



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Luke 16:19-31

“The Intermediate State”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Today the subject is “The Intermediate State,” and for our Scripture reading we are turning to the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Luke chapter 16 and verse 19 let me read verses 19 through 31.

“There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who 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 Hades.”

Now you see here is one of the differences between this Bible and the one you have.

“And in Hades 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 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 there. 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.”

May the God bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege and opportunity before us, the study of the inspired Scriptures which point us with certainty and assurance to the face of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and the Lord of life. We thank Thee for this opportunity to listen, to hear and thus through the hearing to come to a deeper faith in him who has done so much for us. And so, Lord, we pray Thy blessing upon the ministry of the word today in this meeting. May the name of the Lord Jesus Christ be exalted in our midst.

For those who may be here without Christ, we pray, O God, that they may find him as personal savior, and for those who already know him, but who need to know him better. May the ministry of the truth clarify our thinking concerning divine things and thus affect our lives.

We know, Lord, that it is extremely important that we know Bible doctrine, else how can we possibly order our lives by the help of the spirit in accordance with Thy mind and will for us. And so help us Lord to understand the truth of Thy word, and may this hour contribute to that end.

We pray again for each one present and for the many needs that exist in a practical way in the lives of each family and each person. And we pray, O God that through all of the experiences of life the sweet savor of the presence of the Lord Jesus shall be with us and shall guide and guard us.

We commit ourselves to Thee and this meeting to Thee today. For Jesus' sake and in his name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, as I mentioned before the Scripture reading, is “The Intermediate State.” Life after death is of deep interest to men. It is of deep interest to men because of the universality of death. It is also of deep interest to men because of traditional religious beliefs. Christians, for example, are supposed to believe in life after death. Others too believe in life after death. It is also of deep interest because of the speculations of moral philosophy. The words of Job are words that in a sense are spoken by all of us at one time or another. “If a man die, shall he live again?” It is even interesting that agnostics are somewhat interested in life after death. Huxley, a noted agnostic had over his tomb stone written, “Be not afraid, ye waiting hearts that weep. For God still giveth his beloved sleep. And if an endless sleep he wills — so best.”

Jesus was not an agnostic. The Lord Jesus came and he said, “If it were not so, I would have told you.” And so the fact of life after death is something which he assumed. Charles Kingsley had graven over his tombstone, *Amavimus, Amamus, Amabius*, and if you'll remember your Latin it means, and he was referring to his wife, “We have loved. We love. We shall love.” And in these three words, he affirmed his belief in a life after death.

When we talk of the term intermediate state, we are speaking of the period of existence between physical death and the resurrection of the body, the period of existence between physical death and the resurrection of the body. That is the intermediate state. The Bible proof of such a period rests upon the passages which link

the resurrection of our Lord Jesus with his future coming, that is, the resurrection of the body by the Lord Jesus with his future coming. These texts which point out that the resurrection of the body occurs when Jesus comes again indicate that there is an intermediate state.

This morning I would like, for a few minutes, as we begin the message, although we want to devote most of our time to what the Bible says, to devote a few moments to evidence from the intermediate state at large, that is, from all of the evidence that we can have. When we come to the intermediate state, science has something that is very profound to say. As a matter of fact science has this to say about the intermediate state. [pause] Now that we have heard what science has to say about the intermediate state, we can go on to philosophy. Philosophy has, of course, a little more to say than science. Now I hope you won't hope I was just trying to pull your leg. I was trying to say something to you that is very important. Science has absolutely nothing to say about the intermediate state. Science deals with things that are tangible. The intermediate state is intangible. When we think of science, then we should think of silence as far as the intermediate state is concerned.

Philosophy is different. Philosophy has something to say about an intermediate state. We, kind of, laugh at the philosophers. We really should not, but we nevertheless pull their legs every now and then. Philosophers, you know, it has been said, are men in a dark room looking for a black cat that is not there. Now philosophers are very clever and so they have retorted that a theologian is a man who claims that he has found it. [Laughter]

When I think of the philosophers and what they have had to say about the Bible, I am reminded of the story of an Irish highway robber. He pulled his gun on a man who had some money, and he said, “Your money or your life.” The man said, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you all my money in exchange for that gun.” Pat said, “Sure, it’s an even trade.” The man handed over his money. He handed over his gun. The man said,

“Now, you hand that money back or I'm going to blow out your brains.” Pat said, “Well be dad you can blow away there is a devil a bit of powder in the old thing.” Now there are no Irishmen here. That means, “There is no powder at all in that thing.”

