

# Reality of Hell

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

This passage was told by the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 16:19 and the following verses:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren: that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

I expect that almost anyone would have the feeling that it would be rather an amazing thing if a man preaching today would preach on heaven and hell; but that is a reflection of the day in which we live. If there is anything true about the Christian Gospel at all, is it not eternity? You know what Paul says, "If we in this life only have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." You would never be able to sustain the Christian Gospel if you were going to promote only this world. That is one reason one feels such misgiving today about the popular emphasis directing all the attention of believers to thinking about this world. One does not think about the Christian Gospel unless one is thinking about what one could say to a man who is paralyzed, who cannot move a finger, and who never will be able to do one thing in physical action. Would there be a Gospel to preach to him? What would it be? Would it be that he should do something? When the true Gospel is preached to him he could have everything that is in the promises even if he were paralyzed. He cannot earn it, and he will not have to pay for it. The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This matter of thinking about heaven and hell is not advanced thinking. It is actually elementary thinking. In the book of Hebrews, this is called the ABC s (Hebrews 6:1). As a matter of fact, if a person wanted to give an idea of the Gospel to little children, one of the first things that would be told to them would be that when Grandmother died she had gone home. Parents are glad to be able to tell the child Grandmother has gone home.

I am sure all believers could say this, then why not think it? Why not think it everyday, that heaven and hell came at the end of living in this world? In philosophy we say that whenever we are thinking of any movement of any sort: that is, of any series of events that came to an end, the last item gives meaning to all the rest. The last event in the series is retroactively meaningful to all. What does that mean? That means that if a man came into the house during the day and saw his wife standing at a table, where there are bits of paper; and she has her mouth full of pins: she has bits of paper and scissors and cloth in hand;

she is not playing paper dolls. If he asked her what she was doing, she would not tell him, "I am cutting cloth," though that may be just what she is doing at that precise moment. And she will not say "I am playing with pieces of paper;" though that may seem to be what she is doing. She will tell him: "I am making a dress." That is what all her activity is about. And that is the last item: the dress.

If he should come into the kitchen and see her involved in kneading a mass of something that looks like glue to him: while she is working away at it, it may look for all the world very unappetizing: yet all this squeezing and working she is doing is involved in making a Christmas cake. It is that end result, the cake, that makes all that she is doing with that "goo" actually meaningful. The last event in the series gives meaning to everything that goes before. Life is like that.

I cannot think of anything more burdensome than to live each day just to be through with that day. When I was in Taiwan with one of my former students, I was at one of his places where young men came in the evenings. He provided a wonderful place for them. They called it "Welcome Inn." They would come to this Inn, and have their evenings of fellowship and relaxation in Christian surroundings.

On one occasion I asked a certain man what day it was, and he reached for his book and replied, "The 136th day. I have 135 more" – (until he could come home). In his notebook he showed me he had marked off all the days, and he was just checking them off, until the date when he was scheduled to go home.

Should we think there is anything strange about a man thinking about the future? This is what gives meaning to life. There is nothing morbid about a human being, who has believed the Lord Jesus Christ, thinking in terms of going to heaven. First of all I want to tell you that heaven as we understand it is a believer's idea. Heaven is a common element in spiritual thinking. I know that all the world is interested in a heaven of some sort, so it is not surprising that there are various views of heaven.

Every thought in our tradition, the Christian tradition about heaven are thoughts of pleasantness and peace. I have never heard a song about heaven that was not sung with gusto. "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!" "When they ring those golden bells for you and me" will stir your heart. "Face to face shall I behold Him;" "There is a better land far, far away where saints in glory stand." Many a believer has responded to that song in his heart. "When all my labors and trials are o'er and I am safe on that beautiful shore, just to be near the dear Lord I adore will through the ages be glory for me. Friends will be there I have loved long ago." That is the song of a Christian. It is our song. There may be many doubters about heaven, but I never yet knew anybody that did not want his children to go there: "Safe on His gentle breast."

What you and I need to do with ourselves is to face up to this thing. Is it just a poet's dream? Is it real? Is it meaningful? All of this is proper and significant thinking. To be without any hope, to have no prospect for the future is demoralizing; and fortunately the Gospel leaves no doubt. Listen to the Lord Jesus Christ, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). Christians in more than 1,200 different languages around the world comfort one another with those words. Christians believe this thing.

