

The Doctrine of Hell and Its Fruits, Part 1

Luke 16:19-31

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 16 and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It's one of Jesus' longest. It's the most story-like of all his parables. It's full of rich and vivid detail. And it's because of the detail that the subject matter in this parable is really all the more disturbing, troubling, even harrowing, and the point of the parable all the more poignant, even piercing.

This parable, as you probably know if you've been reading it over, describes the conscious punishment of the ungodly. It's one of the major texts in Scripture that helps us to understand and piece together a biblical doctrine of hell. But that's not its immediate purpose, to build the doctrine of hell. That's not the immediate purpose. The immediate purpose is to warn people. It's to warn anyone who may be in the rich man's condition, in the rich man's situation, "lest," as verse 28 says in Luke 16, "lest they also come to this place of torment."

Rich man is a picture of the Pharisees back in Luke 16:14, who were lovers of money. Rather than listening to Jesus' teaching on stewardship, he was teaching his disciples about how to use their funds, their money, their lives. Rather than listening to that, and rather than repenting of their greed and of their love of luxury, their love of ease and comfort, and living a self indulgent lifestyle, the Pharisees, Luke tells us, as they heard these things, they were ridiculing him.

Listen, that is the wrong response. When you find yourself listening to Jesus and ridiculing him or scoffing him, you know you are in a bad frame of mind and you'd better repent. These Pharisees were cutting themselves off from the only hope of salvation. Jesus is the only way to escape the horrors of hell that are described in this parable, and yet they were scoffing at him.

So committed were they to their idolatry, so committed were they to their love of ease, their love of good company around the table, of good wines and fine foods and, maybe updated today, fast cars, and nice houses, and a nice spread of land, and a good way of living, so committed were they to all their pleasure and comfort and all the stuff that money can buy, they were willing to trade eternity for their best life now.

Listen, folks. We're to look at that and take these Pharisees all through Scripture as a cautionary tale. We should not look at the Pharisees as the villain in the story, merely, as like some kind of a flannel-graph killjoy, you know those cartoon characters that always showed up to rain on Jesus' parade. They were that. But we tend to identify ourselves with the hero in the story whenever we read. We need to look at the Pharisees and maybe hold them up as a mirror to ourselves and say, could that be me?

Pharisees are always there, dogging Jesus' steps, but they are useful, aren't they, on the pages of Scripture, for us. They're always there. They're always included, lest we, like them, go to this same place of torment. They, you need to understand this, they were not the killjoys that we may think them to be. They loved to party. They loved their money. They loved all the luxuries that money could afford. They were the wealthy religious establishment of their day, like the evangelicals of today. They held their religion in one hand at a safe and controllable distance from their hearts, but their first and abiding love was the good things in life.

So to punctuate his teaching to those who justified their love of money before man, according to verse 15, to those who

cared more about being approved and admired among men but who disregarded God, and who softened the demands of his Word and his law, who distorted his Word and interpreted in such a way as to justify themselves before men, Jesus delivers a parable to illustrate what he's been teaching, verse 15, that what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Beloved, we need to hear this, all of us. Look at Luke 16, starting in verse 19. Let's read the parable. "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came, licked his sores.

"The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

"Then Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things. But now he is comforted here. You are in anguish.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

"He said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Sobering, isn't it? The rich man suffers in torment. There's no hope for relief. Every avenue of his escape is cut off. There are no visitation hours in hell for him. There's no hope to bridge the chasm between separating him from paradise, between him and the land of the living, or paradise and the land of the living. There is no hope of bridging that gap.

His wealth is gone, along with all his friends, along with all his party companions, all his hunting and fishing buddies, gone along with all comfort and pleasure and ease. All that's gone along with all the accolades and the affirmations of men. That's gone. The only voice he hears now is his conscience. His

only companion now is torment. His eternal regret, his only companion, is an accurate and active conscience that reminds him continually of what Jesus said and then accuses his unregenerate heart, which will never let him repent. Not ever. He is hopelessly lost.

My dear friends, I don't want this at all, this picture, to be true of any of you, not one of you. I don't want this to happen to any of you. So before we work our way through the details of this parable, I want to stop here at the very beginning and kind of give you an overview on the doctrine that is informing this passage.

Understand, Jesus, he has seen in his preincarnate glory, he has seen the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. He's seen this. He knows the truth about heaven and hell, and he's come from God to us, to man, to preach the truth, to tell us this is what's next. But, beloved, if you've grown up in the evangelicalism I have, you haven't heard this very much.

