

19 “Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. 20 “And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 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. 22 “Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 “And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 “And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.’ 25 “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. 26 ‘And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’ 27 “And he said, ‘Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father’s house— 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ 29 “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 “But he said, ‘No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

One of my inner fears is that since you kind folks have asked me to be your lay pastor, which is a great blessing and honor, I have this fear that someone may ask me to say words at a funeral.

That's part of the usual package, right? The pastor is supposed to be someone who can elevate joy at a wedding, and also in his bag of tricks, he is someone who can relieve and comfort the pains of loss when someone dies.

Kirk and I were driving over to the little men's retreat hosted by Larisa and her family and one of the things we looked at, carefully, is that I don't have one of

those personalities that makes people feel good. No one feels better when they file out of church after I speak, than they did when they came into the building.

That may have something to do with the diminishing numbers we're seeing in our congregation. I don't make you feel good. I make you feel bad. Who's going to keep coming back for more of that? Well, look around you.

Each year we have perhaps half a dozen people who come a few times to see what we're about, and some come a few times, some only once, but most eventually vanish never to be seen again. I just want you to know I'm painfully aware of that phenomenon. I'm not blind.

The problem, as I see it though, is I'm in pretty good company. What Jesus has been saying through most of the chapters of Luke's story, isn't making people feel good. It's making most of the people feel bad. And some of the people are feeling so bad about what Jesus is clearly saying that they're going to eliminate Him within just a few weeks of when He will teach what we've read this morning.

This story, this parable, isn't designed to make anyone feel good. Can you imagine if someone holds me at virtual gunpoint and insists that I say a few words at their loved ones funeral, and I get up and read these words of Jesus.

I can think of one positive response; if they don't kill me, I'll never get asked twice. Don't get that guy! We all felt bad when we got there, and he made us all feel worse! What a downer.

The doctrine of hell is a problem. Obviously it's a problem if you end up there for eternity. But that's not the problem immediately at hand. Hell causes a perception problem for our God. Our religion. Our brand, if you will.

What kind of a God do you people worship, who sends people to eternal flames??! I mean, if you're going to invent a God, which is what most of the world has done, why invent one with obvious PR problems?

A wrathful horrible God who sends people to eternal destruction where they are never destroyed. The worm never dies. The agony just goes on and on forever and ever. The weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth is eternal and there's no hope of any remedy. Who does that?

Well, in fact, this PR problem is not a modern conundrum. At the Second Council of Lyon in 1274, the Catholic Church defined, for the first time, its teaching on purgatory. A second chance. A purging place. A place where you can work off your short fall when you were on earth. And you can get help from earth if your folks who remain give money to the church.

See, God's not quite so awful as Jesus painted Him. Except . . . that's not in the Bible. You won't find it in the canon of scripture. You will however find Hebrews 9:27 which says; *It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this is judgement.*

So what do we do with the PR problem of hell? Because Big Eva christianity is catering to a market economy. We're adjusting christianity to fit the market segments as they exist, and not vice versa. Multi trillion dollar christianity needs to be as user friendly as possible to attract the current market segments available. Nobody likes the hell thing. Gotta create a marketable christianity.

Lots of possibilities. I'm already in trouble for speaking about how narrow minded God apparently is about human sexuality. That's a PR problem for God. Nobody wants to hear about that. Even in church. But then there's this hell thing, and that's just almost insurmountable.

You find out that the world stands in judgement on God. The world is holding court and God is on trial. We like the idea of heaven. That sells really well on Hallmark. But this narrowmindedness about sex is troubling. And then add hell to that, and this God's gotta go.

Like I said, not a new problem. The catholics came up with purgatory and then sort of made that work for them. Your money now can help old uncle

Harvey who we're pretty sure is looking at quite a lot of purgatory unless someone up here pays up.

It eased the hell problem and added to the coffers. But it isn't scriptural so what can Big Eva do about this hell business that the world says only an unrighteous God would ever come up with. Who wants a mean God. Who needs a God who's more evil than we are making a hell and burning people in fire forever and ever. If that's your God, you can keep Him.

Hell is really unpopular. Such a negative. We thought you said God is love. What kind of love is that?? Can't have sex when and how you want, and add in hell in that bargain. No thanks.

Al Gore came up with that excellent title for his book. An inconvenient truth. Well, this no sex except with the person you're married to that is of the opposite binary gender is inconvenient to say the least, and then this hell stuff is completely untenable. Who wants a God like that.