No one knows what heaven will look like. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be like." It is probably not a locality at all in the sense of being local. That puts it in space. It probably does not belong in space, as it does not belong in time. It is eternal and infinite, and yet it is a place. "I go to prepare a place for you." Of course when I said that no one knows what heaven will look like, I am sure that there are some who will remember the gates of pearl, the golden streets, and the sea of glass. I hope it will not be any big shock to such, but there will be no pearl, no gold, and there will be no glass up there: because pearl and gold and glass belong in this world. But the gates will be wonderful like gates of pearl, and the streets will be wonderful like streets of gold, and the surroundings will be wonderful, brilliant like glass: the realities to which these symbols refer will be greater than those.

This will help to understand how some people think about hell. People have a way of brushing off the very idea of hell. They think about hell as everlasting fire, and will say right away: "How can there be that much wood to burn that long? How can there be that much coal to burn that long?" But whoever said it would be a wood fire and whoever said it would be a coal fire with smoke? The idea of a wood fire or a coal fire with smoke rising, is like the pearly gates and the golden streets. This is symbolic language that refers to something real or actual. The realities are greater. While you are thinking about the reality of heaven, listen to the words, "Our Father which art in heaven . . ." There is not anybody in the world who can take that out of the Lord's Prayer. It is real. We are not entirely without some knowledge about it. Heaven is like home. A believer's view of heaven is based on what Christ gave us when He called Almighty God His Father, and said that He was His Son. Believers are brethren as if they were in one home.

There are other views of heaven that poets and the people of the world have. There is homesickness in the human spirit for something beyond this world. The Indians who used to live in this country had their happy hunting ground, and the Hindus in Asia have Nirvana, a state in which you do not know anything so you do not hurt. The Moslems have their pleasure garden where they have all manner of sensuous pleasures, and the Greeks have had their Mount Olympus, a kind of deified Congress. This is not the Christian's view of heaven. The Christian's view of heaven is a very simple and rather humble home with a Father and a Son and children and brethren. It is where there is love, light, joy, blessing, peace, and happiness. The nearest thing I can tell you of what heaven will be like is if you have ever been in fellowship with a group of your friends about whom you did not have the slightest question, and had some communion in fellowship that was just joy!

Hell is just as real as heaven is real. You cannot have one without the other. I could sympathize with a person who would do without heaven if he could do without hell, because I was as a young Christian so deeply burdened about my own people who were not believers. I would have been glad to forego heaven if only they could forego hell, but it was not up to me. What was up to me was to tell them they could get to heaven. Hell is real, but that does not mean that I relish it. Paul said, "I could wish myself accursed from God for my brethren." But that did not do any good. Paul was not accursed from God. His brethren were unbelievers and would be lost. I am stressing this because I think believing people are oftentimes unconsciously unfaithful to their friends. If a person knew that a man had a serious illness, and he did not tell him so that he could be cured, there would be reason to doubt how much of a friend he really was.

I have no pleasure preaching about this. But I am preaching it not only for you who hear me, but also for the several hundred people you know that will not be in church all this week, and who may not ever be in church. As they watch us, it may never dawn on them that we think they are going to be lost. In that case we are missing something, brother. We know the bridge is out, but we do not put up a red light. This leaves a responsibility on us. I do not know what you can say or what you can do, but I can not agree with the idea of letting people go straight on through into oblivion without letting them know that the Lord Jesus Christ talked more about hell than anybody. I have been a teacher and preacher for 30 years, and have emphasized this truth for 30 years. But I fear there have been men going out from seminary preaching, and never telling people that there is a hell. You and I have a responsibility.

There have been many errors about hell that have caused people to get a casual view about it. You know about "Paradise Lost." Milton was a great poet but "Paradise Lost" is only, after all, a poet's fancy. This idea of Satan's being in fellowship with his imps in hell talking things over in kind of a conversation could not be more misleading. I feel quite sure that Dante's "Inferno" was the poet's dream. Because of such literature some people have a poetic feeling about hell.

