

The Voice of the Lost

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes that a person's nature determines their destination after death, and that obtaining a new nature through regeneration is essential for going to heaven.

Duration: 35:21

Scripture: Luke 16:19, Romans 3:23

Topics: "Lost Souls"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that man is a moral wanderer, far from God and unwilling to return. However, God is constantly calling humanity to come back to Him through various means such as revealed truth in the holy book, reason, common sense, life and death, human history, and our own moral constitution. The morally wise are able to hear God's voice everywhere, while the morally foolish are deaf to it. The sermon also highlights the unique story of a lost man becoming an evangelist after death, pleading for others to come home to God, adding his voice to the chorus of those calling for repentance.

Transcript

Verse 19, And 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, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.

It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died and was buried. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and said, Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest 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 them. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou would send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, that they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and a prophet. Let them hear them. He said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

He said unto him, If they hear not Moses and a prophet, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. We pray thee, O Heavenly Father, that thou wouldst give us ears that we may hear, and hearts that we may understand. Save us, we pray thee, from the routine and the habit of things, and the meaningless and feelingless handling of holy things.

Help us to hear, we pray thee, as if this were our last sermon. Help us to speak as if this were the last talk to be given on earth. Help us, Lord, be thou at this moment also with every other man who rises to preach the word.

May this be a night when some encounters are had and some events take place in the kingdom, seen or unseen, known or unknown to us, that will advance thy cause, rock Satan back, and make thy church to grow. We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

These sermons, my thesis has been that man is a moral wanderer, is away from God and is venturing dangerously far from home and from God, unable and unwilling to return. But that God is calling him home, and that God is entreating with many voices, saying, O return ye unto me. God is entreating by revealed truth in the holy book.

He's entreating by general truth, reason, and common sense, as I've explained. He's entreating by the fact of life and death, and by the fact of human history, and by our own moral constitution. God is saying, Return ye even unto me.

Now, the morally wise are hearing him, and they're hearing him everywhere. But the morally foolish hear no voice at all. They think we've made it up.

They have ears to hear and hear not, and they have eyes but see not, and they have hearts but their pattern cannot understand. And for the moral fool there is no tongue in trees and no sermons in stone and no books in the running brooks, and no word in the conscience, and no reason why they should come home. But our Lord Jesus Christ here makes us to hear a voice, and this time it's a strange voice, and I think the only time we've ever heard about it is the voice of a lost man pleading for people to come home to God, adding his voice to the voice of the saved, and the voice of conscience and reason, and the voice of God's love, and the voice of the Holy Ghost, and the voice of the church, and the voice of testimony.

Now we have something here that is different from unusual, and it's an extreme thing indeed. The Lord of all worlds, the Lord of life and death, and the Lord of eternity drew aside the curtain that hides that world from this world, and he lets us see and hear what had never before been seen by living men, only by the dead. And he lets us hear a voice that never had been heard by living men, only by the dead.

He lets us hear the actual words of a condemned man, heard before only by the finally lost, and never by the lost on earth. And here a lost man becomes an evangelist when it's too late. He becomes an evangelist whose voice is a powerful entreaty, and he says that he doesn't want people to come where he is, and his voice cries, O return ye unto God, even though it's too late for him to do it.

Now we want to look at this story which our Lord gave us here, and note some things in it. It is such a full story, and contains so much that no man can hope to do it justice in a dozen sermons, or two dozen. But I want you to note a few things that stand out here so obviously that anybody can see it.

The first thing I call attention to is that the beggar was not saved because he was poor. Now the beggar was a beggar all right, and he was a poor man, and there was nothing said about his being a Christian or a believing man, but it says that he died, it came to pass that he died. It doesn't say it happened that he died, as in some translations, it came to pass that he died.

Things don't happen in the kingdom of God, they come to pass. Quite a difference between a thing happening and a thing coming to pass. So it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Now because this man who died was poor, we have begotten the impression that he went to heaven because he was poor. I want you to notice that this is not, and could not be, the case. If it were the case that a man went to heaven because he was poor, then naturally salvation would depend upon poverty and rags, and a man would be saved because he was poor, or because he was dressed in rags, or because he was covered with boils.

