

## IS HELL REAL?

Luke 16:19-31

April 26, 2020

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Welcome to all of you watching us online today. We are delighted to have you. My name is Danny Forshee and I serve as the pastor here at GHBC. Like almost every other church in the world, we are unable to meet due to the Covid-19 pandemic that is affecting our world. We hope to get back together sooner than later; however, when that happens, I believe it will be much different and we will need to exercise much wisdom and patience. But for now, we do the best we can with what we have. And we have all we need!

Please click the Share button at this time to let others know you are worshipping the Lord with us, and perhaps they will join in as well.

Just a quick word to our GHBC family. Thank you for your giving and serving. By God's power and grace, we have been able to serve or will serve 525 meals and deliver 950 cups/tumblers of care packages to places like hospitals, police departments, nursing homes, grocery stores, and other places and it has been phenomenal. We continue to meet the needs of our church family as well, and for these two things I am so very grateful to God and to you for your continued faithfulness in giving. Your consistent giving of your tithes and offerings allows us to do all that we are doing for our people and the community at large.

We are currently in a sermon and Connect Group series or study entitled What's After ATX? It is a series where we look at what the Bible has to say about the afterlife, and we also look at some near-death experiences and how they relate to Scripture. As you just saw, not all NDEs have pleasant experiences and that is in line with what the bible clearly teaches about the reality of hell.

The title of the message today is Is Hell Real? According to the Bible the answer is yes, and also, we have noticed based on some NDEs experiences they would say yes as well.

Why preach a sermon on such a controversial, difficult subject like hell? 1. It is **biblical**. The Bible teaches unequivocally that there is an eternal place called hell. There are 23 references to hell in the New Testament with 15 of those references given by Jesus Christ. (See Jim Denison's article at <http://www.godissues.org/rob-bell-texas-wildfires-and-hell/>.) Jesus knew hell to be real and therefore out of love and compassion, taught about it to warn us. If you dismiss Scripture and the Jesus of Scripture, then you can dismiss hell and any other controversial biblical teaching that is unsuitable and unpalatable to your spiritual tastes. 2. It is **practical**. Believing in the afterlife and the eternal destinations of heaven and hell has direct import on how we live life here on

earth. Rob Bell in his book, *Love Wins*, says that hell as the Bible teaches is untrue; there is no eternal place of suffering for those outside of Jesus Christ. Or at best we simply cannot know, as it is ambiguous. But Bell is mistaken; the Bible is very clear, unambiguous regarding both heaven and hell. 3. **It is evangelical and missional.** If the Bible and Jesus are telling the truth, then we have our work cut out for us and we have to tell the world that Jesus saves from hell. “If the biblical message is true, then hell is a tragic conclusion for those who have not come to God through Christ.” (PP)

As I preach this controversial sermon I do so with compassion and passion in my voice and tears in my eyes. Even the most ardent atheist would agree that if Christians really believe what they say they believe then they should show compassion for those going to hell. I referenced atheist Penn Jillette last week but will expound upon what he said. Jillette finished one of his shows in Vegas and a man came up to him and gave him a Gideon New Testament and just humbly shared with Jillette. The atheist entertainer was deeply moved and impressed by this man’s humility and directness, and he said these words—

I’ve always said, you know, 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 hell, and people could be going to hell, or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that, well, it’s not really worth telling them because it would make it socially awkward . . . How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe it, and that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.”

<http://pastordougroman.wordpress.com/2010/01/14/how-much-do-you-have-to-hate-someone-not-to-proselytize/>

So, at the risk of being misunderstood and laughed at, I share this message with you out of genuine compassion and concern for your souls. To believe this and not preach on the subject is most dishonest, hypocritical, and unloving.

Our text is the story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus. This story has been classified as a parable, and more specifically, an example parable. New Testament scholar Dr. Robert Stein, in his book, *An Introduction to the Parable of Jesus*, states, p. 20, that in an example parable “the ‘picture-part’ and the ‘reality-part,’ i.e., what the picture or metaphor is seeking to say, correspond more closely.” The example parables also have an imperative force about them as well or a go and do likewise nature about them. The imperative in this parable is do not go to a horrible place called hell like the man in the story!

