

THE BRIDGELESS GULF (Lk. 16:26)

Lk. 16:26 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.

Preamble ... The subject of Heaven is surely one of our favourites, in contrast to the subject of Hell. Both places are inextricably linked though, for both are defined by God's presence or His absence, by His grace or His wrath.

C.S. Lewis said of Hell, "There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of our Lord's own words" (*The Problem of Pain*). ... It is also the doctrine R.C. Sproul said he struggled with the most.

The doctrine of Hell is uncomfortable, even for Christians. However, our understanding of Hell shapes our view of the Gospel for it requires a proper Biblical examination of, – on the one hand, - God's holiness, and, – on the other hand, - our sinfulness. If we do not accept the reality of Hell, we will not rightly grasp the glory of the Gospel. Jesus spent time describing Hell in detail, and He repeatedly warned of its consequences, **Lk. 12:4** And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. **5** But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. ... He spoke of Hell being a place of eternal torment (Lk. 16:23), of unquenchable fire (Mk. 9:43), where the worm does not die (Mk. 9:48), where people will gnash their teeth in anguish and agony (Mt. 13:42), and from which there is no return, even to warn loved ones (Lk. 16:19-31). He calls Hell a place of "outer darkness" (Mt. 25:30), comparing it to the Old Testament "Gehenna" (Mt. 10:28). He talked about Hell more than He talked about Heaven, describing it more vividly. Undeniably, Jesus knew, believed, and warned about the reality of Hell.

However, its existence is widely 'underplayed' and in many places ignored, even within evangelical circles. Also, regretfully prevalent is a view known as 'conditional immortality' or 'annihilationism'. This view claims the

unsaved will remain in the state of death and will not be resurrected to face physical judgment. Instead, their eternal ‘punishment’ will be their continued state of death, absent of any feeling of affliction, and being ‘*unresurrected*’, rather than being resurrected to suffer eternal torment. This view is inconsistent with the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

“The Bridgeless Gulf” is the title of a sermon Spurgeon preached in which he said in his introduction, “I feel that I must now blow a blast ... for sometimes our congregations need to be reminded of the Law and terrors of God, and of the judgment to come” ... He was preaching about Hell, not only to the unsaved, *but also to the saved* for the saved need to be reminded of its reality.

We are just a few miles from one of the most famous bridges in the world. The Forth Rail Bridge was completed in 1890 and was a testimony to human ingenuity. It along with many other similar grand constructions have bridged great gulfs.

There is, though, one gulf no human skill or genius can span ... it is the eternal chasm separating Heaven from Hell. Spurgeon again said, “We find our blessed Lord and Master, whose heart was overflowing with compassion, and whose very Nature was love, often dwelling upon the wrath to come”. Jesus warned His listeners about Hell, and in this passage before us we find Him relating the words of Abraham to a man being tormented in Hell, [Lk. 16:26](#) 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. Jesus was making it clear to His audience there is **NO WAY THROUGH** from one to the other, - not now, not ever.

In 1901, William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, wrote an article in *The War Cry* entitled “A Vision of the Lost”. In it he wrote, “The chief

dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and Heaven without Hell". Sadly, his foresight proved correct. Around the same time, he made another famous statement, "Most Christians would like to send their recruits to Bible College for five years. I would like to send them to Hell for five minutes."

However, it is impossible for the saved to enter such a place. And it is impossible for a born-again Christian to bring relief to those who have rejected Christ, to dip the tip of their finger in a cup of water and cool the tongues of those who are being tormented. ... Outside all the opportunities given in this world to be saved, there is no opportunity given anywhere or at any time in Hell!

This is a terrible subject, but Christ would have been wrong if He had not warned concerning it! ... And how wrong I would be if I did not follow His example. It's a real place, of real danger, and it is the eternity of those who will not believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Jesus instructed His disciples, **Mk. 16:15** Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel. He established the preaching of the Gospel as the means whereby men and women can believe in Christ to be saved. The Gospel is the truth that **Rom. 5:6** when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ... When we could not reach up to Him, He reached down to us, and the message for a lost world is that Jesus saves! ... Paul wrote, **Rom. 15:20** I [have] strived to preach the gospel ... **I Cor. 9:16** woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! ... **I Cor. 1:17** Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. ... And the Gospel will be preached on this earth until the Lord Jesus returns.

