

The Truth about Hell

Insights into Eternity - Session Three

Warm-up question: If the President initiated a draft for us all to go to war tomorrow and you had a choice of jobs in the armed forces, what would you choose to do?

We have all been called up to be part of a war that has been going on for centuries. There are no jobs that are away from the front lines in this war. The battle rages all around us. We are in the midst of the fight. Paul, the apostle writes about this war in his second letter to the Corinthian church, “for though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). When a person receives Christ, he enters into God’s draft. If you are a Christian, you have been called into a battle with eternal significance. If you are not yet a Christian, there is an unseen fight that is going on which will affect your eternal destination, whether you know it or not. Many of us that are Christians are trying to be civilians in a time of war. When World War One broke out, the War Ministry in London sent a coded message to one of the British outposts in the inaccessible areas of Africa which said; “war declared, arrest all enemy aliens in your district.” There was a prompt reply; “have arrested ten Germans, six Belgians, four Frenchmen, two Italians, three Austrians and one American. Please advise immediately who we’re at war with?” The bible makes it very clear who we are at war with. It is an ancient enemy:

¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).

Although most of us would like to have a job in the background where we are not actually fighting, it is not possible. You are on the front line. A war is being waged for your soul and those of your loved ones. Our enemies are unseen entities that are ranked under satan, their leader. They are strategic, purposeful, incessant and relentless. You are in this fight for the rest of your

life.

What are the main reasons that countries go to war?

Certainly today there are many different reasons, but in ancient times it was mostly for land, the spoils of war, or for slaves. When territory was captured, the plunder was shared out equally among those that won the victory. God’s people are attacking satan’s stronghold in the world and releasing slaves from his clutches. The biblical worldview is that satan is in control over planet Earth:

¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

The church’s job in this age is to rescue people from satan’s control and help them to become disciples (learners) of Christ in order that they might not be separated from God for eternity and sent to a place called hell. Every person is deeply loved by God who does not want any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But what if they don’t? What if they die without coming to know Christ? What if they are unresponsive to God’s message of love and good news? At the Second Coming of Christ, He will separate the sheep (believers) from the goats (non-believers), and we are told that some will be punished for eternity:

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the **eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.**’ ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ ⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to **eternal punishment**, but the righteous to **eternal life**” (Matthew 25:41-46 Emphasis mine).

In our first session we talked about those who had been resuscitated and sharing their experiences of the other side of death before coming back. They also shed some light on the debate concerning hell. Peter Fenwick, in interviewing people revived after a trauma or illness, found that 5% of the 350 people he studied remember consciously experiencing hell. Dr. Maurice Rawlings reports that some who experienced hell had the memory of it repressed in a few days time.

Some say that hell is a place where a person that rejects God's free pardon for sin is annihilated. The word annihilation means, "to reduce to utter ruin or nonexistence; destroy utterly." Twice in this passage though, Jesus uses the same Greek word that He used to describe the bliss of His followers, the word *aiōnios*, which means: "Eternal, perpetual. When referring to eternal life, it means the life which is God's and hence not affected by the limitation of time."¹ That does not sound like annihilation. It is the clear teaching of Jesus that someone who rejects the gospel and continues in his sin, at the end of his life will suffer eternal punishment. Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin, leader of Russia from 1922-1953, accompanied her father at death's door and said that she would never sit alongside an unbeliever who was dying again. She said that he went into hell kicking and screaming. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). Voltaire was said to have died crying out in torment as was King Charles the ninth of France, David Hume and Thomas Pain. Speaking for those who do know God, C.M. Ward said, "No Christian has ever been known to recant on his death bed."

Why would a loving God send anyone to hell?

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe **stands condemned already because he has not believed** in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16-18. Emphasis mine).

God has established the way for salvation. The situation is that the entire human race is in the same boat. We have all fallen short of God's ideal for living.

