

The Horror of Hell

Luke 16:14–31 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: We come today to one of the most important texts in all the Bible. If you have a red letter edition, you will notice that the remainder of Luke 16 is almost exclusively the words of Jesus Christ. That is not to say those words are more inspired, but it is to say that there are some teachings our Lord did not delegate to others. They were so vital and so imminent that he reserved the right to address them personally.

What on earth could merit such direct attention? Well, the passage we are looking at today is the most explicit portrait of eternal damnation anywhere in all of Scripture.

When our Lord speaks of Hell, it isn't in the abstract; it isn't metaphorical or speculative. He addresses the subject with a stark seriousness.

Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

²⁸ “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Jesus knew exactly how his disciples would indeed be killed...as a matter of fact he knew the manner of their deaths.

- Some would be sawed in half
- Some would be covered with tar, ran through with a stake and set afire
- Some would be tied with molten chains
- Others would have holes drilled in their head, then molten lead would be poured into the open holes.

And speaking to such a death that they would most certainly face, Jesus said, ²⁸ “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul;”

Jesus said, “Men the death you are facing at the hands of the Romans and the Jews, that death will be a picnic in comparison to Hell.”

One writer has called Hell, “the ultimate horror in God’s universe.”

In recent years, preachers have done a great disservice to those who sit under their teaching by disproportionately addressing the subject or by ignoring it altogether.

Huge sections of the Word bear on this truth.

There are more references in Scripture to the wrath of God than to the love of God.

- The OT is full in every book of our Lord’s fierce judgement on his enemies.
- Jesus had more to say about Hell than he did about Heaven.
- There are approximately 1807 verses in the NT that record the words of Christ.

- 13% deal with judgment and Hell.
- 1/8 of what he says regards judgment and Hell.
- More than any other topic.

Even the title, “Savior”, draws attention to the awful fate *from which he saves us*.

But to listen to the average Bible teacher in America, you would get the idea that Jesus came to save us from low self-esteem or a poor self-image. You could spend a decade in many churches and never learn that there is a terrible place called Hell and you don’t want to go there.

CONTEXT: Remember that for the last few chapters, Luke has drawn our attention to various value propositions. That continues today in 16:14.

TEXT: Luke 16:14–31 (ESV)

¹⁴ “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. ¹⁶ The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷ But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.’”

Remember, last week in the previous passage, Jesus has been calling them to use their worldly wealth to win eternal friends, to leverage wealth for the Gospel. But the Pharisees pushed back because they loved money.

Jesus says, “You can push back all you want, but the truth of God does not change. You can try to force your way into the Kingdom another way, but there is no other way.”

Then He illustrates one of the ways the Pharisees had disregarded the Law of God to their own detriment.

¹⁸ “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

In Jesus’ day, frivolous divorce was rampant in Israel. Men could divorce their wives for burning a meal or raising their voices too loud. Jesus says, you do what you want to do, but you will face God as an adulterer if you do not repent.

NOW, he tells this very familiar story... some call it a parable, but I speculate that it is more than a parable, for it is the only example of a parable where personal names are mentioned. Parables are also typically followed by an explanation; this one is not. So it is very possible this a historic narrative.

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.”

Linen was made from Egyptian cotton and demonstrated great wealth. Some men were fortunate enough to have one set of linen clothing, but this man was so wealthy that he wore this sort of thing daily.

Not only that, his outer garment had been dyed with a Tyrian purple dye, which was extracted from sea snails. Because it was very labor intensive to produce, the purple dye was extremely expensive, and only the rich could afford fabrics or garments dyed with it.

Lydia, the wealthy woman in whose home the believers in Philippi met (Acts 16:40), was a dealer in such fabrics (v. 14).¹

Then our Lord contrasts his lifestyle with another man...

²⁰ “And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.”

Lazarus was laid at the rich man’s gate for a reason. You see, the Old Testament was filled with instructions concerning caring for the poor.

Lazarus was unable to work, so he was laid at the gate. He didn’t lay himself there — someone laid him there, believing that surely this rich man would help him.

He desires the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. Now, that is important. I will show you why in a bit.

Then it says the dogs came and licked his sores. In the Greek, there is a turn of phrase there... Lazarus desired to feed on the crumbs while dogs were feeding on him.

It is a pitiful scene - opulence and poverty just a few yards away. The rich man does not lift a finger to make life easier for Lazarus.

²² “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side.”

Remember, they are still operating in the OT dispensation. At this point, the righteous dead of the covenant community would, upon death, go where father Abraham was, called here Abraham’s side or Abraham’s bosom in the KJV.

¹ John MacArthur, Luke 11–17, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2013), 360–361.

When Jesus died on the cross, he took them into Paradise - as he told the thief on the cross. When Christians die, they go to be with Jesus - "where I am there you may also be," "Absent from the body present with the Lord."

But Abraham's side is the OT equivalent of Heaven.

NOW, understand that Lazarus didn't go to Heaven because he was poor any more than the rich man would go to hell because he was rich. Lazarus was a part of the covenant community of Israel by faith.

22b. "The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side."

Hell, as you and I know it, is not open for business today; if a lost person dies without Christ, today, they are consigned to Hades, awaiting the final judgment. But don't let that encourage you if you do not know Christ; for all practical purposes, they are the same. The eternal lake of fire is coming, but this Hades is a temporal version of the final end state.

²⁴ "And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame'."

