

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 16- Luke 16:19-31

277- What Jesus Believed and Taught
About Hell and Salvation- Part 3

May 10, 2015

Luke 16:19-31

19 "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.

20 "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,

21 and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

22 "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

23 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.

26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.'

27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house —

28 for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

30 "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'"

31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

To the Glory of God

Now there are many people within the modern Church who categorically disbelieve the Bible. And although these people *call* themselves "Christians" they are guilty of false advertising. For some strange reason these people hold themselves out to be smarter than Jesus and more spiritual than Jesus because Jesus absolutely believed the Scriptures were true and He believed they were from God, and Jesus believed that we could formulate what we believe and what we teach from the Scriptures.

And so Jesus believed in Hell. Jesus believed in everlasting joy in Heaven with God for repentant sinners, and Jesus believed in everlasting torment in hell for sinners who would not repent and trust in Him for Salvation.

And in this parable- we see one of the clearest pictures of eternal damnation that exists in all the Scriptures. And so part of our verse by verse "journey" through the Gospel of Luke includes the 16th Chapter and includes this Parable.

Now as we found out last week- this Parable, while giving us a glimpse of hell- is really about the false teaching of the Pharisees and how deceived they were. And we saw last week how this Parable is also about how loving money will deceive you, and how the inward, invisible love for money will manifest itself in an outward and visible scoffing at Jesus.

And while that is the main meaning of this Parable- I *do* think it proper for us to examine the details of this Parable one more time to learn as much as possible from what Jesus was teaching here. So while this is certainly not a comprehensive teaching on hell- I pray that at least it begins the discussion within your own mind and heart.

So basically, we have two people- who are at the opposite ends of eternity. Lazarus- the poor beggar- wakes up after falling asleep in death and is in a very joyous place, and the rich man- who is not named for us- lifts up his eyes in torment.

Now what you have to be careful about here is that since this is a Parable- there is a *purpose* to this story. Jesus had a very *narrow* meaning to this Parable and so we need to understand that since Jesus is making a particular point about a particular subject in this story- we can't formulate too much doctrine based on what Jesus said here or what Jesus left out.

For example- it *seems* from what Jesus said only in this Parable that the rich man went to this place of torment for no other reason than he was rich, and that Lazarus went to the place of great joy for no other reason than he was poor. In fact, Jesus said as much in verse 25 when He said,

But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'

There is no mention anywhere in this Parable about repentance or of trusting in Christ for Salvation, or of even trying to be obedient to the Law of Moses. All that is said is that the rich man is in agony because during his life- he received what Jesus called **“good things”**, and Lazarus is being comforted because during his lifetime- he received what Jesus called **“bad things”**. So if we were to formulate doctrine based on that- especially about Salvation- we would have to say that *everybody* who receives **“good things”** in this life will be punished in the next, and those who receive **“bad things”** in this life will be blessed in the next.

And that would put all of us in a terrible position because even though we *have* repented and trusted in Christ- the poorest person among us here today is richer than the rich man in this Parable. We who have been blessed to live in the United States in the last half of the 20th Century and the first part of the 21st Century have access to more goods and services at a cheaper price than any other group of human beings in the history of the world. And so if hell is reserved only for those who have good things in this life- we are all doomed.

But, we know that is not true. We understand that true and genuine Salvation has to do with *many things* that Jesus never mentioned in this particular Parable. Which is why I tell you to be careful that you don't take everything in this Parable literally. The main point in this Parable is that Jesus is confronting the Pharisees

about them loving money and of that love being manifested in their hypocrisy and in their treatment of other people and of them scoffing at Jesus. That is the *main point* of this particular Parable- and everything else is secondary.

But having said that- I will still tell you that Jesus believed in hell, and so there are things here in what Jesus said that are instructive to us and so we need to look at them.

