

A Prayer From Hell

by Gary Kopfstein

The sermon explores the only recorded prayer from hell, emphasizing the urgency of recognizing spiritual truths and the necessity of seeking Christ for salvation before it's too late.

Duration: 42:51

Scripture: Luke 16:14-31

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus, as told by Jesus in the Bible. The rich man lived a life of luxury while Lazarus was poor and sick, begging for crumbs from the rich man's table. Both men eventually died, but their circumstances in death were drastically different. The rich man had an elaborate funeral, while Lazarus was buried in a potter's field. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding and perceiving the kingdom of God, and highlights the need for individuals to cry out to God for mercy, just like the humble publican in the temple.

Transcript

The message this morning is a prayer from hell. It's the only prayer from hell that we find in all the Word of God. There are a lot of those who have written prayers here recorded in the Word of God, but this one is the only one in all the scriptures that we find an individual in hell crying out in prayer.

In Luke chapter 16, we'd like to read from verse 19 through verse 31. And the Word of God reads, 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 lifted 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 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

thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou wouldst 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. Amen. This 16th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke starts out with the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to his disciples from the first verse onwards.

But at verse 14, the Pharisees also, it says, who were covetous, heard all these things, and they derided him. And so here are the children of God, the disciples of Christ and the Pharisees hearing the Lord Jesus Christ in this whole account. And then as you come down to verse 19, the subject changes dramatically.

And it has to do with this certain rich man and a beggar who is actually named for us. And our lovely Savior gives to us the history of two men, as no other person could. First, he gives a brief account of the lives of these two men here upon earth, how it is that the rich man lived and conducted his life and how it is that this poor beggar that would have desired the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table to have that for food.

And yet he was laid, it says, at the gate of this rich man, not even invited inside to partake of those crumbs. The dogs, moreover, came and licked his sores. One man is rich and he enjoys the luxuries of this world, while the other is very poor and he must even beg for a miserable substance.

He's so poor that he is very ill, he has sores, he has not the money, the finances to seek medical help, while the other man has everything that a man could desire in this world from the great wealth which he possesses. But then our Lord tells of these two men at death. And of course, anyone could do that.

Anyone could tell of a person's life that knows them or speak about their death. The rich man, Jesus says, is buried, no doubt very elaborately, with probably many mourners attending the funeral. The beggar also died, but he was afforded no better funeral than the potter's field would provide for him.

He could not be buried in any tomb. He could not have the money to have a large funeral. To this point, perhaps, any biographer could take us of your life, of my life.

However, the Savior goes on to show these two men where no one else could, and that is in eternity. In eternity, when they died and left this frame, this body, this tabernacle, and they went out into eternity. And it's evident from what the Lord says here in this, I believe a true story.

I don't think it's a parable, although you may disagree with me. I believe that this is actually two men that actually lived in the time of Christ, a rich man whose name was not even worthy to be mentioned, and a poor beggar who is told of us that it is Lazarus indeed. He was not compelled to stop where human writers must stop because he could pull back that thin veil which separates this life from the next to unfold for us the eternal state.

And I don't know of anywhere else in the Word of God that is so clear and so plain to tell us about the rich man and him being buried. And immediately in the next verse, the words are, and in hell, and in hell, he lifted up his eyes and saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, Lazarus afar off. In verse 26, it speaks of a great

gulf that is fixed.

It cannot be transcended. There can be no change in our eternal state once we die. The rich man went to the place called hell and there he would be for eternity.

Lazarus died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom and there he will be for eternity. And so the Lord pulls back the curtain as it is. He shows us what some things that are a reality after death.

And so while they lived, both of these men, it's a story of two men who were satisfied. And you may wonder how I could say that when you think of the poor man and his sores and his hunger, his destitution. But I tell you, he was satisfied.

He was more satisfied than the rich man. The beggar is satisfied with nothing but God. The rich man is satisfied with everything else but God.

And so it is in the lives of so many today. Nonetheless, how soon after death had the rich man's satisfaction, contentment, wealth, and everything that he had piled up, how it disappeared. I think it was John this morning spoke of those in Egypt who built those pyramids and their kings were laid in them and they put all of their possessions, all of their gold, all of their trinkets of this world with them in the tomb, thinking that they could take it with them.

I tell you, as far as it went, it's still in the tomb except for the archaeologists that have opened those tombs and stole the possessions for themselves. And so this rich man in agony cries out in prayer from that place of eternal burning and torment. The Bible records many prayers for us, but in this passage we have only the account of a prayer from hell.

