

## Luke 16:19-31

### *A Story of Hell*

**Main idea:** Hell is no party. Share Jesus with everyone so that they might escape the place of torment.

Just as I mentioned these last couple weeks, I want to make clear again that I'm totally copying sermons from Johnny Hunt and J.D. Greear, with their permission of course. This morning's message is mostly from Johnny Hunt, but I've also gone through it and made it my own quite a bit as well.

This sermon series, called "Who's Your One," focuses on encouraging all of us in the area of evangelism. But as we talk about sharing the gospel, we also need to be reminded of what's at stake.

As much as we often talk about heaven and hell in the church, I noticed several years ago that the Bible often only mentions these things in passing, and rarely ever describes these things in detail. But there's one passage of Scripture that's probably the most clear text on the topic of hell, and that's what we're going to be looking at this morning. Turn with me to Luke 16.

I've been studying hell and judgment specifically for several years now through books, sermons from other pastors, and of course the Bible, and I've come to the conclusion that we don't know as much as we often say we know, but we can actually know far more than we often think the Bible tells us. What I mean is that our usual conceptions of heaven and hell are overly simplistic, but the Bible's picture, while not telling us every detail of things we might wonder about, tells us exactly what we need to know this side of heaven.

And here's what we need to know about hell: hell is real, it's a place of torment, and it's not a place any of us should desire anyone to go.

Luke 16:19-31.

"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 and 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, he 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 end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' But 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, and 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.' And 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.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

Now here's a question: how did a man in hell know that in order not to go to hell, you needed to repent? There's some good theology in hell.

The rich man was told, "If they do not hear Moses, or Pastor Chris, or the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." Here's the thing. If Jesus brought someone back from the dead, who saw heaven and hell with their own eyes, and sent them back to Nokomis to warn you, the Bible is saying there's no more likelihood that you would repent than if you heard Pastor Chris this morning. So I pray that God will help me to preach this morning with compassion, and boldness, speaking the truth in love, so that if anyone here doesn't know Jesus as Savior, they would believe and be saved this morning. I want to, in a sense, scare the hell out of you. And I don't mean to imply that you can go to heaven just because you're scared of hell, but rather that it wakes us up to see just what God saves us from through Christ.

But there's also another reason to preach on this. Because I'm speaking to roughly 50 people in this room, and the majority of you are not on your way to hell. You were, but a funny thing happened on the way to hell: you got saved. But maybe you've forgotten where you were headed to the point that you no longer tell others where they're headed.

We're living in a generation that doesn't like to hear about the reality of hell. So this morning, I'm preaching not only that the lost would be saved, but I'm preaching that the saved will get burdened over the lost. Over the one, who you said last week and the week before, "I'm want to invite that one to church." Really, what we're saying is that we want to invite them not just into a building, but to join God's people, because we are the church, and we want to invite them to know Jesus and have abundant life in Him.

In our passage this morning, we see that Jesus tells the story of a rich man and a poor man, and they both die. Proverbs 22:2 says:

**The rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all. (Proverbs 22:2)**

So in Jesus's story, the poor man goes to what is called Abraham's side, which we often assume is heaven. The rich man dies and suffers in Hades, which we assume is hell. The rich man then looks across the great divide into heaven, and he asks for mercy for water and for someone to warn his family to avoid this place of torment.

Can I ask you a question? If Jesus is not going to allow those in hell to come back and warn people of hell, ask yourself: who will warn people?

On another occasion, Jesus told the story of a future time when He separates humanity into two groups: the sheep and the goats. He welcomes one group, the sheep, with this phrase: "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." To the other group, the goats, He says, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." That's where I was headed, because I was part of the accursed, until someone gave me the gospel. And here's the gospel.

The gospel is that Jesus became accursed for me. The curse that was going to fall on me, namely the wrath of God, which was in the cup in the Garden of Gethsemane, that was going to be poured out on sinners, Jesus Christ drank all of the cup, to become accursed for us. So basically, where the wrath of God was going to fall on Pastor Chris, Jesus Christ became the accursed for me, so that I could be cleansed and forgiven and spend eternity with Him. That's the gospel.

