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SOMETHING WORSE THAN GOING TO HELL

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Pope Benedict used a mass in the suburbs of Rome Sunday to remind people that Hell is a very real place.

But the latest research from Barna Associates shows that only 32 percent of adults see Hell as, "an actual place of torment and suffering where people's souls go after death." Why the low number? Clergy of all denominations agree that the Church has been ominously silent about Hell - "You can traverse the entire United States on any given Sunday morning, and you very probably will not hear a sermon on the judgment of God or eternal punishment. Why has God's chosen Spiritual leaders silenced their voices? Do they not believe in Hell, or do they no longer have the courage and conviction to stand and say anything about it?"

Author and theologian R.C. Sproul said, "If you are their pastor, not just their preacher, and they know that you're for them, it's amazing how many of these hard spiritual sermons they're willing to listen to, and that in turn motivates Christians to improve their lives and their relationship with humanity. As pastors we're not supposed to add offense to the Gospel. But if we try to take the offense that is already there out, then we're offending God and we're offending Christ. And we're not proclaiming the whole counsel of God."

Jesus came to tell us everyone is wanted in paradise, and that Hell, about which little gets said today, exists and is eternal for those who shut their hearts to His love.

A poll conducted by *US News and World Report* revealed that more Americans today believe in Hell than they did in the 1950s or even 10 years ago. But most now think of hell as "an anguished state of existence" rather than a real place. [*US News and World Report*. "Hell Hath No Fury." January 31, 2000. p. 46]

I assure you that the Satan believes in a real Hell. You may not believe in hell this morning, and you may think that it is just a state of mind. We don't like thinking about the reality of Hell because, "I don't believe that a good god will send anyone to Hell." The statement is based on error and inconsistency. We never make the

statement, “How could a good judge sentence a mass murderer to death for his crimes against humanity?” The man is being sentenced for his actions. Thus Apostle Paul says in **Romans 11:22**, “*Therefore consider the goodness and the severity of God...*” Humanity will be judged by its actions.

This morning’s message is based in part on a sermon I heard several years ago from a fire-and-brimstone pastor. While much can be said about the consequences of dying apart from Christ, this message is about something worse than going to Hell, something better than going to Heaven. For now we will just discuss something worse than going to Hell.

I know what you are thinking. Pastor Clarissa, how could anything be worse than going to Hell? If you will give me just a few minutes, when I’m done I’m sure you will be able to say that the preacher was right, there is something worse than going to Hell, and something better than going to Heaven.

Jeremiah 8:20-22 *The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.
For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.*

*Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor people
not been restored?*

In context this passage is about the judgment of God that would result in no harvest for the Jews. But for the purpose of this message we will take it to be the cry of lost souls in Hell.

This crying over a lack of harvest is something more and more farmers are saying. Imagine working a whole year and in the end having nothing to show for it because your crops could not stand the test of frost or the test of rain or the test of scorching heat and drought.

Similarly, because peoples lives won’t measure up, the text in **Jeremiah 8:20** *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*, is one that will undoubtedly be repeated many times in Hell by those who will weep and wail that they squandered their opportunity to get saved, and get right with God, but did not.

SUMMER IS COME, HARVEST IS PAST, AND STILL WE ARE NOT SAVED!
Isn't that the cry of the rich man in **Luke 16**? Now think about this:

The rich man in **Luke 16** was crying over 2,000 years ago to have a finger dipped in water to touch his tongue. He is still crying over 2,000 years later! He will still be crying until Jesus returns, and yet you ask, "Pastor, how can you say there is something worse than going to Hell?"

Well, I guess I have made you sit on the edge of your seat long enough, the one thing that is worse than going to Hell is.... GOING TO HELL AND TAKING SOMEONE WITH YOU.

I had to talk with friends who recently just moved out of the inner city because their 15-year-old son had been seemingly out of control and dabbling with a gang. Having had a bad experience with the church (little c) – but honestly with the church folks - the parents' backslid and only attended church once or twice a year. When I told them there was one thing worse than going to Hell and what it was, there was a deep regretful painful groan.

How could you do such a thing to friends you might ask? I don't want these parents in Hell with their son. It's regrettable if they as back sliding Christians go there, but their sorrow will be doubled to hear their son cry and say, "Mommy, Daddy, why didn't you warn me about this place?! Mommy, Daddy, why didn't you set a better example before me?! Mommy, Daddy, why did you stop bringing me to church, to Sunday School to Youth Group where there were kids like me?!"

