

## What Do You Believe about Hell?

Luke 16:24-31

June 12, 2011

I would ask you to notice the sermon section of the bulletin. It is laid out differently today. There are 4 blank lines in case you want to make a note of questions or principles that this message may raise. Also you see several scripture passages to get you started if you want to study this topic further.

**Introduction:** Somewhere early on in ministry, I remember a professor saying that ministers should beware of offering answers to questions people aren't asking. But recent months there have been interest and questions about Heaven and Hell. Last week we showed a video clip about the little boy who claims while deathly ill he experienced Heaven. His father wrote a story about his son's description of Heaven. Their story has caused a lot of the buzz around the experience of Heaven. We used the popularity of that story being discussed in the news so that we could offer guidance from a biblical basis.

This week we look at the issue of Hell. A book written by Pastor Rob Bell, entitled, Love Wins has stirred up a great deal discussion. In his book, Pastor Bell seems to ultimately say that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ pays for everyone's sin, so therefore everyone dies and goes onto heaven. It seems he indicates that even people who never made a commitment to Christ go to Heaven. Man did that cause some discussion. Bell's book has stirred up so much reaction that the question about the reality of Hell made the cover of Time Magazine. I think it is great when issues of spirituality, religion are in the spotlight. It gives the church an extra opportunity to provide guidance. So today I hope some pointed questions about what the Bible teaches about Hell can get answered.

**Question: Does the Bible really teach that Hell exist?**

The first question that needs to be addressed is whether the Bible from a Christian perspective really teaches Hell exist. Let's read one passage from the book of Luke, Luke 16:19-31.

### **Scripture Reading: Luke 16: 19-31**

Luke 16:19-31 is one passage of many about Hell or some condition of eternal punishment and separation from God. It points out that there is some realm, dimension of eternal punishment.

- Hell is a placed where **once your there, your there.** v.26 Abraham tells the rich man there is a great gulf between Heaven and Hell, and no one travels back and forth from one to the other. Placement in Hell is permanent.
- Hell is **a condition of torment.** v.24 The rich man asked that just a drop of water be brought to him to bring him comfort. Whatever hell is like; it is absolute misery.
- Hell is a condition of **loss of hope.** vs.29-31 The rich man was not getting any request he made answered. He asked for a drop of water, the answer was no. He asked someone be sent to warn his family not to make the same mistake he made, the answer was no. One thing Hell does not contain is hope. Hell is so bade because of the absence of hope.

I can understand it is unpleasant to think about such a reality. I understand people may disagree with the concept. But many references exist in the Bible about a state of some type of eternal punishment and existence.

**Question: How can a loving God be so judgmental? Which raises another question of how can a loving God be so judgmental?** To that I would answer that Hell isn't really judgment that God brings upon us. Hell is what we do to ourselves. Our sin from our earthly choices creates hopelessness

here and later.

To prove my point lets look in the news with the recent story of another powerful political person who has taken a moral fall. His name is Anthony Weiner. He was married within the last year and is a congressman from the state of New York. He and his wife just found out recently they are expecting their first child. News broke last week that Congressman Weiner has been sending sexual text messages and pictures of himself to college age women. When the secret about his actions were first leaked, the congressman lied and said his email account was hacked. Finally he has admitted he was sending improper communication. Now some people from his own political party as well as others are calling for him to resign as a congressman. He has created all of the distress and humiliation. What has been so puzzling is that much of the shame and embarrassment was unnecessary, **but he chose to lie, cover up, blame, and be defiant toward the truth. He created his own hell because he chose freely to lie, cover up, blame, and be defiant toward the truth.**

The story of Lazarus reminds us if a person lives in constant cover up and denial of their mistakes, choosing to be blind to their faults, defiant and never admitting wrongdoing they sentenced themselves to misery - its not God.

If people consistently blame by always putting the responsibility on someone else, never expressing the need for forgiveness and exit this life rejecting the need to answer to God's sovereignty of truth and will, then who is really being judgmental? Pastor Bill Hybels calls our sin "cosmic treason against God."

God is not judgmental. God simply steps out of our way and let us have the life we repeatedly choose now and for eternity.

**Question: How can God be loving send some one to eternal punishment?**

Similar that question is how can a loving God send someone to **eternal punishment in Hell**. We say the soul is eternal and lives on. **Ecclesiastes 3:10 says, "He has set eternity in the human heart."** God will allow the unrepentant soul to live on and pollute heaven?

Some will say we are free to live anyway we want and each person has a right to believe and do what they want. Yet once we die do we expect God is going to wipe away our freedom? If the soul of who we are is eternal and we wanted our freedom to believe and be what we want to be in this life, **we cannot expect God just to wipe that all away when we die**. It's like were trying to have it both ways. Hell is the reward to the un-repentative soul. Hell is God's last act of respect to our freedom to choose wrong over right and to reject God and refuse to submit to God.

Abraham told the rich man that in his earthly life he had received the good things now he was receiving the bad. Meaning the rich man had core values that ignored the suffering of others, and approved of ignoring suffering. Abraham wanted nothing to do with acting compassionately and doing justice. He ignored the beggar Lazarus daily outside of his gate hoping for food. Why in the world would the rich man want to go to heaven where there is compassion and justice? And why would God want someone who ignores suffering and compassion to run loose in heaven?