These mega church's in the big city's with thousands of seats have got a big nut to crack every month. Need to keep those seats filled, and need the offering plates to fill up so we can pay salary's and rent and power and more rent for parking lots and sewage and on and on. It's a big commitment. It's like a big machine that has to be constantly fed.

What do you do? Well, you don't preach about hell. Ever. Pew research has some numbers. 90+ percent of evangelicals believe there is a heaven. Most of them found out about it at christmastime on the hallmark channel, but they believe in heaven.

41% of evangelicals do not believe in a literal hell. 4 out of 10. I haven't asked for a show of hands this morning. If it's 4 out of 10, I might not want to know.

Jesus talked about hell; *a lot*. Most of what we know about hell, if you're going to compare everything that this book says about it and create a doctrine,

most of what has been said in this book about hell, Jesus said.

This passage of scripture this morning is about hell. But even at that, it's really not so much about hell as it's about the surprise and shock of someone who woke up in that place who never expected to be there.

Jesus talks very matter-of-factly about hell. He doesn't say much about it on the build up, He just refers to it as an established truth that He doesn't need to spend any time proving or explaining. It just is.

But the story is about the surprise of a man who goes there. And the further surprise about a man who didn't! First though, I want to talk briefly about why there must be a hell.

We bury our dead. Why? Why don't we just put them in a chair in the corner and go on about our business? Think about that. Well, if we didn't bury them what happens? Pretty ugly stuff. Decomposition begins pretty fast, and along with that comes odor. Decay.

The cops call those guys that have been shut up in a room for a while before they got found . . . what? A stinker. Maybe they have more colorful words now, but when my friend was a cop and would tell stories he said they called those guys . . . stinkers.

We can't have dead people around us. With decay as loathesome as that is, comes disease. It's gross to even talk about.

Think about the laws in the old testament. They had well defined laws that define how to deal with death. But one thing stands out that we've not included in modern times. If you touch a dead body, you are unclean. You have to go through some cleansing ceremonies and wait a certain amount of time before you can be "clean".

I will submit to you that that doctrine is a picture of how God feels about sin. It's like death. Unclean. Vile. Stench. Decay. Disease. Dangerous to be

around. We bury our dead and let all that stuff happen 6 feet under ground, away from our presence.

Why would we expect God to not do the same thing with the spiritually dead? Remove them from His presence. Holiness demands cleanness, if you will. God doesn't want the smelly dead around His place any more than we do. His holiness demands perfect purity. That's why we can only be with God if we are clothed in a perfect righteousness, not our own. Jesus righteousness imputed to us.

Why hell though. Why couldn't He just annihilate the wicked totally. Uncreate them. David Platt has a good illustration. What happens if you slap a cab driver in the face. You get thrown out of the cab. What about if you slap some big Harley guy on the street. You get beat up. What about if you slap a policeman. You go to jail. What about if you slap the president. You might get death.

See how the punishment spirals upwards in relation to the importance of the person you offend? Our sinfulness has offended the Most High God, owner of heaven and earth. What would the punishment relative to that offense be?

Therefore, if God is who He says He is, we believe hell is a real place waiting to receive those who have rebelled against the Most High God. The world asks who wants a God like that, but really, you don't want a God who isn't like that.

A God who isn't higher than all else. A God who doesn't demand justice. A God who is not just, or righteous altogether, or Holy. That's the God men devise that isn't worth knowing. The level of punishment is a direct reflection of the level of glory offended. Most high God, most awful hell.

So with that introduction, let's look at this story that Jesus is going to tell. We talked about slapping the president. What if you are part of a group of people who is mocking the Most High God. The blasphemy of not only mocking God, but also causing others who are weak and unstable to join you in your

rebellion against the Creator of the universes.

That's the setting for this story that Jesus relates about hell. He has outlined a catalog of traits that false teachers who lead people into rebellion against God have. We looked at those last week. They are definitive of this group of men who are mocking Jesus. Here is a list of things that Jesus says define false religion and its teachers;

- They love money. They hate God. Lovers of money are haters of God.
- They use shaming to silence their opponents. They mock.
- They are self righteous. Oh SO righteous are they all. Putridly so.
- They get violent about their claim to speak the new truth.
- They mess around with the book. They find ways to undermine and cancel out the book. They lie.
- They are sexually immoral. They can't keep their pants on.

