

**[NOTE TO THE READER:** On the first Sunday following Mother’s Day each year, the Booher Cemetery (near the building of the Mill Creek Church of Christ) has a “Decoration Day,” at which time relatives of those who are buried in the memorial park gather to decorate the gravesites and fondly remember those who are interred in the cemetery. On Sunday afternoon, May 16, 2010, Blake was invited to present the main address to those assembled for that occasion. His remarks were warmly received, and deeply appreciated, by all those in attendance. While his comments were not a “sermon,” per se, we nevertheless felt that they deserved to be posted on our Website along with Blake’s other lessons. We believe you will enjoy, and profit from, what Blake had to say.]

## **“THE GREAT GULF”**

Presented by

**Blake Brown**

We humans are a busy bunch, aren’t we? Most of the time our days are consumed with the hustle and bustle associated with all sorts of activities—some normal, and some not so normal; some expected, and some quite unexpected. We get up in the morning, make our beds, take a shower, eat a quick breakfast, spend a lot of time at school or at work, grab a bite of lunch, buy groceries, do homework, attend meetings, mow the lawn, participate in sports, go to church, watch a movie on our DVR, do the laundry, and a dozen or more other things that we somehow manage to squeeze into our “never long enough/always too short” 24-hour days.

We use Palm Pilots to manage our hectic schedules. We use I-Phones to ensure that we are never out of touch with family members. We use Instant Messaging to communicate with people we are too busy to phone. We e-mail friends and coworkers from our Blackberries to make sure that we remain updated on important issues. And we send text messages to people who are away from their computers for any length of time (the poor souls!). Yes, we humans are indeed a busy bunch.

In fact, we generally are **so** busy that it takes something unusual to get us to slow down long enough to, as the old saying suggests, “stop and smell the roses.” And it takes something **really** out of the ordinary to cause us to pause long enough to actually assess our activities and our priorities, doesn’t it? Let’s face it: taking a long, hard look at our lives is not one of our favorite things to do. After all, if we started asking questions like,

“I wonder if there’s anything in my life that I need to improve”

or

“I wonder if there’s anything in my life that I need to change?”

or

“I wonder if there’s anything in my life that I shouldn’t be doing”

or

“I wonder if there’s anything in my life that I’m not doing now, but should be doing?,”

there’s no telling **what** kind of honest responses we might be forced to give to such inquiries.

Unfortunately, sometimes it takes either a tragedy or a near tragedy to cause us to make some changes in our lives. Those “wake-up calls,” as we usually refer to them, come in various shapes and sizes, don’t they? Maybe a 50-year-old man, who thought he was “healthy as a horse,” has a heart attack and finds himself flat on his back on a gurney in a hospital emergency room. Maybe a mother of two children narrowly escapes serious injury or death one afternoon as she is on her way to the beauty shop, and another driver runs a stop sign, crashing his vehicle into hers. Or, maybe a family member or friend dies suddenly and unexpectedly, leaving us to think about our own mortality.

Today I would like to ask you to pause and take a look at the graves that surround you in this cemetery. Do you think it is possible that some of the people who are buried here departed this life before they were ready to die? My guess is that some of them did.

Truth be told, we sometimes get so busy with our daily activities that we forget something very important: **this life is not all there is!** As humans, we are composed of two parts—a physical body and an immortal soul. King Solomon, the wisest human who ever lived, reminded us of that fact when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:7 that “the dust will return to the earth as it was, but the spirit will return to God who gave it.” While our bodies will perish, our souls will not. In Matthew 25 Jesus talked about a coming Day of Judgment when this world finally comes to an end. In verse 46 of that chapter He concluded His remarks by saying, “The wicked will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.” By making that distinction, Jesus was clear concerning the fact that when we die, our souls will spend eternity in one of two places—heaven or hell.

Now let me ask you a hypothetical question concerning the people whose bodies inhabit the graves around us. Suppose—just for the sake of argument—that one of those people did not live a righteous life, and as a result is now awaiting the Day of Judgment, knowing what awaits him throughout all eternity. If that person could speak to those of us assembled here today, what would he say?

That is an easy question to answer—because in Luke 16:19-31 Jesus told a true story about two men—a righteous beggar by the name of Lazarus, and an unnamed sinful rich man. The Bible tells us that Lazarus, at his death, was carried by angels to what the Scriptures call “Abraham’s Bosom”—a place of eternal joy and comfort. But the rich man, at his death, ended up in a place of eternal pain, suffering, and anguish, from which he screamed, “I am tormented in this flame!” He asked Abraham to allow Lazarus to come to him, for no other reason than simply to place a cool drop of water on his parched tongue. But Abraham denied his requested, stating, “Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.”

But that was not the only request the rich man made. He begged, “Father Abraham, please send Lazarus to the five brothers in my father’s house, so that he may testify to them, lest they, too, come to

this place of torment.” Abraham denied that request, too, stating, “Your brothers have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”

Now let me repeat the question I asked a moment ago. Suppose—just for the sake of argument—that one of the people in the graves around us did not live a righteous life, and now, like the rich man, is in torment. If that person could speak to us today, what would he say? He would say two things with great urgency: (1) Do not live a wicked, sinful life like I lived!; and (2) Listen carefully to what God’s Word has to say to you—and then obey it!

For the rich man in Christ’s story, and for anyone buried in this cemetery who did not live according to God’s Word, it is too late. There is nothing those people can do to change their eternal destiny. But those of us who are here today **can!** The rich man cries out to us, “**Do not make the same mistakes I did, and do not come where I am!**” I believe that is a message well worth heeding, don’t you? The rich man wants us to end up on the right side of “the great gulf.” The question with which I would like to leave you this afternoon is this: Is that what **you** want for yourself?