

A Prayer Meeting In Hell

A Sermon delivered by

Rev. Reginald Cranston

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at

**Port Hope Free Presbyterian Church
184 Toronto Road
Port Hope, Ontario CANADA L1A 3V5
(905) 885-2900**

**www.freepres.org/church.asp?porthope
ricranston@sympatico.ca**

Dear Lord and heavenly Father, we bless thee indeed for the Word of God. We thank thee, our Father, for thine own infallible truth – this God-breathed Word. And, oh Lord, it's a living Word. We thank thee for the Word that became flesh – our blessed, blessed Saviour the Lord Jesus. And, dear Lord, we pray that this morning Jesus Christ will be seen. We pray, Lord, that our own hearts will be touched and challenged. We pray also that any gathered here today who know not the Lord will indeed immediately fall in love with him; whom to know is life eternal. Come, Lord, and give us the power that the Holy Spirit is able to give. Help us, Lord, to preach Christ and to make much of his precious blood. In the Saviour's name we pray. Amen.

A few months ago the head of the Roman Catholic Church – Pope John Paul II – made some declarations upon the subject of Hell. He stated that Hell was not a physical place. He further stated that, "Hell is not a punishment imposed eternally by God, but the condition resulting from attitudes and actions which people adopt in life." The Pope described Hell as the pain, frustration and emptiness of life without God. Millions today live their life without God.

The words of Pope John Paul conflict with the teaching of Scripture on the subject. He said that, "Hell is not a punishment imposed externally by God." Well, Pope John Paul would have a hard time convincing souls of that who will on the Judgment Day hear the words of Jesus Christ when he shall say:

Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:^a

Matthew twenty-five, verse forty-one.

^a Matthew 25:41

We often say that Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. We might add that Hell is a prepared place for an unprepared people. To say that Hell is only, “A condition resulting from attitudes and actions which people adopt in life,” is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

Luke chapter eight and verse thirty-three: The Lord Jesus is in the land of Gadara. He has cast out the demons from Legion and he has cast those demons into the swine that were grazing on the hillside. And we’re told there in Luke 8:33 that:

The swine...ran violently down a steep place into the lake^b

And so they ran down a steep place into the lake – a literal lake filled with water. Now, we’re not surely going to say that these swine did not really go into a lake filled with water. We’re not surely going to say, “Oh, it’s only a condition of the mind. It wasn’t really a lake. It wasn’t really a literal lake. They didn’t really drown in the lake.” Because the word that is used for “lake” in Luke eight verse thirty-three is exactly the same word that is used by the Holy Spirit inspiring John to write the book of the Revelation. Revelation nineteen and verse twenty; and what do we read there?

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles^c

There’s an interesting statement. False prophets do work miracles; quite a few false prophets up and down the length and breadth of this land – indeed throughout North America – and they’re claiming to have the power to work miracles. And we know from their message; they’re false prophets. Yet many people are fooled and taken in by these false prophets; believing they’re sent from God.

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake.^d

The same word that described the lake into which the swine had run and were drowned – the same word. Now if it was a real lake in Luke 8:33 it must be a real lake in Revelation 19:20. It must be. What is this lake filled with? Most certainly it is not filled with water.

[They] both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.^e

A lake of fire burning with brimstone; it’s a real lake; real fire; real brimstone. It’s not a condition of the mind. Hell is not a condition. Hell is a place; a real place; real fire; real brimstone. If the Lake of Gadara – in all probability the Lake of Gennesaret or the Lake of Tiberius – and there the swine ran into that lake and were drowned. It was a real lake. Now this must be a real lake; a lake of fire and brimstone.

Look at verse ten of chapter twenty of Revelation. Verse ten:

^b Luke 8:33

^c Revelation 19:20

^d Ibid.

^e Ibid.

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone [same word] where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.^f

It's strange how some people get a hold of the Scriptures and they look at simple words like "tormented" and they say, "Oh, well it doesn't mean that." I've heard people – I had a man told me once that he didn't believe in eternal security and I told him that:

God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.^g

He had the audacity to say that it didn't mean "everlasting life." But if you adopt that attitude well then the Bible just doesn't mean anything at all. You can make it mean anything. But if the Bible says that the devil and the beast and the false prophet would be tormented, tormented day and night forever and ever I believe that.

Look on down the chapter – verse fourteen: We have the beast and the false prophet in the Lake of Fire; we have the devil in the Lake of Fire; now verse fourteen:

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.^h

Is your name written in the Book of Life? If not you'll be cast into the Lake of Fire. Remember, it's a real place – a real lake with real fire and brimstone.

