

Hell is For Real
Luke 16:19-31

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May 29, 2011

Introduction to Text: As advertised, I'm preaching on a difficult subject this morning—the reality of hell. I will tell you now that this has been an agonizing week for me as I've read and prepared these notes and my heart for the reality of preaching on the subject of hell. Our Scripture text today is from a parable that Jesus tells. I have carefully taught you before that parables are stories that we need not necessarily find a teaching in every detail of the story, but rather look to find the “one-point” in the story. Hear the parable:

Text: "There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every day. ²⁰ But a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, was left at his gate. ²¹ He longed to be filled with what fell from the rich man's table, but instead the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ 'Father Abraham!' he called out, 'Have mercy 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 flame!'

²⁵ " 'Son,' Abraham said, 'remember that during your life you received your good things, just as Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, while you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to pass over from here to you cannot; neither can those from there cross over to us.'

²⁷ " 'Father,' he said, 'then I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ because I have five brothers—to warn them, so they won't also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹ "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'

³⁰ " 'No, father Abraham,' he said. 'But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹ "But he told him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.' "

Introduction: I had the wonderful privilege this week to hear Former President George W. Bush speak here in our city. I thought it to be a great speech—funny, challenging, and insightful as to what it was like to be President of the United States. He began by referencing the fact that being the President mirrored lots of activities of life in that really his job was a constant string of decisions. He pointed back to the fact that the most important decision in life came years before being the President and that was his decision to stop drinking alcohol. Had it not been for that decision, his life was on such a course that he would never have been able to be President.

I want to begin this morning by telling you that I'm going to ask you to make an important decision at the close of my message. I'm going to give you the choices now.

1. I am already a follower of Jesus Christ and because of that I am not going to hell.

2. I am deciding today to follow Jesus Christ so that I will not go to hell.
3. I still have questions.

To me—this is the greatest decision that you will ever make in your life. It is the decision by which all other questions in your future will be based.

Is Hell Real?

When we come to this question whether hell is real or not, we have two choices. First, we can believe that hell is real. Second, we can believe that hell is not real. Interestingly enough, I think there is good evidence that there are many who would otherwise claim to be Christians who do not really believe in the reality of Hell. Basically, people who deny hell will do so for one of several reasons. (It should be assumed that some will deny hell because they will deny Scripture and deny God.) Why do others deny hell?

Why do some deny hell?

1. Some argue that hell is not a Biblical doctrine.

This seems to be the argument of Pastor Rob Bell in his recent book *Love Wins*. It is his book that has touched off several articles in publications like *USA Today* and *Time*. Those who have come to this view otherwise believe the Bible. However, they have come to a place where they dismiss the words of Jesus about hell because they point to these words about hell being before the cross. Thus, they argue that once Christ died on the cross, there is no need for hell. Now, as much as I would like to believe this, the position is filled with holes and even inaccuracies.

One of my problems this morning is that I don't have time to show you all the Scripture that I would like as way of support, but then again, "How much Biblical proof is necessary?" Do we need one verse? Do we need 10 verses? If we have one statement, and we correctly understand that statement, do we need more? So to this notion that hell ceased to exist at the cross, I would point to the Apostle Paul.

- Romans 9:1-3 ¹ I speak the truth in Christ —I am not lying; my conscience is testifying to me with the Holy Spirit — ² that I have intense sorrow and continual anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from the Messiah for the benefit of my brothers, my countrymen by physical descent.
- Romans 10:1 ¹ Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation!

Why would Paul have so much emotion if he did not believe in the reality of hell.

- Revelation 20:15 And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

It is very, very difficult to argue that the Bible does not speak of hell for those who are not believers in Jesus Christ.

2. Some argue that hell is not a logical doctrine.

For many, their argument against hell is more an argument of logic. Philosophically, they argue that if God is a God of love, there can be no hell. This is the position of noted atheist Bertrand Russell, author of an essay of the 1920's, "Why I am Not a Christian." Russell said, "'Christ believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment."

