

The Agony of Hell, Part 2

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OK. All right. You'[ll] be able to [talk to each other] for all eternity if you get to heaven and don't have anything to do. You could just talk to somebody for a thousand years, get to know him, learn [his] language, memorize everything about him. You won't ever forget anything. You'll be perfect.

We were going to talk about heaven today, but we couldn't finish up with the agony of hell last week. Sorry. You're going to have to wait for heaven until next week. This morning we're going to continue to look at the aspects of hell found in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. So, if you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 16, where we will be looking at verses 19–31.

You might ask yourself this question: “Why spend time talking about hell and judgment, the wrath of God, and those kinds of things? Why not speak of the love, grace, and mercy of God—you know, more positive, loving things?” Have you ever thought to yourself, “That Pastor Jack, he's really into hell. He likes judgment. It seems like [with] every passage he get[s] it in there somewhere. I wish he would preach more on the love of God. The other church I [went] to, they never preached on hell and judgment. They never mentioned those things. I never heard anybody tell me to repent. I wonder why he does that.”

I am so glad you asked. Let me give you seven quick reasons why preaching on hell is a loving thing. I hear this [type of comment] so [often] that I thought, “I better tell everybody why [I preach so often on hell and judgment] and then I can refer them to this sermon.” First, hell is a denied reality. A lot of people are denying that hell exists. Even those who call themselves Christians say, “Hell isn’t really true. Hell is something that came from the Dark Ages and developed into some scary-monster idea about God. God is loving.” They still believe in heaven, but they deny that hell exists. Others believe hell exists, but [think] it’s not really a bad thing because in hell, you die or just sleep—you experience what is called soul sleep. Or, [they think that] maybe you are burn[ed] up and there’s not really a continuing, ongoing torment. You’re burn[ed] up and that’s it. You’re not really conscious in hell.

Doctrines and ideas like that take away the fear of hell, which is one of the great motivating factors [in] bring[ing] people to Christ. There is something we need [to be] saved from and [it is] not inconveniences in this world. We are being saved from the real wrath of God to come. Believe me, if they removed all the laws [and] courts [and] fired all the police officers, do you think our society would get more wonderful? You know what would happen. People would instantly become very active in doing evil. They would begin to express the evil of their hearts. Instantly, wickedness would skyrocket because there would be no fear of being caught, no fear of punishment, no consequences of sin. When you tell somebody, “Hell isn’t a place where people actually suffer. It doesn’t really exist. You sleep through it. You get burn[ed] up,” what you’re really doing is you’re not loving people, you’re lying to people. So that is why telling people the truth about hell is the loving thing to do.

Second, hell is a neglected doctrine. Most churches don’t ever preach on hell or what they consider the negative doctrines associated with it. These churches have pulpits that are manned by false teachers because the Bible says that pastors are to preach the whole counsel of God’s Word [see 2 Timothy 4:2]. To not do that is to tell God you know more than He does

and [it is] to withhold from people what God says they need to know. The loving thing to do is to preach everything in the Bible in proportion to how [often] it appears in the Bible.

Third, I just preach what's in the text. That's what's great about expository preaching through books [of the Bible]—you just preach what's next. [If] hell is next, I preach on it. [If] heaven is next, I preach on that. [If the] love of God [is next], I preach on that. [If the next thing in the text is] worry, I preach on that. So, if you're sitting there going, "Why is he always preaching hell?" then just have a little prayer time with God, and say, "Listen, Lord, You've got it all wrong. You didn't put the right things in the Bible. You put too much hell, too much judgment, too much condemnation. I'm not feeling the love," but don't blame me. I'm just going through the Book. The Bible says that "All Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be equipped for every good work" [see 2 Timothy 3:16–17]. So, what that means is [that] *all* Scripture is profitable, so if I withhold from you anything in the Word of God, I am cheating you, I am stealing from you opportunities to grow in righteousness, and I'm just not going to do that.

Four[th]: Jesus taught on hell more than any other person [did]. There is this erroneous thought that Jesus is only love, that God is only love. Surely, He is [love], and surely everything He did was couched in love, but Jesus spoke of hell and judgment far more often than He spoke of the love of God. Some people have this idea that Jesus just went around saying, "God so loved the world. God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son. God so loved the world." And that's all Jesus said. That's a minor part of what Jesus said. Do this sometime. If this bothers you, and you really want to make sure that I'm telling you the truth here, just read through the Gospels, or just read through one of them. Get a little piece of paper [with] hell, judgment, and wrath on one side and heaven and [the] love of God on the other and mark [down each instance of each concept as you read]. Then you'll be convinced. Surely you can't be doing what is wrong if you

follow Jesus' example. Surely you're doing the loving thing to speak as Jesus spoke.

[Fifth]: God's holy justice and punishment of sinners in hell is a loving doctrine. This just [makes people ask], "How could that be?" Some people think, "No, no, no, it's not loving," and you know what? The exact opposite is true. Some wrongly assume that this whole idea of sinners being cast into hell is bad because it's unloving. In saying that, they're accusing God of being unloving. But the fact is [that] they have it 180 degrees wrong. Would God be loving if He was unjust? No. If He let the wicked go unpunished, would God be just? No. Would He be loving? No. Would God be loving if He let the righteous be persecuted and martyred for the faith and just do nothing? [No.]

