

November 6th, 2022

Heaven: Week 6

How many of us know that kids have absolutely no filter? As the saying goes, kids say the darndest of things. Not only that, they ask a billion and one questions a day.

Kids are hilarious. And they aren't the only ones who have questions. This series has covered a lot of our questions regarding the topic of heaven. We all have many questions.

All of us at one point in our lives have asked the question, "What will happen when I die?" We believe in the reality of heaven, that Heaven is a real place that those who profess their faith in Jesus will go to when they die. However, if we believe this we also must believe that there is a place that exists where souls go that do not enter heaven. This real biblical place is called hell.

The word hell is a frequently used word in the English language, but it's one of the least talked about. It's used as an exclamation, an interjection, and a noun. There are many not so nice phrases that incorporate this word. This is the context that many of us are solely familiar with.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of our Lord's own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason."

If we believe in the mystery and majesty of heaven, we have to believe in the sobering truth of hell. In fact, Jesus spent more time warning people about the dangers of hell than He did comforting them with the hope of Heaven.

There are many popular standpoints that will try and lessen and soften the idea of hell. There are those that teach Annihilationism that believe that souls and their punishment will eventually come to an end. Not only is this unbiblical, but it is unjust because every sinner is then treated the same.

On the flip side, another belief people may take is called universalism. This is the idea that everyone will end up in heaven. This line of thinking argues that God will reconcile everyone to Christ.

Some will teach probationism that endorses that every lost person will be given a second chance to repent.

What we see in the Bible is that the Old Testament outlines the framework on hell, while the New Testament elaborates on it. But Jesus is the most responsible for defining hell.

When Jesus talked about hell, He used the word Gehenna. Gehenna was a literal place in Israel. It was a valley that was so repulsive that Jesus used it as a word picture to hell.

And probably the most heart-wrenching aspect of hell is what *2 Thessalonians 1:9* says, "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."

Shut out from the Presence of the Lord. Hell is the absence of God and His presence.

Open up to *Luke 16*. In this chapter, Jesus is teaching His disciples. Jesus presents this story about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus.

Luke 16:19-23 (NIV)

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side."

The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus is stark. The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen. This shows us just how rich this rich man was.

Not only is the rich man dressed well. He also feasts extravagantly every day. The middle class would have feasted from time to time.

This is a stark contrast to a poor man named Lazarus.

So we see a stark contrast between the earthly possessions of the rich man and Lazarus. But we also see this eternal contrast between them in verses 22-23. In fact, it's a great reversal. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried, but he ended up in Hades in torment. He was burning in hell. And to make matters worse he could see Lazarus in heaven. So the rich man engages in conversation with Abraham.

Luke 16:24-31 (NIV)

So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

I want to highlight two points this morning.

1. We will receive our eternal due once we die.
2. We must repent and believe the gospel now before it's too late.

1. We will receive our eternal due once we die

Hebrews 9:27 says this: “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

All of us will not live forever on earth, but we will spend eternity somewhere. We are all destined to die once while here on earth and then we will face eternity. We just read that the rich man asks Abraham to have mercy on him and to send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water to cool his tongue because of his anguish from the flames.

The rich man has not repented. He says to Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve his torment, like Lazarus is his slave.

It was too late for the rich man. He didn't have faith in God and was too caught up in his own desires to care for the beggar outside of his own gates.

We read in v. 25 that Abraham says, “You received good things in your lifetime and Lazarus bad things. Now he's comforted and you're in anguish.” It's as if Abraham is saying, “What did you expect? If you would've made friends with Lazarus with your earthly wealth, you'd be received by Lazarus into heavenly dwellings. But you didn't. You took care of yourself, and only yourself, during your lifetime. You showed that you didn't need anybody's help. And now, you'll get nobody's help. You're getting the very thing you wanted.”

And not only that. Abraham goes on in verse 26 to say that there's a great chasm that's been fixed. Nobody in heaven is going to hell and nobody in hell is going to heaven.

We only have this one life given to us. When we face our final judgment, it's just that: final.

The rich man gives us just a small snapshot of what one experiences in hell. The Bible tells us hell is being completely cut off from God's presence.

The rich man sobered up real quick once he realized that his decision was final, it was too late for him. His attention then turns to his family. In verses 27-28, he thinks, “If Lazarus can't help me in hell, maybe he can keep my brothers out of hell.” So he says to Abraham, “Send Lazarus to warn my brothers, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” Once again, the rich man is treating Lazarus as his slave!

Abraham responds, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."

2. We must repent and believe the Gospel before it's too late.

When we take a look at this story, the reason the rich man didn't show mercy to Lazarus, who was in need, was because he didn't see his own need for mercy.

Our love for Christ is based on our belief of how much He has forgiven us and it's our perspective of sin that dictates the depth of our love for Christ. Our sin is what separates us from God.

A common question that arises is "How could a loving God punish anyone with hell?" Just because God is loving; however, does not mean that He loves everything.

One day, God will right every wrong. Hell is permitted because God is both just and loving.

This is where the Gospel becomes the greatest news to all of us. We are all sinners. Yet, instead of punishment, we can spend an eternity in the presence of God. In God's love, He has done everything possible to deliver us from hell. But this is our choice. He created you with a free will because He desires your voluntary affection more than some robotic devotion. God will never force Himself upon you. He will allow you to make up your own mind in regards to His lordship. His justice requires that He punish sin but His love provides salvation freely to all who will accept it.

Jesus taught Nicodemus that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life... Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (*John 3:16,18,36*).

God has done everything He can possibly do to keep you from going to hell.

The choice is yours to make. You will live forever- somewhere. Either in the very real place of heaven, or the very real place of hell.

Jesus preached about hell on purpose. He wanted to bring people to a decision.

The Bible mentioned the wrath of God about 600 times. The wrath of God is spoken to create in us a sense of urgency.

God tells you about the consequences of His wrath and the truth of hell so that you will have a sense of urgency, so that you will know that you're in dire need of a Savior, and then invite Jesus to come and rescue you from a hell you are going towards.

Jesus wanted to bring people to a decision.

Evangelist D. L. Moody told a story about a minister who was preparing a sermon on the urgency of receiving Christ without delay. After studying for some time, the preacher fell asleep in his chair and had a strange dream in which he overheard a conversation among several demons.

If you are in this place and your life is not right with God, don't fall into the devils' trap. The Bible says that TODAY is the day of salvation.

You have to make a decision - where are you going to spend eternity?

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What aspects of hell are the most “sobering” to you?
2. Read Luke 16: 24-31. What stood out to you most in this narrative on heaven and hell?
3. Has the doctrine of hell factored into your understanding of the character/nature of God?
4. How can this doctrine help strengthen your relationship with God?
5. What can you take from the doctrine of hell and share with others?
6. What stops us from sharing the Gospel with our loved ones?