

The Rich Man and Lazarus, Part 5

Luke 16:22-31

I want to ask you to turn in your Bibles to Luke 16, and today we will finish the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which has to be one of the most sobering portrayals in all of Scripture of divine judgment. The parable, as we've seen, provides a warning. It's a warning about future judgment, the certainty of future judgment. And the occasion for the parable, as we've been seeing, is the response of the Pharisees to Jesus when he taught about money.

God's judgment is so severe because his justice demands severe judgment. The man called out, verse 24, "'Father Abraham, mercy me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water, cool my tongue, for I'm in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember.'" Abraham addresses his mind, here. He speaks to his intellect. "'Child, remember, you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things.'" "

Notice what Abraham doesn't say. He doesn't say, "You received your good things and Lazarus his bad things." The bad things that Lazarus endured were not deserved. The good things that the rich man enjoyed, "Remember child, you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things. But now he is comforted here and you are in anguish." Oh, the anguish. When a drop of water on the tip of a finger, which really could only provide the briefest interruption to this, this suffering of torment, this is a misery impossible for us to imagine, isn't it? But he's not going to get the smallest degree of relief from his suffering. Why not? Because he's getting what he deserves.

Jesus, said Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." In the first life, all Lazarus asked for were bits and crumbs that fell from this rich man's table. Just the scraps. Rich man couldn't be bothered. So now he, having showed no mercy in his life, he receives no mercy, not even a droplet of water on his tongue. Some criticize this judgment according to human sentiment, and I'd say human, sinful human sentiment. They see this as cruel and harsh, and they condemn this level of severity, and God is unjust. But just as Jesus puts into the mouth of Lazarus, the point is this: justice is being done. You received your good things, Lazarus bad

things. Now he's comforted here. You're in anguish. Justice has been done. Case closed.

To think about this from a different perspective, consider the injustice of this rich man requesting and appealing to Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve his suffering. Think about how unjust that request in and of itself is. I mean, what right does this man have to interrupt Lazarus' reward? Abraham said, You received; *apolambano*, it gives a sense of requital, of repayment, that there's a return on an investment that this rich man had made. Abraham's basically saying, you invested all your money for your own interest. You sought temporal return in your temporal life. Well, you got it. You got what you wanted. You received your good things. You got the return on your investment. You got the repayment. But as Paul says in Galatians 6:8, "The one who sows to his flesh will from the flesh reap corruption." And Abraham says, that's what you got. You reap what you sow.

But Lazarus, he received bad things, and that was not just. But now he's comforted here. The rich man, throwing his own parties, got the closest to Heaven that he would ever come. Lazarus suffered, and he came the closest to Hell that he would

ever come. But now all is put right. Each man is exactly where he ought to be.

Listen, Jesus meant what he said. This parable shows us not only he meant what he said, but it shows what he meant when he said it. This is retributive justice portrayed vividly. God's judgment is so severe because our sins deserve it, because his justice demands it, and also, God's judgment is so severe because his holiness demands it.

Abraham said, verse 26, "'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.'" Jesus describes a great chasm. Literally, *chasma mega*, megachasm. It's a massive, unbridgeable, unpassable void that separates Paradise and Hades. Chasm is impossible to cross, and that is the point. The purpose clause shows that, "in order that." It shows that God fixed this chasm for a reason. He put this permanent separation in place between the just and the unjust, and that means they will never meet again. He did it on purpose.

No possibility of salvation on the other side of death. No such thing. For you former Roman Catholics or current Roman Catholics, there's no such thing as purgatory. That is a pipe

dream. There is universalism, the doctrine that everybody is going to ultimately be saved one day. That is a total lie from the pit of Hell. It's the way that Satan can harvest your soul into the Hell, so you can share that misery with him. No possibility of salvation on the other side of death, no concourse between Heaven and Hell.

This permanent separation's a matter of divine justice set by divine intent, and we have to ask the question, why? It's always the question, why? Why is God justified in dealing with sinners in this manner? Listen, we tend to measure the severity of sins based on the effect of sins upon other human beings, whether ourselves or others, right? That's how we measure sins.

Another way to measure sin, though, which is almost completely ignored in this secular age, is to judge the severity of the sin based on the one who is sinned against. Those who still read their Bibles, they notice how often in Scripture that the death penalty is prescribed in the law of Moses or in the Old Testament for treating that which is holy in a profane or a common way. And admittedly, we look at those passages with some level of curious wonderment, scratching our heads a bit and saying, wow, that's shocking.

When God gave Israel the temple and the sacrifices, he warned the priests that they're to treat everything as holy, everything as holy. They're not to go in the Holy of Holies except once a year, only the high priests, and not without blood. If anybody else goes in there and views the Ark of the Covenant, they're dead. Even the high priest who enters in, if he lingers too long, dead.

