

Between Us and You

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[0 : 00] Hell and money are two things preachers don't like to talk about. Let's do them both on the same Sunday, all right? Let's just have them together. This story brings both of those together.

Some years ago, around 2010, there was a trend of books that were written about people that went to heaven and returned. A best-selling book was called *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven*. I was skeptical about it even before I realized that the young man's name was Alex Malarkey, all right?

I was just a little bit skeptical about it because Paul, he refrains in 2 Corinthians 2.14. He says, How that he was caught up in the paradise and heard unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter.

That the apostle Paul didn't come back and write a best-selling book on that. However, we do know in Revelation 4, John speaks about it. And heaven is real and hell is real. And many people like to believe in one without the other.

But it's in one book that you learn about both, right? And so there is no reality of one without the reality of the other. And so we get to when we hear about Lazarus, not the one in this story, but the other one, the friend of Jesus and brother Martha and Mary, that he was raised from the dead.

[1 : 08] And it's kind of comical to think about a person who makes it to heaven, the paradise. And he starts to get settled in. And they're like, Well, you're getting recalled. You've got to go back. He's going to be like, I like it here pretty good.

And they're like, No, you've got to go back. All right? Well, he goes back and you don't get that description from him. And that's kind of a funny thought. It's wonderful to think about heaven, horrific to think about him.

And to be faithful to the text, we're going to have to consider what it says. I've read the story for you. Let me walk you through it once again here in Luke chapter number 16.

It starts off with a certain rich man. And that rich man, he wore purple. And he ate good every day. Man probably didn't know what it was like to be hungry. He wasn't in a situation where he ever really needed to feel that.

He didn't experience that. Every day he ate more than enough. It tells what color clothes he's wearing, not just to give you a visual picture, but it tells you what kind of person he was. To have purple clothing didn't come easily.

[2 : 07] It took some work. And so it was a status symbol to say that you have purple clothes. Some of our teenagers, they want to buy expensive shoes. And they want expensive shoes simply because they're expensive.

And they want everybody to know that they're expensive. That's why they leave the stickers on their hats and on their shoes. They want you to know, I just bought these, and they were very expensive. Thank you for asking, all right? Purple clothes could do that.

It wasn't always bad. I mean, the woman in Proverbs 31, she wears purple. Her kids wore scarlet. She took good care of them. They had nice clothes. But she's also known as a woman who took care of those in her household and other people.

And so we know that the Bible doesn't teach that wealthy people are evil and that poor people are righteous. Because in this story, the poor man goes to Abraham's side.

He goes where Abraham's at. That Abraham and Job would be people, Solomon would be people in the Bible that would have wealth, that would be well beyond what any of us would have known, that would have been pretty extreme.

[3 : 08] So that isn't the problem with the rich man that we see. But the purple has here, but he doesn't care. It's a contrast here between him wearing this and having all this food.

But outside was a man outside of his gates, outside of his home there. Must have been a big home to be in gated like that. And that man's wearing swords. And that man is desiring to have the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

Told in that culture that a lot of times they would take bread to clean up their hands. Olive oil and different things would be on it. A little piece of bread, clean up their hands. Sounds like something my kid would do. Wipe their face with a piece of bread, right?

That's what's happening. But it's like the bread. And they're just throwing it on their table. Dogs would be coming. Not as you would imagine. Dogs roaming through that. Maybe eating what is there.

He desired just to have what those dogs would be able to eat. He desired just to have what was underneath the table. Came to pass that the beggar died. He was carried by angels to Abraham's side.

[4 : 07] At the same time, the rich man died and he was buried. He immediately is in torments. He lifts up his eyes. Consciousness there.

Immediately in torment of hell. And he cries out in that moment to the father Abraham for mercy and Lazarus. And that he would just come and give him a drop of water that is there.

But Abraham said, And besides all this, man, that statement is just so strong.

And beside all this, that in addition to that fact, there is just a gulf between us that cannot be moved. You can't go from one side.

You can't go from here to there. And you can't go from there to here. And then he says, All right, I'm going to pray. Send Lazarus to go tell my brothers. Abraham says he has the Old Testament, the law, the first five books, Moses and the prophets, the remaining part of the Old Testament.

