

# Judgments & Blessing As Motives in Missions

Revelation 14:8-13

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6 And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an everlasting gospel to be proclaimed to those who reside on the earth—to every ethnic nation and tribe and language and people—7 saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judging has come, and do obeisance to Him who made heaven and earth, the ocean and springs of water.”

8 And another, a second, angel followed, saying, “It fell, it fell, Babylon the great!—she made all the nations drink of the wine of the rage of her fornication.”

9 And another angel, a third, 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, 10 really, he will drink of the wine of the fury of God, mixed at full strength in the cup of His wrath. In fact, he will be tormented with fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb.” 11 So the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the Beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

12 Here is the endurance of the saints, here are those who keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus. 13 I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on’ (“Yes” says the Spirit) ‘so that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow along with them’.”

Introduction - whatever happened to fire and brimstone preaching?

Most of you are probably too young to remember the hellfire and brimstone preaching of the past. Now granted, some of that preaching was horrible, but some of those preachers were such powerful preachers of God's wrath against sin that people often felt like they had come face to face with God and sometimes felt like they were teetering on the very brink of hell. If you have never read Jonathan Edwards' sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," you ought to read it to get a feel for such preachers of the past. It is my prayer that God would raise up an army of such preachers in the present. We need them.

But nowadays, most people have a strong distaste for such preachers. They don't want to think about God's wrath, His judgment, or hell. John Blanchard said, "Hell seems to have fallen on hard times," and he cited several statistics in the West to prove it.<sup>1</sup> Only 3% of Americans think they have any possibility of going to hell. But a majority probably tell people to go there on a regular basis. David Lodge claims,

At some point in the nineteen-sixties hell disappeared. No one could say for certain when this happened...

... or why. But numerous surveys show that preachers do not preach on hell.

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1 John Blanchard, Whatever Happened to Hell

A recent survey of the most successful Evangelical churches all across the United States showed that almost none of these big churches had ever preached on hell even one time. Rather curious, because they claim to follow Jesus, and Jesus preached on hell rather frequently. Kenneth Kantzer, editor of Christianity Today magazine, said that he hadn't heard a sermon on hell in 30 years. The senior editor of that same magazine said that the "passing of hell from modern consciousness" is "one of the major if still largely undocumented modern trends."<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have said that "hell" is a doctrine of the past.

But it is not just an issue of hell being sidelined. Anything negative in the Scripture has tended to be sidelined in the postmodern church, whether that be Biblical penalties for crimes, God's judgment on sin, God's wrath, or even preaching on sin. In his book, *The Potter's Freedom*, James White (who is a Reformed BAPTIST leader) points out that Paul's letter to the Romans would "fail almost every evangelism class currently offered in seminaries" because he starts with the bad news: "Without a single poem, no funny illustrations or multi-media aids, the inspired Apostle drags on about the sinfulness of men, Jew and Gentile alike."<sup>3</sup> That is not Kosher in today's post-modern church.

But this chapter shows that proclaiming God's perspective on sin, judgment, and God's wrath is an absolutely essential component of genuine missions. James White argues one must first understand the bad news before the good news even makes sense, and I believe he is right.

Let me give you the context of where we have been so far in this chapter on missions. Two weeks ago we saw that God had raised up 144,000 missionaries in verses 1-5. Last week we looked at how angels are involved in the missions task of those missionaries. But these next verses give the negative preparatory side of the Gospel that prepare the way for Jesus to bring in a huge harvest of souls in verses 14-16. If you want to see a repeat of the kind of harvest that verses 14-16 describe, then the preconditions of these verses must be present. And they are not present today. I ask several questions in your outline to illustrate that.

## **I. Whatever happened to seeing God's hand in national disasters? (v. 8)**

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2 Martin Marty, "Whatever Happened to Hell," *The Lutheran*, April 2, 1986.

3 James White, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Normal Geisler's Chosen But Not Free* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), p. 81.

## **A. The meaning of the text**

The first question is, "Whatever happened to seeing God's hand in national disasters?" I have read many sermons from the 1600s through the 1800s and a consistent theme was submitting to God's chastening hand when a nation faced war, famine, flu epidemics, Hurricanes, locust plagues, or other disasters. You see a hurricane today and you don't see any calls to repentance.

