

A Survey of the Doctrine of Hell

Various Scriptures

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, June 5, 2022

If you would, please open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. That's the book that we're in this morning. In order to start our message for today, we're going to open up to a letter to the church, which theme is that of Christ. In the opening pages alone, it gives you several names for Him just in chapters, one, two, and three. It calls Him our Lord and our Saviour and Priest. It says that Jesus is our King and our Ruler and our Sovereign. And He's our propitiation and our rest and our mediator who provides us with something that's greater than the temple, greater than the sacrifice, and is greater than anything Israel had in the Old Testament. And as they told us in seminary, if you can't preach that, you can't preach anything. This is some wonderful stuff here. It's a fantastic book. And with that said, let me just read the first and the middle part of Hebrews two with you. Starting in verse 10, it says this,

For it was fitting for Him for who, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise." And again, "I will put my trust in Him. And again, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me."

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death, He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subjected to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

As I read that, you can tell that's a marvelous portion of Scripture because a major focus of this passage is Jesus. It says in verse 10, "For it was fitting for Him to be perfected through sufferings," and that word *Him* there is a reference to Christ. He's the one that's talking about because that means Jesus was prepared to be your Saviour through suffering. Why? In verse 11, so He could sanctify you; in verse 12, so He could bring many sons to glory; in verse 14, so He could render the devil powerless and make propitiation or satisfy the wrath of God in verse 17.

Just to say a few words about that, a survey was done several years ago in the National Post, in which it was discovered that while about half of all Canadians believe in heaven, only about a third of them believe in the wrath of God or the place of hell. It's not a very popular subject today, like a lot of things we've been talking about in this chapter, it's not talked about very much because they find it so offensive. It cuts against the grain. We like to be tolerant as a country, it's not very tolerant to talk about; we like to be open minded, but Hell might be the most narrow-minded subject in the Bible. The same article went on to say that the doctrine of reincarnation was held by more people. And so were other things like the doctrine of annihilationism, which says that your soul ends up being annihilated when you die, which in my mind is no more hopeful than the other. But hell was nowhere on people's minds. One writer for the newspaper said it this way. He said, "For the most part, Canadians have a high respect for God, but we do believe in a higher power. But as to what happens to us when we die that's

up for grabs. It's really no clear consensus as to what this country thinks about that subject.” And I would say he's right when you think that's very accurate if you ask the average person on the street, what happens to you when you die? They'll say anything, won't they? You could hear any kind of answer to that question. I used to live next door to a young man who didn't grow up in church. He had never read the Bible, but when he heard I was a pastor, he started giving having interesting conversations with me. In my line of work, I tell people what I do, and I never know what they are going to say. And he went on to tell me that when he died, he knew he was going to come back as a dog. When I asked him why, he said, “Because I liked dogs.” That's all he said, but he said that because that's the way people think: if I like something, that will happen, if I want to be a dog, God will just make me into a dog. Because heaven is all about me, me, me, I get what I want when I go there.

The Buddhists have their own version of this when they say that heaven is nirvana or a great realm of nothingness. Because that's the goal of every Buddhists. They want to go to a place where you shut your mind off. And so that's what paradise is to them. Just a state of mindlessness. The Muslims do a similar thing when they say Heaven is a place where you get to sleep with virgins, because the idea that it is that it's all about the flesh for them. The afterlife is all about indulging their carnal nature.