Read the text, Luke 16:19-31.

Stein also instructs the readers of parables to seek to ascertain the one main point of the parable and not fall into overly allegorizing the story. In my estimation and interpretation, **the main point of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is when one rejects God's Word and refuses to repent, then he or she condemns himself or herself to eternal hell.**

## I. HELL IS AN ACTUAL PLACE (VS. 23)

Verse 23, like in Mark 9:43, Jesus refers to hell as an actual place. Hades is the place of the unrighteous dead and is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Sheol in the Septuagint. And Hades here is synonymous with the Greek word Gehenna, or hell.

Verse 28 Jesus uses the word *topon*, translated place. It is the same word Luke uses in Acts 1:25 referring to Judas, "that he might go to his own place." Thayer defines *topon* this way, "Any portion of space marked off, as it were, from surrounding space . . . an inhabited place, as a city, village, district."

Why all the fuss over the literal, actual, measurable, geometrical, geographical place of hell? There are many who argue and say that hell is not real.

Here are some of the teachings that refute Jesus' statements on hell:

**Universalism.** Everyone will eventually end up in heaven for eternity because a good God would not allow one population to exist forever in heaven and allow another to exist in hell. A conservative estimate is 70% of writing theologians today do not believe in the biblical, orthodox, and traditional doctrine of hell. Rob Bell believes this, but not Jonathan Edwards who wrote a sermon entitled, "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners." Jesus taught on hell more than anybody else in the Bible because He knew it to exist. Hell is the validation of man's free will. God did not create us as robots; we can choose how we live on earth and we can choose where we will spend eternity. But Jesus makes it clear that it is not God's will for you to go to hell. God created hell, Matthew 25:41 states, for the devil and his angels. (this teaching is not in parabolic form and neither is John 3:18 states, <sup>18</sup> "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

1. **Annihilationism.** The unbelievers will not spend eternity in hell; rather, they will be annihilated. Years ago I read an article in the local newspaper that said, "A Church of England commission has rejected the idea of hell . . . describing instead as annihilation for all who reject the love of God. . . . Hell is not eternal torment, their only end is total non being." (*Fort Worth Star Telegram* January 18, 1996, "Hell Is a Big Void, not a Fire Pit, Church of England Panel Says." (Men like John Stott hold to this view.) Contrast this teaching with these words of Jesus, "But I will show you whom you

- should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him.” (Luke 12:5)
2. **Inclusivism.** This is very similar to universalism. Karl Rhaner, the Catholic Theologian, who wrote the book, *The Anonymous Christian*, adheres to this teaching. The Hindu worships Jesus in the Hindu religion but he does not know it, and the Muslim and Buddhist also worship Jesus in their respective religions and will all go to heaven. That sounds so compassionate and resonates with many. But it would be comparable to me telling you to go and jump off a building and you will grow wings and fly; it sounds cool, but it is not true, only lethal advice that I would never tell you out of compassion for you. John says, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (1 John 5:12)
  3. **Pluralism.** It is a lot like universalism and inclusivism, but the difference is it purports that there are many ways to the one true God. Not one religion has the monopoly on the others. Clark Pinnock, former SBC professor at NOBTS, says in the title of his book, *There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*. But compare this teaching to John 14:6 and Acts 4:12.

## II. HELL IS AN AWFUL PLACE (VS.23-24, 25, 28)

Four times Jesus uses the word torment; it is the Greek word, *baranos*. It means torture; the punishment one would inflict upon another to obtain a confession. Only way to interpret this word is it means a painful experience.

The rich man was in torment, not drinking beer with the boys. Some say live life to the full as there is no hell, and if there is a hell, then I will enjoy it with my friends. What an ignorant line of thinking. Paul said these powerful, descriptive words about hell in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, <sup>8</sup>in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

Some do not adhere to the literal fire of hell as Jesus and Paul did; they believe in hell but not a place of fire. Even so, it is still eternal separation from God and His people, and that is no way to spend eternity.

