

Sermon to the saints of God at Topeka – Sunday, March 25, 2018

Good morning beloved. So, briefly to recap: I think scripture firmly establishes that the lake of fire (Gehenna) is the eternal punishment of the wicked – this includes Satan, his angels, Antichrist, the False Prophet and all wicked men from Cain to the last man. This lake of fire is currently uninhabited, but will be inhabited first by Antichrist and the False Prophet, followed by the Devil and his angels at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, and all the wicked men following thereafter (after they have taken part in the second resurrection and followed Satan in a final attempted encompassing about and assaulting the camp of the saints). Because the current earth and sky will be burnt up and dissolved (and a new earth formed and revealed to the saints – Rev. 21:1), and the lake of fire is an eternal, or everlasting fire, the current earth does not seem like a viable candidate for the location of this lake of fire. In addition, the framework for this as both a casting into the lake of fire and a casting out into outer darkness makes some portion of the deep recesses of outer space a more viable candidate for its location.

Sheol/Hades refers to the ‘underworld’ or the abode of the souls of both wicked and righteous men (prior to the death and resurrection of Christ), with a clear separation in disposition of those souls (which will be parsed out later in this sermon). All men’s bodies (with a few special cases – I outline the possibilities of these special cases in a recent sermon I delivered on Rev. 12) lie in the grave awaiting either the resurrection unto life (the first resurrection) or the resurrection of the damned (at the end of Christ’s millennial reign). Those souls who die in unrepentant sin and therefore without grace inhabit an abode of torment – the nature of which we will try to parse out some today.

The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword. – Eze 32:21

Those righteous souls whose bodies lie in the grave (at least prior to the resurrection of Christ) share an abode as well:

And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave (Sheol) unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. Gen. 37:34,35

This abode seems to be devoid of evil, and its nature as one of peace, rest and comfort is undergirded by the story of Abraham, Lazarus and the rich man.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. - Lu 16:25

There is plenty of scriptural evidence that this abode is actually under the earth (that is, lower than the earth's crust). Since we are very short on knowledge of the nature of the soul (which is a sermon topic in itself), we should be careful in the ways we impose what little we think we know on its nature in terms of understanding scripture having to do with the soul. What we can glean about it follows later in this sermon in an attempted analysis of the story of Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man.

The grave is just that. A tomb, sepulcher or hole in the ground that houses the dead bodies of men. The bottomless pit does not appear to be one and the same with the lake of fire, and although I am not able, with current light, to say in a dispositive manner that it is not Sheol/Hades, it doesn't seem to provide the same harmony of all related verses in scripture to assume Sheol/Hades to be one and the same with the bottomless pit – it has its own specific functions as that which beasts ascend *from* and Satan and his minions are relegated *to* during Christ's millennial reign. (Kind of a brief run through, but I think that's a decent thumbnail sketch to bring us back up to speed for today.)

Let us please begin today's investigation with a scriptural analysis of the exchange and disposition of the penitent thief on the cross, Christ and 'paradise' on the day of Christ's death. This day, beloved, is the most momentous day in the history of the world, apart from the day of the second coming of Christ. This is the day that the work of salvation was finished. This is the day that the promise of salvation made to all God's sheep - from Adam to the last righteous person to die just prior to the crucifixion of Christ – would be fulfilled. And on the day that Christ completed the singular acceptable sacrifice to atone for all the sins of His elect throughout time, this exchange took place between our Saviour, the thief who was given - in the last moments of his life – a penitent, contrite heart toward God, and the stiff-necked, impenitent criminal:

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. – Lk. 23:39-43

Today. That day. And we know that if the Lord said it, it would and did happen. So now we must get down to what circumstances Christ's pronouncement described. We know that their bodies both stayed on earth that day and beyond.

