

The Rich Man and Lazarus, Part 2

Luke 16:22-31

June 12, 2022

I want to ask you to turn in your Bibles to Luke 16, and today we will finish the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which has to be one of the most sobering portrayals in all of Scripture of divine judgment. The parable, as we've seen, provides a warning. It's a warning about future judgment, the certainty of future judgment.

And the occasion for the parable, as we've been seeing, is the response of the Pharisees to Jesus when he taught about money. According to Luke 16:14, says the Pharisees loved money, so it reveals their hidden motivation right on the pages of Scripture. And because they loved money, they committed a host of other sins as well, which are outlined there in verses 15 to 18.

Since they coveted the opinions of men, they justified themselves before men. They exalted what men approved of, things like wealth and power and success and fame and fortune and ease and comfort and all the rest. And so with such a high view of man, and with such a low view of God, these Pharisees had devalued God's Word. They devalued obedience to God's Word. That meant they cared very little about their own commitments. They saw, really, no need to keep the covenants that they had made. As verse 18 shows, they even disregarded the covenant of marriage.

So having no fear of God, having no concern about keeping his Word, being very light on their own concern, about their own obedience, nothing compelled them to keep their own word, either. Thus, easy in and easy out of marriage through divorce.

The text also shows us that the Pharisees, going back to Luke 15:1-2, the Pharisees despised sinners. Sinners, a category that they put all the lowly among men, they put them into that category. So the poor, the weak, who they accounted as losers in society, these are the kinds of people that they despised. And yet these are the very people who were drawing near to Jesus.

That's how this whole section started back in Luke 15 verse 1. The Pharisees criticized Jesus because he received to himself the tax collectors and the sinners, because he would receive them and then sit down and eat meals with these people, bringing them the Gospel, talking about things pertaining to sin and righteousness and judgment. The Pharisees only cared about appearances.

And so Jesus tells this parable to show them that they had the world flipped completely upside down. Everything in their thinking was reversed from biblical truth. Everything was inverted in their minds, and they were headed for a rude and terrifying awakening one minute after their death.

Take a look at verse 19, Luke 16. "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. Poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in

Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side."

Total reversal. Everything that the Pharisee had built his life on, every expectation he had about life and future glory, gone. In just a few short sentences, Jesus shows us that, indeed, what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. God, in these very short, few sentences, abominates everything that men highly esteem by casting it into the flames of torment.

All that appears to be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous in this world, so much of that is an illusion. It's like a, a mirage that masks a wasting desert. And God saw all of this plainly, all through the life of the rich man and Lazarus. He saw in the rich man what no one else seemed to notice and what no one else cared to confront. That is, he had a heart of unbelief. He had a heart that was in love with money. He didn't love God. He loved his stuff. He loved his reputation. He loved his prominence in a heart of unbelief.

Conversely, God saw in Lazarus what no one else could see. But there, lying at the gate of the rich man, was a heart of obedient faith. And how do we know that? Because we see the final outcome. Look at the justice. Divine justice has spoken, and it gives the imprimatur, the approval, of Lazarus by bringing him to Abraham's side.

We're going to get more insight into God's view of the rich man, though, as we go through the text today. But here, at this point in the parable, the rich man, in verse 23, he's in Hades, and he comes to realize where he is in a moment, in a harrowing, terrifying, sobering moment. He lifts up his eyes, sees Abraham there, far off. Lazarus is there at his side. That's totally unexpected. And Jesus portrays a rich man there, suffering in torment. And there he sees an opportunity to make an appeal.

Here in the text that we're going to cover today, verses 24-31, we see the rich man making two appeals to Abraham. One comes in verse 24 and another in verse 27, and then, followed that second appeal, there's a rebuttal to what Abraham says. But two appeals, one in verse 24, one in verse 27, and in those appeals this rich man, suffering in torment, with all of his

expectation ripped away, reality sets in, and he makes these appeals to Abraham, hoping to mitigate his suffering, hoping to mitigate not only his own suffering, but the potential suffering of his five brothers.

But as we see in the text, he makes these appeals to no avail. They're fruitless. They're futile. There's no way for him to avoid the just judgment of God. There's no way for him to escape this final sentence, the carrying out of this sentence for all of eternity. And with Abraham's words, as he makes appeal and Abraham shuts him down at every single point, we see that his last hope dissipates, just like a mirage in the desert. Nothing but desert is left. Nothing but isolation, nothing but the burning heat.

I'm reminded when I read of this of Romans 11:22, where Paul says, "Behold the kindness and the severity of God." Behold, in this parable, the kindness and the severity of God. To the fallen, Paul says severity. But to you believers, God's kindness "if you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off." Kindness and severity.

So what we see in this parable for Christian and non-Christian alike, what's on display here, is the kindness and severity of God. And in the rich man's first appeal to Abraham in verse 24, we see the severity of God in response. In his second appeal, we see the kindness of divine mercy in the response, and we are wise to pay attention to what we read, what we hear today.

