan (Revelation 1:18). He then crossed over to the paradise side of the underworld and released those who had placed their trust in God, from this paradise, also called Abraham's side, where they had been kept in the heart of the Earth. "**But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Jesus was the first of those who have conquered death and could enter heaven based on the victory of His substitutionary death accomplished on the cross.

Matthew tells us that at the time Christ died, some phenomena happened. He says us that there was a great earthquake and that the temple curtain was torn in two, split from top to bottom. Then, he tells us something else that is intriguing:

⁵²The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people (Matthew 27:52-53).

Can you imagine what that would be like to witness? It seems likely that, because of Christ's innocent death on the cross, these holy people were released from the righteous side of Hades upon the sacrificial death of Christ. Scripture does not tell us how long the holy people were around or even who they were. We cannot be dogmatic about it due to the lack of information, but it is possible that, after meeting Mary Magdalene, Jesus ascended to heaven with the righteous held in the place called Abraham's side or Paradise.

Paul the Apostle corroborates this view in his letter to the Church at Ephesus. He tells us that Christ descended to the lower earthly regions before He ascended to sit on His throne:

When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." ⁹(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, to fill the whole universe) (Ephesians 4:8-10).

It is essential that we understand that, since the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, a Christian does not descend into the lower parts of the Earth upon death, but he ascends to heaven to be always with the Lord. He led captives in His train (verse 8) probably refers to the fact that the believers held at Abraham's side were brought to heaven with Christ when He ascended. We know that, since the resurrection of Christ, believers go to be with the Lord upon their death. Paul says:

²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:22-24. Also read 2 Corinthians 5:8).

The passage in Luke 16 we are studying gives us a preview of what was happening in Hades at the time Jesus was speaking, a true story of the destinies of two very different men and where they went upon death. In this passage, the name of Lazarus and Abraham are mentioned, and in some manuscripts (The Vulgate) the name Dives (which is the Latin word for rich) is given to the rich man.

Verses 19-21 – The Situation of the Two Men on Earth

3) While they are on earth, how are the Rich man and Lazarus described? How do you think the lives of the two men were celebrated upon both of their deaths?

The color purple in the days of Christ was not a natural commodity to obtain. This rich man was likely clothed in Tyrian purple⁴ (or Royal purple), the Prada, Armani or top fashion designers of the day. The color was extracted from the mucus of a rare sea snail. Aristotle assigned a value of ten to twenty times its weight in gold. The rich man also wore fine linen. The word used in Greek for the fine linen is *bussos*, a rare strong thread secreted by mussels.⁵ Kings, such as the Egyptian King Tutankhamen, wore this costly cloth. This rich man lived sumptuously every day. He ate the best foods, drank the best wine, and his house was the best mansion in town. We are not overdoing it by presuming that this man was well known in the whole country as someone to be envied. He was an influential celebrity of his day.

Lazarus was *laid* at the rich man's gate or porch. The Greek word translated as "*laid*" is *ballo*. It means to throw out with force. He had been flung roughly, and it seems that he was just left to lay there, life slowly ebbing from him. The gate where they threw Lazarus was more than likely the rear servant's entrance where the servants deposited the rubbish, and the dogs congregated and licked his dying skin. It was evident to anyone that Lazarus was very ill, due to him being covered with ulcerated sores. It was also likely that he was too sick to go anywhere but stay where he was thrown and beg for the scraps of food that fell from the rich man's table. William Barclay tells us:

In that time there were no knives, forks or napkins. Food was eaten with the hands and, in very wealthy houses; the hands were cleaned by wiping them on hunks of bread, (probably thin pita bread) which were then thrown away. Lazarus was waiting for the discarded bread, same as the dogs.⁶

Dogs kept licking at his sores, and it is possible that he was too weakened through sickness and hunger to fend them off. We don't know if the rich man had him thrown out because he was asking him for help or that others in the town had thrown him there because he was a health threat to the local populace. It seems that Lazarus was in no position to help himself. He longed

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrian_purple

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byssus>

⁶ William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, Printed by Saint Andrew Press, 1976. Page 214.

to eat some scraps of food, but he was competing with the dogs for the scraps. Keep in mind that most dogs were not household pets at the time.

Verses 22-26 – The Condition of the Two Men in Eternity

No burial or funeral happened for Lazarus at his death. It is likely that, if no one cared for him while he was alive, his death was no different. Scripture speaks loudly in its silence on the subject. Contrast that with the rich man. We are told explicitly that he was buried. It was probably a lavish ceremony with public mourning. Perhaps his body was given a place of honor among the tombs on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem as only the rich could afford.

The procession to his burial place would require a horde of professional mourners, hired for such an occasion as was customary at the time. Of course, the rich man couldn't care less as soon as he died. He was quite surprised to find himself in Hell. While living at the rich man's gate, it is likely that no one knew the name of Lazarus, but everybody knew the name of the rich man. At the other side of death's door, though, things are turned around; everybody knows the name of Lazarus. As for the rich man, no one has any idea of who he is, i.e., his name is not known, and all of a sudden he's a nobody. How sad it is that many who believe that death is annihilation will find themselves very conscious upon entering eternity through death's door.

4) Some say that, when death comes, the real you, i.e., your spirit, will fall into a soul sleep where nothing is experienced at all, and one is not conscious. What things do you see in this passage that teach us differently?