And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. – John 19:38-42

We could say that the souls of Christ and our brother the penitent thief would have ascended into heaven on that day, and that their bodies stayed on the earth – end of story. But that description of events seems not to harmonize well with the rest of the related scripture, including when Mary Magdalene came upon Christ on the morning of the third day from his death:

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. – John 20:17

Some might say: "Well, His body hadn't yet ascended but his soul, or spirit, certainly had." Not only does this argument prove too much, but it seems to spring forth from a surface reading of the text alone. It proves too much because, in the most real sense of things, Christ and God the Father are one and the same:

I and my Father are one. – John 10:30

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. – John 14:10,11

I do not believe that Christ was speaking to Mary Magdalene in the voice of the triune God, however. He was speaking as the person of Christ. And he certainly would not have split that

hair, in speaking to what had transpired with Him from the time of His death until that moment. He said that he had not yet ascended. Do we really believe that what he was saying is that in one sense he had ascended but in another he had not? I believe the answer to whether Christ and the thief both ascended to *heaven* on the day of Christ's death is most probably: No.

But this doesn't mean that Christ's words to the thief were untrue; God forbid. It just means that we must seek an understanding of that blessed pronouncement of Christ that harmonizes with all His other words relating to the subject at hand. We could believe, as many Bible scholars do, that the souls of both Christ *and* the penitent thief descended into the 'good,' or comforting part of Sheol (which would have, up to that point, been 'paradise'), where the souls of Jacob, Samuel, David, and all the other OT 'heroes of the faith' (see Heb. 11) had been residing in blissful anticipation of the finishing of the salvific act. That once Christ arrives on the scene, He pronounces His victory over sin, death and hell to those who have been awaiting this victory for a great long while. And that He also, at that time, preached to those on the forever-lost and wicked side of Sheol/Hades, having access and dominion over *all* the souls in Sheol – both those who are comforted and those who are already in torment:

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, - 1Pe. 3:18-20

And that finally, Christ delivered all those souls from the comforting side of Sheol into heaven, thereby 'moving' paradise, emptying out that side of Sheol – never to be inhabited by a single soul again – and that only the side of Sheol that is the abode for the souls of wicked men is now inhabited (and is continually filled up, until the time of the second resurrection).

Hell (Sheol) and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied. -Pr. 27:20

Now I believe *most* of what I just attributed to many Bible scholars, but not *all* of it (that's why I put question marks after the word 'paradise' in both the Sheol section of my little diagram and it heaven). I believe that the comforting side of Sheol has been emptied out by Christ at the time of his death – it was, in fact, at that point in time that total victory and salvation was won by our Messiah. Although foreordained from eternal ages past, and therefore an absolute certainty, it was at *that* moment that eternal salvation was fully *achieved*. What all of those blessed elect souls that share their abode with Abraham and Lazarus had in common is that they all slept in

Christ before the act of the promised salvation had been achieved. It may seem too subtle a point for many, but there is a tremendous difference between Christ being prophesied of and the prophesy being fulfilled. He has designed this glorification of His name, through creation, through moral legislation, through deliverance, through destruction, through showing all His power and might, through mercy, through sacrifice, as a very particular playing out of events – His act of salvation being the centerpiece of it all. Not only did he bear the wrath of God on our behalf; he endured death, the separation of his soul from his body. His body was in Joseph’s tomb from the time of his death to the time of his resurrection (Lk. 23:50-53) and his soul was three days in Sheol, “in the heart of the earth” (Mt. 12:40). All those souls were promised that salvation in their natural lifetime, *prior* to the coming of Christ to die for their sins, but saw it afar off. But *now* that salvation has been achieved, won, purchased. They were *already* comforted before His death (as the story of Lazarus and the rich man attests), even though they have *yet to receive* their glorified, incorruptible bodies (which will happen at the first resurrection). But they can now *see* what they had been promised.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Heb. 11:39 – 12:2