And by the way, it wasn't just the churches that called people to repentance during those years. Governors, Congress, and US Presidents often attributed wars and disasters to our national sins and called for a day of fasting, confession of our sins, and prayers for mercy from Almighty God. If you look on Google books, you can find every proclamation made by governors and presidents, and it is astounding how unapologetically and clearly they attribute national calamities to God's hand of judgment. John Adams treated the dicey circumstances they faced in 1798 as being God's just judgment on the nation for its wicked sins, and called upon the nation to fast and pray throughout the entire day of May 9, and

... abstaining on that day from their customary worldly occupations, offer their devout addresses to the Father of Mercies... [and] with the deepest humility, acknowledge before God the manifold sins and transgressions with which we are justly chargeable as individuals and as a nation, beseeching Him at the same time, of His infinite grace, through the Redeemer of the World, freely to remit all our offenses, and to incline us by His Holy Spirit to that sincere repentance and reformation which may afford us reason to hope for his inestimable favor and heavenly benediction...<sup>4</sup>

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4 The full text of the proclamation by John Adams said: As the safety and prosperity of nations ultimately and essentially depend on the protection and the blessing of Almighty God, and the national acknowledgment of this truth is not only an indispensable duty which the people owe to Him, but a duty whose natural influence is favorable to the promotion of that morality and piety without which social happiness can not exist nor the blessings of a free government be enjoyed; and as this duty, at all times incumbent, is so especially in seasons of difficulty or of danger, when existing or threatening calamities, the just judgments of God against prevalent iniquity, are a loud call to repentance and reformation; and as the United States of America are at present placed in a hazardous and afflictive situation by the unfriendly disposition, conduct, and demands of a foreign power, evinced by repeated refusals to receive our messengers of reconciliation and peace, by depredation on our commerce, and the infliction of injuries on very many of our fellow-citizens while engaged in their lawful business on the seas-- under these considerations it has appeared to me that the duty of imploring the mercy and benediction of Heaven on our country demands at this time a special attention from its inhabitants. I have therefore thought fit to recommend, and I do hereby recommend, that Wednesday, the 9th day of May next, be observed throughout the United States as a day of solemn humiliation, fasting, and prayer; that the citizens of these States, abstaining on that day from their customary worldly occupations, offer their devout addresses to the Father of Mercies agreeably to those forms or methods which they have severally adopted as the most suitable and becoming; that all religious congregations do, with the deepest humility, acknowledge before God the manifold sins and transgressions with which we are justly chargeable as individuals and as a nation, beseeching Him at the same time, of His infinite grace, through the Redeemer of the World, freely to remit all our offenses, and to incline us by His Holy Spirit to that sincere repentance and reformation which may afford us reason to hope for his inestimable favor

Oh that we had such recognition of God's judgments today. Oh that we had such calls to repentance today. And Adams continues for two more paragraphs in that vain. I have found numerous similar examples in the first 150 years of this nation of an immediate recognition that national disaster should lead us to repentance. What has happened to a willingness to see God's hand in our nation's calamities? Even many of my fellow Reformed pastors in other denominations are reluctant to do that. They don't see these things as a preparation of a nation for the Gospel.

Verse 8 says, "And another, a second, angel followed, saying, 'It fell, it fell, Babylon the great! — she made all the nations drink of the wine of the rage of her fornication.'"

Before we look at the significance of this statement relative to the missions of the passage, let me give the historical background. We have been seeing that the chronology of events lands these verses shortly after Jerusalem was taken. And that's why he uses the past tense - "It fell, it fell, Babylon the great!" It's past tense. It's already happened. We saw that the temple was burned on August 3 of AD 70 with a resurrection and other astounding things happening on that day. On August 14 Titus raised earthworks against the Upper City, and by September 1 the city as a whole was completely subjugated. By this time the occupation government provisions that we studied in chapter 13 were already in place, including the exclusive use of Roman coinage, the mark of the Beast being branded on Jewish heads and hands, and the occupation government tightly controlling the economy. Things were a mess for the people.

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and heavenly benediction; that it be made the subject of particular and earnest supplication that our country may be protected from all the dangers which threaten it; that our civil and religious privileges may be preserved inviolate and perpetuated to the latest generations; that our public councils and magistrates may be especially enlightened and directed at this critical period; that the American people may be united in those bonds of amity and mutual confidence and inspired with that vigor and fortitude by which they have in times past been so highly distinguished and by which they have obtained such invaluable advantages; that the health of the inhabitants of our land may be preserved, and their agriculture, commerce, fisheries, arts, and manufactures be blessed and prospered; that the principles of genuine piety and sound morality may influence the minds and govern the lives of every description of our citizens, and that the blessings of peace, freedom, and pure religion may be speedily extended to all the nations of the earth. And finally, I recommend that on the said day the duties of humiliation and prayer be accompanied by fervent thanksgiving to the Bestower of Every Good Gift, not only for His having hitherto protected and preserved the people of these United States in the independent enjoyment of their religious and civil freedom, but also for having prospered them in a wonderful progress of population, and for conferring on them many and great favors conducive to the happiness and prosperity of a nation. Given under my hand and the seal of the United States of America, at Philadelphia, this 23d day of March, A. D. 1798, and of the Independence of the said States the twenty-second. JOHN ADAMS. By the President: TIMOTHY PICKERING, Secretary of State.

