

Hell — How Can A Loving God Send Good People to Hell?

June 30, 2019

If you are visitor, it is great to have you. Today we begin on short series on the topic of hell. We waited until the hottest time of year for this series to make a discussion of hell more memorable. While that pun was intended, and there are plenty of jokes each of us could make about a sermon series on hell at church, the truth is hell is not a joking matter.

People are heading there at an astounding rate. People die at the rate of three per second, 180 per minute, 11,000 per hour, 260,000 per day, and 95 million per year. According to the Bible, most of those people are on their way to an eternity in hell. That is a sobering reality.

Unfortunately, most people don't realize what is happening because belief in hell has fallen on hard times in our culture. A poll taken in 1978 revealed that more than 70 percent of people believed in hell. Eleven years later, Newsweek did the same survey and found that it dropped to only 58 percent of people believed in the existence of hell. The same poll taken in England at that time revealed that only 24 percent of the people in Britain believed in the existence of hell. A research group in 2003 learned that less than 1 percent of people think there is a possibility of them going to hell. Awareness of hell and the possibility of going there has evaporated in our culture.

The pulpit and the press have not helped. When was the last time you heard a sermon series on hell? My guess is that most of us have never heard one. Until recent years, the Christian publishing industry also ignored the existence of hell. When the 800-page Bible Almanac was published, it only had

eight lines in it on the topic of hell. When the 396-page Handbook of Contemporary Theology was published in 2001, it didn't even include hell as a topic. That seems to be a major oversight.

Maybe this morning you fit into American culture. In your mind, hell doesn't exist. You are not worried about going there. You are not concerned that your friends and neighbors will spend eternity there. To you, the topic of hell feels out of touch with the modern world. Talking about hell in public feels like you are pro-slavery or in favor of racism. It just doesn't fit into modern culture.

No matter what you feel is the truth about hell, today we will put our fingers in the text and discover what is the truth about hell and who will be there.

This morning, we will cover three topics. First, we will learn a brief history of hell. Second, we will learn how the Bible describes hell. Third, we will answer the question, "How can a loving God send good people to hell?"

In future weeks of this series, we will ask the question, Does hell have air conditioning? Is there a way to escape eternal suffering? We will also look at the judgment everyone will face before hell. Finally, we will go on a guided tour of hell.

We have a lot to cover this morning and in the weeks that follow. Let's dive into our study.

A brief history of Hell

When we look in the Bible to learn about hell, we discover that hell is not something given to us fully formed in the book of Genesis. Over time, God revealed more and more about what happens to people after they die. The best way to learn the history of hell is to follow the various words used in the Bible to

describe hell. We will start in the Old Testament, which is the least descriptive, and work our way to the New Testament, which is the most descriptive.

Sheol — Afterlife in the Old Testament

The most important word to describe life after death in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word Sheol. Unfortunately, the old King James Version written in 1611 didn't translate the Hebrew word Sheol into English consistently or accurately. Thirty-one times it translated Sheol as hell. Thirty-one times it translated Sheol as the grave. Two times it translated Sheol as the pit.

The Hebrew word Sheol is not hell. Hell is the Lake of Fire that comes at the end of history after Jesus judges everyone. Technically, nobody is in hell today because final judgment by Jesus has not taken place.

What is Sheol? In the Old Testament times, Sheol was described as a place where everyone who died continued to have conscious existence after death. There is no easy way to translate the Hebrew word Sheol into English, which is why the Old King James translated it in a variety of ways.

The Old Testament describes Sheol as a place of conscious existence for everyone after they die. It is a place for the righteous dead and the wicked dead. The Old Testament gives a few hints that everyone in Sheol did not have the same experience of life after death in that place. While I don't have the time to show you all the Bible texts, there are hints in the Old Testament that Sheol was divided into two compartments, one for the righteous dead and one for the wicked dead.