Also the rich man still possessed his mental faculties as seen in the story, as he carries on a conversation with Abraham. Speaking of the rich man and Lazarus, let us look at them a little more closely and the great contrasts in their earthly and eternal existences. The rich man lived in great opulence and selfish extravagance. His outer garments verse 19 were dyed in purple dye from snails (the Greek word is *porphyra*.) This was a notable and rare luxury. Furthermore,

his fine linen, (Greek word is *byssos*) was his expensive underwear and this too was another mark of opulence.

Verses 19-21 the contrast in characters continues as Lazarus is covered with sores that the dogs licked while the rich man lived in luxury.

But when both men died things changed dramatically—the poor beggar Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man went to hell. Now make sure you understand; the rich man is in hell not because he has nice clothes and wears expensive underwear! The reason he is in hell is he never repented, gave his life to God and it was manifest in the selfish life of indulgence he lived and the neglect of the poor like Lazarus. And the poor man Lazarus did not go to heaven because he was poor, but he believed on God and had faith.

The name Lazarus means “God has helped,” and God helped the poor beggar indeed as he is carried to Abraham’s bosom (vs. 22) a place of great blessing where the patriarch welcomes those who have been faithful.

But the rich man goes to hell, a place of torment in verse 23. Our choices and decisions on earth determine where we will spend eternity upon death. The righteous goes to heaven and the unrighteous to hell. I read an article in the *Austin American Statesman*, and the transcript of a recent interview by Bill O’Reilly. Both contain the argument that if there is a hell then God is unjust and unfair. Interestingly enough the TV personality Bill O’Reilly argued for the existence of hell while the liberal pastor argued against the existence of hell. But both the article and the interview present the argument that somehow God is evil and unjust if there is a hell, but I would argue just the opposite. God has gone to great lengths to warn us of hell and sent His Son to pay the price of our sins, and if we reject God, then we are the ones to blame. Or as Bill O’Reilly states it he is not turning God into a monster but there has to be a day of reckoning for evil for those who do not repent and spit in the face of God. <http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/oreilly/transcript/there-hell>.

I have a number of quotes from theologians who believe in hell and will include these here in the manuscript but will not have time this morning to read. Athanasius (AD 295-373), my favorite early church father: “For even the rich man, as the Gospel affirms, having indulged in pleasure here for a little while, suffered hunger there, and having drunk largely here, he there thirsted exceedingly.” (*Letters of Athanasius*) John Chrysostom (AD 344-407) “Let us look up from heaven, let us bend down to the tombs and coffins of the departed. For the same end awaiteth us, and the same necessity of departure will often come upon us before the evening. Prepare we then for this expedition; . . . for great is the heat there, and great the drought, and great the solitude.” (*Homily*, p. Lxxxv) John Calvin (1509-1564) “Besides, unless souls survive when freed from the prison houses of their bodies, it would be absurd for Christ to induce the soul of Lazarus as enjoying bliss in Abraham’s bosom, and again, the soul of the rich

man sentenced to terrible torments.” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*) Jonathan Edwards 1703-1758) “The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.” (*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*)

In John Bunyan’s work, *Visions of Heaven and Hell*, the character Epenetus has a vision of hell and he sees Hobbs, the great author, who tried to persuade Epenetus to deny God. The atheist Hobbs tells Epenetus, “For now I know there is a God. . . . I do confess I was His foe on earth, and now He is mine in hell. It is that wretched confidence I had in my own wisdom that has betrayed me now.” (p. 55)

### III. HELL IS AN ALWAYS PLACE (VS. 26-28)

Verse 26 Abraham tells the rich man in hell that there is no escape. None can go to him, and none in hell can exit. It is a solemn, thought-provoking statement that the rich man hears. There is no escape.

Verses 27-28 He understands the severity of his eternal situation or plight and so he asks in compassion for his brothers so that they might not come to the same ruinous end that he is now facing.

