

Luke 16:19-31

Sunday 4/8/2012

If you have your Bibles this morning, I want to invite you to turn to Luke chapter 16. I want to read this chapter, pray over it, and then we will get into it and talk about it for a little while this morning before we get into our communion service.

Luke 16:19-31

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus Christ, and we come today to celebrate Your resurrection. Today is the day that we have set aside all over this world. We have seen all kinds of images on television from all across the world where Christians have gathered to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, so many times that great event just becomes another social activity. So many times it becomes just another tradition that Christians do once a year. They will think no more about

Christ's resurrection tomorrow than they did yesterday. Today is the day that they will set aside and give You five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, but then, Father, they are right back to their own lifestyle. It really means nothing to most of God's people.

Father, the resurrection is everything to us because, as the Bible says, Jesus died, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures. Father, because of that, because of His death, we are spared the agony of this rich man in Luke chapter 16. Many times, Father, we get so caught up in a tradition of something that we forget the full impact of what it means to us. Help us today not to be like that.

Lord, I do not know the hearts of men and women today, but I do know that Your Spirit knows them. There may be men and women here today who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior. Truly, there are people here today who fit this story. There are the Lazaruses who know You as their own personal Savior, and then there are people like the rich man who, if they died today, would wind up by his side in that place called hell.

Lord, I pray today, Holy Spirit of God, that You would quiet our hearts, that You would let us focus. While other churches today are holding pageants and putting on plays, Lord, let us go back to the old days where preachers painted pictures with words from the Word of God of the great stories in the Bible that reached down and struck fear into our hearts and made us tremble at the power of Almighty God, and let us fall at our feet before Him and cry out, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God."

Father, we will be careful today to give You the honor and the praise and the glory. We thank You now in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. The Reality of Hell

Do you know that is a powerful story here? If that story is true, and I do not doubt that it is, then that is something for us to think about today. People say all the time when they come to Luke chapter 16, they like to make it a parable. They will always come to Luke chapter 16 when you try to show them there is a place called hell, and they will all say, "That is just a parable."

I have been in the Bible 45 plus years, studying the Word of God, and I have found out a few things. Do you ever notice how when Christ gives us a parable, He always says that it is a parable? But in this particular case, and in a few other instances, He does not tell us it is a parable. I believe the Bible, all the Bible, is the Word of God, and I believe it is by inspiration of God. I personally believe that the Bible is just the way that God wants us to have it, with every word in it just the way it is supposed to be. So I believe that when God takes the license to tell us that one of the parables is a parable, and then He tells this story and does not say that it is a parable, I believe that is for a reason. Do you know what that reason is? I believe it is because it is a true story. I believe it is a story that actually happened.

The Bible says that here is a man that dies and goes to hell. In Luke 16:23 it says, "And in hell he lifted up his eyes." I know the moment you start preaching this, today anyhow, you are going to find people who always take the position, "Preacher, I do not believe in hell." It is a free country.

I never try to tell anybody what to believe. I do not even try to influence them what to believe. I just preach the Word of God and let the Holy Spirit of God do the work. That is His job. You can believe what you want, but that does not change the fact that Jesus Himself said it was there.

We are greatly influenced by great Christians today and many times all of the realm of Christianity. I was talking to a guy about hell one time, and he said, "Do not you know that nobody believes in hell anymore? Do not you know that very few people, you are in a minority that believes in hell, that nobody believes in it anymore in Christianity?" I said, "Do not you know in Genesis chapter 6 nobody believed in rain but a minority? But it still rained." The fact that you do not think it is real does not mean anything to me.

I saw a poll about 10 years ago, and I am sure it is worse now, that 85% of preachers in America did not believe in a literal hell anymore. Billy Graham, who was probably noted as one of the greatest evangelists in the last 20th century, and is pretty much out of the picture now, came out a few years ago and said that he did not believe in a literal judgment anymore about hell. I bet in this city alone today you could not find five preachers in this city that in the last year even preached on hell one time to their congregation. So God's people, along with most pastors, do not believe it anymore, and they just get to that point. To me, I say, "So what?" Jesus said it was there. In fact, He preached on hell 19 times in the four Gospels.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in hell. They do not believe a lot of things. Being a Jehovah's Witness makes you the most boring person in the world. No Christmas, no Easter, no holidays, no nothing. But in their deal, no hell. Years ago, when I got out on the front porch one Saturday morning, I was doing something, and I saw two guys coming down the road. I immediately saw they were Jehovah's Witnesses. One big guy, one little guy. Back then, I used to spend a lot of time sharpening my sword with them. I do not mess with them anymore.