It is the same word picture we saw earlier - Lazarus desired to dip his finger in the bowl and taste the crumbs. Now, the rich man wanted Lazarus to dip his finger in the bowl for just a little water... to bring any minuscule amount of relief.

ILLUSTRATION: If you dipped the very tip of your finger into water, how much could you transfer onto another person's lips? Perhaps a drop?

WHAT IS HELL?

1. Hell is a real place God created.

Most of the time, the word is used metaphorically in popular culture. Life is hell; I've been through hell. In actuality, that is not true and has never been true - **Hell is a real place**. It is not an imaginative way to describe our sorrows, it has dimensions spatially. We don't know where it is - the characteristic Biblical description is outside.

Somewhere in God's universe there is a place called Hell.

Following the parable of the talents - Matthew 25:30–31 (ESV),

³⁰ 'And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that **place** there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

- **Acts 1:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ “to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own **place**.”

The Greek word used is the word **TOPOS** from which we get our word topography, which is typically used to specify a literal place.

Most characteristic name - **Gehenna** - translated hell. The word has an interesting history used of the valley of HINNOM. It had a history of horror. God’s people murdered their children in that valley. They burned them alive to the false god Molech. It was the place of dread, cruelty, heart-wrenching grief, and desecration, **2 Chronicles 28:3**. By the 1st century it was a garbage dump.

God created all things. That includes Hell. Hell was not created by Satan, it was created FOR Satan.

Matthew 25:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’.”

2. Hell is a place of punishment that is just, terrible, and everlasting.

Punishment is a very unpopular idea. It is considered almost immoral to punish someone.

Prisons are called, “correctional facilities”.

Very few parents these days will inflict punishment on a son or daughter.

- They will have **remedial** punishment... that which will make people better. That’s good, but it is not all that there is.
- There is **preventative** punishment - punish one so that others will fear.

The punishment of hell is not remedial - it doesn’t make anyone better. It is of no benefit to those being punished. It’s not in the absolute sense preventative, unless in hearing of the flames of hell others flee to the cross.

I think that the idea of punishment conveys that there is one in authority that has the duty of judging and inflicting punishment, and that reminds us that there is one over us with that same moral duty.

Matthew 25:46 (ESV)

⁴⁶ “And these will go away into eternal **punishment**, but the righteous into eternal **life**.”

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ “They will suffer the **punishment** of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,”

Once judgement has been fully proclaimed - it will serve nothing except for a punishment of **retribution**.

3. Hell is for the Devil, his angels, and the unsaved.

A. SATAN AND DEMONS

Mark 1:24 (ESV)

²⁴ “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.”

Luke 8:30–31 (ESV)

³⁰ “Jesus then asked him, ‘**What is your name?**’. And he said, ‘Legion’, for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.”

Jude 6–7 (ESV)

⁶ “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— ⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

B. NOTORIOUSLY WICKED.

Revelation 21:8 (ESV)

⁸ “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

C. THERE ARE UPRIGHT AND RESPECTABLE PEOPLE THERE WHO SIMPLY NEVER WERE BORN AGAIN.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ “in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

The Bible says God will take vengeance in flaming fire.

“He who does not believe the son shall not see life but the wrath abides on him. He who hears and believes on him who sent me shall not see condemnation but has passed from death unto life.”

4. Hell is ruled by God and exists for His Glory.

There is a popular idea in people's minds that Hell is the domain of Satan. They have the idea that Hell is outside of God's presence.

John Milton is partly to blame... "Paradise Lost". In the poem, he gives a great deal of attention to Satan. Satan says, "Here at least we shall be free... here we may reign secure... better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven."

God alone rules in Hell.

Revelation 14:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ "he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."

Hell is also for God's glory - It is not an embarrassment or something God failed in. It's a glorious revelation of the glorious justice of God forever.

The holy ones in Revelation praise God for Hell and thank him for Hell.

Revelation 11:16–18 (ESV)

¹⁶ "And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. ¹⁸ The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

5. Hell Never Ends.

Every single mention we have of Hell indicates that it is forever and ever... the unmitigated wrath of the living God, without dissipation or rest.

Absolute poverty, absolute pain, emotional torment, physical torment,

Weeping...the tears in Heaven are wiped away, but yours will go on forever.

Gnashing of teeth - Refers to anger in the Bible...anger at God, anger at themselves, anger at the others there, eternal anger...

We have this saying, "Love the sinner, hate the sin". That is a good rule for us. That is what we should do. However, there comes a time when, not the SIN, but the SINNER is judged.

One scholar discovered that of the 33 places in the Bible that refer to God's hatred - 12 refer to God's hatred of sin, 21 to God's hatred of sinners.

²⁵ “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ”

So there is no purgatory, there are no second chances...

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

I’ve heard men say, “I look forward to going to Hell because that is where all my friends are”. Have you ever considered that the biggest prayer meeting in all the Universe is in the pits of the damned as I speak... begging God that you never come there!!!!

²⁹ “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’ ”

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Interestingly, as if to fully vindicate himself, Jesus did cause one to rise from the dead. Ironically, his name was Lazarus. And if that is not enough, Jesus Himself overcame death... leaving every mouth closed and every heart without excuse.

God has moved heaven and earth to keep you out of Hell.

Some of you have grandparents in glory praying you wise up.
Some of you have friends in Hell praying you never come there.

I am vividly aware of that reality every time I preach... but no more so than today.