On Friday afternoon a man escaped custody from the Newbern Police department. The fugitive is wanted for burglary. I bet a lot of people in Newbern are concerned about a man on loose in our town who was desperate and defiant enough to run from the police. How many want people like that running loose in Newbern? He has not repented enough to turn himself in. He has not yet confessed mistakes. He doesn't appear to be seeking to change his ways. He shouldn't be in Newbern on the loose or anywhere else.

Why would God allow the unrepentant, callous stubborn, self-

righteous soul to run loose in heaven? In the Lord's Prayer Jesus said we seek to pray to do God's will on earth as it is done in Heaven. Heaven is holy and pure. In heaven God is going to wipe tears from our eyes. How can God wipe tears from our eyes if the souls that caused the tears in the first place are there to cause more tears and suffering?

### **Who is going to Hell?**

So who is in danger of going to Hell? There are parts of the New Testament like 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that name various sins of drunkenness, thievery, gossipers, sexual sins etc. For those who never turn to God for forgiveness they are in danger of hell.

There is also differing opinions within Christian denominations about whether believers, Christians can fall from grace and land in Hell. Some Christians believe once we commit our lives to Christ we can never lose our salvation. **They say God will never let go of us. "If they saved, always saved."** I have respect for that view. I don't see how anyone would ever turn their back and walk away from God's love. Scriptures like Romans 8 teaches that once in Christ nothing can separate us from the love of God. John 10:28 is where Jesus promises nothing can pluck us from out of the hand of God.

However, I believe it is consistent with scripture that Christians can fall from grace. Not easily but here is why I believe it's possible. **There is nothing in the scripture that says God takes away our freedom of choice after we become Christian.** If we chose to accept God's grace we can choose to walk away. I see this principle in 1 Timothy 1:18-20 where Paul warns a minister of the gospel to beware about making a shipwreck of his faith like some had done.

But most of all I see the possibility in the gospels. There was

really one group people Jesus called out who stood in danger of going to Hell. The people Jesus pointed to were not the people who had never responded to God's law. The people Jesus warned about going to Hell were the religious people from within his own tradition. It was the religious insiders like you and me.

- Its was religious people like in Matthew 13 who knew better but "Jesus said their hearts were calloused toward God."
- Its was the religious teachers/leaders like in Matthew 23 who cared more about rules than relationships. On top of that they misused their knowledge about God to control others for their own purposes. Jesus said they preventing people from entering heaven and then made anybody they converted twice a son of hell as themselves.
- Matthew 25 Jesus said those who would be thrown into eternal fire were those who cried Lord, Lord but passed by the hungry, the poor the naked the imprisoned.

Listen it is not just the addicted or alcoholic who refuses to change or the defiant criminal, or sexual carousing bad boy or bad girl, wall street thieving banker type that is in danger. It's also those who call Jesus Lord but ignore his word and defy his will.

Pastor Bryan Wilkerson writes, I've heard a father say, "God is often compared to a loving father. As a father myself, I cannot imagine condemning my kids, no matter what they did to reject me. I would be devastated if the rejected me, but I would not send them to hell." What would you do then? Let's say you're an earthly parent, and your child decides he wants nothing to do with you and leaves home for the west coast. What are your options? You can send him letters expressing your love; you can send money to help him get on his feet; you can visit him and plead with him to come home. But there's one thing you cannot do, if you love him. You cannot bind him hand and foot, drag him home, and chain him to his bed for the rest of his life. That's not love; that's kidnapping and imprisonment, and God doesn't work that way. (Preachingtoday.com, 2011)

Nothing in the scripture teaches us we lose our freedom to stop believing and loving God.

### **Two final points.**

If someone is sincerely uncertain about their relationship to God and their eternal destiny all they need to do is what **Romans 10:13** tell us to do. **Call out on the name of the Lord and you will be saved.**” If someone wants to turn to God all that is needed is to call out for saving. Those who are in danger of hell are those refuse to call out to God or they act like they have but really haven't, or they never think they need to.

### **What does all this mean to the church?**

Also the reality of Hell challenges the church to answer important questions?

Do we as a church nurture a sense of urgency and passion that our mission is to share Christ so people have a heaven to gain and hell to avoid?

Do we care to be involved in the lives of others who are slow or refuse to see the spiritual danger they are in.

Do we care enough to be controversial to talk about the reality of Hell and the need for genuine faithfulness to God?

Do we dare to be humble and practice James 5:16 regarding the need to be confessing our sins to each other so we seek to avoid spiritual blindness by daring to name our personal sins as well as collective failures as church?

Do we care enough to attend this Thursday's meeting about the possible future ministry ideas for our church so our church is a difference maker in our community.

God is so great. Heaven will be wonderful. Hell is awful. We need to always be a church so nothing hinders us, divide us, weaken us, distract us from living the Christian life together so that Christ grows within us and lost people can see the hope and path of eternal life through us.