That list of defining traits about the pharisees who mock Him precedes the story Jesus is going to tell these men who mock.

We have in us an impatience for slow justice. We like it when the evil guy who is terrorizing a group of people gets shot through the head by a sniper. Good. He got what he deserved. Problem solved by justice.

But God is slow to anger. His mercy is waiting. Withholding justice due. His justice doesn't give us what we deserved on the day we deserved it. God waits, and He pleads with us to understand our offense against His holiness and beg for forgiveness.

These mockers of God are worthy of the fiercest wrath and hell, forever. And yet Jesus patiently and mercifully gives them a picture of their future. There's still time to believe. Still time to understand their sinful rebellion. Still time to repent and beg God to forgive. Still time, until death finds you and takes you to the next world.

19 *“Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day.*

I'm always looking for modern equivalent's. This is a rock star. The money and adulation pour in. You've made it to the top and you're living your life, in the immortal words of Frank Sinatra, *I did it my way*. The best of the best.

This guy is filthy rich. Purple dye came from a certain crawfish. You'll remember Lydia, in the book of Acts, was a seller of purple. It was a laborious process with rare materials. Purple die was like gold. This man had a closet full of the best and the rarest, and he lived in elegance. Splendor.

This is the catch line for the pharisee's. They loved money. This is who they want to be. This is the rock star at the top. Jesus has locked them into His story with this opening line. We may not have any of this, but hope is free. We wish this was us. So much money you can have the best of everything and do exactly what pleases you every single day.

We have TV shows that capture audiences that are about this very thing. Star makers who are creating Rock Stars. We know it's not coming to our house, but we can dream for an hour, can't we. We live vicariously. Movies about the nobody who the prince can't help falling in love with and she wakes up a princess with everything. That formula never fails. They can make that same movie a thousand times, and believe me, they have. Now the plot thickens.

20 *“And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 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.*

Leave it to Jesus to rivet us with a contrast that is as stark as our minds can fathom. A guy with everything, and a guy with less than nothing. Lazarus.

This is the only parable where one of the participants gets a name. There's a reason for that, and we'll talk about it shortly. Just the name alone is full of depth. Lazarus means "one helped by God".

It says he was laid at the rich man's gate. The greek word is more like dumped. There's no care, no delicacy in the word. Thrown, like you throw out trash might be a use for this word. Dumped. They dumped him at the rich man's gate. It's rough treatment, not careful.

That indicates partly the state of Lazarus. He has no mobility. We aren't told why. But someone else dumped him where we find him. He's a beggar. No resources, at all. He can't provide anything for himself. No water, no food, no other necessities of life, like human waste. He's a mess. But it gets worse.

He has sores all over him. And this word is the word that we get our word ulcers. He has open lesions all over his body. He is human refuse. But it gets worse. How can it get any worse? The dogs, in that land they aren't pets, they are mongrel curs. In Israel the worst thing you can refer to someone as, is a dog or a pig.

Mongrel mangey cur dogs are licking his open wounds. Talk about infection. He is human refuse. Trash. No value to anyone, in fact he's a liability to anyone who is of any relation to him at all. He's dumped in a pile at the rich man's gate.

Now jewish theology according to the pharisee's is similar to Job's comforters. If you're blessed, if you're the rock star guy, it's because you're righteous and God has smiled on you and all of that wealth is because God has blessed you in return for your righteousness.

If you're human refuse, dumped in a pile some place, you're suffering because of God's cursing you in this life because you're unrighteous. So at this point in the story, they've all identified with the rich man who God has blessed. That's them. And the poor guy dumped in a helpless pile with dogs licking his open lesions, that's just the final stopping place before death, for the wicked and unrighteous.

Lazarus is wishing for even the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. He

wishes he were one of the dogs, waiting for a crumb to fall. That would be an elevation for him.

And in the mind of the pharisee's, that shouldn't happen. No, he's being punished for some hidden wickedness, by God, and any help rendered would be to interfere with God's obvious judgement. So it's built into their theology, you do not intervene with what God is carrying out and help the helpless. God made them destitute, and God rewarded the rich man with the riches. Leave it alone, but, of course, be the righteous rich man, not the wicked Lazarus, dumped and dying.

