

GOING DEEPER

Why Hell?

October 1-7, 2023

DAY
1

WEEK 4 OF AFTERLIFE: DAY 1

Have some chair time this week in going deeper with this week's sermon. Grab your Bible and a notebook to complete this lesson on your own.

MAIN POINT

Jesus taught that we will spend eternity in either heaven or hell.

INTRODUCTION

Have you seen or read any contemporary books or movies about the afterlife? What did you think?

If you were to base your understanding of heaven on contemporary books and movies, what would you think? What would you think about hell?

How seriously do people take the afterlife? How seriously should we take the afterlife? How does the reality of heaven and hell change how we view this life?

People can disagree about how life began, what it's worth, how to live, and issues of bioethics, but one thing is clear to us all: Life on earth is temporary, and eventually everyone dies. This reality leaves people naturally curious about eternity. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus told a parable about the separation of sheep and goats that teaches us about eternity. To the sheep He will say, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," and to the goats He will say, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!" (Matt. 25:34,41). Because these destinations are forever, we ought to take the short time we have in this life very seriously, and we ought to encourage others to think on their destinies after death.

UNDERSTANDING

READ JOHN 3:36.

This verse indicates God's wrath, for a time, is on every single person. Have you ever thought of God's wrath being on you? What does that mean?

How, then, can a person avoid the wrath of God?

Will God ever “get over” someone rejecting Jesus Christ? Why not?

If we are going to believe God’s Word, and if we are going to teach others that rejection of God’s Son Jesus means an eternity of misery in hell, then we had better understand why the rejection of Jesus makes the Father so angry. But God was merciful, and instead of crushing the rebellion of men and women right then and there, He made a way by which they could be redeemed. God sent prophets to tell them that the Messiah was coming, and that He would bear their iniquities. God the Father sent His Son Jesus, to give amnesty to all of us who are in rebellion against God. The price for our forgiveness was His own life. Jesus died on the cross, taking the wrath that men and women deserved, so that they might be reconciled to God. That’s what makes God so angry about the rejection of Jesus. It is the rejection of God Himself, and the greatest sacrifice and demonstration of love that could ever be shown.

READ MATTHEW 10:28-30.

How can these verses serve as a positive motivation for believers?

How would you describe a healthy fear of the Lord?

What do you learn about your value to God from these verses?

Why is that important to understand when you think about eternity?

We should not fear God’s wrath if we love His Son Jesus, but we do fear what will happen to others if they do not repent and believe the gospel. We proclaim the gospel for their sake, even when they are hostile toward us, so that they might repent and escape the wrath that abides on them. In this passage, Jesus also teaches us that we have great value to God. God provides everything for sparrows, and if God takes such care of sparrows, He will surely take care of those made in His image. God does not grudgingly give us heaven for the sake of Jesus, God delights to give us all good things because of the love that Christ has shown us.

READ MATTHEW 18:8-9.

What insight do these verses give us into preparing today for eternity?

If Jesus doesn’t literally want us to gouge out our ears or cut off our hands, what does He mean here?

If we’re saved by grace, then why is it so imperative for us to fight temptation?

The teaching from Jesus in Matthew 18:8-9 speaks to the issue of sin and how it stands in the way of a person entering the kingdom of God. Obviously, Jesus doesn't want us to chop off our hands or poke out our eyes. If we did this, we would be terribly disappointed, for this would not cure us of our sin at all. Rather, Jesus gave a graphic example for how we ought to "cut off" sources of sin in our lives. No matter how much we might enjoy the pleasures of sin for a little while, those pleasures would pale next to an eternity bearing the wrath of God.

APPLICATION

How would you say your understanding of heaven or hell affects your conduct in this life? How should it?

Penn Jillette, of the magician duo Penn & Teller said this: "How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?" What reasons or excuses do believers have for not telling people about Jesus? What happens when we don't?

How can we, as a group, better hold up the reality of heaven and hell for each other?