If you're taking notes, here's point number one for your outline. Just two points today. First one is the severity of divine judgment. Number one, the severity of divine judgment. Let's go back to the middle of verse 22, where we see the rich man coming to clarity. That happens at death.

It says, "The rich man," verse 22, "also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I'm in anguish in this flame.'" "

The rich man is no longer nestled in the comfort of his palatial mansion. He's no longer experiencing non-stop pleasure. He's no longer surrounded by all of his friends. He's in Hades, and he's feeling every bit of it. He's fully aware that the torment that he suffers is coming at the hand of God.

Albert Barnes says this: "Think what is represented by torment, by burning flame, by insupportable thirst, by that state where a single drop of water would afford relief. Think about what's represented there. Remember, all of this is but a representation of the pains of the damned, and that this will have no intermission day or night, but will continue from year to year and age to age without any end. And you have a faint view of the sufferings of those who are in Hell." End quote.

The rich man, in addition to all this, he's now alone. He's very alone. He sees at Abraham's side Lazarus there, so that's the enjoyment of fellowship. But he being very, very far away, he looks across this great chasm, and he feels the isolation. He feels the loneliness. Another pain visits him as well, and that's the pain of a fully activated conscience that now torments him with accusations of his own sin, makes him aware

that what he's suffering, he's suffering justly. He experiences in this condition the internal torment of this unrelenting, inescapable truth: that he deserves to be here, and he experiences deep regret.

In this new state of being, the rich man, he realizes here that his entire world, the entire way he built his life, every pursuit, every ambition, everything he thought counted it was important, all of his worldview is completely undone in a moment. His only thought now in this condition is to mitigate his suffering just a bit, just to get a little bit of relief.

As we see in verse 25, Abraham cuts off all hope of relief. There's no relief to be found and no hope of relief is coming. Look at verse 25. Abraham said, "'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. Besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'"

Now when we read that, our first impulse might be to sympathize with the suffering man. Feeling sympathy, it's natural to us as human beings. It's normal. We are reactive creatures. We are not impassable as God is. We are passable; that is, we have passions, we react to stimuli, we react to knowledge, to information. We change. Our state of being goes from happy to sad, contented to ill-at-ease.

And we are ill-at-ease when we read about this. It's normal. For those who feel no sympathy here in seeing this horrible account, they got something wrong with them, don't they? When we read the rest of the account, we know that he doesn't get any water, here, not even a drop of water. We feel the severity of the fact that there is no mercy at all, not even a hope of mercy for those who are under divine judgment.

And that can hit our human sentiment as a bit harsh. We can think thoughts like these, we say things like this: "Well, Lazarus' suffering, it was temporary. The rich man's pain, it's eternal. Would it hurt to give him just a little bit of water? Just a tiny little bit of relief on the tongue? Would it hurt?" Maybe we look ahead at the next verse. We say a "chasm." "Yeah,

I know, a chasm may separate them at the moment, but can't the almighty God of love cross this great divide?"

If you think biblically, you know that God answers that last question, doesn't he? Speaks to the voice of conscience, informed by what we know to be true from Scripture, saying something like this: "I have already crossed the great divide, sending my own Son in the likeness of human flesh to die for sinners. I've already crossed that divide. I've already been merciful. I've already been kind."

More on that later, but for now we should stop and consider this and think carefully about our own thinking about this. Since we have sympathy for the suffering man, and since Abraham doesn't seem to have any, are we more compassionate than Abraham? Take it a step further. Jesus is the one telling this parable, isn't he? So do we presume that we are more merciful than Jesus?

Those are obviously the thoughts of sinful presumption. But it's important because these are the objections that come against this text and texts like this throughout Scripture about

the doctrine of Hell. This is what the opponents of God and those who reject the Bible say. "God is not just. If I would be merciful, how much more should God be merciful?"

We need to address some of these objections about Hell, lest we treat the doctrine, a doctrine as serious as this one, this eternal, conscious suffering of unrepentant sinners, lest we talk about such serious doctrines flippantly, lest we respond by just delivering a superficial platitude and a clichéd one-liner about "God is just."

God is just. Let's think about that. Some who ridicule the doctrine of Hell can be quite bold about it. They could even be quite blasphemous. You've probably seen some of this on the Internet, people saying things like this: "Listen, I would never torment somebody if I had the chance. I mean, not even my worst enemy. If I had my worst enemy, the one who did me the greatest harm in my life, and I had him locked up in my basement, and I could torment to my heart's desire and get my pound of flesh, would I do it?"

Maybe some who are really, really angry, some who've been really, really hurt, some who've been deeply offended, might say, "Yeah, I could do that. I could do that." How long could you do that? Who could say, "You know what? There's an end to my anger. There's an end to my wrath, there's an end to the retribution that I would deliver."

