

# Earth, Heaven, and Hell.

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*Luke 14: 15-25, Luke 15: 11-32, Luke 16: 19-31.*

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In this discourse the Lord Jesus brings before us earth, heaven, and hell — earth with its hindrances, heaven with its happiness, hell with its horrors; and all divinely real. The hindrances are real, and you yourself, my dear unsaved reader, are the very witness that they are so; otherwise, you would have been converted before now. You cannot say you have not been called, sought, and invited. "Oh," you say, "I have been hindered." Take my advice then: take a flying leap over the hindrances of earth, and taste the joys of heaven, lest eternity find you in the horrors of hell.

In the fourteenth chapter we have the invitation, in the fifteenth, the man who accepted the invitation, and how he was welcomed, and in the sixteenth, the man who would not accept it, and from whose eternal future the Lord draws aside the veil. And who was this last? I believe he was the elder brother of Luke 15, the one who would not go in, though the Father came out and entreated him. Why would he not go in? Because he was too good; he would not go in with such company — he refuses to have to do with the younger brother — whom grace had saved, and the brothers are sundered for all eternity.

He who will not go in when called by grace must taste the terrible truth of the sixteenth chapter — find himself *outside for ever*: and let me tell you this, my unsaved reader, you cannot find yourself in hell without having *passed the open door of heaven* to reach there. How terrible! To pass heaven's open door, with its joy and its gladness and its love, to spend eternity in the lake of fire.

In the fourteenth chapter the Lord gives us the paltry excuses of the heart of man; in the fifteenth the irrepressible love of the heart of God; in the sixteenth, the eternal misery of the one who made the excuses. He shows us earth and its madness, heaven and its merriment, hell and its misery. You are on earth now: where will you spend eternity? "In heaven, I hope," you say. Make *sure* of it, my reader, make sure of it.

Have I put a false colouring, on these chapters, or what do they teach? Is it not *madness* to refuse God's grace, and slight God's mercy, though the "excuse" of chapter 14 be polite? Does not chapter 15 show a scene of divine gladness — the joy of God over the sinner's salvation, and

the sinner called to share that joy for evermore? And is not chapter 16 the scene of man's misery — utter, eternal misery — as he is seen to fall from the lap of luxury to the pit of hell?

The Lord presents here the piteous condition of the lost soul — its cry for help, its wail. Look! What is all it dares even appeal for? There is given here the circumscribed extent of the prayer of a lost soul in hell. *One drop* of water! *One drop*; and it is denied. Why? — Because the guilt of the sinner has landed him in a spot where the mercy of God cannot reach him.

Do you ask, "Is my guilt so great that it cannot be pardoned?" Not now! Now there is no blessing God does not offer you freely; *now*, but not *then*; then there is only left for you one thing, to mourn throughout an endless eternity your own terrible folly in rejecting the offer of God's salvation.

*Now* it is all mercy and no judgment; *then* it will be all judgment and no mercy. Now Christ offers you everything His love can give; then He can only judge you. If you refuse His *love* you must taste His *power*; if you pass by the open door of heaven, and make light of the voice that bids you come in, there is nothing left but the terrible future of which Luke 16 is the picture. The rich man dies, and, I dare say, everything that could make a death-bed easy and painless surrounded his — every luxury his money could buy; but he dies — money cannot keep off death. When death comes in, that cold, pale, grim monster, what terror will seize your soul, you that are Christless, unsaved, unpardoned, unblest. Do not think that you are going to have a long time to prepare. You may be swept off in a moment, having no time for anything. Mark the rapidity of this scene. He dies and is buried, and in hell he lifts up his eyes. Look at the transition. Life, death, burial, hell, torments! This is the Lord's own solemn picture of the end of an unconverted man. Do you tell me it is but a picture? True; but if the *picture* is so terrible, what, oh what will the *reality* be? Can you brave it? Dare you risk this awful future, this terrible hell?

There is thirst in hell, but there is *no water*; *now*, if any man thirst, there are rivers of living water wherewith to slake his thirst — *now*, but not *then*. Oh, will you not drink now and live? Will you be there, and find even one drop denied you?