I came out on the porch, and they came up, and they said, "Hi." I said, "You guys are Jehovah's Witnesses." He said, "How do you know that?" I said, "Because I am a Jehovah's Witness." He said, "Well, we know all the Jehovah's Witnesses around here. We do not know you." I said, "When did you become a Jehovah's Witness?" I said, "Oh, about 22 years ago when I asked Jesus Christ, Jehovah God, to come into my heart and save me from a literal burning hell, and Jehovah God came into my heart and saved me from a literal burning hell, and the Bible says in Acts chapter 1, 'You are to be my witnesses,' so I am a Jehovah's Witness." The little guy looked at the big guy and said, "Well, that is not the kind we are." I said, "That is the only kind there is. You guys must be phonies."

We talked back and forth for a little bit. We settled on the fact that they did not believe in hell. I told them, "I know all kinds of Jehovah's Witnesses that believe in hell." He says, "Where are they at?" I said, "Everyone who never died without Jesus Christ as his own personal Savior."

The fact that the whole world does not believe it anymore changes nothing for me. Absolutely nothing. The book is either the book or it is not. A while back, some guy years ago wrote a little song. It is a cute little thing. It kind of goes like this: "God said it. I believe it. That settles it for me." Everybody sang that song, and it is a very popular little song, and everybody even sings it today. But the truth of the matter is, God said it. That settles it. It does not make any difference

whether you believe it or not. Where do we get the idea that just because the popular opinion is, or "I do not want to believe it," that it is not true anymore?

Here is a man that has five brothers, and in this story, which we know is not a parable, he believed it. Do you know why he believed it? Because he wound up there. He says, "I have five brothers. Five of them." As far as you can tell, they are all lost. This Easter morning, I want to bring you a message that I think is a very appropriate Easter message, and I want to bring you a message on a letter from hell.

I have probably preached this sermon a hundred plus times over the last thirty years of my life. There was a time when I used to do Bible conferences, and Mel Suhr and I would preach. Dr. Ruckman and I would preach together in different Bible conferences around the country. I probably preached this message a hundred times. I really have. I call it one of the old throwback messages. You do not hear anybody preach it like this anymore today because people get offended. We are trying to build big churches today with lots of people. You cannot build big churches today when you preach messages like this.

I have told you many, many times, I am not interested in building a big church. I am not interested in impressing anybody. I am interested in what the Bible says as truth. That is where we are at today. I looked at the crowd this morning as I walked in. I said something to one of the ushers, "A lot of these people picked the wrong day to come to church this morning."

Somebody out there is already saying, "Well, I do not think that is a very good Easter message." I disagree with you. I think it is an excellent Easter message. Are you sure you are not a Jehovah's Witness? The very aspect of the resurrection of Christ dying for me and making a way for you and for me not to go to this place called hell, I think a letter from hell is very appropriate for Easter. I think it is appropriate for Christmas. I think it is appropriate for every day. Do you know why? Because in this world, 86 people a second die and go to hell. That is why.

Most of God's people do not even bother them. Some of God's people have been saved 10, 15, 20 years and never have walked across the street to preach to somebody about Christ, much less told somebody the story. Just like the rich man here, most of God's people are just like that. They live their lives the way they want. They are boozed up. They care less about what God wants them to do with their life, and then suddenly a family member gets sick. Suddenly somebody gets struck down or has a bad car wreck, and suddenly everybody says, "Oh my God, let us do something! Let us do something!" Most of the time, it is too late.

Some of your family, some of your friends, some of your moms, some of your dads, and some of your kids, they need to hear a message just like this. I bet right now, if they could, I bet some of those people who died and went to hell would have a letter for you right now. I bet they would.

We had a girl that came to this church about 5, 6, 7 years ago, and she made a profession of faith. She never really got saved. She came for a while, and she was hanging out with some of the crowd that used to hang out in this church, and they are not much around anymore. They had about as bad a Christian testimony as you could ever get. I talked to this girl about two weeks before she got killed, and I asked her why she did not come back to church. She told me that a

guy in this church had such a rotten testimony in her life, and she thought that he said that he did not have to come to church. He did not have to do what was right. He did not have to do all the things the Bible said, and that is why she did not come back to church. About three weeks later, she was killed tragically in a car crash. I bet she has got a letter for you today. I bet she has got some things she wrote down for you.

