

## **Hell: A Necessary Truth**

### ***Questions and Answers about Hell***

**This morning we wrap up** this series about Hell. It is an important topic, but I am not sad to see the series end. However, ending the series does not end the reality of Hell. Just because I will not be talking about it and you will not be hearing about it, does not change its reality. Just because something is out of sight and therefore out of mind, does not mean it does not exist.

**When this series ends** in a matter minutes, my hope is that its truth will never be far from our thoughts. I hope it will motivate us to share Christ more than before.

**Let's tie up some loose ends** by considering questions people have about Hell. Most of these can be answered definitively from Scripture. In a few cases I may be called upon to speculate a bit. When I do, I will tell you.

#### **1. Why does hell exist?**

This is a great place to start. I admitted to you at the very beginning that I wish hell did not exist. But the Bible makes it clear that there is indeed a hell. So, the question we want answered is **Why?** Matthew 25:41 offers a little insight.

*They he will say to those on his left, depart from my, you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

**In speaking clearly of hell**, Jesus indicated that it was created for the devil and his angels. It was to be the final abode for Satan and his demons. Satan was created as an angel, to serve and honor God. He rebelled and led one third of the angels in a rebellion against God. He lost in this failed rebellion and will one day be banished to the lake of fire forever.

**But we know** that in addition to Satan and demons, people will also be condemned to hell. Like Satan, people have also failed to love, worship and serve the God who gave them life. Like Satan, people have selfishly and proudly thought that they could determine their own fate and be the gods of their own worlds. In doing so, they have rejected the very God who gave them life and all that is good.

**Hell is the place for all who fail to recognize God as the rightful Lord over creation.**

This will not satisfy us completely because we are thinking with inferior minds and limited perspective.

J.P. Moreland a teacher at Talbot School of Theology and wrote

*Even though I might not have a completely good explanation at this point for why there's a hell, I know there's got to be one because I have too much evidence that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God and he taught about it. And because I can trust him and his deep love for people, as demonstrated by his death for us on the cross, I can have confidence that hell will eventually make sense, that I'll see its fairness and that I will ultimately recognize it as being the best moral alternative.*

**God is mysterious** but he is also good. God has declared some things that I might perceive to be unfair, but he is also loving. God is full of justice, but he is also merciful. There are some things about God and his actions that are beyond my ability to comprehend. At that point, I choose to trust His nature and character.

**I may not be able** to explain the reason for hell in a way that will satisfy others, or even myself, but I trust God!

## **2. Are the images of hell meant to be taken literally?**

The New Testament uses a number of words and phrases to describe hell.

First, Darkness, Punishment, Separation from God, Devouring Worms, Weeping, Gnashing of Teeth, Pits of Darkness, Unquenched Thirst, Regret, Bottomless Pit, Hopelessness,

**The variety of descriptive phrases** has led some to conclude that none of these are meant to be understood in a literal way. This may be the case. But as I have indicated before, we must be really careful when taking biblical language in any other way than literal. There should be compelling reasons to do so.

**My answer is that I am not sure.** However, that should not provide comfort or assurance that hell will not be so bad. If the language is not meant to be taken literally, it does not change the reality that hell will be a place of incredible suffering, sorrow and hopelessness.

## **3. Are there degrees of punishment in hell?**

Will some in hell suffer worse than others? Will the punishment be the same for everyone found there? **Will a serial killer be punished the same as a relatively good person who simply refused to accept Jesus as savior? Will Hitler and Stalin suffer more than others?**

**Jesus offers some insight.** He was condemning some of the towns where he ministered because of their unbelief. Compared them to wicked cities from the past. He indicated that in the judgment it would be worse for the present cities.

For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. . . . For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.” Matthew 11:21-24

**Then in Luke 12** Jesus tells a parable about some disobedient slaves who receive punishment for their actions. They each get different levels of punishment. If this a picture of the punishment in hell, then it certainly indicates degrees of punishment.

**Paul hints at this** in Romans 2:5 when he writes, that unbelievers are ***storing up wrath***. This seems to indicated that the wrath they receive will be equivalent to what they deserve based upon their actions. **The N.T. certainly** indicates the likelihood that not everyone in hell will suffer the same punishment.

#### 4. **Where is hell?**

Many 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews believed hell was in the center of the earth. In the O. T. it speaks of people dying and going ***down to Sheol***, but *Sheol* is simply a reference to the place of the dead. Could refer to the grave.

**Some have suggested** that hell is somewhere out in space, possibly in a Black Hole. These are believed to be places of great heat and pressure, from which nothing can escape, even light.

**The best answer is** that we really do not know where hell is. We should be less concerned about its geographical location and more concerned about how to escape it and how to help others do the same.

#### 5. **Is Satan in charge of hell?**

The common understanding of most people is that hell is a place ruled by Satan. He created it as a place to torment people who would ultimately go there. When a person goes to hell they will be ruled and tormented by Satan and demons. This is one of the greatest distortions about hell believed by people.

