

Hell Is For Real
Selected Scriptures
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We're near the end of a summer series entitled "Hold Fast" - the forgotten truths which we must always remember. Today, we come to one of those truths that frankly almost everyone would just as soon forget. Nothing Scripture teaches is more hated than the truth of eternal hell. In fact, in his book, "Why I'm Not a Christian", Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher, wrote these words: "There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment." Most people, like the agnostic Russell, simply cannot countenance the possibility that there is a place of eternal conscious torment, eternal conscious punishment. And frankly, many Christians are ashamed of this doctrine. And there's a sense in which we can understand that. I think all of us can agree with C.S. Lewis when he writes: "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 especially of our Lord's own words." I understand that. I think we all understand that. But it's important for us, as we contemplate this reality, to understand that the Scripture clearly teaches that there is a real place where every sinner who refuses to repent and believe in Jesus, God's Son, and His work on the cross will endure conscious eternal punishment, suffering in both body and soul forever.

Now let me begin by saying that this is a very difficult message for me. It was difficult for me to study this week. It's difficult for me to preach to you. I take no joy in this. I know it'll be difficult for you to hear. But I could not preach a series on the forgotten truths of Scripture, leave this one out, and still be a faithful minister of Jesus Christ. We need to be reminded to hold fast to a truth that today's church has joyfully and completely forgotten. And it is this truth: hell is for real; hell is for real.

Now I want to begin by briefly reminding us of the unbiblical substitutes for hell. There are a number of ideas that are floated as substitutes for what the Scripture teaches. First of all, there is the idea that there is no life after death. This is the evolutionary mindset; you're simply a mechanism, a physiological mechanism, and there is no eternal soul - you die, you're dead, that's

it. Another unbiblical substitute for hell is the idea that all unbelievers will ultimately be saved. This is called universalism. This was propounded recently in Rob Bell's book "Love Wins". It's the response of liberalism throughout the last several 100 years to the reality of hell. A third unbiblical substitute is the idea that unbelievers get a second chance after death. This is sometimes referred to as second probation. It's the mistaken idea that after death, God will again offer salvation in much the same way He does today to those who died outside of Christ. Scripture, however, teaches that one's eternal state is fixed at death as we will see today. A fourth unbiblical substitute for hell is that unbelievers will be ultimately destroyed; they will simply cease to exist. This is annihilationism. Annihilationism teaches that all unbelievers will at some point cease to exist. Some of them teach that that will happen at the moment of death. This is conditional mortality. God created humans potentially immortal, only believers receive immortality. So, unbelievers cease to exist when they die. The other annihilationism view says: no, they will endure the penalty of God's wrath from the time of their death until the final judgment, and then be annihilated and cease to exist. Those, then, are the most common unbiblical substitutes for the doctrine of eternal hell.

But the question for us as believers, and you've heard me say this so many times, is never, "What do I like?" How would I write the ending of the wicked? What does the culture believe? What is the majority vote? The issue for us who are followers of Jesus Christ is always the same - What does our Lord teach? What does the Bible say? And so, I want, secondly, having considered the unbiblical substitutes for hell, to take a brief survey of what the Scripture teaches about the doctrine of hell. Obviously, we can't exhaust the subject this morning, but I want us to at least see some of what Scripture addresses in this issue starting in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, there are numerous examples of the fact that God is not only a Savior and, by the way, let me stop and say God is a Savior. He is a Redeemer. He's the one who sent His Son into the world to die for sinners so that we could be delivered from hell. God is a Savior. That's a wonderful reality. God declares Himself, in Exodus 34, to be compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. That is very true. But God is also holy and just. That's why the very next phrase in His self-revelation, in Exodus 34, is that He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. He can't! He must! He

is bound by His character to punish rebellion. And punish He does. The most graphic examples in the Old Testament, of course, would be the universal flood in Genesis 6 and following where God destroys every human being on the planet except for the eight in the ark. And then there's Sodom and Gomorrah where God destroys the cities of the plains sparing only Lot **and** a few relatives in demonstration of His hatred, His holy wrath against sin. If you doubt whether or not God will judge, read the Book of Genesis. Read those accounts.