None of us can say we have never sinned. If you have only sinned once it is enough to make you a sinner. We all suffer with the same disease. Sin is what separates us from God eternally. We all stand guilty before God. James puts it this way; "*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it*" (James 2:10). If there could have been another way for God to get you into heaven by any other way, apart from sending His Son to die a cruel and tortuous death, don't you think He would have taken it? He has given man the gift of free will but His justice demands that rebellion has to be penalized. A holy God cannot allow sin to be in His presence, so He honors the choices that a rebel who refuses to repent has made. In His love for the human race, He has initiated a rescue plan. His Son would take on human form and be a substitute to take the place of guilty man, taking the punishment upon Himself. That way His justice would be satisfied and He can reach out in love to save all that will turn their lives over to Him and walk in obedience to Him. When we repent and receive Christ, the Spirit of God gives us power to live for Christ. We also hold the answer for others and the Holy Spirit gives us the power and boldness to speak to others about God's rescue plan for the human race. We assail satan's kingdom when we speak the truth of God's word, robbing him of God's precious jewels (Malachi 3:17. KJV), or treasured possession (NIV), the lives of people that Christ died to save. We are at war with satan to release the captives from his citadel. The church today is on the attack, breaking down every defense that the enemy has raised against the Church. We are told that the gates of hades (hell) will not overcome the Church (Matthew 16:18). Gates speak of defenses against an invading army. The gates of hell will not be able to hold back the attacking Church of God, bringing precious people to their eternal home.

How bad does a person have to be to be sent to hell? What is the line that a person crosses?

⁸ "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

I want to be very clear by restating it with the above scripture. The passage teaches that people that

¹ Key Word Study Bible, New Lexical Study Aids, AMG Publishers, page 1580.

are cowards, people that are liars, people that are unbelievers in Christ; will be sent to a lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The picture that the scriptures paint is clear. Jesus spoke much of eternity. He warned his followers about Hell because He did not want them to go there. I do not know whether the lake is a literal lake of fire, or if the lake of fire is a figurative picture or a state of being. Personally, I do not care to find out! Either way, what we do know about the lake of fire is that it is a place which will be full of torment and destruction. The Bible also describes Hell as a place of eternal darkness (Jude 1:13). We have a choice to be consumed by the Light, or by the Darkness. We will embrace one or the other for eternity. Think about the nature of light and darkness. Light promotes health and well being. Plants need light to survive. Light exposes, and it also nourishes. It promotes life. It illuminates. Darkness covers and hides. It is an absence of light. Psychologists tell us that prolonged darkness can cause depression and other maladies. It is not healthy for people to live with an absence of light. The lake of fire will be a place of darkness. Today it is considered unpopular to even talk about such a place of darkness. Who would deserve to go there? Let me ask you this: How many murders does it take to be a murderer? One! How many lies does it take to be a liar? One! How many sins does it take to be a sinner? One! We are all in need of a Savior, and there is none other than Jesus that can save you from your sin and its penalty. The way to God is first to realize our need of a savior. Paul, the Apostle, puts it this way, "there is no one righteous, not even one.... there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12). Paul carries on by saying that no one will be declared righteous by keeping a system of works (The law, verse 20). He states that a righteousness apart from the law has been made known, the substitutionary death of Christ for you and in place of you. This righteousness is imparted to you when you repent of your sin and receive the person of Jesus Christ to sit on the throne room of your life. This is the only way out of going to a place of torment (Acts 4:12). When you do this, your name is written in the Book of Life, a record book of all those who have turned their lives over to Christ and received Him into their lives to forgive their sin. Those whose name is not found in the book will be tormented in the lake of fire:

¹⁴ And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if any-

one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14-15)

¹⁰ "...he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ "And the smoke of **their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night,** those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." (Revelation 14:10-11, Emphasis mine).

The unsaved will be judged according to the Light they have received.

I believe that there are different degrees of punishment in that awful place. Chuck Swindoll has something to say about the degrees of punishment in hell:

"There will always be some who will not have as much divine input as others. Because that is true, I believe there will be degrees of eternal punishment. Before you pick up stones to stone me, look closely at the words of Jesus:"

⁴⁷ "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48).

"Let's understand that no one without Christ spends eternity in heaven. But the *specifics* of how God handles those who are without Christ because they heard so little might very well be answered by the idea of degrees of punishment. But we do know for sure that heaven will not be their home."²

We also need to be careful as to our influence. The greater the influence we have the greater the accountability and responsibility for that influence. There are people that are on television that are role models for our young, and yet are living immoral lives. They will be judged more strictly due to their influence over many. Don't be quick to jump into positions of influence over others. Jesus said for us to take the plank out

² Growing Deep in the Christian Life, Charles R. Swindoll, Published by Multnomah Press, Page 324.

of our own eyes so that we can take the sliver out of other people's eyes (Matthew 7:3-5). Every one of us that are Christians is already in a position of influence, especially if you are known in your neighborhood or workplace as a Christian. People are watching you to see how you live your lives. Their eternity depends on their response to the message of Christ which can be read in the way that you live your life.