So, the philosophers and the critics of the word of God come to us with a big gun. It's very scary looking. When I look at it I tremble. But it doesn't really have any powder in it. And the things that philosophy has to say about the Bible cannot really refute the truth of the word of God. They may look as if they are a gun held to our heads to blow out our Christianity, but there is not powder in that gun. If we look at our existence I think we probably would say the fact that we live again after this life is no more wonderful or mysterious than the fact that we live now. That we can exist now after so many thousands of years of non-existence is a tremendous and wonderful and mysterious fact, but we do. And the fact that we could exist after this life is surely not as wonderful and mysterious as the fact that we exist now. Now we could come from non-existence is surely just as mysterious and just as wonderful as that we should continue on our existence after we have passed through death.

We really have two voices in answer to the question of is there an intermediate state. Last week I was having a cup of coffee with a friend of mine who is a preacher, and as we were coming home I was kind of testing him on his knowledge of the intermediate state, thinking about what I was going to say this morning. I said, “Now if I were to say to you why do you believe in the intermediate state, what would you say to me?” He said, “I'd say first of all because the Bible teaches it.” Well I couldn't say anything against that because that's exactly what I would say. I said, “But now assuming that I do not believe the Bible then what would you say?” Well, he said, “Then I would say that life seems incomplete.” And he went on to expound that particular idea. Now the order in which he said these things is the order I think in which we ourselves would support the intermediate state. We would say, “What does the Bible say?” Then we would say, “What does science, philosophy, or what does reason say?”

I want to reverse that and begin with the weakest evidence, the voice of reason. It is important, but nevertheless it is indecisive and it is secondary. First of all there is the testimony of history and intuition. Wherever you go through out this earth, you will find that innate, man has an intuitive sense of life beyond the grave. We find it in Socrates, to whom I have already referred. Socrates said that if in accordance with the common belief when he took that hemlock he would pass to the company of his forefathers, then he gladly did it in order that he might enter into the company of Ajax and Palamedes. And we see it of course in our American Indians who buried with themselves all of their accouterments of life in order that they might be prepared for the “happy hunting ground” beyond. And so innately, in the minds of men, there is the belief in life after death.

Now this is one thing that distinguishes man from the animal. Even the highest apes have no sense of a life beyond this life. It is the thing that scientifically so far as we can tell makes the difference between the highest form of the ape and man. Shakespeare speaks of it in Anthony and Cleopatra, and you remember the queen when she is decked out and she is ready now to go. She said, “Give me my robe, put on my crown. I have immortal longings within me.” And she expressed through the great dramatist the fact that men intuitively believe that there is a life beyond the grave.

There was a little boy who commented about his grandmother to his mother. He said, “Mommy, why is grandmother reading the Bible so much these days? Is she cramming for her finals?” Even the little boy senses that beyond this life there is another life. So, the testimony of history and intuition is that wherever men have been they have believed in a life after death.

Secondly, there is the testimony of logic. Our life is incomplete. Every man who has lived for a number of years comes to sense that fact. We know that the things that we want to do cannot measure up to the things that we have done, and our dreams and visions seem to expand with the years. There are so many things I would love to do, but I know I do not have time to do them. The sense of incompleteness becomes more and

more evident as the years pass by. There are lots of books that I would like to write. There are a lot of places I would like to preach the word of God. There are a lot of people that I would like to speak to about Jesus Christ, but life is incomplete. We cannot possibly realize the things that are bound up in our hearts. There are realms of the knowledge of God that many of us as Christians would love to possess for ourselves, but we cannot do it because we sense that our life is incomplete and death is closing in upon us and soon will have us.

