



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

May 20/21, 2017 - Jeff Bucknum

**Straight from the Pit of Hell - (Luke 16:19-31)**

**[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]**

A number of years ago— it was a different time of the year and it was in the United States— I occasionally get a chance to go to other churches and to hear different sermons. The church that I attended, it was around early November and in the USA, was a really good one and the pastor there is a guy I know. He said in his sermon, “I want to talk to you today about five different ways that you can have a better Thanksgiving with your family.” I thought that was an interesting sermon title and very appropriate, right, coming up to the American Thanksgiving holiday. He usually preached on a passage of scripture but he just felt compelled to say, “Look, I need to help you guys out by giving you some things that the Bible teaches about how to have personal relationships with one another.” And the second point in his sermon was like, “Here are the lists of the things you shouldn’t talk about at thanksgiving: politics...” Right, which is broken in every Thanksgiving table in every home in America. Politics. “You shouldn’t talk about Religion.” And I thought that was interesting coming from a pastor that you shouldn’t talk about religion. He said, “Look, there’s other places that you can do that and other times that you can do that but it doesn’t go well with turkey. [laughter] And the third - don’t talk about your brother’s unemployment- Right? I know he’s 48 and he’s still living in the basement but it just won’t go over well. He’s probably going to tip the table over and throw gravy on everybody.” It got me thinking when he was doing that. I started thinking that there are certain settings where certain conversations are not appropriate. Increasingly so, in churches these days, from church pulpits all across North America, there are certain subjects that, if you want to keep your job as a pastor, you don’t talk about. Now that might be a fortunate thing from you point of view, or unfortunate perhaps, but Hell is one of them.

You’re not supposed to talk about that subject. It makes everybody feel uncomfortable. It’s hard- believe me- it’s hard to talk about from the pulpit as a pastor. It’s not one of the things that you wake up on a sunny morning in May and think, “I want to talk about Hell!” And for some people, it brings back a lot of bad memories. If you grew up in the church that was, in your words, a Hellfire and brimstone church, you remember some sermons back in those days that don’t warm the cockles of your heart. There was an Italian preacher in the middle ages, actually, who preached a sermon. Here’s how it went- or the portion of the sermon. I’m just going to quote him, right?

“Fire! That’s the recompense for your perversity you hardened sinners. Fire! Fires of Hell! Fire in your eyes! Fire in your mouth! Fire in your guts! Fire in your throat! Fire in your nostrils! Fire



inside and fire outside! Fire beneath! And fire above! Fire at every part! Ah, miserable folk, you will be like rags burning in the middle of this fire!”

I can't imagine that in Italian! [laughter] Some of you remember sermons like that, right? I mean, I remember, even in my young age- I'm 45, and I remember sermons like that. And you get to the point where you're like, "I'm so sick and tired of hearing about God as a cosmic judge and you trying to scare everybody into the Kingdom, C'mon! He's also a loving *Father!*" And that's true. And you hear enough of those voices in the church and eventually the leaders of the church say, "You know, we should be talking about God as a loving Father more than we talk about him as a cosmic judge!" That's kind of the point, actually, in churches where that's *all* we talk about- is God as a loving Father, which is so true, and I thank God for that in many ways.

*But*, I'm just going to tell you, you're not going to read the stories of Jesus very long, and you aren't going to read the parables that Jesus tells, without coming across judgement pretty quick. Honestly, it's kind of one of his favourite subjects. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, he talks about Hell *way more* than anybody else in the Bible. This is one of those passages, Luke 16:19-31. Maybe the most famous one, it's called *The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus* and, in it, we're going to learn some things about Hell.

1. *The kind of thing that leads to Hell*
2. *The kind of things that happen in Hell*
3. *The kind of thing that keeps you from Hell.*

### **[The Kind of Thing that Leads to Hell]**

Here's the first of those: It's longer than the other two, so don't be shocked. *The kind of thing that leads to Hell*. Look at verse 19 of Luke chapter 16, it's a story that Jesus is going to tell in the presence of a bunch of his disciples and it's got a particular edge to the Pharisees who love their money.

