

**"Hell: The Fullness of God's Justice"
(Luke 16:19-31)
Pastor Woohyun Jung
March 4, 2018**

(Luke 16:19-31)

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.'

²⁵ "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.

²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you 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.'

²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

³⁰ "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹ "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.'"

Core Issue: Hell is a real place of eternal punishment inflicted by the just wrath of God. We must turn to Christ who alone can save us.

Opposing Value: Many of us reject the doctrine of hell because we have a limited understanding of who God is and it goes against our desires.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we'll be starting a two-week sermon series on heaven and hell. Now, it would be impossible for me to share everything about this in just two sermons. That being said, what I desire to do is to open our eyes to these future realities and inspire us to study more, reflect on it more, and respond accordingly. But more importantly, we must remember that everything we read in the Bible points to God. It tells us of who God is. Then the reason why we study heaven and hell is not simply to quench our curiosities, but it's to clearly and rightly know who God is so that we may worship Him better. So with that in mind, let's talk about hell.

WHY SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT HELL?

Hell obviously isn't the most pleasant topic to talk about. So many other truths in the Bible are more appealing. We could just spend two weeks talking about heaven and studying it would be a pleasure. It'll lift our spirits and everyone would be eager to learn. But to reflect on hell fills our hearts with heaviness. It makes us uncomfortable. Why go out of our way to be depressed? [Why should we talk about hell?](#)

A simple answer would be this: **Because it's taught in the Bible.** Hell is not something that's mentioned in one or two obscure passages; actually a huge portion of the Bible deals with this doctrine. Did you know that the Bible refers more often to the wrath of God than to His love? Christ was love incarnate, full of compassion and mercy, yet He spoke very frequently of judgment and of everlasting punishment. If God in His wisdom has chosen to provide us with so much information about hell, we must pay a close attention. **If it's important to God, it must be important for us too.**

Another reason why it's absolutely imperative and necessary for us to talk about hell is **because so much is at stake, yet it often has been distorted, twisted, and rejected by the people.** We often hear people say something like this: "I refuse to believe that everyone who doesn't believe in Christ is lost and condemned. I work with good people who are Muslim, Jewish, or atheists. And you're telling me that they're going to hell just because they don't believe in Jesus? That's such an arrogant statement. That's just unfair." [Why is it that so many people have difficult time believing in hell?](#) One of the reasons may be because they may personally know someone who is adamantly resistant to the gospel. Imagining that person as the object of God's eternal wrath makes hell seem even more unbearable. Another reason may come from the fact that they've been a victim of someone who wrongly used the teaching of judgment to corner them with fear and terror. No wonder they're so repulsed by it. Or it could just be that it goes against their personal conviction. But in contrast, the Bible makes it absolutely clear that the sinners will be punished eternally in hell. This is why we must talk about hell.

It's true that some may accuse us of being morbid and even unloving for believing in hell. But let's think about this for a moment. If a child runs out into the street, is it unloving to warn her of the destruction coming in the form of a car? Does anyone criticize the fireman for waking up a family to rescue them from a burning house? Does anyone blame a doctor for telling a person that he has an illness that must be treated if he's going to live? Of course not. We would thank them for warning us. Hell is a far more terrible and permanent reality. The most loving and responsible thing we can do is to study this doctrine so that we may be better equipped to lead others out of such an unspeakably horrible place.

But most importantly, we must talk about hell because we'll learn to embrace a God who isn't always easy to understand and whose ways are far beyond us. In Isaiah 55:9, God says, "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.*" At the end of the day, our feelings, wants, and desires are not ultimate – only God is ultimate.

With that in mind, if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Luke 16:19-31.

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.'

²⁵ "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. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you 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.'

²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

³⁰ "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹ "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.'"

I want to approach this message by answering three questions from this passage and other parts of the Scripture:

- Is hell real?
- What is hell?
- Why is hell needed?

