The Rich Man, Lazarus, and Hell

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Date: 14 March 2021

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[0:00] Hello Table Church, my name is Anthony Parrott and I get to serve as the lead pastor here. And you have not seen me for the past few weeks because we've had some wonderful sermons by our preaching cohort, by one of our elders, Becky Fair, and I've been spending these past few weeks preparing for this sermon because you know how like Instagram influences are always like, hey a lot of you have been asking about my skincare routine. Well, no one asked me about my skincare routine, but a question that keeps coming up for this church is what about hell?

This church, if you've been part of it for any amount of time, you know that it's made up of quite a few people who have either been hurt, abused, wounded by the church, or a church's teachings or a pastor's teachings. You know it's made up of a lot of folks who have been figuring out their faith. How do we keep loving and believing in the good news the gospel is?

Jesus Christ and his way of love and forgiveness and reconciliation. How do we do that and still take scripture seriously and in context and all of those kinds of things? How do we do it in such a way that doesn't create pain and hurt and turmoil for ourselves, for other people? And one of the questions that keeps coming up is what about hell? Does hell really make sense in light of who God is?

But if we get rid of hell, is there really any good reason to follow Jesus anymore? And what about all the people who did like, you know, admittedly awful, terrible things? Do they just get to waltz on into the gates of heaven willy-nilly because, you know, God is just so good. It doesn't really matter what we do here on earth. So these are big questions. I've been thinking about it a lot. I've been thinking about honestly for the past year that I've been here about how to answer them well. So let me start with a story.

It begins with the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Because why not? So in the late 60s A.D., there was a revolt of the Jewish population against the empire of Rome. And Rome had been dealing with these supposedly pesky Jews for a while and putting down rebellions here and there, well, where self-proclaimed messiahs would raise up and try to gather an army and Rome would have to crucify a bunch of people. And so finally, the general who eventually would become Emperor Titus takes the Roman army and besieges the city of Jerusalem. And if you know anything about sieges, things get pretty ugly pretty quickly because there's no access to food, there's no access to water, there's no access to medical supplies. And so the city eventually begins to crumble and its citizenry begins to die. So what do you do with all these dead bodies as the siege goes on and on and on?

[3:01] Well, we have reports from a Jewish historian named Josephus. And Josephus is trying to kind of play both sides of Rome and the Jews where he's trying to make the Romans seem pretty reasonable and he's trying to make the Jews sound, you know, like a group of people that you should take pity on.

And so he tells a story about the siege, about how they would take the dead bodies and they would throw them over the city walls into a valley. And we have these records of the general Titus, the Roman general Titus going and the smell being so putrid and horrible. And there would be worms that would be eating the decomposing bodies. And there would be the sound of wailing and sadness because of all of the corpses in this valley. And this valley was called Gehenna. Now, if Gehenna is ringing any bells, it's because it's a Hebrew term that in many English Bibles gets translated as hell. It was a valley where there had been human sacrifice in centuries before by kings who were not following the way of Yahweh, but of foreign idols and gods. And so Jesus comes along as a prophet who says, listen, if you continue on in the way of violence, then you will end up in Gehenna, this valley. And within a generation,

Jesus's prophecies came true. Jerusalem was the siege, bodies were thrown into the valley, and eventually the city was torn apart brick by brick and the temple destroyed. So when we talk about hell, and we talk about the Bible's perspective on hell, we have a lot of things to think through because what exactly are we talking about? Are we talking about a word, Gehenna, which is actually a valley, which then eventually gets translated in English Bibles as hell? Are we talking about the afterlife?

Are we talking about fire? Are we talking about Dante's Inferno? What are we talking about? And today in our passage of scripture, we've got this story that Jesus tells about a rich man and a poor man, and the rich man goes to Hades, a Greek concept of the afterlife, and the poor man goes to the bosom of Abraham, this paradise, wonderful place where the righteous would go. Do we take this story as about a detailed map of the afterlife, or is it about something else? So we have to deal with two things in the sermon. One, the actual meaning of this story of the rich man and Lazarus. And two, we want to talk about hell, at least some of you do.

Many of you have good, legitimate, and honest questions, and I didn't feel right about talking about this parable, and then saying like, well, it's not actually about hell, so we're not going to talk about it, even though you really want to. I have it in my notes. PP, BBB, TTT.