“There was a rich man [says Jesus] who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury everyday. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered in sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.”

This is a good contrast, okay. Two different men in the world there may not be. They live in close proximity to one another but they are *radically* different in their situation and their socio-economic status. The first guy is the rich man and he is dressed in purple— that means he wears the kinds of clothes that kings wear because he can afford them. He's not a king, but he's got the money of a king. It also says that he had fine linens on his body. That's doesn't mean that he's wrapped himself in a bed sheet, what that means, actually, is that he had really great underwear. Isn't that great that the Bible tells you that, I mean he's got silk underwear. Even his *underwear* is awesome! He lived in *luxury* everyday. In fact, the literal reading of that, if you translate it directly from the Greek, it says, “enjoyed himself sumptuously every day.” What does that sound like? If I said, “You enjoy yourself sumptuously,” Clearly, I enjoy some sumptuousness-ess, right? [laughter] Okay, eating. He's a feasting man. This is in a culture where, of course, if you have a feast, you have it once every twenty years. The wedding of your children is a moment for the feast. The return of the prodigal son, that's the moment



for the feast. You kill the fattened calf that you've been raising for that feast. Here's a guy who has that feast *every day*. He's dressed like a king because he eats like a king and he thinks of himself as a king. He is the model of wealth and importance this rich man.

And then there's Lazarus. And Lazarus was laid at the gate of the rich man. That language is pretty clear. Somebody else put him there. It's a passive verb, he was *laid* there. That's a word that's used for people who were sick in bed. They're laid up sick in bed. He's ill, and he's probably put at the gate because everyone knows that, look, here's your best chance to get help because *that* dude, in the purple and silk underwear, is going to walk by you everyday. And he'll see you and he'll help you. So, they lay him at the gate of this rich man, so he'll see him all the time. And this man is not hard to miss, he's unimportant. But, if you were to look at him, you would note that he is covered with sores. Listen, I apologize in advance. I know it's a sunny morning and you don't want to look at this picture, but close your eyes. Okay, so that is a picture of a leg with skin ulcers. There were way worse ones, by the way, that's not a bad one. That is what he had all over his body; skin ulcers. Dogs would come along and lick them — and by dog I don't mean Fluffy, your poodle, who comes in the morning and licks your face and you think it's so cute. No, that's not the dog we are talking about. We are talking about wild dogs who are infected with disease and are licking the sores so that they keep oozing puss. That is the dogs that are licking this guy every day. This man is sitting at the gate wanting something and he dreams, longs, for just a piece of bread that falls from the table of that rich man. Now, when it says that, actually, it's referring to a particular kind of bread. If you have a big feast in those days, you don't have chopsticks or forks so you use your hands to eat. At the end of the meal, of course, you have gravy all over your hands and it's a bit of a mess and there aren't any moist towelettes nearby. So there is a little piece of bread that they used to take—it was leftover, scrap, crusty old bread— and they would wipe their fingers off with it and clean it off. Then you would take that bread and you would throw it under the table. You don't eat that bread. Yuck! You throw it under the table so that the dogs could come and they could eat it eventually. But this man, Lazarus, is saying is, "Listen, I don't want the feast, I just want that little piece of moist towelette bread. That's it! I *long* to have it. That would be my feast."

There is a guy in Guatemala City at a market that I was at a number of years ago. You walk into the marketplace and there are people bustling about to all of the open stalls and they are walking everywhere with their bags. Right in the middle, at the entrance, was a man on a cardboard mat, covered in sores, and he had no legs and he couldn't see. He was waving his hat yelling in Spanish, "Help me! Help me!" When I think of Lazarus, I think of that man.