One of the first things the rich man experiences is utter torment (Verse 23). The Greek word used is *basanos*, which means "going to the bottom, the lowest torture or torment."⁷ This Greek word is possibly used to describe what we talked about earlier, i.e., that in Hell there are different levels of suffering, and the deepest level of torment was what this man is experiencing (present tense, in that he is still there today). His tongue was burning; he needed water to cool his tongue. Even though he does not have a body, he is experiencing the sense of touch and is in terrible pain. He also has the sense of sight and recognition, for he saw Lazarus across a vast chasm and Abraham by his side. How painful to see Paradise and yet know that it is too late and that he will never experience one moment there.

Later at the Great White Throne Judgment, found in Revelation 20:11-15, we read that death, and Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire, where there will be eternal darkness. From that point onward, the ex-rich man will no longer be able to see anything. He has the sense of speech; he calls to Abraham and communicates his pain. It seems that there is no change in his attitude toward Lazarus, for he still thinks that he can command Lazarus to get water for him and also to visit his brothers. His appeal to Abraham is somewhat manipulative. He calls him Father Abraham, intimating that he is in relationship to Abraham due to his being born into a nation of faith in God. How deceived he was! How similar to many born into a Christian country today. Many people call themselves Christian, yet not all of them are in a relationship with God through Christ. The sense of hearing is also still with him; he can hear Abraham talking with him.

⁷ Finis Jennings Dake, *Dakes Annotated Reference Bible*, Copyright 1961 by Finis J. Dake. Page 80 of the New Testament.

Abraham then answers the rich man and says something that will remain with him for the rest of eternity. It was a powerful statement, full of truth, but with no hope: he will remember his life (v. 25) on earth and all the opportunities he missed to repent and give his life to God. How painful that would be! The mind will be very clear; our faculties will still be with us, perhaps more so in eternity. There will be a considerable amount of regret over deeds committed alongside an inability to set them right for it is too late. The ex-rich man does not have anyone to pray him out of this situation; it is a lie from Satan to believe your position can be changed after death. He was told that his location was fixed, that the chasm that separated them will forever be there, and that there will not be anyone who can cross either way (v. 26). Where death finds you, eternity binds you. According to what we see in Scripture, there is no purgatory, no reincarnation, and no chance of relief. The time to change your eternal destiny is before you die before it is too late.

Is it a sin to be rich? Does a person that is poor go to heaven because he or she is poor? If not, then what was the sin that sent the rich man to Hell? There are many sins that the rich man may have committed, but his primary sin was that ***he was quite content without God***. His life was one in which he had no need. He paid no heed to anything but his pleasure and comfort. It could be that he never noticed or cared about Lazarus, which indeed would have increased his condemnation. He had been in a position to help Lazarus, but instead, he left him to suffer and die. He seems to have had the notion that it was perfectly normal and natural that Lazarus should wallow in pain while he basked in a life of luxury. He looked at a fellow man, hungry and in pain, and did nothing about it. Lazarus was discontent on earth without God and had sought Him out in his need, and he found Him to be merciful and gracious. The rich man had not felt any need at all. Both had been born into the world in the same situation as you and I. Paul in his letter to the Church at Ephesus describes every person's position in this way:

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

During our lifetime on Earth, God sends opportunities our way to search out a path to His home. This is the universal need of every person on this planet—to find God. After death, God will honor the choices we have made in life. If we choose to live without God on Earth, He will grant our wishes for eternity. If you are living your life without a second thought of God or eternity, call out to Him now while you can still experience His grace. Why wait for another second? Undoubtedly, your spiritual enemy, the devil, will seek to have you put off this message for another day, but Christ waits for you with open arms.

Verses 27-31. A Plea for Those Who Are Still Alive.

Why was the ex-rich man so concerned about his brothers still on Earth? He had prayed twice while in Hell. The first prayer was for water; the second was for his brothers on Earth. Both prayers were refused. He had been unfaithful to his responsibility. His responsibility was toward those around him, but especially to his brothers. He had set before them as a pattern the most corrupting thing on Earth—an example of a man who was content without God. Now that he was in Hell, he remembered that his brothers were living according to the model that he had given them, i.e., a contented life without God. The one thing that can add agony to a person in Hell is

to be shut up forever with those you have helped to bring there. As we have said, every one of us influences others for good or for worse. Let us commit ourselves to be faithful to those who model their lives after us: our brothers, our sisters, our sons, daughters, and our close relatives. We must live wholeheartedly for Christ. Other lives depend on it.

On what basis were the rich man's brothers refused a messenger? The ex-rich man had the Word of God (at that particular time they had the writings of Moses and the prophets). That is all the witness that they need. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18), so if they do not believe God's Words, they will not believe even if one should return from the dead. God's written Word is the most crucial evidence that one can examine to prepare us for life in eternity. It is ignored at great danger to one's eternal life beyond the grave.

What are the main take-home lessons that this passage teaches us?

- 1) One of the most important lessons is that the time to seek the Lord is now and not to put it off.
- 2) Secondly, that there are consequences to our actions that are not always felt on earth but follow us into eternity.
- 3) Another lesson is that we influence others more than we realize on earth.
- 4) Fourthly, is that God's Word is the most important evidence for us to prepare for life eternal.
- 5) The fifth lesson is that no matter what our economic position in this world, if we don't have Christ, we don't have eternal life with God (1 John 5:12).

Prayer: Father, thank you for telling us plainly in Your Word what we need to do to prepare for eternity. I ask that everyone who is not confident of their eternal destiny would pray to You and seek until they find eternal life in Christ. Let none of us be content in life without You. Help us as we reach out to those who do not know Christ, and help us to win them from the Kingdom of Darkness and bring them into Your Kingdom of Light. Amen.

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