

Hell: A Necessary Truth

A Personal Experience

Luke 16:19-31

This is the third in a five-part series on the doctrine Hell. The doctrine of Hell may be the most hated doctrine found in the pages of the Bible. No one wants Hell to be real, especially when we have friends and relatives who may already be there or who may be heading there. There may be some in this room who are on their way to hell, right now. That is tough to think about. But if hell is real, then we must think about it.

Except for those alive when Jesus comes again, everyone is going to die. What then? The Bible is clear that those who are born again, Christ followers will instantly be in the presence of Jesus. The New Testament says ***to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*** That phrase, ***absent from the body*** is clearly meant to describe the moment of one's death when the human spirit leaves a human body which has ceased to live. The spirit of a person, the soul of a person does not die. That person, is instantly in the presence of Jesus.

What about those who do not know Jesus? What about those who have not placed saving faith in Christ and have not been born again? What happens to those when they die. What will it be like one minute after they die?

That is a question many people privately want answered, but few people honestly want to discuss. For some reason, we have a hesitancy to discuss death in personal terms. My death! Somehow, we think avoiding the subject will enable us to escape the reality.

We know, from experience that everyone eventually dies. **What then?** That's a great question, isn't it? What happens one minute after you die? What will it be like?

Believe it or not the Bible gives us a great picture of what it will be like after you die. Jesus told a story that provides a bird's eye view of what it will be like for a person to die without having trusting Christ for salvation. In telling the story, Jesus is relating the personal experience of a person who died and found himself in Hell.

READ Luke 16:19-31

I believe this text to be a clear picture of the afterlife. A vivid description of what it will be like after one dies. So what does this passage teach about what it will be like one minute (or one second, or one year) after you die? There are six things that we can know are true.

1. You Will Be Alive (23)

In verse 22 we see that both Lazarus and the rich man have died.

The funerals for these two men were radically different.

For Lazarus there was probably no funeral. No mention of family or friends. Likely his body would have been taken out to a common burial site for those who had no family. Or, possibly cremated.

When the rich man died, there was probably a big funeral. Many people would have come out to mourn the death of this wealthy man. They would have placed his body in a first rate tomb with all the trimmings.

I've preached a lot of funerals. Some with crowds of hundreds. Then I have conducted funerals where there were only ½ dozen family members. **In once did a graveside service and there was no one to carry the casket, so I helped the grave diggers and funeral home workers carry it to the grave.**

I've buried some who were very wealthy. I've buried some who were dirt poor. In each case, regardless of the wealth, social status, number at the funeral, the people who were buried **were dead**. One person was just as dead as the next. In our story, both men have really died.

But notice, though they have died, they are still alive.

Pew Research in November 2015

72 % believe in heaven

58 % believe in hell

37 % of **none's** believe in heaven

27 % of **none's** believe in hell

Of those who believe in heaven and hell . . .

82% think they will go to heaven.

2% believe they will end up in hell

Those who believe in an afterlife are in definite agreement with the Bible. The Bible teaches that your soul does not die. It continues to live. We have confidence from the Bible that one minute after you die you will still be alive.

In Matt. 17:3 Moses & Elijah are still alive though buried for many years.

In Heb. 12:1 we are told of a “great cloud of witnesses” that surround us. These are all the believers who have lived and died before us.

Death is not extinction, but separation.

Adam died the day he ate the forbidden fruit. Still alive physically, but separated from intimate relationship with God. He did not die physically for over 900 years.

So, one minute after you die, you will still be alive.

2. **You Will Leave Behind the Physical and Material (19-22)**

The second thing I note is that one minute after you die, you will no longer be affected by the physical, material, and financial situation of your physical life.

In their physical lives they were a “rich man” and a “poor man”. This is no longer true, one minute after they died. In physical life they were “healthy” and “sick.” No such things one minute after they died.

Your body and all that is material are left behind. Your body is laid to rest in the ground. Your possessions are divided among those whom you or the state designate. Your money is left to family, or causes important to you. None of it goes with you. As one person put it *I've never seen a U-Haul hitched to a hearse.*

The Egyptians believed they could take it with them. That is why the pharaohs had so much of their wealth buried with them. But the evidence of history is that long after the mummified bodies were turning to dust, the wealth was still there to be stolen by grave robbers.