A few weeks ago – for a number of weeks in our prayer meeting we were looking at unusual prayer meetings. And we considered I believe in our morning worship the prayer of Solomon. He prayed in his sleep. We considered the prayer of Samson who died praying. There was also the prayer of Jonah. That was an unusual prayer meeting in the fish's belly.

Here's another prayer meeting; an unusual prayer meeting. Here's a prayer meeting that was held in Hell. Here's a prayer meeting; here is a man who prayed out of the bowels of Hell. I want to consider this matter this morning; this prayer meeting. I want to consider this place where this rich man was praying. And don't let the devil tell you this is only a parable because the Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you that. This is not a parable because when the Lord Jesus told parables in telling the parables he never mentioned anybody's name. But in this story the Lord Jesus mentions three names: Abraham, Lazarus and Moses. So the Lord is speaking about real people. And he's talking about a real place. And when he's talking about Lazarus he's talking about a real person. And when he spoke about the rich man he's talking about a real person.

I don't usually indicate the number of points I have in my sermon but it's unavoidable this morning. Because when you get to the second one people say, "Oh, dear, he's another one to go." Well, here there are three points in this message because I want to consider the three prayers of the rich man in Hell.

^f Revelation 20:10

^g John 3:16

^h Revelation 20:14,15

First of all, his first prayer: Verse twenty-four, we'll read verse twenty-three:

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

You'll notice the rich man had all his senses. He could see. He could feel. He could remember. No doubt he could smell, too – the sulfur rising from the brimstone. And in Hell he lifted up his eyes – he could see; being in torment – he could feel; and seeth Abraham afar off. You know those words struck me – afar off. This soul in Hell and he's afar off; far off from Lazarus; far off from Abraham; far off from Heaven.

And seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.^j

Here's his first prayer.

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.^k

There's his first prayer. And it is a prayer for relief. Notice that. His first prayer is a prayer for relief. Notice how he prayed: he cried. You know when I thought of this man crying and I thought to myself, "What crying must go on in Hell." Every soul that leaves time and passes into eternity they're crying today. You can't hear them but if you die as you are you will hear them. And you will cry also as you have never cried during the days of your life on earth. Because when you cry in Hell there's nobody to wipe away your tears.

Here we have his terrible lament. Here is the rich man's first prayer and it is a cry for relief. He begins by crying for mercy. The fact that the rich man cried for mercy indicates to me that this rich man realized that there was no escape from the burning Hell. You notice that. He prayed three times. Not once did he pray for a way of escape. Not once did he ask to be released from his prison or torments. The rich man obviously realized there was no escape. Were to God that men and women and young people today would realize the same truth.

It was Nicholson who said, "If a soul spent a thousand years in Hell and then was released," he says, "I could preach that there is hope in Hell." But he says that there is no hope.

What did we read in Revelation nineteen and Revelation twenty?

[They] shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever^l

And the rich man cries for mercy. He wanted a drop of water to relieve his thirst. And he asked for mercy. The one thing he should have asked for before he died and went to Hell was mercy. The one thing he could have received was mercy. All he had to do was come to Christ and say:

ⁱ Luke 16:23

^j Ibid.

^k Luke 16:24

^l Revelation 20:10

[Lord] be merciful to me a sinner^m

And he would have obtained mercy in an instant. He would have received mercy in an instant.

My unconverted friend, today are you going to seek mercy when it is too late, or are you going to seek mercy today?

And then he cries not only for mercy, but for ministry. Isn't it interesting, the man that he had no time for when he lived in that house and fared sumptuously every day:

[dressed] purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:ⁿ

And it said in verse twenty-one that Lazarus the beggar lay at his gate:

Desiring to be fed with the crumbs^o

The poor beggar man desired; asked the rich man to give him the crumbs that fell from his table. The rich man had no time for Lazarus. And you will see in a moment or so when we look at the three prayers of the rich man; in each of the three prayers he mentions Lazarus. He now wants the man that he had no time for before. And he pleaded for mercy and he pleaded for a ministry. He wanted Lazarus to come and minister to him.

Isn't that strange? He didn't want Lazarus to come and minister to him before. He wanted Lazarus to come and minister to him by giving him a drop of cold water. The one man whom he ignored when he lived among his riches was Lazarus. Now he wants Lazarus to minister to him. And now he counts a drop of water as being the most precious thing of all - strange how things change in this sense in eternity.

Souls today put no value on the Gospel of Christ. Souls today – thousands of souls today – ignore the preaching of the Gospel. And they ignore the Christian who distributes a Gospel tract; or they trample on their feet the prayers of those who are interceding for them at the Throne of Grace; and they count all these things as nothing – they ignore them. But whenever they die and pass into God's eternity suddenly that Gospel tract: "Oh, that Gospel tract. If only I was given it again. Oh, that sermon that I turned a deaf ear to. That sermon; how I wish I could hear it again. That Christian that invited me to Church and asked me to come and hear the Gospel and I refused; oh if only I had that invitation again."