Husbands, [imagine] you get a call from the hospital [and] your wife has been brutally attacked [and] robbed. She is in critical condition. You run down to the hospital. You're there talking, and you find out there were ten bystanders and two police officers [who] watched the whole thing take place and did nothing. Were they being loving? No. When you allow evil to continue, when you don't do anything about it, you are not being loving. You are being evil. God, if He did not punish sin, would be evil.

A.W. Pink has written this in his work *The Attributes of God*:

Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it is not a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could he who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom. 9:22) toward it. How could He, who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, not loath and hate that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite, as Heaven is.¹

¹A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 83. Also available at: http://www.eternallifeministries.org/awp_attrib.htm.

He is right. God would not be loving if He turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to people who are rebelling against Him, hurting each other, and doing acts of wickedness. He would not be just. He would not be loving. Therefore, to tell people these things [about hell] is loving.

Six[th]: Warning sinners of danger is the loving thing to do. If I knew you were headed to[ward] some danger, if you were going to be ambushed, if you were being swindled by some realtor or some business scam, and I said nothing, would I be loving you? No. If I knew you were walking into some ambush and I didn't tell you, I would be expressing evil toward you because I would be watching you walk into peril. Well, if somebody is headed for hell and I don't say anything, am I loving [him]? No. I am hating [him] because I don't want to be inconvenienced, I don't want [him] to get mad, I don't want [him] to think whatever. I'm thinking about me. I'm not thinking about [him]. I'm not doing what is best for [him]; I am doing what is best for me. That is selfish. That is sinful. But the loving thing to do is to warn people of real dangers.

Seven: You need to understand that hell and the wrath of God moves us to greater thankfulness and praise for our salvation. You will never be able to praise God, you will never have a spirit of thankfulness that God wants you to have until you understand how scary hell is, that you deserve it, that you have earned the right to be there, and that by God's grace, He saved you from that. He became a man, poured out that judgment, that scary wrath that you deserved, out on His Son in your place as a substitution for you so that you could go free. If you don't understand the depths, the severity of God's judgment, you will never just be so thankful. [With] some people, it doesn't matter what happens to them. You poke them in the eye, [and they say], "Oh! I praise God my other [eye] works." Chop off their hand, [and they say], "Oh! Praise God I still have [another] one." Cut off their arm, it's like, "Praise God for [the] doctors who stopped the bleeding." They have this perspective that no matter what happens, no matter what this life can bring them, they have been saved by the grace of God from a fate of eternal death. If you don't understand what you need [to be] saved from, you will

never praise God for your salvation from hell, [which], in a way, would give God maximum glory.

So, those are some of the reasons I preach on hell. Now let's look at the text. We come again here to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Jesus told this parable in the midst of His disciples and the scoffing Pharisees. We're going to go back a little bit [before we look at the text]. It's so amazing how [Jesus] does this. We've seen it before, like when He makes a Samaritan, [who] the Jews really hated because of what [that nation] had done to the Jews previously, the hero of one of His stories. He does things like that, which kind of just [irk] them. It breaks them out of their little trenches that they've dug [themselves] into.

In this case, what Jesus did [was] tell them the parable of the unjust steward. In the parable, He praises the unjust, evil, wicked steward, not because he did evil or was wicked, but He praises him for his shrewdness. The unjust steward, though he was evil, saw the consequences of his sin, that he was going to be fired and jobless and have a bad reputation, so he rewrote all of his master's bills—an evil thing—and made friends for himself in this life, [thus] providing for his earthly future. That was a good thing. That was a shrewd maneuver—wicked, but shrewd. Jesus' whole point [was], “Can't we, as children of the kingdom, sons and daughters of the kingdom, can't we look past this world, see into the future, and use our resources to win people for heaven [who] will greet us when we get there and be at least as shrewd as the unbelievers are in preparing for their earthly future?”

Then He explains, “Listen, if you're faithful in a little thing, you're going to be faithful in much. If you're not faithful in a little thing, you're not going to be faithful in much” [see Luke 16:10]. He tells the Pharisees, I think specifically: “You can't serve God and wealth” [see Luke 16:13]. This makes them scoff because Luke says they were “lovers of money” [Luke 16:14]. Jesus realizes that they have a problem with what He is saying. They esteem[ed] themselves as holy, righteous, just, [and thought that] their good works and outward religious show was impressing God because

they were wealthy and they believed that if you were wealthy it was obviously because God blessed you because you had wealth because of God's blessing. Therefore, if you were wealthy, you were surely going to heaven. That was their reasoning. But Jesus wanted them to know that they, too, needed a Savior. He brought up adultery. At that time, the Pharisees were swapping wives, divorcing, remarrying, divorcing, remarrying, and Jesus let them know, "If you divorce a woman other than [for] adultery, and you marry another, you commit adultery and you cause her to commit adultery" [see Luke 16:18]. He said that so that they would know that they were in a continual state of guilt before God, they were sinners, they needed a Savior, and they needed to believe in Him as their Messiah or they would perish in hell.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus before us hits [this issue] from a whole different angle. Jesus [took the] rich man and show[ed] that [the rich man] ended up in hell, which would have shocked [the Pharisees]. Look at what the parable says [in] Luke 16:19–31:

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are

in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.” And he said, “Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” But he said, “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!” But he said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

There’s our text. [Last week], I isolated eight realities of hell [from this passage]. I wanted to spend more time on [the first one] because it is one of those things that I think needs to be said. So, last week, we spent a lot of time on the first one: Death and hell are approaching for the wicked. But why spend these times looking at these different [realities] here? Well, [there are] two different reasons. If you don’t know Christ, if you have never come to Christ, and you’re thinking, “I don’t know if I believe in hell,” hopefully you will be convinced, you will be scared, and you will flee from the wrath to come, run to Christ, be forgiven, transformed, and saved. If you already know Christ, why do you need to know this? So it will make you praise God more for what you have been saved from and will motivate you to tell other people about Jesus. That’s why we’re looking at these [realities].

Let me review [what I spoke about] last week. Hardly any [other] country goes to the elaborations to [which America goes when dealing with death]. [A] person dies, [the undertaker] suck[s] out all [of the person’s] juices [and] pump[s] [him] full of pink antifreeze or something (I don’t know what it is)—[he] put[s] Twinkie juice in there so [the dead person] look[s] rosy and never rot[s]. [The person is] there, and [he’s] dressed up

in a tuxedo, and [he's] put into a padded coffin. You'd hate for [him] to scratch [his] elbow. You have a mattress in there because you want it to be soft, and a silk pillow. I don't even have a silk pillow, but if you die, you get a silk pillow. [The undertaker] put[s] [the person] in there with a seal, and latch[es him] in there in a very beautiful coffin. [Americans] have kind of glorified death and tried not to make it deathly sounding. Then, even if the person doesn't know God, hasn't lived for God, hasn't attempted to glorify God all [his] life, we talk about [him] being in a better place and being at peace now, and on and on it goes.

Last week I talked about [the fact] that, first of all, we know we're going to die. I've never met anybody yet who said, "I'm never going to die." You may not want to talk about it, you might want to change the subject, but you are going to die. I think everybody knows that. [Second]: I [also] think everybody knows that they don't know when they're going to die. You may know, if you have some terminal illness or something, [an approximate] time you might die, but really, no one knows. Death always comes upon us suddenly and then we die.

Third, we all know, because the Scriptures tell us, that our days are numbered. That is, we aren't going to go on, but God has determined the days for us. Four[th]: You know there is a God because He has put a knowledge of Himself in every person. You may be an atheist and say, "I don't believe in God. There is no God. You can't convince me there is a God." I don't need to because God tells me in His Word that you know He exists. And you know what? I believe God. He tells me in His Word that He has put a knowledge of Himself in your heart, He has put His Law in your heart, He has given you a conscience to accuse or defend you, and has shown you through creation and what has been made that He exists [see Romans 1:20]. So, I know you know there is a God. Because you know there is a God, you know that you are without excuse for not seeking that God. [Fifth]: We talked about how every moment you exist without repenting and believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are gambling with your eternal soul. These are serious issues.

Then we talked a little bit about the afterlife. I thought it would be good to spend a few moments and survey what happens in these places [in the afterlife]. Where do the wicked, wicked demons and men go in the afterlife? We looked up a whole bunch of places: Sheol, Abaddon, the pit, the bottomless pit, Hades, Gehenna, Tartarus, hell, and the lake of fire, which is the second death. We looked at all those places. This morning, we're going to finish up these other realities of hell's torment mentioned in our text.

The first for this morning—the second in our list—is: Hell is a place of conscious torment. Look at [Luke 16:]23, where we read this: “In Hades he lifted up his eyes,” this is the rich man, “being in torment.” Stop there. The parable goes on to narrate how the rich man is in agony in flames [and] he wants the pain subdued with some water. He is conscious. He has a dialogue with Abraham. At once we see that many false concepts about hell are overthrown even by a partial portion of this one verse. There is this teaching of what is called universalism. That is the teaching that everybody is going to get saved [and] no one goes to hell. Hell is going to be an empty place. It will be very hot down there, but no one will be there. Maybe the devil and his demons [will be there], but no people will be there. God, because He is so merciful, and He has such a wideness in His mercy, will surely save all people. That is called universalism. But, of course, here we see the rich man is in hell. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13–14: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it” the way to destruction. Then He said: “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Not everyone is going to heaven. In fact, Jesus describes them as the “few.”