I want us to consider together this morning, first of all, the circumstances of this prayer and how they, I trust, are going to serve for every one of us here this morning, young and old alike, rich and poor alike, as instruction from the very lips of a loving savior to warn us. Is that not mercy in itself that Christ would warn us of the eternal hell and tell us of the man called Lazarus and where he is residing at this very moment? Consider that the rich man prayed when he saw the kingdom of God. There, if you look with me at verse 23, Jesus said, and in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom.

And like so many others, he had never been aware of spiritual realities in life. It was not that he denied them. He was just merely oblivious to them.

How much greater fear ought to there be in the hearts of those who have the privilege and the blessing of sitting under the preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here's a man that had no knowledge, had no, no understanding of spiritual truths. And the reason for this was that he had never experienced the new birth.

Do you remember the words of Christ in John three, most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again of the spirit of God, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And when it says, see there, it's not speaking of seeing with the eye because I cannot see the kingdom of God with my physical eye, but it is speaking of preceptive perception, understanding, comprehending, grasping the kingdom of God because he was not born of the spirit of God. And so in this world is sure evidence of the quickening power of the spirit of God within is the realization of spiritual truth that drives one to begin to cry out to God in prayer, like the publican at the temple.

Oh God, be merciful to me, the center. He felt himself to be the only center in the world, it seems, but he knew where to turn. He knew where to cry out to whom it was.

I could, I could help him God. Oh God, be merciful to me, the center. And there's not a soul.

There's not a man or woman, a child on earth that can sit back and say, well, God is sovereign. God has chosen. So I'll just sit back and wait until God does something that publican knew all that truth.

And yet we find him crying out to God, God, be merciful to me, the center. And that's exactly what every lost person needs to do to cry to God for mercy. Here's the rich man in hell in torment crying out, but it was too late.

His prayer would not be heard. It would not be answered. It could not be answered.

He had Moses and the prophets and all those in his lifetime. And I'm sure many others. And yet he went on his life, enjoying his riches with no consideration of his eternal soul.

And isn't it amazing, my friends, how fast life passes by. Tomorrow will mark five years from since 9-11. I cannot believe that five whole years have come and gone in my life here and gone.

And we think of our lives being a vapor here for about a little time. And yet sinners outside of Christ live as though they've got a million tomorrows. They're preparing for life on earth.

They're building and fixing and providing and gathering and heaping up riches. And yet to what avail? Because that day will certainly come. That day will come when this eternal soul must leave the physical body and go out to its eternal destiny.

And here the rich man without price died in his sin, died unforgiven, died rejecting Christ. And in hell, he lifted up his eyes being in torment. He prayed and he prayed earnestly from a real sense of need.

I believe we see that in that 23rd verse when it says, and being in torments, I cannot imagine what it must be like. I cannot imagine what those eternal souls right today who have left this life without Christ, what it must be like for them as they know the final judgment day is coming. During his lifetime, I believe that this rich man had times when he said his prayers.

You know, I don't feel for a moment it's right that we teach our children as I was taught in my home. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

And if I should die before I wake, I can't remember the rest of it. Pray the Lord my soul shall take or something to that effect. How often we say our prayers.

There's a prayer book called the Valley of Vision. And it's a tremendous book, tremendous book of prayers. And the Church of England has a, what's called a prayer book.

And the vicar would stand in the pulpit and read the prayer to the people in the service of worship. Not from the heart, not from a renewed heart, but actually read someone else's prayer made up. Many say their prayers, but without a mediator, without the Lord Jesus Christ, the prayers of the lost are not heard.

Yes, we need to teach our children to be thankful to God. We need to teach them that God has created us in all things. We need to teach them to thank God for our meals and everything else that he gives, but to

require from God, to ask from God, God, you must have a mediator in between.

And so during his lifetime, this rich man, I'm sure said his prayers and being a religious man, he was not unfamiliar with a cold formal type of praying, probably publicly and privately as well. How blasphemous a thing it is for us to just say our prayers, whether they are written or whether they are spontaneous. But now the man is praying with all his might and he's praying without the aid of a prayer book and he's praying earnestly being in torments in this flame.

He's crying out now. Had he prayed so earnestly while he lived on earth, he would not have come to this place of hell of torment. And then notice with me, if you would, in verses 23 and 24, that he prayed in great soul agony as well.