Best of all, verses like Psalm 49:15 gave hope to those walking with God who died and went to Sheol. God spoken through his prophets that one day he would pay a price to take the souls of the righteous dead out of Sheol.

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah. Psalm 49:15 (ESV)

In the Old Testament, there was little information given about life after death. The main points about life after death in the Old Testament were:

1. People continued to live after death in a place called Sheol.
2. There were two compartments to Sheol. One was comfort and the other was suffering.
3. God would one day pay a price to take the righteous dead out of Sheol.

While the Old Testament only opened the door on life after death a crack, the New Testament throws the door wide open and fills in the details on life after death the Old Testament saints were missing.

Hades — Afterlife in the New Testament

While Sheol was the key word to understand life after death in the Old Testament, Hades is the key word to understand life after death in the New Testament. In the New Testament times, since everyone spoke Greek and most couldn't read Hebrew, they wrote a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that everyone could read called the Septuagint. In every location the Hebrew word Sheol was used in the Hebrew Old Testament, the Greek Septuagint used the Greek word Hades. We know the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word Hades mean the same thing. That also means the Greek word

Hades in the New Testament is referring to the place called Sheol in the Old Testament.

Some of English Bible translations of the Bible obscure this a bit. They translate the Greek word Hades with the English word hell. That is not true. Hell and Hades are different places. Sheol in Hebrew and Hades in Greek are referring to the same thing. They refer to the temporary resting place for the dead where everyone exists while waiting God's final judgment. After God's final judgment, some will then be sent to hell while others will be in heaven.

During the 400 years between the time of the closing of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, the Jews developed a more mature understanding of Sheol (also called Hades). They realized this temporary place of the dead was divided into two sections, one where the wicked were in torment until final judgment and another where those who were right with God lived in comfort until final judgment. The half of Hades that was a place of comfort for the righteous they called Abraham's bosom. They also called it Paradise. The half of Sheol (Hades) that was a place of agony was simply called Hades.

The two compartment background of Hades, one being a place of suffering, and the other being a place of comfort, was the background for the parable Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. In Luke 16, the rich man died and went to Hades, where he was in torment. From Hades, he could see the beggar named Lazarus on the other side of Hades in comfort. There was a great chasm separating the two.

The belief that Sheol (also known as Hades) was divided into a place of torment and into a place of comfort was the prevailing belief in Jesus' day. When Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, he affirmed the prevailing belief that Sheol (Hades) was composed of two compartments, one of comfort for the righteous and the other of suffering for the wicked.

We know the Old Testament prophesied that not all people in Sheol (Hades) would stay there. One day God would ransom the souls of some in Hades and take them home to heaven. When Christ rose from the dead, this is exactly what he did. He took to heaven the Old Testament saints that were in the Paradise compartment of Hades. There are a few verses that show us this. Let me show you just one.

Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives..."
Ephesians 4:8 (ESV)

The apostle Paul also told us that today, after Christ's resurrection, every Christian who dies no longer goes to the Paradise side of Hades but goes directly to heaven to be with Jesus.

If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:22–23 (ESV)

Today, when Christians die, we go directly to heaven. The other side of Sheol or Hades, is still occupied by the wicked. The other side of Hades is still being populated by the death of the wicked. There they wait in temporary torment until final judgment while the Old Testament saints and the New Testament Christians are already in heaven with Jesus. What happens after final judgment? That brings us to our next word.

