

# A Christian in Hell

by John Sung

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*The story of the rich man and Lazarus serves as a warning to prepare for the future and to become Christians in their earthly life.*

**Scripture:** Luke 16:19

**Topics:** "The Consequences of Choices", "Eternal Preparation"

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## Description

John Sung delivers a poignant sermon titled 'A Christian in Hell,' exploring the parable of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31. He emphasizes the tragic fate of the rich man who, despite his earthly wealth and pleasures, finds himself in torment after death, realizing too late the importance of spiritual preparation. Sung urges listeners to reflect on their lives and priorities, warning against the dangers of neglecting eternal matters for temporary pleasures. He highlights the futility of seeking comfort in hell and the necessity of turning to God while there is still time. The sermon serves as a powerful reminder to prepare for eternity and to heed the call of salvation before it is too late.

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## Transcript

Luke 16:19-31

"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20).

This afternoon, let me tell you a story. It is about a Christian in hell! Very strange! A Christian in hell? You think for yourselves: Could Christians be found in hell? What is it to become a Christian in hell? After reading this story, I feel very miserable. I would wail for the fellow. Why didn't he become a Christian in his earthly life? After landing in hell, after having tasted its painful bitterness, this man now considers to become a Christian. Isn't this really pitiful? This is a most pitiful story. I hope after you've heard this story you will not want to become a Christian in hell.

This story is recorded in Luke 16. You read it and you'll know whether there's a Christian in hell. I don't know how to expound it. This afternoon let us ask Jesus to preach it here. Now, I've preached on this topic three times in Foochow. Don't you think this is old stuff. Now what I'd like to speak about are the five things the rich man has done in hell. Let's read:

vs. 19 "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously." Here Jesus tells us how busy this rich man on earth was. He had not one minute to spare. He was busy day in and day out. Today he plays mahjong. Tomorrow he holds a party: cabaret, cinema. How merrily busy. He is immersed in this world. He gives not a thought for the future, yea, not a minute can be spared for that. He cares only for the present.

I came to Hankow this time and I saw many refugees fleeing. I asked them why? They replied, "To safe-guard our lives." And there were some who in preparation for coming tribulation made underground shelters or were house-moving. They took great pains at that. Let me tell you, "Prepare for the future!" But this rich man made no preparation. Everyday he was enmeshed in this world --- living in pleasure and luxury. He laboured for the comforts of this life but not of the next.

Vs. 20 "And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores." Lazarus, bitterness, full of sores, penniless and homeless --- a beggar eating the leftovers, laid at the rich man's gate. The rich man couldn't care a glance. He spurned him, an eyesore to him. He cared for his own pleasures. How could he care for miserable Lazarus, miserable begging Lazarus? Now God had chosen Lazarus to preach His Word to him. But he was deaf to all that.

Though Lazarus had a miserable life on earth, his body was wrapped with disease, no home, no friend, no relative, no one loving him. Though in such miserable circumstances, he was saved from sin and he found victory over sin. No money so he could play no mahjong. He could not go for a fling, nor talk of smoking opium. Full of sores, who would partner him for a dance? Those who saw him thought how miserable he was. But, he knew God. He believed Jesus. Though his body was in bad shape, his spirit had boundless joy and hope. He forgot this present suffering. He prepared for the future.

Brothers and sisters! What are you making preparation for? Busy studying, busy making money, busy cinema going, busy dancing, card playing. God says to you, "Tonight thy soul shall be required of thee." To whom shall your busyness go? Where will pleasures lead you? Have you planned for your future?

Vs. 21 "And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores."

I ask you, did the rich man give him anything to eat? Rather, he fattened himself with feasting and wine, table full of them, not a thought for the miserable worm. No, he did not. Fortunately, Lazarus was at his little gate. Were he placed at the main gate, he might have got a scolding and beating, even to death. The rich man cared only for his daily bouts of this and that kind of pleasure. He prepared nothing for the future. He is one of many such rich men in the world. Once I was preaching at the Cheeloo University in Shantung. A student asked me, "Dr. Sung, why do you want to be a preacher?" I said, "For future's sake. And for the love of souls, to help them prepare for the future, to believe in the Saviour Jesus Christ." Then came my question, "Why do you study?" The reply: "I study in order to graduate. After graduation, I can earn money and marry and have children and bring up children. When I get older, my children would have graduated. Then I die, and I am finished."

Alas! How ignorant! You know how to prepare for now but not for eternity! We need to prepare for eternity. Don't just look at the here and now and lose the future. We need to prepare for the long-term future.