PRAYER

Thank God for His gracious gift of salvation through Jesus on whom He poured out His wrath on your behalf. Thank Him for the promise of heaven and pray for those you know who are bent on hell. Invite God to embolden you to share the truth about eternity with those He puts in your path this week.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 3:36

Before moving on with his narrative of Jesus' ministry and message, John wanted to state one more time the essence of the gospel—believing people receive eternal life; rejecting people receive God's wrath. What is the wrath of God? By his very nature which is perfect, God opposes the disobedience and rebellion which come from unbelief. The word *orge*, from which we get our English word *orgy*, describes the anger of disapproval. It can arise gradually and is usually guided by reason and understanding. Hundreds of passages in the Bible refer to God's wrath. Any approach to God apart from Jesus Christ is futile. Religions, cults, and civic groups miss the message of the Bible when they talk frequently about God but do not want to disturb the pluralistic harmony of their members by emphasizing Jesus Christ. God allows no approach to himself apart from his Son. Whoever rejects the Son has forfeited eternal life and receives instead the wrath of God. This is what the Bible means when it says life is in the Son.

MATTHEW 10:26-30

10:26-27. Part of the fear of persecution is that the truth of the injustice may never become known, and justice may never be served. But Jesus encouraged the Twelve not to fear injustice from the persecutors. Ultimately, any concealed truth will break into the open. In fact, he exhorted his disciples to be instrumental in making the truth known (10:27), that justice might be done.

10:28-31. Another fear related to persecution is the fear of bodily harm and death. But Jesus helped his disciples to shift their focus. He told them, in essence, "Do not worry about your body. It is expendable. Concern yourself, instead, with the condition of your soul-life, which is eternal, and which, if invested rightly now, returns great reward" (16:24-27). A believer who adopts this perspective will not be afraid of those who can kill the body but will fear God' the Lord who has authority as judge to condemn the soul and the body to eternal destruction in hell. This healthy fear of God will cause a person to live by obedience, respecting the authority and power of the judge (Prov. 1:7).

To the stark truth of 10:28, Jesus added the comforting grace of 10:29-31, assuring the believer that the judge is also the Father, who values his children greatly and will always protect their souls.

Using a line of reasoning converse of that in 10:24-25, Jesus argued that because the Father cares what happens to the lesser (an insignificant sparrow), he will care much more deeply for the greater (a person made in his image—especially one who claims him as Father). The price of sparrows used in sacrifices (10:29), two for an assarion (the smallest copper coin), is intended to emphasize the insignificance of the bird; while the numbering of one's hairs (10:30) by the Father emphasizes how much the Father values and cares for his child.

MATTHEW 18:8-9

18:8-9. Jesus used similar words over and over with different audiences, or sometimes with the same audience at different times to make the same point. We find statements identical in meaning to these two verses in 5:29-30. The wording differs in several details, but the message is the same.

Because these warnings were addressed to the community of believers, we might conclude that a believer can lose his salvation and be sent to hell. Indeed, the warning is intended to sober believers concerning the seriousness of stumbling. But the eternal punishment would only be carried out on a person who proved, by his sin, that he had never been a child of God.

GOING DEEPER

Why Hell?

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DAY
2

WEEK 4 OF AFTERLIFE: DAY 2

Have some chair time this week in going deeper with this week's sermon. Grab your Bible and a notebook to complete this lesson on your own.

MAIN POINT

Jesus taught that we will spend eternity in either heaven or hell.

INTRODUCTION

What do you think the average person thinks will happen to them when they die?

How seriously do people take the afterlife? How seriously should we take the afterlife?
How does the reality of heaven and hell change how we view this life?

If life is a journey, we need to realize that it only ends in one of two destinations. We will either spend an eternity in heaven, or we will spend an eternity in hell. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ taught us. In Matthew 25:31-34, Jesus told a parable about the separation of sheep and goats. To the sheep He will say, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," and to the goats He will say, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!" (Matthew 25:34, 41). Because these destinations are forever, we ought to take the short time we have in this life very seriously, and we ought to encourage others to think on their destinies after death.