For example- notice that the rich man was shocked to find that he wasn't with Father Abraham. And that fact spoke to the Pharisees- who just knew that if *anybody* was going to Heaven- it would be them. But notice also that even though the rich man was separated from Abraham- he could still communicate with him- even though he couldn't get to him. And this goes back to what the Jews believed at that time about eternal life.

According to the ancient rabbinical writings that we have found- Jews believed and taught that *everybody* who died went to a place called "Sheol". And this Hebrew word is listed in the Old Testament 67 different times in 65 different verses. Now depending on which English version you use- the Hebrew word that was translated as "Sheol" was also translated as both "the grave" and "hell" in the Old Testament, and "Hades" and "hell" in the New Testament. For example- the King James renders **Genesis 37:35** and **Psalm 16:10** like this:

Genesis 37:35

And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

Psalm 16:10

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

... where the words "**Grave**" and "**Hell**" are *both* translated from the very same Hebrew word "Sheol". Now this is not a slight against the King James- but we have no evidence in any of the notes of the translators that suggest that there was any *theological* or *grammatical* reason for the King James translators to translate this same Hebrew word into two different English words.

So it *seems* that the difference was due to two different "teams" or "groups" of translators working on different parts of the Old Testament, and each team using a different English word- like they did with "Holy Ghost" and "Holy Spirit".

But because one team translated the Greek word into "Ghost" and the other team of translators translated the very same Greek word as "Spirit"- doctrines were developed over the centuries that sought to spiritualize what was simply a translation difficulty. And great tension arose by well-meaning people who were trying to justify the word "Holy Ghost" over against the word "Holy Spirit".

Well, the same thing has happened about the words "Hades", "Hell", and "Sheol", and "the Grave". Well-meaning people have taken what is simply a "translation difficulty" and they have formulated doctrines about one English word over against another- even though there is no reason to do so. The newer translations have fixed this "difficulty" and translate all of the references of the Hebrew word "Sheol" as "Sheol".

But what we need to know is that Sheol was "the abode of the dead" *before* Jesus rose from the dead. And it *seems* that Hades or Sheol was divided into two different sections *before* the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And one division of Sheol or Hades was the "abode of the damned", and the other division was the "abode of those who were saved" by Grace through Faith- which was also referred to then as "Abraham's Bosom". And Jesus referred to this understanding when He said in verse 23:

Luke 16:23

In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

So there was a large place- some say that it was *underneath* the ground- which was divided by a large "gulf" or a "chasm" that separated the two groups from each other. And Jesus even refers to that in verse 26 when He tells the rich man:

And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.'

Now the fact that Sheol was sometimes referred to as "hell" in the Latin Vulgate and because people considered Sheol to be underneath the ground- that is why in the Apostle's Creed it says about Jesus:

"He descended into hell"

... which *should* have said,

"He descended into Sheol"

The Nicene Creed that was developed from the Council that convened in 325 AD leaves this part out as they saw this as something that deserved its *own* discussion because left to itself- it would generate further distortions. And they were correct, because there are several Full Gospel Ministers today such as the late Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland along with Joyce Meyers and Creflo Dollar who teach an ancient blasphemous heresy that says that Jesus literally went to hell when He died because He was a sinner, and that Jesus Himself had to be "born again". That heresy doesn't stop because these people go on to teach that since Jesus Himself had to be born again- that *anybody* who has been born again could have died on the Cross and paid for the sins of all Mankind- even them.

Now what makes the information about Sheol complicated, as you try to piece all this together, is that it also *seems* that at some point- toward the end of the age of the Old Covenant- that the word "Sheol" came to refer *only* to the place of the damned- at least in the way that the average Jew understood it.

And during that time- Sheol- as strictly a place of the damned- was likened to "Gehenna", which was the city dump outside the city walls of Jerusalem which was always smoldering. Now the word "Gehenna" came from "the Valley of the Son of Hinnom", from **2Chronicles 28:3** and **33:6**, where apostate Israelites and followers of various Ba'als and other Canaanite gods, including Molech, sacrificed their children by fire. And in **Jeremiah 19**- go there with me- **Jeremiah 19:2**- Jeremiah prophesied that it was a cursed place when he said:

2 "Then go out to the valley of Ben-hinnom, which is by the entrance of the potsherd gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you,

3 and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.

