

THE TRUTH ABOUT HELL

YOU ASKED FOR IT (PART 3-THE TRUTH ABOUT HELL)

An old tale describes a man who habitually read the obituaries the first thing each morning. If his name was not listed, he dressed and went to work. One morning he read the obituaries and discovered his name was written there. Of course he was shaken, but he decided to go to work anyway. Once at work, he called a friend and asked: "Did you read my name in the obituaries this morning?" "Yes," said his friend, "where are you calling from?" That is a very real question for each one of us. The morning our name is in the obituary, our soul will be somewhere. The truth is that you are not a body which contains a soul. You are a soul that has a body, and when your body is gone, your soul goes on living in one of two places-heaven or hell.

The predominant 21st century worldview is that hell is a myth. It is not a real place. Even those that may concede it is a real place say that very few people (if anybody) deserve to go there for all eternity.

John Lennon, the former Beatle, had a smash hit in the early 1970s with a song that included these words.

"Imagine there's no heaven;
It is easy if you try
No Hell below us
Above us only sky."

That is exactly what many people say - there is no hell. Yet, what is so strange is that the word "hell" has never been more popular or commonly used. Consider -

A teenage driver is known as "Hell on wheels."

When we witness extreme violence or a major argument we say, "All hell broke loose."

We say that a bad spouse is "Hell to live with."

A great effort means you are "Trying like hell."

If someone is really pumped up about something, they will say, "I am as excited as hell."

If you want to move quickly, you go like "A bat out of hell."

The odds of winning the lottery, "A snowball's chance in hell."

What does the troublemaker do? "Raise hell."

If something is very painful people say, "It hurts like hell."

So the question is "Is hell more than just a word? Is there a place called hell?"

IS HELL FOR REAL?

1. *The Bible speaks of hell many times*

Revelation 20:10 says, "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (Revelation 20:10, NASB)

Hell is the only place in the universe where there is no hope. Here in this life, we can say, "There is always tomorrow" or "Wait 'til next year." In hell, there is no next time, there is no tomorrow, there is no next year; it is eternal.

2. *The Son of God affirms the reality of hell*

Most of what we know about the biblical view of Hell comes from the mouth of Jesus. Of the 1,850 verses in the New Testament that record the words of Jesus, thirteen percent of them deal with the subject of hell and judgment. Jesus talked more about hell than any other topic. Of the forty-parables that Jesus told, more than half of those parables relate to the concept of hell and God's eternal judgment.

Mark 9:43-49, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

The word Gehenna, the word Jesus used for hell in Mark 9, refers to the Valley of Hinnom, which was located south of Jerusalem. In Jesus' day, it was used as a garbage dump where both trash and the bodies of executed criminals were burned. It was the most repulsive place in the entire city.

The reason Jesus compared this place to hell is because hell is a place of incomparable anguish and sorrow. It is a place of emotional anguish. Jesus said in

Matthew 13:42, "And [God] will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

If there is no hell, then Jesus Christ was not the Son of God because He was either mistaken or He lied.

WHAT WILL HELL BE LIKE?

1. Hell is a place of conscious existence

Jesus told the story about a rich man who went to hell and a poor man who went to heaven Luke 16.

Luke 16:19-24, "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 hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 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.'

Both Lazarus and the rich man survived their own funerals. They didn't stop living, and they didn't stop being who they were. Lazarus is still Lazarus, and the rich man is still the rich man. Even in hell the rich man could see, hear, feel, recognize, remember, speak, and think ahead. There was only one thing he couldn't do. He couldn't get out of hell. Once in heaven, always in heaven; once in hell, always in hell. .

Matthew 25:46, "Then they (the unrighteous) will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

In the Greek the same word for "eternal" is used in both clauses. If eternal life is truly unending, it stands to reason that eternal punishment must be the same.

When the rich man spoke, Abraham said 2 horrible words, "son, remember." Have you ever done or said something that you deeply regretted later, something that continued to come to your mind and torment you? One of the worst things about being in hell is the fact that you know you didn't have to be there.

Menotti, a contemporary composer, wrote these words about his understanding of hell. He says, "Hell begins on the day when God grants us a clear vision of all that we might have done that we did not do. For me, the conception of hell lies in the words "too late."

Hell is going our own way, devoted to ourselves and then coming to the end of life and realizing, "I've missed the whole point. I was put here to love God and serve him, and I didn't do it.

2. Hell is a place of suffering

To my knowledge, whenever hell is mentioned in the scriptures it is described as being a place of torment and suffering.

3. Hell will be characterized by the absence of God

The worst suffering possible is to be forsaken by God. What would it be like to be completely without any influence from God? Missionaries who have gone out to some of the most primitive parts of the world that have no Christian influence have said the spiritual darkness is so heavy you feel you could cut it with a knife. The presence of the Demonic and the Devil and the powers of darkness are felt "big time." The absence of God is the worst thing about hell.

WHY DO PEOPLE GO TO HELL?