Our text also shows that annihilationism is false. Annihilationism is the false belief that when you die you're just annihilated, burn[ed] up, go out of existence. You're like a little moth [when] you throw it in the barbecue and pfft. That's it. [It's] gone. The moth isn't suffering. It's just instantaneous. How much pain does a bug feel when it hits your windshield [when you're] going 70 mph? It's pretty inconsequential, isn't it? Ah! and that's it, you

know? It's a splatter after that and it's not hurting anymore. It's squished and it's gone. [People who believe in annihilationism] say that's how hell is. Yes, there is a judgment by fire, but when you get cast into it, pfft, [you're] gone. That's kind of handy if you want to live in rebellion against God all your life and not have to [really] suffer any judgment, isn't it? Just like saying [that] everyone will be saved—no one suffers judgment—annihilationism says you get instantly burn[ed] up and [therefore] no one [really] suffers judgment. These doctrines are doctrines of demons designed to remove the reality and danger of hell.

British theologian Michael Green says [that] Scripture “does not teach the conscious unending torment of those who are eternally separated from God.” You're kidding me. John Stott, who has written some great works (I loved his commentary on 1 Timothy, and *The Preacher's Portrait* and *Between Two Worlds* are great books), said this: “I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment.” John Wenham, who is an Anglican preacher and writer, said:

I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a terrible blot on her presentation of the gospel. I should indeed be happy if, before I die, I could help in sweeping it away.”²

This is a guy who taught at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Think about that—a “hideous doctrine”?

Revelation 14:11, God speaking, [says]: “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night.” This is one of many other texts, like the parable before us, [in which] the wicked are described as suffering torment. Annihilationism is not true. Hell is a place

²This quote and those in the preceding paragraph are taken from *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 156 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary), n.p.

where “the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched” [see Isaiah 66:24]. Others, like Seventh-Day Adventists teach what is called soul sleep. Now, it is true when you look at the Scriptures you find out that sometimes the Bible uses [the word] “sleep” as a metaphor [for] those who have died. You see that in 1 Corinthians 11, the text we often talk about when we’re talking about communion that [says] some were partaking in the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner, so Paul says, “For this reason, some sleep” [see 1 Corinthians 11:30]. That is, they have died. But [the Seventh-Day Adventists] take it to go beyond just dying to actually sleeping as a spirit when you get to the other side. Therefore, when you die, you have no idea what’s going on and you don’t wake up until the Resurrection. This, too, is false. We read in Revelation 6:9–10, concerning the souls of those who have been martyred for their faith during the Tribulation, these words:

I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

[They are] hardly asleep. The rich man in our parable isn’t talking in his sleep to Abraham who is talking in his sleep. They are awake and they are conscious. As we read in Revelation 14:11, “they have no rest day and night,” forever and ever. There’s no resting. You’re awake all the time in hell. [There is] no sleeping it through.

Others have argued that this language of people suffering in hell is really metaphorical and people couldn’t really suffer in hell because they don’t have bodies. How do you poke a spirit? [They say that] you can’t suffer in hell because flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God [see 1 Corinthians 15:50]. People often assume that because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God that means that spirits have no form or

substance at all in hell. Think about angels. Angels don't have flesh and blood. Do they have form? Yes. Do they have substance? Yes. Can you touch them? Yes. But they have a spiritual substance. You say, "Well, what kind is that?" I don't know, but they have it.

Notice, in our text in [Luke 16:]23, that the rich man is said to have "lifted up his eyes." Notice at the end of [Luke 16:]24, that he asks [for] water to be fetched for his *tongue*. That Lazarus is in Abraham's *bosom*. Jesus described hell as a place of "weeping and gnashing of *teeth*" [Matthew 8:12, emphasis added]. [In the afterlife], you have bodies, you have substance, you have a form. It's not the same one that you'll have at your resurrection, which is everything the angels have and something else better, but you [will] have a form. The wicked in hell do have a form.

[Luke 16:]23 [says] that, being conscious and having a form, the rich man is being "tormented," which is kind of an interesting word. It has a long history. It started out [as] a word used to [describe] a touchstone. If you think, "What's that?" If you've ever read any Puritan works, you've come across that word, and you think, "Touchstone? Hmm. Is that like touchdown?" Then you have to look it up. You find out it's a little granite slab, a flat rock, that every merchant had in [his] shop. [He] would keep it there and if you came and you wanted to pay in gold because gold was valuable then, just as it is today, you wouldn't want to get a steel slug with a gold veneer on it. So, what you would do is you would take the gold coin, set it on the touchstone, get out a little hammer, and whack the gold coin on the end, which would dent it. Seeing [that] gold was soft, you could see the dent and then you would know it was genuine. After [the word] was used of that touchstone, [it came to] describe things put under trial. Just as the gold was put under trial to see its genuineness, so [the word] became a synonym for being put under trial. By the time Jesus came around, it was used to describe the extracting of information from prisoners by torture. You put them under trial to get the truth out of them, just like you would the gold coin. This is the word that is used here. This [rich] man is under torment, he is under the trial of hell.

