



TIME OF GRACE®

Skeptical Faith: Are Heaven and Hell Real?

Study Notes

Summary

The reality of heaven and hell is one that Jesus himself talked about. But by looking at what he says about them in the Bible, we get the incredible perspective on what comes next and how we should feel about our place after we're done on this earth.

- **Luke 16:19-31:** 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 Hades, 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 set in place, 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 family, 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."
- The creation of hell means God cares about _____
_____ to you.

Points to Ponder

1. Some wonder how a loving God could create a hell? But Pastor Jeremy says it means something very good about his attention toward you? What is that?

2. Did the rich man end up in hell because he was rich? Is being rich a bad thing? Why was the rich man in hell?

3. Define *repentance* and what it means in the life of a believer.

Homework for Next Week

Read Galatians 5:22-26; Isaiah 54:8; Isaiah 63:7; Jeremiah 31:3; Luke 6:35

Time of Grace Ministry
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Luke 16:19-31
July 31, 2022

Pastor Jeremy Mattek

You may be familiar with the name Colton Burpo. When Colton was four years old, he had appendicitis and it was incredibly serious. He spent multiple weeks in the hospital and in a coma. And for a while, it looked like he wasn't going to make it, but he did. Eventually, he was able to come home. Eventually, he was fine again and a couple of weeks after he got home, Mom asked Colton what he remembered about his time in the hospital. "Well, I saw Jesus," he said. "Yeah, he was wearing a purple robe, he looked like a king, he was talking with John the Baptist, and his angels were singing to me so that I wouldn't worry." At first, Mom thought, "Okay, that's a little unusual, and maybe he's taking some of the stories that he heard in Sunday School and misremembering something." But then he went on. He said, "And oh, while I was in surgery, I was sitting on Jesus' lap, and I was looking at you, Mom. I saw that you were here. You were in this room." And she was, in that particular room that he had mentioned he saw her in. "And I saw dad," he said, "And he was in a room all by himself, and he was praying." And he was. But he hadn't told anyone that he had done that, not even his wife. And yet, Colton, he saw it. And then he went on. "And then when I was in heaven with Jesus, a man came up to me and he said, 'Excuse me, are you Todd's son.' 'Well, yes I am,'" Colton said. "Well, I'm Todd's grandfather. It's nice to meet you."

And so, Colton met his great-grandfather who had died many years before Colton was even born. And Colton said, "He had curly hair, and he smiles a lot, and he was really, really nice." And then Colton said, "And Mom, I have two sisters." And Mom said, "No, no, Colton. This is uhh -- no. That's not right. You only have one sister. You must be thinking of your one sister and then your cousin Traci." And Colton said, "No, no. I have two sisters, Mom." And then he looked at Mom and said, "You had a baby die in your tummy, didn't you?" And she did. She had a miscarriage. But she and her husband hadn't told anyone about that. No family, no friends, and certainly not their four-year-old son. But when she heard that from Colton's mouth, she suddenly felt better. She felt a feeling of peace that had been missing since she miscarried her daughter. The peace of knowing, the peace of believing that her daughter was waiting for her in heaven, and that one day she was going to see her again. And it's significant that she felt that because really nothing in her life had changed. She had still never held her daughter in her arms. She still never met her face-to-face. The only thing that changed really was her perspective. She had a new perspective and the new perspective changed everything.

You can read about Colton's story, the rest of it, in a book titled, "Heaven Is for Real." Maybe you've read it. But it shows us the importance of perspective. I'll share with you another perspective.

A friend of mine was an ER nurse for many years. And she told me the story that once she was in the ER and somebody, a woman, came in in critical condition. And they worked on her. They tried to save her life, but they were not able to. They were unsuccessful. And so, the woman died. And she was dead for 45 minutes until she woke up again. My friend, the ER nurse happened to be in the room when this woman woke up. And when the woman woke up, she was confused, she was terrified. She had this look of horror on her face. And when they settled her down and she realized where she was and what was going on, my friend, the nurse asked, "Can I ask what you were thinking about when you woke up, because you looked really scared." And she said, "Well, I died. And when I died, I saw this white light off in the distance, and so I started walking towards it. And as I started walking towards it, I could hear something. I could hear voices and as I got closer and closer, I could tell it was the voices of children, and they were so happy. They were playing. They were having such a great time. And so, I started walking a little bit faster because I wanted to get there more quickly, because it was so, so happy, and so exciting. And as I'm getting closer and closer the voices were louder and louder and I thought to myself, "This must be heaven. I'm on my way to heaven." And so, she kept running and she kept going faster and faster, wanting to get there until she was almost there. And when she almost was then "Boom!" It was like she hit a wall. Like a glass wall. Because she couldn't go any farther.