When I first came to Kansas City, I had a blind guy who was a pastor that I worked with, a great guy. He did the funeral for a guy, and some of you might remember this. He was in a Chiefs game. This had to be back in '77, '76, I do not know. But it is the reason why when you go to the Chiefs game and the Royals game, you cannot take a thermos with you. This guy was a biker, and there was a bunch of bikers there, and they all got drunk, and somebody crashed him over the head with a thermos and killed him. My buddy did his funeral, and I got to take him because he could not see. We used to let him drive when it was real foggy, but I took him there that day. This guy was lost, and his place was filled with bikers. He was asking me who was all there, and a bunch of bikers, and his family was down there, all lost, and they were crying and wailing and all that. He was a pretty tough guy, and he started his funeral like this. I have never heard anything like that in my life. He said, "Let me tell you about some things a blind man can see." He says, "You know what, folks, I hear a lot of crying today and a lot of weeping over this guy, and I think most of it is because we all know this guy did not go to heaven." He said, "I want to tell you something, if you would have wept as much for him while he was still alive to get saved as you do now because he is lost, he would be in heaven." That is a rough sermon. That is a real rough sermon. You have got to be blind to preach something like that.

I cannot imagine a child of God, saved and on their way to heaven, not trying to find a way to save their parents or their brother or their sister or their kids. It just absolutely blows my mind. God's people are crazy. I preached this sermon one time, and afterwards a lady came up to me, and she was as mad as a wet hen. I am not sure how mad a wet hen gets, but that is the phrase. She says, "I brought my unsaved son today, and I begged him to come to church, and you just had to preach a message on hell, and now he will never be back." I said, "Ma'am, I am going to tell you something. You do not give people what they want; you give people in preaching what they need." If an unsaved guy is in a preaching service, that is what he needs to hear.

This dear sister, to tell you the rest of the story, had been married two times. She had made every bad decision in life she could. She did nothing for God. She wasted her whole life. She never brought those kids to church. She lived a godless life in front of them, and now she has finally come back to church. Her kid does not want anything to do with her or the Word of God because of her godless lifestyle, and now it is my fault because I told him there is a place called hell. You are out of your mind.

Let me tell you something. Some of you parents that are saved here and on your way to heaven, you are on your way to gift-raftering your kid to the lake of fire. I am telling you that right now on the authority of God's Word, you better wake up. One of these days, they are going to have some things to say. I think one of the most tragic verses in the Bible is Psalms 142:4. It talks about an unsaved man or an unsaved woman once they get into the lake of fire. They look back at the fact

that their mom or their dad or their brother or their sister or their coworker never told them about Christ.

Psalms 142:4

I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.

That is going to be the cry in hell. This guy says, "I have five brothers, five of them, five of them. My God, send somebody to them before it is too late."

Let me just say to you, I know this man did not send a letter from hell, and I know you cannot get a letter out of hell. But if he could have, I am sure there are some things that he would have said. At least he was concerned about his five brothers. People like to hear from people. That is just a fact of life. We are human beings. Our whole world is built on communication. I watch some of you kids texting back and forth. I do not know how you do it. By the time you are 40 years old, your fingers are going to be worn down to your knuckles. It is texting, texting, talking on the phone, emails, emails, emails.

When you go on vacation, somebody sends you a postcard, "Wish you were here." They do not really wish you were here, but that is what they are supposed to say. Kids in school, it has changed a lot now. Now you have email, Facebook, MySpace, whatever it is, and you can get on there and email each other. Things are different. But years ago, when you did not have that stuff, you had to sit down and write a letter. Then Elvis Presley came on and wrote "Return to Sender" until they went to computers because nobody would take the letter. Anyway, back then you had to write letters. When you wrote those letters, people would write you back. Most kids did not write enough. I know when I was in the army, I did not write as much as I should. Most boys do not. You write back, "Everything is fine, we are doing this today, could you send me some money, love you, see you later." That is the way it goes.

I have seen those boys overseas, 10,000 miles from home, homesick, in despair, death tugging at their elbow, tired, fatigued. I have seen them wait there as the guy called names out at mail call, and I have seen them stand there like a 10-year-old girl waiting for a love letter. Sometimes it comes, sometimes it does not. People like to hear from each other.

