

How Hell Exalts Christ

Preached by: Matthew S. Black

Text: 2 Thes. 1:8-9

Date: June 5, 2011, 10:30am

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Hanover Park, Illinois

This morning I begin a small two part series.

Part 1 is entitled: *Hell and the Glory of Christ*.

Part 2 is next week, and it is entitled: *Heaven and the Fullness of Christ*.

Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb

I want to preach about the doctrine of hell this morning through the lens of exalting Jesus Christ. We talk much here, as we should, about Jesus' first coming—that Jesus is a Lamb – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He's humble, meek, and gentle. His arms are open for you.

But Jesus in His Second coming is pictured in Scripture as a *lion*. Lions are powerful and dangerous. Lions are majestic. Even in Jesus' day, the lion was a symbol of royalty. He is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" who in the book of **Revelation** (ch. 5) comes and He unrolls the scroll and breaks the seals of judgment in human history, and He comes to bring an end to human history as we know it and utterly destroy all those who oppose Him.

Paul describes Christ's coming in judgment this way in **2 Thess. 1:8**, "in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

My theme this morning is "Hell and the Glory of Christ".

I want to talk about

- why we resist hell and the proper attitude we should have
- what hell is,
- and how hell exalts Christ.

I. Why people resist hell and the proper attitude we should have towards it (2 Pet. 3:9; Eze. 33:11; Rom. 9:2; Lk 13:34).

Now it is easy to preach doctrine and forget about how all this affects our lives. In our flesh there is a temptation to explain hell away.

As you know, this week my dad had open heart surgery. It is during these times that the possibility of endless conscious torment and suffering becomes very, very real and disturbing. To picture the one you love in the torment of hell brings great

emotional pain to one's heart.

This week I had to come to the place where I love the holiness of God more than I love my dad.

Hell exists because people love their sin. God has to have a place where people go who make no apologies for their sins. It is clear there is no repentance in hell. There is no change of mind about the treachery of sin. People go on loving their sin in hell. That is why it must be eternal.

But still we grieve, and God grieves, for hell to exist. God takes no delight in the torment of those who are forever without Christ.

- He is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 **Pet. 3:9**).
- He takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (**Ezekiel 33:11**).

Paul's heartbeat is the same.

- Paul says when he thinks of his people perishing in **Rom. 9:2**, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and neither should we. We must say with Jesus, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! **How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!**” (**Luke 13:34**).

II. What hell is.

A. Words for hell.

1. NT: Gehenna, Tartarus

Gehenna or Hinnom (OT) was the place in south-west of Jerusalem, where Solomon, king of Israel, built "a high place", or place of worship, for the gods Chemosh and Moloch.

In a later period it was made a refuse dump and perpetual fires were maintained. Thus, in the New Testament, Gehenna became synonymous with hell.

“The word *hell* (*gehenna*) occurs in the New Testament twelve times—eleven on the lips of Jesus. It is a solemn warning from the Son of God who died to deliver sinners from its horrors”.¹ Hell is a place of torment, where those who go there have no purpose what so ever. They are literally “thrown

¹ Piper, *Desiring God*, 58.

away”. They are put into God’s eternal prison.

Many want to repudiate hell because it is so horrific. But “[w]e cannot repudiate Hell without altogether repudiating Christ.”² The one who taught us and warned us most about hell is Jesus Christ. He taught more about hell than heaven and warned us to flee from the wrath to come.

Tartarus (occurs only in 2 Peter 2:4 (ESV) — “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment”).

= *Tartarus* being a Greek word, not used elsewhere, or at all in the Sept. Homer describes it as subterranean (cp. Deut. 32:22, which may refer to this). The Homeric *Tartarus* is the prison of the Titans, or giants, and ***it is a place of eternal punishment in the lower world***

2. **OT: Sheol** – *Sheol* is translated as “grave” 31 times, “hell” 31 times, and “pit” 3 times, and means “the grave” or “the place of the dead”.

