

Matthew 10 (28) – Jesus is in Hell

Today we are going to talk about a very hard thing. But it is a very important thing, and an undeniable, biblical reality. You can't believe in Jesus or believe in the Bible, without believing in Hell. But even for those people who do believe there is a Hell, this is an uncomfortable subject to deal with.

The thought of people you've known suffering eternal punishment is too much to dwell on. And God isn't asking Christians to do that. Hell is a tragedy that will forever mark the horror of human rebellion. But the Good News of the Gospel is that those who place their faith in Jesus Christ will know God as a deliverer, and a loving Father and friend, forever.

Still, Hell is hard to talk about. And even though it is an uncomfortable truth, it is wrong to try and defend the doctrine of eternal punishment in ways that lessen what Scripture says. And today we will deal with what is perhaps, for some, the most controversial aspect of it. Jesus is in Hell.

Now, this is not to say that Jesus has to stay in Hell to continue to pay for sins. On the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished," meaning that his work of paying for sin was fully accomplished. However, Jesus is in Hell. But he is not receiving the punishment. He is delivering the punishment.

People often say that Hell means separation from God. 2 Thessalonians 1:9 seems to verify this, when it speaks of those who *will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might*. And Jesus seems to echo this when, in Matthew 7:23, he says to the *workers of lawlessness, 'I never knew you; depart from me.'* And again, in Matthew 25:41, Jesus says, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire....' So, it would seem from these verses, and from all the talk you hear about it, that Hell is indeed a place of separation from God.

However, Hell is NOT separation from God. And this is very important. If Hell is complete separation from God, then God is not omnipresent, and

then Hell itself, rather than God himself, becomes the object of fear. And that goes against what the Bible teaches about God and about Hell.

Jesus, talking about Hell, said your fear must be of God. He said, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28). The most horrible thing about Hell is not torture or temperature. What makes Hell so horrible is not the absence of God, but the presence of God. And fire is not the only way Hell is described. Hell is also as described as outer darkness.

In Matthew 8:12, Jesus says that those who reject him will be *thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Once again, in Matthew 22:13, Jesus describes it as *the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Matthew 25:30 says – *...cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* 2 Peter 2:17 says that for false teachers...*the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.* Jude 1:13 says that false teachers are...*wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.*

Something else you need to realize is that there will be degrees of punishment in Hell. Listen to Jesus in Matthew 11:23-24 – *And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hell. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.* Jesus, speaking of his return and the coming judgment, said this in Luke 12:47-48 – *And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.*

Hell will be a place of misery. But some will suffer more severely. And whether Hell is fire, or darkness, or more or less severe for some people than others, the point is that no one will like it. And the truth is that Hell is not

ultimately about fire, or darkness, or anything else. It is about God. Whatever the punishment of Hell involves, the real horror awaiting the unrepentant is the inescapable presence of God in his wrath forever.

Lots of people have had a bad experience with religion. So, some Christians say that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. However, when you read the Bible carefully, you see that everyone already has a personal relationship with God. It is often said, and it is actually true: all roads lead to God. For each person, God is either their Judge or their Father. In eternity, God will be present with you as your Father in Heaven. Or God will be present with you as your Judge in Hell. Christianity is more than a simple relationship with God; it is a *saving* relationship with God.

On the cross, God poured out all his wrath against all the sin of his people on Jesus, his own son. Jesus could redeem mankind because he was a sinless man. And he could pay for all sin because of his infinite worth as God the Son. The value of Jesus meant that his sacrifice was sufficient to pay for all the sins of those who receive him as their savior. But there are those who will not receive Jesus as their savior. And so, God will pour out his wrath on them, instead. And they are not worth the value of God. So, their punishment will last forever.

In Matthew 25:46, Jesus describes the endless afterlife experience of all people, saying that the wicked *will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*. For the righteous, eternal life will be an endless experience of God's love. For the wicked, eternal punishment will be an endless experience of God's wrath. John 3:36 says – *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*. John 5:29 says – *...those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment*.

In Heaven, God will be there, but his wrath will not be manifest there. In Hell, God will be there, but his love will not be manifest there. Those who are in Hell will wish God were absent, but he will not be, and that is what

makes it Hell. It is wrong to say that Hell will be the absence of God. Psalm 139:8 says – *If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.* Jesus is in Hell, as the righteous judge, with the presence of his holy justice and wrath against sin.