UNDERSTANDING

READ JOHN 3:35-36.

What is the wrath of God? How can someone avoid the wrath of God?

Will God ever "get over" someone rejecting Jesus Christ?
Why does rejection of Jesus make God the Father so angry?

If we are going to believe God's Word, and if we are going to teach others that rejection of God's Son Jesus means an eternity of misery in hell, then we had better understand why the rejection of Jesus makes the Father so angry. But God was merciful, and instead of crushing the rebellion of men and women right then and there, made a way by which they could be

redeemed. God sent prophets to tell them that the Messiah was coming, and that He would bear their iniquities.

So God the Father sent His beautiful Son Jesus. Jesus, who is the embodiment of love and patience and mercy, came to give amnesty to all of us who are in rebellion against God. The price for our forgiveness was His own life. Jesus died on the cross, taking the wrath that men and women deserved, so that they might be reconciled to God. That's what makes God so angry about the rejection of Jesus. It is the rejection of the greatest good and the greatest kindness that could ever be shown. It is the rejection of the thing that the Father loves: His only Son.

How can we be sure that the Father will accept us into heaven because of our faith in Jesus Christ?

The answer to this is because the Father loves His Son. God the Son is God, and when the Father sees His Son, He sees His own perfection of love and mercy and justice. When we embrace Jesus, we embrace grace and goodness and love. We abandon evil. For Christ's sake, because Christ died for us willingly, the Father will gladly pardon us on account of Christ's love and death for us.

READ MATTHEW 10:26-30.

How can the fear of the Lord be a positive motivation for us as Christians?

How does understanding that God "destroys body and soul in hell" a good motivator for urgent evangelism?

It is the will of God for us to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ boldly. Jesus said that we ought not to be afraid of those who can kill us because the punishment for not obeying the gospel is far worse. The gospel teaches us that even if unbelievers kill us, God will bring us back to life. We do not need to fear because God is greater than any danger that can come against us.

Why does Jesus tell us to "fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell" and then say "Don't be afraid therefore; you are worth more than many sparrows"?

We should not fear God's wrath if we love His Son Jesus, but we do fear what will happen to others if they do not repent and believe the gospel. We proclaim the gospel for their sake, even when they are hostile towards us, so that they might repent and escape the wrath that abides on them.

In this passage, Jesus also teaches us that we have great value to God. God provides everything for sparrows, and if God takes such care of sparrows, He will surely take care of those made in His image. God does not grudgingly give us heaven for the sake of Jesus, God delights to give us all good things because of the love that Christ has shown us.

Does "destroying body and soul in hell" mean that sinners cease to exist?

Some teach that hell is a place where sinners are ‘annihilated’, or cease to exist as their punishment. However, many other passages indicate that this punishment is eternal. In Matthew 25:46 Jesus says that the wicked will go away into “eternal punishment”. In Mark 9:48 Jesus describes hell as a place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Jude 12-13 that “the blackness of darkness is reserved forever” for the wicked. Revelation 20:10 says that they will be “tormented day and night forever and ever.” The best way to understand what Jesus means by ‘destruction’ is to realize that the punishment they will endure is terrible indeed.

READ MATTHEW 18:8-9.

How seriously should we be fighting temptation? If Jesus doesn’t literally want us to gouge out our ears or cut off our hands, what does he mean?

The Lord Jesus wants us to be serious about fighting sin. As John Owen once said regarding our sin-fighting, “Do you make it your daily work? Be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.” We are to fight sin tooth and nail to keep it from drawing us away from our relationship with Christ Jesus.

But Jesus doesn’t literally want us to chop off our hands or poke out our eyes. If we did this, we would be terribly disappointed, for this would not cure us of our sin at all! Rather, Jesus wants to make a graphic example for how we ought to ‘cut off’ sources of sin in our life. No matter how much we might enjoy the pleasures of sin for a little while, those pleasures would pale next to an eternity bearing the wrath of God.

APPLICATION

How can an eternity of suffering in hell be a just punishment for unbelief?