The Bible so often speaks of the reality of hell. One of the most difficult questions for Christians is, and I bet you've heard this, "How can a good and loving God send someone to hell?" But the Bible's response to that

question is simply that God does not send anyone to hell, we go of our own volition because we choose to reject God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Right after John 3:16, oddly enough, comes John 3:17, and it says:

**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17)**

Jesus didn't come to condemn you. He came to save you. God doesn't send anyone to hell, we send ourselves to hell when we reject the Savior. We did not need God to condemn us to hell, because we were taking care of the hell part just fine on our own. That's why Jesus came to save me, not to condemn me.

In 2001, a poll was taken in America, asking whether or not Americans believed in hell. In 2001, 71 percent of Americans said, "We believe in hell." In 2013, just twelve years later, it's changed from 71 percent to 58 percent of Americans saying they believe in hell. That means that it went down on average a little more than one percent per year every year. Just think about what that trend means for the next ten or even twenty years.

It's becoming less popular to believe in hell, and even to talk about hell, which is why it's going to be more and more important for the church, us, be more and more informed about what the Bible says about hell. So here's what I want you to know that the Bible says about hell.

Number one, it's real. Some people will look at our passage this morning and say, "Oh, well, that's just a story Jesus told." That would be fine if this were the only place, but this ain't the only place. By conservative estimates, in the gospels, Jesus referred to hell no less than 60 times. Jesus treated the topic of hell very seriously, so we should, too.

So when someone says, "Are you saved? Have you been born again? Are you a Christian?" And somebody responds and says, "I'm not sure, but I hope so. I think so." Listen, if there's a way to know so, this is one of the subjects I want you to know so. The Bible says in 1 John 5:13:

**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)**

There's a lot that I don't know. I don't have it all figured out, not even on the topic of hell, which I've been studying for longer than I've been a pastor, and even with greater intensity in these last few years. I don't know everything, but I'll tell you what I do know. I know that God is good, and that by grace through faith in Jesus, I'm saved from sin and saved from torment in hell.

One night when I was thirteen years old, I went to revival service at my church, and I went forward and I told the counselor, "I've received Jesus as my Savior, and I want to follow Him in baptism and with all of my life."

Therefore, I know that I have eternal life. It's not because of what I've done, but because of what Jesus has done for me. Heaven and hell are real, and everybody here is going somewhere after this life is over.

Number two, hell is a place of pain. In verse 16, it says that the rich man was in torment in Hades. Hell is no party. You've probably heard people say that they would rather go to hell than heaven because all their friends would be there. But hell is no party. Hell is described as the place where people gnash their teeth in agony. In verse 24, the rich man stated that he was in anguish in the flame.

Number three, hell is a place of sadness. C.S. Lewis wrote an interesting short book called, "The Great Divorce," which isn't about marital divorce, but about the great divide between heaven and hell. In the story, a group of people from hell hop on a bus and visit heaven. But even there, they couldn't understand how God could give them joy if they would only seek their joy not in themselves, but in Him. In that book, C.S. Lewis wrote:

**"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." - C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce***

You see, hell is a place of sadness because those in hell refuse to humble themselves before the only One who can save them.

Number four, hell is a place of fear. God's truths are designed to warn us. Somebody says, "I went and heard that preacher, and it scared the hell out of me." Good! The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. In other words, you can't really know anything until you first come to fear God. And the Bible also says not to fear him who can destroy the body, but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. That's God. Fear Him. And yet, when you come to fear Him, the Bible also says you have nothing to fear, because this God loves you. Again, fear is only the beginning. If you're sitting in your seat scared to death of God's judgment, you are at least in some ways at the beginning of your understanding of God's love for you. He wants to lead you from a place of fear, being scared when we realize how perfect and powerful God is, to a position of confident love, ready to share that we've been adopted as children of God. You see, perfect love casts out fear. And you are perfectly loved.

I find that most people are disturbed by the doctrine of hell. Listen, the doctrine of hell ought to disturb you. I'd been concerned about your mental health if the thought of hell didn't disturb you. The idea of a place of torment is a fearful thing! It's designed to be that way because eternal things are at stake, and it ought to wake us up to fully embrace God's love.