But there is no preaching of the Gospel in Hell and there is no opportunity to be saved out of Hell because, - as Abraham explained to the rich man a fact the rich man was already agonisingly aware of, - 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 (Lk. 16:26).

The rich man realised it was too late for him and that was why he *begged* Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his family (v.27-29). He did not want them to end up where he was! When the rich man **19** was clothed in purple and fine linen, and *[faring]* sumptuously every day, Lazarus was a starving vagabond ... the most the rich man would have given him was if a few crumbs happened to fall from his table ... in just the same way he would have thrown them to the birds. But in Hell the rich man was pleading to send Lazarus to warn his family ... The point he was making was there is no Gospel preaching in Hell, there is no salvation in Hell, there is no escape from Hell ... and so he wanted the Gospel to be presented to his loved ones while they were on earth that they might believe and be saved for in Hell, it would be too late.

The Gospel is only effective in this life for only in this life can a person cry out to God for salvation. Only in this life does God give the opportunity to all to repent of their sins, but once this life is over the opportunity has gone. Some people trivialise it, "Oh, I hope I've done enough that God will allow me into Heaven". ... None of us can *ever* 'do enough', and that's why Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin and we must believe in Him to be our Saviour.

We have loved ones who are not saved, ... we need to pray and put every obstacle in their way so they will stop travelling down that road to a lost eternity. We must *all* sow and share the Gospel ... and it is only the work of Christ on the cross will save them. ... As Christians we can so easily close our eyes and fool ourselves we have plenty of time to tell our loved ones ... Well, that is not true, and we often accuse the unsaved about 'procrastination' ... I fear we as God's people are sometimes guilty of procrastination for when God gives us an opportunity for the Gospel, we don't always take it. ... I include myself ... We are not as earnest as we ought to be about the lost estate of immortal souls. As General Booth said, if we could glance into Hell for

five minutes, we would pursue the salvation of our loved ones with greater urgency. ... How many we wished we had told of their need of salvation, but we didn't, and then the person to whom we were intending to speak died ... They will never get another opportunity ... And from Hell to Heaven, there is **no way through!**

There is another plain teaching of Scripture ... The Lord Jesus said there is **NO WAY OUT** for lost souls are forever *bound* in Hell. There is no reprieve, no second chances, no reincarnation, and no Purgatory to get them out. There is no absolution. There is no prospect of acquittal. There is no clemency. There is no deferment. There is no amnesty ... There is nothing to give hope for there is **no way out**. The gate is locked firmly shut for eternity! ... I'm grateful to God I have never been in a prison cell to hear the door being closed behind me and the key turning, and I've lost my freedom. But not only is the gate shut in Hell, when the gate is closed, the captives are fast bound in fetters which will *never* break, in chains which will *never* rust, in a darkness we can never comprehend.

There are no exits out of Hell after a hundred years, a thousand years, or a million years! ... And if you read carefully, you will see the rich man did not even ask to be released from Hell for he knew in reality it could never happen ... and you will notice too there is nothing in his words or demeanour which indicates he had any desire for Heaven, - he knew all his hope was gone. ... Besides, there is no evidence this man had any intention of repenting of his sins, and that is because Hell hardens the soul even to the most debase extent. ... That's why the rich man was not crying out for Abraham to release him. The inhabitants of Hell have no desire to be in Heaven for sin has so corrupted them. ... The man didn't even ask for a cup of cold fresh water but instead, he only asked for a 'finger-tip's' drop of water. ... This man lived without God, died without God, and in Hell expected to receive no mercy from God!

During his life on earth he enjoyed good times, - there is nothing inherently wrong with that. However, the life he lived had only a limited space for God, if any at all, ... and this is evidenced in the fact this parable was for the scribes and Pharisees (Lk. 16:14). ... Hell does not change a person's character for good, but it hardens them to become the most stubborn and the most rebellious against God. It doesn't make them realise their sin or give them the slightest desire for remorse. In fact, there is nobody in Hell who moves one step closer to God ... such is Hell's corruption and depravity!