[5 : 09] He has that available to them. And he says, They're not going to listen to that. They're going to need somebody to be raised from the dead. If somebody is raised from the dead, then I know that they would be persuaded.

Moses says if they're not persuaded by the word of God, they're not going to be persuaded by that either. And so this is a parable or a true story is the question.

If you've grown up in church, you know that it's often talked about. But there is not a separation. It is a true story in the fact that all the things that happen in the parables that we read are based on reality.

A woman losing her coins, women would lose coins, all right? Or as men lose their coins. Calm down, ladies, all right? That's a real thing that happens. Or a shepherd losing their sheep.

Meaning that in the stories that Jesus tells, they're all based inside of reality. They're not science fiction. He's not making up some kind of metaphor, some kind of allusion to the truth.

[6 : 07] He's telling real things that had happened. So I believe this being a historical account. However, even in knowing what parables are, these are stories that are based in real aspects of life.

Which means when he talks about heaven, or when he talks about hell, he is talking about heaven, and he is talking about hell. And we should pay attention. There's always been a desire, and there probably always will be, for an attempt to erase hell.

To try to find ways that we can remove it. Let's say that this teaching on hell is not real. Let's say that this is some kind of, something that isn't a parable, but it's something else. And you try to make an allegory out of it, like some people do in the Bible.

You still have enough in the scriptures that hell is real, and that it's filled with torment. And that there's a gulf between it and hell. And there's always that attempt to erase it.

So first thing I want you to see, which is typically the last thing that I would say in a sermon, which is to tell you the time frame in which you have that makes a decision. And I want you to know that the time is now to the side.

[7 : 09] There's a real sense of urgency in the matter. Because that transition to the eternal state takes place at the moment of death, and it is permanent. Verse 23. The Bible doesn't give any teaching or any place for a purgatory or a place in between the two places.

It says that immediately this is what happened to him. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5.8 that he is confident that when he's absent of the body that he will be present with the Lord. Jesus on the cross with the man tells him that today you will be with me in paradise.

First thing we need to realize is that the transition to our eternal state happens immediately upon our death. And when we are there, there is a great gulf that is fixed.

And besides all this between us, you there is a great gulf that is fixed. It's one that cannot be crossed. After death, is there a final chance to be saved?

After death, is there a final chance to be saved? And the answer is no. Several years ago, a man that was a well-known pastor led a large church.

[8 : 27] He wrote a book called Love Wins. His name was Rob Bell. And he wrote something that was very attractive because it was a pastor that had a credible testimony and he was now saying something that other people wanted him to say.

This is what he says in his book. He says, Has God created millions of people over tens of thousands of years who are going to spend eternity in anguish? Can God do this or even allow this and still claim to be a loving God?

Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite eternal torment for things they did in their few finite years of life?

To the question, does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite eternal torment for things they did in these few finite years? The answer to that question is yes.

First question is no. The second question is yes. You can find many books that would tell you that there is some plan for people after they die to have a second chance. You can find many people that would say that because God is loving that people would never stay in that condition and they would eventually be annihilated.

[9 : 33] They would cease to exist or they'd have another chance. You can find many books that will tell you this but you will not find it in this book. And this is the book that God has given us. After death is the judgment.

It's singular and it's not going on. It's appointed on the man once to die and then after this is the judgment. Hebrews 9.27. So I want to give you four truths real quick here about God's wrath in a world that tries to erase hell.

Let me give you four things. First of all, God is willing to show wrath. Romans 9.22 says, What if God, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, that He might not know the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy that He aforeprepared unto glory.

God is willing that people that will perish here and that He's been longsuffering towards them. But now through their decision they have now been prepared for this day of destruction.

So the answer is yes. There will be people that suffer for all eternity. Second of all here. So first of all, God is willing to show wrath. Secondly, second thing here is the objects of God's wrath are the unsaved, the unbelieving.

[10 : 49] Romans 1.18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth and unrighteousness. So those objects of His wrath are those that have never put their faith in Him.

John 3.36 tells us, He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life. But the wrath of God abideth on Him.

God is willing to show His wrath, the object of God's wrath through the unsaved, and they will suffer eternal judgment. And then lastly, some are prepared by God for eternal judgment, not because He delights to do so, but because of their sin.