By this point, she could see the children. She could see them happy and laughing and having a great time. But she couldn't get there. And so, she tried to get their attention. She tried to wave, and she tried to scream, and she tried to bang on what was in front of her, but the children didn't notice her. So, she tried harder. Waving more frantically, banging more loudly, screaming at the top of her lungs. And she said, "I kept doing this for as long as I could until finally, I realized it was no use and I gave up, and I collapsed." Which is when she woke up with a new perspective. And according to her, the new perspective was she never wanted to be on the outside of heaven looking in.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says this, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. And 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.' 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. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 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.'"

That's the Word of God. Do you ever get anywhere close to having that kind of feeling in your life? That nobody loves you? And does anyone really know how often? But Lazarus, I mean, his pain was obvious to everyone on the outside. Everyone could see and could look at him and know that he was broken. That some important things were missing.

But we typically do a pretty good job of hiding our pain from one another. So that nobody really knows what's going on on the inside, you know. When people ask you, "How are you doing?" we typically say, "Ohh, we're fine," even when we're not. Hoping that that's enough to move along the conversation so they get to the next topic, the next thing, so that they never have time to discover just how lonely you sometimes feel in the middle of everyone. Or just how down you can sometimes get about yourself when you see all the ways that you're broken. Or how intentionally you try to cover up things in your life. How carefully you choose your words so that nobody knows what's really going on on the inside. Or just how strongly you believe that if your life were fully exposed like Lazarus' life was, where everybody could see everything, how strongly you'd believe that maybe no one would want anything to do with you as you really are at any moment.

And in that way, Lazarus got just a small taste of hell before the rich man felt it in all of its abundance. And the thought of hell that really upsets some people is how it relates to God. And that some people think that the creation of hell or the fact that God created hell means that God must be a really, really, bad God. Like, what kind of God would send people to hell? But really the creation of hell actually means something very good about his attention towards you. I mean, just think about the last time somebody stepped over you or somebody pushed you away. Think about the last people who obviously wanted nothing to do with you, or the last time you were a victim, or your children were, or your friends, of somebody else's cruelty or hate. The fact that God created hell means that that matters to him. It matters to God. It matters to God when somebody treats you poorly, when people do not treat you well. Just think about what it would mean if a place like hell did not exist. It would mean that people could treat you poorly, that they could step over you, that they could do whatever they wanted to you, and God would be indifferent, but he's not. The creation of hell means that God cares about what happens to you. He cares about what happens to you.

And why did the rich man end up in hell and Lazarus end up in heaven? We get a clue to that by looking at their names. You know, if I were to ask you if you were to read through this section what's the name of the person who ended up in heaven. You would say, "His name is... Lazarus." And if I were to ask you, what's the name of the person who ended up in hell? You would say, "His name is..." We don't know. The Bible just calls him "the rich man".

As Jesus was telling the story, Jesus defined this man it seems, in the same way that he defined himself when he was on earth. That life was good as long as he was rich. Whether or not he had God, whether or not he ended up in heaven, life was good if he was rich. Except he didn't end up in hell because he was rich. You know, it's not wrong to have money. It's not wrong to have a lot of money. There are a lot of great examples in the Bible of people who had incredible wealth who were also incredibly godly. You know, and the Bible doesn't say, "Money is the root of all evil." It says, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." And you can love money

whether you have a lot of money, or you have very little money at all, if the love of money is what drives you from day to day to want -- never being content with what you have, always getting more. And of course, it's not just the love of money. It's not just money that people can love more than they love God, more than they love heaven, more than they love wanting to be with their creator. It's really anything in this world that has any kind of control over our mood, our joy, our emotions. And there are so many things.