Jesus is delivering punishment. Revelation 14:9-11 – *...If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night...* Revelation 19:1-2 says – *After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he...has avenged...the blood of his servants."* Revelation 19:15-16 says – *He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.* Revelation 20:15 says – *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* Jesus sends people to Hell.

And contrary to what you might have heard, the demons aren't tormenting people in Hell. Jesus is tormenting the demons in Hell. Matthew 8:29 says – *And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?*

Because of sin, people don't understand the beauty of God's holiness, righteousness, and justice, and how they are equal with his love. This is why people have such a problem with eternal punishment. This is why people want to either avoid talking about Hell, or make it less than what it is. They want to call it separation from God. Instead of the personal wrath of God against personal sins committed against him. As all sin ultimately is.

In this life, Hell is hard to talk about, and hard to think about. In eternity, eternal punishment will make perfect sense. But many avoid it today. Because it's easier to tell people that God loves them and promote the Gospel

as the way to a good life of happiness. But this isn't the whole picture, and it can obscure the biblical picture of salvation as *Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come*, as 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and elsewhere so clearly says.

Our understanding is limited; when you are thinking or talking about Hell, you must rely on what the Bible says about it. And it's wrong to try and defend the doctrine of eternal punishment in ways that lessen what Scripture says, or portray God as delighting in torture. But the Good News of the Gospel is that those who place their faith in Jesus Christ will know God as a deliverer, and a loving Father and friend, forever.

Jesus spoke of Hell and the awfulness of God's judgment a lot. For example, within the 28 chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about hell 42 times. God's wrath is essential to the Gospel. Jesus didn't suffer on the cross so that you could enjoy a happier life. He died to rescue you from the wrath to come. God's wrath is his opposition to sin and his righteous punishment of sin. If God does not punish sin, he is neither holy nor just.

Still, most people think that even if God exists, God would not be angry. But most people haven't understood God's anger from the biblical viewpoint. People filter the words anger and wrath through their own experience. In your own experience, you suffer because of someone else's anger. Or your own anger causes others to suffer. You have been or seen a person who loses their temper. You have known or been habitually angry people. Anger is a destructive force in this world. And the idea of wrath seems malicious, and not a good goal for humanity. So, to think of God as having anger and wrath seems wrong, and not like what you think God is or should be.

However, everyone agrees that anger is sometimes justified. Anger can be righteous indignation about truly wicked injustices. But most often, human anger is unpredictable, petty, and misplaced. And human wrath takes the form of vindictive, malicious, and disproportionate vengeance. So, again, to think of God angrily displaying wrath seems unnecessary, and wrong.

However, God's anger is not like human anger. And God's wrath is the just and measured response of his holiness toward evil. God is just, he is love, and he is good, and you need to understand God's wrath considering all his perfections. Thank God that his anger is not like ours. And the fact that God has anger is no excuse for your own anger. They are not the same things.

Again, Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come. The word *wrath* is important for understanding what Hell is. Eternal punishment is not simply the natural consequence of rejecting God. Some people don't like the thought that God sends people to Hell. So, they say that people send themselves there. And that is true, to an extent. People make choices that lead to Hell. But that's not the whole truth. Jesus says your sinful choices are deserving of Hell, and he calls Hell punishment. Hell is eternal punishment. It's not simply a self-imposed consequence. It's the penalty of God's wrath.

Jesus warned you to *be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell*". But immediately following that, Jesus says, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*" If you fear God (Luke 12:5), you don't have to fear anything else (Matthew 6:26, 31-32 / Hebrews 2:14-15). A true, holy fear of God brings a peace and trust that is greater than any natural understanding.

One of the means that God uses to keep you peacefully trusting in Jesus is the fear of what God would do to you if you did not believe. The reason you don't live in constant fear is because you believe. But when unbelief tempts you, a holy fear warns you how foolish it is to distrust God.

Hear the mercy of Jesus when he says to fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in Hell. Jesus says that God's wrath is coming. And he provides a way for you to escape it. Godly fear is what awakens you to your need for rescue and points you to Jesus as your savior. All roads lead to Jesus, eternally, as Savior in Heaven, or as Judge in Hell. Which Jesus do you want to know forever? The choice is yours.