So, so goes the opponents of the Scripture. They say, "I, therefore, am more merciful and more compassionate and more loving than this God of the Bible." That's what they say. They follow up with this: "Why would I worship a God who is less merciful than I am?"

Do you see the flaw in that thinking? It's category error, isn't it? It's people who fail to admit that there is a radical distinction between the creature and his Creator. They fail to acknowledge the essential difference between God and man. And they dare to answer back to God. The folly is to compare God to man as if man is the standard, as if his sentiment and his feelings are a litmus test for measuring God's goodness and God's mercy and God's love, as if human sentiment can condemn divine justice.

Listen, if God's justice is injustice, there is no justice. And it is a world that can tear itself apart. Listen, of course we're not more merciful than Jesus. Perish that thought. Banish it. And yet we need to realize, here he is. He's teaching us about the doctrine of Hell. This is the same one that in Luke 15 talked about the father pulling up his robe, exposing his legs, which was shameful in that society, and he runs to his son, and he embraces his son even when his son is not really repentant, and he pours his love and affection to win his son to himself.

That's the love of God described in Luke 15. Jesus told that parable. You know what? He tells this parable, too. Here he is warning us about the severity of God. Jesus is the one who evangelizes us by offering Heaven and threatening Hell. He does both things.

So how can God's judgement be so severe and yet remain just and warranted and, we need to add, necessary? There are three reasons in this text, and we have one verse for each of those reasons. So for the sake of your note-taking, we'll call these

sub-points A, B, and C, three reasons that God's judgment is severe, warranted, just, necessary, three reasons.

We'll start here with sub-point A: God's judgment is so severe because human sin deserves it. Jesus shows us in verse 24, in the rich man's appeal, that sin is intractable, that it is stubborn, and sinners are obstinate and willful. The sinners are committed to their sins to the core of their being, and they will not repent. Sin has so overtaken their personality, their disposition, that it is their very nature. They will not repent, and they continue to sin from the very bowels of Hell itself.

Severity of Hell is justified, which we're going to see if we think carefully about the appeal of the damned. Look at verse 24. "He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger, the tip of his finger, in water, cool my tongue, for I'm in anguish in this flame.'"

Several things to notice, here, about this man's sinfulness. First, we see that his conscience has been fully activated. How do we know that? How do we know his conscience is fully activated? I keep saying that. Let's prove it. Because we

can see that in spite of the severity of this torment, notice that there is not one word of protest coming from this man. Not a peep. Not once does he say what we hear from senators all the time today, protesting, "This, that's not what fair!" He never says that.

If his conscience were clear, we could understand him protesting. But notice his conscience is accusing him. He's not ignorant of his sin; he's fully aware of his sin. If he were ignorant of his sin, if his conscience was not accusing him, we would expect him to say something like this: "Ask Abraham to have the furnace shut off. Just turn down the heat, please. Check the thermostat." He'd say, "Have someone douse these flames, turn off the heat, spring me from this prison, get me out of here because I don't deserve this."

That's not what he says, is it? Jesus wants us to see this clearly. Those who go to Hell, they know they're guilty. They realize they deserve an eternity of torment. Listen, no one goes to Hell ignorant of his crimes against God, unaware of why he's there. He'll suffer in the full knowledge of his sins, aware of his guilt, knowing that his sentence is just.

And yet, secondly, even though he's aware of his sin, notice there's still no humility whatsoever. His appeal begins by addressing Abraham as "Father." It's kind of presumptuous, isn't it? If Abraham is his father, what's he doing there? If Abraham is his father, why is he not at the father's side?

This is the constant refrain of the Pharisees. They were quick to claim kinship with Abraham. They were very quick to claim solidarity with him, trusting that ethnic connection to Abraham merited divine blessing and favor. In fact, over in John 8:39 they said, in controversy with Jesus and arguing with him, they said, "Abraham is our father." And there's an insinuation in the text that they're making a distinction between themselves, who are true children of Abraham, and Jesus, whose origins and his birth are really unknown, maybe even mixed with the Samaritan race.

Jesus responded to that claim, "Abraham is our father," by saying, "If you were Abraham's children, you'd be doing the works Abraham did. But now you seek to kill me, a man who's told you the truth that I heard from God." This is not what Abraham

did. What did Abraham do? James 2:23 says that "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness, and he was called a friend of God." Why? Because, as the text shows, Abraham obeyed God, and he obeyed God from a heart of genuine faith. He believed God. He obeyed God. He fulfilled God's will.

That is not how the Pharisees lived. Not at all. It's not how the rich man lived, either. His life is dominated by his physical concerns, his physical appetites, his comforts, his pleasures. He has no spiritual interests. The rich man loved money, not God, just like the Pharisees that he represents.

If the man had a modicum of humility, the first words out of his mouth would be something like these: "Abraham, I confess before God and before you, that I didn't follow your faith. All my life I didn't walk in the obedience that you showed when you believed God and it was reckoned to you as righteousness. I didn't do what God says, like you did. I'm so ashamed, and now I am getting what my deeds deserve. But please, Father Abraham, forgive me."

