

- ***READ Luke 16:19-26*** Sometimes when we are experiencing extremely difficult points in our lives, we struggle to put into words exactly what it is that we feel like we are going through. We often use hyperbole and say something like, "this is the worst day of my life!" Or we might take it to the extreme and say something like "this is just like hell on earth!" There have been many people who have thought to themselves that they were truly going through hell during their darkest of days.
- In the July 1969 edition of the "Christian Science Sentinel", J. Woodruff Smith wrote the following dialogue between two unnamed individuals.

"A man who was going through deep waters of fear called a Christian Science practitioner. In anguish he cried, "Oh, you don't know what I'm going through, I'm just going through hell." With vigor his helper replied, "that's no place to stop. Keep going."

While many of us can probably well sympathize with the feelings of this unknown man, I must admit that the rich man that we just read about in **Luke 16** would probably have loved to be able to just keep going through hell and come out on the other side. Sadly, Abraham informs him that wasn't an option or a possibility.

- So when using such language as this person did to describe this low point in his life, was he using hell accurately? Further, when we hear people say on a really hot day, "it is hot as hell out here", is this an appropriate or accurate statement? I guess what I'm trying to figure out is exactly it is that makes hell...hell? Is hell something that is simply bad or hot? Is the worst day on earth actually comparable to spending a day in hell? Can the heat of hell ever be compared with something we might feel on this earth? Does anything we experience on earth actually compare with what hell is actually all about? I mean...is hell even a real place or is it just a state of mind that we use to scare our children away from doing bad things? I'd like to take some time this morning to consider the teachings of Scripture concerning hell so that we might be reminded of what truly makes hell hell.

I. Hell is a real place.

A. There are a great many people who would like to live as if hell does not exist.

1. A 2014 pew research study found out that while 72% of Americans believed in heaven, only 58% of them believed in hell. I think we can easily understand why this is the case. Naturally as humans, we don't necessarily want to admit to the existence of the worst thing imaginable. We're very quick to admit and discuss the glories of heaven, but it isn't fun to speak about the horrors that are a reality in hell. Sadly, we often think that if we simply don't believe in something then that something will cease to be a reality.
2. Others would seek to argue that Jesus's teachings that include talk of a hell-like place are not literal in nature, but they are metaphorical. These people would argue that Jesus's teachings on the place called *Gehenna* ("**Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**" **Matthew 10:28**; "**If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; It is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet to be cast into hell.**" **Mark 9:45**) are not literal teachings, but they are actually references to Valley of Hinnom, which was basically the garbage dump of Jesus's day. They would say that hell is not an actual place, but it is a feeling or a state of mind of full regret for not accepting Jesus as the Son of God. Kind of like saying someone is down in the dumps. (<https://hellochristian.com/4285-6-reasons-why-hell-is-not-real>)
3. And still others would suggest and believe that hell is only a temporary state of existence because those who are disobedient to God will not actually spend forever in torment, but they will simply cease to exist at some point. This is the teaching of annihilationism. Their consciences will cease to be, and they will be wiped clean from that which is known and exist. It might as well be as if they have never existed.

- B. These three theories don't harmonize with what Jesus said and with what inspired writers wrote on the subject of the afterlife, reward, and punishment.
1. These thoughts might sound somewhat appealing because, again, we don't like to think about being punished, but whether or not we acknowledge hell doesn't change its existence or validity.
 2. I wonder about these people who dismiss hell as being nothing more than a metaphor...would they dismiss heaven as being a metaphor, as well? I doubt that would be, but wouldn't consistency demand that such be the case? Someone holding to hell as a metaphor might seek to strengthen and validate that belief by standing upon God's love, and that a loving God wouldn't send someone to hell. However, God's love is also accompanied by His holiness and justice. His holiness and justice demand that if God is holy then those who are in His presence must also be holy, and those who fail to strive for such would be sent away from Him. (**I Peter 1:16**) Yes, God is good and will reward those who serve Him faithfully, but that doesn't mean that He won't punish those who make the decision to rebel against Him. (**Matthew 25:31-46**)
 3. Furthermore, Jesus and others seem to take the subject of hell seriously and to the extent that He and the inspired writers encouraged the enduring of temporary and literal pain and suffering for their faith's sake. (**Matthew 10:28**; *"Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."* **II Corinthians 4:17**) If hell isn't real then why would these men tell the hearers and readers to suffer? I sure wouldn't want to suffer to avoid something that wouldn't actually have the possibility of happening.
 4. We can be confident in the existence of hell, but that alone still doesn't tell us what it is that truly makes hell hell and beyond the scope of what we experience in this life. Let's look for the next few moments at what the Bible tells us sets hell apart from anything we might experience in this life.

II. Hell is hell because:

A. it is everlasting separation from God.

1. We know well that it is sin that separates us from God (**Isaiah 59:2**), but we can find some relief and consolation in knowing that He is willing to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all of our unrighteousness if we will confess, repent of our sins, and seek to walk in His righteousness. He is willing to accept us back into His fellowship. (**I John 1:5-9**)
2. Sadly, that time for repentance ends once this life ends. The Hebrew writer tells us that it is at the point of our death that the judgment then comes. There is no indication of second chances. (**Hebrews 9:27**) If we go back to our opening reading from **Luke 16**, we find a man who had wasted his chance at glory, and now he was stuck in torment with a great gulf separating him from the righteous.
3. Paul really puts it clearly and succinctly when he says in **II Thessalonians 1:9** concerning those who affected the faithful of God in this life, *"These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."* Hell is hell because those there will never have the opportunity to be united in fellowship with God.