4 "Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had *ever* known, and *because* they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent

5 and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it *ever* enter My mind;

6 therefore, behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter.

7 "I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will give over their carcasses as food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

8 "I will also make this city a desolation and an *object of* hissing; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its disasters.

9 "I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them."

So Gehenna, or "The Valley of Slaughter", came to be known as a very ugly, dirty, disgusting horrible place that was always on fire- and because it was outside the walls of Jerusalem- it was likened to being outside the Grace of God and a place of torment.

Now we need to understand that the average Jew living under the partial Revelation of God of the Old Covenant had very little comprehension about hell itself. And so his understanding of hell was filled with signs and shadows and types like the city dump. But when the final, full, and completed Revelation of God in the New Testament was given- those shadows and types were replaced with clear Truth.

And so at some point- the understanding of Sheol- as only the place of the damned- was joined together with additional Revelation to give us what we know today about hell.

So we know several things about hell today that the Jew didn't know such as:

- ✓ It is a literal place and *not* a state of mind
- ✓ It is a lake of fire burning with brimstone
- ✓ It is the "Second Death"
- ✓ It is a place prepared by God for the devil and his angels
- ✓ Those who are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life are thrown into it
- ✓ It is a place of everlasting torment
- ✓ It is a place for which no one escapes

... and Jesus believed in and taught about hell. And the Apostles believed in and taught about hell. And so we should believe in and teach about hell. Charles Spurgeon once advised fellow-preachers,

"Shun all views of future punishment that would make it appear less terrible."

Yet efforts to extinguish the flames of hell abound in our day, just as they did in his. So as you listen to popular views about hell- you can test what you hear with a few biblically-discerning questions:

- ✓ Does this view of hell *diminish* the threat of God's Judgment?
- ✓ Does this teaching soften the *urgency* of repentance?
- ✓ Is this offering the sinner any hope of Salvation beyond this life?

The modern views of hell simply don't survive the test of Biblical fidelity. And they allow the sinner to feel more comfortable and complacent by making God appear *less* severe and *less* serious about "Divine Punishment".

So, for some, the doctrine of everlasting punishment in Hell feels like a Divine Overreaction. Take Clark Pinnock as an example. We met him in our first examination of hell. He said,

"How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been?"

Now the assumption behind Pinnock's question is that no amount or degree of wickedness could justify conscious torment without end. And for this reason, Pinnock departs from the Authority of Scripture and proposes a *modified* view of hell in which the ungodly simply pass out of existence after a period of suffering.

But I would suggest to you that eternal torment is actually a fitting response to our sin. So instead of seeing hell as some form of *overreaction* to our misdeeds- we should look at "Everlasting Punishment" as God's Commentary on the gravity of our rebellion. In other words, it is not God's view of sin that needs adjusting- but *our own*. So I suggest to you that hell is a fitting response- it is a proper response to how awful our sins are to God.

And Isaiah was particularly good at explaining these kinds of things. Please turn with me to **Isaiah 66**. In **Isaiah 66** we see that one day the nations will come to worship God in a renewed Jerusalem. **Isaiah 66:22-24** says:

22 "For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me," declares the Lord, "So your offspring and your name will endure.
23 "And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the Lord.
24 "Then they will go forth and look On the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."

So instrumental to our worship in the age to come will be the regular reminder of the fate of the wicked. And this fate is presented to us here in **Isaiah 66** in terms of judgment, exclusion, and persistent pain. The fire that burns the bodies of the rebels is an image of Divine Judgment. And back in **Isaiah 66:16** we read,

For the Lord will execute judgment by fire And by His sword on all flesh, And those slain by the Lord will be many.