1. IS HELL REAL?

Let's take a look at the passage. Here, we see two men who lived completely different lives. Verse 19 tells us that the rich man lived like a king. He was dressed in purple and fine linen, and lived in luxury every day – displaying his wealth to the whole world. In contrast, Lazarus lived in absolute poverty. He sat at the gate of the rich man longing to live off of the crumbs from his table. Not only that, he was covered with sores and even the dogs came and licked his sores. His life was miserable. Up until this point, the readers may conclude that the rich man was blessed while Lazarus was cursed by

God. And we do this over and over again with our own lives as well. According to our circumstances, we assume that God has either blessed or cursed us. Well, let's read on.

Verse 22 tells us that Lazarus died. Now, it would be completely acceptable to expect his body to be dumped somewhere where no one knows, and no one would've cared. His life was insignificant. Lazarus was really nobody. But something unexpected happens. Jesus tells us that a group of angels appeared and took Lazarus' body to Abraham's side. Then the rich man died as well but there were no angels; it's simply told that he was buried. In verse 23, we find out where he was taken to – Hades (or hell) where he was found to be in torment. And out of desperation, we see him turning to Abraham and asking for mercy, when in his earthly life, never showed mercy to others.

Let's stop here for a moment because I have to point this out: throughout the story, there is no attempt made by Jesus to prove the existence of hell. He simply assumes its existence as part of life; part of God's creation. To Jesus, hell was a real place. And we see this not just in this passage but in other parts of the Bible as well. Jesus talked about hell more than any other person in the Bible. Jesus actually talked about hell more than He talked about heaven. And Jesus doesn't only reference hell; He also describes it in great detail. There's no denying that Jesus knew and believed in the absolute reality of hell, and warned the people about it. And there are countless passages in the Bible (both OT and NT) talking about hell, judgment, and eternal punishment.

Unfortunately, though the Bible is very clear on this issue, our natural instinct is to reject it because it makes us uncomfortable. It feels too harsh, too dark, and too hopeless. Maybe some of you find yourselves questioning and doubting as well. [But when you find yourself at odds with the Bible, what is your natural response?](#) Submit to the Scripture or interpret and change the Scripture to fit your view? Sadly, many have altered the truth by adopting different views. Let me just share three views regarding hell that people including some Christians believe.

First, **Universalism** believes that in the end all people will ultimately be saved. Second, **Conditional Immortality** argues that only Christians receive the gift of immortality, while non-Christians do not. In other words, those who receive Christ as their Lord and Savior will enter heaven and enjoy eternity with God while the lives of everyone else will simply end when they die. Third, **Annihilationism** claims that those who are not Christians will experience suffering after death, but after a time they will be annihilated. In other words, they believe that God will punish the sinners for a season but not for eternity. God will end their existence out of mercy. Now, for all three views, an interesting thing is that they all originate in an attempt to compromise this idea of eternal divine punishment.

As much as these views sound nice and we could even sympathize with their struggles, we have to recognize that these views are not based on the right interpretation of the Scripture. It's just not biblical. And on a more serious note, tampering with the Word of God is not only wrong; it's also a sin against God. It's an act of evil because we're claiming that what we believe is more important than what God has to say. We're saying to God, "You got it wrong and I have it right." Let me make it very clear: the root of all objections to hell is our sin – more precisely, our self-centeredness.

Maybe some of you are questioning the reality of hell today. Maybe some of you have been influenced more by the views of the world rather than the Word of God. No wonder it's so difficult for many of us to accept this doctrine. [How, then, do we overcome our doubt?](#) **We need to look to God and begin to see Him for who He is** – not distorting Him to be who we want Him to be. Friends, hell is a real place and we must face this reality.

2. WHAT IS HELL?

A Renaissance poet, Dante, depicted hell as a place under the earth's surface with nine levels of suffering, where sinners were bitten by snakes, tormented by beasts, showered with icy rain, and trapped in rivers of blood; some were even immersed in huge pools of human feces. C.S. Lewis depicted hell as a dark, gloomy city where you progressively lose your identity, value, and significance. The band AC/DC sang in their song, "Hell ain't a bad place to be – it's where all our friends are." Rob Bell said that hell is not about someday or somewhere else, but the pain that people experience in this life – genocide, rape, and unjust socioeconomic structures. Now, [what's your view of hell?](#) How extensive is your understanding? Or maybe you never took the time to think about this? In contrast, [what does the Bible say?](#) Let me point out three biblical descriptions of hell.