And then thirdly, there is the testimony of the moral order. If you look about you and see the injustice and inequity in the world, you surely would have to conclude that if there is not life after death, then there is no real moral order in this universe in which we live. We do not have to do anything more than read our newspapers to realize that things are not right in this world. Men are able to get away with the deepest of injustices and inequities, and nothing is done. As a matter of fact, often society seems to support the injustice and the inequity rather than the reverse. And if there is no time when things are righted, then this universe in which we live is not a moral universe at all, and I do not believe that I could really believe in a just God if I did not also believe in life after death. F.W. Newman said, “If man be not immortal, God is not just.” And I think that is true, and we all realize it. I am not an existentialist and consequently I cannot believe that this life is everything. I have to believe that there is a life beyond this life, and that that life gives real meaning to the life now. And consequently from the voice of reason with its testimony of intuition, with its testimony of logic, the sense of incompleteness, and its testimony of the moral order, I have to believe in the intermediate state. But of course if that is all the evidence I have, I have to say that is probable evidence. I need more. Is there something that upon which we can count and be sure about?

Well the Bible gives us that in the voice of revelation because this Bible claims to be a revelation from God, and I am firmly persuaded in my own mind after studying it for many years that that is exactly what it is. It gives us information that no scientist can

possibly give us and that no philosopher reasoning as a man can possibly attain unto. This is the voice of revelation, and the Bible from its opening words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” through the creation of man in which God breathed into the dust the breath of lives. Now some have suggested that the reason that word is in the plural, “God breathed into the dust the breath of lives,” plural, is because he was breathing more than one life in, like cats have nine lives, men have at least two, this physical life and the spiritual life that is beyond. I do not know whether we can really prove that from the word of God. I am not inclined to think that we can, and I do not depend on that to prove that God has given us a life that extends beyond the grave. The very fact that God breathed with his own breath into the dust of man is a suggestion of that which the Bible unfolds as its pages are read. That is that man’s life is essentially a divine life, and consequently it is a life that exists forever.

Every single individual has eternal life in the sense of life that is endless, even those who never accepted the gospel of our Lord Jesus have eternal life. Not eternal life in the biblical sense of the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ, but eternal life in the sense of endless life, and even those who pass out of this life into the life beyond the grave without Christ, shall exist endlessly. Well, of course, the Bible in its opening stages is not to be expected to have the complete revelation that it contains later on, but we move on from Genesis on through the books of the Old Testament and finally to the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ who in the 14th of John and in the 2nd verse says, “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” The Lord Jesus has affirmed without any question that there is life beyond the grave.

For many years men reasoned about land in the west. You can read of it in your history books. You know that they talked for a long time about whether there really was something out there where the sun sets. And finally a man by the name of Columbus

made the great adventure. He came to the west. He discovered land. He came back, and he was able to say, there is land out west. I have seen it with my own eyes. The Lord Jesus is one who has come from the life beyond the grave. He is one who has dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He lived among us, and we saw him, flesh and blood just as you, and I, are, a little boy like this young man here at one time, then an adult of thirty years of age. Finally he died upon a cross, then he came back and he spoke to us about the life that is beyond the grave. And we have seen him and we have known in experience that there is such a life. The Lord Jesus is the guarantee himself that there is a life beyond the grave.

Men of course who have listened to the word of God have responded and consequently when they died they have expressed their faith. The Earl of Shaftesbury said as he died, “I am touching hem of his garment.” John Newton when he was nearing his end said, “I am still in the land of the dying. I shall be in the land of the living soon.” Frederick Denison Maurice, an outstanding preacher in his day, as he was dying heard the words that a friend said to him, “You have preached your last sermon.” He said, “Yes, but only my last sermon in this life. I expect to preach some more in the life beyond the grave.” He expected to extol the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, then the word of logic has something to say to us regarding the intermediate state but it is incomplete and indecisive. The word of revelation is definite and plain. There is a life beyond the grave.

What is this intermediate state? Now if you think about the intermediate state from the standpoint of what the Bible teaches, you notice that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has transformed conditions among the dead. Now if you get yourself a new Schofield Bible and I hope you do, and you begin in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1, and you read through that entire Old Testament and on into the New Testament and then you read up to the cross of Jesus Christ and his resurrection, you will discover this. You will discover that the event of the resurrection has made a difference, a very marked difference in the state of those who have died.

Now wouldn't you like to know that? Well get yourself that Bible and read it, and come to understand for yourself. One of the things I have noticed in this new Bible in the little reading that I have done. I only bought it Friday or Thursday, so you see I'm not but to just about the Book of Isaiah at the present time. No I better take that back. But I've noticed this about it, that it is very, very good in just this realm of Sheol/Hades because in the text now are these words which are really place names. Sheol and Hades are identical terms. One is the Old Testament term Sheol, and the other is the New Testament term Hades. They both refer to the realm of the dead. Now, when we think of these terms we are thinking of terms that refer to a place. Sheol in the Old Testament is the term, and Hades in the New, as I say.