Gehenna — A Portrait Of Hell

In 750 B.C., King Ahaz ruled Judah. He was a spineless idolater. He adopted some of the most revolting forms of idol worship in existence as he followed other gods. He burned his own children alive on altars to foreign gods. He did this in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, just southwest of Jerusalem. God judged Ahaz for his sin and dethroned him. He was followed by his son Hezekiah, who was a good king. Unfortunately, he did not last long. After Hezeiah, his son Manasseh ruled. He was just as evil as his grandfather. He also burned his children alive on altars to foreign gods in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. The Valley of Ben Hinnom in Israel was forever associated with pagan worship and repulsive human sacrifice to false gods. People just couldn't forget. Eventually a godly king named Josiah came along. He obliterated pagan worship in that location and to remove the terrible memory of the Valley of Ben Hinnom, he turned it into a garbage dump. It was a terrible garbage dump. It not only had trash in it but it was the place the corpses of dead animals and dead people were thrown to rot in the open. It stunk of rotting flesh. The smell of rotten human flesh in the Valley of Ben Hinnom made people sick to their stomach. There were constant fires burning in the garbage dump. It was a terrible place. The people nicknamed that valley Gehenna, which is short for Ben Hinnom.

Gehenna is used 12 times in the New Testament to describe the fires of hell. Eleven of the twelve times it was used were on the lips of Jesus. When Jesus wanted to describe what the final resting place of the wicked was like, he pointed southwest out of town to the garbage dump that constantly had burning

fire, smoke and rotting flesh in the heat of the sun and said going to hell is like spending eternity in Gehenna. That is where the fires never die and the worms that eat the bodies never cease. He used that word to describe hell because it was the most vivid and horrific description of the final resting place of the wicked that he could use that people would understand.

Lake of Fire — Hell

When we get to Paul, John, and Jesus we find the final place of rest for the wicked after they are taken out of the compartment of torment in Hades and are judged by Jesus, is the Lake of Fire. That is hell proper. Gehenna was simply an earthly description of the eternal reality of the Lake of Fire, also known as hell. Let's see what the Bible says about who goes there.

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15 (ESV)

Hell is the final resting place of everyone who has not trusted in Jesus.

Let me summarize what we covered. In the Old Testament, everyone who died, went to Sheol, or what is known in the New Testament as Hades. Sheol (or Hades) has two compartments. One is a place of suffering, the other is a place of comfort called Paradise. After Jesus rose from the dead, he took the Old Testament saints in the Paradise compartment with him home to heaven. Today, all who die trusting in Christ are also brought directly home to heaven. All who have ever died apart from Christ in the Old Testament and since Christ are send to the compartment of torment in Sheol (also called Hades) while they await final judgment. After final judgment by Jesus, those who died apart from Christ and do

not have their names written in the Book of Life, will be sent to the Lake of Fire for eternity. The Lake of Fire is hell.

How does the Bible describe hell?

Hell is a place of punishment.

Let's begin by looking at the Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats that describes what will happen at the final judgment by those who die apart from Jesus.

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:41–46 (ESV)

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, people's destinies are linked to their relationships with Jesus. Their relationships to Jesus are revealed by the way they treat other people, especially the way they treat people in need.

This parable is talking about the final judgment in front of Jesus. Those who died apart from Christ will end up in the Lake of Fire that was originally prepared as a just punishment for the devil and his fallen angels. We see that the Lake of Fire is also just punishment for every human being that joined Satan's rebellion against God with our sin. Notice the Lake of Fire is considered just punishment for sin. It is fair punishment for sin.

While we are on this verse, I also want us to notice that twice the punishment of the Lake of Fire is described as eternal. The same word for

eternal is used to describe eternal life and eternal punishment. If the punishment is not eternal, our lives in heaven will not be eternal.

...since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...
2 Thessalonians 1:6–9 (ESV)

In the book of Thessalonians, Paul comforted Christians who were suffering for their faith. Paul reminded them that nobody gets away with anything. Those who were torturing Christians would one day need to face Jesus. God will bring about justice. Part of that justice is Jesus will inflict just vengeance upon them for their sin. Notice God will not just inflict just punishment on those who are torturing and killing Christians. He will not just inflict just punishment on the mass murderers in this world but on everyone who does not obey the good news of Jesus. All who have not responded to the good news of Jesus will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction. Those are the Bible's words, not my words. Hell is just punishment for sin that lasts for eternity.