First, hell is eternal. The Bible teaches that hell will last forever (Matt. 18:8; 25:46; Mk. 9:48; Lk. 16:24). Revelation 14:11 is probably the most graphic NT statement of the eternal suffering: "And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image." Torment forever and ever – that's the description of the destination prepared for unrepentant sinners. We could, of course, easily dismiss this thought and go on with our busy lives but if you reflect on this, it is truly terrifying. There will be no end to this suffering.

Second, hell is a place of torment. The Bible makes it clear that hell involves more pain than we can possibly imagine. Whenever Jesus described hell, He never took it lightly. He always presented hell as a horrific place of intolerable suffering. For example, in Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus tells us that hell is a place so bad that you should be willing to cut off important parts of your body to avoid it. Let me share other imageries that Jesus used to describe hell:

- Weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 22:13)
- Torment (Lk. 16:23)
- Blazing furnace (Matt. 13:42, 50)
- Unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12; Mk. 9:43; Isa. 66:24)
- Eternal fire (Matt. 25:41)
- Darkness (Matt. 22:13)
- Eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46)

From our passage today, we learn that **hell is a place where people will consciously experience all these things.** It's a place of pain, fear, loss, anger, separation, helplessness, and hopelessness. On these descriptions, John Calvin wrote, "By such expressions, the Holy Spirit certainly intended to stun all our senses with dread." Jesus didn't want anyone to walk away and ever think that hell is a tolerable place to spend eternity. **He wanted us to tremble in fear.**

Now, some of you may wonder if there will be literal fire in hell. I want to share what Pastor R.C. Sproul said in response to this question. He said, "Probably not. But if hell is not a lake of fire, whoever is there will do everything they could and give up everything they have to be in a lake of fire." A sobering thought.

Lastly, hell is a place of punishment created by God. Now, this statement may have caught some of you off guard. “Did you just say that God created hell?” Yes, and He rules over it. Because it’s a place, it has been created by God. It was by His command that everlasting fire was prepared. I know it sounds odd and even uncomfortable for some of you but it’s the truth. Then it begs the question, “Why?” [Why did God create this place?](#) To simply put, **to justly judge and punish those who have sinned and rebelled against God** (Matt. 5:22; 23:33; 25:31-46; Rev. 20:10-15). Listen to what Paul says in 2 Thess. 1:6-9: “God is just... He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might.” No matter how innocent, kind, and good some people may seem on the outside, the Bible makes it clear that hell is reserved for those who don’t know God or obey the gospel. **And the scary thing is that the wrath of God is retributive not corrective.** In other words, the wrath isn’t intended to correct the behavior of those opposing Christ to make them fit for salvation. Rather, the wrath is simply a **pure act of vengeance against sin, wickedness, and evil.** This is really hard to swallow. But we must remember that the judgment will be just and fair. **The punishment is rightly deserved.** Pastor John MacArthur said, “Only the hell-worthy will suffer hell. Nobody will be in hell who does not deserve to be there.”

Some people claim that hell is not really a place of punishment but a place of separation from God. So they think that it won’t be that bad in hell because they never wanted to be with God anyway. But let me clarify one thing: **it’s true that hell is separation from the grace of God, the care of God, the love and goodness of God, but it’s not separation from God.** Listen carefully because it’s going to hit you hard. Pastor R.C. Sproul said, “The greatest problem that the person in hell has is not the devil but God. God is in hell actively punishing the wicked. The person in hell wants nothing but to get God out of hell because the terror this person would face is God Himself.” This statement is true because when we are saved, the Bible tells us that we are ultimately saved from God’s coming wrath (John 3:36; Rom. 5:9). **In hell, God will be present in the fullness of His divine wrath.** He will be there to exercise His just punishment for those who reject Him. They will know God as an all-consuming fire.

