

"I am tormented in this flame."

Luke 16 vv.19-31.

Quiet a moment! Just listen! ... Music! Where is the music coming from? ..
Let us find out.

In our imagination we step into a large house. Marble pillars support the palacial ceilings. The walls are hung with costly tapestries. The furnishings are all of equal elegance and beauty. No expense or trouble has been spared to add to the comforts. Many servants and maid servants walk busily hither and thither.

In one of the apartments there is a great table decked with the most sumptuous food. The finest wine glistens in the crystal glasses. Beautiful dishes are laden with meats and other food. What splendour, what wealth!

And there, at the head of the table, sits the owner of it all. He is clothed in purple and fine linen. Every day is a feast day in his home. Every day he has more than enough to eat and to drink. Every day he lives amid such wealth and pomp. He knows nothing of misery and poverty. Life's troubles do not press upon him for he has no worries. He orders just what he wants, for he has plenty of money. He has plenty of friends, as many as he wishes.

He lacks nothing to complete his happiness and prosperity; nothing disturbs his untroubled life.

No, he spares not a moment's thought on death. He prefers not to think about that. He wanted things always to remain just as they were.

Still less does he give a thought to God. He has no need of the Lord. He can manage quite well on his own.

This then was the life of this extraordinarily rich man.

Come now, let us leave, for we have had a good look at it all. We leave the magnificent palace and step through the great gate to the outside world.

All at once we hear a quiet groan. Oh, who is that? ... Oh, just look, what a poor wretch. There by the gate lies a poor beggar. This beggar wears no fine clothes, his body is covered with a few rags. Furthermore he is suffering terrible pain. He is covered all over with ugly, painful boils. He is almost friendless.

But still, now and then the dogs come up to him and they lick his burning sores. That gives some measure of relief to his great suffering.

He sees the wealth and luxury of the rich man. He sees how the servants ~~xxx~~ throw out the food that is left over. He looks with longing eyes at these crumbs for at times his poor body is almost perished with hunger. We do not read in the Bible that he was given any of this food. Probably not.

What a difference between the rich man and the poor beggar.

The rich man knows him. The beggar's name is Lazarus. When he goes out to visit his friends he always sees him lying by the gate of his house. He may well have been annoyed to see him there, but he has not dared to drive him away. But neither has he had the poor sufferer brought indoors. He does not see that his painful sores are washed and bound up. Nor does he ever let Lazarus join in eating of the delicacies of his table.

No indeed, he would rather have nothing to do with this beggar. How selfish was he not? Are you the same? Do you show any concern for a poor person? ...

On a certain day Lazarus is not to be found lying by the gate as usual. Why is that? ... Well, Lazarus is dead! At last he is released from his suffering. The rich man will see him no more on earth. Now he is rid of the beggar.

We read nothing about a funeral. Probably in some lonely place he was buried by some strangers. It was no great funeral. Of course not. He evidently had no family and few friends. The rich man certainly did not attend. Certainly not!

Secretly this lordly gentleman was glad to be rid of such a nuisance.

Poor Lazarus! ... No indeed, quite the contrary! Read what the Bible says: "He was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."

Now, what does that mean? ... Well, it is perfectly simple. His soul went straight to heaven, for Lazarus was a child of God. On earth he was poor and afflicted, but in heaven he is rich and happy. There he suffers no more pain; there he sings God's glory for evermore.

Abraham is there, and there too is Lazarus, the poor beggar man.

Look, a solemn and stately procession is leaving the rich man's palace. In front walk some men who are carrying a coffin with great reverence.

Numerous relatives, friends and acquaintances follow behind.

In that coffin lies ... the rich man! He is being taken from his home for the last time, for he too is dead. He may not have given death much thought,

but death came all the same, unexpectedly for him also. He had to leave everything behind - everything.

There they take him to his last resting place to the grave. Doubtless it was a magnificent tomb, hewn out of the rock and with a great stone before the opening. Everything is done to show that a very distinguished man is being borne to the grave. They show their last respects.

But ... just read also what God's Word says about him: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments."

How terrible! ... The time of mercy for him was past. His happy and untroubled life was over - for good. Now he is in ~~xxx~~ torment, in unbearable pain, in everlasting pain.

What a difference between these two. The tables are turned.

"He lift up his eyes, being in torments," and ... shocked, he sees in the distance, Abraham. And with Abraham, in his bosom lies Lazarus. The poor, despised, neglected Lazarus.

He cries with a loud voice. What does he cry? ... Just read it.

"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

No, he does not ask for Lazarus to bring him a glass of water, but his request is that Lazarus may dip just the tip of his finger in water and touch but his tongue, which is dry and burning with pain. Oh, if only those dry lips could just once be moistened, what a relief that would be. For this he longs.

How dreadful it will be in hell! Just think about it.

The rich man longed for just one drop of water. Yet he still wants to use Lazarus as a servant. Oh, he was used to being waited upon.

And was his prayer answered? ... No!

Abraham replies: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented."

Do you hear that? The one drop of water is refused him. Is that not cruel and unmerciful? ... No children, that judgment is righteous. His whole lifetime he had despised the glory of heaven. He had never had the slightest desire for it.

Now the time of grace is gone for him. He can no longer be shown mercy.

Furthermore Lazarus cannot come to him, for Abraham continues: "Between us and you is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot." Yes, that gulf separates them for ever.

At once the rich man asks: "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."

But this request too is refused.

"They have Moses and the prophets," Abraham replies, "let them hear them." In the law and the prophets there are clear and repeated warnings.

"Nay, father Abraham," the rich man persists, "but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent."

But Abraham's reply is: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." If they reject God's Word, then they will certainly reject the preaching of Lazarus.

What a strange story, isn't it?

But listen, this is not history, this is a parable, spoken by the Lord Jesus when He was walking through Perea.

This then is a parable, for in fact those condemned to hell cannot see God's people in heaven, neither can they speak to them.

Yet this parable, this example, is full of warnings for us too. Here we can learn how terrible it shall be in hell. There we shall get not the least drop of water to quench our burning thirst. There nothing remains but everlasting, unbearable pain.

Boys and girls, take notice of this, believe this. No, I do not want to frighten you, but this is the truth.

When you have pain here, then your mother does all that she can to lessen it. She nurses you with love and endless patience. But that will not happen in the world of endless ruin. There you will suffer everlasting pain, but there your mother will not help you. There you will have to bear God's wrath for ever.

And you are warned also. God's Word warns. God's servants, the ministers warn you. At Sunday School you are warned. Is that not sufficient? Do you need still more? ...

No, you will not have more warnings.

Does nothing have any effect? ... Then one day the time will come when you too will lift up your eyes in hell - and then it will be too late.

Oh kneel down and pray God to save you from that fearful lifeless condition. Ask Him to make you alive through His Word and Spirit. That is necessary, yes - rather, it is indispensable; for otherwise ... I hardly dare to say it: otherwise you will be for ever damned.