## ***B. The significance of this text for the theme of missions***

But this is precisely the time when Christians emerged from where they had been hiding in the regions around Pella and they began to evangelize Israel and then the rest of the Roman world and beyond. And since this chapter indicates that God started with Jewish evangelism, it is appropriate to think about what kinds of changes in thinking had to happen before a Talmudist could be harvested in verses 14-16? The Gospel message is a redefining of everything that a person has previously thought. For example, an unregenerate person tends to think rather highly of himself, but the work of Evangelists, angels, and the Holy Spirit in this chapter is to bring them to despair of any self-confidence or any self-trust. The unregenerate tend to trust money, people, the state, and anything other than God, and God has already providentially vaporized those things out of their lives and has made them realize that nothing is what it looked like; only God can be trusted. Look at the revolutionary implications of each word.

First of all, this angel has just insulted Jerusalem by calling it Babylon. Pharisees would have considered this blasphemy. It would be equivalent to saying over the radio today that America is an abomination to God and unfit for the least of God's mercies and that our national hymn itself is blasphemy when it says, "God bless America." America cannot be blessed when it persists in its rebellions. Now, you might get away with saying that in America today, but not in Israel.

These words were fighting words. We already saw that the Jews of that day believed God would bless and save Israel and that they were a special and a great nation. To say otherwise was considered (to quote a recent blasphemous speech by former president George Bush) "blasphemy against the state." And when I heard Bush say that, I thought, "What? Blasphemy against the state? That implies that the state is God!" And of course Bush has been treating the state as God.

But in any case, John doesn't mince any words in this book. He calls their beloved State a beast, a demon, and in chapter 11:8 John had described the city where Jesus was crucified as Sodom and Egypt - almost the worst insults he could have given. But to call Jerusalem Babylon? Wow! Those were words that could have gotten John shot, if they had guns back then. Unthinkable.

Now, I won't get sidetracked into the debates around the identity of this great city. I spent a whole sermon on that when we looked at the identity of the great city in chapter 11:8. And later in chapter 18 we will look at twenty-

three ways in which the text clearly identifies Babylon as being a metaphor for apostate Jerusalem. And beyond those twenty-three Scriptural clues, there are numerous statements from history that show that Talmudism had Babylon as its origin, and their final authority was not Scripture but the Babylonian Talmud, and the occult symbols of Babylon were on the temple furniture during these last days of Israel, and they had a Babylonian curtain that had replaced the Biblical curtain. They were Babylon through and through - at least spiritually speaking. But the Jews didn't consider Jerusalem the harlot city Babylon. Sure, they had borrowed from Babylon a lot, but they considered Israel to be faithful Zion, blessed of God. So calling Jerusalem "Babylon" was a hammer blow to the idol of the state that the Jews worshiped. To them, it was still a nation under God, not a nation under Satan.

Second, the unthinkable had indeed happened - Jerusalem had fallen. And this angel is rubbing that in. The Jewish rebels had insisted that God would never let the temple fall into Roman hands. Right up till the end, they were convinced that God would turn things around and restore the city. They were so deceived. It would take an incredible humbling of their spirit for them to acknowledge that God had made Jerusalem fall just as Babylon had fallen with a crash. Their trust was in the city and temple. This missions message was breaking that trust and showing it to be idolatrous. Anything (including statism) that stands in the way of the Gospel must be seen as a stronghold that needs to be torn down.

Third, verse 8 says, "she made all the nations drink of the wine of the rage of her fornication." Far from being better than the Gentiles, as most Jews saw themselves, they were in bed with the Gentiles and one with them. That too was a humiliating analogy. And it would have taken such strong words to break through the spiritual blindness that had gripped the population.

And the fornication was both metaphorical and real. Any Christian who lived through this era knew that Nero was married to a Jewess, and the leaders of Israel used her to influence the empire. She pretty much controlled Nero. Queen Berenice was the mistress of Titus and she manipulated Titus. So the two main leaders of Rome during the war were literally head over heels with women who had prostituted themselves and controlled the leaders with literal lust of their fornication (which is one way of translating that phrase).<sup>5</sup>

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5 The Greek word for "rage" has two definitions. One is rage or intense displeasure, and the other is "intense expression of the inner self, freq. expressed as strong desire, passion, passionate longing." So it could be translated as rage, as heat, or as passion. In context it is probably better to render this as "has

But the primary fornication was spiritual and economic. And we looked in the past at the enormous leverage that the billionaires in the family of Ananus had. I won't go into the details of the corruptions that happened till I get to chapter 18. But each of these phrases would have hit first century Jews like a ton of bricks if they had been told these things before the war. They weren't ready for the message then. Before the war, Jews thought the exact opposite of these words.