[6:03] So we're going to do both. Now, topic of hell, too much for one sermon. So there is going to be a hour-long podcast that I'm going to record when I'm done with this, and maybe video as well, that will go into this in the greater detail. So if you would like the bonus extended director's cut about the topic of hell, I will not subject all of our live stream viewers to that, but if you want to go get that podcast or video, we'll link to it, and you can go listen to it voluntarily because you are using your time wisely. Let's talk about Luke 16. This is what Luke 16 says. There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. This is Jesus talking.

He's telling a story. He says, at his gate, this rich man's gate, there was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, and longing to eat from what fell from the rich man's table. Now, Jesus is already being subversive here. The rich man doesn't get a name. Well, the poor man is named Lazarus.

The story continues. Even dogs came and licked Lazarus's sores. And the time came when the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side, or some translations, Abraham's bosom.

The rich man, still not named, also died and was buried. And in Hades, where the rich man was in torment, he looked up and he saw Abraham far away and Lazarus by Abraham's side. And so the rich man called to him, Father Abraham, listen, listen, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in agony in this fire. Now, the rich man, he is dead.

He is in Hades. He's experiencing agony and fire. And he sees Lazarus with Abraham, the founder of the Israelite nation, the Hebrew religion, the first friend of Yahweh in the scriptures. Rich man sees Lazarus and says, hey, can you send that lackey down to cool my tongue? So even in the fires of Hades, the rich man is still treating Lazarus as subhuman, less than, merely a servant to serve the rich man.

[8:19] And Abraham's replies, son, remember that in your lifetime you received good things while Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, there is between us a great chasm that's been set in place so that those who want to go from here to you can't, nor can anyone cross over from there to us. The rich man answered, did I beg you, Father Abraham, and send Lazarus to my family? For I have five brothers. Let him warn them so that they will not also come to this place of torment. And Abraham replied, they have Moses and the prophets, the scriptures. They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them. No, Father Abraham, the rich man says, but if someone from the dead goes to them, then they will repent. And Abraham says, if they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't even be convinced. Listen, listen, listen. This is important for Jesus followers. They won't even be convinced if someone rises from the dead. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Okay, now let's talk about how to read a parable. These are the stories that Jesus would tell in order to convey a truth to his listeners, to his audience, and he would wrap it up in the language of the day so that they could either understand or have to sit and think about it to understand. Now imagine last week we had Anna and Aaron and Heidi. They preached on three parables last week. The lost coin, lost sheep, lost son. Now imagine if they said, now the point of the parable of lost coin is that women should not be in charge of money because they always are losing stuff.

Or imagine that they said that the point of the parable of the lost sheep is that shepherds need to build bigger electrified fences so sheep don't get lost. Or that the point of the parable of the lost son the prodigal son is that if you ever have a son that returns home, the only proper meal to have is a fattened calf and any other food is unbiblical. Take that you vegans. Okay, that would be ridiculous.

Parables, when you interpret them, have a single point. They are not allegories where every single idea, point, noun, verb correlates to some other broader, bigger point, noun, verb, idea. It's not the, that's not how parables work. They have one big idea that they communicate. So imagine reading the story of the rich man and Lazarus and thinking, well, clearly we have an accurate picture-perfect description of the afterlife here. There's fire. There's a great chasm that can't be crossed.

There's agony for the wicked. Thanks to this parable of Jesus, we know exactly what the afterlife is like. Isn't that such a convenient way of missing the point about economic justice?

No, this picture, this parable is not meant to provide a picture of the afterlife. Rather, it's Jesus using the cultural language of his day, the references that his audience would know.

[11:23] Hades is a Greek idea. Abraham's bosom came from the early Jewish rabbis. Jesus is using the references and languages of his day, his culture, his audience to make a point about economic justice and righteousness. We're told, we're told in Luke 16 what the surrounding context for the story is about. Listen to the verses just above this parable. Luke 16, verses 13 through 15. Jesus says, no one can serve two masters. Either you're going to hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. And then Jesus makes it clear, you cannot serve both God and money. Verse 14, the Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this, and they sneered at Jesus. So Jesus says to them, you're the ones who justify yourselves in view of others, but God knows your hearts. What people highly value is highly detestable. Some translations say is abominable in God's sight. In the chapter before, we're given the larger topic of who's included and excluded from God's kingdom. Now, remember, when we talk about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, we're not talking about otherworldly afterlife, here beyond the kind of ideas. In Jesus's message, the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of God has arrived. It is about this worldly present idea.