Now in the pre-resurrection stage of life beyond the grave, Sheol is a place for all the dead. In the Old Testament you will read of both righteous and unrighteous saying that they expect to go to Sheol, not just the unrighteous but the unrighteous and the righteous, both go down to Sheol. I know that the modernists kind of ridicule some who are conservative in their theology because we are supposed to have a geography of the nether world. That is supposed to be something that man is not to believe. But the Bible is very distinct on these points, and it speaks of Sheol as a place.

Furthermore in Sheol the inhabitants have consciousness. They have memory, and they have knowledge. Do you remember when David lost his son which hath come to him through Bathsheba? And after he had finally fasted and prayed and word came to him that the son had died, he stopped fasting. He washed himself and made himself clean for ordinary life and someone came up to him and said, “King David why are you now, since the child has died, no longer morning and fasting.” He said, “Well, the child can no longer come to me but I shall go to be with that child.” David had the faith that beyond this life, he would be with that child which had been born to him and to Bathsheba.

Now when we look at our account in Luke chapter 16, we notice for example, that the rich man is in Hades. He lifts up his eyes, being in torment. He sees Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. He has consciousness. He has memory, and he has knowledge. All of these things pertain to men in the old covenant days who passed out of this life into the life beyond the grave. They are not sleeping. Their bodies are asleep, but their souls are very much alive in consciousness. The Bible does not teach souls sleep. The Bible teaches bodies sleep. Our bodies fall in the grave and there they sleep awaiting the resurrection. Our souls pass immediately into the life beyond the grave. So the era of soul sleep is not taught in the Old Testament nor in the New.

You'll notice to that they were not annihilated. The era of annihilation is not taught in the Bible. Many of our false cults say that when we die, we die and that is it. Our memory perishes and we do not have any existence any longer. The Bible does not teach that. Some tell us and denominations have been built upon this--you know it's a kind of strange thing to me that the denomination of the Unitarian Universalist is so small. Really there are just a few thousand who are a member of that group, and the Universalists, you would have thought that when they were separate, they would have had the largest number of people in their denomination of anybody in the whole of the western world. But they had a handful, just a few thousand so to speak, with this wonderful doctrine that everybody is going to be saved ultimately. You know why they couldn't get anybody? Nobody would believe it. They couldn't believe it. They knew from the voice of reason and the voice of logic that it would be impossible for God to save all people. And so here, you can see with the rich man in hell that the eras of soul sleep, annihilation and universalism are not taught in the word of God.

Furthermore Sheol in the Old Testament period is a place of torment as well as a place of bliss. The rich man is in torment. He says for example, in verse 23, “For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” And then he says in the 24th verse, “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.” And so, in Sheol we have torment. At the same time also we have bliss. I wish we had time to turn to a passage like Psalm 49 and point that out, but Dr. Waltke has been here and has spoken on that Psalm and if you remember that message that may tax you a little bit, but if you remember the message you will remember that he beautifully pointed out this fact. Now here then we have the situation in the Old Testament before the resurrection of Christ or this period of time, Sheol is a place for all the dead. The inhabitants have consciousness, memory and knowledge. It is a place of torment for those who are unrighteous. It is a place of bliss for those who are righteous.

Now with the experience of Jesus Christ, things change. With the experience of Jesus Christ we have an apparently quite an important transformation of one aspect of Sheol. Remember the Lord Jesus when he died descended into the lower parts of the earth. I'm going to ask you if you will to turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4. Now it is impossible for us to do justice to this great passage. Let me just suggest to you the things that it seems to mean. Now the apostle is speaking about the gifts of the risen Christ. He says in the 7th verse,

“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, (or as Weymouth renders it, ‘he led captive a host of captives) and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)”

Notice the 9th verse, “(Now he that ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)” Now that is a reference to our Lord's descent into Hades. That is why the Christian church has from the beginning in its

Apostle's Creed affirmed the fact that he descended into hell, or into Hades. Now there are some interpreters who like to interpret this verse as meaning that Jesus descended to earth, and that is they interpret the verse something like this, "Now he that ascended what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts, that is the earth." Now that I do not think is a valid translation of this verse. And furthermore it seems to contradict with specific statements of the Old Testament upon which this is built in which the writer in the Old Testament speaks about the lower parts of the earth, and he doesn't mean the lower parts which are the earth, but the lower parts within the earth. He is referring to Sheol. So, I'm going to assume that Jesus as the church has believed from the beginning descended into Hades.