Suddenly things become very valuable that sinners count for naught today. My friend, what you're hearing today is perhaps the most valuable thing you will ever here. And that is the Gospel that is able to save you from joining the rich man in a Christ-less sinner's Hell.

^m Luke 18:13

ⁿ Luke 16:19

^o Luke 16:21

You will notice also not only his terrible lament, but also his terrible loneliness. Now, the Lord here is telling the story about that place called Hell and the rich man dying and going to Hell. He died. He didn't just finish everything in the grave.

After this the judgment:^p

After this – there's always an "after." The rich man died and in Hell he lifted up his eyes. Now, there would be many, many, many souls – I shudder to think how many. But there are many souls in Hell today. There would have been many souls in Hell at the time the Lord Jesus told this story. But there is only one name mentioned and that's the rich man.

Does that not draw our attention to this man's loneliness? No doubt he was in a crowd. No doubt he was in a multitude of poor lost souls. But the rich man must have felt the loneliest man in eternity. He was the only man that was mentioned. Something else struck me as I read this familiar passage of Scripture. When we come here to pray we often quote the words of our Saviour.

For [the Lord said] where two or three are [met] together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.^q

And when we've only a handful of people we know for sure the Lord is in our midst. "Where two or three are," the Lord said, "There I am in the midst."

There's no two or three mentioned here. The rich man is praying alone. And he's not met there in the Lord's name. He's praying alone and the Lord is not there.

My friend, if you die without Christ you're going to a place where there is no God; where there is no Christ; where there is no Lord; where there is no Saviour. And none of us – I'm sure – can comprehend or describe the loneliness of the lost soul in Hell.

We often say you go to a strange city and there are millions walking the streets of that city and you're a stranger there. And you can feel the loneliest man in the face of the earth.

There may be – and probably are – millions in Hell today but every individual feels the loneliness of a lost eternity. My unsaved friend, Christ is here today. He's not with the rich man in Hell but he's here today in this meeting. And here's the opportunity you have of receiving him and receiving his mercy.

His terrible loneliness and his terrible loss.

Abraham informed this tormented soul that there was no relief from his suffering because – verse twenty-six:

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.^r

^p Hebrews 9:27

^q Matthew 18:20

^r Luke 16:26

There was no hope of relieving his suffering or retrieving his soul. You notice that.

There is a great gulf fixed^s

Abraham said, “We cannot go to you; neither can you come to us.” Abraham answered the rich man’s prayer. And Abraham in as many words said, “Rich man, you’re lost!”

Now it’s brought home to him. He’s lost. What a catastrophe. But, friend, if you hear the Gospel today and you’re given an opportunity of getting saved today – what a catastrophe if your soul was also lost. It need not be because the Lord Jesus came:

To seek and to save that which was lost.^t

You’re lost now.

Sometimes whenever you’re invited to preach in our churches and take services the brethren will say, “You can be sure there’ll be some lost souls in the meeting.” That really brings this home to me. What they’re saying is, “You can be sure there are unsaved in the meeting. There will be unsaved in the meeting. Pray that God will save them through your preaching.” But they say, “there are lost souls in the meeting.”

You see, my friend, you are already lost. You are already lost if you know not Christ. And I would say that:

Now is the accepted time;...now is the day of salvation.^u

Don’t start praying when it’s too late as the rich man did. Start praying now.

He prayed for relief.

His second prayer: He prayed for his relatives. We come down to verse twenty-seven. Abraham has given the rich man his answer telling him:

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.^v

Verse twenty-seven:

Then he said,^w

His first prayer concerned himself. He wanted some relief for himself. Then he said:

^s Ibid.

^t Luke 19:10

^u 2 Corinthians 6:2

^v Luke 16:26

^w Luke 16:27

I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:^x

Here's his second prayer. First of all he prayed for relief; now he prays for his relatives.

When he learned that there was going to be no relief for him from his misery he prayed that somehow someone would go and speak to his relatives and keep them from every coming into this same place of misery and torment. And so he says:

For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.^y

He wanted Lazarus to go and sound a warning. He wanted his relatives to be warned. The rich man requested that Lazarus would be sent and speak to the five brethren still living in his father's house and warn them; warn them about the way ahead; warn them about the road they were traveling; warn them about the Hell they were facing. My friend, isn't that what we're doing today? I believe that if this rich man could communicate with us this morning he would say, "Preacher, warn your people! Warn them. They that know not the Savior – warn them about this awful place of torment. Warn them."