By all observable criteria, the rich man was blessed and known by God and Lazarus was not, right? If you were coming up to these two and you were going to make a judgment based upon what you can observe in their lives, you would say, "Look, the rich man *obviously* has the blessing and hand of God upon him. But this Lazarus guy, meh! We feel sorry for him. He's been forgotten." But here is my question: why is Lazarus named? Isn't that interesting to you? I mean, Jesus tells a story and he tells a story about two guys and one of them has a name and the other one doesn't. If you were telling a story about a rich guy and a poor guy, you would probably tell the story so that rich guy has the name,



right? I would. But, the poor guy has the name here. In fact, this is the only parable, in all of Jesus' parables, where there is an actual name of a guy.

There are all sorts of theories on why that is; here's mine. So, one of our pastoral interns upstairs, she has worked as a nurse in our community for a number of years. At the end of one of her nursing exams, there was an extra credit question— right, like 100 questions and then at the end you get an extra credit question. The extra credit question was this: After all sorts of questions about, you know, kinesiology and, like, how is that you inject people so that you don't hurt them, and whatever. At the end of the questions was this: Name the custodian. She said that, when she read it, she was like, "Oh my goodness, I don't have a clue who the custodian is." Out of the entire class of all these nurses, there were only two of them who could answer that question correctly. Of course that's the case. Of course that's the case. That's the way that it always works. We don't know the names of the people of no influence. We know Bill Gates. If you were in the airport and Bill Gates is there and you see him, you're like, "O, Bill Gates!" You see how much he tips. "Oh, he's not tipping enough, he's a billionaire!" We know the names of wealthy people. Their names are known, they are important, and they are valuable in our society. The poor people are just a dime a dozen, there are a penny a dozen. There are everywhere and who cares what their names are.

Yet, in this passage what you have is the poor guy being named and the rich guy not. This is God's way of saying, "Don't you see that your economy, the way that you view the world, is so different from mine. You think when you look with your eyes, that the really important, valuable, known people in the world are the ones that are the top of the heap, and I'm telling you that's not the way it actually is." Lazarus was known by God. The rich man, [shaking his head "no"] despite all of his wealthy and popularity in the community, watch...verse 22:

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. [It actually, literally, reads Abraham's bosom. I'll explain to you why in a second.] The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'"

It's interesting of course that there is a difference, at the moment of their death, between the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is buried, and we are told that Lazarus was not. I don't know if that means that he was not, it's just that Jesus didn't think that it was important to note that. The rich man, of course, had a burial, he had, probably, a massive funeral. He was a celebrated man in the community— I mean, purple-wearing people were very popular. People lined up, I'm sure they walked forward and gave great testimony about how important this man was, what a blessing he was, "Surely he's in a better place now", and "Clearly God has welcomed him because of his righteousness and goodness", and blah, blah, blah. But, despite what is seen in this life, on the other side of the grave, you have these two ending up in two very different places and things have been flipped.

What you have is Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, or by Abraham's side — now the language there is probably a reference to a great banquet where Abraham is relaxing and reclining at the great banquet. (That is how they used to do it in those days.) Next to him, in the seat of honour... If you go into a



great banquet in those days and you go in, the host is the most honoured and then you have the most honoured guest and they sit right next to him. In that seat of honour is Lazarus, who is reclining on the bosom (chest) of Abraham, at peace, eating all the food that he ever wanted; great banquet of God. But, the rich man is in *torment* and he can see what has gone on. He's at a distance now and he says, "Oh, I just *long*, I would give *anything* to just have a smallest bit of water. Send Lazarus to just give me the *smallest* bit of water to satiate my thirst because I'm in torment here." You see how it's flipped, yeah? Like, totally flipped. Lazarus used to sit out at the gate and long for the smallest piece of bread from the table of the rich man and now the rich man sits out across the chasm and he longs for the smallest bit of water from Lazarus. The question that you have to ask, at this point, is, "Why did this happen? Why did he end up there? What caused the rich man to be in Hell?" Here is Jesus' point with this whole parable, okay? He was callously indifferent to the poor.