Who are these witnesses who form a great cloud (a very great number)? They would not be angels. First, witnesses generally refer to men – people – in the scripture, rather than as the spiritual creatures called angels (as opposed to human messengers – Tim talked us through that distinction a while back). Second, in the context of the scripture under analysis, that great cloud of witnesses is specifically those people who have been talked about throughout the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews. They weren’t made perfect in their salvation before salvation was achieved. But now they are made perfect. Those who slept in Christ prior to the Cross were not given what was promised until the time. Now they are made perfect - not because of glorified bodies, which very few get prior to the first resurrection. But where and what our faith has us aspire to, and what lies ahead for *us*, is described in this wonderful passage of scripture that manifests the inhabitants of heaven:

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just

men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. – Heb. 12:22-24

I believe that all those blessed men and women, whose souls, by their own words, would go to Sheol at the time of their deaths (prior to the death of Christ) will now ascend into heaven (after his death). So, what of the penitent thief? Did he accompany Christ on that day? I am good to be taught by those who have a sound, scriptural take on this – but I believe the case of the thief on the cross is very different from all those men who came before him. I believe that it is entirely possible, nay probable, that Christ *was* talking to him while upon the cross (unlike how he talked with Mary Magdalene - as the person of Christ) in the spirit of the triune God. The difference between the thief on the cross and all those already in the comforting side of Sheol/Hades is that the thief died *after* Christ's salvation had been fully achieved on the cross – all those others had slept in Christ prior to that glorious event:

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him (because both were still alive and this further cruelty and violence prevented each from escaping his fate). But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: - Jn. 19:30-33

If Christ led the souls of just men out of the 'Abraham's bosom' side of Sheol and into heaven by the victory of the cross, then there would be no reason for the penitent thief to go there – as he died after that victory had been won. So, at the death of the penitent thief, his soul could have immediately ascended into heaven, and it would be true that he was with the Lord. As the divine person of Christ, as one person of the triune God, he isn't limited by time, space, etc. Further, I believe that what Christ said unto the thief wasn't true *only* for the thief – I believe it is true for *all* those who die in faith *after* Christ's salvific sacrifice. That part of Sheol that *had* been the abode for the souls of righteous men prior to the death of Christ has been emptied out. Now, when one of God's elect dies in his/her flesh, I believe that their body obviously still goes to the grave, but their soul goes immediately to heaven, to be with Christ 'this day,' just like it happened with the penitent thief. This is underscored by our learned brother Paul, who posits only two options for himself: to be alive in the flesh (and therefore continuing to minister to God's people and to evangelize) or to die and to be with Christ (and therefore heaven):

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: - Php. 1:21-23

The souls of those blessed elect sheep will be joined with their glorified bodies at the first resurrection, but all of these souls are now in heaven, as the *'spirits of just men made perfect.'* For the wicked, the torment of their souls begin immediately upon death and continues in Sheol/Hades until they are reunited with their bodies fitted for destruction at the resurrection of the damned and summoned to their eternal abode – the everlasting fire.

One final note about 'paradise.' The English word only appears thrice in the Bible, all in the New Testament – we get our English word from the Greek *paradeisos*. It is spoken of as the location of the reward to him that overcometh (amongst the seven churches):

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. – Rev. 2:7

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught UP to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught UP into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. – 2Cor. 12:2-4

Paradise is up. Paradise is heaven.

We must now look at a scriptural treatment of the work that Christ was about from the time of his death until his resurrection, as the claim has been made.

For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. – Mt. 12:40

There are those who believe this merely refers to the notion that Christ's body would be in the grave for a time - that this could never mean that Christ descended into Sheol – that such a notion does not become his holiness. I believe that such a view of the matter actually places a limitation, and therefore a lack of sovereignty and self-sufficiency, on His holiness that is based upon an incomplete understanding of it.