"Son, remember!" Yes, memory will go down with you there. You must leave your money, leave your pleasures, leave everything you have prized and valued on earth behind you; but you will carry two things down with you - *your sins* and *your memory*! You may try to stifle convictions now, to cover up your sins now, to hush the voice of conscience, and it is quite possible you may succeed. It is quite possible you, who have neglected the gospel, may come to a death-bed, and conscience give you no warning word; for the wicked have "no bands in their death, but their strength is firm." Yes, you may come to a death-bed, and have no fear to die, and yet you are *Christless, unsaved*. Why is this? Because your conscience has been stifled so long, till at last it gives you no warning cry, and mourning friends dry their eyes and say, "He died like a lamb, died like a lamb!" Alas! *died and was damned*! "Son, remember!" remember amid the flames of hell, remember those gospel preachings when you wished the preacher would have done, when you thought him mad because he would seek to warn you, seek to draw you into a place of safety.

"Son, remember" how you despised the love of God; when the portals of heaven stood wide open to receive you, how you refused to go in.

Think of reviewing a lifetime in which you did your best to damn your immortal soul, and to know you had *succeeded!* Is this true? Is it a reality? Is it a fact, that by-and-by, in eternity, you must cast your eye back over your history, and, as the long dark night of eternity rolls on, you must remember that you refused to let God save you? Yes, it is but too true of every gospel-neglector, or gospel-rejector. Are you such, my reader?

Can you bear to picture yourself in that scene of ceaseless woe, with all your joys gone, all your pleasures gone, all your friends gone, and you having waked up to find yourself a sinner in your sins? Memory reigns supreme there. Memory brings back all your past life, your wasted opportunities, and you say, Will it go on? Will it never end? Yes, it goes on, it goes on, it will *never end*.

The Lord tells here the past, the present, and the future of a soul in hell. "*Remember*" - how that word fills up the *past!* "*Tormented*" - that is the terrible, the everlasting *present*. "*Now thou art tormented.*" "But," you say, "is there no escape?" Listen: "*Fixed*" — there is the *future*. "a great gulf fixed." What does that mean? That God Himself cannot then bridge it over; He then has, I may say, no power to show you mercy. Your portion is settled for ever: memory crushing you with all the scenes of your lifetime, which is for ever *past*, beyond recall; torment, sorrow unspeakable in the *present*; and for the *future* a "great gulf fixed" between you and those eternal scenes of joy and gladness in which you too might have been, had you not refused to share them.

But, thank God, now there is pardon, now there is room, now there is a welcome in the Father's house for you, now God's invitation is going out to call you to his great supper of salvation.

God's feast is a feast of joy, a feast of salvation. He Himself provides the feast; He spreads on the table that which divinely meets the needs of the guests. But besides meeting *your need* as a sinner, God has a deeper motive. He wants to gratify His own heart by having you as a guest.

What a grand thing it is to know that God wants *me* for His guest! He wants company. In Luke 14 the great thought of the heart of God is, He wants to have you, wants to have you for His own. Though man has sinned and gone away from Him, His love remains the same; He comes out in the energy of His grace, and entreats you to come to Him, to be His guest. I find the kind of company, too, who accept the invitation, the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, *i.e.*, those who could bring nothing to the feast.

It is on earth the invitation comes. Earth is the waiting-room, in which the fate of the soul is decided, either on the one hand for glory or on the other for the dark, the bitter gloom of the lake of fire. Who shall decide? With *you*, my reader, lies the responsibility.

Perhaps you are saying, "I must wait a more convenient season." Take care, lest it never come. Take care, lest, like Felix, your faith may be in a convenient season which never comes. He trembled once, and you may have trembled once in your history. There are moments when

God puts the gospel before a soul in such a way that it is almost constrained, almost persuaded to believe; but the soul puts it from him, does not decide, and the moment never recurs again.

I ask you, my reader, do you accept or do you decline God's invitation? Either you must accept it and go in, on the ground of being a lost, ruined sinner, or you must refuse, like the elder brother, who did not like this ground.