So talking about who's being included and excluded in God's rule and reign today, not in the hereafter. Jesus says this, or Luke 15 says this, now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, this man, Jesus, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Oh dear God help us. So basically Jesus is showing the people in charge, the religious rulers and leaders of the day, that the people invited to take part in God's kingdoms about those least expected to be able or to be worthy. So when we take the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we're neutering the story of it's this worldly power when we try to make it an encyclopedia entry on the afterlife. This idea of economic justice is a major theme throughout the gospel of Luke. Think about Mary's song that we looked at way back in the halcyon days of December.

Luke chapter one, this is Mary, the prophet, the mother of Jesus, the Theotokos, the mother of God speaking. She says, he has performed mighty deeds with his arm. He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but he has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things and he has sent the rich away empty. Think of Jesus's very first sermon in Nazareth, Luke chapter four. The spirit of the Lord is on me, Jesus says. He's quoting Isaiah and applying it to himself because he has anointed me, Jesus says, to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. The prisoners, they should be in prison for a reason, right? No freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind. The blind, well, God obviously gave them their blindness because they're evil. No, he's proclaiming recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. The Hebrew concept of jewel will leave where all debts are released, where all lands are returned. This is what Jesus has come to proclaim. And so go figure that we hear a story about a rich man and Lazarus. And instead of making it about economic justice and the great reversal, we make it about an encyclopedia entry about heaven and hell. In the Middle Ages, this parable, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, was very popular because it was used as encouragement to give alms, to do this altruistic giving of donations to ease your conscience about the existence of the poor. And this dramatically misses the point. This is not about, you know, my couple percentage points of my salary going to make my conscience feel good. This is about the great reversal that those that our society raises up will one day be brought low. Specifically for Jesus, it's about the Pharisees and religious leaders who within one generation will be without a job when Rome comes and destroys the Jewish temple.

They've got Jesus right there in front of them, teaching, proclaiming the law and the prophets, Moses and the prophets, the Old Testament, declaring the year of Jubilee, the works of Messiah. They've got Jesus right there telling them what's important to avoid the ways of violence, to pursue the ways of peace, because it doesn't have to end this way. Someone could come back from the dead and they still wouldn't listen.

[16:17] Christo Gonzalez writes this, he says, There is no miracle capable of leading to faith and obedience when one has vested interest and values that one places above obedience to God, such as the love of money of the Pharisees whom Jesus is addressing. In other words, it doesn't matter how big the miracle is, how bold the message is, when you have vested interest in keeping the status quo the status quo, well, it doesn't matter if someone comes back from the dead, you are going to keep fighting for the status quo.

Gonzalez writes, The main obstacle to faith is not lack of proof. It is an excess of other interests and investments, of time and money and dreams and so on, in the current way things are.

Now we of course have a version of this in our own culture. Why is it that the default assumption for the poor is that the poor are the ones who have had a moral failing? That they are poor because of their actions, because of what they have done wrong or what they have failed to do? That it's the poor's fault for being poor? Is it possible that it's those with the massive accumulations of wealth who are the ones that we should default to seeing as the ones who are living in sin?

This parable, this story of the unnamed rich man and the man named Lazarus, points out that number one, our natural assumptions about the successes and moral status about the rich and the poor probably need to be questioned. And number two, there will be a great reversal. And number three, that justice and judgment go hand in hand. A rich man who knows the name of the beggar, hey Abraham, send Lazarus. Oh, you're telling on yourself now rich man, you knew the man's name and you failed to give him the scraps off of the table. The rich man knows the name of the beggar at the front of his gates, refuses to see him, refuses to care for him, and in fact continues to treat him as a mere water boy and messenger in the afterlife. This stirs something within us that cries out for justice and judgment in this life now. Scott McKnight says, justice and judgment go together. One can't want justice and not want evil and sin to be judged and erased and eliminated. Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel said that we need to distinguish between the wrath of God and the God of wrath. We want God to have wrath. Wrath, as it's been said, is when love faces evil. Wrath is the proper response to injustice. Wrath is the energy necessary to implement justice. Which of course brings us to the other half of this sermon.

Hell. Now like I said, we're going to go through this topic relatively quickly, and then there will be an extended discussion available elsewhere. But let's make just a couple of my assumptions. And when I talk about hell, when I talk about this topic, I want to be careful to not be overly prescriptive here.