There is a great example of that in the Bible in 2 Samuel 18:28-29, David and Absalom. There is a great battle going on. Absalom is in the battle, and David is separated from him. They are out there, and they win a great victory. So this runner comes running in there, and he says, "King, King, we had a great victory! The kingdom is saved!" All David cared about was, he says, "What about the boy? What about the boy?" A second runner comes in, "Oh, we had a great victory! The kingdom is saved! Praise Jehovah!" All David says is, "What about Absalom? What about the boy?" People like to hear from people, and I guarantee you if this man could get a letter out of hell, he would have some things to say.

II. The Horror of Hell

I think he would want to talk about the horror of that place. When you look at our text and other places in the Bible, Luke 16:25 says that he is tormented in that flame. That is literal. Luke 16:24 says that he wants Lazarus just to get the tip of his finger and touch it to his tongue. He cries out for that, the Bible says. The Bible says down there in Luke 16:23, he says, "I am here, and I lift up my eyes, being in torment."

Job chapter 30 talks about a man in hell with his bones burned black with heat. Matthew 25:46 says it is everlasting fire, everlasting punishment. It is the very fact that He rose from the dead that spared you from this. You need to go tell somebody about it. Matthew 25:30 says there will be wailing, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. I preached this message one time down in West Virginia at an old country church, and I preached on hell, this same message, and I preached on wailing and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Some lady came up and said to me, "Preacher, I ain't got no teeth." I said, "Madam, teeth will be provided when you get there." It says wailing and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Revelation 14:11 says the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.

You say, "God wouldn't do that to a man. We have a God of love. It is all brotherhood of God, fatherhood of man. God wouldn't let a man be tortured like that." You do not know very much about history, do you? Kind of naive. Haven't had much experience with human nature. Do not get out much. Have you ever read a book called *Treblinka*? Have you ever read a book called *The Fears and Practices of Hell* by Eugene Copeland? I mentioned that book a while back, and Joe Crites, as he always does, found it online and said it is one of the most incredible books I have ever read in my life. Have you ever read the book *Enemy at the Gate*? Have you ever read the book *Auschwitz* by the doctors that were there?

People in America say, "God wouldn't do that to a man. He wouldn't let him be tortured. He wouldn't let that thing happen to him." Sure He would. Sure He would. It happened all the time. There have been many a man, woman, and child back in the 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th century who were hung upside down and whipped to death until they bled to death. There were many of them impaled on stakes and left to die, which sometimes took two weeks. There were many of them skinned alive, roasted alive, put their heads in cages full of rats or poisonous snakes. You ought to read *Fox's Book of Martyrs* sometime. You ought to talk to Harlan Popoff or Richard Wurmbrand.

From 1939 to 1945, when Adolf Hitler put that mess on over in Germany with the camps, let me tell you something, they were absolutely unbelievably cruel. They made lampshades out of their skin. They shaved off their hair before they sent them to the gas chambers and made mattresses out of it. They took gold out of their teeth after they were dead. They took all of their clothes and sent it to the guys on the Russian front. They would stand up there. I have seen pictures where they would stand up eight or nine Jews, and then a German SS officer would take a nine-millimeter Luger and shoot guys and bet on how many heads it would go through. Do not tell me it would not happen. You are out of your mind.

Dr. Josef Mengele was called the Angel of Death. He was the Camp Kommandant doctor at Auschwitz, and every time that train came in, and it came in every day, they would separate the

ones that could work. They would take the old women, the old men, and the kids, and he would walk down there with a little swagger stick. If he marked this way, you went to the camps. If he walked this way, you went to the gas chamber. He took those little kids because he was fascinated with making a pure race. So he committed some of the most horrendous experiments on those kids without anesthetic. He would inject dye in their eyes to see if he could get their eye color changed. He would take men and put them in freezing water and then time how long it would take them to freeze to death so they would know how long their pilot shot down on the North Sea could expect to survive. They would put them in high altitude chambers, and they would put it up to 20, 30, 40,000 feet. Their brains would blow over the wall just so they could know what their pilots would be up against. Human guinea pigs. Do not tell me about it. Do not tell me about it at all.

People say, "God just wouldn't let that happen." You are wrong. He did. Down through history, they died by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands, by the millions. So do not tell me God would not let that happen and let a man burn in hell. Oswald J. Smith, one of the great Canadian preachers back in the last century, wrote a book on hell. He called it "God's Madhouse of the Universe." My God, what a place.

