

Hell: A Necessary Truth

What Jesus Said about Hell

No Christian doctrine is more troubling to believers and rejected by others than the doctrine of Hell. I suppose the N.T. teaching about election comes close, but even those who struggle with it do so primarily because of its relationship to Heaven and Hell.

J.I. Packer

No evangelical, I think, need hesitate to admit that in his heart of hearts he would like universalism to be true. Who can take pleasure in the thought of people being eternally lost? If you want to see folk damned, there is something wrong with you!

C.S. Lewis

There is no doctrine I would more willingly remove from Christianity than [hell], if it lay in my power . . . I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully: "All will be saved."

Francis Chan

The saddest day of my life was the day I watched my grandmother die. When that EKG monitor flat-lined, I freaked out. I absolutely lost it! According to what I knew of the Bible, she was headed for a life of never-ending suffering. I thought I would go crazy. Since that day, I have tried not to think about it. It has been over twenty years. Even as I write that paragraph, I feel sick. I would love to erase hell from the pages of Scripture.

It seems almost impossible for people in this culture to think in terms of divine punishment that will last forever. For many, it is just too much to swallow. **But the Bible teaches** that Hell is a real place where real people will go to experience punishment for their sins. As much as we might wish it did not exist, the question is not what we wish, but what is true?

First century Jews believed in hell. They believed it was a place of punishment for the wicked after they faced God's judgment. They used various images to describe hell, such as fire, darkness, suffering. **The fear of hell cast a constant shadow** over their lives. For some it motivated them to be better people. For others, it simply sucked the joy out of life, knowing that at some point they would likely end up there.

Into that world Jesus came, with a refreshingly new message. He brought a sense that everything could be better. He healed the sick and raised the dead. He taught and modeled the compassion of God. He challenged stale, depressing traditionalism that had become a masquerade for true faith. In His life and message there was a positive **magnetism** which drew people to Himself.

One might expect that when it came to hell, He would break ranks with the common assumptions of His day. He challenged and debunked so much of what the people had come to believe, that surely He would bring a more positive, refreshing and hopeful perspective on Hell. *Maybe he would even reveal that there was no Hell at all.*

He did not. Rather than easing the prevalent fears about Hell, He reinforced them. Rather than denying the reality of Hell, He declared its reality and legitimacy. Rather than presenting it as a cultural myth, He declared that it was a real place. And not only was it real, it was every bit as horrible as the people believed.

This morning, I want us to consider what Jesus said about Hell.

1. The Words of Jesus

1) Matthew 5:22

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

1. Acknowledges the reality of hell
2. Associates hell with fire. Judgment. Destruction.

2) Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

1. Associates hell with sin. Sin is what causes people to be in hell
2. Avoiding hell is worth more than physical pleasures

3) Matthew 7:13

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

1. The way to hell is easy.
2. More people will go there than to heaven
3. Associated with destruction.

4) Matthew 8:11-12

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will

be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. Associated with outer darkness
2. Associated with weeping and gnashing of teeth

5) Matthew 10:28

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

1. Associates destruction of body and soul in hell
2. God is the one who controls who goes to hell and what happens there

6) Matthew 13:40-42, 47-50

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. Hell is a place of separation.
2. Associated with weeping and gnashing of teeth
3. Associated with fiery furnace
4. Implies forced incarceration. *Throw them.*

7) Matthew 22:13

Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. Associated with confinement.
2. Associated with outer darkness
3. Associated with weeping and gnashing of teeth

8) Matthew 25:30

And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. Associated with outer darkness
2. Associated with weeping and gnashing of teeth

9) Matthew 25:41

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

1. Associated with being cursed.
2. Associated with eternal fire
3. Prepared for the devil and his angels

10) Matthew 25:46

These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

1. Associated with separation. *Go away*
2. Associated with eternal punishment.

2. The Teachings of Jesus

When we take all of the words of Jesus on the subject of hell, we can summarize his teaching on hell in the following statements.

1) Hell is real place where unredeemed sinners will go after death.

Every time Jesus spoke of hell, he did so with clear conviction that it was a real place for real people who died without their sins being forgiven. Hell is always seen as the destination for those who do not go to Heaven. Only those who have been redeemed through faith in Jesus go to Heaven. All who not received the gift of salvation through faith in Christ will remain unredeemed.

2) Hell is a place of darkness, separation and confinement

The inhabitants of hell are those who have been separated from those who are declared righteous through faith in Christ. They are described as being bound and confined in hell. Total absence of the presence of God.

3) Hell is a place of punishment

Our culture increasingly rejects the principle of punishment for wrongs done. The focus often shifts more toward taking steps to change the behavior of the person going forward with little thought to the purpose of punishment.

Jesus, and the other N.T. writers clearly spoke of hell as being a place of punishment for those described as wicked, evil, sinners. This punishment is **deserved** and includes **suffering**. That may be hard for us to accept, but to be true to the N. T. we must acknowledge this truth.

Jesus often spoke of hell as being a **place of fire. Fire burns**, inflicting pain on any who fall into it. Jesus repeatedly spoke of there being **weeping and gnashing of teeth** in hell. These are natural reactions to pain and suffering.

4) Hell is forever

There are some evangelicals who deny the eternal nature of hell. But the plain words of Jesus certainly seems to imply that hell will last forever. Jesus spoke of the **eternal fire** or hell and of the **eternal punishment** of hell. In each case he used a word that general means everlasting, never-ending.

5) Hell should be avoided

Jesus came to earth on a rescue mission for to save people from this fate. He told the truth about hell, **not to depress us with a sense of dread**, but to use that truth as **a backdrop for His mission of grace and mercy**. He repeatedly stressed the reality of hell and the nature of hell, but always as with the addition of the good news that hell can be avoided.

Our sins have caused a separation between all people and God. Our sins prevent us from being in a right relationship with a holy God. But God's love found a way to for his holiness to be maintained, for the judgment for our sins to be paid in full, and for us to be reconciled to Him.

Jesus became one of us, lived a sinless life and died in our place, paying the penalty for our sins. In doing so, he provided an escape from hell for all who would respond to his invitation to join his family and be reconciled to God.

3. The Invitation of Jesus

These messages on hell are not pleasant. I don't think they were to Jesus, either.

To paint an accurate picture of such a terrifying place does not illicit positive emotions. In fact it can be downright depressing. But Jesus knew that people needed to know the truth about hell in order to comprehend just what he was offering to them (and us) and what it would cost him.

Against the backdrop of a very real hell, Jesus offered a precious invitation.

Matthew 11:28-29

Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Spoken to people who desperately wanted to know they were right with God.