Well we know that isn't so, because that would make salvation a human thing and not a divine thing. Beside that, there are many beggars that are liars, and no liar shall have his part in the lake that burns with fire. Every liar shall have his part in the lake that burns with fine brimstone, and no liar shall have his part in heaven.

There are many beggars that are thieves, and there are unclean beggars, and there are beggars who murder, and there are drunken beggars. So let's remember that this man, Lazarus, didn't go to heaven because he was poor. He was poor, and he went to heaven, but his qualification for going to heaven wasn't his poverty.

Keep that in mind always when reading this story. The second thing I want you to notice is that the rich man did not go to hell because he had plenty. This also is mistakenly believed by some, and I suppose preached by them.

If that were the case, if a man went to hell because he had plenty, then that would be to equate eternity with time, and ignore the spiritual nature of men. Men go to hell not because of how much they possess, they go to hell because of their spirits. Many holy persons have had wealth, though no holy person ever loved money.

I want you to see the distinction there. The love of money is a root from which all evil grows, but it is not money, it is the love of money. You can love anything so as to make it idolatrous, and you will perish because you love evil, or love at least that which is not God.

So let's remember that we do not have here a story of social inequality, as one translator puts at the head of this story. The danger of social inequality, that you know, socialism and communism and all the rest, comes in and says that a man is marvelously wonderful because he's poor, and that he's a scoundrel because he has something. But I notice as soon as the poor men get anything, they act the way the rich man got acted when he had it.

So human beings are just human beings whether they have anything or not. Now I say the rich man didn't go to hell because he had money, but he went to hell for another reason, and Lazarus went to heaven for another reason. Now this is the crux of the short message tonight.

I want you to get it because to me it is the most solemn thing, and if you have not heard it, it may be a startling thing. But the reason Lazarus went to heaven and, by these, the rich man went to hell was that each one went to his separate place because that was where he belonged by nature. Always remember that.

You'll always go where you belong by nature. The fish belongs in the sea, and it'll stay in the sea if it can. The bird belongs in the air, and it will be in the air when it can be.

Certain animals belong in the snow, and they will stay where it's cold if they can. Others can only live where it's warm, and they go where it's warm. They go where they're fitted to exist.

The holy angels inhabit the heaven of God because they are holy, and God's heaven is holy. That's what the Bible means when it says, Pursue holiness without which no man shall see God. A holy God has a holy heaven, and the holy people are fitted for that heaven, but there's no other kind of people that is fitted, or are, if you like, fitted for heaven.

So each person went where he belonged. He went where his nature fitted him to go, and that is where we'll all go finally, my brethren. We'll all go where our nature fits us to go.

In Bernard Celeste's country from which Jerusalem the Golden is taken, there are 40 stanzas of that Jerusalem the Golden incidentally, and there are only about three or four that are ever sung, but I have read with great delight over and over the others, and one of them says this about the saints that walked around on the earth and suffered and grieved and labored and worked. It says when they die, Jerusalem demands them. Heaven demands them.

Why does heaven demand them? For the same reason that when you throw a stone in the air, the earth demands it. It goes down where it belongs, the earth. When you toss a ball into the air, it goes a little way and then stops and then starts down, and it starts down because the earth is claiming its own.

When our Lord Jesus Christ had said about our Lord Jesus Christ, he said about himself that when Satan comes, he'll find nothing in me. The only reason Christ escaped the devil and was free from him was that there was nothing in Jesus that Satan could lay claim to. There was nothing there that belonged to him.

Satan couldn't claim him because Satan couldn't show that there was anything there that was like Satan. But never you forget it that as long as Satan can lay claim to anything in a man, Satan will do it. And wherever heaven claims anything, heaven will get that thing in that person, and where hell claims anything, hell will get that person.

There was Judas Iscariot. Nobody sat down and looked over the record, no archangels or seraphim or cherubim, not even the great God himself sat down and looked upon the record and said this deed that he did was good and this deed was bad and this deed was good and this deed was bad. Somebody tried to tell me, they came to see me the other day, I had a chat with a good, nice chap, but he had the idea that your deeds were weighed against each other.

Nothing like that took place here, and nothing like that took place with Judas Iscariot. Nobody said, I think we ought to send Judas to hell because Judas has done this and this and this. The scripture says he died and went to his own place, and that was all there was to it.