Once I went to a village. An old woman wept: "Aiya, Aiya, for years I have saved up to buy a big coffin. Unfortunately my son has sold it!" She knew how to prepare a coffin for the present and there are many

who prepare lands and houses, coffers (coffins) indeed, to become officers in government and to amass their dollars. Pity! What pity! That's the plight of this rich man. Day in day out he is immersed in pleasure. O fool, tonight your soul will be required of you. Where will all your possessions go? To whom?

Vs. 22 "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 it came to pass..." Don't look at all here and now. Look to the hereafter. "And it came to pass that the beggar died." Did Lazarus die? "I'm afraid. I'm most afraid!"

Did he say all this? He wasn't afraid! Death was like returning home. The moment he died he went to heaven. All misery ended. He had a miserable, miserable life on earth. He had no loved one, relative nor friend. There was no one to look after him, no one to inquire his welfare. He had no money to pay for a doctor's visit. On the brink of death he lay as usual at the gate of the rich man's house. He groaned but no one cared. Though he went through Death's dreary valley the Lord was with him. The angels came to take him, and laid him in Abraham's bosom. O, what joy! Before he was rejected by many a hostile look, a beggar full of sores. Now, he was transported to Abraham's bosom, to the shelter of Abraham's great name, forevermore in the heavenly home.

Heaven is my sweet home,

Home sweet home!

Ne'er this world to roam!

The Bible says that Lazarus died. Doesn't it say the rich man also died? When Lazarus died, there wasn't any coffin, funeral, relatives, friend, or property. Who came to his burial? Perhaps that only dog who accompanied him in his earthly life. When the rich man saw him die, he sent a few servants who wrapped him in a mat and dumped him in some wild valley. That was all. Oh, the rich man also died. Yes, he died, for life is short, the world passes away. Yes, he died, so ceased his life of pleasure. Do you know, when a rich man dies, he must ride in the biggest coffin with a train of mourning relatives and friends? It's a roaring crowd! His wife, second wife, third wife, ..., all come to send him off. Many people come to send him off. What a display of pomp. But where is he sent? The Buddhists say "To Western Paradise" to "Wailing" Paradise, rather. The rich man is sealed in the biggest coffin. He'd been an "officer" who had amassed many "coffers." Now he is lifted into a big tomb. The tomb door is sealed. A big tablet is erected. That is his Graduation Certificate. He's graduated buried. But is he finished? If he is really finished, good.

Vs.23 "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom".

1) Now in hell, he was nothing. Money, clothes, great leather cloak, all gone! Wife, children, second wife, third wife, .... more wives, none could go along with him. All the gold and treasures in his big leather suitcase could neither be carried along. Death had snatched away everything!

2) "Being in torments" When I visited the refugee camp in Shanghai this time I saw they had lost everything. How sorrowful. Some escaped to the Foreign Territories, but they couldn't bring a thing. But the misery these refugees went through was nothing to compare with the rich man's. In hades the rich man had nothing, he could have nothing. He couldn't bring a thread or needle, but he had sorrow, sorrow upon sorrow, indescribable sorrow. All the more sorrowful for this rich man so used to a life of pleasure.

Having gone through the sufferings in hades the rich man began to do five things:

I. Look to the Lord. In his torments he looked up and beyond, he looked up to God. He saw Abraham and Lazarus. Now, he looked to God. He looked earnestly to the Lord. No cards, nor mahjong, nor parties, only the Lord. He struggled to look to the Lord. He yearned for where the Lord was. There, his ancestor Abraham was, and Lazarus whom he recognized.

No matter how he stretched himself to look to the Lord, he could not! In the story of Zacchaeus that I told last night, did we not see him looking to the Lord? He could see the Lord. Brothers and sisters, look to the Lord in your present life. It is no use looking to Him after you die.

In Shantung there was a high school graduate who studied in a Church school. He became lifted with pride. He became anti-Christian, anti-God. He thought he was somebody upon graduation. But he contracted leprosy. Poor fellow. He was now humbled. He looked to the Lord. He came to hear me and asked me to pray for him. He confessed his sins. He repented. He was healed of his leprosy. Good that he came to the Lord in his lifetime.

This rich man enjoyed himself everyday in his lifetime. He did not look to the Lord until he landed in hell, in suffering. He now began to lift up his head to God. Weren't it better to have done so in his lifetime?

In Yenching University there was a sister who received a Bible when she parted from her friend. She not only did not read the Bible but tore it to pieces. She did not want the Bible. She did not want Jesus. The year after, she contracted T.B. She went to Shansi for convalescence. That friend of hers came to see her again. He gave her a second Bible. Now, she dared not tear the Bible. When I was in Peking, she was helped to my meetings. She was deeply moved. She confessed her sins. She repented. I prayed for her and she recovered with the Lord's help. Good that she looked to the Lord in her lifetime.