It says, and in hell, he cried. I cannot for one moment, imagine the cry, the scream, the volume of how he was crying out in this prayer since he had never experienced such agony of soul on earth. Therefore he had never prayed like this.

Some have known what it has been to be pressed. So such painful situations in prayer in this life, some can say with the solace, the sorrows of death encompassed me in the pains of hell laid hold of me. I found the trouble and sorrow.

I'm sure that many of God's people have experienced that kind of praying when in trial and persecution and sorrow, heartache, the way down and crying to the Lord. And that's the kind of prayer that God answers, isn't it? He comes and he brings comfort to the soul by his spirit through the word. The most pitiful site on earth, I believe, is an unsaved person at peace.

I can well remember my father, an atheist, and I would try to witness to him. We'd come home on furlough and stay with him in his home. And we would endeavor to speak to him about the Lord, about his sin, about his need of forgiveness with God, about the eternity and about death coming.

I mean, he was up in years and even towards the end of his life, physically, he was on his deathbed. And he'd always say to me, Gary, I'm not afraid to die. And it broke my heart because I knew that he was not afraid to die.

Hell was going to be his eternal home. He was going out of this life into eternity as a lost man. And yet he could face me and say with boldness, I'm not afraid to die because he was not aware of spiritual things.

He wasn't aware of eternity, aware of his sin. I'm not afraid. Having peace in this life without Christ is a very dangerous thing.

It's an awful, terrible thing to have peace and not have Christ. Sadly, we know that he, this rich man, prayed too late. And how we long to see people stirred by the realization of God's kingdom, beginning to pray in earnestness and agony of soul.

There is a prayer that the unconverted person can cry out to the Lord. I believe that God will answer. And it is that prayer of the public.

And I mentioned earlier, God be merciful to me, a sinner. God, show me my sin. God, show me your son.

Show me my need. Crying, asking God to reveal his son to you and your need of his forgiveness. I believe this must be done.

However, as we see in this account, it must be done in this life while there is time. We must seek the Lord while he may be found, while he is near, while we yet have our life and being upon this earth or else we pray too late. I see as well in this account that the petition of this prayer is intended for our correction.

And what correction is needed? This man prayed, you notice, to the wrong person. In verse 24, we read, and he cried and said, father Abraham, father Abraham, even the friend of God and the father of the faithful is, is no correct object for prayer. It is more than a little interesting that this is the only prayer in the Bible addressed to a saint.

Think about that for with me for a moment. Remember this prayer came from hell from a rich man who died without Christ and he's praying to a saint that is to father Abraham. And let those who make the practice of, of praying to the mother of God or any other saint be corrected in this hellish petition.

And he asked father Abraham for the wrong deliverer. He says in that verse, and he cried and said, father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus. Lazarus indeed was now among the blessed who had come to an end of, of all the suffering in his life, of all the hunger and thirst and pain and tears.

But he was not able to relieve this rich man's agony, nor are any of the saints above. You see, when we go out into eternity, there's no changing. There's no help coming from any saints, any who have gone before us, any Christian father or mother or children.

It is an impossibility. There's a great golf fixed and none can pass either direction. And so he could not surmount nor cross that great golf between him and the damned.

But of those who are saved, those who have repented of their sins before God and found his forgiveness and believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving him as their Lord and savior. Our God tells us in the book of revelation that therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will dwell among him among them.

They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore. The sun shall not strike them nor any heat for the lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ for the lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

I look for, and I long for that day to come when the people of God, the church of the living God, the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ through all the ages will be gathered together with the Lord, with the lamb in glory. God sent, you see, in the fullness of time, his deliverer, his only deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, his own son. He spanned the great golf between God and man in his nature when he took upon himself human flesh yet without sin so that Christ could then take and lay that life down willingly upon Calvary's cross, being that scapegoat, that surety, that sacrifice, that substitute, that savior to save us from our sins.

He lived a perfect life and he satisfied actively all of the law of God, all that God demanded in the law of our race and going to Calvary, going up Calvary's mount, being nailed to that cross. Jesus did bear our sins in his own body on that tree and he bridged that infinite expanse between our sin and God's righteousness. He is our only hope.