You can't get higher than the rich man, and you can't get lower than Lazarus. The contrast is total white and total black. But then, Jesus shocks his hearers;

*22 "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom;*

What????!!! That's backwards. He's wretched in life because God made him wretched because of his unrighteousness. He doesn't go to heaven! They all know Abraham is in heaven, in fact, in their minds, Abraham is the most elevated person in heaven, besides God himself.

God doesn't take wretches to heaven, and he certainly doesn't carry them there with angels and deposit them next to Abraham. In fact that's exactly, EXACTLY opposite of what they taught and believed.

*and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

Lazarus didn't get a funeral. He got removed and taken to the dump. No dignity, no funeral, no nothing. But immediately there were angels transporting him to glory.

The rock star though, he gets a funeral. A million dollar funeral. Wailing and mourning and the whole deal, and it probably lasts for days. It would need to

last longer than the last rich guy that died. However many days of wailing it takes, his estate will purchase that for him. The funeral is still going on for days on earth, but instantly, in the next life, it says in vs. 23 *And in Hades.*

Hades is hell. The rich man is in hell. And he's very conscious in that place. He's going to describe it for us. He still has eyes. He can perceive things visually. And we have that one word so far. Torment. Torture. Agony. Pain. Torment is the descriptor of all of those things.

The pharisee's are shocked. The rich man should be with Abraham and Lazarus should be in hell. Jesus has it all backwards, according to their invented doctrines and teachings.

The contrast in the next life is even greater than in the previous. Lazarus riches are indescribable. No words. Paul was caught up to that place and when he returned he said; I've got nothing. I can't describe it. There aren't words. Heaven is indescribably good, and hell is indescribably bad.

It's the same contrast as we began with, but it's on steroids, and the two people in the story have traded places. The rock star is in torment. The man with open lesions, immobile, licked by dogs, starving and thirsty, is in paradise that is indescribable.

And to make it worse, the awareness, the consciousness, the ability to perceive, you're in hell and you can see across to heaven. Bad enough to be in pitch black darkness in a body that is indestructible, in flames, forever, but it gets worse because you can see across the chasm to the people there who are indescribably rich.

*24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.'*

We remarked at the fact that Lazarus has a name in this parable. The rich man doesn't. Interesting that the rich man knows Lazarus' name. That opens lots

of possibilities. He recognizes and knows that the fellow there with father Abraham is Lazarus. And all of his brothers, who we'll meet in a moment will also recognize Lazarus. They know Lazarus. What was the previous relationship?

The other importance of the name is that God knows every name. In heaven we will receive a new name. Names are associated with the dignity of being. In hell, no one remembers your name. In heaven, you not only have a name, you'll get a new one too. The contrasts continue. Only the mind of God could come up with a story that is so brilliant in it's colors.

The rich man is used to giving orders. Was Lazarus his slave in life before whatever the problem was that immobilized him? That would explain him knowing Lazarus name.

He cries out now for mercy. The tiniest of mercy. One drop of water to cool his tongue. Please send Lazarus to do that. Why? Because he who used to be in luxury now is in agony. Everything flipped places in the next life. Lazarus has everything and is in no need. The rich man has agony worse than even Lazarus on earth, and is in need of everything. Anything. Even a single drop of water. The rich man is the beggar, The destitute man is rich.

What did Jesus like to say? The first will be last, and the last will be first. Here is a brilliant image for us of what that truth means. The rich man is begging, the destitute man is wildly rich.

*25 "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.*

This is a troubling verse. I'm not as rich as the rich guy, but I've certainly had a bonus of good things. God has blessed me with a wonderful wife and such a beautiful family. We look around us and it's rare to see someone that I would trade the sum total of what God has given me, in this life.

The verse is just a statement of fact. It doesn't hold any judgement about why those things are true. It's not saying the rich guy is in hell for being rich and Lazarus is in heaven with Abraham because he was poor.

That would be an opposite theology from the pharisee's but not necessarily any better than the one they had. Although, it is *easier* for the poor to come into a right relationship with God than it is for the rich. Remember that the original complaint that launched all of this teaching and parables was that the pharisees complained Jesus is no Messiah because of the fact that He receives sinners and eats with them.

Just the opposite. Jesus is spending time with sinners and outcasts because they are closer to the Kingdom than the religious self righteous folk. Abraham is just stating the obvious. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven.