But there are two Old Testament texts that speak very specifically of the ultimate fate of the wicked. The Old Testament doesn't give us the fullness of revelation on this subject that the New Testament does, but there are two texts that deal with this specifically. I want to start in Isaiah 66. In Isaiah 66, in verse 22, Isaiah finishes this wonderful prophecy by talking about the new heavens and the new earth that God will make. By the way, He'd already promised to do that if you go back to chapter 65:17: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; / And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind." That, by the way, will be the last message in this series. Most Christians think we're going to spend eternity floating around on clouds, playing harps in a place called heaven. No, we were made for earth. We're going to spend eternity on a new earth in which righteousness is at home. So, we'll look at that together. But notice how the Prophet puts it in Isaiah 66:22: "'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.'" This is a promise that God will save a remnant of the Jewish people. This is Romans 11: "all Israel will be saved" - those who were alive at the time of Christ, those who throughout church history (throughout history) and then, of course, Gentiles will be saved as well. So, he's describing the fact that the redeemed will be in this new earth. And notice verse 23, "[They will worship 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." These are the redeemed, the worshippers of God. But then Isaiah ends the last verse of his prophecy on a very sobering, apparently discordant, note. Notice what he writes: "Then they [that is, the redeemed who are worshipping God in that new earth] 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 [flesh or all] mankind."

Now what's going on here? Jesus often quoted these very words in His ministry, as we will see, in reference to hell. **The** scene is of a battlefield. The divine warrior has defeated those who have rebelled against God and their carcasses litter the battlefield. In verse 24, Isaiah describes the redeemed gazing upon the corpses of God's defeated enemies and what they see is so unthinkable that, in the past, when the rabbis read this portion of Scripture, they would change the wording. Because what they describe, what Isaiah describes here, happened on occasion in the ancient world. An army would leave the bodies of its defeated enemies lying on the battlefield unburied. It was the ultimate act of desecration. What the birds didn't eat, the worms would finish. One commentator writes, "In all other cases, the maggots would die when they finished their foul work, and the fire would go out once its fuel was consumed. But in the prophet's picture of God's judgment of those who rebel, the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. The punishment and shame of the wicked have no end. Their fate is eternal. It is no wonder that they will be loathsome or abhorrent to all mankind." So, Isaiah ends his prophecy with the realization of the eternal state. And in that eternal state, there will be a new earth on which the redeemed lived and there will be an eternal place of suffering for the wicked where the worm doesn't die, and the fire is not quenched.

Now turn over to Daniel 12 - the other passage in the Old Testament that very clearly addresses this issue. Again, there are other passages we could go to but these are two very direct and specific passages. Daniel 12:2. Daniel prophesies a coming resurrection. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake..." We know from the rest of Scripture the many, ultimately, will be all human beings who have died, who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake. This is resurrection. And notice, that all will be resurrected to one of two possible fates - these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. You'll notice that both destinies have the same length of time. They are both everlasting - the righteous resurrected to everlasting life, the wicked resurrected to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Body and soul, the righteous enjoy life, and body and soul the wicked face everlasting contempt. So, that gives us the foundation for what our Lord, then, will teach and what the apostles will teach about the final state of the wicked.

So, let's turn our attention, then, to the New Testament and specifically to the teaching of our Lord. Many New Testament writers mentioned hell, sometimes by name, but many of them at least refer to the reality of eternal punishment. However, no one in Scriptures spoke more about hell than our Lord. And He did so often without using the word hell. He speaks of what will happen to the lost, what will happen to the wicked in eternity. But he also uses the word hell more than anyone else. In fact, the word hell occurs 12 times in the New Testament, eleven of those times it comes from the lips of our Lord. No one was as graphic about hell than Jesus was. His language was, by far, the most and is by far the most powerful and the most terrifying of any of the biblical writers.

