

Heaven And Its Awful Alternative

1 Thessalonians 4:13

4/3/11

We closed our third message on heaven last Sunday night by looking at the exhortation and command in Colossians 3:1 where we are bidden to “set your minds on things above, not on things of earth. Remember we stated that word for “set your minds” is the word “ZETEO” and has the meaning of diligently, actively, single-mindedly, pursuing the things above and of course the things above all relate to Heaven. C.S. Lewis said, “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought the most of the next world.” Someone has well said, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”

Nothing is more important than an accurate understanding of what’s to come when we part ways with this world. What we experience now will give way to something we need to be prepared for, and its my prayer that as we go through this study that you will feel you are learning how to prepare for Heaven, something of what to expect in Heaven, and how by being Biblically informed you can help defeat the devil who wants to blind the minds of the unsaved about the joys of heaven and how you can even be an instrument of motivation and instruction for believers who have so many non-Biblical understandings of heaven that they have cut and pasted into their minds from books, movies, conversations with friends, and their own thinking about what they think Heaven is going to be like.

Now this whole series is going to be about Heaven BUT not exclusively. A study on Heaven would be woefully incomplete without addressing the existence of Hell. If Jesus talked consistently about something, doesn’t it make sense that we should address it too? Does it come as a surprise to you that Jesus spoke of this place called Hell more than any other person in the Bible? Why is that? Jesus spoke much about Hell because He doesn’t want anyone to experience it. His words about Hell are words filled with warning. As stated we are not going to do a detailed study of Hell in this series on Heaven but I think it is important that you understand some very graphic words and descriptions that Jesus and other Biblically inspired writers recorded about this eternal dwelling place of those without Christ

Here is something that is pretty amazing. For every American who thinks he is going to Hell, there are **120** who believe they are going to heaven. I have to tell you I think that is an unfounded optimism and is really antithetical to what Jesus stated in **Matthew 7:13-14** when He said “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.” Sounds to me that Jesus is saying the exact **OPPOSITE** of what most Americans are thinking and saying. **So who are you going to believe? Friends** there is just no getting around the fact that Jesus believed in and taught much about Heaven and Hell. And if we are going to accept His teachings as true, we cannot embrace the reality of one without accepting the reality of the other.

Why or how could/would most people think they are going to Heaven when they are not? I believe the answer lies largely in the fact that we view ourselves through our own lens of self righteousness and our good works and we think that should have some bearing on our entrance into Heaven. Now a Bible believing person knows that in our selves we have no goodness or righteousness and that our works account for nothing in so far as purchasing our salvation. But the person without Christ knows very little about this universal disease called sin that we are all born with that immediately places us at enmity with God and which God takes so seriously that He sent His Son from Heaven to atone for. **Romans 3:23** says “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Isaiah also affirms that when he stated in **59:2** “Our iniquities have made a separation between us and God, and our sins have hidden His face from us so that He does not hear.” Please understand this and write this deep on your heart, No one goes to heaven automatically. **No one**. Unless our sin problem is resolved before we die, the only place we will go in our true default destination is not Heaven but Hell. Judging by what is said at most funerals you would assume most people are going to heaven, but that is NOT what Jesus said, remember His words, “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.”

Friends no thinking person in their right mind can afford a “Well, I will just wait and see attitude.” I sure hope my name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life but if it isn’t I will have plenty of company in hell.” Friends that type of statement makes my blood run cold. There won’t be any camaraderie in hell, there won’t be any such thing as a friend in hell, and there won’t be any such thing as ‘it isn’t so bad here’. Friend’s hell is a place prepared for the devil

and his angels. It is a place of torment forever. It is a place of fire and brimstone and gnashing of teeth. It is a place forever bereft of the presence of God and the opportunity to forever do anything about it. Hell will not be like it is portrayed in comic books and by godless comedians. There will be no giant lounge where between drinks people sit around and tell stories of their ungodly antics on earth. There won't be any jokes, or smiles, or happy times in hell. To be in Hell is to be in anguish and heartache, it is without a doubt the worst and most horrible thing you could ever imagine and those who make light of it have no Biblical awareness of what they are saying or thinking. The reality of Hell should break our hearts and take us to our knees and to the doors of those that are without Christ as their Savior. There are those who think they are too highly educated, too compassionate, too civilized to believe in any such place as a literal Hell, but can the creature say to the Creator, "I think you got it all wrong?" Because any of us could die at any time, because Jesus could come at any moment, we need to know right NOW, this very moment that we, through the blood of Christ as our Savior have a place reserved for us in Heaven. That is why the Word of God states in **2 Co. 6:2** "Now is the day of salvation." And Joshua says in **Joshua 24:15** "Choose for yourselves THIS DAY whom you will serve."