...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:10–15 (ESV)

This is a great description of hell. First, we see the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is the place where they will be tormented day and night forever.

We also see there is a day of final judgment where everyone will stand before Christ and will be judged by what is written in the books. All of those who have trusted in Christ have their names written in the Book of Life. The Bible also tells us that everyone's deeds are written down in another book. This book of your deeds enables Jesus to judge everyone, who is not forgiven by Jesus, fairly. Some of you wish you have your own YouTube channel. I have good news for you. You already have one. All your deeds are being recorded by God in this book, so all apart from Jesus can be judged perfectly and fairly by Jesus before they are sent to the Lake of Fire.

Notice death and Hades will give up the dead that are in them. The souls of people that are in Hades will come out. The bodies of people that are dead in the grave will rise to life and be reunited with their souls. Everyone will be given indestructible bodies. Those who are in the Book of Life will live forever with Jesus on the new heavens and earth. Those whose names are not in the Book of Life will be living forever in their indestructible bodies in the Lake of Fire. The problem with an indestructible body is it will last forever in the Lake of Fire. There they will be tormented day and night forever.

Justice will ultimately be done by God and the punishment for the crime of sins will be perfectly suited to the sinner. One thing is clear: All who die apart from Christ will pay for their sins eternally in hell.

Hell is eternal.

We have already seen the eternity of hell a number of times in the verses we studied for our last point. Here is more evidence.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

What is important to notice is the word used for eternal both times in this sentence is the same word. If everlasting contempt is not eternal, that would mean everlasting life is not eternal. Eternal means eternal. Suffering in the fires of hell continues not for just 10 years or 50 years but for eternity.

Jesus also talks about hell being eternal and involving never-ending punishment.

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. Mark 9:43–48 (ESV)

Notice Jesus said the fires of hell are unquenchable. They never go out. Jesus' point is those who go to hell will find no relief forever and ever. Those are not my words. Those are Jesus' words. As I said last week, if we can trust Jesus to save our souls, we should be able to trust Jesus when he talks about other things, like the eternity of hell. He knows a lot more about this subject than we do.

It is worth going back to Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats for another look. Look what he said about the goats.

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Matthew 25:41 (ESV)

Jesus called hell the eternal fire.

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...
2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 (ESV)

We think of destruction being once and done. Paul described hell as the process of eternally being destroyed. How is this possible? I don't know all the details but if everyone is raised from the dead and everyone receives indestructible bodies, which is what the Bible seems to say, it is possible people will be in the Lake of Fire in an indestructible body forever being destroyed. The mere thought of that send chills down my spine. This is what the Bible says.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name. Revelation 14:11 (ESV)

This is a passage that describes all worshipers of the beast in Revelation. They end up in the Lake of Fire, where the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever without rest day and night. Hell is eternal.

...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Jude 7 (ESV)

This verse appears a little confusing. How could Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example of people being punished in eternal fire? It was in Genesis 19 when we read of God raining down fire and sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah for their sin. That was more than a thousand years before Jude wrote his letter. That was ancient history!

What I didn't realize is that smoke from the volcanic activity in the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah was still rising in the first century, more than a thousand

years after Genesis was written. What a great illustration of an eternity in the Lake of Fire when the volcanic fires in Sodom and Gomorrah were still burning more than a thousand years after those cities were destroyed.

I say this to show you the Bible is very clear about hell. It is eternal. That may not feel fair to us but it isn't about what we feel is fair. It is what the Bible says is just and fair.

Hell is indescribable pain.

We have already seen some of agonies of hell as we studied the eternal nature of hell. Let's look at other ways the Bible describes the pain of hell. To describe agonies of hell, the Bible uses word pictures. We use word pictures to help us communicate when words cannot adequately describe something.