We find example after example after example of that kind of severity and judgment because we're being taught all through Scripture, God is not a man. God is not a man. God is God. We need to fear him as a mighty and holy God, and beloved, we don't fear him as we ought to. Perfection of God's holiness is beyond our comprehension. It is impossible for us to fathom the depth and the breadth and the height of God's holiness.

We're men and women. We don't live in spiritual realms of glory like the angels do. We're not in the presence of divine holiness every single day. We are fallen human beings. We're sinful creatures. We're tainted, we're defiled, and our sins, just the fact that we're separated from that means we don't understand the holiness as we ought to, but the fact that we sin puts us even further from perceiving God's holiness, further

from knowing the infinite offense that our sins are against a holy, holy, holy God.

We're too dull, we're too distant, we're too weak, and frail, and too sinful, too tainted with sin to discern how fitting it is that our sins merit an eternal punishment of conscious torment. We don't get it. So those are the reasons God's judgment is so severe, because our sin is so sinful, because God's justice is so perfect, and exacting, and because God's holiness is supreme. Now Jesus has taught us about this doctrine of Hell and provided us with a warning. We don't want to go there. It's clear. And telling the parable, Jesus assumes divine justice. That's just the background assumption he makes.

God is just to punish sin. God is just to execute retributive justice upon unrepentant sinners. He makes no apology for that. He assumes it to be true, and he even assumes that we ought to get it. Verses 27-31, the man comes, in verse 27 and makes a second appeal. Duly sobered, here, by Abraham's, reply, he says, verse 27, "'Then I beg you, father, to send Lazarus to my father's house.'" I beg you. The man sought for mercy for himself. Previously, he wanted relief from his own suffering. Too late now. He's already received a lifetime of

mercy from God, verse 25, "Remember that you in your lifetime you received your good things."

God already showed him mercy. He squandered the opportunity, squandered it like a foolish manager. And now he seeks mercy for his brothers so they don't join him in suffering torment. They, just like he did, they live in the abundance of God's mercy every single day, and they, like him, have also ignored it every single day. So he asks here, it's audacious when you think about it, he asks for more than mercy. He asks for something special. He asks for something spectacular, something superlative, "Send Lazarus back from the dead." Dramatic visitation, that'll prevent their torment.

What's his appeal assume about his five brothers? That they, too, have unbelieving, impenitent hearts. So he thinks it'll take a dramatic visitation from the dead beggar Lazarus, whom they all know, by the way. Then they'll listen. Then they'll repent. Abraham's not buying it. He answers, verse 29, "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them."

Folks, "Let them hear Moses and the prophets." Do you hear the divine mercy of God? "They have Moses and the prophets." That is kindness. The kindness of God, beloved, is in the Word of God. If you don't find it there, it's because you're not



reading your Bible. God has already been merciful, so merciful to give us his Word.

Notice the response of the proud sinner, verse 30. He says, "No, no, Father Abraham." Time out, Father. Got a little correction to do, here. You've got to sort out your thinking. You think that's enough. Nah, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they'll repent. In other words, look, law and prophets, that's good. Appreciate that. Thanks for the favor. Not good enough. And in fact, our family, we're kind of special. We need a little something more. We need something a little more dramatic.

More to the point, though, he's saying God's Word is not sufficient. It's insufficient to save me. We need something more. We need a dramatic, fantastic experience. Listen, Abraham, we need to be wowed. Subtle charge here, isn't there? Subtle charge. He's saying this: Listen, Abraham, if I had something just a little bit more dramatic, a little bit more impressive, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be suffering torment in these flames if God had done what it takes.

Who's he blaming? Why is he in Hell? It's God's fault, not his. God's Word is not sufficient. He had a Bible, didn't work for him. He read his Bible every day, and to what end? Here I

am, suffering in Hell. Didn't do me any good. Go to synagogue every Sabbath. Give them my charity. Moses and the Prophets just didn't do the trick. Obviously, Abraham, you've got to take it up a notch.

Well, Jesus provides one more answer to that from Father Abraham. It's not an answer that's deserved, it's an answer that's graciously granted. This is the conclusion of the parable, verse 31. "He said to him, 'If they don't hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" Again, to the point, so much for the spectacular. Dead people rising, it's not going to do it. Against the rich man's protest, against the protests of really the modern-day charismatic movement, signs and wonders have nothing to do with producing conviction of sin, nothing to do with prompting and promoting faith.

Leon Morris calls this the fallacy of the natural man. It is the fallacy of the natural man to complain against what God has given and to demand something more of God. "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. But no sign will be given," as Jesus said, "except," what, "the sign of Jonah." He says, Stop looking for dramatic signs and wonders. Look to the written Word of God where Jonah's life is recorded. Read it.