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. – Ps. 139:8-12

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. – Rev. 4:11

We even see a type of Christ in showing His omnipotence, imperviousness to affect, and salvific mercy in scripture:

And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. – Dan. 3:23-25

There are a lot of people who believe that the ‘descent’ of Christ into the ‘lower parts of the earth’ could never mean Sheol/Hades, but that merely means his coming to the earth in the form of a man. For instance, when we look at this blessed verse from the Psalmist:

My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. – Ps. 139:15

There are some Bible scholars who say that this rendering of the ‘lowest parts of the earth’ here actually refers to the womb. There isn’t a lot of etymological evidence, that I’ve been able to find, that bears that notion up soundly. And while I’m willing to consider the notion, I just don’t see it working in harmony with the rest of the scriptures on the matter. Besides, even if it did refer to the womb, it could be referencing all the things those born of the womb endure, including death and separation of body from soul.

One problem with this view is that the position seems to be motivated, at least in part, by an incredulosity that Christ would or could have done such a thing, which I think is, in turn, partially motivated by incomplete and vague notions of Sheol/Hades/Gehenna, etc. Another is that it seems to deny, at least in that moment, his sovereignty, omnipotence and omniscience

as the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity and who made all things unto himself. Finally, though, we have lots of scripture showing that Christ manifested himself in human form lots of times prior to his coming in the flesh to dwell amongst us during the time of his ministry on earth. And these weren't apparitions, they were Christ. He questioned and expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. He supped with Abraham prior to destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. He wrestled with Jacob in the desert all night. He protected Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the burning fiery furnace. And he charged and encouraged Joshua at Jericho. But this 'descension' was different than just coming onto the earth – he lived and suffered as a man, having his soul separated from his body at death:

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) – Eph. 4:8-10

I believe the two verses are parenthetical in thought partially because the main issue of the passage seems to be the giving of gifts, but unlike other forms of literature, the parenthetical reference doesn't lower its value or importance – in some cases, it seems to heighten it. The language is very specific, both as to the descension (into the lower parts of the earth) and the ascension (up far above all heavens – or beyond the sky and outer space and to third heaven). This descension into the lower parts of the earth has been taken, in the main, three ways:

- 1) The earth itself - although why the more specific language? Many scriptural references are to 'earth' or 'the earth' – why the 'lower parts of'?
- 2) Beneath the earth (that is, into the physical grave, or sepulcher) – This doesn't tell the complete story – the story of His soul, or spirit – and there is never any scriptural room for the idea of 'soul sleep' or 'soul dormancy' in men, let alone for the living God between the time of his death and his resurrection!
- 3) Beneath the earth (that is, beneath the physical grave, or Sheol).

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (Sheol); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. – Ps. 16:10

He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his (Christ's) soul was not left in hell, neither his (Christ's) flesh did see corruption. – Ac. 2:31 (Peter, speaking of the context of Ps. 16:10)

What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave (Sheol)? Selah. – Ps. 89:48

I believe that this third sense is that which seems to harmonize with the other related verses, if you take a closer look at the meaning of ‘led captivity captive.’

This is a phrase in scripture that I have struggled with (and I imagine I’m not alone in this). Many Bible scholars view this phrase as a victory over the forces of evil: Satan, his minions, sin itself. I believe there is something more, and I think something different, going on here. There is no question that Christ vanquished the punishment for sin committed by his elect sheep at Calvary. But I think there is more going on than suggesting that ‘led captivity captive’ means a chaining, imprisoning and parading of a defeated foe in war. To be sure, that happens in a much more grandiose, spectacular and glorious fashion than any of us could imagine or pen. But this is not the time for that. That comes later. The Holy Spirit, through our brother Paul, is speaking about events that have already happened, and we know that the glorious, ultimate triumph of spiritual warfare of our Captain is still ahead and to be revealed at his second advent. In addition, perhaps the simplest explanation of the phrase ‘he led captivity captive’ is bound up in the notion of slavery, or captivity, itself. Even though there had been many heroes of the faith already asleep in Christ, having been given the promise prior to his death on the cross, no one was literally released from their bondage until the blood of the Lamb was actually shed – until the salvific act was *finished*. The atonement was in the blood itself – in the sacrifice: not in the promise of the sacrifice. So, when Christ died, he set a host of men free from the slavery of sin (captivity) and took them captive to himself.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. – Ro. 6:6