Now, the primary word that Jesus uses for hell, in the gospels, is the word Gehenna. Gehenna is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew Ben-Hinnom. It means the Valley of Hinnom. Now the Valley of Hinnom was an actual valley, southwest of the city of Jerusalem, just outside the city walls. It became infamous in Old Testament times, the Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna. It became infamous because it was there that the idolatrous children of Israel sacrificed their children in the fire to the god Molech. Ultimately, when they repented of their idolatry, the site became a pariah and, in fact by Jesus' day, the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) served as the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. Because of the trash, it was infested with worms and maggots. A trash fire constantly burned there giving off a horrific odor. And occasionally, the bodies of criminals apparently were dumped there and burned instead of receiving a proper burial. So, Jesus chose the expression Gehenna or the Valley of Hinnom because just outside the city wall of Jerusalem, was a powerful illustration of the eternal reality of hell; a living illustration of what the future would be for the wicked.

Now let's look at just a few of the passages where our Lord uses this word. Matthew 5 as Jesus begins the body of the Sermon on the Mount, He comes to this concept. Matthew 5:21: "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" In other words, there are human consequences, namely, the death penalty for murder. "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court..." Jesus is saying, 'Listen, you don't have to kill somebody. All you have to do is be angry in your heart with them to violate this commandment of God. And if the

law were interpreted the court system the way God intended, you could be found guilty for violating this command just by being angry with someone in your heart. And maybe you express that anger in your words: "...whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court..." In other words, you would not only be convicted for violating this command for being angry and speaking out in anger, but that case would then be referred to the Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin, who had the authority to issue the death penalty. Jesus goes a step further. He says, in fact, "whoever says, 'You fool,' ..." - it's not that "you fool" is necessarily worse than "you good for nothing", He's simply saying if you speak out in anger against someone you will not only be found humanly guilty in the court system, but this would have been shocking, you will be "guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." Literally, you'll see in your marginal note the "Gehenna of fire". All you have to do, Jesus says, is be angry. All you have to do is speak in anger and you deserve, having broken the command against murder, you deserve to be sent to the Gehenna of fire.

Hell, Jesus says, is a real place. It's as real as the local courts. It's as real as the Jewish Supreme Court. And He associates this place with danger and with fire. Go to verse 27: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery' [another of the Ten Commandments] but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble..." - you can immediately see the connection here. "If your right eye make you stumble [that is fall into sin in this way], tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell [Gehenna]. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell [into Gehenna]." Jesus warns us to take sexual sin and sexual lust seriously because to live in those without a repentant heart, is to risk having God throw you into hell. Jesus, here, warns us because He's the Savior and He doesn't want sinners to go to hell. This isn't...this is a warning, an invitation. It's a call to take stock. Turn over to Matthew 10:28. Jesus is preparing His disciples to face persecution that's going to come. And He says to them in verse 28, "Do not fear those who kill the body [that's the worst that persecutors can do] but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him [that is God] who is able to destroy both soul and body [in Gehenna] in hell." Jesus says, notice specifically here, that sinners in hell will have

both body and soul. And He says you better fear God because He's able to, He has authority to do this. In fact, in the parallel passage in Luke 12:5, Luke quotes Jesus this way: "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" The point of these passages is Satan is not in charge of hell. I love John Milton's poetry and reading "Paradise Lost". You know, it talks about Satan ruling in hell. Satan doesn't rule in hell. God rules in hell. Satan is a prisoner there or will be. You better fear God. I don't know if you're here this morning and you'd have to admit to yourself - you know I don't really fear God, I don't live in fear of God. Jesus says, you better, because He has authority to cast you forever into hell, into Gehenna.