Now in Hades the New Testament tells us that Jesus preached a message. If you turn to 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 18 and 19 the statement is made that Jesus preached to the dead. In 1 Peter 3 in verse 18 we read, "For Christ," that's page 1335 in the new approved edition of the King James Version, 1 Peter chapter 3 and verse 18.

Don't you feel kind of poverty stricken in not having this version? Verse 18, 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 18, some of you are looking around for that particular passage. It's after the Book of James, and it's before 2 Peter. The 3rd chapter and verse 18, don't let me confuse you and upset you by giving a page number that you don't have in your Bible. After all, your Bible is really a good Bible. If you can't buy one of these don't go out and commit suicide. Just take your Bible and read the one you've got.

1 Peter 3 verse 18, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom, (my text says, yours has 'by which') by whom also He went, (by the way 'by whom' is wrong, and I don't like to criticize this new version already, but after all what is a preacher going to do if he cannot criticize the English text of the Bible when the RSV was first translated I asked J. Vernon McGee how he liked it. He said he didn't like it at all. I said, "Why?" I thought he would give me some scholarly reason for it. He said,

“Well half of my messages are criticizing the Authorized Version and now with this new version, I’ve lost half of my messages.” So I don’t want to criticize this too seriously, but really that word does not mean “by whom” or “by which” either for that matter. It is really “wherein” or “whereby” and it’s an adverbial expression. Something peculiar to Peter but let’s don’t get into details. Notice “by whom also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.”

What did he preach? Well if there were two classes of spirits in Hades, he probably had a two-fold message. That is, he preached, and this word in the Greek text means not to preach the gospel, but to proclaim a message. And so if with the two groups who were in Hades, held there because you see the blood had not been shed, and so redemption could not have been a complete possession for them, until Jesus came and died. To the one group which had rejected the gospel of the Lord Jesus then of course he would have one message, a message of doom. To the other he would have a good message in the sense that he has now come and accomplished the purpose of the ages and he is able to take them with him now to paradise, which from this time on will be up in the third heaven. So the Lord Jesus made a proclamation, now the text also says he made a proclamation to spirits. He spoke to angelic beings who had tried to thwart the incarnation and he spoke to them the fact that he had accomplished his redemption in spite of what they had done to prevent it. And those that were associated with them in opposition to the plans and programs of God, the message of the Lord Jesus was a message of doom. But to those who were believers he spoke of having accomplished his redemption and took them with him to the third heaven.

Now then that is why we read in, and will you turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 12, 2 Corinthians chapter 12, this is why the Apostle Paul is able to say now in this post resurrection situation, 2 Corinthians 12 and verse 1,

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;), (Paul is speaking about this unusual experience that he had) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.” Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth. Apparently paradise was located in Hades as a separate compartment. When the death of Christ occurred and he went to the realm of the dead and gave his message of doom to the opponents of the gospel of Christ, he took the believers with him, and he took paradise. And now paradise is in the third heaven, as Paul says, and it is up. And so a tremendous change has taken place in paradise as a result of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. So paradise is relocated. The gates of Hades now have no terror for the believer in Christ, for as the Lord Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” No believer today enters Hades. In the Old Testament days Abraham and others entered into Hades and they waited the ministry of Jesus Christ who would accomplish redemption. When he came he took them with them. Now the moment that you and I die, we pass immediately into paradise into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the New Testament says plainly that now there is no change for the unsaved. They are still kept in Hades, and they are kept there under punishment.

