

## The Brothers of a Man in Hell

By  
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*“Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” (Luke 16:27, 28)*

This scripture text with its surrounding context comprise one of the most dramatic, portentous illustrations to be found anywhere in the recorded ministry of Jesus Christ. Some call it a parable, but the Bible does not designate it as such. Some say that the characters in this brief but striking episode were men with whom Jesus was acquainted in the days of his flesh. But none of these suppositions are clearly expressed, but neither are they necessary to support the eternal doctrines set forth so vividly in the drama.

Jesus begins the story with the words, “There was a certain rich man,” and in a very colorful, descriptive language portrays the whole span of his existence from the ivory courts of his earthly palace to the red hot flames of his bed in hell. At one and the same time, he weaves into the tragic fate of this rich man the triumphant transition of the soul of a poor beggar, from his mean abode among the dogs of the streets to the land “where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.”

Hundreds of men of every generation have been told that the rich man went to hell because of the way he treated the poor man who was laid at his gate. But I can prove to you that this rich man took Lazarus into his home and did all that he could for him about as easy as you can prove that he did not. The Bible does not say that the rich man went to hell because of his mistreatment of Lazarus. Neither does it say that he went to hell because he was rich. The Bible nowhere puts a premium on poverty. It does not even

imply that the beggar went to heaven because he was poor. Riches do not consign a person to hell; neither does poverty give one a free trip to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man did not go to hell because he was an atheist. His intimacy and recognition of Abraham proves that he was a Jew and a believer in the God of Abraham.

There is no greater contrast in the Bible than is seen in the lives of these two men in this world and in the world to come. There is poverty and riches, sickness and health, robes and rags, famine and feast, heaven and hell. Anyone could write the life story of the rich man. They could tell of his achievements, his fortune, his funeral. But earthly writers could go no further. The remainder of the story is left to him alone who is able to cross that great impassible gulf and describe to mortal man the abject misery, woe, and despair to which the unfortunate tenants of those dark regions of the damned are subject.

His had been a non-stop flight from the pillow of death where weeping friends had frantically brushed back the death damp from his brow coming from the smoking ruins of his eternal despair. If there had been a purgatory or a substation anywhere in between, we may be sure that this man would have chosen it a thousand times over the flame out of which he lifted up his eyes. He cried for just one drop of water but even that was denied him.

When the hopelessness of his utter despair came home to his consciousness, he then thought of his five brothers. If it was his lot to spend eternity in hell, he wanted to be there alone. Man by nature is a social being. He seeks and enjoys the fellowship and companionship of his kind. But there is one place you go that you will want to be there alone. The loneliness of a devil's hell will be more than a man can stand, but the presence

of the groans and screams of the multiplied thousands of others will make that place a mad house of the wicked, a place beyond description.

Hear the rich man cry when he thinks of his brothers: “Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father’s house and let him tell my five brothers not to come to this place.” The man in hell was very specific about the message he sent to his brothers. And in this message you will find the reason that he went to hell. He does not argue with Abraham. He knows he is lost, that he is forever in hell, and more than that, he knows why he is in hell. He sends a message to his brothers not to do as he had done. He does not tell them to sell all they have and give to the poor. It was not for them to be kind to beggars. Rather, he sends only one short message: “Tell them to repent lest they also come to this place of torment.”

This message that he wanted his brothers to hear has reverberated down the corridors of the ages for over five thousand years. It has been on the lips of every preacher of righteousness from Noah to this very day. It is the heart of the Gospel, the message around which Jesus Christ built his kingdom: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Some try to say that this old time message of tear-stained repentance is out of date today. Men have focused on the faith part of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ to the neglect of genuine, heart-felt repentance. The command is to repent and believe. There is only one way that the wanderer may come to God and that is the path of repentance.

Repentance has turned the tide of many a battle, changed the course of millions of lives, transformed many a dead church into a “burning bush.” It has done more to warm the cold hearts of this old world than any message that man has ever heard. The reckless

abandon with which man is catering to unbridled passions and unholy desires is a clarion call to every God-fearing man on earth to go forth into the highways and hedges and find that rich man's brothers and reveal to them his message proclaimed in hell: "repent."

If we put our ears to the ground, we will hear the roars of subterranean fires which seethe and hiss under the thin crust of our civilization. If we look into the distance we will see the thunder clouds as black as midnight, threatening enough to curdle the blood. It will take more than a social gospel to check this great deluge of wickedness that is sweeping this world to hell. What this world needs more than anything else is an old fashioned baptism of heart-felt repentance – a genuine repentance that will remake lives, reshape empires, and cause wicked thrones to totter and fall, driving back the coming darkness and ushering in a day of light, life, and glory.

The sad and pitiful plea of a man in hell is the message that I want to pass on to you today. It is not a plea for himself. He is already hopelessly doomed, and he knows it. But from the terrible despair of perdition, he lifts of his eyes in hell and cries: "Go tell my five brothers to repent so that they do not come to this place." This is the only message that the world has ever heard coming from hell. This is the only time that the Bible ever pulls back the curtain and gives us a fleeting glance into the black walls and charred pits of eternal damnation. There are a thousand messages he could have sent, but he only told of unbearable torment that caused him to utter one resounding cry – "repent, tell my brothers to repent and avoid this place."

That same message was preached by John the Baptist and by Jesus Christ. And it is the same message that Jesus gives to his followers to take into all the world. I would to God today that every man, woman, boy and girl would tune their ear to that faint cry far

away, that cry of a man in hell calling for repentance. I also wish that every Christian would hear him say, “Go find my five brothers and tell them to repent.” His brothers represent every lost man and woman on God’s earth today. Let us go and tell them to repent.

Fifteen years ago on a dark Saturday night, I was alone in my room, struggling over a great problem. I was trying to decide what course in life to pursue. A decision had to be made. I had been through a very disappointing experience with my home church. In that moment of greatest trial, I earnestly sought God. And somehow through the gloom around me, I seemed to hear coming over the years, a voice from hell. It was the voice of the rich man saying, “Go tell my brothers not to come to this place.” When I heard that desperate cry, it startled me beyond words. But that night I went out on life’s road in obedience to that cry, never to ignore it again. Since that night, many moons have cast their golden glow down upon the lost and reckless world. But all of this time, I have been out among the crowded thoroughfares of this earth looking for that man’s brothers. And thank God, I have found a few of them. I have seen them come in from sin’s dark night, repent of their sins, and be saved by the power of Jesus Christ.

Are you out there in that group of lost ones? Are you one of that man’s brothers or sisters? If so, the message rings out to you today with no less urgency than when it was first spoken thousands of years ago – repent and be saved.