So, don't be deceived. If you die without believing in Jesus Christ, you won't be eternally burn[ed] up, you won't be sleeping it off, you will be consciously suffering. Pop singer Billy Joel sang:

They say there's a heaven for those who will wait, Some say it's better but I say it ain't, I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints, the sinners are much more fun...you know that only the good die young.³

If you're older, you know that song and you could probably sing it [from memory]. But you don't see the rich man laughing. You don't see him in hell partying with his buddies. He's not the good person; he's the bad guy. There is only eternal torment if we die without repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus. There is no other, intermediate option.

Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon "The Future Punishment of the Wicked, Unavoidable and Intolerable" wrote:

Nor will they ever be able to find any thing to relieve them in hell. They will never find any resting place there; any place of respite; any secret corner, which will be cooler than the rest, where they may have a little respite, a small abatement of the extremity of their torment.

They never will be able to find any cooling stream or fountain, in any part of that world of torment; no, nor so much as a drop of water to cool their tongues. They will find no company to give them any comfort, or to do them the least good. They will find no place, where they can remain, and rest, and take breath for one minute: For they will be tormented with fire and brimstone; and will have no rest day nor night for ever and ever.⁴

³Billy Joel, "Only the Good Die Young." Lyrics available at:

<http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/Only-The-Good-Die-Young>

⁴Jonathan Edwards, "The Future Punishment of the Wicked, Unavoidable and Intolerable." Available at: <http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/Punishment.html>.

Hell is a scary place, and you are consciously tormented [there].

[Third]: You are tormented in hell by your ignorance of the truth. Notice, the rich man [in our text in Luke 16] is ignorant about certain truths. What happens is [that] in this life, God tries to reveal Himself to us. The Scriptures say He reveals Himself to us. As Paul says in Romans, men “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” [see Romans 1:18]. They put it down. They don’t want to believe it, you know? As John says, the wicked do not come to the light, lest their deeds should be exposed because they love darkness rather than light [see John 3:19–20]. People who don’t believe in Christ keep shunning God and rejecting the truth. You would think that when they died maybe they would kind of pop out of it, and [think], “Oh!” I think that happens to a degree when they finally believe in God when they’re in hell. They believe in hell when they’re in hell. But, a lot of times, they remain ignorant.

You can see that as you look through some of the things that happen here [in our text]. The rich man doesn’t understand that it is too late to change his eternal fate. He’s still trying to change it, isn’t he? He still wants comfort: bring the water, send Lazarus. He’s still trying to make his existence in hell comfortable. He doesn’t want to go to heaven; he doesn’t want to be with Abraham and Lazarus because he never wanted to be with God in this life either. He just wants the same comfort in his rebellion against God as he does then. He is still blinded that that [desire] is warped. He is blind to the fact that his influence on earth is over. He can’t evangelize anymore. He can’t do good anymore. He can’t warn his brothers anymore, and he can’t send any messengers to warn his brothers anymore, though he asks for it. He doesn’t realize it’s over. He is blind to the fact that his present circumstance is fixed and unalterable. Surely, this will be a torment for those who are in hell, when they realize, “I can’t change. This is going to be the same, and the same, and the same, and the same, and it will never ever change.”

He is ignorant that he is locked into hell where no one leaves and no one enters. He saw [Lazarus] far away in [Abraham’s] bosom and surely this is

a torment. I don't know if it's still that way, if God has made a porthole from hell to heaven so that people can look up and see where [they can't go], but that's how it is here [in our text], isn't it? Imagine dying of thirst and being dropped off in the desert. You're crawling and crawling, your lips are swollen, your skin is blistered, your throat is parched, and all you can think about is water, water. You're just about ready to give up. You come over a small rise, and there is this huge fence that's like the [Great] Wall of China going on as far as you can see in both directions. Right on the other side of that fence is this cool, crystal clear, babbling brook. There it is, and as you're up against the fence, you try and dig under it, but you can't do that. You can't get through it either because it's too strong. [The water] is *right there*, but you can never have what you long for with all your heart. That's what's happening here. It's not that the rich man desires to be in heaven, he just desires the pleasures of heaven without God.

[Fourth]: You feel betrayed in hell. Notice in [Luke 16:]24, the rich man cries out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me." Think about it. The rich man is Jewish. He is one [of] the descendants of Abraham. He is of the chosen nation of Israel. Maybe [he knew] what tribe he [came] from. All these things are true because the Jews are privileg[ed]. The Jews receive[d] the Word of God. They receive[d] the oracles of God. It was from them that the prophecies came that Christ would be born of the tribe of Judah, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem and all those other Scriptures [that] He fulfilled. They had the Scriptures [that] said, "This is the Messiah," that all pointed to Christ.

