

Introduction: Review

Last week we launched our “Salvation” series by noting that we are saved in three distinct steps (tenses): getting saved, being saved, and will be saved. We also looked at some of the benefits of this great, gracious, and gifted salvation, which was initiated by the Father, implemented by the Son, and inculcated by the Spirit:

Reconciliation with the Father (2 Corinthians 5:18)

Abundant life in the Son (John 10:10)

Righteousness peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17)

Plus, an amazing future which includes:

- Indestructible, pain free, disease free, eternal bodies.
- Reunion with loved ones who have died “In the Lord” (Revelation 14:13).
- Eternal rewards.
- Inheriting the KOG over which we will reign with him.
- The greatest pat-on-the-back ever when Jesus will say, “Well done my good and faithful servant. Come, share in your master’s happiness” (Matthew 25:21).
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No wonder Paul gushed in 1 Corinthians 2:9:

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him.*

Saved From

Isn’t it amazing that we are being saved for such wonderful things? Today, however, we look at the other side of the coin to see what we have been saved from. Before we do let’s take a quick poll: “When was the last time you heard a message on hell?” IKR! Hearing a sermon on hell is about as cherished as hearing one on tithing (lol). A recent Barna survey reported that 55% of seminarians believe teaching about hell is

inappropriate today and over 2/3 of church goers believe it is just a myth the church uses to control people.

The Biblical Teaching on Hell

But what do the Scriptures say about hell? Hell is described generally in three ways: (1) Fiery torment, (2) Separation from God and (3) Darkness. Jesus added that it was a place of “weeping and gnashing teeth” (Mt. 8:12) and the “undying worm” (Mk. 9:48). Biblical names for hell include Gehenna (smoldering garbage pit) and Hades (place of wicked dead). Hell then, is a place, not a state-of-mind, although some states-of-mind can be hellish. Neither is hell on earth, although some situations on earth can be hellish. If heaven is real so is hell as Jesus taught plainly on both. What then is the nature of hell? Here are three characterizations:

The Nature of Hell

Hell is the place of Ultimate Justice. Those who object to hell should never complain about things like corrupt politicians, murderers, child abusers, sex offenders, tyrants, and “Man’s” general “inhumanity to man.” If we don’t have a place of ultimate justice/consequence in the universe then there’s no reason to obey, “Do not repay evil for evil because vengeance is mine declares the Lord, I will repay” (Romans 12:19). Hell is the place of ultimate accountability, the place where the ultimate punishment fits the ultimate crime. What is this ultimate crime? According to scriptures like Hebrews 3:12-15, the ultimate crime is not trusting in God’s character or promises. Because God is eternal and we are eternal, that crime is eternal and warrants eternal punishment.

Hell is the place of Ultimate Hurt. When we say something “hurts like hell” we don’t have a clue as to what we are saying (contra Billy Joel’s description also). Theologian Jonathan Edwards writes in “The Future Punishment of the Wicked” :

They will not be able to find anything to relieve. They will never find any resting place there; any secret corner, which will be cooler... where they may have a little respite, a small abatement of the extremity of their torment. They never will be able to find any cooling stream or fountain, in any part of that world of torment; no, nor so much as a drop of water to cool their tongues. They will find no company to give them any comfort or do them the least good. They will find no place, where they can remain, and rest, and take breath for one minute: for they will be tormented with fire and brimstone; and they will have no rest day nor night forever and ever.

Hell is the place of Ultimate Mercy. This point may sound contradictory given what we just heard but follow my logic for a minute. God created us to have a relationship with him. Although we sinned against him, God has given us every goodness imaginable. God loves us so much that he gave his Son to die for us (John 3:16). God sends his Spirit to woo us to him each day. If we continue to say no to his gracious entreaties, and do so until we die, then the worst thing imaginable would be to spend eternity with the one whom we ignored/despised. It would be like being married to someone who hates you and whom you hate. You go to divorce court, but the judge renders the verdict, “No divorce for you.” “Live together forever.” That would be horrible. Now think about having to spend all of eternity with an awesomely holy God who has done everything for you, but you don’t want any part of him. That misery would be worse than hell itself, the only place his presence is not. Therefore, God is merciful in sending people to hell for he is only giving them what they desire, i.e., an eternal divorce from him.

Who’s Going to Hell?

In sum, hell hurts like hell and is the place of ultimate justice and mercy. But who goes there? The Bible is clear there are three major groups that need to start stocking up on asbestos swim wear right away: (1) the devil, (2) his angels, and (3) those who reject Christ.

Shockingly, this 3rd group includes moral people, loving people, bright people, generous people, religious people, and even good people. I have spoken to many people about their need for Jesus. Many reject him on the grounds they are “good-to-go because they are good enough.” Out of my many defeaters of this “goodness” argument is that personal goodness simply doesn’t matter. I then use the following illustration:

Imagine you're sleeping in bed one night when suddenly you are awakened by the piercing sound of your in-home fire alarm. In panic you straighten up and immediately smell the smoke and see the flames. You are trapped and all hope is lost. But in the nick-of-time a fire-fighter burst through the flames and finds you. He says, "Come with me if you want to live" and reaches out his hand. But you respond, "Thanks but I don't need saving. You see, I'm good enough." "I don't smoke, drink, or chew or run with the people that do." "I don't cheat on my spouse, taxes, or golf scores, too often. I even attend church on Christmas and Easter." Puzzled, the firefighter responds, "What's that got to do with anything? The fire doesn't care about any of that." "You need to follow me now!"

In this illustration sin is the fire starter, hell is the house on fire, and Jesus is the fire-fighter. It simply doesn't matter how good, bad, or ugly we think we are; we need to be saved! Because God is "Willing that none should perish but all to enjoy eternal life." (2 Peter 3:8) he sent his Son to save us from such an awful future.

Conclusion: Near Misses

Any accurate message on the reality of hell should elicit in us three great motivations. (1) To engender more passion about the Great Commission and Jesus' mission to "Seek and save the lost" from such devastating eventuality (Luke 19:10). (2) To generate more pray for those who don't understand what Jesus did to save them. (3) To generate more praise for what we ourselves have been saved from. On this last point, John Wesley, who constantly referred to himself as "a brand snatched out of the fire" ended his sermon, "Of Hell" with this thought:

Let us look back and shudder at the thoughts of that dreadful precipice, on the edge of which we have so long wandered! Let us fly for refuge to the hope that is set before us, and give a thousand thanks to the divine mercy, that we are not plunged into this perdition!"

(1) If Jesus is the Savior, what did he save us from?"

(2) If heaven is real then hell must be also because the Bible plainly, and often, teaches on both.

