

Gospel and Hell

Outline

1. Hell is Biblical
2. Hell teaches of this life and the next.
3. Hell teaches God's justice that gives you peace
4. Hell teaches God's love that gives you security

1. Hell is Biblical

The Bible teaches that.

- i. Everyone will exist eternally, either in Heaven or Hell: *Matt 25:46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.* (also, John 5:28, Rev 20:14-15)
- ii. Everyone has only one life on earth. God will judge us on earth and send us to Heaven or Hell. *Heb 9:27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*
- iii. Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6). Therefore, trusting in Jesus or not will determine our eternal destiny in Heaven or Hell: *John 3:16, 36 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life...³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.*

For the past 2000 years, every Christian denomination has believed this teaching is biblically accurate. But many people cannot imagine a loving God would make a horrible place like eternal Hell to punish man for sin. So, they have three theories:

- Hell is when a person ceases to exist after death — against (i) above.
- Hell is permanent, but God gives a 2nd chance to repent in Hell — against (ii).
- Hell is temporary, and God will eventually save everybody — against (iii).

The person who talks most about Hell in Scripture is our Lord Jesus. In fact, except for James 3:6, Jesus is the only one who even uses the word Hell (Gehenna, which means Valley of Hinnom). The Canaanites worshipped Baal and the fire-god Molech in this valley by sacrificing their children in a continuous fire. Even Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah, were guilty of this terrible practice (2 Chron 28:3; 33:6). But King Josiah ended this worship. (2 Kings 23:10).

In Jesus' time, people used the Valley of Hinnom as the garbage dump of Jerusalem. They threw all the filth and garbage of the city, including the dead bodies of animals, executed criminals into this valley, and lit constant fires to burn them. Worms thrived in filth.

Jesus used this awful scene as a symbol of Hell. In effect, He said, "Do you want to know what the Hell is like? Look at the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) — *"where their worm does not die, and fire is not quenched"* (Mark 9:48).

Some people question whether Hell has actual fire or is fire symbolic. But remember, the reality is greater

than the symbol. The Bible cannot find human language to describe either Heaven or Hell. Heaven is more glorious than we can see, hear or conceive (1 Cor 2:9). Hell is more terrible than the language expressed in the Bible.

2. Hell teaches of this life and the next.

Read the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). We divide the parable into the story (Lk 16:19-22) and the dialogue (Lk 16:23-31).

The story teaches of this life (Luke 16:19-22): There were two men — one very rich and one very poor and weak whose name was Lazarus. The rich man dressed in purple (purple dye was expensive) and fine linen (worn as undergarments). He lived every day in luxury, housed in a compound with a gate. Lazarus was very poor and weak that he couldn't even beg at the marketplace but lay at the rich man's gate. It was a custom for wealthy Jews to feed the poor Jews. But Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table (which generally would feed dogs — Matt 15:27). It showed that the rich man was uncaring. Even the dogs showed compassion to Lazarus and licked his sores. Both men died—the rich man woke up in Hell, but angels carried Lazarus to a place of honour at Abraham's side (Lk 16:22-23). Abraham is the father of the covenant people of God.

One principle this parable **doesn't** teach is that the rich go to Hell and the poor go to Heaven. Many wealthy people in the Bible, like Abraham, Lot, Esther, Philemon, and Theophilus, were godly. Many poor people mentioned in Proverbs were wicked — where laziness, drunkenness, and debauchery led to their poverty.

The principle of this parable is in *Luke 16:13 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

Whenever there is competition, something always wins. Whatever wins in your life becomes your god, which you pursue, serve, and **highly value**. It becomes the measure of how you judge your success and by which you rank yourself compared to others and justify yourself before others, making you worthy of their respect. Then things that you highly value become idols in your life (Col 3:5). It is detestable in God's sight (Luke 16:15). It breaks God's greatest commandment to love Him with all your hearts, soul, strength and mind and love neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27).

Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.

So then, how do you manage wealth and talents? Be a steward that uses wealth, talents, or gifts as an investment for life after death. Read the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-12. The fundamental principle is that if God blessed you with certain valuable assets, then manage them with integrity and invest them in God's kingdom. But suppose you think they are your own to give you self-worth, value and importance with others (justify yourself in the eyes of others). In that case, it becomes detestable in God's sight. What you do with material blessings in this life reflects where your heart is, and what you cherish the most in your life becomes your god. Therefore, even the **good things** God gives you, like money, talents, intelligence, beauty, family, and strength, can prevent you from seeing your need for a Saviour. Suppose you make the good things the most important things in your life to give you identity, without which you feel you're nothing — then, it is idolatry, making it more valuable than your need for God.