How is an eternity of blessing in heaven justice for trust in Jesus?

How does understanding that everyone will wind up for eternity in heaven or hell affect our conduct in this life? How should it affect our conversations?

If you feel in your heart that hell is a horrible place and that the wrath of God is a terror, how ought you to pray for those who are still lost without Christ? Can you think of persons you ought to pray for every day, that the Holy Spirit might draw them out of rebellion and into repentance?

Remember that if we love Christ, then we need not fear anything in this world. God has promised to raise us from the dead and to give us eternal life in Christ Jesus. Remember that the gospel is good news to all people. When you pray for those who are still lost, ask God to give you both the opportunity and the boldness to share with them the hope that you have found in Christ.

PRAYER

Offer a time for group members to pray aloud, thanking God for salvation through Jesus Christ. Thank Him for reminding us that everyone will spend their eternity in heaven or hell, and for giving us the blessing to be able to herald the good news about sinners being able to escape God's wrath through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 3:35-36

Before moving on with his narrative of Jesus' ministry and message, John wanted to state one more time the essence of the gospel—believing people receive eternal life; rejecting people receive God's wrath. What is the wrath of God? By his very nature which is perfect, God opposes the disobedience and rebellion which come from unbelief.

The word *orge*, from which we get our English word *orgy*, describes the anger of disapproval. It can arise gradually and is usually guided by reason and understanding. Hundreds of passages in the Bible refer to God's wrath. Morris quotes Hodgson: "The wrath of God and divine punishment are essential elements in a doctrine which is to face the facts of evil and retain a fundamental optimism. The belief that God has sworn in His wrath that men who do certain things shall not enter into His rest enables the Church to open its worship each day with the words, 'Come let us sing unto the Lord. Let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation' " (Morris, p. 250).

Any approach to God apart from Jesus Christ is futile. Religions, cults, and civic groups miss the message of the Bible when they talk frequently about God but do not want to disturb the pluralistic harmony of their members by emphasizing Jesus Christ. God allows no approach to himself apart from his Son. Whoever rejects the Son has forfeited eternal life and receives instead the wrath of God. This is what the Bible means when it says life is in the Son.

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DAY
3

WEEK 4 OF AFTERLIFE: DAY 3

Have some chair time this week in going deeper with this week's sermon. Grab your Bible and a notebook to complete this lesson on your own.

MAIN POINT

If you hear the voice of God today, you better respond today.

INTRODUCTION

What do you think it feels like to know you have only one week left to live?

What might be some of the positive aspects of knowing you only had one week left?

What kinds of things would you want to make sure you did during that last week?

Often when we come to the end of our lives, our thoughts are full of regrets about things we should have done differently, conversations we might have had, and relationships we might have mended. Jesus died without regret because He fully completed the work the Father gave Him to do. But in the last days of His life, Jesus taught with a sense of great urgency. He left us all with a warning: If you hear the voice of God today, you better respond today.

UNDERSTANDING

READ JOHN 12:37-43.

Based on this description, what do you think it would have been like to be in the crowd that heard this teaching from Jesus in Jerusalem?

Why is it surprising that more people did not believe in Jesus?

What does John tell us about the reason for the people's disbelief?

Does it bother you to think about the fact that the people were unable to believe? Why or why not?

Why do you think John chose to include the passages from the Book of Isaiah in his description of the people listening to Jesus?

Isaiah knew what it was like to preach to an audience with hard hearts. Similar to the Israelites in the Old Testament, these people had rejected God's message and messenger. They had heard the voice of God, but did not respond. Therefore, God had hardened their hearts and no longer called out to them.

Why, though they might have believed, did so many refuse to acknowledge their belief in Jesus?

What does it look like to love the praise of men more than the praise of God? Have you ever felt that tendency? If so, when?

We feel the tension in the Christian life to want the best of both worlds. We want to be both followers of Jesus and to be loved by those around us. But the truth of the gospel is a dividing line that commands full allegiance. In the end, we cannot have it both ways.

READ JOHN 12:44-50.

