

Blaming God

"I beg you...to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

Luke 16:27–28 (ESV)

We are always blaming God for our sins and failures. We tend to take the credit for our good accomplishments, and blame God for all the bad stuff.

Jesus told this story of the rich man and Lazarus when the Pharisees were verbally attacking him. Along with the famous parable of the prodigal son, Jesus gave this story as a rebuke to the Pharisees. In the story, the rich man now in torment can see "father Abraham" in peace and comfort across an unbridgeable divide. He asks Abraham to give him just a drop of water to relieve his suffering, but Abraham, says the divide between them prevents Abraham from crossing over to him and the rich man from crossing over to Abraham. The rich man then asked Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn the rich man's brothers, but Abraham, refused to do so.

At first blush we may take the rich man's entreaties as evidence of a repentant spirit, and a desire to save his family from his own fate. But that is not what the story reveals. The rich man is simply blaming God for his current state of affairs. In fact, the rich man is saying that, if God had only been fair, if God had given him a fair chance through a fair warning, the rich man would have changed his ways and avoided his fate. He is in torment because God let him down by failing to give him a fair chance through a fair warning. It is God's fault that he is in torment, not his own fault.

Mankind continually makes this argument to God. The rich man mistakenly thinks that, if something dramatic were done such as Lazarus returning from dead, his family and others would be so amazed and startled by such a miracle that they would repent and be in proper relationship with God. Jesus tells this story as a rebuke to the Pharisees who witnessed miracle after miracle and still violently opposed Him. This story is also a rebuke to all those who, in the face of Jesus's life death and resurrection, all his miracles and the Bible, *still* continually ignore or oppose Him. We learn several things from this text. Miracles were given to authenticate Jesus's deity and His status as Messiah. Miracles are not designed to convert. We come to faith through the preaching of the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."¹

In addition, the bible is full of warnings. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."² "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."³ "[T]he sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."⁴ Jesus talks about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. Love compelled Jesus to give stark, fair warnings.

Finally, we learn from the story of the rich man and Lazarus that each person who ends up in hell ends up there by his or her own efforts. Heaven is not earned; it is

¹ Romans 10:17 (ESV)

² Matthew 4:17 (ESV)

³ John 8:24 (ESV)

⁴ Matthew 8:12 (ESV)

God's gift of grace. In contrast, hell is earned. We are not *saved* by our own efforts, but we are *condemned* by our own efforts. All sin must be punished, and it is always punished in the flesh. Either our sins are punished in the flesh through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ or our sins are punished through our own flesh. The choice is ours. Hell is always man's fault.