However until we choose to receive God's gift of eternal life and receive Christ as our Savior we are not headed for Heaven but literally toward a terrible place called Hell. In **Revelation 20:12-15** we read "And I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each on of them according to what they had done. 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." Here we can clearly see that Hell will be inhabited by people who haven't received God's gift of redemption in Christ. Upon Christ's return, there will be a resurrection of believers for eternal life in Heaven and a resurrection of unbelievers for eternal existence in Hell. **John 5:28-29** also testifies to this when it declares, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Jesus speaks additionally of this awful place in

Matthew 8:12 when He declares the unsaved, “Will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16** Jesus taught that in Hell, the wicked suffer terribly, are fully conscious, and retain their desires, memories, and reasoning, long for relief, cannot be comforted, cannot leave their torment, and are without hope. Because God is the source of all good, and Hell is the absence of God, Hell must also be the absence of all good. I don't think Hell is a place where demons take delight in punishing people and where people commiserate over their awful fate. Most likely, each person is in solitary confinement with their thoughts of regret and their feelings of anguish and pain. That is the way the rich man is portrayed in **Luke 16:22 and 23** He is alone, in pain and in anguish. It is said that misery loves company but in hell there will be nothing to love.

As to the length of hell that is answered also. **Matthew 25:46** states, “These will go away into ETERNAL punishment Jesus said if the unrighteous, while at the same time referring to the righteous He said, “But the righteous to ETERNAL life.” The Greek word for eternal is “AIONAS and Jesus used the same word to describe both Heaven and Hell. That is to say if Heaven is to be experienced consciously forever so also Hell must be experienced consciously forever.

Referring once again to C.S. Lewis who made this observation. “I have met no people who fully disbelieved in Hell and also had a living and life-giving belief in Heaven. “ **The Biblical teaching on both destinations stands or falls together.**

Randy Alcorn phrased it well in speaking of Hell when he stated, “If I had a choice, that is if the Scriptures, were not so clear and conclusive, I would certainly not believe in Hell.” “Trust me when I say”, he went on; “I do not want to believe in Hell. BUT if I make what I want- or what others want- the basis for my beliefs, then I am a follower of myself and my culture, not a follower of Christ.”

My brothers and sisters the most basic truth of the Word of God is that there is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun. Each is just as real and just as eternal as the other. If we understood Hell even the slightest bit, none of us would ever think or say to another , “Go to Hell.” **It is far too easy to go to Hell. It requires no change of course, no repentance and no faith in God.** We

were born with an autopilot set for hell because of our sinful nature and unless and until we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ we are headed for Hell. The most loving thing we can do for our friends and family is to warn them about the road that leads to destruction and tell them about the road that leads to eternal life.

Where you and I are right now here on this planet called earth is an in-between world touched by both Heaven and Hell. **Earth leads directly into Heaven or Hell, and we have a choice between the two.** Someone has said, the very best of life on earth is a tiny glimpse of heaven and the very worst of life on earth is a tiny glimpse of hell. For those who believe in Christ this present life is the closest you will ever get to hell. For unbelievers, it is the closest they will ever come to Heaven.

Considering the reality of it shouldn't we be willing to do whatever it takes to come to Christ to avoid Hell and go to Heaven?

Consider the absolute amazing aspect of this thought. God determined that He would rather go to Hell on our behalf than live in Heaven without us. He so much wants us to go to Heaven that He paid a horrible price on the cross so that we wouldn't have to.

Yes, the price has been paid but still we must choose. Like any gift, forgiveness can be offered, but it isn't ours until we choose to receive it. A convicted criminal can be offered a pardon by the governor, but if he rejects the pardon it is not valid. A pardon must be accepted. Jesus offers each of us the gift of eternal life and the pardon of our sins. However to have it we must receive it. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." That was the true light which lighted every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him to them gave He the power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."