This is not only a classic atheist or agnostic argument, but also the opinion of many within so-called liberal Christianity. The tone of their argument basically suggests, "How could a perfectly loving God send someone to Hell?" Listen, God sends no one to hell. In fact, Hell was not created for people; **hell was created for the devil and his demons.**

Beyond that, **we cannot begin to understand the love of God until we understand the reality of hell.** Only in seeing the reality of hell can we see a God who loved us enough to send His only one of a kind son, to take on our sin and die.

So, Hell is for Real!

And since it is for real, we better understand certain things about hell.

1. Hell is literal.

Verse 23 of Luke 16 describes hell as a literal place. In fact, verse 28 uses the word translated from the Greek, "place." It is the same word that is used in Acts 1:25 to describe that Judas went to "his own place."

As I said a moment ago, people want to talk about the justice or fairness of God when debating the existence of hell. What about the fairness of God in writing to us through inspired men to make us believe in a literal place of hell, but then there not really be a literal place.

What about the fairness of Jesus—the only begotten son of God—humbling Himself on a cross to die for sin, but yet in the end all—even those who have blasphemed God—go to Heaven?

Furthermore, if you decide there is not a literal place of hell, you better apply those same rules to heaven.

2. Hell is eternal.

Some are going to argue that hell is not forever. The technical term for this is annihilation. But, what do we do with these Scriptures.

- Matthew 25:46, "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (From parable of the sheep and the goats.
- Mark 9:44, 46, and 48, in describing hell, "Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."

You were created an eternal being. You are going to spend eternity in either heaven or hell. This is part of our being made in the image of God.

3. Hell is horrible.

Torment is the word that grabs our attention. Inquiring minds want to know what hell is like. What have you heard about heaven? (Place of no pain, grief, crying, and best of all a place of no sin) Hell will be the reverse. Ultimately, hell is the absence of God. Earth and history, even in the darkest of days, does not know what the absolute absence of God is like.

4. Hell is avoidable.

The point of this parable is that hell is avoidable. The purpose of Jesus' coming is that hell is avoidable. You will be either judged according to your works or His work. If judged according to works, none have a chance.

We all know *John 3:16*, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." **Hell is avoidable.**

Revelation 20:11-15 says, "¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. ¹² I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books.

¹³ Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works. ¹⁴ Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire." **Hell is avoidable.**

The other day when I had the opportunity to hear the former President speak, I had to have a ticket. Truthfully, I didn't deserve the ticket. I didn't earn it, I didn't pay for it, I don't work for Acadian Ambulance, but I was offered a ticket. And, I accepted the ticket. Joyfully and thankfully, I accepted the ticket. It was all grace. But, even in the grace, I had to accept the invitation. I had to abide by the wishes of the one who invited. I had to make a choice to go. No, the analogy is not perfect, but does point us to make a choice to avoid hell.

Agree with God that you are a sinner and that your sin separates you from a Holy God. Accept His work on the cross as the complete answer for your separation caused by sin. Surrender your life to Him for the rest of your life.

So what?

First, to the one who has yet to believe in Jesus in order to avoid hell. I began by telling you that I would ask you to make a decision today. I'm ready to do that.

1. Again, here are the choices: I am already a follower of Jesus Christ and because of that I am not going to hell.
2. I am deciding today to follow Jesus Christ so that I will not go to hell.
3. I still have questions.

Second, those who have already to follow Christ must make a decision to make Him known to others. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:20, we are to be ambassadors for Christ.

Let me read you a quote of someone.

“I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think people shouldn’t proselytize and who say just leave me alone and keep your religion to yourself—how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?”

“I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.”

Now, what if I told you that these are the words of atheist Penn Jillette of the comedy act Penn and Teller?

I spoke a few weeks ago at another church for the occasion of the National Day of Prayer. I spoke about the crisis that we have in America. I spoke about the leadership crisis, the economic crisis, and the moral crisis—all reasons for earnest prayer. After the program was over, a man in his 80’s came up to me and with tears in his eyes said, “Pastor, I don’t really disagree with anything you said except I would like to add that the real crisis in America is that there are people all around me who are dying and going to hell—many of whom are my dear friends.” God, give us that kind of passion!