He went to where the moral gravitation pulled him. Heaven is a magnet that draws the saint there, and they can't go anywhere else. Let a saint die, and he couldn't go to hell because the magnet draws him.

Heaven demands him because his nature belongs there. But the rich man died and went immediately to hell, not because he had money, but because he had a nature that belonged in hell. And as soon as he was dead and the body gave him up, his nature went where his nature belonged in hell.

To me, this is a terrible thought. We are very kindly when we get in trouble, people are to rule, they're very kindly at the time of death, and we like to think of all the good deeds that people did which don't mean a thing. Or we think very kindly and sympathetically and pardon the wrong deeds they did, and that doesn't mean a thing.

Where does his nature belong? Does his nature belong in hell, or does his nature belong in heaven? Does he have a new birth, a new nature within him? Does he have the spirit dwelling within, and does his nature belong with God? Then nothing can keep him away from God. Does his nature belong in hell? Then nothing can take him to be with God. Before she was converted, my dear little old sympathetic mother, she sympathized with everybody to the point where she suffered most of the time, not because there was anything wrong with her, but because things were wrong with other people.

And she'd cluck, cluck, cluck, and chuck-chuck about people, and she'd say, oh, he doesn't go to heaven, there's no reason why heaven should exist. She'd say, that good man, he was so good he ought to go to heaven. Well, he had done some good deeds, but the point is, what kind of nature did he have? Did he have the nature that belonged to God, and which God demanded back and heaven claimed? Or did he have a nature that belonged to Adam and sin and hell? Well, that's the way you figure it, not whether he gave a bag of groceries to a poor widow, or whether he was kind to his neighbor when he had his leg broken, whether he gave to the Red Cross.

That's not the way to tell where you go when you die. The way to tell where you go when you die is what kind of nature you have in you. Jesus, our Lord, said, Accept him, and be born again.

That is, born another time. What happened when he was born the first time? When he was born the first time, he had a nature given to him. We don't like to think it, but we're born into the world with a nature that belongs in hell and not in heaven, and when we die we go where our nature belongs.

That's why the Lord said, Accept a man, be born another time. What is it to be born another time? It is to have an infusion of another nature. Theologians call it regeneration or the infusion of eternal life.

They have different names for it, but it's the receiving of another nature. Peter says that by the exceeding great and gracious promises, we have obtained the nature of God. That's what a Christian is.

He's somebody that's obtained the nature of God through Christ, and because he has God's nature, he'll go where God is. He'll go to Abraham's bosom because he has the same nature of Father Abraham, who is the father of the faithful. That, to me, I repeat now for the second time, is a very solemn truth.

It doesn't make any difference whether I have joined a church, it doesn't make any difference whether I give commission, though if I have a new nature, I will join a church where the people are that have the new nature, and I will give to the church that is there for those that have the new nature, and I will appreciate what God has done for me, and I will want others to share in it, and so I will mingle with missionary-minded people and evangelistic-minded people because I will want others also to share this new nature. So that's

what you and I are set out to do. We have arrived at a place where almost everything we talk about now is a need to be fulfilled.

We appeal to the people, we say, Well, you have certain needs, and Jesus is just the one to meet your needs. Now, that need may be to have a good grade in school, it may be to go someplace in safety, it may be to have a better job than you have, it may be to have a restful mind, to have peace of mind, as we say. Whatever the need is, our evangelists run out and say, The Lord will meet your need, and personal workers say, Well, he'll meet your need.

This is not what we're sent to say, that the Lord is a need-meeter. We are sent to say that the Lord is the Lord and giver of life, and that he gives life and a new birth and a new nature to men who have a wrong nature. Because he gives us a new nature, then when we die we go where our nature belongs, and our nature belongs where God is who gave us that nature.

That's why men go to heaven. They go to heaven because they have the right nature. Each nature has its own proper place.

The rich man had been content with earthly goods. He had a wrong nature, and nobody could tell him about it. He was always busy.

He had one party after another and was always getting new clothes, and his money hindered him. There's no doubt about that. Our Lord said it was difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God because his money was in his way.

That is, his money prevented him from getting the nature that would have taken him to God. He was busy. Instead of going to the temple or to the synagogue and hearing the Law of Moses read and finding out how bad he was, and hearing the Psalms read and finding out he could be forgiven, he was a Jew, instead of doing that he had another party and dressed richly and fared sumptuously.

