

The Doctrine of Hell and Its Fruits, Part 2

Luke 16:19-31

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.'"

My fear is that too many professing evangelicals have been inoculated against the truth of the doctrine of hell. And it's not by outright denial. It's not by accepting or embracing some falsehood about hell: annihilationism, universalism, conditional immortality, whatever it is. But just through repeated neglect, they've rejected this doctrine, not consciously, but in practice. They can hear the word hell; they can read it in a book, or even see it come in their Bible reading, their daily devotions. But it's absent doctrinal content. It's without any explanation, without any exhortation, without any admonition, without any warning, without any pleading.

And so the truth about eternal, conscious torment sits on the ground like a loaded gun. No one touching it, though. Has no real impact on their minds. It doesn't shape at all the way they think, the way they prioritize life, the way they go through their lives. So many in our churches have become accustomed to hearing Bible talk, hearing sermons. They're used to the language, but they're strangers, they're foreigners to the concepts, to the doctrines, to the theology, the really hard questions that are answered, all answered by the Bibles they hold in their hands, but they don't know how to use it.

Pastors that they listen to and sit under are glib. Bible studies that they attend are shallow. The Christians that they're around are sentimental and self-serving and affirming of their weakness. Even when they know about hell, they seem relatively unaffected. They seem at peace, they seem untroubled, by that doctrine. They should not be untroubled. This should trouble us. This should bother your soul. This should bother your psyche.

The evidence I see that Christians seem unaffected and at peace, untroubled by this doctrine, twofold. First of all, they say nothing to warn their neighbors about hell when they evangelize, if they evangelize. They don't warn their neighbors

about this. They tell them about what Jesus is going to do for them. They front-load the conversation with all Jesus' benefits and none of his wrath, none of his threats, none of his warnings.

Think about your own evangelism, as I've thought about mine. Who wants to deliver the bad news? Everyone wants to be the doctor on the sunny day, right? Nobody wants to be the doctor when you've got to tell the person, you got cancer; it's terminal. That's what we're telling people.

Second piece of evidence that I think Christians are not taking this seriously: they just never seem concerned enough to examine themselves to be sure that they're in the faith. They're not diligent, as Peter says in 2 Peter chapter 1, diligent to "make every effort to make your calling and election sure." Instead, many people should be asking questions when they live such a casual, mediocre, lackadaisical kind of Christianity, which is not Christianity. Doctrine of hell should snap us back into reality, shouldn't it?

I'm very concerned far too many evangelicals will stand before Christ, and they will confess to his face that he is Lord. But they will hear those dreadful words from him. That says, "Depart from me. I never knew you." From the very gates of

heaven, they're going to find a porthole straight to hell, and they'll fall downward to their eternal fate, never losing that surprised look on their face. What happened?

So to think anyone would spend one second in this terrible place is absolutely terrifying. And yet, for an inoculated evangelical listener, he listens, stifles a yawn, checks his watch, and somewhere between boredom and mild irritation, he wonders, how long is this going to take?

Why doesn't hell concern him? Well, it's because of the same dripping faucets, secularism, and humanism, that's been infecting the entire West for centuries, has been doing the same thing to our churches. David Wells said this nearly thirty years ago. He says, "The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common." End quote.

Again, it's not that we've changed our view, that we consciously reject the doctrine of hell. We just don't talk about it, so it falls into disuse. Many professing Christians today, if they hear anything about hell, they seem unaffected. They simply shrug and move on with their day. Robert Peterson

says, "talk about hell has a strange and unfriendly ring to it." That is true. It seems strange, and it seems unfriendly. It ought not to be strange for us in the church, and it ought to be the friendliest thing that we talk about.

Why? Because we love people, because we love God, we love his Word, we know it's true. And so we love the people who are under the threat of its judgment. We love those people. If you love your neighbor and you see his house on fire, you're going to walk past and not wake him up? You would be the most beastly of a person if you did that. No, you run in there at the risk of your own life. Got to wake up your neighbor, get him out of a burning house so he doesn't die. How much more permanent is this?