Notice, thirdly, that instead of humility we see the stubborn and abiding pride in his words. The rich man's appeal commands a certain action. Literally, there are two verbs there, "mercy me" and "send Lazarus." "Mercy me" and "send Lazarus." Notice that the rich man maintains his old, earthly, worldly minded distinctions of social status and social class. He discriminates based on class, based on wealth.

He considers himself and Abraham as basically on the same level. I mean, they are in the same social class, both wealthy men. Lazarus is beneath them both. He and Abraham, both wealthy men, and he thinks in his pride, without any spiritual sensitivity whatsoever, he thinks Abraham is going to be sympathetic to him as a social equal. "Certainly Abraham will treat me like a fellow gentleman. Do me a solid here, Father Abraham, send that beggar on an errand for my personal benefit. After all, doesn't someone like Lazarus, doesn't he exist to serve the wealthy?"

It's I. Howard Marshall who points this out; he says, quote, "He," the rich man, "he thinks Abraham will send Lazarus to help him. Even in Hades he thinks of Lazarus as there to look

after his wants, while in his lifetime he had never spared a thought for Lazarus' wants. He remains totally blind and unrepentant." End quote.

So we see so far the rich man has an active conscience, but he's got no humility. He's still filled with his pride. It's a stubborn, intractable pride that is not rooted out at all, which means, fourthly, see here, there's no remorse in how he treated Lazarus. It doesn't even register on his mind. Though his conscience has been awakened, though he knows he suffers justly for his sins, he's not remorseful about his sins in the slightest.

The fact that the rich man knows Lazarus' name, this shows that he knew who he was, even though he never tried to lift a finger to help him during his life on earth. It's hard to believe the rich man still has no compassion over what Lazarus had to endure at his gate. Hard to understand why he wouldn't cry out, "Lazarus, forgive me. Forgive me for ignoring you, for pretending like you don't exist, for treating you like human garbage, for treating you like dog food."

No remorse, and fifthly, notice here in the text, still there's no repentance. No repentance. He asked for relief from his physical suffering. And notice that his mind is still focused on his body. He's still focused on his comfort. He still stares at himself, if he had a mirror, stares at himself in a mirror. He's unconcerned to seek the true relief that he needs, which is relief from his spiritual suffering of guilt before God, of shame for his sins, to be delivered from an accusing conscience.

He cares nothing for forgiveness. He cares nothing about his guilt before God. There's no concern in him that he's offended a holy God. He knows he's suffering justly. He's getting exactly what he deserves. But rather than attending to this malignancy of his own soul, instead of seeking God's forgiveness, the rich man's only interest continues to be about his body, about his physical needs, about his physical sensations.

We can go on and on, making observations like this, but that's enough to show why God's judgment is severe, because human sin deserves it. Another sub-point, sub-point B: God's

judgment is so severe because his justice demands it. God's judgment is so severe because his justice demands severe judgment.

The man called out, verse 24, "'Father Abraham, mercy me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water, cool my tongue, for I'm in anguish in this flame.'" But Abraham said, 'Child, remember.'" Abraham addresses his mind, here. He speaks to his intellect. "'Child, remember, you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things.'" "

Notice what Abraham doesn't say. He doesn't say, "You received your good things and Lazarus his bad things." The bad things that Lazarus endured were not deserved. The good things that the rich man enjoyed, "Remember child, you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things. But now he is comforted here and you are in anguish."

Oh, the anguish. When a drop of water on the tip of a finger, which really could only provide the briefest interruption to this, this suffering of torment, this is a

misery impossible for us to imagine, isn't it? But he's not going to get the smallest degree of relief from his suffering. Why not? Because he's getting what he deserves.

Jesus, said Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." In the first life, all Lazarus asked for were bits and crumbs that fell from this rich man's table. Just the scraps. Rich man couldn't be bothered. So now he, having showed no mercy in his life, he receives no mercy, not even a droplet of water on his tongue.

Some criticize this judgment according to human sentiment, and I'd say human, sinful human sentiment. They see this as cruel and harsh, and they condemn this level of severity, and "God is unjust." But just as Jesus puts into the mouth of Lazarus, the point is this: justice is being done. "You received your good things, Lazarus bad things. Now he's comforted here. You're in anguish." Justice has been done. Case closed.

To think about this from a different perspective, consider the injustice of this rich man requesting and appealing to Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve his suffering. Think about

how unjust that request in and of itself is. I mean, what right does this man have to interrupt Lazarus' reward?

It's Alfred Plummer who writes, "The rich man had asked for a slight alleviation and in a way which involved an interruption of the bliss of Lazarus. Abraham says to interfere with the lot of either is unreasonable. The rich man had unbroken luxury, and Lazarus unbroken suffering in the other world. There can be no break in the pangs of the rich man or in the bliss of Lazarus now." End quote.