But I mentioned that because I think this kind of idea is swept into the church today; the idea of reinventing heaven, or just the afterlife in general, has made its way in here. There have been several books that have come out in recent years on the subject of Heaven and Hell. And it might help to mention one of them because it sheds light on what we're going to talk about today, we're going to talk about the issue of hell this morning. And so, in 2006, a real estate agent from the US named Bill Wise wrote a book called 23 Minutes in Hell. It says, “Suddenly, at three o'clock AM on the 23rd of November 1998, without any notice, I found myself being hurled through the air and then was falling to the ground completely out of control. I landed in what appeared to be a prison cell, the walls of the cell were made of roughhewn stone, and I was completely naked, which added to my vulnerability. This was not a dream, I was actually in this strange place, fully awake and cognizant, I had no idea what had happened, how I traveled or why I was there until it was shown me where I was, because I was in a place called hell.” And while he was there, the book goes on to talk about how big his prison cell was, and how nasty the pit was. He tells you what the demons look like, and how big their bodies were, he talks about how thirsty he was, and how terrified he was and how real it all felt to him and what it did to his body. But he didn't talk too much about Scripture. Because the Scripture tells us that Revelation 20 says the dead in hell don't have the resurrected bodies yet until Christ returns. When you die, you don't go to hell in your body yet, you get that later. But the book didn't quite make that connection. And he didn't explain how he was able to see all that very clearly, because Matthew eight refers to hell as a place of outer darkness. Which means that when you're there, there's some kind of issue with vision, you can't see very well. And he also didn't talk about why he was so privileged to witness such a thing, because as far as I know, no one else in the Bible got to do that. I mean, the apostle John went to heaven, and saw the glories there, but he never went to see all the things that happened in hell. But nevertheless, people love to speculate about that sort of thing nowadays, don't they? They love to let their imagination run wild when it comes to heaven and hell. They do that for several reasons. For one thing, that's where our hope is found. We get our hope in the next life, not in this life, we find it on the other side of the grave. So there's a propensity to wonder about it. But either way, when it comes to this subject, we need to make sure that our minds are fully go back to the Word of God.

And with that said, if you would look at our passage that I just read to you, it talks about this in Hebrews two, verse 17, if you would look at that passage. It mentions this issue of the wrath of God because it says, “Therefore

He [or Christ] had to be made like His brethren and all things so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” I told you before that word *propitiation*, It's the Greek word *hilaskomai*, which is only mentioned a few times in the Bible, but it refers to the act of taking away God's wrath or hatred towards sin. Because the idea is that God is angry with your sin. He is upset with it. And He's so upset that He'll send you to hell for it. And that's what Christ came to deal with. That's what the cross was all about. That's what your salvation is based on; it is based on the fact that Christ paid for that for you.

If you missed that you missed the whole thing. If you don't understand that, you don't get what Christianity is all about, because it's just some man dying on a cross. In fact, I told you last time that this word propitiation could literally translate as mercy seat. It's a word that had a rich history in the Bible, because it refers to a term that the authors used to talk about the cover that set on top of the Ark of the Covenant, where the high priests would go once a year on the Day of Atonement, in order to sprinkle blood for the sins of the people. Because the idea is that Christ, when He died, He mercy-seated for you. He went into the presence of God passed the veil, sprinkled His blood there, and that's what saves you from your sins. The Jews understood this because they made sacrifices all the time. But they got the picture of God's wrath and punishment and judgment because they poured it out on animals every week in the temple. As Gentiles, we kind of forget that. But all that's wrapped up in this term, this passage says that Christ did this as your high priest, if you notice that in the in the verse, which means He did it in order to bring you back to God, because that's what a priest does. A priest is a middleman between you and Yahweh. Because you had offended God, your sins and made Him angry, and Christ came to restore the broken relationship. It also says that He did this to be merciful and faithful to you, which means He did it to show you grace. Because you didn't deserve this. You weren't worthy. In fact, you are just the opposite. You are a sinner when He saved you, you were on your way to hell. And yet He came to die for you anyway, because that's the kind of Saviour He is.

This is important to remember, friends, because we often think of hell as a place where other people should go when they die. We look at it as a place where sinners should be judged, but not us. We're not sinners, we're in church. We're perfect little angels. We pray, we read our Bible, we tithe, we mow our grass twice a week. But that's not true because the Bible says Hell is a place where we should go to undergo God's judgment, and it's only His grace and mercy that keeps you out of that place. This is also important to talk about because for a lot of us, we look at hell as a place where other people's sin should be judged, but not ours. We see it as a place where other people's crimes against the Lord should be dealt with, but not our crimes, because they're not that bad, because we didn't kill anybody. Right? I haven't murdered anybody, I shouldn't go to hell. Friends, let me tell you something, there are plenty people in hell right now that never murdered a soul.

Hell is a place where every sin will be judged, which means every one of us should go. One commentator said it like this, he said, “The magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin. The higher the person against whom a crime is committed, the grave or the sin, it is more criminal to strike a head of state than a private citizen. And God is of Infinite greatness. Therefore, an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against Him.” And what he meant by that as you can slap me in the face, and nothing bad will happen to you. But if you slap the Prime Minister or the President in his face, you'll go to jail, because he has a higher office. And in a similar way, your sins, although you may not think they're hurting anybody, or offending the God of the universe, when you commit them, it's as if you're slapping God in the face. Our sins are an insult to Him and He

won't take that lightly. Because one day, He'll make everyone answer for it who have not come to the cross for forgiveness. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by doing a survey the doctrine of hell.