Now I have five minutes and that’s really about all I anticipated having at this point. And I want to just very quickly tell the story of Luke 16:19 through 31 in order that you may see that what we find here agrees with what I’ve just said. Someone, first of all, looks at this and says, “Oh that’s just a parable.” How can you look at the story of the

rich man and Lazarus and make anything out of it doctrinally. Well I realize that in the stories which our Lord Jesus tells, if it is a story, we must be careful not to push it beyond the point of creditability and beyond the point of good hermeneutics or principles of interpretation, but I'm not at all sure that this is a parable. I know that the opening of the chapter seems to record a parable, “And Jesus said that there was a certain rich man,” in verse 1. And then he says in verse 19, “There was a certain rich man.” And I realize that the first is the parable of the unjust steward, as my new Schofield, shame upon them, does say, then of course I may have to say this is a parable. But I'm not at all convinced that this is a parable and do you know why? Well of course the term is not given it. Usually when a parable is introduced it is introduced something like this. “Now, Jesus spake a parable unto them saying.” There is no such thing as that here. Furthermore in no other parable, if this is a parable, is a personal name ever given to an individual referred to in a parable. Now that's a kind of a strange thing isn't it? This is the one time that a man is given a name. If this was a parable I think you might have reason to believe that the Lord Jesus may have confused someone.

Suppose I was to say to you, “Now last week there was a seminary student who was converted in one of the classes at the seminary. He heard the gospel and it came home to his heart for the first time. He had thought that he was a Christian, but he was not really a Christian. It has happened at the seminary. And suppose you were to come up to me and say, “I'm just delighted to hear that. What was his name?” I'd say, “Well there really was not anyone there who was converted. I was just giving you an illustration. I was just saying that it was possible for such a thing to take place.” I think you would say, “Well, Dr. Johnson I think you misled us today.” And so Jesus said, “There was a certain rich man.” I'm not sure at all that this is a parable. In fact I'm inclined to think that this is a true story and our Lord Jesus was referring to a certain rich man. But nevertheless because I know that I haven't carried everybody in the audience with me on this point, I'm going to just say, “Okay let's just say it's a parable for the sake

of argument for one moment.” And I still remind you of the fact that Jesus in his parables always used things that were true to life. When he spoke about a sewer sowing seed, there were sewers who sowed seed. When he spoke about a man who was doing something else, there were men who were doing that. When he spoke about a man sleeping an unjust judge, for example, why there were men who were unjust judges and who slept.

So even if this is a parable it does record things that are true to reality. Therefore I look at this and I look at this with the desire that it teach me something. And I think it does. There is a three-fold contrast in these men. There is Lazarus, the beggar laid at the gate of the rich man. The rich man saw him day after day. For in the life beyond the grave, he knew his name. He said, “Send Lazarus.” He knew Lazarus. He had seen him there constantly. And so there is a tremendous contrast in life between these men. Lazarus at his gate, beggar, eating not the crumbs from this man’s table, but that word really means he was eating the garbage from his house. For you see in those days’ men did not use the kind of manners that men use today. You find the best manners in Charleston, South Carolina. And furthermore I have someone in the audience who would be glad to say Amen to that were he not embarrassed about it because he too is from Charleston. The best manners there in Charleston, men do not reach into the common pot with their hands and pull out the meat and eat it. But in those days men ate that way.

Have you seen movies for example, have you seen how men used to eat in ancient times and have you wondered how in the world they managed to eat without having to go and take a shower before they got through. Well that’s the way they ate. They just reached down in the pot and took the piece of meat and put it in their mouth. And do you know what they used to wipe their hands? They used the bread. When they finished a piece of bread, they would take it and they would just wipe their hands with the bread in order to clean their hands of the grease from the meat, and then they would throw that bread aside. That was what Lazarus was eating. He was eating the garbage

off the rich man's table. And so Lazarus by the gate eating the garbage of the rich man, the rich man living in the lap of luxury with Neiman Marcus clothes and eating at Arthur's every night. Then there is a great contrast when death comes.

Death ends things for the rich man, but death begins things for Lazarus. Lazarus' body possibly was even thrown out on top it and burned, but the rich man has a very elaborate funeral. At the very moment when the minister is extolling the rich man his soul is in Hades in torment. And ever since I have read this story and have attended the funerals of men whom I have known were not Christians I have thought of that. I cannot help but think of it. Every time I attend a funeral in which a man is extolled who was not a believer in the Lord Jesus, I cannot help but think of the tremendous contrast. Here we are down here on earth extolling virtue of a man whose soul is in Hades in torment at the very moment. But that is the picture that we have here in death. And then a tremendous contrast in the life to come, the gulf that existed between the rich man and Lazarus in life is now a permanent gulf and oh what a terrible one in the life to come.