If you don't know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, journey with me 1,000 years into the future, and this is you speaking, "Summer is come, harvest is past, and I am doomed." It is doubly maddening because you will cry out and say, "that preacher told me, 'O why, O why didn't I listen to her when it could have made a difference?'" I pray to God you don't go there, and if you do go there despite my prayers, I pray you go alone. I am afraid though, that Hell is going to be full of children angry with their parents and brothers crying to their brothers and sisters crying to their sisters and cousins crying to their cousins and classmates crying to their classmates for their poor example and bad influence. I don't think anybody goes to Hell alone; I think the power of influence is much stronger than we would like to imagine.

Perhaps the rich man in **Luke 16** was so concerned for his 5 brothers because he knew he had set a bad example for them, and as bad as Hell was, it horrified him

that his brothers would wind up there also. You see there is one thing worse than going to Hell, and that is taking someone with you.

And if you haven't figured it out already, the one thing that is better than going to Heaven - it's taking someone with you.

Jeremiah 8:22 asks - *Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?*

This is God's indictment to the Church? *For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?*

Astonishment hath taken hold of God. What astonished Him? That there was balm available and yet it was not applied. This thought reminds me of another verse:

Isaiah 59:16 *He saw that there was no one, and wondered why there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him.*

What made God wonder?

1. God knew prayer was effective, and God wondered why people weren't praying.
2. God sees souls rowing towards the edge of life and making life changing decisions, and we as Christians are aware, and God wonders why we aren't interceding and pleading for their souls. Church, take your eyes off the sunset and look with urgency for a moment downstream! Now is the day of salvation, there is no opportunity after this life. God knows we know the condition of the world and wonders why we aren't doing more.
3. God knows that those who are aware of the danger are also those who know that prayer works! But instead of praying about those in mortal danger, our prayers often concern trifling matters of creature comforts. If your prayers were scientifically studied, how would they be categorized?
90% for self-needs. 9% for other friends' needs. 1% for lost souls?

If that describes you, then it is no wonder God wonders. As if that weren't enough, another reason that God wonders is that He knows that we know there is something better than going to Heaven, and that is taking someone with you. It has to amaze God when He sees the unconcern in His people.

In our text, God was trying to get the attention of the Rich man. He threw a brick at him everyday. The brick's name was Lazarus. Every day Lazarus laid at the gate of the rich man, hoping that the rich man would have compassion upon him.....and every day the Rich man ignored the brick that God threw at him. He looked out his window and there was Lazarus. He walked out the gate, and right past him ignoring him and in doing so ignoring God. God was trying to get him to stop to pay attention! It was an opportunity for him to use the things that God had given to him, but he never slowed down enough to notice all the things that had obstructed his view. Is there a Lazarus lying outside our gate this morning? Is God trying to hit us with a brick?

I wonder how many here were responsible for someone else starting doing drugs, or drinking, or getting them involved in sinful acts. That is, you are the one that introduced them to these things, and today you are on your way to Heaven and they are on their way elsewhere.

“One day, when Vice-President Calvin Coolidge was presiding over the Senate, one senator angrily told another to go 'straight to Hell.' The offended Senator complained to Coolidge as presiding officer, and Coolidge looked up from the book he had been leafing through while listening to the debate and wittily replied. 'I've looked through the rule book,' he said, 'You don't have to go there.'”
[*Crossroads*. Issue 7, p. 16] You really don't have to go; you can heed the Word of God, repent and be saved.

Once we have that matter established in our own lives, then we must think of others. Each of us today knows people who have no idea where they will spend eternity. Some of you even know people who are positive that they are going to Hell. And yet you refuse to say anything to them about it. When you keep your mouth shut, you are really shouting at the top of your lungs, “You can go to Hell!” But is that really what you mean to be saying?

The Bible says there will be no tears in Heaven, and part of the reason we won't groan for the unsaved is because it wouldn't do them any good. If you are going to weep for souls, you have to do it now right at this very moment while it can do some good, lest your family, friends or enemy come to that unhappy day where they say, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended and still I was not saved."

SOMETHING BETTER THAN GOING TO HEAVEN AND THAT'S TAKING YOU WITH ME! AMEN! AMEN! AMEN!