Moreover, the wicked will be excluded from the comfort and delights of the heavenly Jerusalem. Note in **Isaiah 66:24** how the

worshippers will *go out* and look on the dead bodies of the rebels. The wicked will suffer in the wasteland, shut out from the Presence of the Lord forever.

Finally, the image of the undying worm and the unquenchable fire suggests that the wicked will experience unceasing pain. In Scripture, the worm is associated with spoiling and decomposition. That such a worm does not die in the case of the wicked suggests that the Lord's enemies will lie in a perpetual state of decay, growing increasingly rotten though never passing away. In a similar fashion, the fire will devour their flesh continually. Surely the pain involved in such a state defies description. **Isaiah 33:14** captures the frightening prospect for us:

Sinners in Zion are terrified; Trembling has seized the godless. "Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?"

This, then, is the fate of the ungodly. But what have they done to deserve it? We see in **Isaiah 66:24** that the dead bodies moldering outside the city belong to those **"who have transgressed against [God]."** And this transgression has taken the specific form of idolatry, as described in **Isaiah 66:17**:

Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go to the gardens, Following one in the center, Who eat swine's flesh, detestable things and mice, Will come to an end altogether," declares the Lord.

So to understand *why* idolatry is such a grave offense, we must recall Isaiah's encounter with the Holy One of Israel in **Isaiah 6**. The prophet saw the glory of the Lord filling the temple and he cried out,

Isaiah 6:5

Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

So when Isaiah stood before the thundering Magnificence of God, he saw his own sin in its true light and it undid him. And in that moment- Isaiah would have thought no punishment was be too severe for his crimes.

Challenges to the doctrine of hell start out like *all* of the activities of the devil- by first *questioning* what the Bible clearly says and what it *means* by what it says, and then when that doesn't work- by outright *rejecting* what the Bible says. But they don't end there. Wayne Grudem, recognizing the trend to make hell appear more bearable, noticed a tragic pattern and so he said:

“The doctrine of eternal conscious punishment...tends to be one of the first doctrines given up by people who are moving away from a commitment to the Bible as absolutely truthful [...]. Among liberal theologians who do not accept the absolute truthfulness of the Bible, there is probably no one today who believes in the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment.” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*)

Now the most prominent campaigns against the Truth about hell are attacks against two Biblical aspects that the modern leaders find particularly offensive:

1. The Eternality of Hell
2. The Severity of Hell

So let's look at these closely.

1. The Eternality of Hell

Luke 16:27

And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house

Now the fact that the rich man in this Parable desires that Abraham send somebody else to warn his brothers shows that he knew that he was never going to be able to get out of this place. And yet one view of hell that seems to be making a strong resurgence today in the modern Church is what we looked at two weeks ago- a false teaching called Annihilationism. Now there are slight variations to this heresy- but it essentially teaches God will simply snuff every unbeliever out of Existence rather than punish him forever.

Now some Annihilationists make room for Divine Wrath- but they don't allow that Wrath to extend beyond the lake of fire. In other words,

these people do not allow in their thinking the full force of God's Judgment- which is eternal, conscious torment. For them, the lake of fire is what completely consumes and finally destroys sinners. And whether they see death as the end, or whether they see hell's torments as limited in duration- the result is the same- these false teachers deny the *endlessness* of hell. Look what Jesus said in **Matthew 25:46**:

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

Now I want you to notice two things about what Jesus says here:

- A. Jesus says that Hell is "Eternal"
- B. Jesus says that Hell is "Punishment"

So while it is really hard to get what Jesus said here confused- the Annihilationists have nevertheless managed to get this horribly wrong. And so for absolutely no good exegetical reason- the Annihilationists understand the word "**eternal**" in this verse to not mean a "duration of time", but to what they call the "*quality* of God's Judgment". So they teach that God's Wrath is eternal in *quality*- even though it has an end. Other Annihilationists say "eternal" refers to the *effect* of Divine Judgment. That is to say, God's Judgment results in death- as in extinction or annihilation- which is a state of "non-being" that lasts eternally.