But by the end of the war, their idolatrous trust in statism, political intrigue, power, money, and other things had been ground into dust. Everything they had trusted in was in ruins. What a perfect situation for these 144,00 to come into to declare that their trust should now be Christ alone. Wars have a way of humbling people and preparing them for the Gospel.

But the sad thing is that modern missionaries no longer preach that war, economic judgments, or other disasters are judgments from God. When you have a Deistic view of God on the issue of national disasters, it undercuts missions. But when you declare all judgments as coming from God's hand and at the same time you step in to lovingly minister to war victims, famine victims, etc., there is a tremendous platform for the Gospel. In fact, so powerful is it, that the historian Henry Chadwick said that the Christian mercy ministries to war victims, famine victims, and victims of other disasters was the single greatest cause for the success of missions in the first three centuries.<sup>6</sup> They helped people to see that they needed to fear the God of Scripture because He brought these judgments and they needed to trust the God of Scripture because He was a God of mercy, not the state. And they could see the mercy and love lived out tangibly in the lives of Christians.

## **II. Whatever happened to preaching the wrath of God? (vv. 9-10a)**

But the second thing that needs to be restored to missions is preaching the wrath of God. Whatever happened to such preaching? It seems that the only thing most people preach to the world nowadays is the love of God. You've heard that message - "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." But a number of theologians have pointed out that you will look in vain for

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made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her fornication."

6 "The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment 'See how these Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labour in the mines, and in social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war." Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (Penguin Books, 1982), p. 56.

any evangelistic message of Jesus that uses the subject of the love of God to draw sinners to Himself. While that may be a bit overstated, it was certainly not His emphasis. But Jesus routinely preached about the wrath of God to unbelievers. And that is what this angel proclaims in verses 9-10:

9 And another angel, a third, 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, 10 really, he will drink of the wine of the fury of God, mixed at full strength in the cup of His wrath.

We dealt quite fully with the mark of the beast in a previous sermon. Both Josephus and Yohannan ben Zakkai had convinced Israelites that it was no compromise to give a pinch of incense to Caesar and to wear His name or number. We saw the astonishing way these leaders got the Jews to compromise their faith with the illusion that they were actually defending their faith.

But in an age of compromise where nothing seems to be absolute, the Gospel of the 144,000 would have stood in sharp antithesis. And people were now being faced with two decisions - receive the wrath of Rome or receive the wrath of God. But they were finally in a position where wrath was unavoidable.

And we saw a few weeks ago why they willingly got branded. To do otherwise seemed suicidal. Josephus had told them that it was suicidal to resist Rome wrath and that God doesn't want us committing suicide. But this message from the angel was presenting the only motivation to make a person willing to face the wrath of Rome - they didn't want to face God's wrath for all of eternity. Those who receive the mark of the beast "will drink of the wine of the fury of God, mixed at full strength in the cup of His wrath." God's wrath had brought Rome in the first place and God's wrath could continue to bring more temporal judgments. But it was God's eternal wrath which has motivated many people to embrace the Gospel. What has happened to the preaching on the wrath of God? It has almost disappeared in the American church. And the pathetic results could have been predicted.

### **III. Whatever happened to preaching on hell? (vv. 10b-11)**

My next question in the outline is, "Whatever happened to preaching on hell?" Starting at the second sentence of verse 10:

In fact, he will be tormented with fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb." 11 So the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the Beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

This is a description of hellfire - eternal torment of all those who refuse to put their trust in Jesus. Jesus bore God's wrath as a substitute for those who cast their sins on Him and who put their trust in Him. But if Christ's substitutionary atonement is rejected, nothing but wrath remains. The word atonement itself means a covering of wrath. That's why modernist churches and translations no longer translate it as atonement, and why they have removed the word atonement from their hymnals. Modernists don't want to think about God's wrath. But God's eternal wrath is real. Granted, it is an uncomfortable subject, but it is inexcusable that preachers do not warn people of the wrath to come. In Ezekiel 3 God told Ezekiel that if he did not warn people to flee from the wrath of God he would have their blood on his hands. Modern preachers who refuse to warn people of God's eternal wrath do indeed have the blood of sinners on their hands.

Yet preachers not only do not warn people of God's eternal wrath, they deny it. And it is not just unbelieving preachers who deny it. It is become more and more popular for evangelicals and even Reformed people to deny the reality of hell as a place of eternal torment. Recently the pope denied that hell is a real place. He claims it is just a metaphor of suffering and a metaphor of the discomfort we have apart from God. But look at what this passage says,

It says first, "he will be tormented with fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb." The word for torment means ongoing pain or torture. So hell is torture. When the rich man went to hell he said, "I am in agony in this flame" (Luke 16:24). He was conscious, he was talking, and he was feeling pain. If hell produces such agony, no wonder Luke 13:28 says that there will be weeping in hell. As one theologian worded it, "Weeping is not something we get a grip on; it is something that grips us."<sup>7</sup> He went on to say,

Recall how you were affected when you last heard someone weep. Remember how you were moved with compassion to want to protect and restore that person? The Lord wants us to know and consider what an upsetting experience it is for the person in hell.