2 Peter 3.9. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackens, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any shall perish, but that all should come to repentance.

But some will not come to repentance. Many will not come to repentance. The wrath of God will abide on them for all eternity. I can hear the response to this. Lord, I would pray to God that it wouldn't be a response in your heart, in your mind, but it would be the many people, which is this.

[11 : 57] I could never love a God who would... Then fill in the blank. I could never love a God who would... What? Who would disagree with you. I would never love a God that would do things that I would never do.

I would never love a God who would be more concerned with His own glory than your feelings. I would never love a God or believe in a God who would send people to hell. The absurdity of this idea that God is somehow answerable to us.

We look to Scripture and it's clear. Do you not believe that God knows more about justice than you or I can ever know? So we let the Bible speak for itself when it says things that are uncomfortable for us.

When it says things that we, in our lack of understanding and not in our holiness and not in our wisdom, wish we're different. So the rich man does not change. There's a gulf that's fixed that can't be passed.

But also this man, in verse number 24, he says, Father Abraham, have mercy. Send Lazarus to do this thing. His suffering has not done anything to change his sense of self-importance.

[13 : 00] He had an acknowledgement. He knows the man's name because he knew him every day when he passed him in the gate whenever he left. But he still sees him as something else. Send Lazarus to go and do this for me.

All this to say is that there is no second chance. But if we would know that those who do not respond to the Word of God will not under any circumstances. This man has not changed in his view of self-importance.

He has not acknowledged even what has brought him to be that. And for all eternity, he still continues in that. If a man lives to be about 70 years, there has been about 30 lifetimes since this story was being told.

30 lifetimes that would have taken place where that man lived as a rich man and one of them who did not respond to God, who did not worship God as master, had a master in money.

And then since that time, for now for 2,000 years, he has lived the equivalent of his life now 30 times over. And Lazarus had lived now in heaven now, paradise in heaven now, for that same amount of time.

[14 : 06] And that will continue for all eternity. The decision was made then, and it was never going to change. There was a great gulf between them. So the problem isn't with the message.

It's with the audience. The problem isn't with the message. The problem is with the audience. Luke 16, 27 says this. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, Father, that I would have sent him to my father's house.

For if I, brethren, I will testify, lest they would come to this place. And then he says, they have Moses and the prophets. But he said, but if somebody would be, if he would go to him, if they saw somebody risen from the dead, then things would change.

If you're not persuaded by the word of God, you will not be persuaded. It's those of you who know the rest of the story. You know what's going to happen in a little bit to this Jesus that is telling the story.

What if one rose from the dead? Would they believe it then? We know the answer. Matthew chapter number 28. Towards the end of it, we have what we, one of the givings of what we call the Great Commission.

[15 : 05] But right before we get to that passage, that verse, we have in Matthew 28, 10, it says, Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid. Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came in the city and showed unto the chief priest all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept.

And if this comes to the governor's ear, we will persuade him and secure you. So they took the money and did as they were taught. And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

After a man had risen from the dead, people still continued in their sin. And the reason was you can't serve two masters. How does a large amount of money cause people to deny something like the resurrection and the truth?

It's because people worship at the altar of money. And so that money was the master that they were worshipping because riches can be deceitful. Not only do riches not get one in heaven, but they have a power to separate a person from God in a way that few things will.

[16 : 21] Mark 4, 19, And the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things in their hand choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. Riches have a danger of changing our view of God because it has the ability to change our view of ourselves.

That's really what's at the heart with these Pharisees. They believed they were the first people to really promote what we would call a prosperity gospel, is, I'm doing well, I am wealthy, and I am rich.

Which means that God is pleased with me, which means that I am good, which means that everything is okay with my soul. When they would say, it is well with my soul, their next verse would be, because my bank account is full.

It is well with my soul because my table has everything that I could ever want on it. And that's why these Pharisees are so mad when Jesus would speak to them and say, You ought to be using your resources for greater good because they had been using it to find their own protection.

They thought they had self-insured themselves from all eternity that was coming. This rich man has no compassion on Lazarus because he could not see himself as a person who was also in need.