Abraham said, "You received *apolambano*." It gives a sense of requital, of repayment, that there's a return on an investment that this rich man had made. Abraham's basically saying, "You invested all your money for your own interest. You sought temporal return in your temporal life. Well, you got it. You got what you wanted. You received your good things. You got the return on your investment. You got the repayment." But as Paul says in Galatians 6:8, "The one who sows to his flesh will from the flesh reap corruption." And Abraham says, "That's what you got." You reap what you sow.

But Lazarus, he received bad things, and that was not just. But now he's comforted here. Comforted, is, interesting word, it's *parakaleo*. Common word in Scripture, *parakaleo*. We're to *parakaleo* one another. We're to encourage one another, strengthen comfort, console, encourage one another, build one another up, *parakaleo*.

The wooden literal construction of this word, *para* "at one's side," *kaleo* "to call." So it's to be called to one's side. Comfort, encouragement, consolation of Lazarus is portrayed here in the parable, vividly, because Lazarus has been called, literally called, to Abraham's side. It's the very picture of comfort, consolation, edification, encouragement.

The rich man, throwing his own parties, got the closest to Heaven that he would ever come. Lazarus suffered, and he came the closest to Hell that he would ever come. But now all is put right. Each man is exactly where he ought to be. God considers it just, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, to grant relief to those who are afflicted.

It's also just, on the other hand, to bring retribution, to slay the wicked. We heard that from David earlier, Psalm 37:10: "In just a little while, the wicked will be no more. You will look carefully at his place, but he will not be there." Verse 38, Psalm 37, "The Lord loves justice. He will not forsake his saints." But what, we, what is he going to do? Punish the wicked. Jesus said this very same thing in the Beatitudes. Luke 6:23, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." And then in verse 26, the opposite: "Woe to you who laugh now, you shall mourn and weep."

Listen, Jesus meant what he said. This parable shows us not only he meant what he said, but it shows what he meant when he said it. This is retributive justice portrayed vividly. God's judgment is so severe because our sins deserve it, because his justice demands it, and also number 3 or sub-point C, God's judgment is so severe because his holiness demands it. God's judgment is so severe because his holiness demands it.

Abraham said, verse 26, "'Besides all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from

there to us.'" Jesus describes a great chasm. Literally, *chasma mega*, megachasm. It's a massive, unbridgeable, unpassable void that separates Paradise and Hades.

We can see clearly by looking at Revelation 21:22, there is a complete cut-off and separation between these two lands, the land of the damned and the land of the blessed. There is no ability for one to see from one side to the other or vice versa. But Jesus describes this great chasm, and the point here is less about our picturing a physical chasm and more about considering the one who created that chasm in the first place, and then thinking about why he put it there. Who is this who created the chasm, why did he make it?

"A great chasm has been fixed." Perfect passive. It's what we call a divine passive. God is the hidden agent in the passive voice there. He's the one who fixed the great chasm, and the perfect tense makes this emphatic. That is to say, it has been fixed. It will not be unfixed. It's permanent.

Chasm is impossible to cross, and that is the point. The purpose clause shows that, "in order that." It shows that God

fixed this chasm for a reason. He put this permanent separation in place between the just and the unjust, and that means they will never meet again. He did it on purpose.

No possibility of salvation on the other side of death. No such thing. For you former Roman Catholics or current Roman Catholics, there's no such thing as purgatory. That is a pipe dream. There is universalism, the doctrine that everybody is going to ultimately be saved one day. That is a total lie from the pit of Hell. It's the way that Satan can harvest your soul into Hell so you can share that misery with him.

No possibility of salvation on the other side of death, no concourse between Heaven and Hell. J. C. Ryle says this: "This verse clearly teaches, if words mean anything, that there is no hope of deliverance from Hell for those who die in sin. Once in Hell, men are in Hell forever. Doctrines of purgatory or a limited duration of punishment cannot be reconciled with this text." End quote. J. C. Ryle added, proscribing, you know, cutting off any hope of what people call annihilationism, that eventually God's just going to snuff out the soul. That's not allowed in this text. Jesus won't allow it; he's cut that off.

This permanent separation's a matter of divine justice set by divine intent, and we have to ask the question, why? It's always the question, why? Why is God justified in dealing with sinners in this manner? Listen, we tend to measure the severity of sins based on the effect of sins upon other human beings, whether ourselves or others, right? That's how we measure sins. So, for example, we say stealing a candy is a minor offense. Knocking off a bank, not so minor. Johnny biting a kid in preschool, that's at one level. Johnny growing up and committing murder, that's on a completely different level. We consider age, we consider the effect on others.

We consider a lot of those factors, human-to-human, and we have a biblical justification for thinking that way, for measuring severity by considering the effect of sin on fellow human beings. God, in the law of Moses, he gives us the *lex talionis* principle, that is, an eye for an eye, and that eye-for-an-eye principle ensures that punishment fits the crime.