This is not only a motivation to repent and believe in Christ, it is also a motivation to share the Gospel with others. We should have compassion on them; we should witness to them.

If hell is torture, no wonder Jesus said that there would be "wailing" in hell (Matt. 13:42). Wailing is so intense that it is disturbing; even frightening.

John Thomas says,

...wailing... is the pitiable bawl of a soul seeking escape, hurt beyond repair, eternally

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7 John Thomas, "That Hideous Doctrine," unpublished paper.

damaged. A wail is sound gone grotesque because of conclusions we can't live with. And if people convulse with wailing, it is no wonder that Jesus says that this would lead to "gnashing of teeth" (Luke 13:28). Some have thought that the gnashing flows from anger, or frustrations. Others think that it is the gritting of the teeth as a defense against crying out or an intense pause when one is too weary to cry out any longer. Either way, this pain lasts for eternity.

You can see why preachers shy away from this kind of doctrine. It is what one person called "That Hideous Doctrine." He believed the doctrine, but he said that it was hideous to even think about it. Yet Jesus calls us to do just that, and the book of Revelation calls us to do just that. It is for our good that we think about hell.

Now, some try to explain away the word "forever" and say that hell instantly annihilates a person and he ends his existence; that forever does not mean unending consciousness, but unending non-existence. So they deny that the person is in hell forever. There are a couple problems with that. The first problem with that is that the exact same word "forever" is used of both heaven and hell in the same verses. If forever means a short time then we have no hope of being in heaven for anything more than a short time. Eternity is endlessness. So it is no wonder that people don't want to think about hell, or try to explain hell away. It is a place of endless torment. It is no wonder to me that people put their trust in Jesus Christ when considering an eternity in the fires of hell. It is a motivation to believe the Gospel, and the refusal of the church to preach on hell undercuts the success of the Gospel. We for sure are not imitating Jesus.

But hell is not just torment in general. It is a place of torment. It is not just a metaphor. Jesus calls it a place. This is implied by the phrase, "before the holy angels and before the Lamb..." The word "before" is a spatial term and lines up with the various places elsewhere in Scripture that describe hell currently being a place in the heart of the earth. This torture they were experiencing is not the final lake of fire, but is a temporary waiting place; waiting for the final judgment when Hades itself will be cast into the lake of fire. Not to go down too much of a rabbit trail, but people have criticized the idea of a lake of fire. And they think, "Ha ha. Lake and fire are contradictory." But is not a volcano a lake of fire? Is not the sun a lake of fire? It is made up of liquid gases that are burning at intense heats. In fact, I think the lake of fire will be something like a massive sun cast out of the known universe into outer darkness.

But that phrase "before the holy angels and before the Lamb" also exposes

the error of many modernist theologians. The current Pope claims that hell is separation from God and "is not God's work but is actually our own doing."<sup>8</sup> In other words, it is simply a psychological state. And he denies that God brings even that. But this verse indicates otherwise. The angels and the Lamb are present to guarantee this hellfire. David said that even if one were to go to hell, God is still there. Hell is not the absence of God. Hell is God's active torture of those who are His enemies. We cannot soften this to try to make God look nice to postmodern man. God is not nice on their terms; He is our Lord and He is their judge.

Some people try to make God out to be desperately trying to keep people out of hell, as if hell was a provision of someone else and not His will for them to go there. But Scripture is quite clear: God made all things including hell. In Matthew 25:41 Jesus describes hell as being "the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." God prepared hell for a reason, and you can either hate God for it and experience its endless pain, or you can trust and submit to God as He really is, and experience the joys of heaven. But ignoring hell will not make it go away anymore than ignoring God will make God go away.

Now, it was common for older Romanists to treat God as wrathful and distant and Jesus and Mary as compassionate and kind. But notice, it is Jesus who is overseeing their punishment in hell.

Others think the Gospel (which is good news) is incompatible with the doctrine of hell (which is bad news). But notice that Jesus is described, not with the metaphor of a lion, but with the metaphor of a Lamb. The Lamb represents the Gospel. When the Lamb (representing the Gospel) is rejected, hell is guaranteed. The one assumes the other. And the saccharine sweet Gospel that ignores hell is often a counterfeit Gospel. The Gospel is good news indeed because the very one who prepared hell for sinners offers a way of escape. The Lamb was sacrificed so that those who put their trust in Him would not have to go to hell. We cannot shake our fist at God over hell when He has made a way of escape from hell.

