



THINGS IN HELL WE ALL NEED!

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Welcome to the program today. I hope you've had a good week and that this is the start of an even better one. There is no better way to begin a new week than by honoring the Savior in worship and spending time in His word.

Our lesson text today will come from the sixteenth chapter of the gospel of Luke. This is one of the more familiar stories our Lord told in His preaching, although its details are some of the most unpleasant of all that Jesus spoke. It involves two men who died and what happened to them in the seconds after death.

I'm reading now from Luke 16, beginning in verse 19. ***"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."***

Thus reads Luke chapter sixteen, verses nineteen through 31. In the case of each man, in a mere moment, their state changed. The suffering beggar was suddenly taken to the realms of splendor, peace, and rest, and the satisfied rich man is in dire need and misery. I want to focus on this rich man who forfeited all his possessions, including his soul at death, and the few lessons he teaches us.

Hell is a seldom-heard subject in the pulpit today. About the only time you hear the word anymore is in casual, vulgar speech or when someone is angry and cursing. We certainly don't hear it as much as we used to in the church. We became so sophisticated, until hell seems such a repulsive and crass thing to talk about, that we left it in out in the country church of long ago, and it doesn't have a place in our more refined and educated congregations. We have become so wise and scholarly in our own eyes that we cannot fit the eternal punishment of sinners into our logic and reasoning, and so we say it must not exist, or it must be explained in a different way than we have traditionally believed. Or the church has become so worldly and compromised that we don't want such a shocking subject making us uncomfortable. And then, the pendulum has swung in recent generations, and we have become so positive and the church so commercialized, consumer-oriented, and 'seeker-sensitive', until judgment and hell are a deterrent, not to sinful living, but to a growing church, and is counter-productive to our mission.

So, it's increasingly rare to hear much about it in the pulpit or anywhere else, for that matter. But Jesus did not take that approach. He said in Matthew 10:28, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Analyze the gospels, and you'll find that the loving Savior spoke more about the punishment of the wicked than he did the reward of the righteous. That's even true in the events Jesus relayed in our text in Luke chapter sixteen. Interestingly, Jesus spends much more time talking about what the lost rich man was experiencing in torment than he does about what the beggar gained in Paradise.

The story of Lazarus and the Rich Man is about these two men who lived very opposite lives. Both died, and both were rewarded according to their deeds on earth. Jesus used these events as a warning against covetousness and it also illustrates one of the great themes of Jesus' preaching: that those who are most spiritually advantaged in life, such as the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, often waste their opportunities and forfeit their position of blessing and the blessing goes to the more lowly of earth, the Gentiles, and those who are truly poor in spirit. But I believe Jesus was briefly lifting the veil that divides the seen and the unseen realms and allows us to see what happened to these men after death, where in fact, they are at this moment, today.

Jesus says Lazarus was a beggar who was laid at the gate of the rich man's home and was covered in sores. He was starving and begging for mere crumbs from the rich man's table. He died, and the angels gathered his soul and carried him to Paradise into the rest of Abraham's bosom. He wasn't saved because he was poor. He didn't go to Paradise because he was tormented on earth. Some people suffer on earth because of their sins, and they will be judged for their sins, whether they suffered for them here or not. This man, rather, was saved because he followed in the footsteps of Abraham's faith in his life. While the poor may be more likely to respond to the gospel than the rich, being rich or poor has nothing to do with salvation itself. But all that Jesus said about this man was that he suffered in this life, and when he died, his suffering was over, his faith became sight, and he went to be at rest. That's really all that needs to be said. Jesus' focus here was on the fate of the rich man. He was lost. He wasn't lost because he was rich, but he was lost because of what his riches did to him. He was greedy, covetous, uncaring, uncompassionate, selfish, and absorbed in earthly cares and pursuits.

When the rich man died, I would imagine there was a great funeral, and many noted the death of this man of position. But on the other side, where the family and other mourners could not see, the tables were completely turned. Jesus describes his suffering and agony, and the pitiful conversation that took place between him and Abraham. We don't have time to go into the merit of the translation of different Greek words as 'hell' and the distinction between what here is an apparent intermediate state of the lost after death and the ultimate, eternal destiny of the wicked after the final judgment, but I will simply say that both are similarly described as states of fire, torment, punishment and the warnings we can derive are very applicable. When we behold the rich man in his present condition, we need to see some things he now has that we actually NEED today.

The first thing found in hell that we need on earth today is a proper estimate of what is important and essential. In verses 23-24, Jesus said, "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." The desperation of this man not only tells us how horrible hell is, but it also illustrates the great contrast between his life of plenty on earth and his utter poverty in the next life. This rich man could afford the most sumptuous wines on earth by the gallon. He could drink and eat whatever he wished. He likely threw lavish parties for those of his societal class, where the wine flowed like a fountain. I doubt if there was a day in his life when he worried about whether he would have something to eat or drink. But now... Now, he begs for a mere drop of the most essential element of life that there is: water. Just a drop of water. Now, he's the beggar. Now, he's not asking for some extravagant meal and some smooth and intoxicating drink to be served to him. He just wants a drop of water. The extravagances of life have all been stripped away, and he doesn't care a thing about them. He just wants a drink of water!

Friend, most of the things we possess in life are not necessary. And it's not that it's wrong to possess them. The problem is, they possess us. 1Timothy 6:8-9 "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." Jesus said in Mark 10:25, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Why? Because he one time said the word of God is like seed that falls upon thorny soil, "...and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22) The problem is not money and possessions themselves, it's the desire to have them and the pursuit of them. It's what they do to the value we place upon things temporal and spiritual in life. This man finally begs for what, throughout a lifetime, he took for granted.