Hell has a strange and unfriendly ring to it, that is very true. I checked websites of some of the larger churches in northern Colorado. Most of them have no statement on hell at all. Some have no doctrinal statements posted on their website at all. Wonder what qualifies them as evangelical.

Others, if they mention hell, they're very vague about it, or they bury the doctrine of hell in a statement about hell several layers deep in the website. So if you're a lazy web surfer, which most of us are, you can't find it. Even those that

admit believing in hell on their websites, when you listen to the preaching from the pulpit, you have to wonder if it's ever preached. Is it ever covered? They're too busy telling everybody about the love of God and the next big thing at their church. They're completely ignorant of what gives God's love such weight.

What gives his love weight? What makes it so lovable, so desirable, is the fact that we were under the threat of this judgment. It's the weight comes from doctrines about our accountability before a holy God. The weight of his glory. The weight of human accountability. The weight of our punishment. The threat of his justice. And that's what makes his love lovely.

Look, a church that does not preach the doctrine of hell is like a bank that refuses to handle money. It's like a restaurant that refuses to serve food. It's like a hospital that refuses to treat illness. The very purpose of the church is to preach sin and righteousness and judgment. Why? So that sinners may be saved from this punishment of hell and be reconciled to God.

So beloved we're not going to let the world push us into a sentimental prison with regard to the doctrine of hell or any other doctrine of the Bible. We're going to let Christ recover

for our church the doctrine of hell, and may he use it to his glory. Jesus' parable refutes all the pretensions of our modern, secularized culture, the squishy-headed liberalization of today's religion. Even though that's not why he delivered the parable, that's what it does.

Parable is a warning to the materialistic, a warning to us American Christians, American Evangelical, to jolt our minds away from our complacency. It's written for the sake of the unbeliever, to provoke the unbeliever about God's compassion in his dire need. It fuels the fire of our evangelism, doesn't it? To rescue souls from hell, to snatch sinners like brands from the fire.

So let's look at this doctrine of hell in the pages of holy Scripture. Some people find it surprising Jesus taught more about hell than he did about heaven. That is true. You can check that out for yourself, but we'll cover some of that today. Jesus described hell probably more vividly than anybody else before or since. He came to give clarity to his own generation, not only about who he is, his identity, his salvation, heaven in the future, but also hell, lest any in his own generation should go there. He brought more clarity than anybody about a reality that was hidden in the shadows until he explained it.

People of Jesus' day, they understood. They embraced the concept of life after death. They believed all souls went to the grave after death, a place in the Old Testament Hebrew called Sheol. You've probably heard about that, or read that word Sheol. Sheol is the abode of the dead, and the righteous understood the concept of punishment and reward in Sheol.

There was a vague concept. It wasn't clear in the Old Testament. Progressive revelation over time made things more clear as time went by. In fact, at the end of the Old Testament there are passages like Isaiah 66:24, Daniel 12:2. These passages made a clear distinction between the fate of the righteous and the fate of the unrighteous, and it pointed out the doctrine of an eternal, conscious torment. Isaiah used the language of torment. He said, "Their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." That's language we hear showing up in the New Testament, isn't it?

Daniel also used the language of consciousness and eternal, or everlasting, Daniel 12:2. He said, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." He's not talking about soul-sleep there. He's just talking about the fact that they are dead. They're no longer in the land of the living; this is a

reference that they'll awake. It's a reference to general resurrection. Their souls have been in Sheol, separated from their buried body. Now they're going to be resurrected to judgment. Some are going to be resurrected to everlasting life, Daniel 12:2, some to shame and everlasting contempt. But there is a resurrection of all humanity.

