



## 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:** <sup>19</sup> There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." <sup>30</sup> "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." <sup>31</sup> 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 Genesis 6:13; Matthew 18:6; Psalm 11:5; Luke 4:18.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Skeptical Faith: Are Heaven and Hell Real?**  
Luke 16:19-31  
May 9, 2021

***Pastor Mike Novotny***

Hey, everyone, Pastor Mike here from Time of Grace. I'm pretty excited today, not just to share God's grace with you, but because we have a good friend who's in the house today who'd love to share God's grace with you, too. This is Pastor Jeremy Mattek. Some of you might be familiar with his work, his ministry. He's been a colleague here at Time of Grace, a great speaker on our Grace Talks lineup, the pastor who does our Evening Encouragements, if you've seen those online. Pastor Jeremy and I met half a lifetime ago when we were in college and he's joining us for the skeptical faith series.

But before we get to that, Jeremy, for those people who haven't met you yet, you're brand new, you're a total stranger. In less than 64 seconds, tell us as many personal things about yourself as you're willing to share.

***Pastor Jeremy Mattek***

We'll see if I can accomplish that!

First of all, thanks for letting me be here; thanks for letting me invade your space and share God's word with you today. That's an awesome privilege and I don't take it lightly.

I've been serving as a pastor since 2004 in public ministry. I started my ministry down in – well, it won't be down for everybody – but in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I served at a congregation there for 14 years. Prior to that, I spent an intern year with Pastor Mark Jeske and some of you might be familiar with that name if you've been watching Time of Grace for a while.

Now for the last three years, my family and I have been serving at congregation in central Wisconsin and when I say "my family," that consists of me, my wife Karen, and our five children, ages 12 through 19.

***Pastor Mike Novotny***

Wow! Our daughters play volleyball together.

***Pastor Jeremy Mattek***

They sure do.

***Pastor Mike Novotny***

There's that; they just won a championship.

***Pastor Jeremy Mattek***

They were highly successful. So if you haven't seen that headline.

***Pastor Mike Novotny***

Okay, there are better things to talk about. So in this series called Skeptical Faith, we're trying to open a Bible and honestly answer some of the toughest questions that Christians face and not just pastors like us, but people watching at home, their kids, their grandkids, their friends, their neighbors. You know, this is the reason I want nothing to do with religion or Christianity or Jesus or your Bible; all that stuff. And today's a huge one. We're going to talk about heaven and hell.

So as you kind of think about all the questions we could have answered, why does this topic, heaven and hell, deserve to be, you know, like the top five big questions that a Christian should be able to answer?

***Pastor Jeremy Mattek***

Yeah, that's a great question. The topic of heaven and hell might be one of the least talked about topics just among people in general because we don't like to talk about it. In reality, everybody thinks about it. You know, there's a passage in Ecclesiastes that says, "God has placed eternity in the human heart," so there's a sense of something beyond what I'm living right now; beyond the place where I'm living now that God has placed in the human heart so that we wouldn't be surprised, so that we would be inclined to go searching for it. And when you think about the timeline of our existence for each person, you know, we each have our beginning date but our end date goes into eternity and our time on earth is about this much compared to the time in eternity. And you know, we want to get that right. People also have a lot of questions about that; questions that are often asked with a lot of fear and Jesus addresses those questions with some beautiful answers that take away all the fears that anyone could possibly have about death, about afterlife, about heaven, about hell. He talks about the reality of it all but the beautiful reality of how he uniquely prepares to receive all the best that it offers.

***Pastor Mike Novotny***

All right, you've got my attention. In my office, just a few feet from here, I have a 150-foot rope I got from Amazon and only the last few inches of this white rope hang out the side of the drawer and there's like a one-inch piece of black tape and that's my reminder, like, this life might feel long but my 80 years, however many years we get, is nothing compared to eternity. So I'm happy that you're tackling this.

Well, I hope all of you at home enjoy this message. It's an important one; something that Jesus tackled so let's listen to Pastor Jeremy as he opens up God's word and talks to us about heaven and hell.

*Pastor Jeremy Mattek*

A woman came in in critical condition. And they worked on her, they tried to save her life, but they were not able to save her life; they were unsuccessful and so the woman died. 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 when 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 was 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 - 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. 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. That's what she thinks that was. It was just a small taste of hell and she never wanted to get anywhere close to that ever again.

Whether or not you believe the details of those stories, whether or not you think they're accurate, the perspective of the reality of heaven and the reality of hell is one that Jesus himself talks about. He talks about it in the gospel of Luke where he contrasts two lives, two individuals living at the same time. And by looking at them, we get the incredible perspective on what comes next and how we should feel about our place after we're done on this earth.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus says this: "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and in 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.'" And based on what we know about palaces and beggars back in those days, we know that it was likely that the rich man had to step over Lazarus to get into his palace. And so, he saw him; he just didn't want anything to do with him. And apparently, neither did anyone else. No one came to check on him, nobody offered him anything, nobody came to care for him, nobody asked him how he was doing, nobody loved him.

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? For Lazarus, I mean, his pain was obvious to everyone on the outside. Everyone could see and 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 in the inside. And when people ask you how are you doing, we typically say, "Oh, 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 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 men felt it in all of its abundance.

And the thought of hell that really upset some people as it relates to God, that some people think that the creation of hell, 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 toward 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. I mean, 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. 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 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 this 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 lots of great examples in the Bible of people who had incredible wealth who were also incredibly godly. You know, 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 wanting 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. The 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 it shouldn't is to very simply ask yourself the question: What are you worried about these days?

Just like there was a day when 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 one thing that both of these individuals had in common; they both died. They both had to say goodbye to everything on earth that 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, well, 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 it against the stone and constantly happening as if you're in a little car and being crunched 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? Do you know what that one thing - the 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. 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 that he did not do while he was on earth. What was missing was he didn't repent. He didn't repent. And do 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 the 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. A phenomenal place.

But there's something you should know about the cave before you go in - it's 136 degrees inside. One hundred thirty-six 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 you 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 a cross after he had been severely beaten; a cross on which he was raised to forgive anyone who has ever mistakenly believed that there was something in this broken world more valuable than the one who sees all the ways we hurt, who sees all 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 in this 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 good 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.

I mean, just think about the perspective on their lives. You know, these individuals, they would have lived during the time of Jesus who lived about 2100 years ago, which means that they'd both been alive for about 2100 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 three percent of them. And Lazarus, on the flip side, was only alone and broken for about three percent of his existence but comforted for all the rest of it. That's minimal! The three percent; that's where we're living right now in our three percent. But that doesn't mean that your three percent 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 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. 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 us not really knowing if that was going to be the last one. She'd take a deep breath and she wouldn't breathe for a little bit and then she'd take a deep breath and the time between breaths 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 open really, really wide - and you could tell her eyes were just darting across the room and you could tell she was really confused about where she was. And so when she settled down we asked - I was there with her parents and with another pastor - we asked, we said, "Amy, what's - you know, what's going on? You look really confused?" And she looked around and she was sort of 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 through our little three percent 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; a 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, and 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. So 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 will forever live. In your name we pray, amen.