Now if you're having a hard time wrapping your head around this- don't worry- you're not alone. Nonsense is always hard to understand. It's simply impossible for an unrepentant sinner to experience an eternal *quality* of Judgment without that Judgment lasting forever.

Matthew 25:46 clearly teaches that the duration of Divine Punishment and Divine Life are the same- both eternal. John MacArthur has said,

"Punishment in hell is defined by the word *aionios*, which is the word eternal or everlasting. There are people who would like to redefine that word *aionios* and say, "Well, it doesn't really mean forever." But if you do that with hell, you've just done it with heaven, because the same word is used to describe both. If there is not an everlasting hell, then there is not an everlasting heaven. And I'll go one beyond that. The same word is used to

describe God. And so if there is not an everlasting hell, then there is not an everlasting heaven, nor is there an everlasting God. It is clear that God is eternal; and, therefore, that heaven is eternal, and so is hell.” (John MacArthur, “A Testimony of One Surprised to Be in Hell, Part 2”)

So to suggest that passages like **Matthew 25:46** refer to eternality as a *quality* of Judgment, but not the *duration*, especially without any exegetical or grammatical support, cannot be understood any other way other than as a deliberate attempt at being deceived and of misleading other people. And that isn't a mistake- it is done on purpose. And that makes what these people teach to be evil. The meaning of the word “eternal” in that passage is clear- it's everlasting.

Now some Annihilationists explain away “eternal” as being in the sense of an eternal *effect*. They say words like destruction and death refer to some kind of disintegration or consumption. One popular statement is:

“A God of Love would never torment the wicked for all eternity. So He ends their existence and the *effect* of that singular act of Judgment lasts forever.”

So these people will graciously allow God to be wrathful- but only for a period of time. They say that for anybody to believe that Divine Punishment is everlasting is going way too far- it's a form of “cruel and unusual punishment”.

But these false teachers deny the eternality of God's Wrath because they do not believe what God has said about the quality of His Love. The Bible repeatedly and clearly teaches that God's Love is wrapped up in His Glory- for which the God of the Bible holds to passionately. And so there is no greater insult to God, no greater sacrilege, no greater crime, no greater sin than to marginalize or minimize or belittle God's Glory. Therefore- since God holds His Glory to be the primary Value of the Universe- the punishment against those who belittle that Glory must fit the crime.

So apart from the metaphysical problem (How can something that no longer exists be said to last forever?), there's a very serious problem with the “cessation of existence” view- it fails to account for a Lawgiver Who is infinite and eternal by Nature. So the severity of an offense is

measured, not merely by the nature of the act itself, but also in relation to the One offended. For example, if one man punches another man on a street corner, he may suffer some consequences- charges of disturbing the peace, assault, or battery, etc. But to punch the President of the United States ups the ante. And when the Secret Service finishes with him- he'll be doing some serious prison time.

It's like that with offenses committed against a holy God. Since an offense against a finite lawgiver is finite- the punishment to satisfy the offense is also finite. That's the principle behind **Exodus 21**, an eye for an eye (vv. 23-25). But an offense against an infinite, eternal Lawgiver is *not* finite- it's infinite and eternal.

And we have to know that it is up to the natural Judge to determine the severity of the natural infraction itself- i.e., telling a "white" lie versus committing homicide. But the *nature* of sin is measured against the very Nature of God- Who is holy and eternal. Likewise, God alone- Who is perfect in Righteousness- determines the Justice that sin demands. And according to His Word- the Punishment for an offense against a holy God is everlasting torment in hell.

In other words- God is so Holy and so Pure and so Glorious that the least slight to that Glory is so hideous so blasphemous and so terrible an insult- that the only correct and proper response of this Holy God is to damn that sin and that unrepentant sinner in everlasting fire. So ultimately- any departure from the Biblical understanding of hell is due to a departure of a Biblical understanding of God and His Glory.