There is no doubt much that we do not know about hell, but something can be known about it. Hell will be dark. It is the blackness of darkness forever. There will be no friends. There is no love, just isolation. To get a good idea of this one should go to any penitentiary, and ask any person who deals with

prisoners what solitary confinement means to a human being. What happens then is that the keepers put a man alone in the dark, and do not let him be anywhere near a person. Unless that man knows God you will find that nobody can endure this without losing his mind. This is getting close to what hell is. There will be no fellowship there. There will be no rest there. The Scriptures reveal that hell is a bottomless pit, a state of everlasting suspension.

Cain is the first man in the Bible, who is known to have received the judgment of God. God told him he would be a homeless wanderer. The word "vagabond" is used in our King James Version. That would be a good word if the poets had not made something so romantic out of it. What that really means is being homeless and friendless, being in isolation. Cain told the truth when he said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

Someone may ask, "What about that fire?" The fire in hell is not wood and is not coal and is not oil, so what would it be? The only thing that one can think of is the soul; so that the fire of hell would be soul-fire. We do know about that fire that the Lord Jesus said "Their fire is not quenched." It seems He is the only New Testament speaker that ever said: "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:46). Jesus of Nazareth told the parable of the rich man being in torment in the flame. What kind of flame? Soul fire, I would say.

What is fire? Fire is one of those things that no scientist can tell about exactly. There are some things in every day experience that no scientist knows. One of them is electricity. One may claim we all know about it. But what do we know? We know how to turn it on and off. But have you ever thought about electricity itself? You may have a copper wire with electricity passing through it. Can you see it go? Does the wire bulge? What goes? You have as much wire as you had before. What went? If you were at the other end, you could know something went all right. But no scientist knows what that thing is. He knows how it acts but he cannot tell you what it is.

Just so, scientists do not know what life is. They do not know what light is, nor do they know what energy is in the universe. How does light travel across space when there is nothing in space? I could ask you many questions if we were studying in science, that would show there is much we do not know all round about us. Every Boy Scout knows how to build a fire. We know about fire, but what is fire? It seems to be a condition. The best way I know to say it is to say that a physical element changes its form in the process; perhaps by uniting with another element, in the course of which heat is given off. That is the way I could describe it. But what it is we still do not know.

By the way, all fire does not have smoke. If you have worked in a chemistry lab, you will remember how often you have had your bunsen burner burning alcohol, and you did not know the flame was on until you put your fingers over it and found out. The flame did not show. Not all flame shows. It will serve our purpose to remember that when the word "fire" is used, it is not limited to physical things. Perhaps the disintegration of the personality is like what happens when the wood disintegrates into ashes, or when oil disintegrates as it burns. Maybe the disintegration of the personality is like nervous prostration, being an endless, coming apart at the seams, always on edge, in tension with no rest. "There is no rest, saith my God, to the wicked." If anyone should feel that this is terrible, it is! No one wants his loved one to go to hell. Some may not believe the Bible, so they may not believe in heaven or hell, but they do not want their children or any other loved one to go to hell.

It is wonderful to be able to assure you nobody needs to go to hell. What difference would it make what I think? What makes the difference is what the Bible says. Was Jesus Christ wrong? I am telling you what He said. He died so that no one would need to go to hell. He died that people might be able to come to God. But I do not know how much damage has been done by those who somehow assume that because Christ died everybody will come to God. That is actually one of the most foolish things that has ever been said, yet it is getting around. It has even been heard on the foreign fields. When I was lecturing in the Orient I was confronted by native Christians who asked me point blank, "What do you folks back home

mean by coming out here and telling us that you will be carrying on work among our people, but you will not try to win their souls to Christ: that all you want to do is make them better people?" These believers told us, "We have known Christ. We know what it means to come out of Buddhism into Christianity. This is impossible apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. What do you mean by sending us missionaries and leaders and speakers, who tell us that we shouldn't especially emphasize Jesus Christ as the only Savior?"

Christ Jesus died and rose again to deliver whosoever believeth in Him. One of the most wonderful things you can think about heaven is that it is open and ready and free. Anybody can come to it who wants to come. "Only heaven is to be had for the asking." Heaven is the hope of every believer, "Absent from the body; present with the Lord." I believe in heaven, and I believe in hell, and this is why I am going to tell everywhere I can that Christ Jesus died that "Whosoever will might come. And whosoever cometh he will in no wise cast out." You cannot put it any better than that. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." You cannot have it any better than that. He had made that available.