**Satan is not in charge of hell.** He will be thrown there to be punished, as well. The punishment in hell does not come from Satan but from the wrath of God.

#### 6. **What about those who never hear about Jesus?**

This is one of the most difficult questions when comes to the doctrine of hell. What about the person who never hears the gospel? What if he does the best he can and lives a basically good life? Will he avoid hell and go to Heaven?

**Everything in me wants that to be true.** But that is not what the Bible teaches. In fact in Romans 1, Paul makes it abundantly clear that everyone is without excuse, because God has given them some revelation.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1:18-21

**God has provided** enough revelation through His creation, to cause people to be accountable. Paul says they suppress it. They still need the gospel. It is the power of God to save. Only through Christ can a person be saved.

**Here is the way the argument usually goes.** An innocent person who never hears the gospel will surely get to heaven. They cannot be held accountable for what they do not know. God will provide a pass for those who do not know. Hell is only for those who hear the gospel and reject it. This sounds logical to us, but this is not what the Bible teaches. That assumes that there is an innocent person.

**If I believed this were true,** I would lead the charge to end all of our mission efforts immediately. I would make a motion at the next SBC that we defund the IMB and call all missionaries home. I would tell all international students, if anyone tries to tell you about Jesus, don't let them. **If there is a special pass** for all who never hear the gospel, we are doing them the greatest disservice by sharing the gospel.

**Those who never hear** are not being condemned for rejecting what they never knew, they are condemned for their sin. That may be more than we can fully comprehend, but that is what the Bible teaches.

**This still troubles many people.** Still troubles me. But there are a few things that I know are true that help me.

- 1) No one will be in hell who does not deserve to be there.
- 2) I don't have to reconcile it in my mind, because it is reconciled in God's mind.
- 3) I trust God. I know that He is good, loving, merciful and gracious. He proved this through the death of His son on our behalf

## 7. What about children and hell?

Hell is always described as a place for those who are being punished for their sinful choices in life. No indication of children in hell. All of us are born with a sin nature. So even children have a sin nature. We come into this world dead spiritually and separated from God. So, where does that leave those who die as children?

**The Bible says very little about this.** A couple of situations shed light.

David's son, conceived in adultery, died. David indicated that the child could not come back to him, but he could and would go to his son. This indicates that he believed the infant was in heaven. 1 Sam. 12:22-23

**In Deuteronomy 1** Moses is explaining to the people that God was not pleased with them for refusing to enter the promised land and what would happen to them.

The LORD was angry with me also on your account, saying, ' Not even you shall enter there. Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it.

**Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it.**

**The adults** would not enter the land. They would be punished for their unbelief. However, the children would enter the land. There seems to be a special allowance for those who were not accountable.

**Christ taught that** we need to become like children in order to be saved. He made a point of embracing and welcoming children to Him, even rebuking those who were preventing the kids from getting to him.

**Psalm 8:2 says *From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise.*** The inclusion of "infants" is significant because they would not be conscious of giving praise; it would have to be something instinctive.

**Finally, Jesus made it clear** that the kingdom of Heaven belongs to children, and pointed out that those who come to Him must come with the faith of a child.

**Clearly God is setting** children apart in a special way and He provides special treatment for them. I believe this includes a special allowance for the salvation of young children and infants.

**There is no hint** that children who die will be in hell. There is ample evidence that they will be in Heaven.

## 8. Did Jesus go to hell?

There are some who believe Jesus went to Hell between his death and resurrection. Some of those believe he was actually being tormented in hell by Satan until the time of his resurrection. That is false. We can know for sure that Jesus did not go to hell to be tormented by Satan to pay for our sins.

- 1) Our sin debt was paid in full on the cross at his death.
- 2) The suffering of Christ was not from Satan but from the Father

### 1 Peter 3:19-20

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

**This passage** teaches that Jesus went and preached to demons who were held in prison because of their part in the moral decline described in Genesis 6, which led to the flood. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 speaks of these demons. I believe Jesus proclaimed to this group the victory that He had secured through his death which would be validated through his resurrection.

## 9. Is hell forever?

There are some who want to believe hell is a place of temporary punishment. Once people have been there for a while, they will have been purified enough to go to Heaven, or they will simply die and cease to exist. However, the Bible provides ample evidence for the eternal nature of hell. **Three Illustrations**

Matthew 25:46

Speaks of hell as being **eternal punishment**.

*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

2 Thessalonians 1:9

Speaks of hell as **eternal destruction**

*They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction*

Revelation 20:10

Speaks of hell as being **tormented forever and ever**

*The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

## 10. How can I avoid hell

### 1) Admit and repent of your sin

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

*Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Luke 13:5*

### 2) By Faith, Receive Christ as your Lord and Savior

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, John 1:12*

*Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Romans 10:13*

### 3) Surrender your life to Jesus as Lord

*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9-10*

*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. Luke 9:23-24*

## C. S. Lewis was right when he wrote . . .

***The safest road to the hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.***