Now on a human level, it's understandable when people recoil from the Bible's teaching about eternal torment. It's an absolutely horrible, terrifying doctrine. It's impossible for us to conceive of a crime so severe- even the crimes of notorious people like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao, and Osama bin Laden- that would merit the everlasting, excruciating agony described in the Bible.

But that shows just how little we understand the sinfulness of sin on the one hand, and the Holiness of God on the other.

Isaiah 55:8&9 tells us that God's Ways are higher than our ways, and His Thoughts are higher than our thoughts. So we cannot fully comprehend Him. In an uncomfortably poignant and penetrating way, the doctrine of eternal hell confronts our loyalty and it reveals our true authority, and demands that we set aside what seems reasonable to us and trust in the Righteous Judgment of a holy God. When we embrace

the hard doctrines of the Bible- it becomes one of the most significant evidences of true, God-given faith.

The Biblical Doctrine of an eternal hell gives us yet another reason to praise God for the Gospel. It took an Eternal Person to satisfy the Eternal Penalty against sin- which disqualified the entire human race- except one Person- Jesus Christ. And Jesus is the Son of Man *and* the eternal Son of God. So when Jesus laid down *His* Life- His Sacrifice satisfied every requirement of Divine Justice. And for all those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Substitute- His Death has forever satisfied the Eternal Wrath of an Eternally Righteous God. Jesus bore our Punishment in His Body- absorbing all of God's Eternal Wrath. But for those who do not embrace Christ- they are left to themselves. And they bear the guilt of their offenses against an Eternal God, and they will suffer for it eternally- never able to satisfy God's Eternal Wrath.

So I hope that the Doctrine of Eternal Torment sobers you. May it fill you with praise to God for saving you from eternal punishment, for giving you eternal life instead. And may it humble you when you realize you're not getting what you *deserve*. And may it ignite in you a passion to proclaim the Gospel to those poor souls who are unaware of the terror that awaits them outside the Mercy of God.

2. The Severity of Hell

Luke 16:24

And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

Now whenever Jesus described hell, He was never flippant or dismissive about it. He used very vivid and terrifying terms to describe the final destination of unrepentant sinners- shocking and scaring His audiences with frighteningly graphic metaphors. Hell is a place so bad that you should be willing to cut off sensitive and irreplaceable parts of your body to avoid it (**Matthew 5:29-30**); even martyrdom would be worth avoiding the torment of hell (**Matthew 10:28**). And Jesus always presented hell as a *horrific* place of intolerable suffering.

And Jesus' descriptions are consistent with other Biblical writers. Daniel referred to hell as a place of shame and everlasting contempt

(**Daniel 12:2**). Paul called it a place of endless destruction and punishment (**2Thessalonians 1:5-10**). Jude called hell a place of eternal fire and darkness (**Jude 7**). The Apostle John described hell as a place where sinners suffer everlasting torment, with no rest day or night (**The Revelation 14:9-11**).

And taken together, all those descriptions of hell communicate pain, fear, loss, anger, separation, and hopelessness. It's utter agony, eternal torment.

The New Testament describes hell as a place of unimaginable torment. Biblical writers help us picture scenes of unspeakable horror, and most of the time they're merely quoting what Jesus said about hell:

- ✓ **weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12)**
- ✓ **spiritual and bodily destruction (Matthew 10:28)**
- ✓ **fiery furnaces (Matthew 13:42, 50)**
- ✓ **outer darkness (Matthew 22:13)**
- ✓ **unquenchable fires (Mark 9:48-49)**
- ✓ **endless torments (Luke 16:23-24)**

John Calvin, commenting on those descriptions, wrote,

"By such expressions, the Holy Spirit certainly intended to confound all our senses with dread."