We are, in fact, slaves to righteousness – purchased by the blood of the Lamb. He had the only currency that could redeem us, and redeem us he did. We were once slaves to sin, but since the cross, we are *his* slaves, or servants. The Greek word *duolos* (doo-o-los) is the word that is translated in the NT as ‘servant’ (which means bondman, or slave). Men of God are referred to as servants of God:

James, a servant (duolos) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. - Jas 1:1

And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. - Re 15:3

We were in bondage to sin (in captivity) and now we are the servants, or captives, of Christ. He led those heroes of the faith, at the time of his ascension, 'captive' to himself, and does so now with each one of his sheep at their calling (in *their* consciences), but at the day that he died on the cross (in *reality*) – that he 'might fill all things.'

He 'led captivity captive and gave gifts to men' – not stated as to opposite and therefore juxtaposed rewards, but having purchased slaves to sin and made them slaves to righteousness, he gave (and gives) them spiritual and temporal gifts that facilitates them serving him in a manner that he has designed and is well-pleasing in his sight.

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: - Col. 1:12-14

The reality is the apparent paradox (though not one, at all) that we are slaves, or servants, of Christ, that have been set at liberty by him from the slavery to sin.

Finally, onto the story of Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man - what we can and cannot say (for sure) about the dispositions of Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man (as well as other righteous souls) in Sheol/Hades, both at the time that the story was preached by Christ and since.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 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; and in hell (Sheol) he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 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. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. 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. 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. – Lk. 16:21-31

1. We can say, for sure, that this whole story takes place prior to the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ (as Christ himself is telling it, on the ground, during his earthly ministry). At least one important aspect of this detail is that - though the salvation of the Lord, through his blood, was promised – it hadn't happened yet. That would suggest that that the souls of Abraham and Lazarus shared the same abode as Jacob, Samuel, David, etc. – the abode of all the righteous souls who have been separated from their fleshly bodies through natural death.
2. The moniker of 'Abraham's bosom' is not given only as a metaphor for the sense of comfort felt by those souls who were present. The soul of Abraham was present and led the dialogue.
3. Abraham and Lazarus both feel comforted. They have finished their course; they have reached the end of their faith (1Pe. 1); there is no more doubt; there is no more evil influence upon them; there is no more toiling in and grieving for sin; they are with God (in some sense of real comfort – while we don't know much about the real sense of that comfort, we know that it is real and dominates the disposition of both souls); they await their glorified states with absolute certainty in their anticipation of it.
4. Everyone involved in the story could think, speak, see, feel, sense, etc.
5. There is a 'gulf' between Abraham and Lazarus on the one side, and the rich man on the other. (I have often thought of this gulf as sort of a force field that you can see through, but can't get through – but that's just where my mind goes is the absence of anything more concrete from scripture.)
6. The rich man is tormented greatly, and that dominates his dialogue.
7. The flame that the rich man speaks of is not the flames of the lake of fire, as the lake of fire would have been uninhabited at the time (and even now).

I have held the belief, in the past, that since I read of 'eyes,' 'tongues,' 'fingers,' and 'bosoms,' they all had to have some sort of bodies. But it is the soul that departs the body – and no secondary or temporary body is ever expressed in scripture besides referring to the actions that the souls can undertake and that they can be seen and heard. I don't believe that the fact that those in Sheol or hades can feel, see, speak, etc., demands a physical body that we must therefore assume. I think we impose that demand in our lack of understanding (I am totally open and willing to hear different if someone has some better light there). The fact is that we have so