Since this topic is so misunderstood today, I just wanted to put it in our series, and put aside our series in Hebrews for a moment. Let's talk about an overview of this topic from 1000 feet away and do a survey of it because if you think about it, we've looked at some big things so far in this book, and we've talked about the ascension of Jesus and His return and second coming. We've talked about His incarnation in His humiliation and condescension and becoming a man. We've talked about angels and demons. We've talked about the devil and spiritual warfare. We've looked at the spiritual gifts and how some of them have ceased. We've talked about creation and how Christ was there when God laid the foundation of the earth. But I would have to say this morning we're looking at the most controversial topic of all. I mean, this subject, let's face it, really ruffles people's feathers. If you don't believe me, just go out this morning and tell someone they're going to hell and see what they do. In the best-case scenario they will ignore you, in the worst case, they might take a swing. Because people hate the notion of judgment today. There's a natural disgust toward it. In fact, if I were to ask some of you, what do you believe about this issue, you would probably say nothing because I hate it. I can't stand this doctrine. I don't like the idea of God sending people to hell, I just shut it out of my mind. If I were to ask other ones, when is the last time you heard a sermon about this? You would probably say never. But whether you want to hear a sermon about it or not, this is a doctrine that's in the Bible. It's found all over the Word of God. And so let's talk about that today by looking at five descriptions of the doctrine of hell that are found in the Bible.

The first description is that hell is Gehenna. This means it's a place where people's souls are thrown away and decomposed forever. And you can find this one over in Matthew chapter five, if you want to turn over there in your Bibles, we're going to be flipping back to several passages this morning, kind of back and forth in Scripture. And as you're turning there, it might interest you to know that Jesus is the one person we're going to be quoting from the most this morning because this was one of His favourite topics to preach on, which means if anyone ever tells you Jesus loves us and He would never send anyone to hell, you need to ask them the question, What Jesus are you talking about? Because if you're talking about the Jesus in the New Testament, that's not the case. He talked about hell over and over and over again, this was something that He echoed from the Old Testament. Because the Jews did the same thing back then, in fact, the topic of God's wrath is mentioned 580 times in the Old Testament, and they used about 20 different words to describe it. The authors of Scripture were continually telling us that God is angry with our sin. And this is something you see in Matthew five, verse 21. Jesus says,

You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder, and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court. And whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing shall be guilty before the supreme court. And whoever says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

If you want to see Jesus say a similar thing again, if you look in verse 27. The Lord repeats the same idea when He says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it away from you, for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you. For it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." Now, I don't know about you, but I remember when I first read that as a believer, and I was shocked, because it sounds so

harsh. When Jesus tells His disciples that if you call your neighbor a fool, you'll go to hell. And if you lust after someone, you'll go there too. You will end up there if you're angry with someone and you'll do it if you covet their spouse, which is convicting because who is innocent of those things who hasn't been guilty of one of these sins? Jesus says that the Lord is so righteous that even the smallest offense will be punished eternally by Him.

The word he uses for *hell*, as I just mentioned, is *Gehenna*. It meant two things in Greek, it referred to hell or the place of eternal judgment. But in a literal sense, it referred to a valley near Jerusalem where the Jews burn their trash. In the Old Testament, it was called Hinnom or the Valley at Hinnom, because it served as a big garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. It was located on the south eastern side of the of the city near the temple in such a place that after the sacrifices were killed, the priests would drag them out of the temple and drop them off in the valley. They would take their dead bodies from the altar, put them in a pile near the temple, and one of their jobs was to take them and chunk them off the cliff to get rid of them. On certain days, like Passover, it was said that the valley would literally run red with blood and look like a furnace after dumping them down the hill till the priests would light them on fire to incinerate the corpses, which means they were just corpses all along the valley floor, rotting corpses, stinking corpses, decaying corpses because that's what Gehenna was in the mind of a Jew. It was a place of dirt and filth and rubbish. It was a spot nobody wanted to go to.