The book of Ecclesiastes, in one place it refers to the person who has trouble sleeping at night. And the reason that person has trouble sleeping at night is because their mind is swirling. They're worried about so many different things. Good things they might never gain, bad things they might never lose. Worried about things on earth just not going the way they were hoping. And for Christians who are not supposed to worry about anything, Jesus tells us in the book of Matthew. You know, maybe a good way to see if your heart is going in the direction that it shouldn't then is to very simply ask yourself, what are you worried about these days? What's keeping you up at night? What has the biggest control over your mood or your emotions? Is it God, or is it something different? Sometimes if it's something different, it's something that's not major at all.

You know, I remember one night a number of years ago, I was having trouble sleeping. I don't think it had anything to do with the chicken nuggets, and the potato chips, and the soda that I had right before I went to bed. I think it had more to do with the football game I was watching. I was watching a football game of my favorite team and they were playing one of their big rivals and it was a very intense game, went down to the wire and my team ended up losing and in a very controversial way. And I was not very happy about it at all. And it was an evening game, it was late at night and then I tried to go to bed feeling all riled up and I had trouble going to sleep. I did not fall asleep. I remember looking at the clock. It was 3:30 in the morning and I still had not fallen asleep and I was exhausted but still not able to fall asleep. So, I prayed to God, said, "God, please, please, let me get some sleep tonight. Let me fall asleep so I can get some rest," and then immediately I fell into a deep sleep and I had a very vivid dream in which my wife was shot. And then I did not have any trouble not thinking about the football game anymore.

Just like there was a day where the rich man did not have any trouble not thinking about his worldly wealth anymore. And there was a day when Lazarus didn't have any trouble not thinking about his poverty, and his brokenness, and his pain on earth. As different as their lives were, there was a thing that both of these individuals had in common. They both died. They both had to say goodbye to everything on earth they had up until that moment. But that's when their lives became very different again. Lazarus was taken to Abraham's side where it says that he was comforted. But the rich man, he went to hell, where it says that he was in torment. And that word torment should at least rattle anyone who thinks that hell won't be so bad. Because the word torment has the picture of like metal rubbing against metal in a very uncomfortable way. Like, taking metal and rubbing against a stone and it's constantly happening as if you're in a little car and being crushed by two semis at the same time. And, because hell goes on for eternity just like heaven does, it's a pain that never ends, that never finishes. It's a place of torment.

There's another place, there's another piece of torment that we get a glimpse into in this section and that is the fact that it doesn't seem that Lazarus could look down into hell and see what was going on there. The rich man tried to get Abraham's attention and say, "Hey, can you send Lazarus down here and let him, you know, just send him down here to do something." But it seems that Lazarus was kept safe from seeing all the pain that was down there in that other place. But the rich man, he could look into heaven, and he could see what he was missing, and he could see it every day. He had to live with the eternal pain of regret, of knowing what he could have had, of seeing it but never getting anywhere close to it. And it was in that place of torment that he finally realized the one thing that he was missing when he was on earth. The one thing that would have made the biggest difference. The one thing that his family needed, his brothers needed. And do you know what that was? You know what one thing he was missing when he was on earth? It wasn't the Bible. It wasn't the Word of God. Abraham pointed out very correctly and said, "No, they have Moses and the Prophets. Your brothers, they have access to the Word of God just like you and I." We have access to the Word of God so easily. We can buy it at any bookstore, we can get it online, we can download it on our phones. We have the Word of God. That's not what was missing. What was missing we see in verse 30 of that chapter. The rich man himself identified it. It was something he did not do while he was on earth. What was missing was he didn't repent. He didn't repent. And you know what it means to repent?

There's a cave in Mexico called the Crystal Cave. It was discovered not even two dozen years ago. It was discovered about 20 years ago. It's an underground cave and it's full of crystals. Like giant crystals. Crystals that are up to 36 feet long and incredibly wide like as round as some big silos that you would see on a midwestern farm. You know, giant, and with crystal being worth up to \$21,000 per pound, that cave is worth more than most countries in the world. Phenomenal place. But there's something you should know about the cave before you go in. It's 136 degrees inside. 136 degrees. Which means you can only stay inside for about 30 minutes before the heat will burn you alive. And so, if you go to that cave, if you go in, if you want to see it and you can, just make sure you don't get too attached to it. Make sure eventually at some point you turn around and walk away.