Listen, I stand on the shoulders of hundreds of thousands of Christian brothers and sisters who have read this passage through the ages and have made this same point: Calloused indifference to the poor is a sign that you are not a follower of God. This rich man should have known, he did know. Look, you can go through the Old Testament and I can show you so many places. I'm tempted to just read all of these passages that list off the way that the poor in Israel was supposed to be treated by fellow Israelites, but I'll just give you one: Deuteronomy 15:7. How is that you are supposed to treat the poor in the land? Here you go:

"If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted towards them. Rather, be open handed and freely lend them whatever they need."

Clear. In other words, if you pass by somebody in need, say at your gate, and they are a fellow Israelite, you should not turn the other way or make excuses for why you can't help. Instead, you should look at them and you should care for them. That will be a sign that you really love God and that you really follow Him in His ways. Darrell Bock, a commentator on the book of Luke, wrote about this passage. He said:

"The rich man is not condemned because he is rich, but because he slipped into the coma of callousness that wealth often produces. He became consumed with his own joy, leisure, and celebration and failed to respond to the suffering and need of others around him."

See, he knew God's commands, but he disregarded them completely. I mean, you walk by the guy every single day and he just didn't care, and it demonstrated the nature of his real commitment to God. So, here is the theological question that you have to ask at this point. Does this mean that we gain right standing with God by how we treat the poor? You can understand how you read it that way, yeah? When you read this passage, there's not a lot of talk about faith or anything like that. So you read this passage and you say, "Okay. So, in order for somebody to be saved and to end up in eternal bliss, as opposed to eternal torment, the standard, the acid test, is how you treat the poor. By doing that you gain entrance." There has been people throughout the ages who have read this passage that way. But listen, we don't care for the poor in order to gain right standing with God. We care for the poor *because* we have right standing with God. Please listen to me. So many people miss the message of Christianity this way. They think it's a works-based religion. Listen to me very closely, we



don't do our works, we don't feed the poor, in order to gain right standing with God. We do it because that right standing with God has already been earned. Jesus earned it. He saved you and now he compels you. Because you were poor, he says, " Listen. Now, as evidence that you actually believe this, act!" When you read about faith, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But when you read about that faith in the Bible, that faith is an active thing. It's not just mental dissent. It's not just thinking good thoughts about God. It actually plays itself out in one's life, so that I can tell the nature of the *roots* of your tree by the *fruit* that I see. So, you have passages that say that very thing. James 2:14-17,

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. [I don't know, maybe sitting at your gate every day that you leave.] If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' [you can imagine rich man patting Lazarus on the head. 'I hope you are warm today. You will find food somewhere' (licking food from his fingers)] but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? [What good are your words if they are not followed up by actual things you do?] In the same way, faith by itself, not accompanied by action, is dead."

1 John 3:17-18,

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"

So, I was telling some of the men at the men's conference recently that I reading online about the way you can tell the difference between fake gold and real gold. So, all you ladies here, if you want to know if your husband really bought the real one, this is how you do it. You take your wedding ring, or your gold that he got you from a necklace, and you put a scratch in it with a nail, or something like that, and you go get the nitric acid that you have in your kitchen, [laughter] just in case the kids do... Anyway, you bring the nitric acid and you pour it on there and, if it's real gold, nothing will happen. If it's fake gold, it will probably bubble and turn green. So, you know what you're doing today. [laughter] This is a great image, though, isn't it? I mean, here is something that on the face of it looks exactly the same: fake gold, real gold. You don't know. But, there is an acid test, that you can do to it to verify the truthfulness of it. What I am saying here is that if you take a Christian who looks or says certain things, "I'm a believer, I'm a believer..." and you scratch them and the acid of God's sight pours on them, they will bleed love for the poor. It's just what happens, the pity, and compassion. They know that they've been shown compassion and as result they end up having compassion. True Christians don't ignore the needs of the hurting in front of them. To do so declares that you really don't love God.

