

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF HELL

Luke 16:19-26

INTRODUCTION:

You have, no doubt, heard of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World is the first known list of the most remarkable creations of classical antiquity, and was based on guidebooks popular among Greek sightseers. The historian Herodotus (484—ca. 425 BCE), and the scholar Callimachus of Cyrene (ca. 305—240 BCE) at the Museum of Alexandria, made early lists of Seven Wonders. Their list of the seven wonders included:

- Great Pyramid of Giza (Thought to be the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and the only one still in existence)
- Hanging Gardens of Babylon
- Statue of Zeus at Olympia
- Temple of Artemis at Ephesus
- Mausoleum of Maussollos at Halicarnassus
- Colossus of Rhodes
- Lighthouse of Alexandria

Other lists of Seven Wonders include the Seven Wonders of the Natural World (which includes the Grand Canyon, the Great Barrier Reef and Victoria Falls in southern Africa); the Seven Wonders of the Medieval World (including Stonehenge, The Great Wall of China and the Leaning Tower of Pisa); and the Seven Wonders of the Modern World (such as The Golden Gate Bridge, the Channel Tunnel and the CN Tower in Toronto, Canada). I'm working on a list of the Seven Wonders of Clay County...and I only have about seven to go, in case you want to nominate anything...or anyone.

But this morning, I am not going to be preaching about any of these lists of seven wonders. I want to speak to you about a different list of Seven Wonders...just as real and far more relevant. This morning I want to talk to you about the Seven Wonders of Hell.

Would you read along with me from Luke 16:19-31?

¹⁹ *“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

²² *“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, 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.'

²⁵ *"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*

²⁷ *"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'*

²⁹ *"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'*

³⁰ *"'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'*

³¹ *"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Among the Seven Wonders of Hell is:
I. IT IS A WONDER THAT HELL EXISTS

A Gallop Poll taken in 1994 revealed that 93% of Americans believe in heaven; but only 54% believe in hell. In contrast, a 2003 survey by the Barna Research Group found that, according to their statistics, 76% of Americans believe in heaven and 71% believe in hell.

But do you know what? It really doesn't matter what most Americans think. We can't vote hell into or out of existence. Hell is. It is real. It is not a legend, a fable or an urban myth. It is not something that theologians thought up to theorize what happens after we die. It is not something that preachers dreamed up just to scare people. Hell is factual, actual, real and true. In fact, did you know that Jesus said more about hell than any author in the Bible? He knew that it existed and he wanted us to know.

Jesus wanted us to know that hell is real so we would not end up there. And God wants us to know that hell is real so we will not end up there. The Bible says that God does not want anyone to perish but rather He wants everyone to come to eternal life in Christ.

Jesus wants you to know that hell is real. God wants you to know that hell is real. And I want you to know that hell is real because I want you to avoid it.

I also want you to know that God created hell. But he did not create it for man. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus said, *"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* God

created hell but he didn't create it for you. He created it as a prison in which to contain the devil and his angels.

God did not create hell for people but that doesn't mean that people will not go there. They most certainly will. But God doesn't want that for anyone and He doesn't want it for you. Jesus doesn't want you to go to hell. And I don't want you to, either.

II. IT IS A WONDER THAT HELL IS ETERNAL

It is a wonder that hell exists and it is a wonder that it is eternal. Hell has a beginning: God created it. But hell has no end.

In Isaiah 66:22-24, the prophet quotes God in a dreadful prediction:

²² *"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.* ²³ *From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD. ²⁴ "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."*

For those who rebelled against God, their worm will never die...NEVER; nor will their fire be quenched...EVER.

In Matthew 3:11-12, speaking of his own ministry, John the Baptist said,
¹¹ *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

"Unquenchable fire," he said. That means it doesn't end. It is everlasting. It is eternal.

Hell is not a temporary state. It is not a transitional phase through which we pass for a time until we are purged from our sins. It is a permanent destination for those who go there. And it is final. No second chance. No "do-overs". No "Mulligans". And no escape.

It is a wonder that hell exists and it is a wonder that it is eternal.

III. IT IS A WONDER THAT HELL IS SO AWFUL

Four different times in our text for this morning, Jesus uses the word "torment" to describe hell. It is a place of torment. In the Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written, that word means anguish or severe pain. It is a wonder that hell is so awful.

Most often, it is described as a place of utter darkness and a lake of burning sulfur and unquenchable fire. Have you ever had a bad burn? You know the pain. Now imagine that over every square inch of your body. And now imagine that it never ends. There is never any relief or respite. Nothing ever gets numb to the pain. That is the way the Bible describes the awfulness of hell.