He had plenty to eat and plenty to wear, and so his money came between him and God. But it wasn't his money that damned him, it was his nature that damned him. If we could only keep that in mind and remember it, we'd be good theologians and we'd be wise in the truth.

But to get the notion that the Lord looks at a man and says, Well, you enjoyed yourself on earth, didn't you? Well, you go to hell. You had a tough time on earth, didn't you? Well, you come to heaven. That is simply making heaven to be a kind of a flord for people that can't stand the snow.

The place where people go, they say, Well, earth treats me pretty bad. I was sick while I was on earth, and I was miserable, and I didn't have much money and never could hold a job. Oh, well, the Lord said, You deserve something better.

Off to heaven you go. Another man says, How about you? Well, I had plenty. I had two or three estates.

I had a couple in Canada and one in California and one in Florida, and I had plenty. All right, God says, You've had your share. Well, you know that? That's figuring things the way man figures them.

It's looking at things the way man sees them, and it isn't biblical at all. God doesn't ask how much money you had or how little. He doesn't ask whether you ate steaks or whether you lived on the scraps.

Your nature takes you where you're going. Today you're trusted in the mercy of God. It was the mercy of God that took the man to heaven, the mercy of God that gave him the new nature and prepared him for heaven above.

It was the mercy of God that forgave him his sins. You say, The Bible doesn't say he sinned. Yes, it does.

Have you found that in the Bible, that the poor man sinned? Have you found that there? Did you say you didn't read it? Yes, I did. Not tonight, but I read it. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

There is none that doeth good, no, not one. There is not one that doeth righteousness. He was a man, and he, being a man, sinned.

Therefore, the poor man was a sinner. And if the poor man had died a sinner, his poverty wouldn't have taken him to heaven. He was cleansed and pardoned by the Lord God of Abraham, so that when he died he could go to Abraham's bosom.

But the rich man perished because he had neglected in his preoccupation with the wealth of this world, he had neglected to seek the pardon and the mercy of God, and so he went to hell. And when he got there, he called to Abraham and recognized him. Did you say, how about this? Well, this is not part of the sermon tonight, but it's teaching of the Bible, and teaching of the old Jews, and the teaching of the Church, that before Christ rose from the dead and went to God's right hand, the place of the dead, shul, hades, or hell, was somewhere below and divided into two compartments, and the good were in one side and the evil in another.

And when our Lord died, you remember the old creed says, and he died and he descended into hell. And some people don't like it, but he did. He went down where that place, not the fiery part of hell, but that part we call now Abraham's bosom, and he gathered all that were there and took them to heaven above.

This is, I say, apart from another sermon. But there was a division there, and it was called a great gulf. It was fixed between the two.

That is not the gulf that is fixed between the hell that's out there somewhere and the heaven that's there somewhere, but it is the gulf that was fixed in those days before our Lord led captivity captive and gave gifts unto man. So Abraham could see the beggar, or yes, could see the beggar and take him in his arms, and the beggar could see across that gulf that was fixed and see the man who was in hell suffering there. And he cried, speak to my brothers, let them come to this place.

The man who hadn't time to think about his brothers while he was on earth enjoying himself with his money thinks about his brothers now where he can't do anything about it. But always remember, if you were to make a triangle, if you were to have heaven here and hell here and earth here, remember from earth there's a one-way street to hell, and from earth there's a one-way street to heaven. But between heaven and hell there is no passage at all.

Scripture says, You that would come to us cannot, and we that might want to go to you cannot. The man in heaven above who might want to go to hell, if it were possible to speak to someone there, cannot go. There is no passageway, there is no road, no highway between heaven and hell, and there is a one-way highway between earth and hell.

The man who goes there can't come back, and the one who goes to heaven can't come back. So says the scripture. Speak to my brother, he says.

He might have been a hard and inhuman man while he lived, not because he really was hard, but because he was fleshly and lustful and loved to eat and drink and feast and forgot his soul and forgot his breath, the soul of his brethren. Now he felt concern for his sinning brethren. That's the voice of the lost, my brother.

I believe it's the voice of the lost sounding tonight, if you and I had good enough ears to hear it, because here our Lord Jesus Christ let us hear it. He let us hear a voice that never had been heard by anybody but the damned. Now we hear it.

