



### **Part 33: Jesus and Hell**

Matthew 10:24-31

Jesus teaches us to soberly consider the reality of hell.

#### **I. No More Controversial Topic**

This week, we jump out of the Sermon on the Mount to pause to consider something that Jesus speaks about seemingly without any hesitancy or embarrassment, which is the subject of hell.

Twice in the last two weeks we've heard Jesus speak about the danger of hell (Matthew 5:22, 30).

"The doctrine of hell is one of the chief grounds on which Christianity is attacked as barbarous and the goodness of God impugned." – C.S. Lewis

"There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that he believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment." – Bertrand Russell

Jesus spoke about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. There are 31 different passages in the Gospels where Jesus speaks about hell. Amazingly 13 percent of his sayings are about hell and judgment, and more than half of his parables relate to eternal judgment!

“Beloved, these are such weighty things that while I dwell on them, I feel far more inclined to sit down and weep than to stand up and speak to you.” – Charles Spurgeon

## II. Jesus Speaks of the Reality of Hell

“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

Context: Jesus is commissioning the 12 Apostles to go preach and demonstrate the good news of the Kingdom in his authority and power (Matthew 10:1f). They will experience opposition and persecution.

“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Matthew 10:22

- A. As Jesus’ disciples, our goal is to become like him. Certainly, this includes adopting Jesus’ view of reality (Matthew 10:24-25).
- B. We are to fear God not man. We are to share with others what Jesus has taught his Apostles whether it’s culturally popular or not (Matthew 10:26-27).
- C. Jesus speaks of the reality of hell (Matthew 10:28).

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### 1. Historical Background

Jesus speaks of hell as “Gehenna.” This name refers to the Valley of Hinnom southwest of Jerusalem that was infamous in Israel’s history as the place where the Israelites sacrificed their children to pagan gods (2 Kings 16:3-4; 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35).

There is some evidence that this valley later became the city dump where its refuse was burned creating a constant smoldering fire. By the time of Jesus, this valley was used as a symbol of the final state of judgment.

### 2. The smoldering garbage dump may help us understand some of Jesus’ descriptions of hell as a fire.

“We do not know the topography, temperature, or very much else of hell. One is wise to be skeptical of those who claim to know that hell ‘is not a place but a condition.’ How do they know? One thing we do know is that behind Jesus’ picture words there is some kind of awful judgment for people, who, without repentance, hurt other people. A review of Jesus’ teaching shows that he spent a great deal of time warning people, particularly disciples, of the

seriousness of judgment. We do not honor love by omitting references to judgment.” – Dale Bruner

3. There is a debate among Christians about the duration of hell for those judged by Jesus.

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- a. Annihilation or Conditional Immortality: a person’s time in hell depends on their deeds, and they are eventually destroyed so they cease to exist.
- b. Eternal punishment: one’s experience of hell is for eternity.

### **III. Pastoral Reflections**

- A. The doctrine of hell is embedded in the broader Story of God’s rescue and renewal through King Jesus. The major theme of the Story is God’s desire for people to be saved.

“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?...Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their evil ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11).

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9

“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3-4

“For God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish (be destroyed) but have eternal life.” John 3:16

“God has threatened hell, not in order to cast us therein, but that He might persuade us to flee from it.” – Chrysostom

- B. God’s judgments are congruent with His justice and love.

“Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward a stranger? Far from it...Anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference...God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer...which is eating out the insides of the human race He loves with his whole being.” – Becky Pippert

- C. God doesn’t send people to hell, but He does honor their choices.

“Hell is God’s great compliment to the reality of human freedom and the dignity of human choice.” – G.K. Chesterton

Note: Sin is slavery (John 8:34). It is naïve to think one can repeatedly refuse God’s grace and not become more enslaved to their sin nature (Romans 8:15-18; Galatians 6:7-9). This may be part of Jesus’ warning against anger and lust (Matthew 5:21-30).

D. The fear of Judgment should lead us to a deeper love of King Jesus.

Can fear of God actually lead us to love God? Yes! Consider this truth: Jesus descended into hell for you and me! The Eternal Son of God, who had never known a moment of separation from His Father, was separated from Him on the cross!

What kind of love is this!?

“The Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Romans 10:11-13

Recommended resource: “Reflections on the Biblical Doctrine of Hell” by Doug Brown (<https://greenwoodcc.com/2023/09/21/reflections-on-the-biblical-doctrine-of-hell/>)