As the Apostle Paul says, "salvation is from the Jews" [John 4:22]. Salvation is to the Jews first and then to the Greeks [see Romans 1:16]. All those things are true, but listen, being chosen and being privileged to have first choice and responsibility and the blessings of having the Scriptures does not automatically make you saved, as we see here in this text. The rich man is in hell. Why? [He is in hell] because every Jewish person must repent of [his] sins and believe in the Messiah. The whole nation is chosen and privileged, [but] everybody is not chosen to salvation. It's just the same

for us. Just because you're a Gentile doesn't mean you're saved either. Every individual must come to grips with [his] sin, who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and believe in that, and trust in that alone for salvation. The common thought of Jesus' day was that pretty much all Jews went to heaven except for traitorous tax-gatherer Jews, but pretty much all of them went to heaven and all the Gentiles went to hell. But here we see the rich man, a Jew, whose father is Abraham, in hell because he has died without placing his faith in God.

[The rich man] is probably thinking all these things as he is calling Father Abraham. [The rich man] realizes, "Listen, [I'm] a Jew. I've been religious. I've gone to synagogue. I've given. I've tried to do what's right. I've worn my yarmulke. I've gone to the Wailing Wall or whatever. I've done my thing. Surely I should get in." But notice, Abraham does not have mercy on him. Abraham will not send Lazarus to cool off his tongue. He will not send Lazarus on any errands. I'm sure a lot of Christians are going to feel [this same way]. Jesus describes the same thing in Matthew 7:19 and following: "Lord, Lord, have we not?" [Some Christians might say], "Listen, [I've] done all these things. I've gone to church. I've served in AWANA. I have my Bible. I gave up a lot of good Sundays. I didn't watch football a couple times. I've done so many things. I've sacrificed for You. Surely You're going to let me in. I've never murdered anybody. I never robbed a bank. I didn't beat my wife. I provided for my family. I mean, I've been pretty good." No. No. But that sense of betrayal, those twisted thoughts of self-righteousness and refusal to believe in God's provision for your salvation, will torment you all the more in hell and you'll remain in that ignorant state of thinking you're betrayed.

[Fifth]: You are in agonizing flames. Amazingly, some deny that there will be any flames in hell. It is just amazing when you study this [passage] and [then] you read things [people say to deny what's written in the Scriptures]. It's like, "Oh, you've got to be kidding me."

They say, "We all know that flames are of this world and there [are] no flames in the afterworld. That is the spiritual realm, so there [aren't] any

flames. The flame must be metaphorical of unfulfilled desire and regret, and maybe some anger and remorse. Surely, those kinds of feelings will be the flames of hell.”

Surely, those things will be part of it, as we’ve just mentioned [that] regret and things like that *will* be part of hell’s torments. But the question is: Will there be any flames? They may not be the same kind of flame that we have in this world. I’m sure they’re not. But you are insulting God when you tell God, “Listen, God, it is impossible for you to make any sort of spiritual flames that could burn a soul in hell.” Are you going to tell God He can’t do that? Isaiah 66:24 describes hell as a place where the fire is not quenched. [In] Matthew 3:12, John the Baptist says that Christ “will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” In Matthew 5:22, Jesus says: “Whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.” In Matthew 13:40, Jesus said: “The tares are gathered up and burned with fire.” In Matthew 13:50, it says [the angels] “will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And in Matthew 18:8–9, Jesus said:

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

In Matthew 25:41, Jesus says to the wicked: “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.” Jude in Jude 7 says that false teachers will undergo “the punishment of eternal fire.” In Revelation 19:20, the beast and false prophets “were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.” In Revelation 20:14[-15], John says that “death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was

not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” In our text, it is clear [that the flames exist, since the rich man] says, “I am in agony in this flame” [Luke 16:24].

To say that there [are] no flames in hell is really just to say, “I don’t believe the Bible.” It’s obvious [that] there will be flames. They may be spiritual flames, they may be the same kind of flames we have in this world and God makes them work in the world to come. He can do anything He wants and it will torment the wicked forever.

[Sixth]: Our memories will add to the torments of hell. Look at [Luke 16:]25: “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember.’” Stop there. This is one of the very subtle things [in this passage]: remember. In this life, your memories start fading. The older you get, the worse it gets. You can’t remember anything anymore. If it’s not in Outlook, you have no idea [what you’re supposed to be doing]. I mean, if Outlook ever went down, my brain would just be gone, you know? I wouldn’t show up. I’m sorry, but that’s the way it is. You forget, you know? Sins unknown in this life, sins forgotten in this life, sins hidden from men in this life will come back with perfect clarity and you will remember them all. You will remember the good things you enjoyed at the hand of God—the health, the family, the country, the food, the job He gave you. All of those things will come back and you’ll realize that you lived your whole life feeding off the very grace of God which you despised by not receiving His Son. You will remember it all, but it will not comfort you.

William Gurnall in his *Christian in Complete Armor* has written:

But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus; God’s mill goes slow, but grinds small; the more admirable His patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and unsupportable will that fury be which arises out of His abused goodness. Nothing smoother than the sea, yet when stirred into a tempest, nothing

rages more. Nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire.⁵

In this life, do you know what we get? The calm sea [with] a little ripple every once in a while. Tsunami, earthquake, tornado, hurricane, a little flood—those are the little ripples in the ocean of God’s goodness, but there will come a time when that will be turned into a tempest for people who reject Christ, who will experience that for all eternity. Their memories will torment them in hell as God’s decree is, “Child, remember.” Remember.