We want to set a foundation about the doctrine of hell. And we need it because the doctrine of hell has fallen on hard times. There are very few pastors preaching this anymore, let alone mentioning it in public. So I want to break that pattern

and illuminate the doctrine of hell for you. If you're taking notes, you can write this down as point one in your outline. We'll call this the modern rejection of the doctrine of hell. The modern rejection of the doctrine of hell.

Hell, as I'm sure you know, it refers to the place of eternal, conscious torment of the wicked, and it should come as no surprise that sinners are really not fond of that doctrine. What is surprising is the number of professing Christians who are squeamish about the doctrine of hell, who make all kinds of apologies for it if it ever comes up in conversation, who say, you know, I personally can't see my way to understanding why this is even here, but I want to tell you about God's love.

They're unwilling to preach it, unwilling to use it in their evangelism, unwilling to think about it deeply, unwilling to answer any objections about it. They'd rather tuck it into a closet and close the door. Ever since the Enlightenment in the late 17th century, early 18th centuries, there has been an assault, as I'm sure you're under, aware of, and we're seeing all that, the fruit of that coming out today in our country, but there's been an assault on Christianity in the West. It's been going, going on for centuries.

You've got to inform yourself on what's happened in our culture, and it's been going on for centuries. You need to see how what's going on in our culture has informed the way you think. Some of the assumptions that you make, some of the presuppositions that you hold, are actually not from the Bible, but from the world. Get informed.

For hundreds of years, Enlightenment thinkers have been pursuing humanism. And it's a secular form of humanism. They emphasize humanity over the divine. They believe, rejecting the doctrine of sin, they believe in the inherent goodness of humanity, and they reject the doctrine of sin. They reject the doctrine of original sin and even sin in us now.

They elevate human reason. Enlightenment thinkers elevate human reason. They pursue human potential, which as yet for them is unrealized and boundless. Humanity's true potential in history past has been suppressed. It's been held down, held back by religion, holding back humanity in this primitive faith in God, these primitive fears about an angry deity who will exact retribution and punishment upon the world. The Enlightenment has come to set humanity free.

As Enlightenment humanists, secular humanists promote man at the same time they demote God. They have to demote God and



dethrone God in order to perpetrate an attack upon Christian theism, an attack upon the divine, in order to elevate man. So they say doctrines like sin and judgment and eternal hell, all those were designed just to strike fear into the hearts of people, that they might be subdued and controlled by religion and controlled by the church. They intend to leave behind all that old dusty fear-mongering stuff and write new definitions and chart a new course.

So it's no surprise, really, when concepts like sin and righteousness and truth and justice, they are all redefined to fit in with human sentiment, to line up with human sympathy. I'll just give you an example of that. Every time some mass shooting takes place, every time some horrendous crime is perpetrated, especially on a child, and comes up on the news, the conversation in the public square, it's never about sin, is it? They recoil from using the word wicked, and evil, and unrighteous, abhorrent before God. You don't talk about any of that.

It's all about psychology, isn't it? Some psychologist will come on CNN, explain the shooter's mental health, wag a chastising finger at society for not seeing the signs earlier, advocating for more treatment, more drugs. We could have handled

this. This could have been prevented. This is a preventable outbreak of mental illness. All that stuff. You know it, I know it, we see it all the time.

It's Herman Bavinck who describes this radical reversal. He says, "Whereas before the mentally ill were treated as criminals, now criminals are regarded as mentally ill. Before that time, every abnormality was viewed in terms of sin and guilt. Now all ideas of guilt, crime, responsibility, culpability and the like are robbed of their reality. The sense of right and justice, of the violation of law and guilt are seriously weakened to the extent that the norm of all these things is not found in God, but shifted to the opinions of human beings." End quote.

Is that not so? When concepts like right and wrong, truth, justice, sin, guilt, crime, punishment, when all these things must align with human opinions and satisfy human sentiment, listen, it is no wonder the biblical doctrine of hell is altered into a manageable level or rejected altogether. When sinful humanity dethrones a holy God, when people learn to sympathize with humanity over and against God, it's no wonder when we hear things like these: Inflict an infinite eternal punishment on a finite sinner with a finite list of sins? However great they may

be, however thousands of years that sinner sinned, the punishment does not fit the crime. Therefore, God is unfair.

Here's another objection: the doctrine of hell makes God less than a man since no man would ever do what God purportedly will do, torment the guilty forever and ever. Can you do that to somebody? If you can't even do it, why would we assume even worse of God? They say that the doctrine of hell, that is, believing God will punish the guilty with an eternal, conscious torment, is barbaric and abhorrent. We left all that stuff behind in the Middle Ages. This makes God a tyrannical monster, more a devil than a God, delighting in tormenting those who don't measure up to his supposed standards. Will God really glorify himself in the screams and the moans and the groans of tormented sinners for all of eternity?

Even backing up, how could a good and loving God create millions and billions of souls, knowing they will not trust in Jesus Christ and knowing they will always have their sins and knowing they'll spend eternity in hell if he was powerful enough to avoid that? And some of that right there is one of the difficulties that informs the false doctrine of open theism, says, God is loving, and he's kind and he creates all these souls, but he really doesn't know the outcome. God is in process

like you and I are. He's learning along with all of us. He's waiting to see what happens, too. But he's got a, he's got standards to uphold, got justice to pursue. He can't deny that. Bummer that it's going to be hell.

We're going to answer these questions, as we go through Luke 16. But these are the accusations, are they not, of the modern and postmodern world, against God, those who have been shaped by a secularized, humanistic culture. They abhor the doctrine of hell. They deny the doctrine of eternal, conscious torment of the wicked in hell.

In fact, you want to draw a line down humanity? You put on one side those who are squeamish and reject the doctrine of hell. And on the other side, those whom, though they may not understand it, though they're not gleeful in pronouncing that kind of a judgment on anybody, but they are on the other side because they, like David, settle themselves in trusting God.

Which side of the line do you stand on? When the world sympathizes with the sinner over and against the one who is ultimately sinned against in every act of sin, they demonstrate their sinfulness. When the world worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator, man becomes the victim, and God becomes the victimizer, the abuser, the oppressor, the

tormentor. So the modern, postmodern world has turned God into the devil and the devil into a god.

In this world, the visible evangelical church, caught up as it is in its love affair with money and success, enamored as it is with the pop culture and political influence, hopelessly addicted to pragmatism, always trying to bait people, the unchurched, with entertainment and efficient programming, slick marketing campaigns, most of these churches have no room for theology whatsoever.

Theology, at least as done by them, bores people. They have no patience for hearing and learning doctrine. They have no depth of understanding. They have even less concern about applying doctrine to their lives. And since so many churches today trade in the glib and the superficial, they have really no answers at all for the real problems that plague the human conscience. They have no answers for questions that have been posed against the doctrine of hell. They have no responses for all the hostile attacks that come from the modern, postmodern mind.

And so, folks, I want to tell you, with sadness in my soul but with love in my heart, that many professing evangelical Christians need to hear this message today. Many of you need to

hear this, many of you who consider your evangelical friends, family members, neighbors, just because they enter churches, that they're okay, that they're fine.

Beloved, don't trade in the same kind of superficiality. Jesus couldn't be more serious about the doctrine of hell. And we need to pick up on that sobriety and bring this to people that we love. We need to absorb it for ourselves so we live in a totally different way than we've lived. And then we need to bring this truth to people that we love and care for and we're concerned about because they're going to die if they don't repent, and they're going to go here.

If you or others that you know share more in common with the rich man than with Lazarus, perhaps you need to be snapped out of your complacency. Perhaps that loved one in your family needs to repent of their love for money. Perhaps you need to check yourself on your love of ease and comfort. Perhaps you need to question your self-assurance and self-satisfaction if it's in anything else except the Gospel. And if you're finding your assurance not in the evidence of a transformed life, but in the fact that you prayed a prayer, or walked an aisle, or were baptized at one point in your life, that is a problem.

Hear the truth, beloved, about hell for your own soul's sake and for the sake of those you love. Because this God with whom we have to do is the one that, after he has killed, he has authority to cast both body and soul into hell. That's the one we reckon with. Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much for your love for us in sending the Lord Jesus Christ to teach us, to teach us about who you are, what you're like, to reveal the truth about you and reality of the way you think about the world, the way you think about us, that you don't approve of our sin. In fact, it, it is what provokes wrath and brings judgment. But we're thankful that you sent him not only to teach about who you are and the consequences and the justice that comes from rejecting you and staying in our sins. We're thankful that you sent him to teach us what salvation looks like, that we can be saved from our sins, that we don't have to spend eternity in hell.

There are so many people here who have, by your grace, come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. They've looked upon his work on the cross and realized that he on the cross absorbed your wrath, that eternal wrath that is represented by hell, by all the language of hell. He absorbed that for us, for every sin we've committed against you. He took that on himself because he loves

you and he loves us. You poured that upon him because you love us, Father.

Father, help us to learn to soak this in, to not recoil, not turn away, but to look square on at the truth about this doctrine in the Scripture. Let our minds be settled deep in our conviction, and deep in our resolve to fear you always and to tell sinners the truth. We love you, Father. We thank you so much for the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen.