

## 4. The Truth about Hell

### Insights into Eternity

#### **Hell: A Subject Not to be Avoided**

Today, we come to study the subject mostly avoided by pastors and teachers, and one that we would all rather avoid if possible is the topic of Hell. The story is told of C. S. Lewis' listening to a young preacher's sermon about 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."<sup>1</sup> Even though we may be uncomfortable 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." Some people avoid the issue of Hell because they want to view death as the end when it is just the beginning. We will appreciate more what Jesus did for us at the cross when we look at where we were heading before coming to Christ.

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. He said that, as a rule, people remember that which is good and forget that which is terrible. So, if the interview was delayed just a little bit, days, weeks, or months later, people only recall the positive experiences.

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 saw a tunnel that 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. There were elongated shadows of people moving back and forth like animals caged in a zoo. The man called out, "Jesus is Lord," and then suddenly, he was aware of being back in his body.

Dr. Rawlings also gives an account of giving CPR to a patient who had a pacemaker installed and who was in the throes of death. The patient kept coming back, slipping in and out of consciousness, and pleading 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, but finally, he gave the man a prayer to pray because of the man's distress. 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.

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

Rawlings is not a theologian or a minister; instead, he is an unbiased doctor who wrote down the experiences of the patients he resuscitated.

Many people claim to have had near-death experiences, but there is no way to know valid ones. It is reasonable to assume that, if God caught up Paul into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2), and if Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father before he died (Acts 7:56), then there may be those today who have been permitted to glimpse what lies beyond this life. Some would have us believe that everyone, regardless of their beliefs or lifestyle choices, will be welcomed by the brilliant light and ushered into a peaceful eternity. However, this does not agree with Scripture. Satan seeks to counterfeit true accounts and dupe some into believing that all roads lead to God. We must remember that Satan is a deceiver, the father of lies, and described as an angel of light. Some near-death stories may glorify God, and they could be true, but our faith must rest upon what God has spoken in His Word.

While we wait for the return of Christ, our mission as Christians is to rescue people from Satan's control so that they will not be separated from God 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:

### **Is Death the State of Annihilation?**

<sup>41</sup>Then 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. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I 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.' <sup>44</sup>"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?' <sup>45</sup>"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.' <sup>46</sup>"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (Matthew 25:41-46. Emphasis mine).

Some say that Hell is 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." Twice in the passage above, Jesus used the same Greek word to describe eternal fire and eternal punishment (vv. 41 & 46), and once to describe the eternal bliss of His followers (v. 46). The Greek word *aiōnios* 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."<sup>2</sup> That does not sound like annihilation. It is the clear teaching of Jesus that someone who rejects the Gospel and continues in his sin will suffer eternal punishment at the end of his life.

Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin, leader of Russia from 1922-1953, accompanied her father at death's door and said she would never sit alongside an unbeliever who was dying again.

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<sup>2</sup> Key Word Study Bible, New Lexical Study Aids, AMG Publishers, page 1580.

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 sin that is one too many?

<sup>16</sup>For 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. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever 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 has 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 God would have taken it? God has given Man the gift of free will, but His justice demands that rebellion 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, God honors the choice that a rebel who refuses to repent has made.

In God's love for humanity, He has initiated a rescue plan. The Son of God took on human form and became 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 to Him and walk in obedience to the Gospel.

### Who Are Those Sent 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 Emphasis mine).

The verse above teaches that cowards, liars, and unbelievers in Christ will be sent to a lake that burns with fire and brimstone at the second resurrection at the Great White Throne Judgment. 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 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.

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 all need a Savior, and there is none other than Jesus who can save us from sin and its penalty.

The way to God is to realize our need for a Savior. Paul the apostle put 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 our place. This righteousness is imparted to us when we repent (turn away from sin and turn to Christ) of sin and receive the person of Jesus Christ to sit on the throne room of our life. The gift of God's righteousness is the only way out of going to a place of torment (Acts 4:12). When we respond to the Gospel, our names are written in the book of life (Revelation 21:27), a record book of all who turn their lives over to Christ. It is a terrible fate for those who realize their name is not in the Book of Life:

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.**

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:

<sup>47</sup>That 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. <sup>48</sup>But 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 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

## 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 film and pop stars are role models for our young on television but living immoral lives, but God will judge them more strictly due to their degree of influence. 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 Christian is in a position of influence, especially if you are known in your neighborhood or workplace that you are a believer in Christ. People are watching to see how you live your life. Their eternity often depends on their response to the message of Christ read from what you say and 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).

Even those 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 would be different levels of punishment for those in Hell as well.

Let's now look at what Jesus taught concerning two individuals who died and where they found themselves in eternity. The Lord does not tell us that this is a parable. It is also significant that one of the two is named Lazarus, not typical for a parable. This writer's viewpoint is that Jesus is telling us of a situation that is real.