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 13:41–42 (ESV)

Weeping and gnashing of teeth is a common description used many times in the Gospels to describe the agonies of hell. The word weeping may not be a good translation. Weeping sounds like sobbing, as if our favorite football team lost a recent game. That is not what is described here. The Greek word for weeping can also be translated as wailing. That is screaming and crying in utter agony.

Gnashing of teeth means being in such pain that you grind your teeth.

When I was in college, I went with a friend to his family's beach house in New Jersey. The wooden deck was old and splintered from the sun and ocean air. I had my shoes off, and I scuffed on the deck while walking across it and sunk a splinter deep into my foot. Being a college wrestler, I thought I was man

enough for a little self surgery with alcohol, a kitchen knife and tweezers. I figured I could cut my foot open with the knife then dig out the long splinter lodged deep in my foot. I turned out to be a wimp. After five hours of trying and my friends trying, I couldn't get the splinter out because of the pain. During that time they put a washcloth in my mouth because I was grinding my teeth in pain as my friends and I attempted self surgery. I eventually gave up and went to a clinic. The doctor shot me up with novocain, and using a scalpel, he cut deep into my foot and took out the deep splinter. I was grinding my teeth over the pain from a splinter in my foot. I cannot imagine hell without novocain.

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. Mark 9:43 (ESV)

In this passage, Jesus was not suggesting we literally cut off our hands if they cause us to sin. He was using language of exaggeration to make a point. The agony of hell is so real and so bad, you would rather have cut off your hand in this life to avoid sin if it would keep you from face the agonies of hell in the next life where you are punished for those sins. Those are powerful words.

How can a loving God send good people to hell?

This is the question everyone asks. It is the question you might be asking this morning, especially after we studied the punishments of hell, the eternity of hell, and the pain of hell. How could God send good, nice, and kind people to hell. Hell feels so overdone. Think of the nice people around us we see every day at work or in the grocery store who do not know Jesus. How could God justify sending them to hell for eternity? Let's answer that question.

None of us are good people.

To answer that question, we are going to work our way through a few important verses in the book of Romans.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. Romans 1:19–20 (ESV)

The Bible tells us atheists don't exist. That is why the Bible never tries to prove the existence of God. The Bible says, "The fools says in his heart there is no God." Everyone innately knows God exists simply by looking at creation around us. God's invisible attributes, such as his love for beauty and order and his great power, are obvious by just looking at the world around us. Look at the plants, the animals, the sun and the lake. Everything screams God's existence. Not only does creation scream God's existence but God plants in everyone a conscience that knows right and wrong before a page of the Bible is opened. The problem is that while we know God exists, are accountable to him, and know the basics of right and wrong, we choose to go against God. We choose to lie, cheat, and steal. We know that is wrong, and we feel guilty before God for our sin but we do it anyway. Paul said all of us are justly under God's wrath.

Paul summarized everyone's human nature with a constellation of verses in Romans 3.

...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:10–18 (ESV)

The first problem with the question of how a loving God can send good people to hell is that according to the Bible, none of us are good people. Every one of us is incredibly sinful. We may not be as sinful as we can be, but all of us have rejected God, and we choose to sin as the constant pattern of our lives as we live for our own glory, not God's glory. None of us are good people.

We also underestimate the seriousness of our sin. It was one act of sin by Adam and Eve that separated Adam and Eve from God, that brought sin to the human race, that brought death to them and introduced death into the entire created order. It only took one act of sin by Adam and Eve to make them worthy of an eternity in hell. That is the seriousness of one act of sin. A just response to one act of sin is death and an eternity in hell. We have committed thousands of acts of sin.

When it comes to our sin, we do not understand the seriousness of sin. If we saw sin from God's perspective, an eternity in the Lake of Fire would appear just, not overdone. Think of it this way. If you want to understand the seriousness of murder, you do not talk to prison inmates on death row. They will tell you what they did was not too bad. They will tell you the electric chair is too harsh. If you want to understand the seriousness of sin, talk to the ones sinned against. Talk to the wife that cries herself to sleep at night because her husband was brutally killed. Talk to the children who grow up without a father. Talk to the parents who visit a cold tombstone every weekend. They will tell you the seriousness of murder, not the people on death row. No, we don't understand the severity of our

sin because we can't understand the severity of our sin, and sin is much more serious than we realize.