This past few weeks, we've seen many pictures of the erupting volcano in Iceland. Imagine being cast into that molten inferno but never being consumed. The authors of the Bible searched all the language at their disposal to come up with a way of conveying the awfulness of hell and that is the picture they have left for us.

But that's not all; there is more. If you were to go there, just consider the neighbors with whom you would share hell: liars, thieves, adulterers, mass murderers, pedophiles and the like: people for whom no crime was too severe and no sin too sinful, people without moral restraint and without conscience.

Not only that, but the devil and his angels would be your cellmates. I've been told that one of the most fearful things about being incarcerated in one of our prisons is the thought of the people with whom you share the space...and what they would do to you if they got the chance. Hell is all that and worse.

Then add to that the fact that in hell you will have memories...and regrets. You will recall the opportunities you had to accept salvation but you let those opportunities pass you by. You will remember loved ones from whom you are now parted and who are enjoying the glories of heaven.

No wonder that in Mark 9, Jesus said it would be better to be maimed, crippled and blind than to be cast into hell. It is that awful.

IV. IT IS A WONDER THAT HELL IS A PLACE OF PRAYER

Would it surprise you to know that there is prayer in hell? Did you notice in our text for this morning that the rich man, from his place in hell, was praying? He prayed for relief, if even just a drop of relief. He prayed for the chance to warn his brothers who were still alive. Why, in Revelation 6:15 we are told that they will even pray to the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them and hide them from the face of Jesus and from his wrath. Oh, yes, there will be prayer in hell but it will be to no avail.

V. IT IS A WONDER THAT SO MANY PEOPLE WILL GO THERE

The Bible says that the road that leads to the destruction of hell is wide and that many will travel it. Most people don't seem to believe that. The Barna Survey that showed that 76% of Americans believe in heaven and

that 71% believe in hell, also revealed that less than ½ of 1% believe they are going there. That is in contrast to the clear teaching of Jesus that many will go to hell.

I've already said that in hell, your neighbors would be mass murderers, pedophiles, thieves and liars. But you know who else will be there? Some good moral people will be there. Good moral people who have not accepted Jesus as their savior will not escape hell because goodness and morality will not save anyone. If our goodness and our morality could save us from hell, we wouldn't need a savior: we could earn our own salvation. But we can't earn it. We don't deserve it.

That being said, you also need to know that some of your neighbors will be there. Some of your friends will be there. Some of your family will be there. Anyone who has not accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior will go to hell. I know that isn't a popular message and I know some will find that disturbing but it is the truth. That is why it is a wonder that so many people will go there.

The reason for the wonder of so many people going to hell is a sixth wonder:

VI. IT IS A WONDER THAT IT IS SO EASY TO GO TO HELL

It is really easy to go to hell. Do you know what you have to do to go to hell? Nothing. That's all. Nothing. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We have all lived beneath our calling, beneath our privilege, beneath our station as children of God. That having been said, what do we need to do to go to hell? Not one thing. Just keep doing what we are doing and that is where we will be...for eternity.

VII. IT IS A WONDER THAT HELL IS SO EASY TO AVOID

It may seem to be a paradox but it is true that while it is easy to go to hell, it is easy to avoid it, also. Hell was not prepared for man but people will go there because people have disobeyed God and have violated His laws. All of us have. So all of us are bound for hell. And it is easy to go there if we just do nothing.

But it is easy to avoid hell if we will only accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. Let me explain very clearly and very simply how that is done.

- Accept that you have sinned and have broken God's laws. Don't try to minimize it, excuse it or blame someone else. Just simply acknowledge that you have sinned.
- Trust Jesus Christ to save you from the penalty of your sin. Admit that you can't save yourself and acknowledge that Jesus alone can save you because he has already paid the price for your sin.
- Confess before others that you have sinned and that you are accepting Jesus as your savior.

- Be baptized into Jesus Christ as a symbol that:
 1. You are being cleansed of your sins
 2. Your former self is being buried with Christ so you can be raised with him
 3. You are immersing yourself into Christ, plunging into a life filled with Jesus
- Then walk with him daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, whom you receive at the time of your baptism

See? It is really easy to avoid hell. You don't have to pray your way out. You don't have to pay your way out. You don't have to work your way out or even find your way out. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man comes to the Father except by me."

I hope you are persuaded to accept God's simple plan for salvation. I hope you are not simply almost persuaded but are fully persuaded to come as we sing.

#470 in The New Church Hymnal – *"Almost Persuaded"*