This principle prevents us from excessive responses to crimes and misdemeanors and the like. The bank robber and the

murderer don't just get after-school detention. Candy thief and the biter, they're not sent away for 25 to life, you know. So we understand that. We rely on that to have fair responses among one another, and that is one way to measure sin.

Another way to measure sin, though, which is almost completely ignored in this secular age, is to judge the severity of the sin based on the one who is sinned against. That we're not quick to do. Punch a fellow citizen, hit him in the mouth, or whatever, that's a misdemeanor battery. Punch a cop, we ought to, it's probably still a misdemeanor battery, or even just completely ignored these days. But punch a cop, and I would advocate that we elevate that a bit up the chain to aggravated or felony battery. Listen, punch the president, any president, by the way, you're going to go away for life, a long, long time.

Those who still read their Bibles, they notice how often in Scripture that the death penalty is prescribed in the law of Moses or in the Old Testament for treating that which is holy in a profane or a common way. And admittedly, we look at those passages with some level of curious wonderment, scratching our heads a bit and saying, "Wow, that's shocking."

When God gave Israel the temple and the sacrifices, he warned the priests that they're to treat everything as holy, everything as holy. They're not to go in the Holy of Holies except once a year, only the high priests, and not without blood. If anybody else goes in there and views the Ark of the Covenant, they're dead. Even the high priest who enters in, if he lingers too long, dead.

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, Leviticus chapter 10, disregarded his holiness, and what did God do? He incinerated them with fire coming down from Heaven, immediately. When David had the Ark of the Covenant transported back to Jerusalem, there were two priests, brothers Uzza and Ahio, and they used an ox cart to carry the Ark of the Covenant. Well, God had instructed the Levites to carry the Ark by hand. They used an ox cart. Easier that way, maybe. When the ox stumbled, the Ark began to slide from the cart, and Uzzah reached out and touched the Ark of God with his hand to steady it, lest it fall in the mud, and God immediately struck Uzzah dead, dead. It's the incomparable R. C. Sproul who said, "Uzzah had the audacity to think that his sinful hand was cleaner than the mud that the Ark was about to fall in."

We find example after example after example of that kind of severity and judgment because we're being taught all through Scripture, God is not a man. God is not a man. God is God. We need to fear him as a mighty and holy God, and beloved, we don't fear him as we ought to. Perfection of God's holiness is beyond our comprehension. It is impossible for us to fathom the depth and the breadth and the height of God's holiness.

Psalm 47:2, "The Lord the most high is to be feared," why, "because he is a great king above all the earth." We see this in Isaiah chapter 6, where the seraphim, these are the angels who serve as guardians of God's holy presence. "Seraph" literally means "to burn," so these are "the burning ones."

The seraphim are burning, and each of these seraphim, these creatures, is pictured there in Isaiah chapter 6 as having six wings. With two wings he flies to carry out his work God gave him to do. With two wings he covers his feet. What's that about? He's covering his creatureliness in the presence of his Creator. With two other wings he covers his face, lest he gaze upon the perfection of holiness before him.

These angels are granted this great honor, and yet these seraphim, these burning ones, they have the good sense to know who it is they're serving. They understand the grave danger of treating this eternal, thrice-holy God in a common way. And that means they minister, even themselves in his presence, having never committed any sin, they minister under a covering. They get it.

Listen, we're not angels. We're not holy angels. We're men and women. We don't live in spiritual realms of glory like the angels do. We're not in the presence of divine holiness every single day. We are fallen human beings. We're sinful creatures. We're tainted, we're defiled, and our sins, just the fact that we're separated from that means we don't understand the holiness as we ought to, but the fact that we sin puts us even further from perceiving God's holiness, further from knowing the infinite offense that our sins are against a holy, holy, holy God.

We're too dull, we're too distant, we're too weak and frail and too sinful, too tainted with sin to discern how fitting it

is that our sins merit an eternal punishment of conscious torment. We don't get it. So those are the reasons God's judgment is so severe, because our sin is so sinful, because God's justice is so perfect and exacting, and because God's holiness is supreme.

Now Jesus has taught us about this doctrine of Hell and provided us with a warning. We don't want to go there. It's clear. And telling the parable, Jesus assumes divine justice. That's just the background assumption he makes. God is just to punish sin. God is just to execute retributive justice upon unrepentant sinners. He makes no apology for that. He assumes it to be true, and he even assumes that we ought to get it.

So in coming to our second point, verses 27-31, the man comes in verse 27 and makes a second appeal. Duly sobered, here, by Abraham's, reply, he says, verse 27, "'Then I beg you, father, to send Lazarus to my father's house.'" "I beg you." The man sought for mercy for himself. Previously, he wanted relief from his own suffering. Too late now. He's already received a lifetime of mercy from God. Verse 25, "Remember that you in your lifetime you received your good things."