Johnny Hunt told a story about a big tough football linebacker who went to his church and heard a sermon about hell. When the linebacker laid in bed that night, he began to think about what he heard, going over it again and again in his mind, and he couldn't sleep. So he got up. It was a restless night. The next day he went to see a liberal preacher, and he said, "I heard a sermon yesterday, and the sermon so disturbed me I couldn't sleep last night. And I thought maybe you could encourage me so I could start sleeping again." And liberal preacher said, "I bet he was a Baptist." And the linebacker said, "Yes, sir, it was." He said, "Yeah, they're known for that hellfire brimstone stuff. Don't believe all that." And he tried to comfort him by telling him hell wasn't real.

But the linebacker went home and he still couldn't sleep, so the next day he went back to Johnny Hunt's church, and he gave his life to Jesus. Hell is a place of fear so that we would take it seriously, and respond to God's grace.

Number five. Hell is a place of isolation. It's not a party. Verse 27 says:

And 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.' (Luke 16:27-28)

The rich man in torment wasn't looking forward to his brothers joining him, because even if they also went to the same place, they wouldn't bring him any comfort. They wouldn't bring him any companionship. Hell is a

place not of fellowship, but of isolation. Even for those in hell, the last thing they want is to see anybody else in hell.

So it's no wonder that when somebody gets mad at somebody, they often tell them to go to hell, because they can't think of a more horrible place that somebody could go. Have you ever thought about that? When you're mad at someone, why don't you say, "I wish you'd just go to heaven? Go to Krispy Kreme?"

No, they say, "go to hell." When the truth is, we shouldn't want anybody to go to hell. Not even God wants anybody to go to hell. It says in 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

Ezekiel 33:11.

Say to them, 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. (Ezekiel 33:11a)

You may have heard me quote those verses before, and you might ask, "Are there more?" Yes, there's more.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Isaiah 45:22.

"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:22)

You see, God doesn't have favorites. Please, never think that God loves you more He loves than anyone else. That God loves you more than He loves atheists, or Muslims, or Democrats, or Republicans. God loves all people, and God invites everyone, all the world, to trust in Jesus and be saved. And He does that through us. If you know God loves you and you have a relationship with God because you've been forgiven by His grace, don't just keep that to yourself! The Bible calls us, the elect, to give our lives to preach the gospel that would intersect every man, woman, boy, and girl. Why in the heaven would anybody in here choose and decide volitionally to go to hell? Why?

Now, I've got to wrap this sermon up, but there's so much more we could say about hell, even from this one passage in Luke. So we're going to end by looking at seven good things in hell. Listen to the good things in hell. Number one, there are what we call good people are in hell.

Someone says, "I don't think he's going to hell; he's a good man." Good people go to hell. I'm sure we all know some people that are not Christians who live about as good and sometimes better than those who claim they are. The Bible says compared to Jesus and the glory of God, there's none good, no not one. We've all fallen short of God's standard, and unless a person receives God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus, even if we considered them to be good people, they cannot earn heaven by their works.

Consider something about this rich man that may have made people consider him to be basically a good person. It's true that he wouldn't give the poor man the crumbs from his table, but he let him sit at his gate and beg. Now, if you pulled into your driveway at your house today, and there was a homeless man sitting by your

mailbox wrapped up in a blanket with a little basket, would you ask him to leave or would you call the police? I know what you're thinking, "I'd go out there and give him something to eat. I'd invite him in." That's why I like you people. But the bottom line is, here's a man, he wasn't all bad. He let this guy stay there.

And if this man was pretty rich like it says he was, it was the place to be! It's like on Halloween, where do you go? You go to where you know they're giving out the good candy. You go across the street from the church right here, where she gives out full size candy bars. The rich man let him sit there. There was some goodness in him.

So let me say something to you. If you've been hung up on the fact that you don't think you're going to go to hell because you're good, you can go to hell as a good man. Hell is full of good men and good women—of people that were kind and courteous. And I'll tell you why.

Number two. There's not just good people in hell, there's good vision in hell. The Bible says being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Lazarus afar off. His vision was so good in hell, he could see what he was missing. This man's in hell, and he's able to see all the way over into heaven. He's able to see all the things that he can't have. God allowed it to happen, undoubtedly. And he's able to see what he's missing.