You always have the tough guys. You always have them. You have the motorcycle guy riding around with a big thing on his back, "Hell's Angels." That is a contradiction in terms. It is like military intelligence. Driving around there, I have guys that I have witnessed to, and they said, "Oh, I know what, me and the devil are going to drink out of the same bottle when I get to hell." Yeah, right. Big tough guys. I know how it is. "See you in hell." Yeah, I know how it is. "Let us party down here, and we will party in hell." I saw that on a T-shirt the other day. Let me tell you something. If this guy could have got a letter out of that place, he would have just said, "I have five brothers. Go tell them." I think he would have talked about the horror of that place.

III. The Smell and Hopelessness of Hell

If a man could have got a letter out of hell, I am sure of it, he would write about the smell of that place. The Bible says it is like brimstone, sulfuric acid. That is like rotten eggs. My God, what a smell for all of eternity. You have people out there, God's people, who for time into eternity have to fill their lungs with smoke, smoking cigarettes. I want to tell you something, I do not care if you do or you do not, but I am going to tell you in that Bible, the only person who ever got smoke in his lungs is somebody in the lake of fire. You are in good company.

If he could, I am sure he would say in that letter, "I have got to get out. I have got to get out. I cannot stand it anymore. I have got to get out." But you do not get out. There is no end to it. Do you ever notice how people in this life like to make their hell on earth so they do not have to think about the real place? Somebody says, "Man, it is hot as hell today." Really? Talk to a guy who just got a divorce, and he says, "I have been through hell." Well, that is probably as close to hell as you are going to get, but I do not think you have.

Sometimes you want to have some fun. Get on the internet, type in "Hell, Michigan." There is a town called Hell, Michigan. A big thing up there is the fact that the whole town is built around

making fun of hell. It says a big sign out there to get tourism, "Come to Hell." They call their children, "Come to Hell, see our little devils." It is on the website. "Today is Father's Day. Bring Dad and have a round of golf in Hell." Their ice cream parlor is called "Screamers" with a big sign out front, "Who says there is no ice cream in Hell?" Hell, Michigan. The beer joints, "Who says there is no beer in Hell?" Big sign on there in the mall, "Best shopping place anywhere is in Hell." Everybody wants to try to make that real story just kind of do away with it so it loses the impact. That is a lot of what Easter is about today.

At Christmas time, we focus about the birth of Jesus. Nobody gets too offended because He is little babies. We all like little babies. At Easter time, we focus on the fact that He is dead and He rose and went back to heaven. I am focused on the fact that when He rose from the dead, He died on that cross for you and me so you and I do not have to go to that place of Luke chapter 16. Great Easter message, I think. But then, what do I know?

The U.S. Marines have a little saying. It says, "When I get to heaven, to Saint Peter I will tell, another Marine reporting, sir, I have served my time in hell." Sounds neat, does it? I have even talked to old veterans. I talked to an Iwo Jima veteran one time that fought on Iwo Jima in 1945, and he told me that he could do whatever he wanted. As hard as I could try to win this guy to Christ, he told me he could do whatever he wanted to do the rest of his life, and his sins were paid for because he went through hell on Iwo Jima, and this is what it is, and so he can do whatever he wants. Now, I agree with you. War is probably the closest thing to hell on this planet, but it is not the same. It is not the same.

Audie Murphy was always a great hero of mine. Most of the young generation growing up do not know anything about him. Audie Murphy was the most decorated soldier in World War II. Audie Murphy is from Texas, and Audie Murphy was a little run of a guy. His dad took off when he was a baby, and his mom died when he was 15. He had three or four kids he had to take care of himself. When he got to the age of about 16 or 17 years old, the war had just broken out, and the only way he could take care of his family was to join the military and send all the money home. But he was underage. His aunt had to sign for him to get in the army. He tried to get in the Marines. They just laughed at him. He was only 5'4", about 110 pounds. The Navy would not take him. The paratroopers looked at him and said, "You will not even open a chute when you bail out. You are too light." But the army took him, and he became part of the 3rd Infantry Division, "Rock of the Marne," they are called from World War I.

He started from the very beginning. He went in that thing, and he is living proof that it is not the size of the dog in the fight, but it is the size of the fight in the dog. This little guy won every honor that the United States could give him and France could give him. I do not know how many Croix de Guerres he got, but at the end, he won the Congressional Medal of Honor for what took place in France in 1945 in the Colmar Pocket. At that time, he was a sergeant. They had moved him all the way up. He had won Silver Stars, Bronze Stars. He had won everything. This little guy was a fireball.