In your own words, How would you summarize the warnings of Jesus in these verses?

Does it bother you that Jesus issued so many warnings during His ministry? Why or why not?

Can you think of another time in the Gospels when Jesus issued a warning? Why do you think He so often did so?

READ MATTHEW 13:37-43.

What similarities do you see in this warning from Matthew and the passage from John?

**How are the warnings of Jesus an expression of His love and mercy?
Given that, how should we view those warnings?**

Jesus never shied away from difficult truth. Indeed, He knew the loving thing to do was be brutally honest with people, even if that truth was frightening or offensive. Unfortunately, most of us fail to take the warnings of Jesus seriously enough.

What are some excuses we might give for not taking these warnings seriously?

READ HEBREWS 3:14-15.

How does this warning from Hebrews reflect the teaching of Jesus in John 12?

Why is an immediate response to the voice of God necessary?

If you hear the voice of God today, you better respond today because not one of us is promised tomorrow. Not only that, but there is no guarantee you will hear that same voice later. The sobering truth from this teaching from Jesus' last week is that today is the day of salvation. Respond. You might not have another chance.

APPLICATION

How might we, as a group, help each other hear and obey the voice of God?

Who in your life might need to hear the warning of Jesus this week?

What are some ways you might humbly but truthfully extend that warning?

How can the authority of Jesus as seen in John 12 encourage you to boldly share the gospel and the warnings that come along with it?

PRAYER

Lead your group in prayer thanking Jesus for His willingness to tell you the truth. Ask for the strength and courage to daily respond to His voice, even when that response requires you to be uncomfortably honest and forthright with those around you.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 12:37-50

The key word in this section is believe; it is used eight times. First, John explained the unbelief of the people. They would not believe (John 12:37-38, with a quotation from Isa. 53:1); they could not believe (John 12:39); and they should not believe (John 12:40-41, with a quotation from Isa. 6:9-10).

In spite of all the clear evidence that was presented to them, the nation would not believe. The arm of the Lord had been revealed to them in great power, yet they closed their eyes to the truth. They had heard the message (“report”) and seen the miracles, and yet would not believe.

When a person starts to resist the light, something begins to change within him; and he comes to the place where he cannot believe. There is “judicial blindness” that God permits to come over the eyes of people who do not take the truth seriously. (This quotation is found in a number of places in the New Testament. See Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:25-27; Rom. 11:8.) It is a serious thing to treat God’s truth lightly, for a person could well miss his opportunity to be saved. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6).

There were those who would not believe, and there were those who would not openly confess Christ even though they had believed (John 12:42-43). Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea belonged to this group initially, but eventually came out openly in their confession of Christ (John 19:38). In the early church, there were numbers of Pharisees (Acts 15:5) and even priests (Acts 6:7). It was the old struggle between the glory of God and the praise of men (John 12:25-26). It was a costly thing to be excommunicated (John 9:22), and these “secret believers” wanted the best of both worlds. Note John 5:44 in this regard.

In John 12:44-50 we have our Lord’s last message before He hid Himself from the people. Again, the emphasis was on faith. A number of the basic themes in John’s Gospel run through this message: God sent the Son; to see the Son means to see the Father; Jesus is the Light of the world; His words are the very words of God; faith in Him brings salvation; to reject Him is to face eternal judgment. In fact, the very Word that He spoke will judge those who have rejected it and Him!

It is an awesome thought that the unbeliever will face at the judgment every bit of Scripture he has ever read or heard. The very Word that he rejects becomes his judge! Why? Because the written Word points to the Living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

Many people reject the truth simply because of the fear of man (John 12:42-43). Among those who will be in hell are “the fearful” (Rev. 21:8). Better to fear God and go to heaven than to fear men and go to hell!

The word judge is repeated four times in the closing words of this message, and a solemn word it is. Jesus did not come to judge; He came to save (John 3:18; 8:15). But if the sinner will not trust the Saviour, the Saviour must become the Judge. The sinner is actually passing judgment on himself, not on the Lord!