Seventh Day Adventists speak of soul sleep when a person dies, and claim that only those who go to heaven will be conscious. Everyone else is unconscious now and will eventually be annihilated. But that is not what the Scripture says. Verse 11 says, "So the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the Beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." They have

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<sup>8</sup> Reuters, July 29, 1999.

torment before the end of history, and torment is a conscious state. Revelation 20:10 says much the same. It says, "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Torment is only something experienced by someone who is conscious.

In his book *The Fire That Consumes*, Edward Fudge tries to explain this away, but he has to exercise some incredible gymnastics on these two texts, saying that the fire lasts forever, but not the torment. He said, although the wicked "are not guaranteed rest during the day" and have "no certain hope that relief will come at night," this "does not say within itself that the suffering lasts all day and all night." The *TableTalk Magazine* said, "This sounds suspiciously like special pleading, to say the least."<sup>9</sup> There is no hint that these people cease to exist while the smoke continues forever. No, after verse 10 describes their torment, verse 11 says "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night." No rest from the torment; no respite from the torment forever and ever. That doesn't sound like annihilationism. Nor does Christ's story of the rich man and Lazarus. And Revelation 20 clearly says, "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." It is specifically their torment that lasts forever and ever.

Some people think that fire is just a metaphor. But it occurs so frequently that it is hard to dismiss as a metaphor. Over and over the New Testament says that it is a place of fire. For example, Mark 9 describes it as a place where "the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:44,46,48). Elsewhere the New Testament describes hell as being a place of "fire" (Mt. 5:22; 18:9), "everlasting fire" (Mt. 18:8; 25:41), "fire unquenchable" (Luke 3:17), "this flame" (Lk. 16:24), "furnace of fire" (Mt. 13:42,50), "eternal fire" (Jude 7), and "fire and brimstone" (Rev. 14:10; 20:10; 21:8).

The bottom line is that you do not want to be in hell. And according to Jesus, once you die it is too late to decide. Now is the time of salvation; now is the time to put your faith in Jesus Christ and submit to His Lordship. If you have not done so, do so before this sermon is out. And if you do not know how, talk to me after the service and I can lead you the mercies of Jesus, our Savior. But Jesus calls us to flee from the wrath to come.

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9 John Blanchard, "Hell on Trial," *TableTalk Magazine*, Ligonier Ministries  
<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/hell-trial/>

#### **IV. Whatever happened to preaching the imperative in perseverance in holiness? (vv. 12-13)**

My next question in your outline is, "Whatever happened to preaching the absolute imperative of perseverance in holiness?" Verse 12 gives a way to tell if a person is genuinely born again, justified, freed from hell, and headed toward heaven. It says,

Here is the endurance of the saints, here are those who keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus.

Just as the book of Hebrews warned Christian Jews that if they reverted to Judaism or Talmudism it was evidence that they were not truly saved in the first place, this verse reminds those tempted to fall away that a true believer will not do so. It defines a true believer in four statements. They are saints, or separated from the world. That deals with our justification and our instantaneous sanctification - being set apart. Second, they will endure in identifying with Christ. Third, they will persevere in keeping God's commandments. That's progressive sanctification. And fourth, they will persevere in having faith in Jesus. In a nutshell, that verse is a repudiation of the Carnal Christian theory that has come out of Dallas Theological Seminary and is being taught in many Arminian circles. It is a dangerous doctrine that gives a false assurance of salvation to people who are headed to hell. It is so sad.

This doctrine of perseverance goes hand in hand with a belief in the previous doctrines. God's wrath stands against all sin. His judgments fall on all who are outside of Christ. Hell is His destiny for all who are not walking on the straight and narrow pathway to eternal life.

And by the way, the typical doctrine of eternal security is a bogus counterfeit of the perseverance of the saints. We believe in the perseverance of the saints - that true believers will persevere because God's grace preserves them, and that those who do not persevere were never saved in the first place. That is the true doctrine of perseverance.

Eternal security (at least as many people teach it) is a doctrine straight from the pit of hell because it teaches that once you make a profession of faith, you can live like the devil and you still have a free ticket to heaven. So, for example, I put an actual image of a ridiculous spiritual birth certificate into your outline. This is the kind of thing being handed out by many ministries. It's kind of tiny print, so let me read it for you. It says,

Born Again Certificate. This is official confirmation of your declaration of being born again. Being that you \_\_\_\_\_ have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior; you are recognized as a Born Again Christian on this date of 11-17-2012.

It then gives John 3:16-17. Then underneath that is a place where there are two signature marks. The one on the left is signed, The Holy Spirit, and the one on the Right is signed Gomas Ministries.