Yet we must understand that Jesus gives us the most detailed description of hell, and he used the Old Testament to defend his teaching on hell.

Dan 12:2 “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Isaiah 66:24 “And they shall go forth and look
Upon the corpses of the men
Who have transgressed against Me.
**For their worm does not die,
And their fire is not quenched.**
They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

Isaiah 33:10-14,
“Now I will rise,” says the LORD;
“Now I will be exalted,
Now I will lift Myself up.
11 You shall conceive chaff,
You shall bring forth stubble;
Your breath, as fire, shall devour you.
12 And the people shall be like the burnings of lime;

² Consider the full quote from Dorothy Sayers: “[T]here seems to be a kind of conspiracy, especially among middle-aged writers of vaguely liberal tendency, to forget, or to conceal, where the doctrine of Hell comes from. One finds frequent references to the ‘cruel and abominable medieval doctrine of Hell’ or ‘the childish and grotesque medieval imagery of physical fire and worms . . . But the case is quite otherwise; let us face the facts. The doctrine of Hell is not ‘medieval’: it is Christ’s. It is not a device of ‘medieval priestcraft’ for frightening people into giving money to the church: it is Christ’s deliberate judgment on sin. The imagery of the undying worm and the unquenchable fire derives, not from ‘medieval superstition,’ but originally from the Prophet Isaiah, and it was Christ who emphatically used it. . . . [O]ne cannot get rid of it without tearing the New Testament to tatters.” (Dorothy Sayers, *A Matter of Eternity*, 86).

Like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire.

13 Hear, you who are afar off, what I have done;

14b “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?

Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”

Isaiah 1:31 “The strong shall be as tinder,

And the work of it as a spark;

Both will burn together,

And no one shall quench them.”

Other passages that speak of unquenchable fire: *Psalm 21:8-9* and *Jer 7:20*

- In fact, many of those who reject the doctrine of eternal conscious torment do so on the basis of the Old Testament, saying that it is not presented there. The word “Sheol” is the Hebrew word used for death and the grave. Also it is used as the destination of both the wicked and the righteous. This is true, but we are not without descriptions of Sheol. Daniel 12:2 (ESV) — “many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”.

- Jesus Himself gives a description of Sheol [known in Greek by Hades] in **Luke 16:23–30** (ESV) —speaking of the rich man who goes to hell, Jesus says: “in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’”

The wicked that go to the grave are in torment and can see heaven. Those in heaven can see hell. This is consistent with what Isaiah teaches (Isa 66:24).

B. Let us never forget that hell is a place **created by God** through Christ for the devil and His angels.

- **Matthew 25:41** (ESV) — “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’”.

C. Hell is a place of **misery**. Consider how the Bible describes hell.

1. This place prepared for the devil and his angels is a place, first and foremost of eternal conscious torment (Rev. 20:10).
 - **Revelation 20:10** (ESV) — “the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and

ever.”

2. It is a place of God’s **justice** (2 Thes. 1:8–9).
 - Our statement of faith describes hell this way: “the wicked, who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into *everlasting torments*”.³
 - Christ comes to bring the judgment of eternal suffering and destruction to those who do not know God or obey the Gospel. Christ will come “in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the **punishment of eternal destruction**, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thes. 1:8–9).
 - **John 3:36**, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but **the wrath of God remains on him**.”
 - **Re 14:10**, Those who go to hell “shall drink of the wine of the **wrath of God**, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb”.
3. The Bible’s description of hell is terrifying. Hell is nothing to joke about. Sometimes people joke about wanting to go to hell to party with their friends. If they knew the torments of hell they would never say that.

If we speak of hell lightly or never speak of hell to people, it simply proves that we do not grasp the horror of hell. No one can overstate the terrors of hell. Jesus spoke more than any prophet or apostle on hell, and the images He uses are utterly frightening.