Earth has its ranks and stages, but there all are gone. If I asked Nicodemus, the moral man, How came you here in heavenly glory with Christ? "Oh," he would say, "it was the blood of Jesus!" Woman of the city, how came you here? "It was the blood of Jesus!" she replies. Paul, the blasphemer, the persecutor, how came you here? "The blood of Jesus" is again the answer that thrills through heaven; "that blessed, precious blood of Jesus!"

If I look, too, on the terribly dark side which Luke 16 speaks to us of, it is all the same. What took the rich man to hell? His sin. Look at the category, in Revelation 21, of those who find themselves in the lake of fire for eternity. "The fearful, the unbelieving, abominable murderers," etc., etc. What brought each one there? His sin. All rank, all difference is gone then. Sin consigns the unbelieving sinner to *hell*, and *blood* brings the believing soul to *glory*; all else is set aside.

Where, then, will you be found for eternity? Will you be found among the number of those who tread that golden city with Jesus? Do you accept or refuse his invitation?

We have looked at the man who would not go in — turn now and look at the man who did go in. He says, "I will arise and go to my Father." That is decision. There comes a moment when the soul decides. Do not suppose you have to fit yourself before you come. Christ meets you where you are and as you are. Christ knows — all about you, and He knows too He is the only One who can meet your need, and so He asks you to come to Him. The prodigal said, "I will go;" there was decision, and, oh, how the Lord yearns to meet a returning soul, how He loves to greet that soul, to bid it welcome, to show out all His love to you!

You may be returning with a weary heart, with a slow footstep; but I read, "the Father ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." What does that kiss tell? It tells of unchanged affection. The heart of God has never changed towards you. And what did the Father say? Why, he did not speak a word. With reverence, I might say the Father's joy was too deep for utterance.

There is no reproach, no word about the past. If you go to *hell* you must remember the past through eternity; there it is, "*Son, remember.*" If you come to God *now*, the past is all forgiven, all blotted out, no memory of it remaining, and not a word to remind you of it; for God delights to say, "Their sins and iniquities *I will remember no more*" (Heb. 10: 17).

True the prodigal was not worthy, but why did he get the kiss? Because he was worthy? Not at all, but because the Father loved him! The prodigal does not say, when he comes to his Father, "Make me a servant;" and very rightly, for if he had made a bad son, I do not think he would have made a very good servant; and another thing, if you come back to God, you have no business to tell Him what He shall say to you, and how He shall treat you, and what He shall

make of you. No, no! you have just to leave Him to do as He likes; and what does He do? He folds you to His heart in the tenderest embrace of love! The Lord sees the first returning thought of the prodigal's heart, the very first; and why? Because, I believe from the very day the prodigal left his Father's house, the Father never left His post, as it were, of watching the road for his son's return. And oh, how He welcomes him, all unwashed as he was, in all his rags!

"Bring forth the best robe," He says to the servants; and that is my province. That is the Evangelist's work, *i.e.*, to tell you of Christ, to seek to display His attractions before you, to tell you that you have nothing to do, but that Christ has done it all for you. Christ Himself is the best robe. There is the best robe for the worst sinner.

"Put shoes on his feet," too. The law said, "Take off the sandal." Grace says, "Put shoes on," *i.e.*, "I will provide him with fitness to tread those courts above." The law says, "Take your shoes off, you are not fit." Grace says, "I will make you fit."

And then there is the merriment, the joys of heaven, and oh! who would be fool enough to put aside this, and risk what the sixteenth chapter gives? Will you not come to Jesus, hear Him say all is forgiven (and the *all*, you know, is a great deal in *your* case), and taste the gladness of heaven

"They *began* to be merry." And we never hear that they left off; there was no end. We begin down here, but it goes on and on and on through the countless ages of eternity.

Only come to Jesus, and then you will taste the sweetness and truth of these lines -

"Every sin shall be forgiven,  
Thou through grace a child shalt be  
Child of God, and heir of heaven,  
Yes, a mansion waits for thee,  
Even thee, even thee,  
Yes, a mansion waits for thee."

W. T. P. W.