[17 : 28] He saw nothing in that man that was like him. Every one of us as believers, regardless of what means that you may have, when we see people that are poor, ought to be able to say, I can relate to that because I came desperate to be rescued.

I came empty, ready to be filled. It changes our view because we can understand what that is like. The rich man took earthly riches as a false evidence that his life was pleasing to God.

The man was rich, but he was not free. He was mastered by his money. Our service to others shows something about our loyalty to God.

You must be made free to be free to care for others. It is possible to know before death who is your master. It is possible before death to know who your master is.

This rich man should have known his master was not God. He should have known it was money. And death being the great equalizer, since after death, the one thing that counts is the human heart.

[18 : 37] It is the great equalizer. Look at the reversal that takes place. And this rich man had a name in this world. Lazarus had no name. He was just the man who sat at the gate.

But in eternity, Lazarus has a name. And he is just being referred to as the rich man. Lazarus desires food for his table. And now, this man just desires for a drop of water.

The rich man gave him none. Lazarus can't give him a drop of water. Lazarus had no companions, but the dogs that were around him and the rich man are surrounded by other people that are in worse condition than those dogs.

They're in torment. The rich man was separated by Lazarus by this great gulf of pride in this life. Now, Lazarus is separated from the rich man from a gulf that is fixed for all eternity.

The rich man had close companions. Lazarus had dogs. Now, Lazarus is close to Abraham as you can get. Think about John, the beloved, who laid his head upon the chest of Christ.

[19 : 38] He laid his head upon the bosom. That's what's being said here, is that Lazarus is right there with Father Abraham. Remember, a month or so ago, we looked at the story of sitting at the table.

Somebody, when you're invited, you shouldn't come sit at the front place. You shouldn't sit right by the host. You ought to sit farther away and be invited up because this is the place of importance.

This is the special place. When this story is being told, it's saying that Lazarus is right there by Abraham. And you're not even at the table, rich man. You are now on the great gulf on the other side.

And they will both stay in this for all eternity. They are today with so many other people. Your care for those in need is not insignificant.

Personally in here, your care for those in need is not insignificant. True followers of Christ will not be indifferent to the poor like the rich man in this story was. God loves the poor and is offended when his children neglect them.

[20 : 35] Proverbs 17, 5. Whosoever mocketh the poor reproaches his maker, and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished. He goes on to say in Matthew 25 that if you minister or you serve the poor, you're ministering as unto me.

As Christians, we are known by the fruit that we bear. The Holy Spirit's resident in our heart will most certainly change how we live and what we do. This rich man was not free, but he was rich.

But he was not free to serve other people. The rich man had never seen himself desperate and broken. He had only seen resources for him because he had been mastered by money. And he should have recognized that before his death.

But now for all eternity it is known. Evidence his brothers would not listen. It says if they had the prophets, they wouldn't listen to him. Here's an example because in Deuteronomy chapter number 14, it goes on to explicitly even says, The stranger and the fatherless and the widow which are within thy gates shall come and shall eat and be satisfied.

That this man had access to this word of God and what to do, and he ignored it. The Bible explicitly even told him that you should care for the poor that are inside of your gates.

[21 : 45] It did not listen to the word of God. And so would had, if the rich man was able to go back in life and he was able to feed a meal to Lazarus, would that have saved him? One meal, two meals, ten meals?

Put him on a program? Let him eat at his table every time? Most certainly not. Giving to the poor will not save anybody. But every day that he passed him, he should have been reminded of the fact that he was being mastered by money and not God.

This realization shall have led him to repentance. Every time this rich man left the gates of his home and he saw this man in this condition, and he had no desire to help that man.

He had nothing inside of him that showed any desire to care for the poor and that broke him. It should have been an altar call for him. If you're unbelieving today, I'll give you an opportunity to respond in the service.

We call that an altar call. You can come forward. You can speak to me in a foyer. That is an invitation. But if you're not believing today, if he is not the Lord of your life and you're being the Lord of other things, such as money, I pray that you are very much aware of it every time it comes to the place that you know that you have no desire to live out God's word.

[22 : 57] Not that you just don't do it, which as believers, there's things that we want to do that we don't, and things that we don't that we do, and we wrestle with it. The Holy Spirit makes war in our heart.