- He warned often that there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (**Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30**). The pain and misery of hell are so great that people will grind their teeth together in pain.
- Hell is a place where “their worm shall not die and the fire is not quenched” (**Mark 9:48**)—Jesus describes hell with the frighteningly “vivid idea of an undying worm, everlastingly consuming an unconsumable body”. Jesus’ teaching comes directly from the last verse in Isaiah (Isa 66:24).⁴
- Hell is described as a place of “unquenchable fire” (**Matthew 3:12; Mark 9:43**) and a place of “eternal fire” (**Matthew 25:41**).
- It is described as “the hell of fire”(**Matthew 18:9**);

³ BCF, Section 35, paragraph 2.

⁴ Jamison, Faucett, and Brown Commentary on Mark 9:48.

- The rich man that Jesus describes in the flames of hell experiences conscious torment. He says there is “anguish in the flame” (**Luke 16:24**).
- **Matthew 25:46** (ESV) — Speaking of the wicked, Jesus says, “these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” William Barclay translates it: “punishment that never stops.”

Eternal: “*Eternal* can mean ‘everlasting’, but more generally it means ‘of the age to come’⁵ or ‘ageless’. The “punishment” is *eternal* the same way the “life” is eternal. It goes on for the eternal “age”.

Punishment: The phrase “eternal punishment” is significant”. The “punishment” is eternal the same way the “life” is eternal. What is this punishment? It is a strong word that means: “torment, or suffering inflicted for crime”.⁶

“The point of all these [descriptions] is that we are meant to shudder. We are meant to tremble and feel dread. We are meant to recoil from the reality”.⁷

Many people respond to the doctrine of hell and look at their loved ones dying, and try to explain it away, or not teach it, or put it to the side. In order to put it aside, you have to deny the teaching of Jesus.

4. There are at least sixteen (16) passages in Scripture that teach that hell is conscious, endless suffering and torment.⁸ Let’s look at a few of them.

- A place where people “awake” to everlasting shame.

Isaiah 33:14, “Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”

Daniel 12:2 (ESV) — “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The language is important. There are some who shall “awake... to shame and everlasting contempt”. That is conscious suffering.

- A place so despised, people must be “thrown” into it.

⁵ Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition* (4th ed.) (Mt 25:31–46). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁶ Albert Barnes. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Comments on Matt. 25:46.

⁷ Piper. *Echo and Insufficiency of Hell*. <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-echo-and-insufficiency-of-hell-part-1>. Accessed 4 June 2011.

⁸ Daniel 12:2; Matthew 3:12 (Luke 3:17); Mark 9:43–48; Matthew 18:8; Matthew 10:28 (Luke 12:4–5); Matthew 25:41, 46; Matthew 26:24; Mark 3:29 and Matthew 12:32; Luke 16:26; Romans 2:6–8; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:1–2; Jude 12–13; Revelation 14:11; Revelation 19:3; Revelation 20:10.

Mark 9:47-48 (ESV) —“And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be **thrown** into hell, 48 ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’”

Thrown into Hell

Now if a person were entering into hell simply to be put out of existence, why would it matter how you lived on earth? But how you live on earth matters, because if you live a life of sin (because you do not know Christ) you will be THROWN into hell by God.

Piper: “The reason the Bible speaks of people being “thrown” into hell is that no one will willingly go there, once they see what it really is. No one standing on the shore of the lake of fire jumps in. They do not *choose* it, and they will not *want* it.”

People have chosen sin, but they will not choose hell. It’s like people choose *cigarettes*, but they do not choose *cancer*. People choose *fornication and adultery*, but they do not choose to die of *AIDS*.

- A place that is so awful, it would better for those who go there never to have been born. Of Judas Iscariot we read in **Matthew 26:24** (ESV) —“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”
- A place where blaspheming and sin and punishment go on into eternity.
Matthew 12:32 (ESV) — “And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

Re 22:11 describes the eternal state, “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

Everything that is cursed, reprobate, and unimaginably ugly is in hell. Nothing good is there. Only the stench of sinful, vile creatures that go on being filthy and unholy.