So, let me just be really honest with you. This is so hard to apply in the present world and the reason it's so hard to apply is because you and I are confronted with so many needs in the 'Google age', aren't we? I mean, we have phones on us and I know about the earthquake that happens in Indonesia seconds after it happens. And, if I'm on twitter, I'm seeing video of it as it happens. Everywhere I turn, there are needs. Refugees and hungry and at every stop light, and every time I go into the city, "Give



me more, give me, give me!” Do I need to respond to *every single* one of these? And if I do, won't I ultimately become one of the needy? How do we do this?

My brother-in-law and sister-in-law lived in Guatemala for a number of years and outside of the gate of their home they had, like most people there, a walled compound that they lived in and razor wire on top. They would drive out when the gates would open and outside the gate of their home, there would be like 20 people standing there wanting something from them because they're North American and they, of course, were the wealthiest people around. Even though they're missionaries and they don't make very much, by our standards, they're just so much wealthier than everyone else. And the people would come with their children, sick children, and they'd stand outside and they'd look at you when you drove out. The first time I drove out the gate with them, I said, openly to my brother-in-law, “what in the world— how in the world do you do this? How do you not stop every time and help?” And he said, “Look, Jeff, for the first little while we did and now we've come to the conclusion that we need to make choices regarding how it is that we're going to help. So we've done a lot of reading and a lot of thinking about how that's going to happen and we've supported this institution, this other group that comes down and help these people.” I think that's actually the right approach, that you have to make choices when confronted with so many needs and you have a limited amount of money to help, you have to make choices about what you're going to do. So, let me give you three rules of thumb on how you can make those kinds of choices.

Number one, doing nothing is not an option for true Christians. I worked in the inner cities of Denver, Colorado with a ministry called Mile High Ministries. When we first got there, there were so many poor people everywhere on the streets that I was handing out money. I had the leader of that ministry come to me and he grabbed the money out of my hand, shoved it back into my pocket, pulled me aside and said to me, “Brother, *never* do that!” “Well, uh, Jesus—” I said. He said, “I know! I'm not saying that you should never give. I'm just telling you that if you just hand the money out, it is no way going to help that person. We have a whole series of systems in place that are going to actually, *actually* help. If you want to give money, give there, don't give *that way*.” There's a book called *When Helping Hurts* that goes down these paths. Listen, I'm not here to debate you about it, I'm just saying that this is a legitimate discussion that we need to have. Listen, at the end of it, the solution is not to use it as an excuse to do nothing! “Well, it's really a difficult situation. I don't even know! This money could be well used for my boat!” [laughter] No, no, no, no! There's nothing wrong with owning a boat but if you're owning a boat to the exclusion of helping the poor and oppressed, I don't know, is the love of God in you? So, number one, doing nothing is not an option for Christians.

Number two, help brothers and sisters in Christ first. That might sound weird but I'm telling you that when you go through the New Testament and you realize that the needs of brothers and sisters in Christ take precedent over all others, we should care for everybody, but in a limited economy, we need to make sure that we care for the brothers and sisters in Christ first. Did you notice in that James 2 passage, that I read a minute ago, “Suppose a *brother* or *sister* is without clothes and daily food...” In 1 John 3, “If anyone has material possessions and sees a *brother* or *sister* in need...” Matthew 25, “What you did for the least of these my *brothers*, you did to me.” So, again, needs everywhere, help as



much as we can everywhere, but give priority to the needs of brothers and sisters in Christ. So, Galatians 6, Paul says that,