My friend, that's what we're doing today. We're simply warning you.

*Sinner, heed the warning voice.
Make the Lord your final choice,
Then all Heaven will rejoice,
Be in time.
Come from darkness into light,
Come, let Jesus make you right.
Come, and start for Heaven tonight.*

*Be in time! Be in time!
While the voice of Jesus calls you, be in time!
For if in sin you longer wait,
Then you will find no open gate,
And your cry be just too late: be in time!^f*

And so he wanted Lazarus to warn them.

Next we have not only the warning, but the witness. The rich man had no time for the beggar who had for so long lain at the rich man's gate. Now his prayer is: Send Lazarus to my father's house for I have five brethren – listen to this:

Send [Lazarus] to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify^{aa}

^x Ibid.

^y Luke 16:28

^z "Life at Best Is Very Brief" – author unknown

^{aa} Luke 16:27,28

That he may testify. He wanted Lazarus to give his testimony. Because remember Lazarus wasn't in Hell. It wasn't as if Lazarus was in Hell and he would get out of Hell and tell the rich man's five brethren all about Hell. No! He wanted Lazarus to go and give his testimony.

[Let him] testify unto them lest they also come into this place of torment.^{bb}

He didn't want his five brethren to join him there. That would have been two Hells for the rich man. And maybe it was. Maybe his five brethren did join him there.

Now he wants his brethren to hear the testimony of Lazarus. How often have you heard a testimony of saving grace and you've said in your heart, "That's all right for him. That's not for me. I've got my whole life ahead and I want to see what this world is all about."

Well, that rich man wished – he prayed – he prayed that Lazarus could go and testify to his brethren.

Suddenly he placed a great value in Lazarus' testimony. My friend, what value do you place in this Gospel message today on this testimony? Do you count it is naught? As something that is not even worthy of your attention? Or will you say to me today, "Preacher, I'd like to speak with you. I need to get saved. I need to get saved – and get saved today. Lead me to Christ."

And then you have the word. In his reply Abraham said:

They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.^{cc}

Abraham said, "Your five brethren – they have Moses and the prophets."

Isn't that interesting? When the Lord Jesus met with the two travelers on the road to Emmaus he opened to them the Scriptures:

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them...the things concerning himself.^{dd}

What was Abraham saying here? He was saying, "Your five brethren have Moses and the prophets. It's not Lazarus they need. It's Christ they need. If they were to read Moses and the prophets they would find Christ. It would save them from coming into this place of torment. It's Christ they need."

My unsaved friend, today it's Jesus Christ you need. It's not Lazarus you need. It's not the preacher you need. It's Christ you need. It's the Word you need and you're receiving the Word today. And through the Word you're learning about Christ.

Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.^{ee}

^{bb} Luke 16:28

^{cc} Luke 16:29

^{dd} Luke 24:27

^{ee} Romans 10:17

You're hearing now about Jesus Christ. He's the one that can save you. He's the one that will save you today and save you now. Why not come and settle with God? You've been troubled before. Maybe you're troubled right now. Well, then why not get it settled right now. Better to be troubled about your sin now than to be tormented because of your sin for all eternity. Better to come now.

And you have the worry. This man worried in Hell. He worried about his five brethren. Would that unsaved parents would get right with God and worry about their children's spiritual welfare. We worry over their children concerning many things. Would that parents would worry about their children regarding eternity because if they perish without God they will be worrying forever.

"Why didn't I tell them? Why didn't I set them an example? Why didn't I exhort them to come to Christ?" That would add to this rich man's torments.

And finally, his last prayer, his last prayer: He prayed for relief; he prayed for his relatives; now he prays about repentance. Verse twenty-nine:

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, [Here's his third prayer: He said] Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.^{ff}

Oh, the rich man went down into Hell knowing that sinners need to repent. He mentions this word there in the depths of Hell. Here he talks about his brethren repenting. He knew all about repentance. Here is his acknowledgement. He acknowledged the need of repentance. If the five brethren of the rich man were to escape the torments of Hell they had to repent. That's what he's saying. They need to repent.

Friend, if you are to escape the torments of the rich man's Hell you must repent. You must have done with your sin. This was the first message Jesus Christ preached in his ministry:

Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.^{gg}

It's the first message John the Baptist preached:

Repent...for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.^{hh}

It's the message Peter preached:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,ⁱⁱ

You need to repent, repent, repent. You need to turn from your sin. The Puritans summed it up in a very poignant phrase: "Turn or burn." Repent. Turn from your sin or join the rich man.

^{ff} Luke 16:29,30

^{gg} Matthew 4:17

^{hh} Matthew 3:2

ⁱⁱ Acts 3:19