Besides, how could you have someone in Heaven who gave no thought to God in this life? If you were to allow open access to Heaven ... you would have the drunkards stumbling along the street of Glory! You would have unrepentant prostitutes standing at the corners in Heaven! ... The impenitent murderers would be there. ... And, how could you have someone whose every other word was an expletive carrying on a conversation with the Redeemed in Glory?! How could you have someone steeped in their religion, convinced they were there because they had managed to be good enough to gain entrance ... that they achieved their own salvation, apart from believing in Jesus Christ for salvation, and His work on the cross? ... In Heaven unredeemed souls have no place for they would have nothing to praise God for!

Jesus told the religious Nicodemus, **Jn. 3:3** Except a man be born again, he cannot *... He will not ...* see the kingdom of God. The Saviour is not willing for anyone to perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9), however, His Father's honour and glory and holiness are at stake and that is why Jesus did not include any 'if's' or 'but's' or 'maybe's' ... He made a plain statement it is impossible to make say anything else! He spoke about Hell as being the place of 'everlasting punishment' (Mt. 25:46) ... and everlasting means everlasting, and therefore, how can they *ever* enter Heaven?! Jesus confirmed it will never happen, **Jn. 3:36** He that believeth ... not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth [*remains, continues*] on him.

There will be none who will be able to accuse Jesus of not being clear for the Gospel is all about how He died to *save* the sinner. ... God's Word says there is none without excuse (Rom. 1:20) for even through the glory of God's creation, He has revealed Himself. Sadly, in the obstinacy of their sin, they became 'vain in their imaginations' resulting in 'their foolish heart [*being*] darkened' (Rom. 1:21), and they will 'shut out' and close off' the Gospel of saving grace ... and then God gives them over to what they want, - they want nothing of Him in this world, and they will have nothing of Him, - His grace, love, peace, mercy, - when they leave it!

It is a hard message, - you might be thinking it is hard to listen to ... I can assure you it is hard to preach, but preach it I must! ... At the end of the day, it is about eternal life and eternal death, - eternity with God in Heaven, or eternity under His judgment in Hell. It is what the Lord Jesus preached, the apostles, Paul, and the Church down through the centuries have preached. Paul wrote, **Rom. 3:10** There is none righteous, no, not one: **11** There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ... **16** Destruction and misery are in their ways: ... **18** There is no fear of God before their eyes. ... And John wrote too, **Rev. 21:27** there shall in no wise enter into [*Heaven*] any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

There is only one bridge which spans the abyss, and it needs to be crossed 'under the light of the Gospel'. Because of God's wonderful grace, at present the bridge is open because **I Tim. 2:5** there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, but there is coming a day when 'the bridge' between Heaven and earth, - the Gospel, - will be gone for it will have been removed. When the final storm comes, and when the pitch-black darkness descends for the last time, there will be **no way through** from Heaven to Hell, and there is **no way out** from Hell to Heaven. ... And Peter cautions all of us, **II Peter 1:10** give diligence to make your calling and election sure, - for there is **ONLY ONE WAY**.

The parable of ‘the rich man and Lazarus’ was for the scribes and the religious Pharisees ... and the disciples were also listening (Lk. 16:1) for the saved need to be reminded about this place too. It is because of God’s saving grace alone we are heading to our home in Heaven, for it is because of His grace we have peace with God through our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ Who died for us on the cross of Calvary. Therefore, Hell is a place we shall never be in for He has saved us from it. ... However, Hell remains a fearful place, and we must earnestly pray for the salvation of our loved ones. ... Salvation in Christ is the only means of escaping it because He paid the penalty of God’s judgment at Calvary for all the Redeemed to become enrolled citizens of Heaven. I’ll finish by quoting another old hymn,

Was it for me, the nails, the spear,
 The cruel thorns, the mocking jeer,
 That rugged cross, ’twixt earth and sky –
 Was it for me He came to die?

*He loved me so! He loved me so!
 Dark Calvary He chose to know,
 To vanquish sin and death and woe;
 ’Twas all because He loved me so.*