Look at chapter 18, chapter 18:8. This is a chapter that, frankly, addresses a lot of issues, ultimately, that would be true in the church. You can even, I think honestly, say in many ways, **it's** the earliest chapter on the church. He talks about church discipline in this chapter. But notice what He says in verse 8: "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble [that is into sin], cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast [that is by God] into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell." Again, literally, into the Gehenna of fire. Jesus is not saying that mutilating yourself is going to help you deal with sin; many have tried and found that not to be true. What He is saying is this: hell will be such a horrible place that, if it would help us to avoid hell, it would be better to take the radical step of self-mutilation, cutting off my hand or foot or gouging out an eye, and to enter into eternal life than to coddle and cater that sin and go into hell with all of your members.

Turn over to Matthew 25. As Jesus finishes the Olivet Discourse, He describes what is called, The Judgment of the Nations. This happens at the end of the tribulation period. It is a judgment of those who survive the tribulation period. But we see described here, judgment. Notice in verse 32: "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats..." This is not a judgment of nations as much as the judgment of individuals who survive the tribulation. "He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left." Now notice there are two groups here: there's the wicked

and the righteous, the sheep and the goats, and there are two destinies. Verse 34: “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” By the way, notice these people don’t get into heaven because of their works. They get into heaven because of grace, just like everybody else - blessed of my father, inheriting a kingdom that was prepared for you before the foundation of the world. It’s always grace. But they evidenced the change in their lives, beginning in verse 35, with their behavior, with their lives. **The** reality of their salvation by grace is evidenced by their works. Notice the other destiny, verse 41: “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.’” You see here, there are two destinies: there’s blessing or there’s curse. There’s enjoying God’s presence forever or there’s being banished from God’s presence forever. There is heaven or there’s hell. In verse 41, although God prepared hell for the devil and his angels, those humans who still have Satan as their father (John 8:44) will inhabit hell with him. Now go to verse 46 and notice the two eternal states of these two groups. “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” The wicked endure eternal punishment, the righteous enjoy eternal life. And by the way, just as in English, the same Greek word is used for eternal in both cases. Unbelievers will be punished in hell as long as the righteous enjoy eternal life in heaven.

Now I want to turn to one other passage in Luke’s gospel where our Lord touches on this issue of hell. He does not use in Luke 16 the word, Gehenna, but rather he uses the word Hades. Hades is the Greek word that’s used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to translate the Hebrew word Sheol. And both Sheol and Hades are used in two ways. They are sometimes used just for the grave where all people go (so sort of death in a general sense) and they are also both used often of fate, the fate eternal fate of the wicked or of hell as is clearly true here.

Now you know this is the story of the rich man and Lazarus - a parable that Jesus tells. I wish I had time to walk through this **in** several messages. Honestly, it’s what it deserves. But I want you to notice the context (verse 13). Jesus has just said you cannot serve God and wealth. Verse 14: “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were

scoffing at Him.” That’s the context. So, Jesus then tells a parable about a rich man and a beggar because they believe that if God was truly blessing you, you were righteous. And that meant blessing you with stuff in this life and therefore you were going to end up in heaven. So, in their minds, this rich man - probably in Jesus’ story, a Pharisee, in light of the context - they thought this guy is going to be in heaven; that’s evidenced by God’s blessing on him in this life. But Jesus tells the story in which He absolutely reverses everything they thought.

Now, again, I don’t have time to walk through the story in its detail, but I want you to see verse 23; what Jesus...several important points Jesus makes here about hell. You can’t press every detail, but I think there are, because it is a parable, but I think there are some clear lessons here. First of all, notice: “In Hades (verse 23) he lifted up his eyes...” Here, the rich man, right after death, is conscious; he’s fully conscious, fully aware of his circumstances. And he’s suffering, notice verse 23: “...being in torment...” Verse 24: “I am in agony in this flame.” Verse 25, Abraham says, “...you are in agony”. Verse 28, the rich man says, “...this is a place of torment.” What Jesus clearly intended to communicate is that hell is a place where people suffer. They suffer physically, they suffer spiritually, mentally, emotionally - it’s a place of suffering. And it’s a place **of** unrelieved suffering. Notice verse 24. He cries out and asks Abraham. By the way, he’s still not talking to God, he’s still alienated from God. And he says, “Abraham, have mercy on me...” And he still thinks, by the way, of Lazarus **as** beneath him, as his slave: “...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.” And Abraham says, ‘No, not gonna happen.’