In the New Testament, we see that Old Testament concept of Sheol a bit more clearly when we hear the term Hades. Hades is the abode of the unrighteous dead in the New Testament, and then paradise, which is the place of the righteous dead. In the end of Revelation 20, verses 13-14, it says death and Hades will surrender their dead as the general resurrection takes place. The unrighteous dead will be judged, it says, each one of them according to what they have done. Then death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

What about the righteous dead? Where are they? Well, they are in paradise. We see one here next to Abraham, at Abraham's side. He's in paradise. That's a picture of paradise. And they will enter into the new heavens and the new earth and the new Jerusalem.

Now, you have Bibles ready and warmed up your fingers. Let's take a quick tour of the Bible, see how hell is described, and I'll try to keep you in the New Testament. Hell is, as I said, hell, if we're defining it, is the eternal, conscious torment of the unrighteous. Eternal, conscious torment of the wicked. And let's start by looking at that word torment. Jesus said the rich man in Hades, in Luke 16:23, "was in torment." The rich man confirms that in verse 24. He says, "I'm in anguish in this flame." Abraham, he affirms the same thing in verse 25. He says, "You are in anguish."

So what does that agony, that anguish, that torment consist of? First, go to Matthew 25 and verse 30, Matthew 25:30. Jesus here is describing hell for the Jews. He uses the language, here in Matthew 25:30, of utter rejection and abandonment. Rejection and abandonment. Matthew 25:30, it's a parable of the talents. It's about stewardship. Hell is a place of darkness for the servant who refused to invest his master's money. Jesus says, the master says, "Cast that worthless servant into the outer darkness." Outer darkness, a place of total isolation, utter abandonment.

I don't know if you've ever been in a place of utter darkness, where you cannot see a hand in front of your face,

like a cave or some night, or a cloud-covered sky that's so dark, with no moon, no illumination, and you cannot see a thing. If you're alone, that is a disorienting place to be. Your senses are all messed up.

This is banishment. Outer darkness is eternal exile, such an oppressive loneliness Jesus describes as a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Isolation is so severe. Absolutely cut off in this blackness. Visual senses are starved for stimulation. It causes this dreadful psychological trauma for those who've been banished there.

That's the first description, of rejection and abandonment. Next, go to Mark chapter 9 and here's another description of hell from Christ himself. Jesus uses the language of pain. The language of pain. Severe, unbearable pain in Mark 9 and verse 42. This is the beginning of Jesus' warnings about certain kinds of sins, and he says in verse 42, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it'd be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

Jesus is not here just talking about merely drowning. A drowning victim can feel panicky. He's running out of air underwater, and that's kind of a panic-inducing state of being.

I've been there. That's not fun. Eventually though, and I've also experienced this, that panic gives way to peacefulness, as you're like, ah, this isn't so bad. And then you know you're in trouble. You're loopy. You are in trouble. The victim blacks out, settles into a watery sleep.

That's not what Jesus is describing here, panic of drowning and then blackness comes. That's not the issue here. He says, to have a great, heavy upper millstone tied around the neck, be cast in the depths of the sea. That takes the victim to the crushing depths of the bottom of the ocean. And it does it fast.

Millstones, you probably know this, they were used to grind flour. They're these stones that are round and then they're placed on their side. So you have a base, a lower stone, the bedstone. It remains stationary; it was heavier, immovable. Then there's an upper stone that's a bit lighter but still very heavy. It's fixed on a vertical axle, and then it's turned around, tied to a donkey. These donkeys would go round and round and round. They'd put the grain down there, crush it and make flour. These stones weighed anywhere from hundreds to even a few thousand pounds.

So to have one of these millstones tied to your neck and cast into the sea, it means you don't die of drowning, which

would be a mercy. The weight of the millstone drags you so rapidly to the crushing depths, the atmospheres of pressure upon you will crush your body. The descent is so fast the victim is unable to clear, unable to equalize the pressure in the ear drums and the sinuses. So that's the first to go. The screaming, excruciating pain in the eardrums and the sinuses as they squeeze. And the lower the body descends, the greater the weight of the water above, which crushes lungs and body cavities and the body altogether. Jesus is describing an excruciatingly painful death, here. Cause one of his little ones to stumble? If you had that in your mind, like, maybe that's a good idea, don't.