[19:36] This is something that I've been thinking a lot about the verse in James that says, not a lot of you should be teachers because you will be judged more harshly. I have no interest in leading any of you astray from either your conscience or from what God has revealed to you or what you believe scripture is saying. But I do think I have some amount of ability to talk about this concept, and so here we go. But I am going to talk about this in terms of I statements and not like we statements.

So here are my assumptions. One, there is some sort of afterlife. I do believe that the soul endures after death. I believe that when God granted us the gift of existence, that that gift will not be taken away upon the death of our bodies. I believe in the afterlife. And my second assumption is that scripture, the Bible, gives us some access to knowledge and information about our eternal fate that we otherwise wouldn't have. So those are my two assumptions. If you don't share those assumptions, you may not be all that interested in what I have to say, but those are my assumptions.

Now, yes, the Bible does grant us some knowledge that we would not otherwise have about the afterlife, and the Bible does not have one single perspective on the afterlife. And if you walk away with anything from today, I want you to remember that scripture does not have one single right perspective on the afterlife. We talked about the destruction of Jerusalem, and quite often when we hear language about destruction and fire and Gehenna and worms and gnashing of teeth and all that, it's quite often dealing with today, here, now, present world kind of stuff. There wasn't a whole lot of over-philosophizing about the hereafter because there were this worldly things to be anxious about. What if the Roman army comes and surrounds our city and makes sure that we don't have food and water? These are real possibilities in that world and possibilities that the Jewish writers of the Old and New Testament were thinking about quite often because it happened on a fairly routine basis for them.

So we should be careful to not automatically assume that whenever we hear about destruction and fire and all that, we immediately don't jump to, oh, they must be talking about afterlife kind of things. Early Hebrew thought, so you go to the earliest documents that make up the Hebrew scriptures, the Old scriptures, the Old Testament. Early Hebrew thought saw death as the end with no resurrection, no place where the soul resided. They were through and through monis, meaning that there was the body and there was the soul and they belonged together, and when the body died, the soul ceased to be. This was the earliest thinking about the afterlife. And you'll see this in the book of Job, the book of Ecclesiastes. You'll see this in how the deaths are referred to in like Genesis, where people are gathered with their fathers, meaning their bones are put next to your father's bones. There's no sense of the soul continuing on. The Psalms talk about, if I go down to Sheol, a Hebrew word meaning a pit or the grave, do the dead praise you there? The psalmist asks. And the answer is no. They're dead. They're silent. There's no hope. Now, this changed over time when the Jews encountered other cultures, particularly during exile after the destruction of the first temple, then their thoughts about the afterlife began to develop. And so you get to the book of Daniel, and in the book of Daniel, you have hope of resurrection, that the righteous will shine like stars, and that their bodies will be resurrected, and the dead will be destroyed, everlastingly destroyed, that their destruction is permanent, final. It goes on forever and ever because they're destroyed. By the time of Jesus, the majority of Jews agreed with the Pharisees who believed in resurrection, for resurrection for the righteous, and in the meanwhile a pleasant waiting space, much like Abraham's bosom. The unrighteous were in a shadow world, like Sheol or Hades or the pit, where it wasn't necessarily torment, though maybe it could be, but it was mostly just a place to raid around being dead. But by the time of rabbinical Judaism, a hundred or so years later, the rabbis held that no one actually stayed in Sheol and or Hades for more than 11 months, maybe 12 if you were particularly bad. Eventually, everyone got out. Within Christian writing, within the very first centuries of the faith spanning the globe, there's what I call this horseshoe of different thoughts and perspectives. And I call it a horseshoe because the two extremes are actually closer to each other than you might otherwise realize. But you've got one horseshoe extreme of eternal conscious torment, that the unrighteous or unsaved dead are eternally consciously tormented. No hope of escape.

It is not punishment for discipline's sake, discipline for the sake of learning or change or being reformed. It is just punishment as a dead end. And it is predestined. Some streams of Christian thought hold that God unconditionally, without any thought of what the person was going to be like, decided that some, actually the majority of humanity, would end up in this eternal conscious torment, while a few elect would escape. So that's one side of the horseshoe. Then there is eternal conscious torment, but by free will. It's by people's choices that they can choose to follow the way of Jesus, or choose to follow the light that has been revealed to them in their lifetime and in their culture. And they will get to therefore spend time with God in heaven and in the afterlife, and the new heavens and the new earth. Or they so harden themselves against God and the light that that's been given to them, that they also get eternal conscious torment. But they weren't predestined there, they chose it. Then there, kind of at the middle of the horseshoe, is something called annihilation or conditionalism. And conditionalism says that our lives are not naturally immortal. Our souls are not naturally immortal. We are only offered immortality if we follow the way of Jesus or the way of God.