We work and work to acquire, build, amass, and enjoy, and justify our pursuit by saying "a man has to live". No. A man doesn't have to live. When it comes down to it, what he MUST do is die and face the judgment, and as Jesus asked of that rich man He talked about on another occasion who died: "then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20) You see what will matter then, and what should matter now is water, the Water of Life. Become like David in Psalm 63:1. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Is that what you are seeking and longing for today? If not, you'll find yourself like this rich man one day, begging for just a drop of water and some relief in hell. Relief that will never come.

The second thing in hell that we need on earth is a humble reverence and respect for God. Not only has this rich man's estimate of things changed, but his attitude toward God has also changed. Listen to his

plaintive plea: "Father Abraham..." He's no longer the chairman and CEO. He's no longer the lucrative landowner who is issuing his terms and making his selfish demands while ignoring and living above the poor and disadvantaged. Now, he's the beggar, and he knows it. Now, he is pleading. Now he is financially and spiritually bankrupt and at heaven's mercy. He is the needy one. One day, those tables will turn as well for multitudes of people. One day, all of those who hurried through life and shoved the Lord off to the side; those who made their own way and thought religion was just for the weak; those who put God on the back burner because they had a life to live, a house to build, an estate to build up, life's pleasures to enjoy, will one day see just how much they needed God. Romans 14:11, "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." Death has a way of putting our view of God into perspective.

King Hezekiah was one of the good kings of Judah. But he had a brush with death. He got sick, and God sent him a message that he needed to get his affairs in order because he was going to die. Hezekiah was upset and wept and prayed to God to spare his life. God did so and gave Hezekiah fifteen more years to live. This good king was moved by God's mercy and graciousness, and he said in Isaiah 38:15, as one more modern translation renders it: "But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul." Well, if sickness and death gave a fresh perspective to a man like Hezekiah on earth, imagine the startling realization this rich man came to when he crossed into hell and beheld the bliss of paradise across the way. Friend, if you and I could spend five minutes on the other side of death, we would never be the same. We would never think of God the same. If you're a Christian, you may love God now, but how you would stand in awe of Him then! And if you're not living right, you may think God is laid back and lets it all pass because, after all, He's a loving God and He knows our heart, and so on and so forth... One glimpse of the throne of God, and we would have a reverential fear of God like we've never known. Do you know what the angels in heaven say around the throne of God? Isaiah tells us! God showed him in a vision recorded in Isaiah, chapter six. They cry "holy, holy, holy..." I'll tell you something else: the modern CHURCH needs the perspective of people in hell. We have become so casual about our worship and the way we approach and serve God that I fear we're in for a rude awakening. No, this man was humbled when we went to hell, and we need that kind of humility, and poverty of spirit, and respect for heaven here on earth.

And then the third thing in hell that we need on earth is urgent concern for the lost. The rich man went through life trying to gain everything except for his soul, and now that ship has sailed. Now, he can't do anything about that, and he knows it. But he at least held on to the hope that something could be done for those he loved still here on earth. Verses 27-28: "Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." He had a family who lived the way he lived. He had loved ones who valued the same things he valued. They were as worldly and short-sighted as he was during his lifetime. They were on the same path to hell that he had been on and maybe, by his influence, had even led them down! Now, he desperately wants someone to turn them around. Abraham tells him in verse 29 that such could not be done. They had the word of God and could listen to it and repent, just like this rich man could have. Isn't it a shame that he is so concerned now when he could have used his time on earth to not only save his own soul but also influence his brethren to be saved as well?

Hell is a place of haunting memories, bitter remorse, and sore regrets. If only we who still have time and opportunity would be as passionate, urgent, and caring to point others to the truth as this man was. Notice, he was concerned about his family! Evangelism would see a great revival if we just got busy converting our children, our brothers and sisters, our cousins, our aunts, and our uncles. Our unsaved mother or father. I meet some people who are always trying to think of some way to take the world by

storm for Christ. Some preachers traverse the globe trying to find souls to save, which is wonderful, as long as we're not passing by the nearest mission field of all, and that's in the walls of our home and the domain of our own family and close friends. When the new disciple Andrew discovered the Christ, what did he do according to John chapter one? He RAN home and excitedly told his brother Simon, "I found the Christ," and he brought him to Jesus. When the Gentile guard Cornelius was given the opportunity to hear Peter preach the message of Christ, what did he first do? Act 10:24 says: "...Cornelius waited for them and had called together his kinsmen and near friends." The rich man in hell would give anything he had ever owned to turn his family away from that awful place. There is a hell full of people today who fell the same way.

I meet people who won't obey the gospel because of what they think that implies about their parents or grandparents, who are already gone. They hear the truth, but because their parents believed something else, they think they would condemn them by doing something different. Well, friend, first, you just have to leave the eternal judgment and destiny of souls to God. Neither you nor I can pronounce the eternal fate of another. I can tell this, and I am certain of it, if they didn't make it and they go to that awful place, they never want to see you again. If they do, it won't be a happy reunion. Their prayer is the same as that rich man! Send someone their way and turn them around, and don't let them come here! That's a depressing and horrifying thought. Why don't we get that concerned about those we love now? The concern for lost souls is pressing and urgent in hell, and it should be on earth as well. These are things in hell that we all need today.

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