

The Doctrine of Hell and Its Fruits, Part 3

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.'"

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?

Jesus used the language of punishment, retributive justice, like a courtroom scene, and thinking about a criminal thrown into the slammer. When I say language of punishment and retributive justice, that's to say that hell is not merely consequential. It's not just something incidental, like if I jump from too high of a height and don't take into account the,

the height that I'm jumping from and the law of gravity, consequentially I'll be judged in my stupidity and I will break my ankle.

That's not what he's talking about. He's not talking about his, something here that's impulsive or reactionary on God's part. Hell is intentional. It is a positive punishment for sin by God. Turn over to, you're in Luke, go to a few pages to the right to Luke 19. Luke 19 verse 12. This is Luke's record of the parable of the talents.

Look at verse 12. He said, "Therefore a nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' But his citizens hated him, sent a delegation after him saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given them money to be called to him, that he might know what they'd gained by doing business."

You can stop there. We know that the parable continues with the master commending two slaves for being obedient stewards, took the talents he gave them, worked diligently, made more. He rewards them with more responsibility, more honor. The

disobedient slave, who hid his talents in verse 22, it says, there, the master condemns him, pronounces judgment over him; this worthless slave here is cast into outer darkness, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What about those rebellious subjects from verse 14, the ones who hated him, said, "We don't want this man to reign over us," so that when he went away and then received the kingdom and came back. What about them? Look at verse 27. "But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me."

The whole parable has gone by. We can see clearly this master has not done an impulsive thing in punishing them, has he? He's not losing it. He's not reacting in a rage, in a huff. This is calm, cool, collected exercise of wrath. It's intentional, it's thoughtful, it's retributive. In fact, it's not just here that he's considering, remember he went away, and they sent a letter after him saying, "We'll not have you to rule over us."

Master here, trade, is a picture of Jesus returning with the kingdom. He's portrayed here as calculating, as taking personal responsibility for this execution. Slaughter them before me. Slaughter them in my presence. He intends to see it

done. This isn't him being some petty, vindictive tyrant. This is justice, which means if it's justice, it means it's just, and if it's just, then it's good. This is God. This is Christ in his goodness.

We're not used to this imagery, are we? "Bring them here and slaughter them before my eyes." We live in such a sanitized world. There's a sense in which I'm thankful we're not seeing public executions out on the street, hangings and the like. The violence that we see seems to be either a cartoon caricature, like what we see on movie screens, or carefully curated images in the media.

But actual death? The execution of justice, we're not so familiar with that. Some passages in the Scripture, we need to admit, are pretty violent, aren't they? They're never going to make it into the children's Sunday school curriculum. Cartoon images, images like this, Phineas executing an adulterous couple, running a spear through the two of them while they're engaged in the act. It's not going to be in the pictures in the Children's Bible. May see Phineas holding a spear, but not ramming it through them.

Samuel confronted Saul, dealt with Saul being disobedient and not destroying all the Amalekites. But what does Samuel do?

He takes that Amalekite king, Agag. He takes him out and it says he hacked him to pieces before the Lord. That's language of worship. Slaughtered him. It was just. And if it's just, it's good. We as Christians need to understand that that language is in our Bibles. We need not to be apologetic about it, squeamish about it. We need to own it and realize this is the God we serve, and this violence portrays something about his justice.

Our Lord will execute the same kind of violent justice when he comes at his second coming. Turn over to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 7. Lord's going to execute justice when he comes. Let's actually start reading in verse 5. Paul says, "This is evidence." What's evidence? The persecutions you Christians are suffering, all the afflictions that you Christians are enduring. "This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you're also suffering, since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you."

Didn't we hear language like that as Abraham spoke to the rich man? There's a reversal of fortune, there. God considers it just, verse 6, "to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty

angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on the those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

Listen, people may profess to be Christians. They may attend evangelical churches. But if they don't obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, what does this say in verse nine? “They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day, to be glorified in his saints, to be marveled at among all who believe, because our testimony to you was believed.”

Just a footnote. The punishment that God brings is not a remedial punishment. The punishment Christ brings and the holy angels bring at the Second Coming, it's not remedial. It's not in the sense to say it's not disciplinary or instructive, trying to help sinners amend their ways. That's not what's going on. This is retributive justice, retributive punishment. It's an execution of a sentence because sin and rebellion are infinite offenses against a perfectly holy God.

We shrink back from the teaching of the Bible, the clear teaching of the Bible about the justice of eternal, conscious torment. Beloved, it's because we simply don't get it. We just

don't get it. We're so sin-laden, so sin-sodden, sin-saturated, that it dulls us to the perfection of divine holiness. We're not as offended as we ought to be about the sins committed against God. We have more in common with sinful people around us than with the God who saved us.

My friends, that ought not to be. We have no right, no right whatsoever to judge God as unjust. We're unjust. God isn't. Only God is good. We're not. As Paul put it this way in Romans 3:4, "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, that you may be justified in your words, and that you might prevail when you are judged wrongly by sinners."

Another question, is this punishment eternal? We've seen its torment. It's an eternal torment. It is the torment suffered eternally by those who are conscious, and do they actually experience all this agony? Well, if Jesus' parable about the rich man and Lazarus, is there any indication? We have every reason to see the torment of the ungodly as a conscious torment. Jesus portrays the man, the rich man there, is completely aware of his situation. He's got all his faculties and senses, he feels everything, is aware of everything. I'd say he's conscious.