We hear the voice saying, let's send somebody back. You notice he didn't ask to go. He said, send Lazarus, because he's a saved man and he could go.

The voice of the lost, friends and relatives. The rich man had been a religious Jew, that's quite obvious, because he called him Father Abraham. He was not a Gentile.

He had opportunity. He could have gone to the synagogue and heard the reading of the law, which the Bible says Moses has read every Sabbath in your synagogue. Paul said he was a rich man and he was a Jew, and he knew something of theology.

He had been taught, evidently, as a lad the doctrines of Israel. But he didn't come. Nobody wants to say anything these days that gets them in trouble.

Everybody wants to stay out of trouble, and that's why you hear very little blunt, downright truth telling, even from the best pulpits. But I'll say this, nevertheless, that a great many people go to hell from churches. A great many.

Not only that, but I am deeply convinced that a great many go to hell from the pulpits. This rich man, this religious Jew, knew Abraham and called him Father Abraham, and knew something of the mercy of God, and knew something of the patience of God. He knew something of theology.

I'm not sure, but this rich man, now that the riches he threw of that, that's out of his circle of interest, I'm not sure he couldn't have given a few pretty good answers to the Jewish catechism. But he was in hell, nevertheless. It's an awful thought.

Nobody wants to come to hear preachers say it. Nobody is ever popular that dares to say it. But I believe it's true, nevertheless, that hell receives many recruits from the pulpits, from the boards, women's societies, youth groups of the church, because they are not taught they need to be born again, they are not taught that Christ died for their sins according to the scriptures, they are not taught that they need to be washed in the blood and filled with the Spirit, they are not taught this.

And they go, as the rich man went, preoccupied with other things but religious, not that they'd know Abraham, they saw him and could recite the catechism all right, but they're not prepared for heaven because their nature is not fit for heaven. And they will perish because they have a perishing nature. Like Judas, when they die they'll go to their own place.

No matter how nice they were, they'll go to their own place. So it's not human niceness, it's not the friendly joviality of Adam that saves a man, it's having a new birth, being regenerated, having the nature of God

planted in your heart, having the life of God imparted to your soul, then you're saved. And if you die in that state you could not go to hell because heaven demands you, and will demand you.

The voice of many a lost preacher is more eloquent now from hell down there than it ever was when he preached on earth. He only could be heard, one man was heard, he wasn't a preacher, he was just a Jew who had lots of money while he was on earth and went there. But I doubt not that many a man, if he could only speak to the congregations of lost men now in this world, would speak more eloquently and persuasively from the world below.

And yet I wonder if he would speak more persuasively. He certainly would speak more eloquently, but our Lord said, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. For if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Somebody says we need something dramatic, something tremendous. Yes, but here is that dramatic, tremendous truth. It's truth that saves men, not drama.

Now God help us. I hope that every one of you is renewed and born again, and you have the nature of God in you and eternal life, and that you're ready to go home by the way of the cross. I hope that.

If it's not so, then I'm available to speak to you following this service in the side room. Brother Coulter, myself, any one of the numbers of men and women here would be happy to speak to you. If you think it over now, have you had that event, have you had that encounter with God that took away your sin and imparted to you that nature which belongs in heaven, God's own nature, eternal life? Or are you just a religious person doing pretty good, not being too bad, but with no renewal of nature? If that's the case, then I urgently invite you, and I think if you listen you'll hear a voice from below saying, let somebody go and tell them lest they come to this place of torment.

Let's pray. Lord, how thou didst ever find us when so many millions go their way careless tonight. We'll never know, but it's great sweet grace eternal that takes all our sins away.

And David's royal fountain washes us clean. We thank thee, pray thee for all present to see. Pray there might be a searching of heart and an exposing of our nature before thy light to know whether indeed we belong in heaven or in hell, whether indeed we're sons of Adam or sons of God.

O God, save us from carelessness. Here in Canada and down in the United States and many, a few other countries in the world, we're like this rich man. We have so much.

We live sumptuous, and it's in our way, and it's making us forget that sometime soon we're going to die, and we're going to go where the claim is laid to us, where we belong. O God, help this evening, this hour, and pray for Christ. Let us sing, and if now or after this service you want to see me, I'll be available.

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