

WHAT IS HELL LIKE?

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If you believe the Bible then you believe in Hell. Are you acquainted with what the Bible teaches about that dreaded place?

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Would you believe that Jesus talked more about Hell than any other person in the New Testament? That's right! And it's no wonder. Although Jesus came from Heaven he knew exactly what Hell was for, and what it was like. We would not be able to find a greater expert on Hell than Jesus. He knew exactly the kind of man or woman who would go there. Jesus warned people about the kind of behavior that would send them to that terrible place.

For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, ²² **But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.**" Matt 5:22 (ESV). Jesus tried hard to explain just how terrible Hell is. In that same Sermon, Jesus proposed some radical ideas because he knew just how terrible Hell is, He said, ²⁹ **If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.** ³⁰ **And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.**" Matt 5:29-30 (ESV) Jesus repeated that warning in Matthew, chapter 18:9.

These are strong figures of speech. They are supposed to teach us just how important it is for us to avoid Hell. Jesus also said ²⁸ **And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**" Matt 10:28 (ESV). Jesus spoke especially harshly to those people who were the religious leaders in His day. They were called Pharisees and Sadducees. It is recorded in Matthew 23:15 that Jesus said to the leaders, **"You Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses are in for trouble! You're nothing but**

show-offs. You travel over land and sea to win one follower. And when you have done so, you make that person twice as fit for hell as you are." (CEV) Oh friends, that is a scathing rebuke, isn't it? A little later Jesus said to that same group of leaders, "You are nothing but snakes and the children of snakes! How can you escape going to hell?" Perhaps you too have wondered how you can escape going to Hell.

From these passages we know that Jesus believed in Hell. He also believed that there was a way for people to avoid going there. The reason there is a Hell is because of sin. In Matthew chapter 25 Jesus painted a picture of the last great Day of Judgment. Everyone will be held accountable for their behavior and their thinking. Jesus said that He would be there on that great Day of Judgment sitting as the Judge.

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

⁴¹ "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. ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Matt 25:31-46 (ESV)

Notice that both places, Heaven and Hell, are prepared places. Our heavenly Father has prepared a place for those on the right. This place has been in existence since the foundation of the world. God spoke through Isaiah the prophet and said, ¹⁴ ... "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way." ¹⁵ For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite. Isaiah 57:14-15 (ESV)

The One who lives in Heaven and inhabits eternity also wants to live with you and me. He wants to revive our lowly spirits. He wants to revive the heart of the contrite. Those one the right will live with the One who inhabits eternity.

But there is another place prepared; this place was prepared for the devil and his angels. That place is described as a place of punishment. Both these residences are of eternal duration. There is eternal punishment and eternal life. Even though Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels...many human beings who have lived upon the earth shall go there because they have followed the ways of the devil. Paul said this about the Ephesian Christians:

¹ ... you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and [we] were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)

Yes, Heaven and Hell are prepared places. Heaven is prepared for those who follow King Jesus and have received the forgiveness that God grants through Jesus Christ. Hell is prepared for the devil and his angels, but will also be the abiding place of the lost. Those people who have not believed in God, nor His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus had told his disciples that he was leaving them, but He encouraged them not to lose heart:

¹ "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." John 14:1-7 (ESV)

John the Baptizer also talked about Hell. John predicted that Jesus would send people there! That's right! John said, ¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Matt 3:11-12 (ESV). So John drew a distinction between people and likened them to useable grain and unusable chaff. The guy with the winnowing fork is the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said it would be easy to go to Hell, but harder to follow the road to Heaven. Jesus encouraged the people to

¹³ Enter [in] by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way [road] is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Matt 7:13-14 (ESV)

Jesus once met a Roman soldier who had a sick servant. The man wanted Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus agreed that he would and started going to the soldier's home. But the man felt unworthy to have Jesus into his house, so he requested that Jesus heal his servant from a distance, without going to him. The Roman centurion explained that he had authority to send people here and there; indicating that he thought Jesus could do the same thing. Jesus was impressed with this Gentile's faith. He told those around him,

"Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matt 8:10-12 (ESV)

There is a place Jesus called "outer darkness" and it is a place where people are weeping and grinding their teeth. Even if Jesus was speaking in figures of speech, certainly he is painting a dismal picture of those in Hell.

On another occasion Jesus was telling his apostles that they should teach His doctrine no matter what kind of persecution might come upon them. He warned them about fear, being afraid to speak up for Him:

²⁸ **And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.** Matt 10:28 (ESV)

Some people think that since the soul and body would be “destroyed” in hell then surely people who go there will be annihilated out of existence and will not feel the pain of Hell for very long. However, the Greek word translated here “destroy” does not mean to take out of existence. It means to “ruin” something. I can take a hammer in my hand a “destroy” a radio. It is still in existence, but it is no longer useful as a radio. It cannot fulfill its destiny. It cannot serve any longer as a receiver of sound waves. This is the destruction of Hell. People who go to Hell no longer have an opportunity of fulfilling their destiny with God. They will not go out of existence; they will be ruined! Oh, friends, Jesus Christ is God’s answer to Hell. He wants to forgive you. God’s sinless Son has already paid the penalty of Hell the three days while His body was in the tomb. He paid that penalty for you. Will you become His disciple?