B. it is the absence of protection from Satan.

1. This is an awful consequence of being separated from God...He is not with us to protect us from Satan. Remember that Satan, as a created being, has to be given permission by God in order to afflict man (**Job 1:6-12**) His affliction of temptation upon man is given to him by God, but that doesn't mean that God has just left us out to dry in this life. In fact, God promises us a way of escape from temptation if we will lean upon His strength to overcome that which is before us. (**I Corinthians 10:13**)

2. However, in hell...there is not protection from God against the full power of Satan for that place has been especially prepared for him and his angels. **(Matthew 25:41)** In that place, where God is not, we don't have protection against the evils of Satan. There is no deliverance that we can look toward. In this place, we fear not the destruction and suffering of the body, but we will experience the destruction and suffering of the soul. **(Matthew 10:28)**

C. it is never ending suffering.

1. And it isn't as if we have an ending to this suffering that we can be looking forward to. We know in this life that our suffering is but temporary **(II Corinthians 4:17)**, and it will lead us to something better. But no such light is to be found at the end of the tunnel when it comes to hell. Go back to what we read at the opening in **Luke 16:24** and consider the plea of the rich man. He cried out and begged that Lazarus might even just dip his finger in water and put it on the tip of the rich man's tongue to get him some sort of relief because he was in such agony. Yet...Abraham couldn't allow for such a thing to be done because there was no way for Lazarus to reach him. He was stuck in torment with no relief in sight.
2. Again, some want to claim that hell will just be temporary for those who end up there, but there are too many texts that directly refute such an idea that the punishment of hell will be temporary and will have an ending point.
 - a) *"Then he will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'" **(Matthew 25:41)***
 - b) *"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." **(Matthew 25:46)***
 - c) *"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire." **(Matthew 18:8)***
 - d) **Mark 9:43-48** is a text where Jesus strongly emphasizes the eternal aspect of the sufferings of hell. Three times in this text He mentions the worm not dying and four times He speaks of the fire not being quenched.
3. I fully understand that any thought of eternity can be difficult to comprehend with our finite minds, but I hope that we are impressed with the teachings of Scripture when they warn us that the torment and suffering of hell will have no end.

D. it is eternal hopelessness.

1. While the suffering of hell will have no end, unfortunately hell will be the end of any hope we might have had in this life. We have already mentioned numerous times the sufferings of this life. They exist because we live in a world that is broken and polluted by sin. Therefore we hope for heaven and that place where the sufferings will end, and we will be at peace with God and all others in heaven. We have that hope as long as we live in this world and live a life of faithfulness to God.
2. However, what makes hell...hell is the fact that we have nothing positive to look forward to. Peter describes hell as a place of black darkness of which has been reserved for the false teachers. **(II Peter 2:17)** Jude also uses this same kind of language in regard to hell when he speaks of evil men *"for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever."* **(Jude 12,13)**
3. Hell is hell because God is not there. Without God there is no protection from the one who is seeking to destroy us, and while we might wish for it to be a quick and painless death...it will not be. In fact, it will be sufferings unending with no hope or a reprieve in sight. These things are what truly make hell hell, and why it ought to be some place that we take serious and should want to avoid. We might think what we are going through presently is akin to hell, but we truly have nothing in this life to compare it to.

III. Thankfully, we have the choice whether or not hell will be our eternal place of dwelling.

- A. God wants us to avoid hell...which must be why we have so many warnings for and deterrents against it in the Bible.
1. So many different descriptions are found in the Bible and have already been mentioned over the past few minutes concerning hell...and none of them are good! The *"second death"* (**Revelation 21:8**), the *"lake of fire"* (**Revelation 20:14,15**), *"eternal punishment"* (**Matthew 25:46**), where the *"worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched"* (**Mark 9:43-48**), the *"furnace of fire"* where there will be *"weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (**Matthew 13:50**), the place *"prepared for the devil and his angels"* (**Matthew 25:41**), and the *"black darkness"* (**II Peter 2:17**) are all descriptions breathed out by God for inspired men to write so that others might know of the fury that might possibly await them.
 2. God would warn us because of what Peter says a little further on in **II Peter 3:9** that God doesn't want anyone to perish. He doesn't want anyone to go to hell! He wants for all people to be saved and avoid hell, and that can be done through the decisions that we make. It will be determined by whether or not we will repent and turn to God.
- B. Whether or not we truly experience hell will be determined by our decisions we make in this life.
1. We will finish up by looking at **II Corinthians 5:10,11**. In this text, the Apostle Paul lays down a fact that each and every person will realize as being such. Each and every person will stand before the Lord in judgement, and they will have to give an account for the life that they lived. Where they spend eternity will not be based upon their ethnicity. It won't be based upon their last name. It won't be based upon anything except the way they lived their lives and whether or not they repented of their sins and were faithful to God.
 2. In **v.11**, Paul concludes the thought by drawing the conclusion that if we know that this will take place...if we know there will be a judgment...if we grasp fully the fear of the Lord and remember that He can destroy the body and the soul in hell...then won't we commit our lives to Him in faith and obedience? Won't we train our consciences to do only those things that are true and right? I most certainly believe this should be the case. If we are fully knowledgeable of the terrors of hell then how can we but seek to live for God so that we can avoid eternal suffering? Hell is real, and many people will be there. Thankfully, we will have the choice whether or not we will be there with them.

There are some times where we just need a good reminder of the fact that hell is real and we ought to be scared to death of the thought that we could spend eternity there. For some people, their initial step of faith in Jesus was a direct result of their fear of hell, and that is completely ok. We ought to be scared of hell, and we ought to turn to God in faithful service so that it will not be our eternal home. May God help each of us to take the threat of hell seriously so that we might live in such a way that hell is avoided and heaven is made our eternal home. Hell is hell because God and His glory are not there. That is a place I never want to be, and I hope you and I can both never experience the terror of truly being without the Lord in that awful place of hell. ***PRAYER***