

ReGroup 3/5/23

Eternity: Hell Part 2

In our second look at Hell, we will finally take a look at the how the Bible describes Hell. We will discover that in the same way that Heaven will offer different experiences to Christians, depending on their faithfulness during their earthly lives, there is also going to be varying degrees of punishment when the final judgment comes. That being said, just as Heaven today is building towards the New Heaven, Hell is merely a placeholder for the Lake of Fire. It's there that the full judgment will be unleashed on those who step into Eternity without God.

Obviously, this subject is one we approach carefully and sensitively, knowing that we are talking about something that we will all *scarcely* escape. To put everything in proper perspective, we will first discuss how Jesus' work on the Cross was all about saving us from a future in Hell.

The Worst of Us, The Best of Him

We learned in part 1 that Hell is a place of *Divine Judgement* created for the devil and his angels. Because they rebelled against God, God cast them out of Heaven and created a place to judge them. Because mankind fell away and also rebelled against God, Hell grew to be a place that humans also went when they died. People don't go to Hell for any *specific* sin, but they go there because they don't know God and have not received atonement for their sin. Therefore, Hell became the place people would suffer God's wrath until the debt is paid back. *The only problem is*, our rebellion is so core to our nature and our debt is so great, that it will take *an eternity* for atone for our sin ourselves.

God's Wrath is due to all who remain in sin. His Wrath will rest upon any and all who fail to recognize their sin and fail to make atonement for it. Open up to **Romans 1:18-23** and **read/discuss** the subject of God's Wrath and the need for salvation from it. Note that in Romans 1:23, this is a reference to idols - whereas the ancients excused their sin through vain service to all kinds of idols, modern humans bypass the excuses and just simply serve the idol in the mirror: *Self*.

Did you know that our nature naturally rejects serving God, even though we are literally made in His image? This is what Paul means when He says God is plain to us, yet we so easily and without conviction ignore Him. What seems to be habits that stem from a place of ignorance are actually, truthfully coming from a place of rejection and rebellion.

We may feel this mischaracterizes us or many who don't know God in the world. "How else would they know?", we ask. Paul doesn't shy away from tackling this head on, knowing that many would suspect God to be unjust to punish those who don't even realize what they are doing wrong.

However, Paul doesn't see the controversy, because he would argue *the greater controversy* was the provision which God made to save the world. Now, turn over to **Romans 3:21-26** and read about the way God went about saving the world. Discuss *the scandalous exchange* that God made on our behalf. For our universal unrighteousness, God sent His own Incarnate Son to intercede and save us. In Him, the only righteous person in the universe would suffer the wrath due to every sin and sinner. *In a world where fairness went out the window with the Fall, it sure seems like the worst hand was dealt to Jesus, not to any human guilty of sin. What are your thoughts about these points?* Consult **Hebrews 9:22, 27-28** and discuss it becomes clear that either we suffer for our own sin or we trust that Jesus suffered for us and in our place.

This leads us to a discussion about what Jesus experienced on the Cross and will bring Hell back into view. In Hell, individuals will be judged for *their own* sin. On the Cross, Jesus was judged for *everyone's* sin. So, Jesus suffered a combination of all the judgement that every person *could ever* deserve to suffer in Hell. Not only that, but He also suffered for those who would reject Him and go to Hell anyways, receiving all the judgement any inhabitant of Hell *has ever* suffered, *is currently* suffering, and *will ever* suffer. **Jesus suffered all of the judgment that was ever and could ever be due to sinful man, all at once during His crucifixion.**

The basis for this doctrine of *Substitutionary Atonement* is found in two key passages: **Isaiah 52:13-53:10** and **Matthew 26:36-44**. It's important that we see all that these texts reveal to us, so everyone should open up to these passages and look at them together.

*Let's focus first on Isaiah, where **chapter 52** describes what Jesus endured on the Cross:*

- **52:13-15** describe Jesus on the cross being so marred and mangled, beyond what a normal crucifixion would do to a person. Roman crucifixion were systemically tortuous, but what Jesus suffered was even beyond that, and left Him nigh unrecognizable.