He is the only savior, the only deliverer. There is none other to look for. He's the one whom God has sent into the world to be the savior of sinners like you and I. And oh, sinner friend, I pray that you will cry out unto him that you'll not wait until you see how things turn out, but that in this life, while there's yet hope,

that you will cry out unto him that God would be merciful, give you that which you don't deserve, which none of us deserve, give you that so great salvation, give you that forgiveness through faith in the Lamb of God, in the precious blood that makes atonement for our sins, that you too might know the joy of sins forgiven, having forgiven all your sins by a righteous God.

And so having ignored this rich man, having rejected him, there was no other hope for this man and there is no other hope for any other in that same state. In vain does any sinner seek consolation from any other but the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle said, nor is there salvation in any other for there's none other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved.

Then this rich young man in his foolishness in hell and torment, he also asked and sought for the wrong water. In verse 24, 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 these flames. This is not a fairy tale.

It's not some story out of a man-made book. It's a reality and recorded for us by the sovereign God, a merciful God that hears this man in the place in a destiny in hell for all eternity. Even if Lazarus could have crossed over and done as the rich man requested, what good would such water have done him? How long would such momentary cooling have benefited that rich young, young, that rich man in the flames? Oh, that he had asked for and had received while he had lived on earth, the living water, which Jesus alone can give.

In John 37 and 38, Jesus said on that last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, if any one thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Jesus is still proclaiming that same invitation this morning right here. If any man thirst and let him come unto me and drink, he who believes in me, as the scripture has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

You see, coming unto Christ and drinking is coming unto him and, and believing upon him, receiving him as your savior and Lord. Now this rich man's prayer in the torments of hell had for us, I believe in the answer given to him by Abraham, a very solemn warning. We should tremble to see that the answer given to this prayer from hell is only mockery.

This should not surprise us since mockery is exactly what God had promised to such prayers as this. Do you remember the words of Solomon and Proverbs one? He said, because I have called God says, because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded because you despised all my counsel and would have none of my rebuke. I also will laugh at your calamity.

I will mock when your terror comes. He says, when your terror comes like a storm and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you, then they will call on me. Does that not sound familiar to our passage? When destruction comes upon them like a whirlwind, then God says they will call upon me, but I will not answer.

They will seek me diligently. He says, but they will not find me because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. What a tremendous warning is given in this proverb that relates, I believe directly to our text here this morning with this rich man in hell.

He would not have any of the Lord's instruction and teaching in the life that he lived as a rich man on earth. But in the torments of hell, he then turns to Abraham and he cries, Oh, Abraham, send Lazarus. Oh,

let me dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue.

But God will laugh at his calamity. God will not hear. God will not make a provision at that time.

It's too late. Notice how each part of Abraham's reply is like a mockery to this rich man's crime. In verse 25, Abraham calls him son.

He says, but Abraham said, son, remember that thou and thy lifetime receive us like good things and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted and thou are tormented. He was a son of the flesh.

He certainly was, but not of the spirit. He was a son of Abraham by the first verb, but not a son of God by regeneration. And so to bring up this natural relationship now that he was in the flames of hell, I'm sure must have seemed to this rich man like mockery.

He was being mocked. He asked for something he could not have. He asked the wrong person, the wrong thing, the wrong deliverer.

And he asked it all too late for some of you sitting here this morning. It may be that it'll be too late for you. And don't think because you're young in years that you have all of your life to live and all of your wild oats to sow and all the things that lie before you and marriage and raising a family and having children and grandchildren and whatever, because God may say to you today, your soul is required.

Today may be the day that life here on earth for you ends. And how much more for those of us who are up in years. We know that as we grow older, the body grows weaker and deteriorates and begins to break down and time is short.

Oh, I feel it. I recognize that things are starting to happen in this old flesh that are preparing me for eternity. And maybe sooner than I think, maybe sooner than you think.

And so he was mocked and even many who are baptized church members, but not saved will likewise be mocked one day. Oh, I would care not to have a front that I'm a child of God and yet know nothing of God. Have no love for Christ.

Not really be his child, but I can make everyone else believe that I'm a child of God. I can put on a religious garb and scene that others may not know where I really stand. I care nothing for that because eternity is just around the corner.

Another breath, another heartbeat, another moment. And in hell, many will land. And then notice the mockery when Abraham says, remember what memories there are going to be in hell.

And this is the one thing that this man did not wish to do was to remember. Nor will anyone who makes their bed in hell. You will not want to remember sitting on the 10th of September in community Baptist church and hearing the word of God proclaimed in your hearing and know that you walked out of that building without Christ, without repenting, without trusting the savior.