Calvin understood the Bible's appeal to our senses. When you read about hell in Scripture, you can almost hear the agonizing wails, smell the smoke and burning sulfur, see the flames from the lake of fire, and feel the seething anger of the wicked as they gnash their teeth at the Righteous Judge.

Jesus used pictures and metaphors to help us understand the horror of hell. Darkness represents loneliness, insecurity, the sense of being lost and disoriented, fire represents the excruciating pain of burning, and a *lake* of fire represents the sense of drowning, suffocating, taking the burning sulfur internally. These vivid pictures of hell's environment should provoke a reasonable sense of fear in a normal, thinking person. No one can come away with the idea that hell is a tolerable place to spend eternity.

Now while it's true that hell is a place of untold *physical* pain and suffering (fire, scorching, being cut to pieces), I think we often overlook the *mental* agony of being completely forsaken- abandoned for all eternity. After all, the most chilling cry from our Lord as He suffered God's wrath on the cross stemmed not from physical pain, but from being forsaken by the Father. Jesus cried out, **"My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).**

John MacArthur explained the significance of God forsaking the Son in relation to hell:

"This is a reminder to all sinners that while hell is the full fury of God's personal punishment presence, He will never be there to comfort. He will never be there to show sympathy. He will never bring relief. [...] it is both the punishment of God and the absence of comfort. [...] That's hell—punishment without relief" (John MacArthur; *The King Crucified: Consummation at Calvary*).

As the Puritan Thomas Vincent put it,

"Not only will the unbeliever be in hell, but hell will be in him, too."

The New Testament frequently presents hell as a prison- a place of eternal confinement (**Matthew 22:13; Jude 13; 2Peter 2:9**). Now it's impossible to understand first-century prison conditions by looking at American prisons today where accommodations include cable television, three square meals, educational opportunities, outdoor exercise, and toilet/shower facilities. But in many of the world's jails throughout history, jailors didn't just treat prisoners like criminals, but rather as sub-humans, as *animals*.

But even the *worst* of earthly prison conditions serve as weak analogies to the eternal dungeon of God's hell. God will offer nothing to comfort or relieve his agony- ever. In hell, sinners will forever be hopeless, helpless, and powerless. God casts them into hell for one reason- punishment (**2Thessalonians 1:9**).

If you want an inside glimpse of the agonies of hell, look at the Savior in Gethsemane as He anticipated the Cross. See the bloody drops of sweat falling from His Body as He faced the reality of absorbing His Father's eternal Wrath. Hear His agonizing screams from the Cross as

His Father- for the first and last time- abandoned His sin-bearing Son. Feel His loneliness as He faced those agonies alone.

Hell is a place where God's full Wrath and Fury will be poured out eternally on sinners. Possessing in Himself the essence and omniscience of deity, Christ knew what He spoke of. And as our sin-bearing Substitute, He anticipated the torments of hell and finally experienced the full outpouring of Divine Wrath for all those who believe. Scripture is abundantly clear about the doctrine of hell. Therefore, nothing good can come from anybody advocating a view of hell that makes it out to be anything less than a hopeless, agonizing, eternal separation from the good and gracious Presence of God.

If you reject, diminish, or neglect the doctrine of hell, you undermine the gravity of our sin in contrast to the Holiness of God. But armed with accurate teaching on hell- you help the sinner understand why he *must* flee from the Wrath of God into the Mercy of Jesus Christ.

Similarly, we will only see the justice of hell when we see the awful weight of our sin. And we will only see the awful weight of our sin when we see the God Who says of Himself,

Isaiah 42:8

I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.

When we see this God, we will understand why Jonathan Edwards could say that

“Men do not hate misery more than God hates sin.”

So in the final analysis- our sin is worse than hell. Therefore- we should not marvel that God burns with white hot Wrath against His enemies- those who sin without remorse or repentance. And as we contemplate that- let us try to marvel- that while we were still enemies- Jesus Christ died for us.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.