### **The Rich Man and Lazarus**

<sup>19</sup>There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup>At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup>and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup>"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>In Hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup>So 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.' <sup>25</sup>"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. <sup>26</sup>And 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.' <sup>27</sup>"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup>"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' <sup>30</sup>" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup>"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 describing the two disembodied 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 situated at the heart of the Earth. The apostle Paul also wrote about the place of departed spirits, saying it was located under the Earth's surface: “*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on Earth and under the Earth* (Philippians 2:10). Hades is believed by many to be a spiritual, not 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 father of the faithful, Abraham. Another word used for the righteous side is paradise. Jesus used this term when he talked to the believing thief crucified alongside 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). Jesus then crossed over to the paradise side of the underworld, releasing those whose trust was in God from the good side, also called Abraham's side, where they were 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 conquered death and could enter heaven based on the victory of His substitutionary death accomplished on the cross.

Matthew wrote that when Christ died, supernatural phenomena took place. A great earthquake occurred, and the temple curtain was torn in two, split from top to bottom. He also wrote of something else that took place:

<sup>52</sup>The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. <sup>53</sup>They 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 that, because of Christ's innocent substitutionary death on the cross, these holy people were released from the righteous side of Hades. 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 a lack of information, but it is possible that, after meeting Mary Magdalene, Jesus ascended to heaven with the righteous from 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." <sup>9</sup>(What does "he ascended" mean except that *he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?*  
<sup>10</sup>He 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 to 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 ascends to heaven to always be with the Lord. Christ leading captives in His train (v. 8) probably refers to the believers held at Abraham's side being 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 wrote:

<sup>22</sup>If 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! <sup>23</sup>I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup>but 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 gives us a preview of what was happening in Hades at the time Jesus spoke, 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.

### **The Situation of the Two Men on Earth (Vv. 19-21).**

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?

Purple in the days of Christ was not a natural commodity to obtain. This rich man was likely clothed in Tyrian purple<sup>4</sup> (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 fine linen is *bussos*, a rare strong thread secreted by mussels.<sup>5</sup> 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 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 ulcerated skin (v. 21). It was evident that Lazarus was very ill due to him being covered with ulcerated sores. It was likely that he was too sick to go anywhere but stay where he

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrian\\_purple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrian_purple)

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

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, the same as the dogs.<sup>6</sup>

The picture Jesus gives is of a man too weak through sickness and hunger to fend off the dogs, and in no position to help himself.

### **The Condition of the Two Men in Eternity (Vv. 22-26)**

No burial or funeral took place 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 who was buried. It was probably a lavish ceremony with public mourning.

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 pretty surprised to find himself in Hell. While living at the rich man's gate, no one likely 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 knew the name of Lazarus. As for the rich man, his name is not known, and he's a nobody. How sad it is that many who believe 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 do you see in this passage that teaches differently?

One of the first things the rich man experiences is utter torment (v. 23). The Greek word used is *basanos*, which means "going to the bottom, the lowest torture or torment."<sup>7</sup> This Greek word is possibly used to describe what we talked about earlier, i.e., that there are different levels of suffering in Hell, and the deepest level of torment was what this man is experiencing (present tense, for he is still there today). His tongue was burning; he needed water to cool his tongue. Even though he does not have a physical 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 it is too late, and 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 will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, where there will be eternal darkness. From that

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

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



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 there is no change in his attitude toward Lazarus, for he still thinks he can command Lazarus to get water for him and visit his brothers (v. 24). His appeal to Abraham is somewhat manipulative. He calls him Father Abraham, intimating that he is in a relationship to Abraham due to being born into a nation of faith in God. How deceived he was! Like those born into a Christian country that call themselves Christian yet are not in a relationship with God through Christ. The sense of hearing is also still with him; he can hear Abraham talking with him.

Abraham then answered the rich man and said something that would remain with him for the rest of eternity. 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 for worthless deeds 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 you can change your position after death. His location was fixed, and a chasm separated them so that none could cross (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.

5) Is it a sin to be rich? Does a poor person go to heaven because they are poor? If not, then what sin 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 pretty 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 would have increased his condemnation. He had been able to help Lazarus, but instead, he left him to suffer and die. He believed 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, sought Him out in his need, and found Him merciful and gracious. The rich man did not feel any need. Both were born into the world needing forgiveness and a relationship with the author of life:

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 to search out the path to His home. This is the universal need of every person on this planet—to find God. After death, God honors the choices we make in life. If we choose to live without God on Earth, He will grant our wishes for eternity. If you live 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 try to get you to put off this message for another day, but Christ waits for you with open arms.

**A Plea for Those Still Alive (Vv. 27-31).**

Why was the ex-rich man so concerned about his brothers still on Earth? He prayed twice while in Hell. The first prayer was for water; the second was for his brothers on Earth. God refused both prayers. The man was unfaithful to his responsibility toward those around him, but especially to his brothers. He set before his brothers an example of a man content without God. Now that he was in Hell, he remembered that his brothers were living according to the model he gave 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 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.

Why did Abraham refuse to send the rich man's brothers a messenger? The ex-rich man and his brothers had the Word of God (at that time, they had the writings of Moses and the prophets). That is all the witness that people need. 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 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, 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) Fourth, God's Word is the most critical evidence for us to prepare for eternal life.
- 5) The fifth lesson is that no matter 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 pray and seek You 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 that we may win them from the Kingdom of Darkness and bring them into Your Kingdom of Light. Amen.

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