This parable is about two men— the poor one has a name (Lazarus), and the rich man is nameless. Lazarus means "One whom God helps" or one who depends on God for help (My help comes from the Lord—Ps 121), which made all the difference. God honoured Lazarus. The rich man depended on his wealth on earth for his identity. He ended up in Hell and remained nameless throughout eternity.

The dialogue teaches of the after-life (Luke 16:23-31)

Lk 16:23 The rich man wakes up after death in the torment of Hell and sees Lazarus far away at Abraham's side. The shocking thing is that the rich man doesn't cry, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I beg you, let me out". He doesn't repent and doesn't ask for forgiveness. **No one in Hell can repent because the Holy Spirit is absent there. He gives us the grace to repent and believe the gospel (John 16:8-11) while we live on earth.** Without grace, man's heart is set on self-centeredness that can only grow in eternity, making man a horror. Hell is an eternal horror movie that is real.

Lk 16:24 The rich man doesn't address Lazarus throughout his dialogue. But he addresses Abraham and asks him to send Lazarus to serve him with a little water to ease his agony. He still thinks of his self-importance and Lazarus as a servant.

Lk 16:25-26 Abraham replies that **the boundaries are fixed**. No one can cross over from one to the other. Abraham also tells the rich man to remember the life on earth that caused his heart to be stuck on "good things".

Lk 16:27-29 Then the rich man tells Abraham to send Lazarus a message to the rich man's five brothers to warn them of Hell. He still is self-centred. He doesn't repent or ask Lazarus for forgiveness but treats him like an errand boy sent on his behalf with a message. Abraham replies that they have Moses and the Prophets. Abraham refers to **the scriptures as a witness**; if they don't believe them, they won't believe Lazarus.

Lk 16:30-31 Then the rich man tries to correct Abraham, saying that the scriptures won't be sufficient, but a resurrection of Lazarus will make his brothers repent. Abraham replies that if they don't heed the scriptures, they won't heed a resurrection. This happened when Jesus resurrected a real man, Lazarus, in front of a crowd. Some still disbelieved in Him (John 11:46). Later, Jesus Himself rose from the dead (John 20), yet people do not believe in Him till today. They do not believe they need a Saviour. Why? Because they believe in themselves.

Of course, spending life eternally in Hell would frighten anybody. But since they don't believe they need a Saviour, they think they would not go there if there is ever a hell.

3. Hell teaches God's justice that gives you peace

Many wonder how a God of love can pass such a harsh judgment as an eternal hell. While we can sympathise with them, we say they don't understand the doctrine of Hell. God does not impose Hell on people *"Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). When Abraham looks at the rich unrepentant man in Hell (Luke 16:25), he calls him, "Son", showing tragedy and sadness. God does not look down on people on their way to Hell with contempt but with sorrow, even though they remain unrepentant.

God of justice: We have heard of horrible wars. I have witnessed Hindu- Muslim riots in Mumbai. People are killed, women are raped, and families and homes are destroyed. How can we stop them from taking revenge? We know that retaliation will inevitably set the cycle of violence against each other to go on and on. We can tell them, "Oh, violence is not the answer because it doesn't solve anything". But such words will not touch their hearts because it shows no concern for justice.

The only resource powerful enough to soothe the human heart's desire for justice and keep us from the endless cycle of violent revenge is to believe in the God of justice, who will make everything right in the end. If you don't believe in God's justice, you will inevitably enter the cycle of violent revenge. But believing in God's justice is the only resource strong enough to live in peace in this world. *Rom 12:17-19 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay."*

4. Hell teaches that God's love gives you security

We notice the rich man continued to be self-centred and unrepentant even in Hell. So, the fear of Hell will not change the human heart, which is selfish and self-centred. Abraham knew sending Lazarus with the news of Hell would not change his five brother's hearts. So, what will change our hearts? **Only the gospel will change our hearts.** The gospel is the good news that **Jesus came to die for our sinful, self-centred hearts out of infinite love for us.** Dying on the cross, He suffered judgment on our behalf. There was supernatural darkness for 3 hours from noon to 3 pm, symbolic of judgment (Luke 23:44). He cried, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me*" (Mark 15:33-34). He was buried and rose again on the third day, having paid for our sinful hearts. When we believe in Him, we receive His forgiveness, righteousness (2 Cor 5:21), and **a new heart and spirit** to follow His ways (Ezk 36:25-27). We become children of God, whom the Father loves as much as He loves Jesus (John 17:23, 15:9).

Conclusion: Even as I write and preach this sermon, I fear God for everybody. For I know death is sure, and we are destined only to die once and after death to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible tells us God is not slow to keep His promise (of judgment). He does not want anyone to perish but to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, I implore you, on Christ's behalf, to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20).