¹ Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly (James 3:1).

James, in this passage of scripture is quick to remind us about influential positions even in the church. God's people will model their lives according to how their pastor or small group leader leads their's. At the judgment, Christian leaders will be judged more strictly, due to the amount of light that they have received and their influential position. As one's influence rises, so does the level of accountability. It makes sense that just as there would be different levels of reward for the righteous, there would be levels of reward for those in Hell as well.

Let's look at a passage of scripture that Jesus taught concerning two individuals that died and where they found themselves. I note that Jesus does not say that this is a parable. It is also significant that one of the two is named, which is not typical for a parable. The reason he used the name Lazarus was because it was the beggar's name. My viewpoint is that Jesus is telling us of a situation that is real:

The Rich Man and Lazarus

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 hell**, 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 fixed, 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 father's house, 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' " (Luke 16:19-31 Emphasis mine).

Before we venture into the passage itself, it may be helpful for us to examine what the Bible teaches concerning what happens at death. *Hell* and *Abraham's side* are words in the passage used to describe the two different states these men found themselves in. The Greek word *Hades* (Sheol in the Old Testament) is the word translated as hell. Hades is found 10 times in the New Testament. Jesus told us that while his body was buried in the tomb he would be in the heart of the earth:

⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).

Hades is generally believed by many to be a place in the earth which was composed of two separate compartments. One side is called Abraham's side (NIV), or Abraham's bosom (KJV), and signifies closeness to the heart of a person. Another word used for the righteous side is paradise; this term was used by Jesus when he talked to the believing thief crucified with him: Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in **paradise**" (Luke 23:43, Emphasis mine). This paradise could not be heaven because Jesus, on the day of His resurrection, told Mary Magdalene: "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (John 20:17). These scriptures also bear witness to the fact that when Christ died, his spirit descended to Hades, where He wrenched the keys of death and hell (hades) from satan (Revelation 1:18). He then released the righteous saints, those who had placed their trust in God, from this paradise, where they had been kept in the heart of the earth. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Jesus was the first of those who has conquered death and could enter heaven

based on the victory accomplished on the cross.

Matthew tells us that at the time Christ died, there were a number of phenomena that happened. He tells us that there was a great earthquake and that the temple curtain was torn in two, split from top to bottom. Then he tells us something else which is intriguing. Matthew says:

⁵² The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people (Matthew 27:52-53).

Can you imagine what that would be like to witness? It seems likely that these holy people were released from the righteous side of Hades upon the sacrificial death of Christ. We are not told how long the holy people were around, or even who they were. It is possible that after meeting Mary Magdalene, Jesus ascended to heaven with those righteous that were held in the place called Abraham's side or Paradise.

Paul the Apostle corroborates this view in his letter to the Church at Ephesus. He tells us that Christ descended to the lower earthly regions before He ascended to sit on His throne:

⁸ "When **he ascended** on high, **he led captives in his train** and gave gifts to men." ⁹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that **he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?** ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe) (Ephesians 4:8-10. Emphasis mine).

It is important that we understand that since the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, a Christian does not descend into the lower parts of the earth upon death, but ascends to heaven to always be with the Lord. He led captives in His train probably refers to the fact that the believers that were being held at Abraham's side were brought to heaven with Christ when he ascended. For we know that from the resurrection of Christ, believers go to be with the Lord upon their death. Paul says:

²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruit-

ful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

²³ I am torn between the two: **I desire to depart and be with Christ**, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:22-24). Also read 2 Corinthians 5:8.

The passage in Luke 16 that we are studying gives us a preview of what is happening in Hell as we speak or read. This seems to be a true story of the destinies of two very different men and where they went upon death. In this passage the name of Lazarus and Abraham are mentioned, and in some manuscripts (The Vulgate) the name Dives (which is the Latin word for rich) is given to the rich man.

Verses 19-21 The Situation of the Two Men on Earth

How is the Rich man described?

The color purple in the days of Christ was not an easy commodity to obtain. This rich man was more than likely clothed in Tyrian purple³ (or Royal purple), the Prada, Armani or top fashion design of the day. The color was extracted from the mucus of a rare sea snail. Aristotle assigned a value to it of ten to twenty times its weight in gold. The rich man also wore fine linen. The word used in Greek for fine linen is *bussos*, a strong rare thread secreted by mussels.⁴ Kings such as the Egyptian king Tutankhamen wore this very expensive cloth. This rich man lived sumptuously every day. He ate the best foods, drank the best wine, and his house was the best mansion in town. We are not overdoing it by presuming that this man was well known in the whole country as someone to be envied. He was an influential celebrity of his day.