The sheer audacity of this certificate staggers me. What gives him the privilege of signing for the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit knows what is in a person's heart, but this evangelist does not. How does he know the person had a genuine faith? Over and over again the Scripture points to people who think they have saving faith, but they do not. The last three verses of John chapter 2 say that there were many who believed (Greek word *pisteuo*) in Jesus, but Jesus did not commit Himself (same word *pisteuo*) to them, because He knew what was in their heart. They were trusting in a false Jesus. They were trusting in Jesus to be a provider who would make them comfortable and do miracles for them, but they had never trusted Him to save them from their sins. Their faith was not an unconditional surrender to Jesus. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus gave these sobering words:

Matt. 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" 23 And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

He didn't say they lost their salvation. He said that they were never saved in the first place, and the proof of it is that their lives were not changed. He didn't say that He knew them once, but now He no longer knows them. No. He said, "I never knew you." They had a false assurance of their salvation right from the get-go.

I was witnessing to a drunk on the street one time, and after explaining the way of salvation, he said, "Oh, I'm a Christian. Here, let me show you." And he pulled out a card that said "Spiritual Birth Certificate," and had words similar to the crazy certificate in your outline. He told me that he had said the prayer with a pastor and the pastor had said to him, "Any time you doubt your salvation, look at this spiritual birth certificate. It will help you to not doubt your salvation." His life had not changed at all. He had no interest in God, Scripture, holiness, church, worship, etc. He was a drunk, and Scripture says drunks will burn in hell along with cowards and thieves. He had no faith to follow Christ; he simply had faith in his spiritual birth certificate. Well, that's a pretty flimsy document to put your faith in. He showed no evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, yet he had an absolute assurance that he was going to heaven. This is why the carnal Christian theory is such a damnable theory.

This is the blasphemy being taught by men like Jody Dillow, Zane Hodges,

and other ultra Arminian Dispensationalists. It requires no repentance and leads to no holiness of living. I'll give you another example. One pastor in Texas who teaches this stuff had a prostitute that made a profession of faith in their congregation, but who did not give up her career as a prostitute. When people questioned whether she was a real Christian, the pastor said that to require repentance of her and to require a change of lifestyle was works salvation, and he would defend her right to choose sin if that was her choice. That is total misunderstanding of justification by faith. Yes, we are justified by faith alone, but genuine faith will always lead to other things after justification, such as sanctification. Dead faith does not. As the Protestant Reformers said, "We are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone." True faith always bears the fruit of good works. Both Paul and James make that quite clear. James calls anything else a dead faith.

So, Scripture is quite clear that where there is no perseverance, there is no salvation, and you can have no true assurance of salvation. 1 John is a book that shows us how we can have assurance of our salvation. That assurance is not gained by staring at a stupid spiritual birth certificate. Here is how the inspired apostle tells us we can have assurance. He tells us to look for evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Let me give you some examples:

1 John 2:3 says, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." He is saying that you aren't even a child of God if you aren't beginning to keep His commandments. 1 John 2:5 says, "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him." 1 John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death." That drunk that I shared the Gospel with had no love of the brethren. I told him he was believing a lie because all those with genuine faith will persevere in faith and good works. 1 John 3:18-19 says, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." How do you gain assurance of salvation? He says by seeing evidence of God's love in your that enables you to love others in word and deed. 1 John 3:24 says, "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." 1 John 5:18 says, "We know that whoever is born of God does not keep on sinning; but he who has been born of God guards himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."

There are many supposed Christians who think they are headed to heaven

who will end up in hell because they don't have a genuine faith that leads to perseverance on the straight and narrow. If you have a lackadaisical view of your sin, you should question your salvation. You may still be on the road to hell. If you have no hunger for God's Word or love of the brethren, you should question your salvation. All newborn babes are said by Peter to hunger for the milk of the word; stillborn or dead Christians do not. The apostle Paul warned us, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves" (2 Cor. 3:15). He was wondering whether they are genuine believers or not; their lives did not demonstrate true faith. Paul was serious. The eternal stakes are so great, we cannot assume that we are in the faith. So Paul said, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." This is a serious issue. There may be some in this congregation who are heading to hell.

And verse 12 is simply a summary of this pervasive doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. God will preserve His elect all the way to heaven, but the way He does so, is not by leaving them in their sins. He does so by causing them to persevere by His grace. Verse 12 says, "Here is the endurance of the saints, here are those who keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus." Does that describe you? If not, humble yourself before Almighty God and beg Him for mercy. Don't trust some past profession of faith because faith in your faith does not save you. Only faith in Jesus Christ (which is an unconditional surrender to Him) will get you on the road to heaven. If you think you had faith in Him in the past but you are not surrendering your life to Him now, question your salvation; question whether your faith was a living faith rather than a dead faith.

## **V. Conclusion: are you sure you are going to heaven? (v. 13)**

But this section ends with the promise of heaven. Those who put their faith in Jesus and commit themselves to following Him need not doubt. The Holy Spirit Himself will give us assurance as He causes us to persevere. And those who persevere need not fear death. Verse 13 says, I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on' ("Yes" says the Spirit) 'so that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow along with them'."

