

I. HEAVEN AND HELL

~Other Speakers S-Z: John Sung:

(Luke 16)

THEME SONG

If I should die, where will I dwell---

In heaven or in hell?

Eternal bliss, eternal shame

The choice is mine to name.

Only trust Him, only trust Him,

Only trust Him, now.

He will save you, He will save you,

He will save you now.

This afternoon I would like to speak on heaven and hell. This is a most important subject, but there are many who do not believe in heaven or in hell. Before I was born again, this was a perplexing question to me.

When I was nine years old, I saw a small black thing placed in front of our door. I asked Mother what it was and she said it was a coffin for my three-year old sister to sleep in. Mystery of mysteries! I only knew how lovable little sister was, but Mother was referring to her death. I entered the room. I saw her lovable face now pale and white. Her hands and feet were ice-cold. I did not realise I had seen death.

I called to her, but she did not reply. She cared not for me. I came out and saw Mother's eyes brimming with tears. I didn't know what to do. I did not know how sister died. How was it that I who was older than she had not died? Just then, I saw someone lift little sister into the coffin. I called out to Mother, "Why don't let sister sleep in the bed, but put her in the coffin?" Mother did not listen nor did anybody else, but carried the coffin out. I asked Mother where they took sister, whether she would return. Mother said they had taken her to the lonely countryside and she would not return. Hearing this I burst into tears and wailing.

I asked Mother whether I would become like little sister and Mother said yes. I grew more gloomy. That night I dreamt that I died like little sister, and was put into a coffin. I was afraid and I cried to Daddy and Mummy, "I won't die, I want to stay with you." I woke myself up with a loud sobbing which brought also Father and Mother out of bed to inquire after me. I said, "I dreamt that I died. I was afraid. I do not want to die. Death is so fearful. It takes me to the lonely countryside. No, I won't die! I want to live with Daddy and Mummy forever."

Beloved brothers and sisters, are you afraid of death? Now I'm not afraid, not a bit. For man has to die. No one can ever escape this check-point. What is fearful is where you end up after death. This subject is worthy of our careful consideration. This afternoon is devoted to the discussion of this subject, that we may know where to go after death.

Vs. 19. "There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously everyday." This rich man is what you would call a capitalist, even such an one as is found in Amoy today. He has made a great name for himself on earth but in heaven his name is not found. He cared only for the outward and not for the inside. He lived sumptuously everyday, in wine and women. Now the Bible records no other sin of this rich man save his luxurious living. Imagine for yourself: Did he ever look upwards to heaven or did he look on the things of earth? Yea, he only looked on earth, on the present. So did Emperor Yuan Shih Kai turn

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his eyes on the present world. He did not believe in heaven or in hell. He thought once a man died everything was over. But remember, this rich man was a worshipper of God, a son of Abraham, of the elect. Maybe he was an elder or deacon in his church. As a matter of fact he did not trust God. He was a nominal believer by his reckless godless behaviour.

Vs. 20. "And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores."

There was another man called Lazarus. He was nobody on earth but his name was found in heaven. This man was sick with sores all over his body. He carried the cross daily as a beggar, not that he won't work but because of his disabled limbs and sick body. In our church today there are many like Lazarus but nobody ever cares, like the rich man in this Bible story. These care only after their own comforts. This is wrong, for we should take care of one another which is our God-appointed duty.

Lazarus though in such a sad plight never thought of doing evil. For he believed there was a heaven and there was a hell. He was afraid of the retribution after this life. Many robbers and warlords there are who rob and kill, massacre and plunder, and many capitalists there are who exploit and profiteer --- because they do not believe in heaven or hell. Lazarus looked up to heaven. He looked to the future. In contrast, the rich man looked down to earth. He cared for the present. Lazarus, like Jesus, dared not seek for unrighteous mammon. When Jesus was on earth he possessed not a thing, not even a place to pillow his head. Lazarus was the same. Lazarus carried the bitter cross daily. In Lazarus we see a type of Christ. Lazarus said, "I have no desires of this world. I want to go to heaven. Heaven is my home." Many have asked me, "So many in China have neither food nor clothing, and are dying of hunger and cold in extremest misery. Who will believe your talk on heaven and hell? If they don't take care of the present, how will they give attention to the future? But I say to you, "If you believe in Jesus, then you won't worry not having food and clothing. For, in God's Kingdom, there is the rule of love among us. We take care of one another. When we love God, we logically love His children, who are now our brethren in the same kingdom. How can we see our brethren suffer in hunger and cold?"