Want to consider now for a final point, it's about the usefulness of this doctrine. Why is this doctrine useful? Write down the fruitful vindication of the doctrine of hell. The fruitful vindication of the doctrine of hell. Those accusations from the unbelieving. What of them? Is the doctrine of hell fundamentally unjust? Is it disproportionate to the crime? Of course not. Bible tells us God is good, just, wise, all powerful. And as we've seen, the Bible does indeed teach the doctrine of hell, this eternal, conscious torment of all the ungodly, angelic and human.

Just before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, cities that were guilty of committing the most reprehensible acts of sin and wickedness, vile forms of wickedness, Abraham acknowledged a fundamental proposition about God, which is this. "Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?" Rhetorical question. Shall he not? Of course, he'll deal justly. Otherwise, how can he be the judge of all the earth? And if he's not the judge of all the earth, who is? You?

God is just by nature. He is just in his essence. It's an attribute of his being. So before accusing God of injustice and before letting any unjust sinner accuse God of injustice, remember that God is God. You are a fallen, sinful creature, but

God is God. So as Solomon said, "Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few." Don't dare to utter a slanderous and ignorant judgment against God. Rather, take the posture of David from Psalm 131, not occupying ourselves with things too great for us, but settling ourself, like a weaned child with its mother.

It's another question we can ask here. Does God really take pleasure in delivering eternal retribution to the wicked? Is he gleeful about that, as he's portrayed to be by our enemies? God answered that in Ezekiel 18:23. "He says, 'Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares God, 'and not rather that he should return from his way and live?'" It's a rhetorical question.

God returns to that, leaves no doubt in Ezekiel 33:11: "'As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?'" Herman Bavinck adds this; he says, "The saying that he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone, Lamentations 3:33, applies also in hell. The pain he inflicts is not an object of pleasure either for him or for the blessed in

heaven, but a means of glorifying his virtues, and hence the punishment is determined in severity and measured by this ultimate goal." End quote.

So then what's the value of such a thing as the doctrine of hell? What's its utility? We're Americans. We're pragmatic by nature. We want to know what's the usefulness of this? What purpose does it serve? Well, first of all, it reveals God. Jesus came to reveal God. He came to reveal all of God, not just the parts that people like and want to hear. Jesus intends we see God as high and holy, as great and glorious, which should humble us as we see ourselves in stark contrast to who God is.

To a society of self-righteous Jews in the first century Judea, those who relied on their physical connection to Abraham, those who boasted in their spiritual heritage, those who had in their hands the written revelation of God and law and the prophets, we can add to that the self-assured evangelicals who are worldly and yet untroubled. Jesus came to unsettle hearts that are settled. He came to unsettle those that are at rest and at ease with a false sense of peace.

And so Jesus uses this language, these vivid metaphors, to create clear, true, dreadful pictures in our imagination. He intended this to cause within us a visceral reaction, to evoke

from us an emotional response, so that we recoil, as we should, in horror at this doctrine. That is intentional, folks. Jesus wants to warn us against going to hell, came to strike fear into the hearts of a complacent people. He came to clarify this doctrine of hell, tell people the truth about a current, eternal, conscious torment. For the ungodly religious people who believe they're doing just fine, who see no need in their life or repentance, he wants them to examine themselves.

That's what we're going to see as we work our way through this amazing parable. We're going to learn about the fear of God. You maybe jot some of these down. Number one, we're going to learn about the fear of God, that God's being and his righteousness is the standard of judgment, not man and his mushy, mutable sentiment. When we learn to realign our sympathies with God, not man, when we fear him, our compassion will be rightly directed according to his will. That's what we want.

Number two, if we put God at the center of our thinking, we use our reason obediently. And when we do that, we learn true wisdom. We learn justice. We learn all that God has to teach us. Write down Psalm 36 verse 9, "For with you is the fountain of

life in your light." Do we see light? Let's be humble learners at the feet of our God.

We're going to see more and learn more, number three, about true justice, that God is always just, that his judgments stand up to any and all scrutiny. This is going to help us see God in a more sobering light so we don't trifle with him. We teach others not to trifle with him, but to obey him.

Number four, we'll be forced to trust God with the things that we don't understand. Trust him, even when we don't understand, especially when we don't understand. As we said, we tend to sympathize with sinners over and against God, which is total folly. But when we learn that God sees not as man sees, we realize he is not like one of us. He gets to and sees the heart of the matter, and he always does what's just and right? So we're forced to trust him, number four.

Number five, when we deepen our understanding of divine justice, we're going to see the dreadful sinfulness of sin. We're going to learn to see the offensiveness of sin from God's perspective and realize that eternal conscious torment of the ungodly in hell is the only fitting punishment in judgment for sin and for those who cling to their sin. We need to see the sinfulness of sin. If we don't look around our world and see it

already, we don't look into our hearts and see it's abhorrent to us, the doctrine of hell will help you with that.

Lastly, when we learn about the sinfulness of sin, it's going to deepen our appreciation for the Gospel. We're going to realize that Christ died for us to pay the penalty, this penalty, for our sins so we don't have to spend eternity in hell. We can repent of our sins. We can trust him now, and then we can learn to rejoice in gratitude because we've been spared this judgment.

If your heart is unaffected by the Gospel, check your pulse. More clarity we have about sin, righteousness, judgment, the more clarity we'll have about the Gospel of our salvation, the more it puts this life into proper perspective as well for ourselves. We're going to be more concerned to mortify all sin because we hate it, because we know what it deserves. We want to live obediently before the Lord, exercise a righteous, diligent stewardship of our lives.

As we consider other people, we're going to learn that every soul that we meet matters, matters to us, matters before God. We're eager to teach them the Gospel, to see them saved from this coming wrath. Nothing like the doctrine of hell to motivate our evangelism, right? So useful in calling sinners to

fear God, this "one who, after he is killed, will cast so, both body and soul into hell."

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. 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. 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.