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What about Hell?

Luke 16:24: (NKJV) *Then 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.'*



There are certain questions that everyone, no matter what your faith affiliation, wants to know about. One of those questions has to do with our direction in the afterlife. What kind of a destiny might be waiting for us? Does what we do in this short life dictate what will happen forever? There are many denominations of Christians and there are along with those, many interpretations regarding the answers to these questions. What did Jesus teach us about our destiny after we die? Stay with us as we look into some of Jesus' teachings on this all important matter of life!

Our only question:

What was Jesus saying about Hell?

First, the account of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" Luke 16:19-31 (KJV)

The main characters: Verse 19-20

The issues leading up to the main event: Verse 21-22

The main event: Verse 23-25: The beggar is seemingly in a very good place, the rich man is seemingly in a very bad place.

The complications arising from the main event: Verse 26-28: Abraham is talking and tells the rich man that he must stay here. The rich man says that at least he can help the rich man's family.

The sad result: Verse 29-30

The prophecy: Verse 31 Is this literal? Is it a symbolic story like a parable? How would we be able to tell?

Let's check the context beginning back in Luke 15:1-3: Who was listening? *A wide variety of people are in the audience - tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees and scribes. Luke states Jesus is speaking in a parable. What were the issues? They were judging Jesus and complaining that he was eating with sinners. How did Jesus respond? He begins to speak.*

Mark 4:10-12: Here Jesus sets the groundwork for how he will communicate with the world in general. The closest followers will know about the kingdom of God, but to everyone else it will be spoken in stories, in such a way that they won't really understand what's happening.

Luke 15:1 begins the context of five parables, the Rich Man being the fifth.

Luke 15:3 (above) tells us that Jesus is going to use a parable.

As with most of Jesus' parables, he just starts telling the story - no introduction, no explanation, just a story to respond to the reaction of his audience.

Luke 15:3-7: *The first parable of the lost sheep* shows the recovery of mankind from their lost state of sin. Jesus gives the interpretation of his theme - joy in heaven. He tells them this lesson plainly, so they can follow his themes as they unfold into lessons of plain truth about the development of his father's Kingdom - and condemnation for being too proud and egotistical to comply with it. He's talking directly to the Pharisees.

Luke 15:8-10: *The second parable of the Lost Coin* illustrates in its big picture the value of the redeemed race of man as a part of the symmetry of the ten coins being restored - the lost coin symbolizing the race of man and the woman symbolizing the work of reconciliation.

Luke 15:11-32: *The third parable of the prodigal son* shows the two classes of Israel - the Pharisees represented in the older brother and the sinners and publicans represented in the younger one. This story reveals the attitudes of both classes and the grace of God in accepting repentance.

Luke 16:1-15: *The fourth parable of the unjust steward* frontally attacked the selfish and compromising spirit that the Pharisees displayed and showed their hypocrisy and godlessness.



Jesus deals with the bad attitude of the Pharisees. They react, because they know he was talking about them.

Luke 16:14: Jesus had struck the chord that he was looking for and responds, setting the stage for his next parable. Luke 16:15:

Observations so far: Jesus is in the mode of teaching with stories; and he is dealing with a wide audience from publicans and sinners to tax collectors and scribes and Pharisees.

The fifth parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is now a lesson in reversal. Luke 16:19-21: If Jesus had just "called out" the Pharisees and got them mad, and they were the ones that had all the advantages, it makes sense that they were primarily what was represented by the favored Rich Man in the story.

Consider these:

- **Rich Man...**the rich man was the Jewish nation, specifically the Pharisees.
- **Clothed in purple (royalty)** ...to them belonged the promise of the Kingdom.
- **Clothed in fine linen...**fine linen is a symbol of righteousness. (See Revelation 19:8)
- **Fared sumptuously every day...**they enjoyed but did not appreciate the blessings.

Luke 16:20-21 Consider these:

- **Lazarus...**represented the Gentiles - all nations of the world aside from Israelites.
- **Laid at his gate...**outside the "gate of favor."
- **Full of sores...**sin-sick, covered with sores - not sharers in Israel's sin-atonement sacrifices. They were worshipping the wrong gods, so they were sick spiritually as well as physically.
- **Desired crumbs...**hungry, because all of the promises of God primarily belonged to Israel.
- **In the company of dogs...**dogs in the Jewish mind were looked down upon; Gentiles would be fit associates of dogs.

Did Jesus teach there is a burning hell of fire and torment, or was he teaching something else and it only sounded that way? We believe this is a story using symbolic language.