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all and especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Good to all, but *especially* those who belong to the family of believers. So, nothing is not an option; help brothers and sisters first; and, third, the more you have, the more you should be giving. The Apostle Paul, when he gets the chance to actually come to the Corinthian church, and he is raising money— he’s like a fundraiser for a church in Jerusalem that’s going through famine— and he comes to them and he’s trying to urge them to give and here’s his rationale, “Look, look, look, here’s that way it’s worked in God’s providence. See, God controls all of these things and so, at this present moment, you have money and they don’t. So, what God wants you to do, is to give some of the money that you have so that they can be helped in their need and then maybe— thirty years, fifty years, a hundred years down the track— they will have money and you will have need and they can help you with your needs. See? Equality”. It’s what he says in 2 Corinthians 8:13,

“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed but that there might be equality”

I don’t want you guys to be poor, I just want you to share what you’ve been given by God to share with those in need. That’s why God has you have it at the moment. You’re a conduit of his grace at the present time, your plenty will supply what they need so that, in turn, their plenty will supply what you need. The more you have, the more God expects you to give.

### **[The Kind of Things that Happen Hell]**

That was the first point of my three point sermon. It’s alright, the other two are quick- here we go! The kind of things that happen in Hell. Here’s verse 22, and I’m going to read all the way through verse 26. So, let’s go back to our passage again, Lazarus and the rich man,

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, [there] he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire. But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony [Notice the flip.] And besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’”

Now, there are three things that I want to point out to this passage that are, I think, going to correct some false teaching regarding the afterlife and Hell in particular, which is a real subject of discussion in our setting, okay? Three things that I think you need to embrace in an orthodox understanding of Hell. Ready? Number one, it’s *just*. You do see how, with this man, what he sowed is what he’s reaping now. He passed by Lazarus all the time and now he’s in a position where Abraham is passing him by





all of the time. Like, if you don't want God, if you don't want to have anything to do with Him, God is going to be a complete gentleman, He will give that to you forever. If you are working toward a particular end, that is the thing that God is going to give to you. That is not *unfair*, that is *right*, it is *just*. Some people approach the judgement of God like it's some arbitrary overreaction by God, "Boy, he's just crazy with his lightning bolt attacks!" No, everywhere in the scriptures that you find the judgement of God you find that the punishment fits the crime- he's fair. He'll give you what you want. It's just.

Number two, it's conscious. The rich man is in torment here, right? There's no question that he's actually feeling something. It's why he wants to have his tongue have water on it, so he can be relieved of his distress. He *feels* it. If you go around our society today and you ask people what happens after you die, most people will end up saying something like, "Well, either everyone's going to go eventually to Heaven, except for Hitler and Donald Trump, [laughter] *or*, look, when you die you die and then that's it. It's just black abyss after that. Death; nothing." So, here are a bunch of people who have never died, and never come back, who are saying, "This is the way it is. You die; nothing."

Some Christians have actually embraced this point of view, they call it conditioned immortality. It's a little bit more nuanced and clever. Here's what they believe, conditional immortality says that the souls of everybody are not eternal, that the eternality of the soul is a gift that God gives to those who believe in Jesus only. So, if you believe in Jesus, you will die and your soul will be given the gift of eternality and you will end up, you know, Abraham's bosom, and eventually, Heaven. But if you don't believe in Jesus, you will experience what all the naturalists say. Death, end of it, black abyss, nothingness. It's a very popular view. Here's the problem: this passage. The guy *feels it*, he's conscious there, he *knows* what's going on. I don't know if it's literal and if he can actually see across the chasm or not, but he feels something. He knows something's going on. It's just, it's conscious, it's permanent.