Not the rich man. He just had no concern for them. God's word has made clear what he desires. Our devotion to him is seen in our care for others. Jesus calls this the great commandment.

And love God with all your heart, soul, and with all your mind. It's what he calls on us to do with all of our understanding. He ends that, Mark 12, verse 34, with authority.

He tells them to love your neighbor as a self. He says, He knew that it was clear evidence, the heart of a believer towards others.

The rich man in that story has no second chance. It will not come up. His fate is sealed for all eternity. There will always be a great gulf that is there.

[24 : 02] And so we've got to ask ourselves some questions today. Under the guise of sudden kindness and manners, we're not always truthful to people. I might have shared with you before, Stephanie's in the nursery, so I can tell this story about her.

We were at a Chick-fil-A some years ago, and this friend of ours who moved from Michigan was there, and we were talking about life here in the South. And she said, You people in the South, you just never know what they're really thinking.

They're just always so nice. They'll tell you what they think, but they'll never just tell you what they're really thinking. And Stephanie said, That just makes me so mad. I said, Did you tell her? She said, No, I didn't want to offend her. But she didn't want to offend the lady by telling her that's not true because it is so true.

But Stephanie talking to a friend from Michigan that moved here is one thing. But we do this all the time at funerals and other times. We try to place people in heaven who are not there and will never be there.

And this is a great disservice. It's one thing to have southern hospitality, but it's another thing to be a Bible believer that's honest about heaven and hell and the reality that there's a decision to be made in this life.

[25 : 11] Some of us know we have loved ones in hell today, and that's hard to wrestle with. And we would do well to consider those that would cry out for someone and go reach them. And friends and family members, if I was to hear them today, would they say, Hey, go tell my five brothers.

This is not a place that I want them to be. And I would have to go with them and tell them there is a resurrection that has proved that Jesus was the Son. There is the Word of God. And I would want to persuade them, as it would say here, with the Word of God.

It's something that's not comfortable to think about. But as I pray here in a second, and I ask, and I reflect upon this passage, I ask you to reflect upon the reality of hell. And I tell you, yes, we need to be faithfully sharing the gospel.

Yes, we need to let people know the realities of heaven and hell and how permanent it is. Would you just think for a moment, all of those that have gone before you, friends and family, who now will never have that opportunity, and if you were to hear from them, they would cry out to us and tell us, Go and share this message.

Not having a proper understanding, but we do. This is a story of a rich man and Lazarus. One way or another, this is going to be your story as well. And I'll ask you, do you know if you're mastered by the love for money, or if you have God as your master?

[26 : 32] And all throughout the day, there's chances for you to recognize that in your life, that you could ask God to search your heart and tell you this. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you for the clarity of your Word.

I thank you that I am not left guessing today about life after death. Father, I know so many people in this world have no clue about what is to come to them.

They have no idea what is going to be found for them when they open their eyes in all eternity. And I want to just first of all thank you, Father, for bringing the gospel to me, for letting me know, and for teaching me these truths.

And Father, I pray that right now that if you have made somebody aware of the fact that they are not mastered by you, that they are a person that lives only for their own selfish desires, who only live for the love of lesser things of this world, that right now they would recognize that, and that this would be the day of salvation for them.

Lord, I pray as the Holy Spirit works in their lives, and as I ask the same questions, Lord, I pray your work and hearts. As we continue to pray, your heads bowed and every eyes closed.

[27 : 39] As a public, as an acknowledgement, not before the other people in this room, and not even primarily to me, but would you just be honest with the God of heaven, and you would say, like the rich man, I would be able to leave that house every day without ever thinking, what would God want for me?

Because I don't live thinking, what does God want for me? I only live thinking, what do I want with my life? If you recognize today that you're not a believer, and you do let me pray for you, would you raise your hand, acknowledging that to God, and allowing me the chance to pray for you?

Well, then to the believers in here in the room, Jesus spoke clearly about heaven and hell, and we live so often pressing it out of our mind. Would you take this remaining time of prayer to speak the hymn, to recognize the reality of it, to even think about the hard thoughts of those in our lives that have spent eternity now without him, and know that we have friends and families around us who are about to make a decision that is permanent for all eternity.

May God stir something in our heart that would lead the action of sharing our faith.