In fact, interestingly enough, a newspaper in the states ran an article years ago on this subject called Hell on Earth, in which it said this about the valley. It said,

Below the old city walls in Jerusalem there is a ravine that begins as a gentle grassy separation between hills, then quickly descend south into the rocky Earth. Eventually the ravine becomes a steep, craggy depth, scarred on its far side by shallow caves and pits pocketed by hollowed out chambers. Everywhere you see scorches in smolder from trash fires. Rivers of urine trickled down from open sewers at the cliffs above, watering thorn bushes, weeds and unexpected clumps of grass among the outcroppings. You smell the stench of decaying, putrefied garbage, and the absorbed reek of incinerated substances seared into the rock face. Crows circle around it, worms and maggots slither throughout. Listen and imagine. Some cannot help but hear the tormented screams of people being burned alive, or the macabre incantations of the idolatrous and gruesome positions. This is the place the Bible refers to as hell. It's Jerusalem's Ben Hinnom, the valley of the sons of Hinn, which was named after a particular family.

And I can just stop there and say that that is a vivid description that sticks with you. And Jesus uses it here because His audience would have known what He's talking about, they would have understood the description, because as you can tell, just by hearing about it, Gehenna was just an awful place. Nobody ever had a picnic here. Nobody ever held a wedding in that valley, a lot of valleys in Jerusalem you would use for weddings and celebrations, not this one.

And with that in mind, Jesus uses it in this sermon to give you a wake-up call, because this is what the Sermon on the Mount was. If you look in verse 20, it tells you one of the reasons He preached this sermon. And He says in verse 20 of chapter five, "Where I say to you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus puts that out here toward the beginning of the message, because this is the gist of it. He's preaching to show you what you have to do to get into the kingdom of heaven, and your righteousness has to surpass the Pharisees. The Pharisees were very righteous on the outside, they were very holy with what they did and what they said, and how they acted. But later on, Jesus says their

insides were full of dead men's bones because they did lust after other people's spouses, they did hate others in their heart. And Jesus says, that's not good enough for God. They needed to repent, if they didn't, their souls would go into a place where they were just thrown out, because that's what you do with your trash, right? You just dump it out in the valley. You don't treasure your trash, you don't value your trash, you don't remember your trash, you just throw it out and walk away. And Jesus says that here because that's what God will do with lost people.

And in fact, it'll even be worse than that, because that brings us to another description of hell in the Bible. And that is that hell is a lake of fire. First, it's Gehenna, but a second description of hell, is that hell is a lake of fire, which means it's a vast cauldron of fire or a big basin of it. It's interesting, if you read a book like 23 Minutes in Hell, it'll talk about how big the cell was, and how big the pit of hell was, and how big the demons were. And there are some images there that are true. But it doesn't mention the idea of Hell being a lake, because that's more terrifying. Because the idea of a lake is the idea of total consumption, absolute absorption into the judgment of God. As you know, when you jump into a lake, you don't jump in half way. And you don't get part of your body covered. The whole thing gets covered, comes at you from all sides. And in the same way, the Lord says in hell, the judgment of God does that to you. It comes at you from all sides, so that wherever you go in hell, there judgment is. And you don't have to turn to this passage, but you can just write this one down in Revelation 20, verses 11 through 15. Here's what the Lord says about this lake of fire. It says,

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

That phrase, lake of fire, is repeated three times here for emphasis. And it's so important in the book of Revelation that John mentions it again in Revelation 21, verse eight. When he says, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable, and immoral persons and idolaters, and all liars, their power will be in a lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." That's a convicting passage, because for some of us who say, "Well, I'm not going to hell, because I never murdered anybody." Well, it also says that all liars go to hell. All idolaters go to hell. All unbelieving persons go to hell. It's not just murder. And the word for fire here, it's a typical word for fire in the Bible. But the word brimstone is very interesting because it refers to the fire of God, or the smoke that comes forth from His presence. Some translators render it as incense. It's kind of a play on words, because you can't really on one hand, you can't really have a lake of incense; it doesn't really make sense. But on the other hand, you can have a lack of judgment. And you can have a sea of judgment, or a great body of wrath. And that's what this is talking about. Hell is a place where God's anger and wrath is poured out repeatedly on the wicked, and it's a place where they are burned up, burned up, and burned up all over again. As we'll see, in a moment, several other passages say the flames will not die there, they will go on and on.