There's a theory about the afterlife that lots of people have these days. Hell is sort of a purgatorial slum of Heaven, so it's like a fenced in, lower east side of Heaven, right? What happens every day is that God comes and visits Hell and He gives everyone a second chance. He invites them to come in. Every day He keeps coming and eventually He is going to win. Love is going to win in the end. He's going to bring them back and everyone will end up in Heaven, right? The only thing that is keeping them out is the fence of their own constructing and it's of their stubborn will and God will break down that stubborn will and eventually everyone will come. This is the viewpoint that has just gone viral in our culture. The problem, of course, is this passage. There's a chasm that has been fixed between, that's the rationale here. Abraham says, "Listen, I can't come over there, you can't come over here." Before you died, no chasm, but now.... permanent. David Platt, preaching a sermon about Hell, he read a whole series of passages of scripture about Hell. There is a lot of them. They are terrifying. At the end of reading it in his sermon, in the quiet of the entire room of seven thousand people, as he was speaking at a conference, he said these words. He said,

"Hell is no casual matter. We say things like, 'We had a Hell of a time' or, 'You played a Hell of a game', or 'That was a Hell of a song' and the way we are talking about Hell shows that we have no idea what we are talking about."

So, what's the kind of thing that keeps you from there?



## [The Kind of Thing that Keeps You from Hell]

Lastly, look at the verses 27-31,

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets [they have the Bible]; let them listen to them.’ ‘No [no, no, no, no], father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

When I was in grade nine, there was this smoker who had throat cancer who came to my health class. I remember it poignantly because this guy he had a voice like this [rasping]. He talked to us the whole time, he could barely breathe. With him, the American Cancer Association brought in a lung sample, so you could actually hold lungs of smokers that were *black*. This guy sat on a stool in front of us and could barely talk [rasping] and he told us his life story. About how he started smoking when he was young and “this is where I’ve ended up.” Then every grade nine kid in the room is like freaked out, is like, “Oh my goodness!” There is a palpable power of somebody who has gone a road and is now coming back to you and looking you square in the eyes and saying, “Don’t go down this road. You want to save yourself a lot of pain, don’t go there!” This is what this rich man wants. “Listen, if you could just send Lazarus back, just send him back! I can’t leave, but Lazarus can. Send him back and have him tell all of the people what he sees here. I have brothers! Send him back to my father’s house. Tell all of my brothers!” “Well they have the Bible,” says Abraham. “They have the testimony of--” “Yeah, but I had the testimony,” says the rich man, “and look where I ended up! I didn’t listen to it. But, if somebody actually goes back from the dead, so they die, they resurrect, they go back, and they declare to everyone what they see here. If someone did that...”

You see the brilliance of this story now, don’t you? That what you have is a parable from the mouth of one who did, warning a bunch of people about what he has seen there. Look, Jesus has warned us and he invites us to avoid it all. You know, Jesus was hanging on a cross and He says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” You know what he’s doing there? He’s tasting Hell for you. God turned away from Him there. He was in this place for you. He paid the price for you. There is absolutely no reason why anyone within the realm of my voice should have to experience what this rich man did; none. *[Rasping] He’s crying to you from the grave. Why would you choose to ignore that? Why would you? Following Jesus is not a big deal, it’s basically coming to Him and saying, “Have mercy on me, a sinner. I recognize that I have fallen short of your law and glory and I deserve your judgement, but, ultimately, you took it for me. So I will follow you the rest of my life on earth, so I can spend the rest of eternity with you in the joy of your Father.” It’s not complicated, but it does require a response from you. Why wouldn’t you do that when there is so much at stake?*

Let me pray for us. Lord, I’m thankful for the fact that there is not a chasm fixed at this present moment, as there will be one day. I’m thankful, Father, that that fact right now should move us to be timely. We don’t know the day of our death. We don’t know what this afternoon holds. But, we do know that, in this present time, there is an invitation from our Lord Jesus who says, “Come to me all



you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” So God, I pray that You, by the power of your Spirit, will move in the hearts of people. This passage was actually spoken initially to religious people. There are lots of religious people here. And I pray, Father, that you would help us not rely upon our own standing, but would turn to you, and seek the forgiveness that we have in Jesus, and help us walk in a new way. Oh Lord, would you make that happen in our midst for our joy and your glory. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.