*26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'*

A little heavenology for us. People in heaven can't go visit hell. And people in hell are there forever. They can't get to heaven. God put those barriers in place. There's no purgatory. There's no moving up from a bad place where you work off your debt and go to a better place. Two places with a barrier in between them.

*27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'*

This is the first decent thing this rich man has managed to accomplish in the entire story. Up until Abraham told him his situation was hopeless, it was all about him in life, and all about him in death. Even in hell. Send Lazarus with a drop of water for my tongue.

Finally, he thinks of other people. His brothers. If I can't get out, maybe I can at least help my family members. Lazarus, however, is still his slave. Send Lazarus to warn my brothers. He's going to get just a bit more out of worthless old Lazarus. Send him out of glory back to earth, in the service of his brothers. Back to work Lazarus.

And there's a sense of accusation here. I'm here because I wasn't warned sufficiently, and the least you can do is correct that problem by sending Lazarus to remedy that deficiency.

I'm here because no one told me about this place and you need to fix that deficiency of warning so my brothers don't have to suffer the same injury that I have. You didn't warn me, at least warn them. He's having a little argument with Abraham, trying to get something out of this deal.

*29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'*

And that's the reason the rich man is in hell. It's also the reason most people will be in hell. No time for God. No interest in God. No worship for God. No sorrow over your rebellion and sin against God. People live in this world as if there was no such person as God. Most people will be in hell because they ignored God and just went about their daily living, until all their days are used up.

Look around you. There's what, 2400 people in Tonopah. There's 12 people in this church. And I may not be much good at it, but I will rise in my own defence and say, Moses and the prophets are taught in this church, faithfully, week in, week out.

That explains why the place is empty. People come for a visit and they say, yikes, who would want to listen to bible verses. Nothing but bible verses. That's all this guy does is wear people out teaching bible verses. At least the other place has coffee.

The remedy for hell is Moses and the prophets, and nobody can tolerate listening to Moses and the prophets. About half of 1% of this community come to this church.

And it isn't that they have a loathing for the scripture, it's just that they have other stuff to do. Like vacuum the car. Rake some leaves. Sleep in. Almost anything is preferable to Moses and the prophets. Let's see, do the laundry or go listen to Moses and the prophets; think I'll do the laundry. Anything but that.

Then one day, you wake up in hell, and you're like, what am I doing here in the flames. I checked off the "Evangelical" box on the Pew research questionnaire. I just minded my own business and lived out my days. Why am I in flames. That church sucked. Nothing but Moses and the prophets, every time I went. Like a broken record. Why am I in hell.

The problem isn't usually gross vicious violent sin that gets people to hell. The problem is like the guy who buried the coin and just sort of told God, here's your coin back, I really was too busy with my own life to worry about what you want. Most of the people in hell will be there for lack of interest. No time for God. They simply don't need Moses and the prophets or for that matter any of the scriptures.

Everything anyone needs to know in order to spend eternity in heaven is contained in scripture.

*30 "But he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'"*

The rich man is arguing with Abraham about God's plan to reach sinners. The scriptures are a bore. But miracles! Miracles will get them into the church. God needs some razz-ma-tazz in order to save people. Moses and the prophets isn't getting the job done.

Coincidentally, it wasn't very long after Jesus taught this parable that the

events in John 11 actually took place. And that man's name was Lazarus. What a coincidence. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The rich guy gets his wish. Someone returns from the dead. How did that work out for the pharisees? You can read the entire account yourselves. I'll just skip to the reaction. Did it cause the 5 brothers to repent?

*46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things which Jesus had done. 47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.*

Raising Lazarus from the dead only accelerated the Pharisee's plan to murder Jesus.

*31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Can you think of someone else who rose from the dead? Jesus rose from the dead. God raised Him from the dead. Death could not hold Jesus in the grave. And He was seen by more than 500 witnesses. Reliable, honest people.

Did that cause Israel to believe. No, Israel soldiered on in their wickedness until God used the Romans to destroy their temple and their sacrifices forever in 70AD. The truths of the gospel were taken to the nations. Non jews responded. Only a small remnant of Jews are christian. A tiny percentage. The miracle of resurrection happened, and just like Jesus prophesied in this final verse, they were not persuaded.

But the miracles, if you need miracles, they're all recorded right here in Moses and the prophets. We're back to that. And the things that this world holds in highest regard, are repugnant to God. And the repugnant nobody's here have access to God through Christ, Jesus the Lord of everything.