3. **You Will Be in Heaven or Hell (23)**

This is the third thing that you should know. One minute after you die, you will be either in Heaven or Hell. **These men represent the two possible destinations** of all people.

Lazarus was in Heaven.

Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom. This was simply a Jewish way of saying he wanted to Heaven. He left a world of hunger and pain and was taken to paradise, heaven.

The day is coming when every believer will be in heaven, where Christ is. Place of great joy and excitement. Anything but boring. Creative, intriguing, enjoyable.

Sometimes we have trouble imagining that heaven could really be better than earth. We have trouble visualizing just how great heaven will be.

The rich man was in hell.

Described here as a place of suffering and torment. Place so horrible that even a drop of water coming from the finger of another man would be a welcomed relief.

Hell is a real place and that it will be inhabited by real people. All those who have not been born again through faith in Christ will be there.

Around the end of the 19th century, Robert Ingersoll, a famous lawyer and atheist, delivered a blistering lecture on hell. He called hell the "scarecrow of religion" and told his audience how unscientific it was, and how all intelligent people had decided there was no such place.

A drunk in the audience came up to him afterward and said, "Bob, I liked your lecture; I liked what you said about hell. But, Bob, I want you to be sure about it, because I'm depending upon you."

Just because sophisticated preachers and theologians have rejected the doctrine of hell, does not mean it does not exist. Whose word will you accept today? Those of the intellectual elite? Or the word of God?

1. You will be alive
2. You will leave behind the physical, material and financial.
3. You will be in heaven or hell

4. You Will Be Conscious (24-25)

Notice the request of the rich man. He knew who Lazarus was! He knew about water. He knew what he needed. He knew he was thirsty. In other words he was conscious of his condition and situation.

He knew about his past. His memory of earthly life had not been erased. This may be one of the more horrible things about hell. Remembering what was and what could have been.

The response was to remember what things were like before death. You had it made. You had all the good things of life, the finest of everything. Lazarus had nothing. You remember him? And he did.

He knew about his present.

He realized that he was in hell and Lazarus was in paradise. He realized that he now needed what Lazarus possessed. The roles have been reversed. Now the rich man has become the beggar. Begging for drop of water. Lazarus has become the rich man enjoying the eternal blessings of heaven.

He knew something of the future.

He was concerned about the future of his brothers. He knew that his brothers were headed to the same place. Note that he did not look forward to them being with him so they could enjoy eternity together.

5. Your Destiny Will Be Fixed Forever (26)

Listen to verse 26. This great gulf is “fixed.” No one crosses over it. Your opportunity to be saved and ultimately go to heaven comes before death, not after.

It is appointed to men to die once, and after this, the judgment.

The rich man chose an eternity separated from God. Lazarus had chosen faith in the grace of God. The rich man rejected a relationship with God, and God honored that choice. He would be forever separated. Lazarus chose to trust Christ and was honored for his choice. He would be with the Lord for all eternity.

6. Your Earthly Opportunities Will Be Gone Forever (27-31)

The rich man had five brothers whom he was now concerned about. It is commendable that he was concerned for them, but his concern was too late.

One minute after you die you will no longer have any earthly opportunities. These will be gone forever. **If there is someone whom you want to win to Christ** you should do it now. After you die that opportunity will not be offered. If you are heading to hell, you may be leading others with you. Children. Spouse. Friend. Is that really the direction you want to go? Not only for yourself but for others?

One time Spain controlled both sides of the strait of Gibraltar, separating Europe from Africa. At that spot there was a huge marker called the “**Pillar of Hercules**,” and prior to Columbus’ voyage in 1492, it carried a three word Latin saying chiseled into stone:

NE PLUS ULTRA, which, literally means, ***the highest point or nothing beyond***. It was a warning to sailors not to go beyond that point, for there was nothing out there.

This phrase, Ne Plus Ultra, No More Beyond was the standard belief of that time and was stamped on coins. After Columbus’s discovery of a new world, recognition of the revised outlook was pressed into its coins. The three word phrase was replaced with a two word phrase.

PLUS ULTRA: which meant “More Beyond.”

That truth is stamped on the pages of Scripture and in the heart of every believer.