

Sunday, May 15th sermon: "Blessed Teachings Against Purgatory -- False Roman Catholic Teachings (Pt 2)"

A sermon delivered at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church, Greenwood, MS by John Pittman Hey

Luke 23:39-43; Philippians 1:21-26

Not only is there no scripture to support the false Roman Catholic teaching of Purgatory, but their own teachings regarding Indulgences overthrow the necessity for the torment of flames to purify the souls of sinful believers.

But this false teaching has the effect of sucking out all the goodness and precious comforts of true Bible doctrine, spiriting away the believers' hope in Christ's saving work for us.

Consider Christ's teaching regarding the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a poor, terribly sick beggar who lived on the street before the rich man's house. When Lazarus died, Jesus assures us that the angels took Lazarus to paradise, to rest with Abraham and all the other saints of olden times. There, Jewish teachings held, the Lord's people would remain in comfort until the resurrection at the end of the ages.

But the rich man died and opened his eyes in hell, a place of fiery torment. He begged for mercy, but was informed by Abraham that was impossible.

It turns out that the rich man had not had mercy on Lazarus. Good deeds can never make a man righteous, but failing to help a helpless neighbor out of one's blessings from God, proves the wickedness and unrighteousness of the rich man.

He tacitly acknowledged that he had never repented from defying God's commandments, but hoped that Lazarus could return to his brethren, so they might repent and avoid the torments of Hell.

But Christ made it clear: if men will not listen to and obey Moses and the prophets, they won't do so even if someone comes back from the grave to warn them of impending wrath from God.

Bitterly ironic, another man named Lazarus did return from the dead. The Lord Jesus raised him up after four days in the grave!

And the wicked not only didn't repent and believe, but they actually tried to kill Lazarus, because too many of the common people were believing on Jesus because of the miracle.

Notice that there is no room to shoe horn Purgatory into Christ's timeline here. Lazarus is taken immediately by the angels to paradise!

The teaching is clear: there is eternal torment in the fire for the wicked, and there is immediate comfort and blessing for the Lord's people the moment they die.

Sadly, the Roman Catholic apologists try to twist this teaching of Jesus into some support for the false idea of Purgatory. They claim that the rich man was really only in Purgatory, when it is clear that he never repented and that there was no hope for him. Father Abraham provided the rich man with no prospect of relief at all.

Furthermore, they claim that Lazarus had no need for Purgatory, since he had suffered so much in this life. This repeats the false, medieval and pagan notion that suffering is somehow salvific.

The false teaching of Purgatory manages to suck out all of the goodness and hope that Jesus teaches, and impose upon poor believers an endless cycle of ritual and "good works" because, in the end, it's left up to us to save ourselves from the torment of the flames when we die.

Another example: the penitent thief on the cross next to the dying Lord Jesus. God worked a miraculous faith in this wicked, dying man, for how can anybody place their trust in a dying Savior? Yet this criminal trusted that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and no matter what wicked men were doing to Him then, that Christ would triumph and rule over His kingdom one day.

This thief knew he had no chance of ever going to paradise, with all his crimes, so he asked Jesus to remember him when the kingdom was established.

But Jesus gave this man an astounding promise: today you will be with Me in paradise!

The thief thought he was bound for torment and flames, but Jesus assured him of comfort and rest, today!

What this requires, is that Jesus forgave this man of his great sins. Perhaps the man didn't understand it yet, but Jesus was satisfying divine justice in the place of the thief, as well as all the Lord's people who trust in Him! Christ suffered on the cross so that even criminals who trust in Him might be rescued from the wrath to come.

The thief had done everything he could to deserve eternal torment, but no matter, the Lord Jesus undertook the responsibility for all of that, and promised to take this thief to paradise.

This incident is a great comfort to all the Lord's people, that we will be with Christ immediately when we die. It is also a comfort to lost sinners who believe they are too evil for Jesus to save. Finally, it is a great comfort to know that Christ can save sinners at the last moments of their lives, because God can change their hearts and implant faith and repentance, no matter how disobedient and rebellious they had been all their lives before!

And note well, that there is no room to insert a stint in Purgatory for the poor thief! TODAY you will be with me in paradise!

But as usual, false Roman Catholic teaching tries to strip away the comfort and assurance that this incident gives to the Lord's people.

They will claim that they "never said" how long Purgatory will last, so there was time to shoe horn in a spell of torment for this poor man.

They will say that Jesus granted this man an Indulgence when others must still suffer the torments.

They will say that Jesus only told the poor man today, that one day he would be in paradise.

Finally, they will argue that this thief had no sins left to suffer for, because he suffered on the cross, and he defended Jesus from the scoffers.

Purgatory teaching takes away the glory and the good promises that Jesus gave to us, and subjects us to fear of torments after we've trusted in Jesus.

Paul the Apostle also taught the instant transport of believers into the presence and glory of Christ when we die. In Philippians 1, he expresses his great desire to die and be with Christ now, and yet he understands that it would be better for the churches if he stayed alive and ministered God's Word to them.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul again declares this truth: "we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

There is no room in Paul's teachings for the interposition of Purgatory or torments for believers after their death.

We do not come to the Lord's Table to seek the forgiveness of our sin, for Jesus has already paid all the price for that! We come to celebrate the sacrifice He made at Calvary that took away our sin, and our punishment also.

We must not allow false teachings to rob us of the blessed promises that the Lord Jesus made to us.

That is why we sing,

"Done is the work that saves!
Once and for ever done.
Finished the righteousness
That clothes th'unrighteous one.
The love that blesses us below
Is flowing freely to us now.

"The sacrifice is o'er,
The veil is rent in twain,
The mercy-seat is red
With blood of victim slain;
Why stand we then without, in fear?

The blood divine invites us near.

"The gate is open wide,
The new and living way
Is clear and free and bright,
With love and peace and day;
Into the holiest now we come,
Our present and our endless home.

"Upon the mercy-seat
The High Priest sits within;
The blood is in His hand
Which makes and keeps us clean.
With boldness let us now draw near,
That blood has banished every fear.

"Then to the Lamb once slain
Be glory, praise, and power,
Who died and lives again,
Who liveth evermore;
Who loved and washed us in His blood.
Who made us kings and priests to God."