Here is the reversal - The beggar is now favored and the rich man is out of favor:

Luke 16:22-23: If this was NOT a parable and if they literally went someplace, then there are many questions one has to ask:

- Where would Abraham's bosom be?
- Do all faithful people go there?
 - If so, how big a space are we talking about?
 - Was Lazarus faithful, or just poor? Was the Rich Man bad or just rich?
 - If not a parable, who goes to the bosom? Who goes to hell?

Consider these:

- **Beggar died...**sinners and Gentiles died to their situation of disfavor
- **Carried by Angels...**the angels were the apostles and ministers of the Gospel
- **To Abraham...**became the children of God and heirs of the Abrahamic promise (Galatians 3:29)
- **Rich man dies...**the Jews died to their favor
- **Is buried...**amongst other people, dead in trespasses and sins
- **Lifting his eyes in Hell...**entombed in "hades" as a nation

The same Old Testament word "Sheol" (Strong's #7585) is used 66 times: 31 times it is translated into English as "grave," 31 times it is translated "hell," and four times it is translated as "pit."

Good People go to the grave: Job 14:13 and Ecclesiastes 9:10; Evil people go to hell: Psalms 9:17 and Psalms 55:15 (all KJV)

The New Testament word for "hell" is "hades." (Strong's #86) We can see that the word was translated from the Old Testament by confirming that the same word was chosen.

Old Testament - Sheol (hell/grave/pit - covered over) = New Testament - Hades (hell)

Psalms 16:10 vs. Acts 2:27: The word itself has no connotation of torture. It literally means the grave, being buried.



So back to our parable, we believe Luke 16:22 teaches us about a *state* of being dead and not being any particular *place*. Luke 16:23: One thought on "hell" in verse 23: this cannot possibly be the lake of fire - Gehenna - see the next text:

Revelation 20:14: Gehenna was the Valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem where fires never went out as a garbage dump. Nothing live was burned - it was utterly destroyed, not tortured.

Being in Torments: Strong's # (through the notion of going to the bottom); a touch-stone

Greek English Lexicon: a touchstone, which is a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with metal

As a touchstone, another way to say this might be: "You are revealed for what you are." So when the Pharisees are being told that when they die to their position of favor, they will be revealed as a counterfeit. Their hypocrisy would be made known. They would have recognized the touchstone as a symbol. We can imagine Jesus was looking directly at them while he was talking. A touchstone is something that reveals true identity.

Romans 11:17-20: This fits perfectly with the description of what is happening here. The Gentiles were grafted in because of Israel's unfaithfulness. The Apostle Paul is saying that they need to stay humble with this opportunity, because Israel previously lost their favor. Favor to the Gentiles ended favor to the Jews. We believe this parable is about favor, not about eternity.

A word about justice...can we honestly say that every man, woman and child that has ever lived has had an equal opportunity to come to Jesus and accept him? Justice can't be properly served based on just this short life. (Please refer to last week's program, "Will the God Save the Earth Part 2," regarding the Day of Judgment.) We believe the Day of Judgment will be a time period of accountability.

Luke 16:24-25: **Tormented:** Strong's #3600 *odunao* (od-oo-nah'-o); to grieve The Rich Man was grieving a great loss, not being tortured with physical pain. For example: Luke 2:48 and Acts 20:38.

(in this) **Flame:** Strong's #5395 *phlox* (flox); to "flash" or "flame"; a blaze

In all cases in the New Testament except for this one parable, the word is used with "of fire."

(Real Fire) Acts 7:30 (Symbolic fire) 2 Thessalonians 1:8 and Hebrews 1:7

Jesus' lesson with the Rich Man is not one of torture, but of the revealing of past indiscretions and misuses of favor. He was "grieving" in "the light." The "flame" is not destructive, but revealing and bright, and its purpose is to be the light that uncovers all things. This agony is not caused by physical pain, but by the realization that there is no place to hide.

According to a lot of Christian tradition, we have been taught to just accept "torment in flames." We have to realize that when we look at it in both the context and in the original meaning of the words, it doesn't mean what we might have originally thought. Further, Jesus isn't talking about eternity. Rather, he is talking about consequences for the actions of the Pharisees right then and there - favor then disfavor.

Luke 16:25: With this understanding of "torment" being anguish and "flame" meaning light in mind, let's review and *paraphrase* verse 24.

Father, have mercy on me - Send Lazarus (those whom I despised) that he may dip the tip of his finger in water (truth) and give me just a drop of it, for I am in deep anguish of heart in this light that has revealed my irresponsibility, my folly, my pride, my fall.