God is kind to the ungrateful and the evil, Luke 6:35. Matthew 5:45, "He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust." He's had it all, health, wealth, prosperity, the rich man has. He's even had an opportunity put at his gate to show generosity, to make friends for the future. He uses superlative resources to help this pitiful beggar named Lazarus.

God already showed him mercy. He squandered the opportunity, squandered it like a foolish manager. And now he seeks mercy for his brothers so they don't join him in suffering torment. They, just like he did, they live in the abundance of God's mercy every single day, and they, like him, have also ignored it every single day.

So he asks here, it's audacious when you think about it, he asks for more than mercy. He asks for something special. He asks for something spectacular, something superlative: "Send Lazarus back from the dead." Dramatic visitation, that'll prevent their torment.

What's his appeal assume about his five brothers? That they, too, have unbelieving, impenitent hearts. So he thinks it'll take a dramatic visitation from the dead beggar Lazarus, whom they all know, by the way. Then they'll listen. Then they'll repent. Abraham's not buying it. He answers, verse 29, "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them."

Folks, "Let them hear Moses and the prophets." Do you hear the divine mercy of God? "They have Moses and the prophets." That is kindness. The kindness of God, beloved, is in the Word of God. If you don't find it there, it's because you're not reading your Bible. God has already been merciful, so merciful to give us his Word.

Notice the response of the proud sinner, verse 30. He says, "No, no, Father Abraham. Time out, Father. Got a little correction to do, here. You've got to sort out your thinking. You think that's enough. Nah, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they'll repent. In other words, look, law and prophets, that's good. Appreciate that. Thanks for the favor. Not good enough. And in fact, our family, we're kind of special.

We need a little something more. We need something a little more dramatic."

More to the point, though, he's saying God's Word is not sufficient. "It's insufficient to save me. We need something more. We need a dramatic, fantastic experience. Listen, Abraham, we need to be wowed. I mean, we see great things all the time. We travel great places. We've seen amazing things. We've had amazing experiences. We've been bungee jumping. We've done everything. We've just had it all. We need to be wowed, Father Abraham."

Subtle charge here, isn't there? Subtle charge. He's saying this, "Listen, Abraham, if I had something just a little bit more dramatic, a little bit more impressive, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be suffering torment in these flames if God had done what it takes."

Who's he blaming? Why is he in Hell? It's God's fault, not his. God's Word is not sufficient. He had a Bible, didn't work for him. He read his Bible every day, and to what end? "Here I am, suffering in Hell. Didn't do me any good. Go to synagogue

every Sabbath. Give them my charity. Moses and the Prophets just didn't do the trick. Obviously, Abraham, you've got to take it up a notch."

Well, Jesus provides one more answer to that from Father Abraham. It's not an answer that's deserved, it's an answer that's graciously granted. This is the conclusion of the parable, verse 31. "He said to him, 'If they don't hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

No one sums this up better than J. C. Ryle, who said this: "Let the striking fact be noted that another man called Lazarus did rise from the dead, and yet the Jews stayed unbelieving." Exactly right. People came from everywhere to see this spectacle of Lazarus, whom Jesus had called forth from the tomb four days after he'd been dead. But the chief priests, according to John 12:10, they planned to put Lazarus to death. They couldn't deny the evidence that a man had been raised from the dead, but they wanted to put him to death because, on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. Oh, perish the thought.

Well, so much for the spectacular. Convincing anybody? Ryle continues the thought. He says, "Above all, remember that Christ himself rose from the dead, and yet the Jewish nation would not believe. They couldn't ignore the sign, and yet they refused to believe. According to Matthew 28:11-14, the soldiers came back from the tomb, reporting everything that they saw to the chief priests, the earthquake, the angel of the Lord, the stone rolled back, an empty tomb, and the chief priests bribed the soldiers. They said, "Hey, go lie about it. We'll cover your tracks, we'll take care of the political fallout. We'll give you enough money to go, move, relocate, start a new life. Just say this: 'His disciples came by night, stole them away while we were asleep.'" For a soldier to make that claim, it's his own death sentence because he didn't guard the tomb as he ought to.

Again, to the point, so much for the spectacular. Dead people rising: it's not going to do it. Against the rich man's protest, against the protests of really the modern-day charismatic movement, signs and wonders have nothing to do with producing conviction of sin, nothing to do with prompting and promoting faith.

Leon Morris calls this the fallacy of the natural man. It is the fallacy of the natural man to complain against what God has given and to demand something more of God. "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. But no sign will be given," as Jesus said, "except," what, "the sign of Jonah." He says, "Stop looking for dramatic signs and wonders." Look to the written Word of God where Jonah's life is recorded. Read it.

Albert Barnes says, "God will give nothing further to warn us. No dead men will come to life to tell us of what he's seen. If he did, we would not believe him. True religion appeals to man not by ghosts and frightful apparitions. It appeals to their reason, their conscience, their hopes, their fears. It sets life and death soberly before men, and if they will not choose the former, they must die. If you will not hear the Son of God and the warnings of the Scriptures, there is nothing which you will or can hear. You will never be persuaded, and you will never escape the place of torment." End quote.