Folks, the Bible has power to give new life. The Bible has power to cause the sinner to be born again. God's Word convicts the sinner of sin and righteousness and judgment, and the Spirit himself uses the Bible, the Scripture that he himself authored, and he reveals Jesus Christ to us. He shows the sinner the perfect sufficiency of Christ's atoning work on the cross. The Spirit produces faith by the hearing of the Word of God, so that the sinner can believe in Christ and Christ alone, to receive forgiveness from God, to receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to receive God's justification and the reward of eternal life.

But to the one who refuses to take up and read, to the one who ignores God's mercy, which is all around us, such a one will never find salvation. Such a one will never experience eternal life. But that person will join the rich man in the torments of Hell. Well, that's Luke 16. That's the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, something we all need to consider. And I just want to make one final point, folks, before we leave this powerful chapter. And this one's for the saints.

How are we Christians to think about Hell? How do we talk about the doctrine of Hell with others, whether believer or unbeliever? First, we realize we need to acknowledge that Jesus

never joked about Hell and neither should we. Whenever you spoke about Hell, which he often did, he was deadly serious. He was never gleeful. He never ignored the gravity of the doctrine, saying something flippant like, Go to Hell, as we hear so often today. He never said something like, Burn in Hell or some kind of a curse.

He just told the truth. The truth is more harrowing than some flippant curse that we try to land on people in a stinging moment. We should never be saying things like that. Jesus spoke about Hell in a tone that befitted the solemnity and the sobriety of the danger that people face. He never joked about Hell, and neither should we. He never made flippant comments. Neither should we.

Second, Jesus never backed away from the doctrine of Hell, and neither should we. He leaned into it. He took full responsibility for Hell, and he never tried to get God off the hook. No sinful being is more merciful or loving than God. And yet that's how all these Internet trolls blaspheme the living God, by thinking of themselves as greater than him because they wouldn't torment somebody. Who do they think they are? Who do they think God is? They have too high an estimation of themselves, too low of an estimation of God.

Jesus never backed away from this doctrine. God's Word teaches the doctrine of Hell. And it teaches the doctrine of God's love, and it teaches the doctrine of God's justice and also his kindness and also his mercy. This is the doctrine of divine simplicity, right? All of God's attributes are equal to all of God's attributes. None is elevated above another. God is not controlled. God is perfect in his holiness, his justice, and his love, his perfect jealousy. We need to back away from any judgment against God. We need to proclaim the truth of Hell and never back away from it, because Jesus did.

Third thing for us believers is when Jesus spoke about Hell, he was, yes, earnest, but he was also gentle. He was gentle. The warnings were delivered in sincerity, but also in a tone of gentleness. And we can see that even as he tells the parable. Back in verse 25, remember how Abraham answered the rich man? The rich man falsely, presumptuously called Abraham, father. He had no right to that title. And yet how does Abraham respond to him? Child. "Child, remember." That man to whom he spoke was arrogant, unrepentant. He was vile and wicked, and yet Abraham spoke to him on that first day in the first hour, within the first minute of his eternal sentence in torment, with gentleness.

You know what I think provoked that? I mean, Jesus is making these characters up, but I think what he puts in Abraham is something we should all bear in mind. "Abraham believed God and," what, "it was credited to him for righteousness." Did Abraham deserve to go to paradise? Abraham would tell you, no, a thousand times, no. I deserve to be in the torment of Hell as well. And yet what I got was mercy and grace from God.

Folks, the grace of God, if it does not make you a gentle and a meek, kind person, then it's not being effectual in your life. You're not seeing the fruit of the Spirit grow in you. That is a problem. You know who were harsh, really harsh about the doctrine of Hell? The Pharisees, represented by the man, the rich man in Hell. They were harsh. They were unforgiving. They were unkind, dismissive, indifferent to suffering. And so when they preached the doctrine of Hell, they preached it with anger on their face, condemnation in their hearts, critical spirits.

Beloved, that should never, ever, ever be us. But for the grace of God, we're in Hell, too. We need to speak to unbelieving sinners, no matter how lost, their potential end here, and be shocked and saddened and plead with them, receive the mercy of God. Let Abraham's gentleness, "Child, remember," let that tone guide you in all of your evangelism and all your

outreach, in your own soul, and may God grant salvation to many through the Gospel witness of the saints. Amen? Let's pray.

Our Father, we are, so grateful that you've given us this powerful picture of the torment and suffering in Hell. How you have taught us about your justice, about our own sinfulness, how you've taught us about your incomparable, infinite holiness. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. We ask that you would teach us the fear of God that we might have a heart of wisdom. Help us as we handle this very strong doctrine. Help us to handle it righteously before you, righteously before others. And may you, through our witness, win many to the cause of Christ, that he might be glorified. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.