1. People go to hell because they choose it

"A Loving God Would Never Send People To Hell." God doesn't send anyone to hell. People choose hell for themselves. Think about a man asking her to marry him. The woman says, "I respect you. I admire you, but I don't love you, and I don't want to marry you." Now imagine that he proposes to her a second time, and she declines and a third time she declines. Can you imagine someone saying it was the man's fault she didn't marry him? Hell is not simply a sentence that God passes on sinners who reject Him. It is the end of a path that is freely chosen in this life.

This world is filled with people who reject God's love every day. Those people would be totally out of place in heaven. Can you imagine people who have no desire for God, people who can't stand the thought of going to church dying and ending up in heaven in an eternal church service where 12:00 never comes and you never get out?

2. People go to hell because their sin makes it impossible for them to go to heaven

The PROBLEM is there is a BARRIER called "sin" that makes a relationship with Him impossible.

Romans 6:23, "All have SINNED and FALLEN SHORT of the GLORY of God."

The trouble with our world is not immoral TV, movies and music. It is not abortion or not homosexuality. It is not drug and alcohol abuse. It's not even terrorism. Those things are only the symptoms of a disease called SIN that infects all mankind. The symptoms vary with different people, but the disease and its results are universal.

SIN is a word that is often misunderstood. People tend to think of sin as one specific kind of sin, and if they don't happen to be guilty of that thing, they don't see themselves as sinners. But sin is not just BAD things that we do. SIN is a STATE of DEPRAVITY into which we are all born.

According to Webster the word "depraved" means "marked by corruption or evil, perverted, crooked." Dwight Pentecost writes, "The doctrine of depravity has nothing to do with man's estimation of man, but rather with God's estimation of man. The Scriptures do not measure men by man; they measure men by God Who has created them. The creature is measured by the Creator and is found to be wanting."

Someone described it best when they suggested, "If depravity were blue, we'd be blue all over." Cut us anywhere and we'd bleed blue. Cut into our minds and you'll find blue thoughts of greed and lust. Cut into our hearts and there are blue emotions of hatred and revenge.

Romans 3:11-17 where it says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good; not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways and the way of peace they do not know."

The scripture says we are ALL marked by the disease of sin. And because we are-we are all cut off from our Holy Creator like a diseased leaf cut off from its stem. THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

3. People go to hell because God is just

So many crimes go unpunished while criminals are left free to hurt others. What about the pornographers and drug pushers who ruin so many lives? Hell must exist, if for no other reason than to balance the scales of justice.

"Who among the Gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? Exodus 15:11.

The whole issue of hell revolves around God's holiness and man's sinfulness. Holiness means that God is morally perfect. God cannot and will not tolerate sin in his presence. There's coming a day when he will remove it from his creation.

Acts 17:31 For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.

God's judgment is different that we might think. Judgment in our world is often done out of rage. Like the parent who has told his child to not do something 450 times, and on the 451st time, he just loses it. God's wrath is not an uncontrollable rage. It is not God losing his temper.

Nehemiah 9:17 But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love

God's wrath is not an uncontrolled rage. It is a controlled act of justice.

WHY ARE WE SO UNCONCERNED?

My experience with preaching tells me that preaching a sermon like this is not going to change the way most Christians relate to the lost. I don't expect a whole lot of people to be moved to the place of sharing their faith because of this sermon. If we are god's people and if what I've said is true, then why don't we share our faith?

1. We don't understand the holiness of God or the sinfulness of sin

The farther we get away from understanding God as He really is, the less bad sin appears to be to us. 1 john gives us needed insight when John says, "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. God is completely pure in every way. No sin resides in Him whether by thought or by action. Our holiness could be illustrated by a gold strip going around the top of a cup. God has no such gold strip. He is illustrated by a cup that is pure gold. What I'm saying is that we have a shrunken view of God and an enlarged view of man.

2. We don't understand the gravity of Christ's death

If you only understand a part of what it meant for Christ to die on the cross, you have to come to terms with the fact that something very serious put him there. If there had been any other way for humankind to be saved, God would have taken it. Sin is so bad in the eyes of God that He made the ultimate sacrifice-the death of God's son. When that all important sacrifice is rejected, eternal separation from God is the only other alternative.

"Think how much more terrible the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God and have treated the blood of the covenant as if it were common and unholy. Such people have insulted and enraged the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to His people." (Hebrews 10:29, NLT)

The Greek word for "trampled" was used to describe something like salt which was considered worthless, because it had lost its flavor and simply thrown on the roads to be trampled by feet. In essence, the person who rejects the Gospel of Jesus Christ and refuses to surrender their life to Him is basically saying that His death on the cross is absolutely meaningless. It is the attitude of a Ted Turner, who once said, "I don't want anybody to die for me. I've had a few drinks and a few girlfriends and if that's gonna put me in hell, well, then so be it

3. We are blinded to the inevitability of death

Intellectually, we know that everyone dies. But practically, we live as though we would never die. Somehow we do not understand the fact that anyone can die, young or old, at any time. That being the case, seeing someone saved does not seem to be as critical to us as it really is because we think they have more time. That reminds me of a parable Jesus told in Luke 12.

Luke 12:16-20, "And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

It is a foolish thing to count on having one more day because you may not have it, and all the people that you know who don't know Christ may not have it either. If you want someone to be saved, the time to talk with you about Christ is now.