The rich man makes three requests. They're very simple. He says, "Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue." And "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." Do not think that for one moment that the rich man is in Hell because of his wealth and Lazarus is in heaven because of his poverty. Lazarus is not in heaven because of his poverty. He's in heaven because of his piety. Now that is implicit in the account. You see Lazarus had a perfect right to demand that he be fed of society, but he did not. He accepted the fact that he was not only a beggar but was lame and had to be laid at the gate of the rich man and lived off of the garbage of that man, and he accepted that as a fact of life. He believed the doctrine of Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to those that love God to those who are called according to his purpose." Lazarus was a man of faith, and he accepted the circumstances of life under God. That's why Jesus

called his name. His name is Lazarus, God helps. And God helps the man who is willing to get down under God and acknowledge that he is sovereign and put his trust in him and accept the circumstances of life as his, and that is what Lazarus did. The rich man on the contrary a good Jew was responsible to love his neighbor as himself. That was the evidence that he believed the law of God. But that man by his actions toward Lazarus whom he knew and whom he saw day after day at his gate, evidence the fact that he had not really put his trust in the God of Israel, but rather he was his own God. And so the distinction between the two men is not because of their station in life, it is because of their relationship to God. Lazarus was a man of piety as well as a man of poverty. And so in the life to come, he is in Abraham's bosom in paradise in bliss.

Well now the rich man says, secondly, Oh but then send someone to my Father's house that he may testify to my five brethren lest they also come to this place of torment. Abraham says, they have the word, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” The Scriptures are there. The thing that Lazarus believed and upon which he has been ushered into this eternal bliss is theirs. They can have it, and then the rich man made an amazing statement, and I think you know it's the kind of statement we have sympathy with first of all as we look at it. He said Oh but Father Abraham if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. He knew exactly why he was in Hades, and he recognized that it was just too. And I think everybody in Hades recognizes not only why they're there but that it is just. And he said Oh but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent. And the answer comes, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

I could hold up my Bible at this point and I would except that I've got some notes and they would fall all over the floor if I did it. But I would hold up my Bible at this point and say to you that this Bible, the word of God, is the foundation upon which we go into an eternity of bliss with our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are not willing to believe the word of God we will not believe though any kind of miracle happened before our eyes.

This testimony of the word of God is the testimony of the word of the living God who by the Holy Spirit makes that real in our hearts. If we will not accept the testimony of the word of God we will not accept the testimony of a miracle. It is obvious why this is so. A miracle can be explained away. The word of God is the word of God however. If we do not accept this, we will not accept anything else. And so the rich man when he said Oh Father Abraham no, no, but if one went to them from the dead they will repent. He even in Hell was writing a word of cancellation across the whole of the Old Testament and saying he was saying just this, “The Scriptures cannot save a man.” And so even in Hades his character is fixed as a rejecter of the truth of the word of God.

I must stop. We see the wicked are immediately punished at death, not finally. That final judgment is to come. But they are immediately punished and are under punishment awaiting the final judgment. They recognize it to be just. Their rejection is due to lack of repentance, not riches, lack of repentance. The word is the only means of salvation. If we will not hear this, we will not hear anything. As a matter of fact the Bible records that there was a man by the name of Lazarus who came from the dead in John chapter 11. There is no connection between the men so far as we can tell, but it is striking isn't it? A man named Lazarus came from the dead at Jesus' call. What happened? Some believed. The others said we will put this man to death who brought him from the grave. They did not believe. Lazarus came from the dead and faith was not induced. The man who has really come from the dead is our Lord Jesus Christ. In Acts chapter 17, at the conclusion of that chapter we read in verse 30,

“And the times of this ignorance God overlooked; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; concerning which he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

The Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead according to the Scriptures. If we believe not the one whom God has raised from the dead as he has set forth in the Scriptures, there is no hope for us. When we die we pass into Hades which is the realm of the unrighteous, under judgment, awaiting the judgment of the great day. May God speak to the hearts of all who are here, young and old. May you not pass out of this room without Jesus Christ. To do so might be to die. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these great truths which have come from Thy word. We know, Lord, that the life beyond the grave is extremely important for us. We thank Thee for the Lord Jesus who meets us at death and in whose company we shall exist forever, but Oh Father if there are some here who have not believed in him, who are in this life not sure of that life, Oh give them no rest nor peace until they rest in him...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]