little knowledge about the concept of the soul, that we are just as prone to grasp at and mix myth and literary notions of the soul as we are with the concept of 'hell' itself. In many respects, I think that throughout the history of western culture and thought, there has been an undue influence and informing by prevalent notions of the soul that go all the way back to the early Greek philosophers, most notably Plato. One of the most famous pieces of literature in the history of western thought is Plato's *Republic*, a series of treatises and allegories in which the author not only gives a very detailed accounting of his version of the soul of man (3 parts: reason, spirit and desire), but actually carries that metaphor throughout the course of the book, comparing the 'well-ordering' and 'mal-ordering' of the souls of men to the 'well-ordered' or 'mal-ordered' systems of government. (He dubs a direct democracy as the lowest and most dysfunctional form of government, by the way.) Part of the problem in understanding the torment and punishment of this rich man, as well as all the damned (prior to the everlasting lake of fire, or Gehenna) is our paucity of understanding about the soul itself. We tend to think of the soul as being without physical sensation, and therefore without feeling, pain, happiness, etc. But the evidence suggests the contrary. The point is, beloved, that given scriptural evidence on the topic, I am more prone to believe that the nature of the soul is such that it can 'see,' and 'feel,' and 'think,' and be 'tormented,' etc., than I am to forcing a belief in a temporary or transitory 'body' being attached to a man's soul at death, but prior to his resurrection.

J.C. Ryle: It is vain to talk of all the expressions about it (Hades) being figures of speech: the pit, the prison, the fire, the thirst, the darkness... all these may be figures of speech if you please. But Bible figures mean something beyond all questions, and here they mean something which man's mind can never fully conceive. O reader, the miseries of mind and conscience are far worse than those of the body. The whole extent of hell, the present suffering, the bitter recollection of the past, the hopeless prospect of the future, will never be thoroughly known except by those who go there.

The scripture says that the rich man 'lift up his eyes,' and I have read and been taught that this is the rich man gazing into heaven (third heaven) from hell (the lake of fire). Even if there was a mechanism that would have allowed for that sort of 'Facetime,' the lake of fire is uninhabited and the sacrifice for sin has not been accomplished. In a sense, the rich man is looking from hell (Hades) into an everlasting habitation (or disposition of eternal life) – but I do not believe he is doing so in the manner many of the writers and teachers have meant. He was sent to hell for his sins, the lowest and most miserable of lots, and he was taking his first look up from the vantage point of that awful estate. Abraham and Lazarus, though certainly a separation exists, are talking to an evil, damned man who they are in close enough proximity to (in souls speak) to see and hear. And at that time, though salvation had been promised, it had not yet been achieved.

One word that seems to hold many up (including me many times) in any analysis of this story is 'flame.' The rich man says that he is tormented in this *flame*. The word rendered there means flame – but again, I do not know enough about the soul to know in what manner this is a flame, or how that flame works on the soul of a wicked man. But I do know that it is a *torment*, and that the rich man senses in his torment that it is not only a permanent and unbearable state of affairs for himself, but that the comfort of Abraham and Lazarus are permanent and pleasing as well. And that the rich man's unbearable, eternal state that results from unrepentant sin - or disobedience to the sovereign God of all Creation – is a vital part of the Gospel that we must preach in service to our King.

Ultimately, beloved, I believe that when we are searching the scriptures for meaning, we must seek harmony and alignment in all the scriptures that deal with a topic, without unwittingly smuggling other concepts in. I believe that if we begin and end our investigation of hell, for example, with the story of Abraham, Lazarus and the rich man, we may be prone to weave a tapestry that is partly scriptural, partly informed by myth, culture, art and false notions in religion, without really getting to much of the rest before the investigation gets derailed. On the other hand, coming to a little better grip with all the ways that the concepts and words are used in scripture, without forcing an outcome, may give us better light on something that we had previously missed or been confused about. This approach, and all light, is given by the Lord in his time and in his way. I hope that, although I'm certain I haven't answered everyone's questions on the subject, the approach to this topic has been edifying to each of you in some way. I am grateful to God for giving us this day to talk about His things and to delight in His word.

I love you all.