[25:56] And so our immortality is a condition of our choices and agreeing to live by God's standards. If we so harden ourselves against the will of God, then it is not that God destroys us. It is that God simply allows us to be annihilated, to cease to exist. As Obadiah says, that is as if we had never been. This is annihilationism. That it's not eternal conscious torment. It's not that you are suffering in the flames of the fire or the torment forever. It's just that you eventually, if you do not choose the way of God, just cease to exist. Rounding the horseshoe, there is the idea of post-mortem opportunity. That perhaps you did not get a lot of light in your life, a lot of exposure to good truth. That maybe you were told lies about Jesus, that Jesus was an evil person, that you should never follow him. Or perhaps you have trauma in your life that would lead you to never believe in

Christians or the church. And so you come to the other side of death and you realize, oh, I didn't know all the things that are meant to know. And so I have a post-mortem, after-death opportunity to choose God. And hell still exists as a place for those with hardened hearts can go.

It's probably not a place of literal flame and torment and torture, but simply the existence of, you know, hardening yourself against God and being so turned off by things like love and kindness that you've created a hell for yourself in the afterlife to exist in. Then there is near the end of the horseshoe, something called eventual or gradual or inevitable universalism. That after death, some will get to go immediately to be in the presence of God. Some have lived lives that are so hardened against God's will and God's way, that they experience a hell-like existence in the afterlife. But God's love is unrelenting. God never gives up on anyone, even after death. And so eventually those hardened hearts will soften and will make their way home towards God. And then the final end of the horseshoe, which is not actually all that far off from the first end, is automatic universalism. All roads lead to

God. And so our moral and ethical choices on earth actually have no bearing with where we spend eternity. And the reason I put these next to each other is that there's predestination to hell, or there's predestination to heaven for all, no matter what your ethical or moral decisions were on earth.

So there's your horseshoe of opportunity. Now, what you want to know is, Anthony, where do you sit in all of this? Here's where I sit. Eternal conscious torment. I think it's bad exegesis. I think it's bad reading of scripture, bad interpretation of the Bible. I think most of what Jesus talks about is warnings about AD 70, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. I think when Jesus talks about Gehenna, he's talking about a literal valley outside of Jerusalem, where bodies will be thrown and there will be flames and there will be fire because that's what happens in war. I think the fate of what happens to Jerusalem is what Jesus is talking about. I do think that there are passages that talk about the afterlife, but I don't think it should lead us to a eternal, never-ending, everlasting, conscious torment of people because I don't buy the logic of it. The typical argument in favor of eternal, conscious torment, hell, is that God is so infinitely loving, kind, just, etc., that any slight against God must lead to infinite punishment.

[29:48] But does that even work at a human level? You know, I am infinitely more intelligent than my dog. I have the ability to self-reflect. I can consider the past and the future and my dog will never have those abilities. Therefore, if my dog slights me, do I therefore have the moral ability to inflict unending conscious torment on my dog? Not even for the purpose of correcting her or disciplining her, but simply for the sake of vengeance that will never end. I mean, have you thought about how long eternity is? Can we say that God is love, God is just, that God is kind, that God's kindness leads us to repentance and in the same breath, say, those who don't choose the way of God will experience unending torment. I don't buy it. So, what about annihilation? I actually think that you can make a very strong biblical case for conditionalism or annihilation. It makes sense from a logical standpoint. God doesn't need to destroy us as an action. If we so harden ourselves against God's grace to the point that we see

God's love as hatred and God's grace as torture, then I could buy an argument that says that God, out of mercy, says, I have no interest in you experiencing me as torture and I will simply withdraw the thing that allows you to exist so you stop existing. But I also feel that this doesn't do justice to what Scripture promises. In the New Testament, Colossians 2 Corinthians speaks repeatedly of the reconciliation of all things, including the things under the earth, typical language for those who have died. It speaks of everyone everyone, bowing their knee and declaring Jesus as Lord. And so, do we take that everyone as what it says or everyone, parenthesis, except those who were annihilated? If my child were to make a sustained effort to choose pain and hurt and self-harm, yeah, there may come a point where I realize I can't rescue them, I can't make choices for them, I can't save them all by myself, that they have to make their own choices, but do I ever get to the point where I completely and utterly reject them, give up on them? A major tenet of my theology, my view of God, is that the God, the good gifts that God gives his people,