Folks, the Bible has power to give new life. The Bible has power to cause the sinner to be born again. God's Word convicts

the sinner of sin and righteousness and judgment, and the Spirit himself uses the Bible, the Scripture that he himself authored, and he reveals Jesus Christ to us. He shows the sinner the perfect sufficiency of Christ's atoning work on the cross.

The Spirit produces faith by the hearing of the Word of God, so that the sinner can believe in Christ and Christ alone, to receive forgiveness from God, to receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to receive God's justification and the reward of eternal life.

But to the one who refuses to take up and read, to the one who ignores God's mercy, which is all around us, such a one will never find salvation. Such a one will never experience eternal life. But that person will join the rich man in the torments of Hell.

Well, that's Luke 16. That's the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, something we all need to consider. And I just want to make one final point, folks, before we leave this powerful chapter. And this one's for the saints. How are we Christians to

think about Hell? How do we talk about the doctrine of Hell with others, whether believer or unbeliever?

First, we realize we need to acknowledge that Jesus never joked about Hell and neither should we. Whenever you spoke about Hell, which he often did, he was deadly serious. He was never gleeful. He never ignored the gravity of the doctrine, saying something flippant like, "Go to Hell," as we hear so often today. He never said something like, "Burn in Hell" or some kind of a curse.

He just told the truth. The truth is more harrowing than some flippant curse that we try to land on people in a stinging moment. We should never be saying things like that. Jesus spoke about Hell in a tone that befitted the solemnity and the sobriety of the danger that people face. He never joked about Hell, and neither should we. He never made flippant comments. Neither should we.

Second, Jesus never backed away from the doctrine of Hell, and neither should we. He leaned into it. He took full responsibility for Hell, and he never tried to get God off the

hook. No sinful being is more merciful or loving than God. And yet that's how all these Internet trolls blaspheme the living God, by thinking of themselves as greater than him because they wouldn't torment somebody. Who do they think they are? Who do they think God is? They have too high an estimation of themselves, too low of an estimation of God.

Jesus never backed away from this doctrine. God's Word teaches the doctrine of Hell. And it teaches the doctrine of God's love, and it teaches the doctrine of God's justice and also his kindness and also his mercy. This is the doctrine of divine simplicity, right? All of God's attributes are equal to all of God's attributes. None is elevated above another. God is not controlled. God is perfect in his holiness, his justice, and his love, in his perfect jealousy. We need to back away from any judgment against God. We need to proclaim the truth of Hell and never back away from it, because Jesus did.

Third thing for us believers is when Jesus spoke about Hell, he was, yes, earnest, but he was also gentle. He was gentle. The warnings were delivered in sincerity, but also in a tone of gentleness. And we can see that even as he tells the

parable. Back in verse 25, remember how Abraham answered the rich man? The rich man falsely, presumptuously called Abraham "Father." He had no right to that title. And yet how does Abraham respond to him? "Child." "Child, remember." That man to whom he spoke was arrogant, unrepentant. He was vile and wicked, and yet Abraham spoke to him on that first day in the first hour, within the first minute of his eternal sentence in torment, with gentleness.

You know what I think provoked that? I mean, Jesus is making these characters up, but I think what he puts in Abraham is something we should all bear in mind. "Abraham believed God and," what, "it was credited to him for righteousness." Did Abraham deserve to go to paradise? Abraham would tell you, "No, a thousand times, no. I deserve to be in the torment of Hell as well. And yet what I got was mercy and grace from God."

Folks, the grace of God, if it does not make you a gentle and a meek, kind person, then it's not being effectual in your life. You're not seeing the fruit of the Spirit grow in you. That is a problem. You know who were harsh, really harsh about the doctrine of Hell? The Pharisees, represented by the man, the

rich man in Hell. They were harsh. They were unforgiving. They were unkind, dismissive, indifferent to suffering. And so when they preached the doctrine of Hell, they preached it with anger on their face, condemnation in their hearts, critical spirits.

Beloved, that should never, ever, ever be us. But for the grace of God, we're in Hell, too. We need to speak to unbelieving sinners, no matter how lost, their potential end here, and be shocked and saddened and plead with them, "Receive the mercy of God." Let Abraham's gentleness, "Child, remember," let that tone guide you in all of your evangelism and all your outreach, in your own soul, and may God grant salvation to many through the Gospel witness of the saints of Grace Church, Greeley. Amen? Let's pray.

Our Father, we are, so grateful that you've given us this powerful picture of the torment and suffering in Hell. How you have taught us about your justice, about our own sinfulness, how you've taught us about your incomparable, infinite holiness. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. We ask that you would teach us the fear of God that we might have a heart of wisdom. Help us as we handle this very strong doctrine. Help us

to handle it righteously before you, righteously before others.

And may you, through our witness, win many to the cause of Christ, that he might be glorified. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.