Henry Ironside notes:

What a terrible thing memory will be for the unsaved: to remember throughout all eternity every sin committed and unrepented of, and therefore unforgiven; to remember every opportunity to get right with God which had been carelessly passed by: to remember every gospel message one has ever heard and yet refused to believe. Memory will be the worm that dieth not, tormenting the soul forever.”⁶

Thomas Brooks in his *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices* describes what memories of the truth rejected will produce, saying: “Your light and knowledge will more torment you than all the devils in hell. Your knowledge will be that rod that will eternally lash you, and that scorpion that will forever bite you, and that worm that will everlastingly gnaw you.”⁷ The more you know in this life, the more you reject in this life, the more you will remember and be tormented by that knowledge [in the next life].

[Seventh]: The wicked are not sanctified in hell. You might think that because in this life Christians are sanctified—that is, they grow more godly

⁵Pink, *Attributes of God*, 68.

⁶H.A. Ironside, *Luke: An Ironside Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), 514–515. Also available at: <http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/5425>.

⁷Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*, “A Word to the Reader.” Available at: http://www.gracegems.org/Brooks/precious_remedies_against_satan2.htm.

through trials—that people in all that trial [in hell] would eventually get more godly. I don't know about you, but when some trial comes upon me, my first thought is, "Lord, make it go away!" Do you ever think that way? "Make it go away and sooner [is] better than later." But a lot of times, He leaves it there, and you're [wondering], "Why? Why?" You're trying to be godly about it, but it hurts and so you want it to go away. You want it out of your life. But then, after you get through the trial, what happens? You look back and what do you see? "You know what? I didn't like that, but that was good for me. That helped me. That was a blessing to me. That trial [that] I suffered through, God has used that to help me and to help other people." But the wicked will never experience that. Their suffering will not make them more godly.

Notice the rich man here [in our text]. He's not content like believers in heaven. When we get to heaven, we're going to be totally content [and] fine. God says, "OK, you're going to be a sweeper."

"Great."

"You're going to sweep the closet."

"Great."

"Don't come out of there for a million years."

"Fine."

"You know [that] person that you kind of despised in life? I'm going to put him up on the throne with Me."

"Great. Praise God!" You're going to have total contentment. Not the rich man, [however]. Abraham says in [Luke 16:]25: "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things." What this emphasizes is that in his life, he received the good things—the things [he had] chosen. [Abraham is saying], "You chose not to live for God, you chose not to put your faith in God. Religious, but unbelieving, that's what you chose. You indulged in this world that you lived in, and sucked up as many pleasures as you could, not giving thanks to God. That's what you chose." The rich man chose to live a religious but godless life. That's what he chose and he got it. God gave it to him.

Notice that he has not repented. This experience in hell hasn't made him [say], "I am so sorry, Lord. I'm so sorry I've sinned against You." Notice there is no mention of repentance here at all. Agony? Yes. Trauma? Yes. Regret? Yes. But not regret that he sinned against God, but regret that he is suffering. He says, "I am in agony in this flame," and he actually wants Lazarus to come and minister to him. "Send Lazarus to me to come minister to me. Now, when he was sitting outside my gate, lame, naked, sore, diseased, the dogs licking his wounds, I turned a blind eye toward him."

You can just see his pride and arrogance here. He won't even speak to Lazarus. He knew who Lazarus was. Notice, when he dies, he recognizes Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. He [knew] who [Lazarus] was in this life, but he wouldn't help him. Now, he won't even speak to Lazarus directly because he sees himself as rich and important, a person to be respected. He goes directly to Abraham, commands Abraham to command Lazarus to serve him and give him the very mercy he refused to give Lazarus in this life. You see that his pride and arrogance has not been abated by his trauma in hell. It is increasing.

He [thinks he] knows better than Abraham. [He says], "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my brothers and warn them not to come to this place" [see Luke 16:27–28].

"Sorry. It's not happening. They have Moses and the Prophets" [see Luke 16:29].

"No! Listen, Father Abraham, I know better than you do. You're only the father of the nation. I am the rich man. I know what I'm talking about. You're wrong. Listen, if someone rises from the dead, then they will repent" [see Luke 16:30].

"No," Abraham says [see Luke 16:31]. [The rich man is argumentative], proud, stubborn, obstinate, and his wickedness increases. In hell, the wicked, now unrestrained by law, unrestrained by any consequences—since the consequences are always being experienced—[lacking] motivation to do good, generate into the epitome of evil.

Eight[h] and finally: Hell is a fixed state of torment. Look at [Luke 16:]26: “And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.” [The] great chasm mentioned here is this yawning gulf, [which] is really what it [translates to] in the Greek, this huge, grand canyon that no one is going to cross. It is fixed. “You can’t come to us; we can’t go to you. It’s just a huge crack in the spiritual sphere of reality, where you exist that divides you from us and there is no crossing over.”