Now think about that for a moment. Jesus is, here, clearly teaching that sinners will not experience a small moment of relief in their suffering for all eternity. Moreover, verse 25, Abraham said, “Child...” Remember now this is a Jewish man, probably a Pharisee, and so he was a physical descendant of Abraham; in that sense he’s his child. “Child, remember that during your life you received your good things...” You see what Abraham is doing? He’s saying, and Jesus is teaching us, that not only is there consciousness in the suffering and punishment of hell, but you can remember your earthly life with all of its joys, with all of its opportunities, the missed opportunities, with all of **the** times that you chose to rebel against God, the biting of conscience, all of those things will be in the mind and in the memory for all eternity.

Remember. And in verse 26, Abraham adds: “And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed...” By the way, don’t press the details. It’s not that people in heaven and hell can talk to each other. This is a story told to help us understand. But I think what clearly is being expressed here in verse 26, is that God has fixed a chasm between heaven and hell and there’s no going back and forth between them. At death, your fate is fixed; your circumstances and eternity will be permanent. What an awful place! Gehenna, like that garbage dump outside the city walls of Jerusalem, where the maggots always lived and the fire always burned, suffering in mind and body forever, unrelenting pain. This is what our Lord taught. Now understand this: there is no question that this is what our Lord taught. And so, to reject Jesus’ teaching about hell, is ultimately to reject Him. Either He is a truth speaker and what He says about the eternal state of the wicked is true, or He is a liar. But you can’t have it both ways.

Now, just briefly, I want to look at several examples from the teaching of the apostles in the New Testament about hell. There are many places we could go; just a couple to consider. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 Paul writes, “...the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” And then he explains how he’s going to deal out retribution. Verse 9: “these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”, that is, from His presence to bless. God is present everywhere, even in hell - but away from His presence of blessing, away from His grace, away from His mercy. Jude 7 says, Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them...are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.” Jude says, ‘Listen, if you want to know whether or not God will punish sin, just read Genesis 18 and 19. That is an example of the punishment of eternal fire.’

But I want you to turn, in the interest of time - we really can’t look at many more passages - but turn to Revelation 14:9: “Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand...’ Here we are in the tribulation period. You remember the man of sin will establish worship of himself, and the entire world, except for those God saves and redeems during that time, will worship him. These are really just unbelievers who live during the tribulation. And

notice what they will endure. Verse 10: “he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he...” - that is an idolater, a person who worships something other than God and, again, that’s ultimately all unbelievers, in context, those who live during the time of the tribulation]. “...[he] will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.” Verse 11 - how long? “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever...” The smoke rises forever because the fire never fully consumes its fuel. And then he says in verse 11: “they have no rest day and night...” That implies ongoing existence.

Look at Revelation 20. Revelation 20:10, speaking of Satan, “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.” We read verses 14 and 15. “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Chapter 21:8: “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Folks what I want you to see that, as a survey of the Scriptures and if we were to take a survey of church history, we would see that the doctrine of eternal punishment is what the saints have always believed. It’s what the Old Testament saints believed as well in less precise terms. It’s what Christ taught. It’s what the apostles taught. It’s what the large consensus, almost unanimous consensus of the church, has taught for 2000 years. This is what the Scriptures say.