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That's the image that John is painting here, fire consumes and destroys things; it leaves a path of carnage in its wake. Hell is like that. Even today, when a painter wants to draw someone with anger, they put fire in their eyes, and they have smoke all around them. And that's the image that John is giving us here of hell. And the way he does this is descriptive in Revelation 20. Because it says that in the end, after Christ comes back, he will have the dead stand before the throne in order to find out if a name is written in the book of life. And if not, verse 14 says they will experience a second death. Because the idea is that they've died and now they're going to die again. They've perished, and now they're going to perish over and over. Some scholars refer to it as the second resurrection, because it will also be a time when there will be given new resurrected bodies in order to go back to hell and undergo their judgment for an even longer period of time. It's a frightening image here. But God will literally take the time to bring people out of their judgment in order to give them more. And he will take them out of their current state of misery in order to make it worse for them by bringing them into a new state that's even more miserable. Because just as believers will get a new body in order to experience the glories of Heaven, unbelievers will get a new body in order to experience the terrors of hell. Because the wrath of God is not impulsive. It's not poured out on a whim. It's very cool and calculated and thought out deliberately. Which is what you see here because when you go to hell, God will give you exactly what you deserve, no more, no less. He'll pay you back exactly as he should, a slow and steady judgment of an ever burning fire.

On July 18, 1741 Jonathan Edwards preached with some consider to be the most famous sermon ever preached on American soil. It was called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." And it was on this subject. It's very ironic that Americans like Canadians hate the topic of hell today, but this was the most famous sermon ever given in America. It was so powerful that people literally shrieked and fainted and cried out in the aisles as he preached the message. By most accounts, that's pretty incredible because Edwards was a boring preacher. According to eyewitnesses, he would just stand in the pulpit and read his notes without looking up. But nevertheless, some believe it was these words that were the impetus to start the Great Awakening and lead to the conversion of 1000s and just listen to what he says this is part of the message Edwards preached. He said,

You who remain in an unregenerate state consider this. The fact that God will execute the fierceness of His anger implies that He will inflict wrath without any pity. When God beholds the unspeakable extremity of your condition, and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportionate to your strength, and how your poor soul is crushed and sinks down as it were, into an infinite gloom, He will have no compassion on you. He will not hold back the executions of wrath, or in the least lighten His hand. There will be no moderation or mercy, nor will God stay His roughed wind. He will have no regard for your welfare, nor will He be at all concerned about your suffering, except that you will not suffer beyond what strict justice requires. Nothing will be withheld with the reason that it's too hard for you to bear. Now God stands ready to pity you; now is the day of mercy. Now you may cry out with some encouragement of obtaining hope. But once that day is passed, your cries and shrieks will be in vain, for you will be wholly lost and thrown away. And there will be no regard for your welfare. But now you have an extraordinary opportunity. We are now in a day when He throws the doors of mercy wide open and stands calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners. So you need to take advantage of it.

We're going to read some more from that sermon in a moment, but let me just go on to another description of hell this morning. And that is that hell is a place where the worm will not die. This means that it's a place where your suffering will last forever. You can find this one in the book of Isaiah, if you want to go back to the Old Testament with me to the book of Isaiah chapter 66. And the setting for this one, just like all these other settings is

very helpful because Isaiah has been called the gospel of the Old Testament. It says more about the Messiah than any other Old Testament book. And in order to prepare the Jews for the Messiah's return, this is what Isaiah says in Isaiah 66 Verse 22: "For just as the new heavens and new earth which I make will endure before Me," declares the Lord, "So your offspring in your name will endure. And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath the sabbath. All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the Lord. "Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."

That's a pretty sobering part in the book. Isaiah says at the end here, let me make it clear to you for those who reject all this prophecy I've given you, "they will be an abhorrence to all mankind," which means they will be detestable, they will be revolting. It says on the day "when all mankind bows before the Lord," which means this will happen when Christ returns, and everyone stands before the throne of judgment. On that day, when the new heavens and new earth exist, they will be resurrected to remain with Him from new moon to new moon and sabbath to sabbath, but the lost will be resurrected to go to a place where the worm will not die. And that phrase, *the worm will not die*, is another vivid description in here to describe hell because he refers to the worm that's found on the flesh of a rotting corpse. I don't want to be too descriptive about this, but when someone dies, we all understand that their body decomposes, and the process of decay sets in. And when that happens, worms play a major part in that, because it's their job to eat away the flesh and pull away all the skin from the bones. And that's what this is talking about here. Because when you go to hell, that process of decomposition takes place and never ends for you. The worms eat your flesh, and they never stop. Even the word worm here is a little bit of a metaphor, because you could actually translate this as maggots. Because when a body dies, it puts forth an odor, and it draws maggots to it that look like worms. And that's the word here.

In Bible times, to insult their enemies, an invading army would often leave their dead unburied, so that they were exposed to the elements, and they would get eaten by animals like vultures and dogs, which is horrible to watch. But as the body stayed there in the field, eventually the maggots would come in, making it even worse. Depending on the mood of an army, they would also light the bodies on fire to prevent the spread of death and disease. And that, Isaiah says, in hell, these two things occur simultaneously: you are burned and eaten by worms.

The context for this is so interesting, because Isaiah said this to the Jews. In other words, he wrote this to people who didn't think they were sinners, just like us, they thought they were nice people. But Isaiah says, whoever you are, Jew or Gentile, if you transgress against Me, this is your fate. When he says the worm will not die, that means it will never stop, the fires will not be quenched. It's the same idea there. You know, the Roman Catholic Church has a distorted version of this where they teach about the doctrine of purgatory. Because the idea of purgatory is that for those who believe in Christ, when they die, they go to a place where they're punished temporarily, in order to cleanse them from their sins and burn it off. And then they go to heaven. And purgatory can last a long time, it can last a million years, 2 million years, 3 million years depending on how bad you are. But if you just stay there long enough, you'll eventually get out of it. That's not what this is. There is no doctrine of purgatory in the Bible. This is an eternal everlasting punishment. This is why the 23 Minutes in Hell experience can't help you because hell will not last for 23 minutes. It's not going to go on for half an hour and then stop. It'll last for all eternity.

This brings us to another description of hell that we could talk about this morning and that is that hell is a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. A fourth description of this place is that it's a place where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth, which means Hell is a place of pain. This is a consequence of all we've said

before, because you can't experience fire and wrath and destruction without feeling pain. And if you want to turn back to Matthew 13. This one is mentioned here. I didn't have these in any specific order. I just kind of wrote them as they came to me. But in Matthew 13, Jesus gives us one of His parables of the kingdom. And in it, He talks about what will happen to those who go into the kingdom and what will happen to those who go out of it. It's kind of a constant theme. When He would talk about the kingdom, He would talk about those who were included and those who were excluded. In Matthew 13, verse 24, it says

Jesus presented another parable to them saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?" And he said to them, "An enemy has done this!" The slaves said to him, "Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?" But he said, "No, for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest. And in the time of the harvest, I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up, but gather the wheat into my barn.

And then if you look down in verse 40, this is the explanation of the parable. As the passage goes on, Jesus talks to the disciples and tells them what it means and in verse 40, He says, "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

As you're probably aware, that parable is known as the parable of the wheat and tares. It's a story Jesus gives about two types of plants who two types of professing believers that grew up in the church, the real ones, and then the fake ones, the wheat and the tares. And there's a lot of interesting points in this parable, because it says they're both sewn into the same field. Both the wheat and the tares are placed into the same church, one by the Lord, one by the devil. And they grew up simultaneously and they look alike. Because as you know, it's hard to tell the real thing from the fake in this world. The tares don't come in here with a sign that says, "Hi, I'm a tare, throw me out." It doesn't work that way. Until they stand before the throne of God, and then you can tell that's what the parable means, until they come face to face with the Lord. And then you know who belongs in which category. Because at that time, the Lord will separate the wheat and the tares. And He'll put the wheat in one place where they will go into the kingdom of God and to put the tares in another. Verse 30 says the tares will be gathered up into a bundle and burned. And the idea of putting them into a bundle means that this will happen to everyone indiscriminately. It doesn't matter who you are, black or white, rich or poor, male or female, every tare will suffer the same fate. And the concept of binding means that they are going to be restrained as it happens. There's going to be no pushback against God on that day. There's going to be no one who says I don't want this. And then because down in verse 42, it says they will go to a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, which refers to agony. Because Hell is a truly agonizing place to be.