- **53:5-10** detail the substitutionary atonement of Jesus' sacrifice. He was innocent, while we are the guilty ones. God placed on Him "the iniquity of us all" and made Him "an offering for our guilt".

Read these verses thoroughly and discuss why the nature of Jesus' sacrifice and suffering. **Can you imagine the love that God must have for us all that He would make Jesus our substitute?** Compare this text **2 Corinthians 5:21**, where you'll find a good summary verse for this subject.

*Now, let's turn our attention to **Matthew 26** and the night of Jesus' arrest:*

- **26:38-39** gives us Jesus' perspective as He approached the moment Isaiah had prophesied about. He mentions a "cup" that God has set before Him. This cup refers specifically to the wrath of God. See **Psalms 75:8** and **Isaiah 51:17** for references to God's wrath in this way.
- **26:40-41** shows us the indifference on display through His most devoted followers, serving great contrast to Jesus' burden for humanity.
- **26:42-44** tells us that He repeated this three times before accepting His call to drink from the cup. The three different prayers could symbolize the three different groups that Jesus suffered for: Those who *would* believe, those who *wouldn't* believe, and those who *couldn't* believe.

Consider this, Jesus died for all sin and suffered for all sin - satisfying God's wrath entirely and magnifying God's love extravagantly. Even the sins committed by the devil, his angels and Judas were placed on Jesus, to prove that He was countering sin's curse in every way. **Can you imagine what this must have been like for Jesus?** He literally felt *every ember* of Hell in the three hours He hung on the Cross. It's no wonder that the sun forbid to shine and the earth ceased to turn as the greatest injustice of all time took place: God on a cross, experiencing Hell for sinners like us. **Our worst met Heaven's best, and that's why we can be saved.** Before moving on, **review** all of this information and **hear/discuss** any questions your group may have.

Unquenchable Fire

Jesus went to every extent possible to save us from dying without God and spending eternity in Hell. You might could guess that there's nothing desirable about Hell. There's no silver lining for those who go there nor respite to look forward to once they arrive there. Jesus taught on Hell often, but most of His descriptions were pretty similar.

The best and most straightforward text to look at is **Mark 9:42-50** where Jesus talks about the defiance of our sin and how senseless it is compared to what we in turn inherit in Eternity. **Read** this passage and **share** your thoughts about how Jesus describes Hell and its judgment.

Now, look at **Luke 12:41-48** for some other, key details about Hell. In this passage Jesus talks about how many never take serious the gravity of their sin and certainty of judgment outside of Christ. He also gives us insight about the degrees of punishment in Hell. However, Jesus seems to judge our guilt based on how *accountable* we are, not necessary based on the specific sins we committed. Obviously, there are some sins that seem worse than others, but in God's eyes, **the worse sin is the one committed by those who know better**, see **James 4:17** and discuss this eye-opening revelation.

Ultimately, Hell will one day be cast into an even greater place of torment. Just as Heaven and Earth give way to a New Eternal Reality, where Heaven is on Earth, Hell will be cast into the Lake of Fire. If Hell was constant torment, the Lake of Fire will be *constant, reoccurring* death. There's no way to even imagine this nightmare, but thankfully we find our way of escape through Christ.

Look at **Revelation 21:8** and **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** in closing. Both of these declare that any person defined by their sin will spend forever in this Lake of Fire. However, the last passage shows us that those who find themselves in any of these categories at any point in life can indeed be redeemed and placed in Christ. As we've learned in this lesson, as worthy of judgment as our sin, it can all be forgiven through Christ and we can be made new in Him.

Revelation 21:8 begins by spotlighting the "*cowards*" and the "*faithless*", which symbolize those who **chose to not confess Christ in word and express Him through their lifestyle**. Without faith in Him, we remain in our sin and thus, remain defined by our sin. It doesn't matter if our greatest sin is something as big as murder or small as a white lie - it's all sin and if we remain in it, we remain separated from Jesus.

Gather your thoughts and make note of any questions you may have about this subject and more. We will continue our discussion on Eternity next week - Bring any comments or questions with you then!