Vs. 21. "And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." Lazarus sat daily at the rich man's doorway waiting to feed on the tit-bits that fell off his table. Nobody loved Lazarus. For, he was a decrepit, he could not work. Dogs were his friends, who comforted him. When Christ was on earth neither did the people love Him nor receive Him. He was assailed wherever He went. He found his friends among the tax collectors and sinners, the despised of society. These loved Jesus, who were poor and sinful, and a few others. Now Lazarus' eyes were lifted to heaven and the rich man's eyes were fixed on the earth in abandonment.

Vs. 22. "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died and was buried." Whom would you choose to be of the two? Who would like to be the rich man and who Lazarus? True, Lazarus died first, since he was a poor sick man with no one to care for him. But he was not afraid to die. He was very happy in fact. He knelt and prayed to Jesus, "Lord, I am coming home!" Was Lazarus' death the end of everything? No, He was carried by angels to his father Abraham's bosom, in paradise, which is heaven. This is evidence that heaven is real. When I go to the villages to preach and meet with some old, zealous church member's death, it is one in which angels have come to receive the departed. Now Lazarus could not afford a burial. His body being discarded in the wilderness was eaten by dogs. What a contrast with some member's death in which they make such a big show and celebration, and drum up with a procession. A funeral looks more like a religious festival to welcome the gods. Beloved brothers and sisters. See what luxury must also be lavished on a dead man, and all this for what? Was such a celebration made for Jesus' death? But Jesus did not bequeath to this earth even one of his bones. Sakymuni, Confucius, Laotse, Mohammed, died and left behind their bones. Only Jesus did not. Now, you spend such a lot on a dead body and what do you get? Look! This rich man has a five-storey mansion, a house full of wives and concubines, attired in velvet and eating the fat. But now he is down with illness. Around him are gathered his wife and secondary wives up to No. 7. These are trembling and at a loss what medicine the doctor should give to the rich man. The rich man, afraid to die, gives in to a whirl of dreadful dreams and visions. Could he now enjoy all the good things of life? He couldn't even know anything about these things. All he worries about is death. Why? There is the pain of judgment after death! Could he know after his death the best of coffins they put him in and the best of clothes they put on him? Could he see the farce they make for him and the noise of celebration that excel even a festival of the gods? Those who come for the funeral and all the on-lookers make a festive noise. Does he know? How many fat members of the church, fat deacons, fat elders and fat pastors when they die make such a show-off in their funerals, no different from what was done for this rich man! Their merry-making is to celebrate his home-going to heaven? What does the Bible say? Where did all his luxury go once he died and was buried? And the burial ended everything? The material and the spiritual parts of the man had now come to an end? No!

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When I was preaching in Shantung, a college student from Tsinan came to see me. I asked him his philosophy of life. To which he answered, "Enjoy-myself philosophy." When I asked him what would happen to him when he died, he said death ended all things for him. I asked him if that was the case, why should he pursue his education and go to the university? Would it not be better to spend that money on self-enjoyment? He was dumb-founded. Beloved, let me tell you what comes to end after death. The body is finished, but not the soul!

Vs. 23. "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." How is it after death now? The rich man ends up in hades, in hell, to suffer in the fire that is not quenched and to be bitten by worms that dieth not. This proves hell is real. So death does not end all. Should you ask me where heaven and hell are, astronomers have observed a place in space where there are no stars, wide and empty in the heavens, surrounded on its borders by galaxies of stars. This region is in the north. This is heaven since in Isaiah it is said God's throne is "in the sides of the north." Where is hell? In science you have studied that there is fire in the heart of the earth, fire that is of extreme heat. Where did the rich man go? Is it to the fire inside the centre of the earth? I say hell is right there! Now there are those who ask, "Since God is all-loving why will He punish men in an everlasting hell?" But you must carefully consider this fact that God has given man the chance to repent, and has sent His beloved Son Jesus to tell that unbelievers will be condemned. Now, if you refuse to repent, what further can be done? When you prick your flesh with a needle, does it produce pain in the flesh or pain in the soul? Know this that without the soul there would be no feeling. So, to keep on pricking when it produces pain is to suffer pain of your own choosing. Not to repent from knowledgeable sin will meet with punishment. God is a God who judges between good and evil and metes out the retribution. This is manifestation of the justice of His love. The rich man went to hell to be tormented in fire. The pain of thirst in the fire is unbearable and he now realises his mistake. He begs Abraham to tell Lazarus give him a drop of water to cool his thirst, but there is no intercommunication. He did not look up to heaven until he was landed in trouble, but it was too late. Here is a mystery: It is that after death a man's spiritual eyes can see great distances, from hell to heaven, but not while living on earth. Because we cannot see afar nor into the future, so many are unwittingly seeking the pleasures of the present. Hence the sufferings they have to bear after death. Brothers, wake up!

