

Luke 16:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

Analysis

The rich man's torment: 'And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.' The location is 'hell' (ᾗδης, hadē, Hades)—the place of the dead, here specifically the compartment of torment. He 'lift up his eyes' (ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ, eparas tous ophthalmous autou) suggests conscious awareness. He is 'in torments' (ἐν βασάνοις, en basanois, in tortures)—plural, indicating multiple forms of suffering. He sees Abraham 'afar off' (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν, apo makrothen) and Lazarus 'in his bosom'—the recognition increases his anguish. The man who ignored Lazarus at his gate now sees him honored while he suffers. Hell involves both physical torment and psychological anguish—seeing what you've lost.

Historical Context

This passage provides crucial revelation about intermediate state between death and resurrection. Contra annihilationism, the rich man consciously exists in torment. Contra soul sleep, he's fully aware. Contra universalism, his condition isn't temporary—the great gulf (v. 26) is fixed. Jesus teaches that hell is real, conscious, torturous, and irreversible. The parable doesn't detail hell's full nature (final judgment after resurrection will be worse, Revelation 20:11-15), but establishes that unbelievers immediately enter conscious suffering at death. This contradicts popular notions that death ends existence or that everyone eventually goes to heaven. Hell is Jesus' clearest teaching.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' vivid description of hell challenge contemporary attempts to soften or eliminate this doctrine?
2. What does seeing Abraham and Lazarus add to the rich man's torment?
3. How should belief in hell's reality affect Christian evangelism and urgency?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἐν	τῷ	ᾗδῃ	ἐπάρας	τοὺς	ὀφθαλμοὺς	αὐτοῦ
And	in	G3588	hell	he lift up	G3588	eyes	his
G2532	G1722		G86	G1869		G3788	G846
ὑπάρχων	ἐν	βασάνοις	ὁρᾷ	τὸν	Ἀβραάμ	ἀπὸ	
being	in	torments	and seeth	G3588	Abraham	off	
G5225	G1722	G931	G3708		G11	G575	
μακρόθεν	καὶ	Λάζαρον	ἐν	τοῖς	κόλποις	αὐτοῦ	
afar	And	Lazarus	in	G3588	bosom	his	
G3113	G2532	G2976	G1722		G2859	G846	

Additional Cross-References

2 Peter 2:4 (Parallel theme): For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

Psalms 9:17 (Parallel theme): The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

Matthew 23:33 (Parallel theme): Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Matthew 18:9 (Parallel theme): And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Luke 16:28 (Parallel theme): For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Revelation 20:10 (Parallel theme): And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Isaiah 14:9 (Parallel theme): Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

Isaiah 14:15 (Parallel theme): Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Matthew 5:22 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew 5:29 (Parallel theme): And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.