I won't get into all of the meaning of that verse - it's a marvelous verse. I have preached on it a couple of times at funerals. But at least notice that key phrase, "who die in the Lord." Jesus is our security, and this passage is not calling you to have a faith in your works, or a faith in your faith, or faith in

your perseverance, but to have a faith in Jesus Christ alone. You are called to live in Him and to die in Him.

One day, when Vice President Calvin Coolidge was presiding over the Senate, one Senator angrily told another to go "straight to hell". The offended Senator complained to Coolidge as presiding officer, and Coolidge looked up from the book he had been leafing through while listening to the debate. And Coolidge said, "I've been looking through the rule book; you don't have to go."<sup>10</sup> And that's what I would say to you. You don't have to go to hell. Jesus paid the price of hell, and invites you to lay down your life, to trust Him with your life for now and for all eternity, to cast your sins upon Him, and to receive His righteousness as a free gift; as a legal credit to your spiritual bank account. That is all you need to secure you for heaven.

It is easy to be fearful of going to hell. When I was growing up I many times wondered if I was saved because I wondered if I had previously exercised a genuine faith and a genuine repentance. But someone wisely asked me, "Do you trust Jesus now?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Good. That is one evidence of genuine faith. Genuine faith will keep on trusting and keep on following. So don't worry about the past. Look to Jesus."

Back in the days when thousands traveled West on the Oregon Trail, there was a group of pioneers who were traveling slowly with covered wagons drawn by oxen. One day they were horrified to see a long line of smoke in the west that was stretching for miles across the prairie. It was a prairie fire that was burning the grass and shrubs and being driven toward them by the wind at an alarming speed. They looked back at the river that they had crossed the day before, but they were way to far to be able to make it to the river in time. But one man had the presence of mind to start a new fire directly behind them, and when that space was burned over, he had the whole company move onto the burned out ground. That way by the time the other fire reached them, there would be nothing to burn where they were standing and the fire would go out.

Well, as the flames roared toward them from the west, a little girl cried out in terror, "Are you sure we shall not all be burned up?" The leader replied, "My child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been!"

What a marvelous image of what Jesus bore for our safety. He bore God's wrath to provide a way of escape for us. I know this has been a scary sermon for some of you. It is a scary doctrine. But to those of you who are fearful of

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<sup>10</sup> Crossroads, Issue No. 7, p. 16.

hell, I would say the same. Jesus bore the fire of God's wrath, and if we back up (that's repentance) and stand on Him (that is faith), we are safe. If we stray from Him (that's lack of perseverance) we are not safe. In that case we are walking back to the fire, which the elect will not do. The only assurance we can have is given by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will only give assurance as we cling to Jesus and follow Him. The hymn writer wrote:

"On Him Almighty vengeance fell, Which would have sunk a world to hell. He bore it for a chosen race, And thus becomes our Hiding Place."<sup>11</sup>

Are you hiding from the fires of God's wrath and of hell in Jesus? Let me end by reading my favorite poem, written by Charles Spurgeon. It speaks to both God's wrath and to His salvation. It is quite contrary to the false hope of the false Gospel. It says,

Forth to the battle rides our King; He climbs the conquering car; He fits His arrows to the string, and hurls His bolts afar. Convictions pierce the stoutest hearts, they smart, they bleed, they die, Slain by Immanuel's well-aimed darts, in helpless heaps they lie. Behold, He bares His two-edged sword, and deals almighty blows; His all-revealing, killing Word 'twixt joints and marrow goes. Who can resist Him in the fight? He cuts through coats of mail. Before the terror of His might the hearts of rebels fail.

Anon, arrayed in robes of grace, he rides the trampled plain, With pity beaming in His face, and mercy in His train. Mighty to save He now appears, mighty to raise the dead, Mighty to staunch the bleeding wound, and lift the fallen head.

Victor alike in love and arms, myriads around Him bend; Each captive owns His matchless charms, each foe becomes His friend. They crown Him on the battle-field, they press to kiss His feet; Their hands, their hearts, their all they yield: His conquest is complete.

None love Him more than those He slew; His love their hate has slain; Henceforth their souls are all on fire to spread His gentle reign.<sup>12</sup>

May each one of you escape from the fires of hell by being conquered by Jesus, regenerated, justified, adopted as children, sanctified, filled with the fire of His love. And may each of you passionately warn people to flee from the wrath of God just as this army of 144,000 did in the first century. Amen.

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11 Illustration used by H.A. Ironside, Illustrations of Bible Truth, Moody Press, 1945, pp. 34-35.

12 Words: Charles H. Spurgeon, Music: Henry Cutler, 1872 Public Domain.