Number three. There's prayers in hell. People cry out to God in hell. The rich man cried out to God. But the question is, does God hear them? My answer might surprise you. Of course He hears them. But the real question is simply, are they crying out in faith? The rich man wasn't. He was doing the same thing he always did on the earth. He was demanding that Lazarus serve him. He was demanding a drop of water. He was demanding that Lazarus be sent to warn his family. He wasn't humble. He wasn't really ready for God's mercy. He still wanted to be the boss.

Number four. There's good memory in hell. Aren't there some things you wish you could forget? The rich man was told in verse 25:

"Child, remember that 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."

Listen to this, here's what people have in hell. Consciousness, memory, awareness. You'll remember all the bad things you've ever done. And you'll long for all the good things you used to get.

Number five. There's good theology in hell. He realized that God exists. There are no atheists in hell. You might say now, "I don't believe there is a God." One day you will. Everyone in hell believes in God, and will one day confess that Jesus is Lord.

Number six. There's good priorities in hell. "I beg you therefore, Father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them lest they come here." They believe in evangelism in hell. They're asking him to send somebody back and knock on their door, go to their house. *[knock, knock]* "Hey, I'm here, not from Grace Baptist Church, I'm here from hell, and I've come to warn you not to go to hell."

People in hell were wishing someone would go to their family and tell them. Let's not let the population of hell be more concerned over who's going to hell than the people in the church are concerned about people going to hell. By the way, the man in hell had five people on his prayer list. All I'm asking is that you choose one.

Number seven. There's good intentions in hell. This may be the most powerful part of this sermon. "What do you mean, good intentions are in hell?"

One can reject Christ through outright rebellion. I don't run into many of those. Hardly ever does someone say to me, "I don't care if I go to hell; get out of here with that gospel." Hardly ever do I run into ardent, obstinate people that don't want to hear at all, but the rejection that I know of as a pastor for the last 10 years is most often passive. "Yes, pastor, I'll come to church one day." "Yes, pastor, I'll start following Jesus one day." Most often, people deny and refuse Jesus Christ through apathy, indifference, and procrastination.

Hell is full of people that never intended to go there. They had good intentions. It's been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. "Well, pastor, what does a person have to do?" The Bible is clear on this. Repent and believe the gospel. And when you think about what that means, the answer is really nothing. You don't have to do anything. You believe in what Jesus has already done for you.

You see, your sins will send you to hell if they're never dealt with, but Jesus has dealt with your sins. So just believe, and thank God for forgiving you of your sins through what Jesus did for you on the cross. Some of you this morning may need need to look at the person you came with and say, "Go with me to talk to Pastor Chris, I need to come to Jesus." Some of you children need to say to your mom and dad, "I need Jesus, mom and dad."

Lastly, let me say this. Based on Matthew 25:41, hell was not prepared for any of us. The Bible says that it was prepared for the devil and his angels. Hell was not prepared for any people. It was prepared for fallen angels and the devil himself. On the contrary, heaven was prepared for us. Jesus said in John 14:

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:1-6)

After this life, you can go to a place that was not made for you, or you can spend eternity in a place that was prepared for you. And it all depends on what you do with Jesus.

And this is interesting. I mentioned before that heaven and hell are a little more complicated than we often consider. Well, this hell that we've been looking at all this morning is actually only one of the hells that we find mentioned in Scripture. As we saw, the rich man went to Hades. But Hades isn't actually going to be around forever. Revelation 20:14.

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14)

You see, the Bible says in Hebrews 12:29 that God is a consuming fire,<sup>1</sup> and that in the end, death is going to be swallowed up by life.<sup>2</sup> So the question I want to ask you right now is simply this: where will you be when that happens?

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 12:29

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:4

Some of you this morning would say, "Pastor Chris, I don't know that if I walked out of this room and died before I got to hear you again that I would go to heaven, and I've been wanting to settle this once and for all and forever, so this morning, I want to be sure. I want this morning to repent of my sins, place my faith in the gospel: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ." If that is the desire of your heart, and you are acknowledging you're a sinner, you're sorry for your sins, you acknowledge that you don't have to be accursed because Jesus Christ was accursed for you, and you want to receive His payment on the cross, the wrath He absorbed for you so you could be saved. If that's your desire, would you ask Him right now? Make this prayer your prayer.

*Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sins. Please, come into my life and save me. Cleanse me of my sins. I give You my life, and I receive Your life. Thank You for loving me. In Your precious name, Amen.*