Matthew 23:37-39: Jesus cast off Israel as their favor had ended. Weeks before in our Luke scripture, he had warned them Israel/the Pharisees (the Rich Man), were about to lose favor with God (being close to Abraham) and the Gentiles (Lazarus the beggar) were about to gain that favor. Jesus was illustrating the suffering and anguish that they (Israel - the Pharisees) were going to experience.

Statistically, fewer and fewer people are believing in a hell of torment. It's hard to imagine God allowing "good" individuals of other religions, for example, without access to Jesus, to be in eternal torment. We believe the Day of Judgment justly provides for everyone to come to Jesus on an equal, clear footing. We believe that to have this unjust life determine eternity is a misrepresentation of the plan of God.



Jesus is picking up some of the symbolisms from the Old Testament which further verifies that he is talking about things they would have understood when talking to the Pharisees:

Jeremiah 16:17-21: There is something good on the horizon being discussed here.

Luke 16:26: Once this move to being out of favor happens, they aren't going to be able to cross the chasm. **The prophetic facet of this chasm:** A chasm is a giant pit or hole. Jesus was referring back to Zechariah 9 to make his point. **Zechariah 9:11** refers to the end of Israel's "double" of disfavor, the period that those Pharisees in Jesus' audience were about to enter. **Zechariah 9:12:** Again, a reference all too familiar for the Pharisees but with the end result being peace unto the nations. **Luke 16:27-28:** Of course if one were to take this parable literally, heaven and hell would have to be close enough that one could have a conversation, but separated by a gulf...

A quick recap: According to the Scriptures, hell is *not* the fire and brimstone and eternal torment taught by tradition; rather, we believe the Scriptures teach that hell is the state of death - the grave - before the resurrection of the Last Day. That resurrection is a re-standing up of life so that one can be accountable in the Day of Judgment for one's actions. Hell is simply no more than the state of not being alive, the state of death that brings us to the payment of the ransom of Jesus and therefore the resurrection. We aren't resurrected because we deserve it, we are resurrected because of Jesus' sacrifice.

The five brothers...the Jews of Palestine in Jesus' day represented chiefly the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, while the majority of the other ten tribes were scattered abroad in various lands. Whereas two tribes, Judah and Benjamin were represented by the one rich man, so proportionately the other ten tribes would be represented by five brethren.

Luke 16:29: Again they are indicted by their past - Moses and the prophets - the message had always been clear and can speak for itself. They already had everything they needed. **Luke 16:30:** Surely with the drama of one coming back from the dead (not hell, not heaven) they will hear that message.

But again father Abraham reinforces their sentence with plain hard truth: **Luke 16:31:** Jesus is play acting both parts - the part of Abraham communicating with Israel about the loss of favor; he's play acting Israel saying that if only he would bring someone back from the dead, that would settle it. They would believe and everything would be fine.

Here the parable ends - the lesson is clear - you (the Pharisees as representatives of the Jewish nation) have sealed your fate, by your continual rejection of the teachings and miracles of your Messiah. This lesson was accentuated by one more fact - subtle but dramatic...Jesus, in this parable, used a proper name - Lazarus - why?

Approximately two weeks later, Jesus indeed raised his friend Lazarus from the dead! What was their reaction to this, the most dramatic of *all* Jesus' miracles? Were they impressed, believed, and everything was fine?

Lazarus was potentially already sick. Jesus knows that if he dropped the name Lazarus, he could give them the grand opportunity to repent and come back into favor by giving them what they would say they needed. A few weeks later, he literally raises Lazarus from the dead.

Here is the Pharisees' reaction to this incredible miracle: **John 11:46-53:** Jesus was showing them that he did have gifts from God. Jesus performs this miracle after he tells them the parable and *gives them a name to look for* (!) and they wanted to put him to death. Caiaphas had it right in some ways. Jesus would die for the nation, he would die for the world, and his death would eventually regather Israel. The end result was a complete fulfillment of the warning Jesus gave them in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. It was a story he told specifically aimed at the Pharisees as representatives of the Jewish nation. The parable was for the purpose of telling them that they were about to lose their favor and be replaced by Gentiles. **This warning came true three and a half years* after Jesus died with the conversion of Cornelius!** We do not believe Jesus taught a fire of hell and brimstone. We believe he did teach that we die and are raised because of his ransom sacrifice.

**corrected from audio portion*

**So what about hell?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**