Interesting to note that the rich man still has his mental faculties and he can reason and dialogue, and those human capabilities are not lessened in hell. You will be cognitive and fully aware, and the prospect of no release or no hope will be unbearable.

Jonathan Edwards was the greatest mind America ever produced according to Perry Miller of Harvard University. Edwards was a child prodigy who read Latin at age 6. He graduated from Yale University as valedictorian at age 17. As John Girshner points out that when he preached it was not that the rural farmers of CT could not understand the bright and erudite Edwards; no, they understood him very well! In his famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*,” he states, “It is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery. . . . You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains. So your punishment will indeed be infinite.”

Edwards’ sermon, as hard as it is, is much more in line with Jesus’ teaching than Rob Bell or a host of other Universalists today. You will either believe and turn to

God for salvation and ask Jesus to pardon you or you will continue in unbelief and say it is not true. Charles Darwin chose the latter. In Gertrude Himmelfarb's biography, she explains, "Charles not only could not believe in Christianity but would not wish to believe in it. Citing the 'damnable doctrine' that would condemn all disbelievers to eternal punishment, he protested that 'this would include my Father, Brother, and almost all my best friends' – which made it an unthinkable, to say nothing of thoroughly immoral, idea. There may have been more sophisticated reasons for disbelief, but there could hardly have been a more persuasive emotional one." (Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*, p.22, taken from Philip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, p. 179-80)

Hell is an actual place, an awful place, an always place, and best news of all, it is an avoidable place.

#### IV. HELL IS AN AVOIDABLE PLACE (VS. 29-30)

In the dialogue of Abraham and the rich man, Abraham tells him that his brothers have Moses and the prophets; this was a reference to the Old Testament. The rich man wanted something more dramatic, like a resurrected Lazarus from the dead who would go and tell his brothers. (It is interesting to me that the rich man still sees Lazarus as his servant, some poor soul to do his bidding for him—to bring him water in hell or go and tell his family.) But he is told no, that will not matter even should one rise from the dead.

There was another Lazarus in Jesus' day, a good friend of the Lord's. Jesus raised him from the dead as we read in John 11, but instead of inciting belief on the part of the chief priests and Pharisees; it only enraged them further in hatred of Jesus and disbelief (John 11:47-53).

Please note verse 30 as the key to avoiding hell is given. It is the word "repent," *metanoia*, and it means to turn from sin, to change one's mind toward God and sin. The only way to avoid hell is turn from your sins and believe on God for salvation. When you do that you are saved and when you die you go to heaven.

Phillips Brooks was a great 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher in America. A Harvard graduate, he is best known for writing the Christmas carol, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. He also gave a classic definition of preaching—the communication of truth through one's personality. When Brooks was on his deathbed in 1893, he only allowed one of his friends to come and see him, and that friend was the atheist Bob Ingersoll. Ingersoll asked Brooks why he would want to see him and not one of his other friends. Brooks told Ingersoll, "I will see my other friends again in eternity, but this is the last time that I will ever see you."

C.S. Lewis said Jesus is a liar, lunatic, or Lord. Which one is He to you? You have a free will and you can choose to dismiss Jesus and His teaching or you

can believe. Most will choose the broad way of eternal damnation as they refuse to believe what the Bible teaches. George Clooney said, "I don't believe in Heaven and Hell. I don't know if I believe in God. All I know is that as an individual, I won't allow this life—the only thing I know to exist—to be wasted."  
<http://atheistempire.com/entertainment/entertainers.html>

It is your decision and the verdict you give has eternal consequences. If you do believe in hell and give your life to Jesus Christ then expect to be ridiculed and laughed at, as you will be. But I have made my decision and I am a follower of Jesus Christ and I invite you to believe on Jesus today, repent of your sins, miss hell, and live eternally in heaven with the Lord and His people.

Here are some articles and resources on the topic of hell.

<http://www.joomlabiblestudy.org/landing-page/biblestudy/studydetails-350>

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/driscoll-without-jesus-you-go-to-hell-49598/>

<http://t.co/KyUBVdT>