Sometimes we don't think our sin is serious because we don't see direct consequences for our sin. We see people do horrific things. They get away with murder. How should we think about that? Is God ignoring sin because it isn't that bad? Look what Paul said is happening with our sin in the book of Romans.

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.
Romans 2:5 (ESV)

All that happens when we escape the consequences of sin in this life is we are storing up the consequences of our sin for eternity in the next life. Nobody gets away with anything. God is fair. God will make sure justice is served.

While we don't have time to get into the Scripture on this today, we need to remember that while hell is always eternal and always involves suffering, all the suffering anyone experiences in hell is simply a just and fair response to their sin. That means those who are guilty of greater sins in this life will suffer greater agonies in hell for eternity in the next life. When people sin, they store up God's wrath for the day Jesus judges them.

God is more than love.

The other deceiving part of our original question is about God's love. We always hear that God is love. That is true, but love is an attribute of God. It is not the complete definition of God. There is much more to God than love. If you want to identify the most dominant characteristic of God, it is not his love, it is his holiness. In the Bible, God is described as holy more than he is all of his other attributes combined. In Hebrew, since they didn't have a way to underline or put

things in bold to emphasize a point, they would repeat something to add emphasis. Look at how the prophet Isaiah emphasized God's holiness.

..."Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)

Because God is so holy, so perfect, and so pure, he must be utterly and completely intolerant of sin. He must punish sin. He must bring justice for sin done against him.

The amazing part is God's patience. He didn't immediately destroy Adam and Eve when they fell into sin. That would have been the just response to their sin. Instead, he began to unfold an amazing plan to divert his wrath that we deserve to his own son out of love for us.

How can a loving God send good people to hell is the wrong question. It is based on two false assumptions. The assumption that people are good, which they are not, and the assumption that God is only love, not that he is holy and just. Remember God is so holy that one act of human sin was enough to separate all of humanity from God for eternity and introduced death into this world. We are guilty of thousands of acts of sin. We may not be as wicked as we can be, but we are all sinful and deserving of eternal punishment.

We are incredibly sinful and God is incredibly holy and just, so we fully deserve eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. There was only one way for God to maintain his holiness yet forgive our sin. That is Jesus. In the greatest act of love in the world, God sent his own son, to die in our places for our sin. Only Jesus is of infinite worth so he could pay for, in time on the cross, what we could not pay for even with an eternity of suffering in the Lake of Fire.

This is why it is sheer foolishness to think that we can somehow pay for our own sin. Sometimes we think that if we punish ourselves for our sin will atone for our sin. That is foolishness. Even an eternity in the Lake of Fire is not enough to pay for our sin. Only Jesus is great enough to pay for sin. That is why we sing to Jesus. That is why we love Jesus. That is why we pray to Jesus. That is why we can't stop talking about Jesus. We are all about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, because only he could pay for our sin to take us from the Lake of Fire, which we do deserve, to bring us to heaven, which we don't deserve.

Conclusion

What do we do with this? In each sermon in this series, our application point will be essentially the same. Tell people about Jesus. Beg people to turn to Jesus. Hell is real. Eternity is long. The Lake of Fire may be agony but it is what we deserve. There is nothing we can do to save us from our sin. Jesus died to save us from our sin so through our trust in him we are forgiven and have eternity with Jesus in heaven, which we don't deserve, rather than the eternal punishment in hell we do deserve. So often we are afraid to talk about hell. We are afraid to talk about Jesus. Get over it. When someone is headed for agony and disaster, we don't worry about offending them. We worry about saving them. That is what we want to do this week. Let's talk about Jesus saving us every opportunity we have this week.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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