This rich man had too good a time in his previous life. Had he contracted T.B., that would be a good thing. Now the next thing he did, so amazingly, in hades, is he prayed!

II. He prayed with all his might. Vs. 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 this flame." He prayed in hades, "O Lord, O Lord!" He called on the Lord. "Father! I am your son. My father Abraham, have mercy on me!" Maybe his father couldn't hear him. So he not only called out twice and thrice, but 10, 100, 1,000, 10,000 times. He called and pleaded. Had he repented on earth and prayed as hard that would be fine. On earth he was having too good a time. enjoying himself in every pleasure and luxury. He was self-satisfied, well provided but he did not know what would become of him after death. Like Laodicea which says, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, yet she knew not how miserable and poor, blind and naked she was.

There was a girl student of St. Mary's in Shanghai, member of an Anglican Church. Upon graduation she was married to a non-Christian rich man. She wanted her husband to get married in Church according to Christian rites, and he acquiesced. After marriage, however, the husband forbade her to Church. If she did he would take a mistress. This scared her. Fearing her husband might take another wife, she dared not darken the Church door. All the same, her husband secretly took several others when he made his pile in business at Paotow. When this sister learned of this, she became very dejected. She took to opium. Fortunately she had given birth to a baby daughter, now nine years, an understanding child who gave much comfort to her mother. One day this little girl suddenly took ill and died. This brought much sorrow to her mother. Thus stricken, she remembered the Lord. She needed Christ. She asked me to pray for her. She confessed her sins and repented before the Lord. Yes, she did not turn to the Lord till she was

pushed to such extremity.

Now this rich man did not believe nor pray to the Lord while on earth. He struggled to pray only after he landed in hades. Not only prayed but also sought for one drop of water (he dared not ask for more) nor dared he ask for any other thing. Just one drop of water to cool his tongue!

III. He prayed for a little comfort. The rich man in the fire was dehydrated in lip and tongue. He asked for one drop of water to cool his tongue. "My mouth, my tongue are dried up, my mouth, my tongue...." No more arrogance, no more wild dream, no other request, but one cool drop. Had he been like this on earth, to think so carefully, and live so respectfully within his means, never would he come to such straightened circumstances today.

Once I met a sister on board a ship at Hong Kong. Her thirst for Truth was acute beyond compare. Her spirit being in great misery she surely needed help. She had a male colleague who married a young girl of the same village. He disliked her, hated her and even drove her to death. Later the dead wife appeared in a vision, which scared him off his wits. Hearing such a tale, this sister realized death did not end all. She became very morose. She needed solace. She wanted to know the truth. After hearing me she turned to the Lord. When you are on earth, you can still find solace. Once landed in hades, there is no way out!

Brothers and sisters, I urge you to come to the Lord to find peace. Don't delay. Time and tide waits for no man. Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee! How then? Come. Come to the Lord in time to receive His comfort.

IV. He asked for the smallest one for help.

Not only did the rich man ask for the smallest thing, one drop of comfort, he asked of the smallest person. He asked from one whom he had despised on earth. He asked help from the abominable, diseased beggar, Lazarus. He did not ask help from some big pastor, big doctor, from Moses or Jacob. Had he been humble as now to ask of the little Lazarus and listen to his preaching, confess his sins, and receive Jesus, that would be fine. When Isaiah felt he was a man of unclean lips, God at once sent seraphims to cleanse him with burning coals.

There was a lady principal in Tientsin, a highly educated person. She came to hear me preach, nay, to observe how I could be so interesting, could jump and weep. As she observed, the Holy Spirit caused her sins to float before her eyes. To save face, she refused to confess her sins. She returned home, but became dumb. She requested me to pray. She repented and confessed her sins. She believed in the Lord, was healed, was changed. She loved the Lord very much, and the Church too. She gave \$500 to the Church. Yes, it is when one is down and out that one begins to seek the Lord. When will you come and trust Christ?

Vs. 25,26. "And Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received 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 there."

Abraham did not rebuke him. He loved him still. He called him "son". A father loves his son and would find a way to help him. "Remember ... how you were enamoured by the world, how you lived a comfortable life but spurned the grace of God. Now you are suffering. As for Lazarus he had met with many troubles, was

despised of men, but the Lord has respect of him. The Lord loves him and he loves the Lord. So he enjoys this comfort. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed." In hades, there are no roads, no motor-cars, no trains, no airplanes. "My son, I love you. yes, I love you. I wish in my heart to do something for you ..., but, there is no way out between us."

V. He is a champion loser.

Vs. 27, 28. 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 to this place of torment." Ah! He becomes a champion loser! Now that I'm in hell and have no way out, let me suffer the loss. But I have still five brothers on earth. I'm willing to suffer in hell. I lose. Never mind! O grandfather, never mind me, but please send Lazarus to my father's house to save my elder brother, my younger brothers. He became a champion loser. Had he been willing to suffer such loss on earth, the Holy Spirit would have filled him.