God gives creation, cannot then be taken away. James chapter 1, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

So, what about the idea that all paths lead to God? Well, this kind of belief is easy if you have not experienced traumatic or sustained violence in your life. It smacks of gross injustice. Take your favorite villain from history, Christopher Columbus, Hitler, Cruella de Vil. They die, unrepentant, in fact, believing that their horrendous actions were actually good. And they show up in the presence of a infinitely loving, kind, self-sacrificing, others-oriented, merciful God. And we're supposed to believe that, one, they're suddenly ushered in with no issues whatsoever, and two, that they're even cool with this? Could a person that has set their lives on a course of violence, destruction, mean-spiritedness, evil, encounter the presence of God and think, yeah, I want to spend eternity with Him? I'm not sure that works. It also means that we have to buy into an idea that our moral and ethical choices have no lasting consequences. So, where does that leave me? To quote Bradley Jurczak,

I am more hopeful in Jesus than I am sure of hell. I recognize that our choices have consequences and that there is a deep-seated need for justice and righteousness that I think is cheapened when we say that all roads lead to God. All roads? Are we sure? But I also recognize that I want to take the words of Scripture seriously. When Colossians 1 says that all creation will be reconciled with God, I believe that all means all. I believe in Revelation 21 that says that the new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem, her gates will never be shut. And that any who desire to come in need only wash their robes, and that they can have access to the tree of life. And so I guess this makes me an inevitable universalist. That on the other side of death, that if we experience God's glory, God's goodness, God's infinite justice and righteousness and love and kindness, that there are those who will experience that and experience it as as a consuming fire. My daughter Audrey, when she was like two or three, she hated band-aids. And so she would fall down, scrape her knee on cement, and it would bleed. And so we would put a band-aid on it with some mysitracin. And she would scream bloody murder because she hated band-aids even though we knew that this was the best way to care for her. And I think for some, they will experience the loving and kind presence of God and experience it as a band-aid they hate to receive. And inevitably, it will bring healing.

[35:27] I believe that God's love is relentless. I believe that when we die, God's character does not suddenly change. That when Jesus says that we are to love our enemies, that God is not somehow exempted from that love. I believe that eternity is a really long time. And to believe that God could somehow torment for no purpose, no redemption, no justification, but torment someone for eternity does not compute with the kind of God with the kind of God that I know. So that's where I'm at. If you want to hear more, then there will be a longer version of this on podcasts and online. But yeah, how does, how does, how do we end today? One, don't forget how to read a parable. Parables are not meant to be read as allegories with one-to-one correlations. The point of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is the fact that it's about economic justice, about the great reversal. And there's an irony in the fact that even in today's sermon, we kind of skimmed over that fact to get to talk about the juicy topic of hell. We have some soul searching to do about where do we fit in, in that story of the rich man and

Lazarus and those who dropped the beggar off at the gates of the rich man, but didn't actually do anything other than that. We've got some questions to ask. On the topic of hell itself, I want you to remember that scripture gives a broad list of perspectives on this question. And so we have to make some choices about how we're going to read scripture and how we're going to treat another, one another, when we encounter different perspectives. I think that there is something within us that cries out for justice, that wants there to be some amount of recompense for the evils and the violence done here on earth. But there's also a part of us that recognizes that if I would not inflict unending conscious torment on my creation, on my children, on others in the world, why do I think that God would do that? If I am putting myself in a position where I seem more morally pure than God, then maybe I need to think things through a bit more. So with that, would you pray with me?

Almighty God, in this sermon we have talked about things where I imagine angels might dare to tread. God. And so we come to you with a large dose of humility, recognizing that we need to start with the things that we know about you. We know that you are loving. We know that you are kind. We know that you came in the person of Jesus Christ and you died for us, that you are about self-sacrificing, others-oriented love. We start with that, God. And then we refuse to be dogmatic about much anything else.

God, I do trust and I do believe that your love is unrelenting, that your character does not change simply because our bodies cease to breathe and to beat. God, I do believe that you are righteous and that you are just and that you will perform a great reversal in the new heaven, in the new earth, that will make all things well and all manner of things well. And so, God, I throw myself upon your mercy. I throw my intellect upon your grace. I throw my heart and my will upon your good will, trusting and believing that you will work all things out, that as Abraham prayed, you will be just, you will be good.

God, I do believe that you will be good. Help us to believe that, we pray. Amen. . .