Now a couple of other things to consider, thirdly, the primary images of hell. When the Scripture speaks of hell it does so in three basic images. First of all, fire. Fire is used to describe hell more than 20 times in the New Testament. For example, in Matthew 18:8 “the eternal fire”, 18:9 “the fiery hell”, Matthew 13:49 says that the angels will “take the wicked from among the righteous and will throw them into the furnace a fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”, Matthew 25:41 Jesus says, “Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire...” Now what does fire refer to? Well, clearly, the point is to picture the intense and

unspeakable pain of that place. That is not debated. But are these literal flames as we know them? Is this fire as we know it? It's certainly possible. We can't know for sure because there is some disagreement on this. Many Orthodox scholars take the fire to be literal. Many other scholars throughout church history, including notable ones like John Calvin, took them to be metaphorical or symbolic. Regardless, God chose fire to picture for us the terrible reality of hell. It is a real place of intense physical and mental suffering, body and soul. John MacArthur writes, "If the fire is symbolic, the reality it represents will be even more horrifying and painful." Fire.

The second image Scripture uses is darkness. Matthew 8:12, the Jews who rejected their Messiah, Jesus says, "will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 22:13, the King says to the servants about the man who tried to get in without the wedding garment that the host provided, picturing someone trying to get **into the** feast of heaven without the righteousness God provides in Christ, he says, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." What is the darkness about? Well, remember God is light and His sons are called the sons of light, so darkness, then, speaks of permanent separation from God, from His light, and from His children, from His people.

The third image Scripture uses is weeping and gnashing of teeth. I've already read several passages where that's described. What is this about? Well weeping, that word weeping, has the idea not **of** a tear flowing down your cheek, a lone tear, but rather of sobbing. This is intense and deep sorrow, not of genuine repentance, but rather of remorse and regret. And gnashing of teeth speaks of extreme suffering and, again, remorse - perhaps the biting of conscience. The point of these images is that hell will be a place of unimaginable, unspeakable suffering that we cannot begin to comprehend.

A fourth point we need to consider is the primary attributes of hell. Very briefly, how do we describe hell? First of all, it is eternal, it is eternal. It's called eternal. Matthew 18:8 speaks up the "eternal fire", Jude 7 "the punishment of eternal fire", Revelation 14:11 "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever". Also, images are used that speak **of** an endless duration. **In** Isaiah 66, and several times Jesus quotes in the gospels, that expression "their worm does not die

and the fire is not quenched” - that pictures the eternal duration of hell. Jesus, in Matthew 25:46, equates the duration of heaven with the duration of hell. They’re both eternal in the same sense. And the Apostle John gives us **an** example of hell’s duration. I read, a moment ago, Revelation 20:10 where the devil is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, along with the beast and the false prophet who are already there and have been there, at that point, for the 1000 years of the millennium. And yet, John still writes that from that point, their torment will continue day and night forever. They’d already been there a thousand years. Can you imagine that? Trace back 1000 years in your mind. We’re talking the Battle of Hastings. They’d already been there 1000 years but only eternity to anticipate.

Now some people argue that God would be unjust to punish temporal sins, that is, sins committed during a 70-to-80-year lifespan for eternity. Let me give you two answers to that. The first answer is, who are you to decide what is just? God is just. What He does is just. If this is what He decides our rebellion deserves, then it is what our rebellion deserves. You see, it’s not what you do that matters as much as who you sinned against. That’s true even in this world. Compare the difference if you slap a peer or you slap the President of the United States. Imagine the difference when we’re talking about an infinite God that we have in essence, by our rebellion, slapped again and again and again. John Piper writes, “Degrees of blameworthiness come not from how long you offend dignity but how high the dignity is that you offend.” In addition, hell isn’t remedial. You understand that? Revelation 22:11 says, “Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy...” Listen, hell is not going to cause someone to be righteous; they will still be unrighteous. The sinner in hell will continue to rebel against God in his heart forever. He will curse God and he will suffer in his mind as much as his circumstances allow. So, the punishment of hell will endure forever because the sinner’s rebellion will continue forever. It will also not only be eternal, it’ll be conscious. We saw this in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. In hell he lifted up his eyes. He was conscious. He was aware of where he was and what he was suffering. And, thirdly, it will be suffering - physical suffering and mental anguish. Remember, Jesus says in Matthew 10:28, “fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” It will be suffering of the soul and it will be suffering of the body. This is the heart of what the Bible teaches about hell.