More pain he describes. Keep reading, verse 43, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands and go to hell, into the unquenchable fire. If your foot causes you to send, cut it off. Better for you to enter life lame than with two feet, be thrown into hell. Your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes be thrown into hell, where their worm doesn't die and where the fire is not quenched."

If you're struggling with sin and you think that the key to delivering yourself from sin is to start doing some self-mutilation, Jesus is using these as metaphors. Hyperbole. So don't mutilate yourself. The problem is not in your hand or your eye or your foot. It's in your heart. It's in your mind. Your heart needs to be regenerated. What the hyperbole means is to do whatever it takes, short of cutting things off, but do whatever it takes in a hyperbolic sense to rid yourself of sin. Mortify all sin.

Why? Because adding to the imagery of a crushing pain is the imagery of a burning pain. Those who live closer to the earth, like the people the first century, they dealt with burning injuries all the time. Few times I've ministered in Haiti, such a need for nurses and burn clinics in that country because so much of their cooking is done over open fires. So accidents happened all the time, result in dreadful, painful burn wounds. Really sad to see it in children when they fall against a pot, and a boiling pot of water goes all over their skin.

It's not just about the burn itself, either. What really takes time to recover from are the burn wounds, where the nerve endings are exposed and damaged, and as they heal, it's

excruciatingly painful. Those who believe Jesus and what he says here, they're going to heed his warnings to avoid hell, to avoid this crushing, burning pain, a place where there's no relief for all of eternity.

Thirdly, Jesus uses the language of death. Go back to Luke, in Luke chapter 12, but he uses a language of death, and he kind of describes it using macabre, grotesque imagery of undying worms crawling through the corpse and feeding on the rotting, decaying flesh in Mark 9:48. But Luke 12, Jesus warns about fearing God, starting in verse 4. He says, "I tell you, my friends, don't fear those who can kill the body and after that have nothing more they can do. I'll warn you whom to fear. Fear him who after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. And yes, I tell you, fear him."

That term, we don't see it as much in English, but the term translated hell is *Gehenna* in the Greek. It refers to the valley of Hinnom. It was once a beautiful place of rest and repose, but it became defiled by the worship of Molech, most famously in the reins of Ahaz and Manasseh. They sacrificed their own children in fire offerings to this hideous, monstrous idol. The shrieks of babies in agony reverberated all through that once peaceful and pristine, tranquil valley. It's horrid.

For that reason, King Josiah tore down all the altars of Molech, and he defiled the valley of Hinnom to discourage anyone from returning to that idolatry. He turned that place into the city's rubbish dump, pouring all the sewage and dead bodies and rot there. According to one commentator, refuse of all kinds, including carcasses of criminals, thrown into this valley and consumed by fire, which was ceaselessly burning.

That's the imagery, very similar to the description of Isaiah 66:24. Jesus applied that imagery from Isaiah to the valley of Hinnom when describing hell in Mark 9:48. It's a picture of eternal death, filth and defilement there, evil abomination. Unquenchable fire is all that's there because all that's there is bad. Death warmed over. It's all awful.

Nothing like the doctrine of hell to challenge a false professor, a false professing Christian, to examine himself and see whether he's in the faith. Nothing like the doctrine of hell to exhort all Christians to exercise a wise, diligent stewardship and live for the Gospel and bring salvation to the lost. We're going to see all these fruits and more come to maturity in our lives when we embrace what Jesus taught here in Luke 16. And so will many other places on the doctrine of hell.

PILLAR OF
—TRUTH— 

It's one of the most fruitful doctrines in the Bible. And I hope you see that more and more as the weeks go by.