In January 1945, when they were moving out there on January 26th, and down there in France when they tried to make their final push into Germany, he sent his crew back, and they were

overcome. He had two tanks with him, and both of them got blown up by the Germans, and they started a counterattack, and four German Panzers with 250 Germans began to attack him. He put his guys back. He got with his own rifle, started calling artillery in on the Germans as he stood there. He fired his rifle until it was out of ammo. Then he got up on a burning tank that blew up 30 seconds after he got off. He manned the .50-caliber machine gun, and for over an hour, while he is talking on the phone, calling in the artillery, firing that .50-caliber machine gun, he killed over 200 soldiers. The tanks went back, the artillery kept coming in, they kept getting closer. He kept firing away. In this book, he talks about the fact that he is banging away, and he is on the phone with some second lieutenant in the rear, and the lieutenant is saying, "How close are they? How close are they? Keep pouring it on." He is firing that gun, and the artillery keeps coming in. The lieutenant keeps saying, "How close are they? How close are they?" Finally, Audie says, "Hold the phone. I will let you talk to one of them."

After the war, he made a lot of movies. One of the movies he made was a movie about his own life in the army and all of his exploits. It was called *To Hell and Back*. I am sorry, Mr. Murphy, as much as I have respect for you and thank you for the service of our country, you do not go to hell and get back. You just do not.

Listen, this old earth is as close as a saved man is ever going to get to hell. This old earth is as close as an unsaved man is ever going to get to heaven. I am sure he would write about the darkness of that place, the fire of that place. The Bible says it is outer darkness where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not.

People say, "I just do not believe God would allow a man to burn like that. He is a loving God. He is a kind God. God made all the flowers and all the birds and all the sunsets and the sunrises. That is not God." Years and years ago, I had just gotten saved myself and just plugged into the Word of God. I went to a church that had a revival service, and I heard a young man get up and give this testimony. I never forgot it. He told a testimony of how he got saved. He was stationed down at Pensacola at the Naval Air Station down there, and he worked on the ground crews. He said one day, he had been going to revival services and going to a church, and his buddies were making fun about it. He said one day, "We were out on the line there, and we got an emergency call, and an F-4 was having some problems. An F-4 Phantom was having some problems, and he is coming in for an emergency landing." He says, "We got the fire trucks all out there, and all of us went out to put on our asbestos suits and got out there, and that F-4 started to come in there, and you could tell there was something wrong. The controls were not working very well, and he put his landing gear down, and when he hit that thing, he hit too hard, and the landing gear buckled, and that F-4 hit the ground, had four fuel tanks on it, fully loaded on a training mission out there in the ocean someplace. That thing hit the ground, and those JP-4 jet fuel tanks exploded."

He said the fire trucks were wailing and went after it. The ambulance was there. Everybody was running out. He said you could hear that 20-millimeter ammo popping off inside that fire, and you could hear the roar of that fire. He said they could not even get close to it for 100 yards, and they were holding those big fire hoses down, trying to spray that anti-flame stuff on it. He said the roar was so loud, and the bullets were popping off, and he says over that fire and over those

bullets and over that rage, you could hear somebody scream, "Cut off my legs! Cut off my legs! Cut off my legs!" Nobody cut off his legs, and he burned to death.

Now let me ask you a question. You are all modern 20th century, 21st century people here. You have a 20th century modern educated man with a PhD, trained to fly modern jets, with a college education. If that man would ask you to cut off his legs to keep him from burning the way he is burning, what in God's name should you be doing to keep yourself from going to that place? Matthew 5:29 says, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out." It says in Matthew 5:30, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." You better go to heaven, halt, maim, blind, than go whole into the lake of fire. So do not tell me God would not let it happen.

You say, "You are just trying to scare me." Fear is the most healthy emotion you have. If somebody ran down here right now and said, "We just got a phone call, and there is a bomb going to go off in four minutes, we all have got to get out of here," you would be up that door, up that door. You would be up through the ceiling. You would be everywhere. When we get outside, and a place blew up, and everybody is saved, and your kid is saved, you would be patting that guy on the back, hoisting him on your shoulders. He would be on the five o'clock, ten o'clock news. He would be on *Good Morning America*. He would be a great hero. But I can stand here today and warn you about a place called hell and a lake of fire and eternal judgment, and I am the bad guy.

The Bible says in Hebrews 11:7 that Noah, moved with fear, prepared the ark for the saving of his household. Proverbs 3:7 says, "By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil." You can say whatever you want, think whatever you want, but I am telling you, you better be hell-scared and hell-scorched.

If a man could have got a letter out of hell, I am sure he would write about the hopelessness of that place. To me, the most tragic thing about hell is there is no end to it. Fire in the morning, fire at night, fire all eternity. Dante was the great Italian poet, lived in the 1300s, and he did a work called *The Inferno*, which has been commonly called *Dante's Inferno*. That book or that writing was a play about his journey to the underworld. Here is an unsaved man, Dante was not saved, here is an unsaved man in the 1300s that believed there was a place called hell. In his book there, he says as he entered into the gates to go down to the netherworld, the underworld, he saw on that gate a big inscription that said, "All ye that enter here abandon all hope."

Do not you know when you have been in hell for a hundred thousand years, and you realize that it has just started? Do not you know when you have been in hell 900 trillion years, and you have finally come to the realization that you have not yet begun? Do not you know after 500 octillion years in that place of outer darkness and wailing and weeping and torment and gnashing of teeth that you will realize that nobody is counting the time but you? Yes, you will lose all hope.

Let me tell you something, the greatest single cry, and this is the message today, Easter, Happy Easter, the greatest single cry of my Savior on the cross was when He looked at God and He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Because that is the cry of an unsaved man in the lake of fire for all of eternity, and my Savior took my place, He took your place, and He died on that cross, and He took the agony of hell for you and for me. He cried out,

and God turned His back on His Son so God today does not have to turn His back on you. No, it is we who turn our back on God.

IV. The Shame of Hell

If a man could get a letter out of hell, I am sure he would talk about the shame of that place. What a disgraceful thing it is to go to hell. We get it all out of perspective. We get so caught up in this world. We all have our movie idols. Some of you ladies go gaga over the great movie guys, you know, "I look like Brad Pitt." Some of you guys, you look at these girls out there, the great movie stars, and they are beautiful and all that. Some of you have movie stars, some of you worship rock stars, some of you just worship *Dancing with the Stars*.

But what a day it will be when all the movie stars and the rock stars and all the great idols of this world, the presidents, the kings, the queens, the governors, the congressmen, the senators, and a common ordinary person who goes to church every Sunday, winds up in a place with Alvin Karpis, Charles Manson, Adolf Hitler, Mussolini, Charlemagne, and all the rest of them. If you take your average American idol that you get so excited about and all want to be like and dream, dare you dream about them instead of daydream about what God wants to do with your life, if you took that model and you took that guy that you just say, "Boy, he is the dream guy," and "She is the most beautiful woman in the world," let me tell you something, if you take that unsaved person and put them in a lake of fire for six months and bring them back up with the stench of the nostrils or the burning of the flesh and the filth of a filthy rag, you would have to turn your head to keep from vomiting. We do not believe it, we are all Jehovah's Witness Christians.

The real shame about hell, ladies and gentlemen this morning, is you did not have to go. You really did not. If you were forced to go, you did not have a say in it, you could probably maintain some respectability. But I want to tell you something, if you decide you are going to go to hell, and it will be your choice, you know this: you are in a place that God never intended you to be in, and you will realize that God did not send you there, and you are spending an eternity in a place that God never wanted you to be in, that He sent His Son to die and took your place for, and you rejected it. You turned your back on it, and now He paid your price, you rejected that payment, now you pay your own price. What a shame that is.

Matthew 25:41 says that God never prepared hell for you and for me. The Bible says hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. God never figured, He never thought you and me would look at what He did for you and me on the cross. Have you ever done something for your kids or you have done something for somebody that you just say, "I know they are going to appreciate that"? Have you ever done something for your kids, and it is such a grand thing that you know the kids are going to say, "Daddy, that was the greatest thing, thank you so much"? Have you ever done something for your spouse that is the greatest thing in the world, and you just expect them to fall down and worship you and say, "You are the greatest thing in the world"? Have you ever done something for somebody that is your friend that really cost you something or really you did something enormous, and they come to the point where you think they are going to really appreciate that? Do you know how you felt when they just turn their back on you and do not even thank you for it? How must He feel? He sent His Son down here to die on that cross. He

agonized in your place in hell, and He paid your price that you do not have to go, and then we laugh at His Word, laugh at Him, make hell a punch line in the jokes and in the cities and the things that we do while He died on the cross for you, and then we have the guts to show up today. God help us.

The Bible says that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. God had other plans for you. He never expected you to be there, but we had other plans for God, did we, and it did not include getting saved.

V. The Urgency of Salvation

One last thing. I think it is clear that if a man could have got a letter out of hell, I think with all we have looked at and what we have talked about today throughout the whole Bible, I think it would be clear that he would say the last thing in that letter is this, based on this guy who has five brothers and he wants somebody to go tell them lest they come to this place of condemnation. I think the last thing this man would say, he would say to everybody here that is not saved this morning, and he would simply say this: "My God, listen to the man preaching today. Do not shut your heart. Do not close your mind. Do not close your eyes. Do not close your ears. My God, if I could get out of this, if I could just have 10 seconds to turn it around, if I could just have five seconds, if God would grant me just two seconds to change my plan and change my plea, I would do it, but there is no second chance when it comes to hell. Your chance is today. Do not wait until it is too late."

Two of the greatest stories in the Bible of unsaved men that as far as we know are absolutely in hell today:

1. One of them is in Exodus chapter 8, and it is Pharaoh. Pharaoh was faced with letting the children of Israel go. Last night, most of you saw it, I could not help but watch it. I was flipping back and forth between *The Ten Commandments* and *Independence Day*. I wanted to see if they ever matched out; they did not. But I was watching that thing last night, and I was watching it when God delivered, and I know it is a movie, but it is so true about human nature, and I know it is a movie, and I know it is not biblical in much of its process, but it conveys a good theme. The thing that I got out of it last night, I have seen it a thousand times, but the thing that I got out of it was the fact that it just struck me last night. Maybe it is because of what I had to say this morning, I do not know, but it just struck me last night. God delivered them, and every time God delivered them, there was somebody else in the movie last night, it was Nathan, that so easily took them away from what God wanted to do with them at every turn. They were not ready to serve God; they were ready to turn from God every chance they had an opportunity. I thought to myself, if that is not what pastoring a church is today, if that is not a carbon copy of what you face every day in the ministry. God split the Red Sea, and then they murmur about He did not split it enough. He split the Red Sea, they murmur about, "You split it too long, they are in after us." He puts it down, and He kills everybody, and then they get out in there, and they murmur about there is no water. Just like us, after every miracle God does, we just turn and go right back the way we were before. Pharaoh makes one of the greatest statements when Moses is faced, and they have their face-

off, and Moses faces him with what God said about letting the people go, and Pharaoh makes a statement that is echoed down the minds of people in hell for the next five thousand years because it is the statement that most unsaved people make when they are faced with a decision like you have today. Pharaoh was faced with doing what God said, and Pharaoh said what all unsaved people say, "Tomorrow I will do it tomorrow." Yet the Bible says, "Behold, today is the day of salvation."

2. The second one is over there in Acts chapter 26, and it is when Paul confronts King Agrippa. When you read that story, you see very clearly and plainly that King Agrippa knew everything that Paul was talking about, and he knew Paul was right, but like so many of God's people, he is faced with all the political things. He is faced with losing his job. He is faced with losing everything he has built in his life, even though it was all going to send him to hell. When he is faced with his choice, he says the second thing that some of you will say today, and he says, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Tomorrow and almost. Yet the Bible says, "Behold, today is the day of salvation."

The Bible says in Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" The Bible says in James 4:14, "What is your life but a vapor that appeared for a little while, then fadeth away?"

Philip Bliss, who was a great songwriter back in the height of the Philadelphian Church Age, wrote a great song, and it is in our hymnals, great hymns of the faith, I think it is page 250, 251 somewhere in there. He wrote a song based on Luke chapter 16, based on Pharaoh, and based on King Agrippa, and it is the song for unsaved people. It is the song for you today. It is that old song that goes:

Almost persuaded, now to believe; Almost persuaded, Christ to receive. Seems some soul to say,
"Go, Spirit, go Thy way, Some more convenient day on Thee I'll call."

That is where we leave it today, but yet there is a last verse, and that last verse, oh my dear God, the last verse:

Almost persuaded, harvest is past! Almost persuaded, doom comes at last! Almost cannot
avail; Almost is but to fail! Sad, sad, that bitter wail, "Almost—but lost!"

Every head bowed, every eye closed.