Vs.29. "Abraham said unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. With Moses and the prophets on earth they had every opportunity of hearing their testimony. Similarly, there are many pastors, preachers, lay preachers, who preach and testify. Don't you miss the chance!

Vs. 30. "And he said. My father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." This man was a perfect man. He became such a perfect man in hades, like Moses in his perfect consecration. Moses had asked the Lord's pardon for Israel. He was willing rather to have his name blotted out. It's a pity when the rich man pleaded for his brothers in hell; he could be of little help.

Brothers and sisters, when on earth, work your hardest to save souls, that you might not fall into the same trap as this rich man. In hell, nothing can be done.

Vs.31. "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses, and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." "No way out!" Abraham said, "No way out!" What work can be done in hell? It is enough if one has faithfully worked for the Lord, zealously saving souls. When I was in Shanghai preaching, there was a woman who believed the Word. Her husband beat her up because of her faith. She knelt down to pray to the Lord, "O Lord, save my husband, because he does not know." Her husband, hearing this, was moved. He stopped beating her. He believed the Lord. This woman was a teacher. Because she did not get a certificate, she couldn't register. Someone asked her to make a false certificate. She refused. She left her teaching job and went to the village to work for the Lord. to save souls. She sacrificed for Christ. The Lord greatly used her. This rich man.... he was too late. No way out.

Brothers and sisters, when will you prepare to work? Now or wait? Wait till in hell? This rich man never lacked a thing on earth. Whether it be clothing, food, house, travel. He had an easy life. He enjoyed himself everyday. Now, he might grouse why God did not give him some trouble? So, we say, afflictions are good. Do not get discouraged by troubles, as if these are so extraordinary. In days of trouble, let us examine ourselves. Troubles are good for us.

There was a mother who wailed for the death of her daughter. A woman preacher asked her why she wept so sore for her. For death did not end all. Since she believed the Lord, she had eternal life after death. So why weep? O fool, to prepare only for this life, how to perm one's hair, how to dance, how to entertain, how . . . to enjoy this present life.

Finally, let me give you my testimony. Does death end all? If death ends all, then there's no need of a heaven or a hell. Then. I should quit preaching. Listen all of you, listen, listen, listen! When I was in America, I witnessed to others after I was born again. Though they saw I was a changed person, they didn't believe I was born again. They thought I was crazy. When they put me in the mental hospital. I had a rich man warded by my side. When his fits came he was most terrible. He wailed, "I had sex with my sister." He bit his tongue. It bled. The doctor came to put a rubber bit into his mouth. In a while he came to. I asked why he wailed. He said, "I was burning in hell. I couldn't stand it. I couldn't bear the pain, so I bit my tongue." This occurred whenever night came.

O fool! Don't say there's no heaven, nor hell. Believe in Jesus. Ask Jesus to cleanse you from sin with his precious blood. Or else you have to bear your own burden of sin.

I have another testimony. A little girl Chow Shi Mien by name loved the Lord. Once her folks brought her to listen to my preaching when she was taken ill. She heard twice, repented and believed the Lord. She loved the Lord very much. But she got worse in her sickness. Methodist pastor, Rev. Wang Chin Chi of Peking prayed for her. She said, "I'm very happy." She witnessed for her Lord at nine in the morning. Seeing her mother in tears she said, "Mother, don't cry! I'm going to heaven. Now, you must believe in Jesus. Believe Him and you won't weep for me. We'll meet in heaven---. Her father Chow Ytien Chuen was an opium smoker. She witnessed to her father, "Father. I believe Jesus can save you. O, Repent! Jesus has saved me. He can save you too!" Her big brother was a student. Most conceited, he did not believe. She witnessed to big brother, "Brother, I heard the Word only twice. The Lord Jesus has saved me. He can save you too. Repent, believe! The whole family of four all found salvation in the Lord. After three hours she said, "I see three angels in white come to receive me!" Her mother wept. She said, "Mother, don't weep! I'm going to heaven where the Lord is." Thus saying, she passed away peacefully.

Brothers and sisters, this world is not our home. "Heaven is my sweet home, home sweet home!" There are many here in advanced age, and many young people. Have you made preparation? Are you saved? Has Jesus washed away your sins? O let everyone of us make ready! None of us knows when he has to leave this world. Perhaps this evening, perhaps tomorrow, to wait would be too late.

When I was preaching at Golden Well, there was a man who took ill and died. Someone was sent to get me to the house to pray. When I arrived he had just breathed his last. Too late! Brothers and sisters, are you ready?

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