As we reflect on how hell is described in the Bible, we can’t help but to feel truly terrible – even disturbed by the frightening view of hell that makes us want to just walk away from it. But this is what the Bible teaches. Therefore, as unsettling as it may be, we must embrace it as the truth. It’s not wrong to feel distressed, and to ask difficult questions, but we must be sure that we go to the Bible for the answers. Remember, God’s ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8).

3. WHY IS HELL NEEDED?

We talked about how hell is real and that it’s a place of eternal punishment. Then we can’t help but to ask, [“Why is hell needed?”](#) Why can’t God just forgive these sinners since He is good and loving? Even if these people deserved punishment, hell seems too harsh of a sentence in comparison to their sin – they’re not that bad.” Let me answer with this: **we’ll know that hell is needed when we have a full picture of God’s perfect justice and the seriousness of our sin.** Let me explain.

The Bible clearly tells us that God has no beginning or end; He's all-powerful and everywhere present; He doesn't change; He's holy and perfect; He's consistently just and righteous; He's always good and loving. But instead of loving, worshipping, and obeying this amazing God, the Bible tells us that all of us have sinned against God (Rom. 3:23). This is a problem because God hates sin. He doesn't compromise when it comes to sin. **Therefore everything that is evil, wicked, and sinful (including us) will be hated and rightly punished because God is a just, righteous, and good Judge.**

Think with me. Let's suppose there's a judge who is hearing the case of a serial killer who brutally murdered ten people. The judge listens to hours of testimony from weeping and ruined family members – and the evidences clearly point him to be the obvious offender. But after all has been said, the judge declares the killer to be “not guilty.” And the judge smiles warmly at the defendant and says, “This whole thing must have been really difficult for you. Now, you're free to go.” You could almost see what would've happened after. The court would be in an uproar. The family members would've been exploding with anger, shouting and crying at the injustice they just received. Someone screams, “Why did you let this despicable criminal go?” How shocking would it be to hear the judge say, “Because I'm a good judge!” Nobody would agree with him. In fact, he would be considered a horrible judge. **In a case where someone is clearly guilty, declaring them to be “not guilty” is a huge failure of justice.**

If this is true, then, how is it that so many have such a different understanding of goodness when we talk about God? **God is a good Judge.** He will never overlook injustice no matter how small the offense may be. He's that good. God exercises His justice by punishing the evil and hell was created to do that perfectly. **Hell essentially is a place where God's justice is revealed** (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:5).

Maybe some of you are thinking: “Okay, I get that hell is needed to protect God's justice. But we're not that bad. Hell seems too harsh for what we've done.” Of course, it's normal for us to reason this way because this is how our society operates. When a citizen breaks the law, he receives a punishment that fits the crime. Someone would not get a life sentence for speeding. **The punishment must fit the crime.**

Now, the Bible does present hell as a just penalty for sin no matter how big or small it may be. **Why?** Because of who we sin against. Let me share an example that I read to help us better understand the seriousness of this issue. Imagine walking down the street and you notice someone sitting on a bench focused on something in his hands. You go closer to take a look and realize that he was pulling the legs off a grasshopper. How would you respond? You would probably think this guy is weird but you wouldn't confront him about it. It's cruel; but we kill insects every day without thinking much. But what if it wasn't a grasshopper but a frog? You would be a bit more disturbed, but still reluctant to do anything about it. What if it was a bird? Would you now say something or still just walk away? How about if it was a puppy? You might definitely call the police. Finally, what if it was a child? Would you stop him? Absolutely. At risk to yourself, you would intervene and physically fight him to protect the child.

What is the difference in each of these scenes? Why would most people just walk away if they saw a grasshopper, but stop if they saw a child being assaulted? What prompts a different reaction? In each case the act was the same. But what's the difference? It's the one who is sinned against. The more valuable the creature, the more serious and unacceptable it's to assault them.

God is perfect in holiness, righteousness, and love. There is no one who compares with Him in terms of His beauty. His glory is of infinite worth. Since God is perfectly good, then sinning against Him will be the highest form of evil. Friends, if we don't see sin as an attack on God's infinite worth, then we will not see hell as a just response to it. But when we see our sin as against this awesome God, then we understand that the punishment does indeed fit the crime.