Vs. 24. "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." Now the rich man knows how to pray. Though he requests Abraham his father to send him help through Lazarus, it is not possible by reason of a great gulf separating them. The rich man is all wailing and misery. Despite his remorse, his loud cries of prayer, he has now to suffer the retribution of his sins.

Vs. 25. "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst the good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Did Abraham love the rich man? Yes. Abraham loved him and God loved him too. God used every means of salvation to save the rich man, but he refused to repent. Now he must taste its bitterness. Dear brothers, God has used all kinds of methods to save you. If you repent not, He has no other.

Vs. 26. "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they who would pass from here to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." No way out! For there is a great gulf fixed between you and God. Though God is omnipotent, yet He cannot help because you have not repented while He waited and now you are to suffer for what you deserve.

Vs. 27. "Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house." Ah! The rich man shows love for his five brothers. He begs Abraham to send Lazarus to go and tell them that they might know there is a heaven and a hell that they might repent from their evils. But time did not permit this. The brothers had others to tell them. It was not necessary for someone from the dead to do this.

Vs. 28-31. "For I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Abraham said, they have the Bible, the Words of the prophets telling them. If they believe not the Bible, there is no other way. I also did not believe in heaven or hell before, being blinded by a worldly education and scientific knowledge. Praise the Lord, He has shown me heaven and hell that I might return to Him. If we open the Book of Revelation we shall know what heaven is like. What I say of seeing heaven is what Revelation tells us, they are exactly the same. God has revealed heaven to us that we might understand the most beautiful spot on

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earth is not equal to it. God has also shown hell to me. When I was in the lunatic asylum, there was a patient warded in a room next to me. This madman would weep and pray when night fell. He would recount the sins he had committed and bite his tongue. When daylight came he stopped. When night fell he repeated the same process. This demented fellow would see flames burning all around him. At first I did not understand this. I asked God and He said to me, "In hell, the inmates have nothing else to do except think upon the sorrows, and the more they think about them, the more acute their suffering becomes. So those who repent not will have to face up to all these sins with increasing sorrow to torment them. Whatever they think about will become their punishment." I have had this experience. The more I recall the sins I committed the more I become tormented. When I could bear it no longer, I remembered I needed to pray. When I prayed all my sorrows vanished and peace returned. Have you repented of your sins? If not, you will never be at peace!

When I was preaching in Peking, there was a girl surnamed Chow. She died at the age of fifteen. She got sick at first for four months and was warded at the Central Hospital. When she came to hear me preach, the Holy Spirit worked in her heart to save her soul before death. After she repented of her sins, her illness worsened, so she asked her brother to seek for Pastor Wang (Ming-tao?) to baptise her. She found peace after baptism, yea, even joy unspeakable. Before she died she asked to see her father. She said to him, "You must believe there is a living God." Father replied, "I'm an opium smoker and a great sinner. How will God want such a sinner like me?" She said to her father, "God is love. He loves sinners. He loves you. If you don't trust in God, I shall never see you again." Father was moved by her pleas, so he knelt down to confess his sins.

Now she asked to see her elder brother. "Big brother," she said, "You must believe in the living and true God. God is love. If you repent and confess your sins before Him, He will save you. If you refuse to repent and believe not in Him, I shall never see you again." Big brother was also moved to repentance and returned to God.

Similarly she summoned her younger brothers and sisters who also repented and returned to God. She saved a whole family. She was overjoyed. Finally she asked her parents and the whole family to come before her. She said, "My sickness is fatal. Though I know I'm going to die, I am very happy. For I'm going to a happy place. Daddy and Mummy, brothers and sisters will all be there too. We shall meet over there, and live forevermore. Now angels are coming. Jesus comes! I'm going home. Don't be sad nor weep to make me sorrowful." Thus saying, she departed. A smile broadened over her face. She had gone to the heavenly home.

Beloved brothers and sisters, may you also prepare to return home to God.