- It is a place where heaven can be seen, but not enjoyed.
Luke 16:26 (ESV) — “And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.”
- It is a place where God’s wrath and fury is experienced forever.

Romans 2:6–8 (ESV) — “He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

- **Hebrews 6:1–2** (ESV) — “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”
- **Jude 13** (ESV) — “whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.”
- It is a place where there is no rest day or night.
Revelation 14:11 (ESV) — “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

III. How hell exalts Christ.

A. **Hell exalts the holiness of Christ.** All that is good and holy and gracious and beautiful comes from the fountain of Christ.

In **Isaiah 6** we read about angels who day and night cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!” What a mockery heaven would be if God’s holiness was slighted by the presence of injustice. Hell is necessary to maintain God’s holiness and justice.

We are asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (**Genesis 18:25**). The existence of hell gives us God’s resounding answer: absolutely. He will judge sin meticulously!

We read in the prophet **Nahum 1:3**, “The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked”.

John Piper: “*What infinite beauty and glory and purity and holiness God must have, that endless suffering is a just and fitting punishment for disobeying his Word!*”

If a person rejects the beauty of Christ, they will be left with the ugliness of self for all eternity. No human being understands just how ugly his or her sin is and no one understands the depth of God’s holiness. God is holy. At this time we do

not love God's holiness perfectly.

That which makes us fight against the doctrine of hell is that we may love our lost loved ones more than we love God's holiness.

God does not delight in punishing the wicked. Neither do we delight that they perish. But we do cherish the "vindication of God's infinite holiness."⁹

God has given us many beautiful things that retain the image of God in us—a conscience so that we might be moral beings, and consider all the good gifts He showers on all people – sunlight, smiles, cool autumn days, the joy of family and friends.

All of those things are stripped away. To understand what hell is, let us go to the description of heaven, and strip away all that is good.

Revelation 21:3, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

- There will only be tears in hell
- There will only be death
- Only sorrow, and crying
- Constant pain
- The former things remain
- All the desires for the sweetness of life, with no sweetness.

Another beautiful description of heaven is in **Revelation 22:3-5** "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."

Everything accursed will be in hell
Those in hell will see the worship of God, but will hate it.
There will only be night in hell

B. Hell demonstrates lordship of Christ. All enemies will be put under Christ's feet. Every knee will bow. He should be feared!

The world is convinced that they are not going to hell. So many have mocked the idea of hell.

- Mark Twain said, "Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company."
- Shakespeare said, "Hell is empty and all the devils are here."

⁹ John Piper. *The Pleasures of God*, footnote.

Luke 12:4-5, “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”

We should aim to awaken people to the Lordship of Christ, because He has power to cast into hell.

Application: Physical death is not the main thing we should fear. People put so much value into the quality of this earthly life. They want to be comfortable now. The great majority of those presently living neglect the eternal. They have a paralyzing fear of being uncomfortable on earth for this brief and fleeting life, while having no fear of what exactly happens for incomprehensible years and ages ahead of us.

John 5:22, “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”

Hebrews 10:12-13, “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.”

Paul says it this way, “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (1 Cor. 15:24-25).

Phil. 2:10-11, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Hell exalts the lordship and kingship of Christ. People may blaspheme Christ today. They may ignore Him. But they ought to fear Him because there is only one person in the universe who has power to cast into hell: Jesus Christ.

C. Hell demonstrates the great love of Christ in rescuing His people from it.

1 John 4:10 “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

O the love Christ had to take upon Himself this awful, infinite eternal hell for our sakes! What love is this that the spotless Lamb should die for hardened, stubborn sinner such as I?

Conclusion: May Christ who taught the doctrine of hell so clearly be glorified in the existence of hell. We weep that people go there. We take no delight in their destruction. We gasp at its infinite horrors and cringe that it exists. On this side of eternity we cannot fully understand it, but we lift up our voices that to exalt the holiness of Christ, His victory over all His enemies, and His love, that He would lay His life down for a price so great as hell. I praise my Lord Jesus Christ with all my might!!