APPLICATION – WHAT SHOULD BE OUR RESPONSE?

Then what does this mean for us? [What should be our response?](#) Let's go back to our passage. In verse 26, when the rich man asked for mercy, Abraham responds by saying that it can't be done because there's this great chasm between them. **Now, Abraham's response essentially can be summarized by two words: "Too late."** Yes, God's mercy is infinite but not in a sense that it has no boundaries for there is a boundary. It's too late to repent when you die. Hell offers no means of escape, rescue, or relief – there's no way out, ever.

In desperation, the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his family. He was essentially saying, "I don't wish this place on anybody, certainly not my brothers." Then we hear Abraham say, "Don't they have Moses and the prophets?" In other words, Jesus wanted to show us that God has already provided enough information and evidence about the danger of coming judgment.

But the rich man says, "But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." In other words, he was saying, "The Bible's not enough! They need to see a miracle – something supernatural like someone coming back from death." But would they? [Would you?](#) Let's say that you just saw an amazing miracle – someone getting healed, a demon being cast out, or maybe even someone coming back to life, would you forsake everything you have now, stop sinning, and start living for the glory of God? I'm not so sure. **It doesn't work that way because our hearts are far more corrupt, sinful, and dead than we think.** And that's exactly what Abraham says in verse 31: "*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*" **Ironically, the One who was telling this parable has risen from the dead and He is telling you about hell right now.** Jesus is saying, "If you want to see a miracle, I'm the living proof. Look at me and believe."

I want to speak to those who have yet to place their trust in Jesus. Friends, our sin has merited eternal death. We are helpless and hopeless to pay this debt; we are not able to come up with the payment which means that we are all storing up God's wrath. **It pains me to say this and it will be painful to hear, but if you continue this way, the Bible tells us that you are headed to hell.** Please don't get me wrong. I don't say this with a hint of condemnation or judgment. No, it's actually the opposite. I say this with deepest grief and sorrow, with a humble and broken heart knowing that I too was headed to this horrific place until God in His infinite loving wisdom made a way by sending His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. **Jesus offered an eternal sacrifice, to satisfy God's eternal justice, and provided eternal life for people like you and me** (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus died on the cross to pay the debt for our sin and satisfy God's wrath.

We receive this blessing by turning from our sin and trusting in Jesus. Friends, this really is not about avoiding hell but all about receiving Christ because He is the greatest treasure we can find. So I plead with you, as painful as this subject may be, let this truth sink in and turn to Christ today. Surrender your life before it's too late.

Let me speak to the believers. [How should we respond to this truth?](#) **First, rejoice and give thanks at the fact that the wrath of God was satisfied in Christ.** We have been set free. How can we not celebrate?

Second, hold to the truth. We must realize that Satan continues his efforts to make sin less offensive, heaven less appealing, hell less horrific, and the gospel less urgent. We must guard the truth that has been entrusted to us.

Lastly, we must have the urgency to share that truth to others. In Romans 9:1-4, Paul says, “*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of... the people of Israel.*” Can you feel Paul’s anguish? Do we have the same kind of anguish for the lost in our lives – to the point that we’re willing to give up even our own salvation if we could so that they may be found in Christ? We must go. May God ignite in you a passion to proclaim the gospel to those who are unaware of the terror that awaits them outside the mercy of God! Now, Jonathan Edwards once said, “You cannot scare anyone into heaven. You can scare them away from hell into a quest, but nobody becomes a Christian out of mere fear of hell.” Then as we go, we must share both the bad news and the good news if we are to lead people to the gospel repentance. Presenting hell is insufficient to lead one to salvation. We must also lead them to see the love of God, the grace of God, and the glory of God. Lead them to taste and see that the Lord is good.

CONCLUSION

I want to end this message by reading the second verse of the song, “In Christ Alone.” As we sing this after, I pray that this song will fill us with praise to God for saving us from eternal punishment – for giving us eternal life instead. May it humble us when we realize that we’re not getting what we deserve!

*In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
**Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live***

Let’s pray.