There is another false doctrine [that] is called second probation. You [might] think, “What’s that?” [It] is [a] doctrine [that] says that somehow after you die, [having] reject[ed] Christ and end[ed] up in hell, you can get out of there. You see it, for instance, in Mormonism, where if someone dies, [someone else] get baptized for the dead, and then you can fetch [the dead person] out of [hell and into heaven]. You see it in kind of a morphed view in the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, [which is the belief] that when you die, you go to hell, suffer torments there, [and] pay the penalty of your sin. You basically do penance, you suffer to atone for the consequences of your own sin, and eventually you get out of there. But notice what the text says: “There is a great chasm fixed and no one crosses over.” No one crosses over.

You will not be able to get out if you end up in hell. Just see yourself in hell and imagine the worst pain you’ve ever suffered, [then multiply it] a hundred times over, never abating—ever. Weeping, gnashing of teeth, bitterness, rage. Don’t deceive yourself. It is that place where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched [see Isaiah 66:24].

Thomas Watson, describing the thick state of hell, did so with these words:

If all the body of the earth and sea were turned into sand, and all the air up to the starry heaven were nothing but sand, and a little bird should come every thousand years, and fetch away

in her bill but the tenth part of a grain of all that heap of sand, what numberless years would be spent before that vast heap of sand would be fetched away!

Yet, if at the end of all that time, the sinner might come out of hell, there would be some hope; but that word “Ever” breaks the heart. “The smoke of their torment ascends for ever and ever.” What a terror is this to the wicked, enough to put them into a cold sweat, to think as long as God is eternal, He lives for ever to be avenged upon them!⁸

Forever is forever. If you’re here and you don’t know Christ, don’t game with your soul anymore. We’re talking some serious consequences that are fixed once you die. You can’t change things once you die. If you don’t get right with Christ in this life now, if you don’t place your faith in Christ and Christ alone in this life now, you will perish forever. There will be no adjustment, no fixing, no going back, no repenting. But if you turn to Christ in faith now, He will save you, forgive you, [and] take all your sins from you. He will give to you His righteousness. He will cause you to be born again. He will adopt you as His child. He will give you the free gift of eternal life.

J.I. Packer, in his book *Knowing God* rightly said:

Nobody stands under the wrath of God save those who have chosen to do so. The essence of God’s action in wrath is to give men what they choose, in all its implications: nothing more, and equally nothing less. God’s readiness to respect human choice to this extent may appear disconcerting and even terrifying, but it is plain that His attitude here is supremely just and poles apart from the wanton and irresponsible infliction of pain which is what we mean by cruelty.⁹

⁸Thomas Watson, *Sermons Upon the Assembly’s Catechism*, “Body of Divinity,” chapter 5, “The Eternity of God.” Available at: http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/watson/wsc_wa_004_c.html.

⁹J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 68.

God sets before you this morning life and death. What are you going to choose? You're going to walk out of here and you're going to have either rejected Christ again, or you're going to receive Him as your Savior. You're going to confess your sins, you're going to repent of your sins, and say, "Save me, Lord."

I know there may be some people here thinking to [themselves], "Jack, listen, I know all the facts. I understand I'm a sinner. I understand there's a heaven [and] a hell. If I don't believe in Jesus I'm going to end up [in hell]. There's just something in me that [makes it so that] I just can't bring myself to repent. I mean, I could call myself a Christian," and maybe you are calling yourself a Christian, but you know in your heart you're still not saved and you don't know what to do about it. You can't do it. That's a good place to get to. You can't do it. You need to be like that father who comes to Jesus [on behalf of his] sick son, and he says, "If you can, say the word so my son will be healed" [see Mark 9:22].

And Jesus says, "If? If? That doesn't sound like faith to Me" [see Mark 9:23]. The guy realizes what he's done. He has come to Jesus to have his son healed, but he doesn't really believe Jesus can do it. But if He can, great. A lot of people are like that, I think. They're in the church and they're thinking, "I want to give my life to Christ. I understand the facts, but I don't know how to change myself. I can't do it." You need to say what that man said to Jesus right after He confronted him. He said, "Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief" [see Mark 9:24]. Just go to God in prayer, and say, "Lord, help my unbelief. I understand facts, but I haven't been able to bring it to my heart. Do that for me." He will hear you. Let's pray.

Father, we just want to thank You for Your mercy to us who are saved, who know You as our Savior. As we see in this passage, You have rescued us from a very terrible fate. We think of those people now who have been in hell for hundreds, even thousands of years, because they refused to believe in You. Father, we know that Your grace is sufficient for any sinner who humbly cries out [see 2 Corinthians 12:9]. Lord, I pray for those who are here, who maybe are a little bit frustrated, maybe unsure about their

salvation, maybe wanting to come to salvation but knowing in their heart[s that] they just kind of feel like they're faking it. Give them assurance. Grant them repentance. Draw them to Yourself by Your grace. Help them to break clean with the love of this world and self and to embrace Christ and Christ alone for salvation. In doing that, give them great joy, change their [lives], and help their unbelief. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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