

## SOME THOUGHTS ON HELL.



What a terrible topic to write about. I understand. My suspicion is that more people wonder about hell though, than they do about heaven.

The Bible itself is rather discreet about hell. Many popular ideas about hell actually come more from Dante and Milton than they do from the Bible itself.

I have been a pastor now for many years. I am not a scholar, but I am going to do my best to write down accurate thoughts about the biblical descriptions of hell.

Some of what I am writing is conjecture on my part, so please take that with a grain of salt!

There are two main words used in the Greek of the New Testament to describe hell. Gehenna and Hades.

GENERALLY speaking, the difference is this: Hades describes the intermediate stage after death for lost souls and Gehenna describes the ultimate abode of the wicked. Both are loosely translated using the word "hell."

Of more importance in my opinion, is the IDEA of hell. Many metaphors are used in the Bible to describe hell: "outer darkness," "lake of fire," "blazing furnace," a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth," and "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."

Are these JUST metaphors or are they LITERAL representations? I'm not sure in every case. But it would be a big mistake, I believe, to dismiss these as "just metaphors." The reality will surely not be less awful than the images these words sketch in our minds.

### WHY WILL SOME HUMANS BE IN HELL?

Not because on a scale of 0 to 100, their good deeds just missed the passing grade of 60 ("Sorry, your grade was a 59.9, you missed heaven by a tenth of a point. Goodbye.")

Nor will it be because their sins and misdeeds were really, really, REALLY bad compared to others.

Nor will it be because they grew up in the wrong religion (be patient with me before you react), nor because they have not heard of Jesus Christ.

People will be in hell BECAUSE THEY HAVE REJECTED GOD – and there is simply no other place for them after death.

Eternity has two realms. Joyful existence in the immediate presence of God – or shut out from his presence forever. Heaven is where God will be. Hell is where God chooses not to be.

The picture above is of Passchendaele, one of the most horrible battles of WWI. Even there, God's presence was still to be found. But that will not be the case in hell.

#### HOW IS IT THAT PEOPLE REJECT GOD?

At some point in their lives, everyone knows there is a God. But no matter our religion or non-religion, every last one of us has deliberately pushed that awareness of God to the side so we could do what we knew to be wrong.

This is what the Bible calls "sin." All of us have done this, repeatedly.

Our sins have separated us from a holy God. No matter our religion or lack of religion. Humanity is "lost" because our sins have separated us from God.

But our problem does not just lie there. It is not simply the bad things we have done, or the good things we have failed to do. Our REAL problem lies within.

As Jesus taught, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, filthiness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from WITHIN and defile a man" (Mark 7:20-21).

Forgiveness is not the only thing we need. Until God changes our hearts through Jesus Christ, we are at odds with him.

Left to ourselves, we avoid God. We resist his influence. We resent his laws. We are angry and fearful of his judgment. WE WOULD PREFER GOD NOT EXIST (except to get us out of trouble).

#### THE CONDITION OF OUR HEART TELLS THE STORY.

Those with an unconverted heart hate God and want nothing to do with him. Perhaps not consciously, but it is there, nonetheless. Why would such a person enjoy heaven? They would be TERRIFIED to be in heaven.

People in hell will hate being in hell – but they would hate being in heaven even more so.

Think about it. Since heaven is filled with holy angels, holy people, and a holy God, what is there in heaven they could POSSIBLY enjoy, be comfortable with, or not find appalling to the point of terror?

I cannot count the number of times people have shrunk back from me, faces pale with nervousness, the MOMENT they find out I am a pastor. A mere HUMAN who has just reminded them of God!

What will their reaction be when they see the very face of God? The book of Revelation describes it. They will cry out to the mountains and rocks to fall on them to hide them from the face of God.

#### MIGHT THERE BE A SECOND CHANCE AFTER DEATH?

On a personal basis, this would suit me just fine. I feel nauseated thinking about people spending eternity in hell.

But there is nothing in the Bible that even hints at a second chance after death. In fact, just the opposite. "Man is destined to die once and after that face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

#### MIGHT LOST SOULS JUST BE EXTINGUISHED?

Again, personally, I would prefer this outcome for lost souls than an eternity in hell. But again, nothing in the Bible suggests this.

The dominant implication is that the human soul will exist forever, in fact it CANNOT be extinguished.

#### ARE THERE LEVELS OF HELL?

My personal opinion is "yes." This comes out of my own sense of justice -- some people have done SUCH horrible things -- as well as some hints in the Bible. Jesus said of the Scribes, "They will receive the greater condemnation." And in 2 Peter 2:4 a unique word is used for the place of punishment of the wicked angels in hell -- Tartarus. In Greek mythology, Tartarus was the lowest level of Hell, where the punishment was most severe.

#### HOW CAN PEOPLE ESCAPE HELL?

The "Good News of God" is MUCH more than just escaping hell -- it is the good news of life NOW in the kingdom of God, the close companionship with God which will extend forever -- but still, given this article, I want to address this question.

The Bible says, referring to Jesus, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Jesus himself said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

God has provided a way (when he did not have to) for bitter, angry, contemptuous, immoral, God-hating sinners (like I once was) to be reconciled to him.

It is by entrusting yourself to Jesus Christ with the intention of following him that you make your peace with God.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God has provided Jesus because he loves you and does NOT want you to be in hell.

Hell, after all, according to Jesus, was created, not for human beings, but for the devil and his angels.

There is no reason at all for you reading this to wind up in hell, if you are willing to repent (change your mind about your sin and about who should be in charge of your life) and entrust yourself to Jesus.

Jesus Christ offers you the ASSURANCE of going to heaven when you die. I hope you will take him up on his offer.

If you are interested in this, I've attached two video links below. The first is a 12-minute video I've titled "Choosing a Religion." The second is a 7-minute video, "Would You Like to Accept Jesus Christ?" You might also be interested in the article I wrote "Some Thoughts on Heaven," the third link down.

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