That's what it means to repent. It means to walk away from our excessive love of money, of comfort, of stuff, of popularity, of anything in this world that has such huge control over our mood and our emotions that we're going to have to say goodbye to anyway. It's to turn around from them, from our excessive love of them before it's too late and turn toward the same Word of God that the rich man's brothers had access to every day. Because in it we see a man who did not turn away, who did not walk away from the whip and the thorns and the nails that were pounded into him. A man who was laid, not at the gate of a rich man, but who was laid instead at the foot of the cross after he had been severely beaten. A cross on which he was raised to forgive anyone who has ever mistakenly believed that there is something in this broken world more valuable than the one who sees all the way that we hurt, who sees all of the ways we're broken, who sees all of our pain and saves us from it. He saves us from it.

And why? Because even Jesus knows that this world can never give us anything close to what he can give. But he can, and he will. And it seems that Lazarus knew that. I mean, there's one thing that's in that section that you never hear Lazarus do. You never hear him complain. This man

who was broken, and beaten, and alone, and void of so many things. We never hear him complain because it seems he thought he didn't need to. Because he firmly believed that when he had his Lord, he really did have the one thing he needed more than anything... comfort. Comfort. The comfort of knowing that God saw him, and the comfort of knowing that one day he would be in the only place where there is no more death, or crying, or pain and where every tear is wiped away. He only needed to wait for just a short time through a little bit of pain to get to it.

And I do mean a little bit. Just a little. Just think about the perspective on their lives. You know, these individuals, they would have lived during the time of Jesus who lived about 2,100 years ago which means they had both been alive for about 2,100 years, just some time on earth and some time in heaven. But if you look at the rich man, imagine he lived about 75 years before he died, got to 75 years old. It means he was really only rich if you take his entire existence, the moment he was conceived to where he is in hell right now. All those years, he was only rich for about 3% of them. And Lazarus on the flipside who was only alone and broken for about 3% of his existence, but comforted for all the rest of it. That's minimal, the 3%. That's where we're living right now, in our 3%. But that doesn't mean your 3% is insignificant, it's not.

I'll never forget my 25th birthday. On my 25th birthday I was in a hospice room with a very good friend. She was dying. She was young but she was dying. We knew that. And on the morning of my 25th birthday I received a phone call that this was going to be it. And so, I drove down the street to her hospice room and I spent all day there. And I sat by her bed, and I read scripture and I sang songs and that's just how the day was. As she was going in and out, taking a deep breath, you know, and that's not really knowing if that was going to be the last one. She would take a deep breath and she wouldn't breathe for a little bit. And then she would take a deep breath and the time between breath was, well, there was more time between each one until finally she took a deep breath and we were sure that that was the last one. But then a few minutes later she took a very deep breath. You know, very deep, eyes opened really, really wide and you could tell she was, her eyes were just darting across the room and you could tell she was very confused about where she was.

And so, when she settled down, we asked her -- I was there with her parents and with another pastor. We said, "Amy, what's going on? You looked really confused." And as she looked around and she started looking at individuals telling who it was. And then she said, "Oh. I really thought I was walking into heaven." And then she looked at me. I was right by her bed. And she said, "And you, you were holding my hand, walking me in." And then she closed her eyes, and then she died. But really, that's the moment she really lived. Set free from this broken place with no doubt about where she was going to be and who she was going to be with. And that moment had a powerful impact on me. It reminded me just what our purpose is as we go throughout the little 3% of our existence down here on this planet. It's to hold each other's hands and walk each other into the only place where we'll never be broken ever again. The place that is freely gifted to us by a Jesus who loves us more than we could ever imagine. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for the gift of our Savior, Jesus. We thank you for the gift of the perspective that he gives us as we walk through life: the reality of heaven, the reality of hell, the reality of our sin, the reality that we are forgiven, that we are your children.

As Lazarus was comforted by that assurance during his time on earth and found perfect comfort as he walked into heaven, may that always comfort our hearts. And until we get there, help us to be very good about holding each other's hands. This world is a very difficult broken world, it's a hard world in which to live. Help us to excel at being there for one another. Reminding one another of the place, the home of perfection that Jesus died to give us, our true home in which we'll forever live. In your name we pray. Amen.