And yet here he was in hell and Abraham reminds him, remember son, he has that for which he had sold his soul called as Abraham put it, your good things. And though once considered dear, all his purple clothing and sumptuous fare now only bitterly mocked that man. No, you can't take it with you.

It'll only be a mockery. And then he is directed to consider what he has missed. Abraham says, but now he is comforted.

That is Lazarus is comforted and you are tormented. Never once on earth had he faintly thought of changing places with Lazarus. Have you ever felt you'd like to, you know, if you just could, you'd want to put yourself in another person's shoes.

You'd want to carry their burden. You'd want to carry their load. Have you ever been that way? I'm sure you have.

If you have those whom you love dearly, there are times when your loved one may be going through something that you would take their place. But look at this situation. Here's a rich man with so much, and he would not as much as even think of changing places or even giving in the crumbs, which fell from his table.

But now he would give 10,000 worlds of gold to do so, but it's too late. And then he is told that hell is forever. In verse 26, Jesus says, and beside all this, as though that weren't enough, beside all this between us and you, there was a great golf fixed so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from hence.

There will never be the hope of a brighter day or of relief from the torments of that terrible pit. There is no unlocking the door. There's no changing places.

There's no crying out that God will hear and make amends and forgive you. It's here and now. And it may even be for some this morning or never.

You see, I used to preach the gospel and say to people, I want you to go home and think upon this. That's foolish, isn't it? The further you get away from what you're hearing, the more Satan comes and steals the seed out of your mind. And who knows if you're going to go from point A to point B this morning, this afternoon, and make it home? Who knows what may happen to you physically? What car accident? No, I'm going to say to you instead, right where you're sitting, under the sound of my voice, consider these things.

This is reality. This is truth. This is genuine scriptural principles and truth that are laid out here for us to warn us and instruct us.

Oh, may God's spirit work in hearts this morning. And so this horrible fact will mock all its inhabitants as long as God lives. God is the eternal God, without beginning, without end.

And heaven and hell are eternal places. They are prepared for those who are his. Heaven's prepared to gather them in someday.

But my friend, just as real hell is being prepared to receive all who die without Christ. In a statement about every sinner's future in hell, there's a pastor and writer who said this, and I close. It will be punishment without pity, misery without mercy, sorrow without succor, crying without comfort, torment without ease.

The sinner can look for no relief from God for God judges and condemns him. None from conscience, for that accuses and upbraids him. None from the devils, for they torment him.

None from hope, for that is departed from him. None from time, for this state is forever. It is a state of all misery and it has no consolation, not so much as a little drop of water to cool the tongue.

It is misery, more misery, and nothing but misery, just as sin is all sin and nothing but sin. Jesus Christ, I'm glad to say, is a friend of sinners. And we have sinners in this room this morning.

Sinners who are without Christ, young and old. Sinners who have sat under the preaching of the gospel from many men from this pulpit. Sinners who are yet going on and rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend, there's a day coming when your life shall come to an abrupt stop in death. And if you die without Christ, if you die not seeking God's forgiveness and repentance, if you die without faith in the Savior and receiving him as your Lord and Savior, you will die and go to a Christless hell, separated from the eternal God forever. I think, as the Bible says, man is foolish, a fool, to sit there and say, well, there is no God, or I'll think about it another day.

There were those in the Bible that did that, and we have no account of them ever coming to Christ. I believe they died in their sin, and they are in hell this morning. And I do not desire that one soul under the sound of my voice would go out of this room and die in their sin and go to hell.

Jesus invites you to come and to drink, to believe, to receive him as your Savior. He died for sinners, and there's no doubt in my mind, and I don't believe there's any doubt in your mind, sinner, that you are a sinner. You need him.

May God be merciful to you. Let's pray. Oh, our Heavenly Father, who is sufficient to preach on the subject that I preached on this morning? Who of us is sufficient to understand what hell is really like for those eternal souls that are now in torment and anguish, those who are groaning? Oh, Father, I pray that not a soul here this morning, not a life would depart out into eternity without the lovely Savior.

Pray that you'd bring conviction of sin and the urgency of the day, the message, Father, that has been preached in their hearing, and, Father, that they would flee from the wrath of God which is to come and lay hold on eternal life which is in Christ Jesus. Holy Spirit, work in our midst. Awaken the dead.

Save sinners. Glorify yourself, O Lord. In our Savior's name we pray, amen.

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