How is Lazarus described?

We are told that Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate or porch. The Greek word translated laid is *ballō*. Literally it means to throw out with force. He had been flung roughly and it seems that he was just left to lay there, life slowly ebbing from him. The gate where Lazarus was thrown was more than likely the rear servant's entrance, where the servants deposited the rubbish and the dogs congregated. It was obvious to anyone that Lazarus was very ill, being covered with ulcerated sores. It

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrian_purple

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byssus>

is also very likely that he was too ill to go anywhere, but stay where he was thrown and beg for the scraps of food that fell from the rich man's table. William Barclay tells us:

In that time there were no knives, forks or napkins. Food was eaten with the hands and, in very wealthy houses; the hands were cleansed by wiping them on hunks of bread, (probably thin pita bread) which were then thrown away. That was what Lazarus was waiting for.⁵

Dogs kept licking at his sores and it is possible that he was too weakened through sickness and hunger to fend them off. We don't know if the Rich man had him thrown out because he was asking him for help, or others in the town had thrown him there because he was a health threat to the local populace. It seems that Lazarus was in no position to help himself. He longed to eat some scraps of food but he was competing with the dogs for the scraps. Keep in mind that most dogs were not household pets at the time.

Verses 22-26 The Condition of the Two Men in Eternity

How do you think the lives of the two men were celebrated upon both of their deaths?

We are not told that anything happened for Lazarus at his death. No funeral, not even a burial was held in his honor. It is likely that if no one cared for him while he was alive, his death was no different. Scripture speaks loudly in its silence on the subject.

Contrast that with the rich man. We are specifically told that he was buried. I feel sure that it was a lavish ceremony with public mourning. His body was probably given a space on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem as only the rich could afford. When the Messiah (Christ) returns, Zechariah the prophet says that his return will be first to the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4), which is why it is covered in graves, for the dead shall rise at His coming.

The procession to such an auspicious burial place would require a horde of professional mourners, hired for such an occasion as was customary at the time. Of course, the rich man couldn't care less as soon as he

died. He was quite surprised to find himself in hell. While living at the rich man's gate, it is likely that no one knew the name of Lazarus, but everybody knew the name of the rich man. At the other side of death's door though, things are turned around; everybody knows the name of Lazarus. As for the rich man, they have not got the foggiest idea of who he is, his name is not known, he's a nobody. How sad it is that many who believe that death is annihilation will find themselves very conscious upon entering eternity through death's door.

Some say that when death comes, the real you, your spirit, falls into a soul sleep where nothing is experienced at all, and one is not conscious. What things do you see in this passage that would teach us differently?

One of the first things the rich man experiences is utter torment (Verse 23). The Greek word used is *basanos*, which literally means "going to the bottom, the lowest torture or torment."⁶ This Greek word is possibly used to describe what we talked about earlier, that in hell there are different levels of suffering, and the deepest level of torment was what this man is experiencing (present tense, in that he is still there today if this is not simply a story). We are also told that his tongue was burning; he needed water to cool his tongue. Even though he does not have a body, he is experiencing the sense of touch and is in terrible pain.

He also has the sense of sight and recognition, he sees Lazarus across a great chasm and Abraham by his side. How painful to see Paradise and yet know that it is too late, and he will never experience one moment there. Later on, at the Great White Throne Judgement, found in Revelation 20:11-15, we read that death and Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire, where there will be eternal darkness, from that point on the ex-rich man will no longer be able to see anything.

He has the sense of speech; he calls to Abraham and communicates his pain. It seems that there is no change in his attitude towards Lazarus, for he still thinks that he can command Lazarus to get water for him and also to visit his brothers. His appeal to Abraham is somewhat manipulative, he calls him Father Abraham, intimating that he is in relationship to Abraham due to his being born into a nation of faith in God.

⁵ Daily Study Bible, William Barclay, Page 214.

⁶ Dakes Annotated Reference Bible, by Finis Jennings Dake, Page 80 in the New Testament.

How deceived he was! How similar to many born into a Christian country today. Many people call themselves Christian, yet not all of them are in relationship with God. The sense of hearing is also still with him; he can hear Abraham talking with him.