Now, how do we respond to this? What are the main lessons from hell? Very briefly, there are four of them. Number one: we learn from hell the sinfulness of sin. That sinners have to be sent to such an awful place for eternity, helps us grasp something of the level of our crimes and our rebellion against God. If you want to see the horrific nature of sin, look three places. Look in the garden when, for eating a piece of fruit, God condemns the whole human race. Look at the cross where the Son suffers under the wrath of God as the only way to reconcile sinners to God. And look at hell where sinners suffer forever for their rebellion and you begin to get a glimpse of how awful sin truly is, the sinfulness that is in every sin. Did you notice what I read in Revelation 14:10? It says, “he [they] will be tormented...in the presence...of the Lamb [forever].” Robert Peterson writes, “The wicked will suffer eternally in Christ’s holy presence. Why? Because sin is so sinful, and He is so holy that this is the only way that justice can be satisfied.” Jonathan Edwards writes, “For the unrighteous and the righteous, eternity will be spent in the immediate presence of God. God will be the hell of the one and God will be the heaven of the other.”

Secondly, hell teaches us to fear God. Isn’t that what Jesus said in Luke 12:4-5? He said, “I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!” Listen, as you sit here this morning, you better learn to live in awe and respect and honor and fear of God your creator. That’s what Jesus said. You better not take God lightly.

Thirdly, hell teaches us the necessity of evangelism. Do you understand, friends, that Jesus is saying this is what everyone in our lives, who isn’t in Christ, will one day endure forever? Forever! This is why we have to share the gospel. This is why Christ talks so much about hell. Because, as the Savior, He was warning people: this is what’s coming, this is what’s coming.

And that brings me to number four. Hell teaches us about the grace of God in Christ because this is what Christ has redeemed us from. You know, you might hear about hell and think that God takes some sort of sadistic delight in tormenting sinners forever. Listen, that is a slur on the character of God. Listen to how God Himself describes His perspective. Ezekiel 18:32 He says,

“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies [the wicked]...” He says, ‘I don’t delight in this, I don’t find any joy in this!’ And so He says, “Therefore repent and live.” That’s God’s plea, that’s God’s heart. ‘Listen, I don’t find joy in consigning you to eternal hell’, God says. ‘Repent and live!’ You remember, Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem who wouldn’t embrace Him. I love the way Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5 - you know that’s one of my favorite passages. Paul says God, the Father, was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and He’s given us the ministry of reconciliation. We are ambassadors for Christ. Listen to this: “...as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” That’s the heart of God. He doesn’t take any joy in the fact that one day, if you choose to live in your rebellion, He will consign you to hell. He says, ‘Repent and live!’ He says, ‘Be reconciled to Me, I plead with you, be reconciled to Me!’ That’s the heart of God. If you go to hell, it will be over His pleas, over His invitation. He says, listen, “[I] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our [your] behalf, so that we [you] might become the righteousness of God in Him.” I beg you, I beg you. And if you’re a believer, you should live in gratitude and love and obedience to Christ because this is what you have been rescued from. He loved you and gave Himself for you so that He might rescue you from the wrath to come.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father these are hard and sobering things. But we who are in Christ, we love You. We cannot thank You enough that You are not only just, and holy, and cannot acquit the wicked, but You are also gracious and loving, a Savior who extends graciously the invitation, “Repent and live!” Father we thank You that You have drawn us to Yourself in Christ and that we, who are in Christ, don’t have to fear hell for there is therefore now, for us, no condemnation because we are in Christ Jesus. Lord, we love You and we praise You. We thank You for the privilege of worshipping You even through the Lord’s table. We confess our sins to You, as we come to take of it, because we wouldn’t want **to** sully His sacrifice for sin by treasuring some sin in our hearts. And so, each of us individually, Father, confess our sin. Receive our worship through this means. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen!