

WHAT GOD'S WORD SAYS ABOUT HELL

Matthew 25:46

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Matthew 25:46.

We are living in a time where there isn't much said about hell. People use the term in profanity, but that is about all. As an expletive, or swear word, "hell" is quite popular, but as a reality it is exceedingly unpopular. The Devil gets people to use the word in anger or in jest, and then to forget that there is such a place.

Neither is the subject of "hell" a very pleasant one. However, the subject is not to be dodged because it is unpleasant. It is part of God's revelation and therefore demands our careful and prayerful consideration. While I do not enjoy preaching on this subject, it is my duty to do so. Christ said many things about hell, and preachers ought to preach more about it. In speaking to his students in the Seminary Dr. John A. Broadus said, "In your study of the Gospels you will find that Jesus mentions this subject again and again, and hence you cannot be true to Him if you say nothing about it. But brethren, never preach on hell unless there are tears in your heart."

As unpleasant as the subject of hell may be, nothing is to be gained by holding back the truth or by apologizing for preaching it. Through the centuries since Christ came to earth, the greatest and most effective preachers of the gospel have warned men of this awful doom and have shown them the only way of escape. Today there needs to be a direct, positive and unvarnished presentation of this subject.

I. Is There A Hell?

Yes, there is a hell. Justice itself makes hell a necessity. Hell is the natural, logical and inevitable consequence of sin. Punishment follows sin as inevitably as the night follows the day. Punishment follows sin as certainly as pain follows the infliction of wounds on the human body. Sin damns just as surely as fire burns or water drowns or disease kills. A sinner may continue in sin and sneer at the judgment of God, but one day his sin will strike him with the lightning of its own revenge. Hell is the natural sequence to a life of sin.

The fact that hell is a reality is in harmony with human reason and with the teachings of divine revelation. To deny the existence of hell, as some do, is to deny one of the plainest teachings of the Word of God. To any person who does not believe that there is a hell, I should like to emphasize an important fact, namely, your not believing it will not do away with hell or keep you from going there. A certain man had been examined by twelve doctors and had been told by all of them that he had a dread disease. But the man refused to believe their diagnosis and to do what he might have done to be cured; consequently, he died from the disease. Your statement, "I don't believe there is a hell," will neither close its doors nor put out its fires. You cannot possibly believe the words of Christ, Who had so much more to say about hell than He did about heaven, and not believe that there is a hell. I regret to say that many church members do not believe that there is a hell. The reason I know that is because they will go for years and never say one thing to any neighbor, friend or acquaintance to try to keep him or her from going to hell. Any professing Christian

who actually believes there is a hell will personally plead with lost souls to be reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Word says that there is a hell. That settles the matter for me. I believe what it says, regardless of what anybody thinks or says about it. Here are just a few of the many verses in God's Word which make it clear that there is a hell:

"For a fire is kindled in mine anger and shall burn to the lowest hell" (Deuteronomy 32:22).

"The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17).

"Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming" (Isaiah 14:9).

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

"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. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, 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" (Matthew 5:29-30).

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:32).

"Then shall he say also unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46).

"And if thy hand offend thee, but it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43-48).

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (II Peter 2:9).

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

II. What Kind Of A Place Is Hell?

1. A place of unutterable shame.

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). The awful heart-breaking agony of dishonor and shame is what frequently drives people to commit suicide. Hell is a place of unutterable shame. Every person who goes there will be dishonored.

2. A place of ungratified desires.

The evil desires of the inhabitants of hell will exist in their highest potency, but there will not be any possibility of gratifying them. In telling about the rich man, Christ said, "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:23-24). It is impossible for us to imagine how terrible it would be to be in a place where evil desires grow stronger continually, and then find that they can never be satisfied.

3. A place of intense suffering.

Men frequently suffer in this life, but their sufferings here are not comparable to the sufferings in hell. "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." Notice that the word "torments" is used here, indicating that the sufferings in hell are plural in number. Those who go to hell will suffer pains in soul and body. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

Is hell a place of literal fire and brimstone, or are these words figurative? Please remember that a figure can never equal a reality. A figure is only a shadow of the real thing. If the fire of hell is only figurative, then the intensity of the reality would be beyond description. If there is no literal fire in hell, then what is there will be thousands of times worse than fire could ever be. A figure of speech does not modify the thought which the figure expresses, but rather it is an attempt to declare in words that which is beyond the power of language to describe.

4. A place of inescapable memory.

To the rich man in hell Abraham said, "Son, remember." The man did remember. The memory of his misspent life simply added fuel to the fires of hell. If you go to hell, you will take your memory with you. In hell the drunkard will remember his wretched home, his agonizing wife and his hungry children. In hell the gambler will remember the ruined victims of his vice. In hell the murderer will remember the ghastly face and the oozing blood of his victim.

If you go to hell, you will never forget the many warnings which God gave you in this life, in order that you might avoid going there. You will remember the church services which you attended here, the songs and the sermons that you heard here, the prayer that were

uttered in your behalf, the personal words that were spoken to you by Christian friends, and the numerous invitations to accept Christ that you refused to accept. You will remember that you could as easily have been in heaven as in hell. You will remember, and never forget, but it will be too late.

5. A place of indescribable weeping.

"And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42).

"And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30).

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28).

6. A place of ceaseless remorse.

"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43--48). If you go to hell, your memory will strike thousands of scorpion stings into your soul and biting remorse into your conscience. Words cannot describe the ceaseless remorse that you will have, but it will avail nothing.

7. A place of evil companionships.

Those who go to hell will be separated from God's presence, God's children and God's blessings. Never again can they be with their loved ones who were Christians. None of God's children will ever go to hell. All who do not become Christians in this life will go there. In hell your companions and associates will be vile. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

8. A place of everlasting punishment.

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46). "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (II Thessalonians 1:9).

Christ looked outside the walls of Jerusalem and saw the Valley of Hinnom. It was the place where all of the garbage and filth of the city was dumped and burned. Centuries before the fires had been lighted there and they had never ceased to burn. At any time, day or night, the fires with their ascending smoke could be seen in that valley. It was known as Gehenna, the place of eternal burnings. Christ made it the symbol of hell or the picture of the final abode of all those who die in their sins. He spoke of hell as the place "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). Hell is a place of unquenchable fire or eternal punishment.

9. A place of inexpressible anxiety.

The man, whom Christ described as having died and gone to the place of torment, suddenly began to think of others and wanted something done for them. He was exceedingly anxious that they be prevented from sharing his terrible fate. He did not want them to come where he was. He begged Abraham to send Lazarus to them and urge them to be saved while they had time and opportunity. It is still true that anybody who departs this life without being a Christian goes to a place where he is not wanted.

10. A place of utter hopelessness.

A person can endure many things as long as he has hope of a better day. But there is no hope whatever of a better day for anybody who dies without Christ and goes to hell. Nobody can pass from hell to heaven because "there is a great gulf fixed" between the two places. Nothing can bridge that gulf. There is no change of spheres beyond the grave. There is no way out of hell. Once there, one does not have any hope of escape.

III. How Long Will Hell Last?

"Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). Will their future punishment be eternal? Perhaps the best verse to answer this question is Matthew 25:46. In this verse our Lord Jesus Christ set the eternity of the punishment of the unsaved over against the eternity of the bliss of the saved. Christ said, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

Isn't it strange that no one who believes that there is a heaven ever questions its duration or thinks of life there as being any less than eternal? Well, hell is just as eternal as heaven.

IV. Who Will Be In Hell?

This place of eternal punishment was prepared originally for the devil and his angels. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Hell was not made for man but for the devil. If man insists upon forcing his way into hell, he is an intruder. If man chooses to spend eternity with the devil, then that is his business.

Because hell is such an awful place, God does not want any of us to go there. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God has done all that was necessary to keep you from going to hell. Christ wants to save you and keep you out of hell.

As to the constituency of hell God's Word says, "But the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). How would you like to spend eternity in such a motley crowd as that? All unbelievers, or those who refuse to accept

Christ as their Saviour will be in hell.

V. Is There A Way to Escape Hell?

Yes, thank God, there is a way to keep out of hell. If you will repent of your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will never go to hell. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

Even though you may not intend to do so, you will go to hell unless you receive Christ as your personal Saviour. Your only hope of escaping hell is in Him, Who alone can save. If you remain in your lost condition and go to hell, you alone will be to blame. Don't throw away your golden opportunity by rejecting Christ. Instead, accept Him now and become the recipient of His glorious salvation and the blessed assurance of an eternal home in heaven.