Abraham then answers the rich man and says something which will remain with him for the rest of eternity. It was a powerful statement, full of truth, but no hope: he will **remember** his life on earth and all the opportunities he missed to repent and give his life to God. How painful that would be! The mind will be very clear; our faculties will still be with us, perhaps more so in eternity. There will be a great amount of regret over deeds committed with an inability to set them right, it is too late. The ex-rich man does not have anyone to pray him out of this situation; it is a lie from satan to believe your position can be changed after death. He is told that his location is fixed, that the chasm that separates them will forever be there and there will not be anyone who can cross either way (vs.26). Where death finds you, eternity binds you. According to what we see in scripture, there is no purgatory, no reincarnation, and no chance of relief. The time to change your eternal destiny is before you die, before it is too late.

Is it a sin to be rich? Does a person that is poor go to heaven because he or she is poor? If not, then what was the sin that sent the rich man to hell?

There are many sins that the rich man, may have committed, but his main sin was that he was quite content without God. His life was one in which he had no need. He paid no heed to anything but his own pleasure and comfort. It could be that he never noticed or cared about Lazarus, which certainly would have increased his condemnation. He had been in a position to help Lazarus out, but instead left him to suffer and die. He seems to have had the notion that it was perfectly normal and natural that Lazarus should wallow in pain while he basked in a life of luxury. He looked at a fellow man, hungry and in pain, and did nothing about it.

Lazarus when on earth was discontent without God, and had sought Him out in his need, and found Him to be merciful and gracious, but the Rich man had not really felt any need at all. Both had been born into the world in the same situation as you and me. Paul in his letter to the Church at Ephesus describes every person's situation in this way:

¹² remember that at that time **you were separate from Christ**, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, **without hope and without God in the world.** (Ephesians 2:12).

We are born into the world without God. Each of us is given so many years to find Him. During our lifetime on Earth God sends opportunities our way to search out a path to His home. This is the universal need of every person on earth—to find God. God will honor after death the choices we have made in life. If we choose to live without God on Earth, He will grant our wishes for eternity. If you are living your life without a second thought of God or eternity, call out to Him now while you can still experience His grace. Why wait for another second? Surely your spiritual enemy, the devil, will seek to have you put off this message till another day. Christ waits for you with open arms. Do not think that it is coincidence that you are reading this now:

⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away (John 6:37).

Verses 27-31. A Plea for Those Still Alive.

Why was he now so concerned about his brothers still on Earth?

This rich man had prayed twice while in hell. The first prayer was for water, the second was for his brothers on earth. Both prayers were refused. He had been unfaithful to his responsibility. His responsibility was toward those around him, but especially to his brothers. He had set before them as a pattern the most corrupting thing on earth,—the example of a man who was content without God. Now that he was in hell, he remembered that his brothers were living according to the model that he had given them, a contented life without God. The one thing that can add agony to one in hell is to be shut up for ever with those you have helped to bring there. Every one of us influences others for good or for worse. Let us commit ourselves to be faithful to those who model their lives after us, our brothers, our sisters, our sons and daughters, our close relatives. We must live whole heartedly for Christ. Other lives depend on it.

On what basis was the rich man's brothers refused a messenger?

The ex-rich man is told that they have the Word of God (At that particular time they had the writings of Moses and the prophets). That is all the witness that they need. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18), so if they do not believe God's Words they will not believe even if one should return from the dead. Don't you think he was trying to manipulate Abraham into letting him return to tell his brothers? I'm sure the ex rich man knew that there was no way that Lazarus would want to go back to earth; after all he had been through. God's written Word is the most important evidence that one can examine to prepare us for life in eternity. It is ignored at great danger to one's eternal life beyond the grave.

What are the chief take home lessons that this passage teaches us?

- 1) That the time to seek the Lord is now and not to put it off.
- 2) That there are consequences to our actions that are not

always felt on earth but follow us into eternity.

- 3) We influence others more than we realize on earth.
- 4) God's Word is the most important evidence for us to prepare for life eternal.
- 5) That no matter what our economic position in this world, if we don't have Christ, we don't have life (1 John 5:12).

Who is the 'Lazarus' that is near your 'gate,' your sphere of influence? Pray for them here at the end of this message.

Prayer: Father, thank you for telling us plainly in Your word what we need to do to prepare for eternity. I ask that everyone who is not certain of their eternal destiny would pray to you and seek until they find you. Let none of us be content in a life without You. Help us as we reach out to those who do not know You and help us win them from the Kingdom of Darkness and bring them into Your Kingdom of Light. Amen.

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