I don't know if you've ever seen the way they used to do surgery long ago, but in the old days, when someone got injured or shot or something and they had to pull a bullet out or do surgery, they would put something in their mouth, so they could bite down on it and gnash. Otherwise they would break their teeth in pain. The Agony was so great, it would make them knock their teeth loose as they tightened up under pressure. And with that in mind,

Jesus says hell is a place where people will do that; they will bite down hard in their grief. This word could translate snarl or growl are grimace, like an animal caught in a trap, because that's what the wicked are going to experience and how they're going to be like an animal caught and cornered and lash out in agony, but there seems to be some image here of them lashing out in rage. But it doesn't matter. They stay put. The term for weeping is not a normal term because it doesn't refer to a soft, gentle cry, it refers to the act of wailing. It's the same word that was used to describe the response of the mothers in Bethlehem. When Herod ordered that all their sons be killed, they wailed in response. The word actually could be translated death whale.

We don't have this in our world today, at least not here in Canada, but in the first century, when someone died, the Jews would often pay professional mourners to come out and wail with him over the loss. And the idea was that the louder they cried, the more they got paid. And so they really really did it at the top of their voice. That's all wrapped up in this term. Hell is a place where the pain is so unbearable. People can't help themselves but to cry out repeatedly.

This brings us to one more description of hell that's found in the Bible or just a final one that we could consider. And that is that Hell is a place of outer darkness. Which means it's a place where there is no hope at all. When you look at the Scriptures, light is often used as a metaphor for hope. So that if you're standing in the light, you have something to look forward to, and something to rejoice about, but when you're in hell, you have none of that. And if you want to turn in your Bibles over to Matthew 22. Since we're in this book, just one more parable our Lord gives us here in Matthew chapter 22, this is called the parable of the wedding feast. Remember, I told you Jesus said more about the subject than anyone else in the Bible. So this is why you could just quote Him endlessly on this. Some preachers today say they don't want to scare anyone out of hell, but they've never sat at the feet of Jesus. Jesus was constantly scaring people out of hell, or at least preaching it in such a way that it would convict their souls and they would repent. And this is actually a very beautiful story from the Master here. I'm not going to read it all for the sake of time, but I just want you to kind of look at it as I talk about it. It's in Matthew 22, in the first 13 verses. The main point is mentioned at the end. Because in verse 11, it says, "When the king came in to look over the dinner guests at the wedding feast, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. And the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called but few are chosen." The main point there is that Jesus is telling us about a man who tries to sneak into a wedding feast, and he fails because he's not invited. And as a result, the king's servants bind him and throw him in the darkness. There you see the idea of binding or tying him up. And the reason it's so important is because the parable starts off by saying that the kingdom of heaven is like this. Quite an image for the kingdom of heaven. But Jesus says basically that this is what glory looks like. It looks like a wedding feast. It's a very happy place where people are smiling and rejoicing and singing, because the son is about to be married there. He's going to take a bride. And in order to tell people about it, the parable says the king sends slaves to let everyone know, but they wouldn't come. So in His mercy, he sends slaves again. But they still didn't come. And not only did they not come, but they start mistreating the slaves. They seize them and beat them and kill them. That's a reference to Israel. That's what they often did with their prophets. Jesus said, You guys make such a big deal of your prophets, but do you remember what you did to them? So verse seven says that the King punishes them. He lets people from the street come in who are not worthy. And let me tell you something, brothers and sisters, that's you. You are the street people in the parable, sorry to hurt your feelings, but your Gentiles. You were brought in after Israel rejected them. You're the ones from the highways and byways, you're the hobos and vagabonds in this story, which all goes well until this guy shows up. Everything in the story

runs smoothly, until he appears in the wrong clothes. And that may sound kind of strange to you, but the reason it's important is because the king is the one who provided clothes for a wedding feast. He's the one who gave you something to wear when you came to one. So for this man to show up at the feast, without putting the right clothes on, after they were given to him, was offensive to the king. It was a great insult because it was his way of saying, "No, I don't want that I've got something better. No, I don't want Christ I have a better way to heaven. No, I don't want grace and mercy and salvation. I want to work for it." And as a result, verse 13, says the king cast him in outer darkness. This guy is not going to hell because he wasn't religious. He's going because he was religious. And he was wrong. He's not going because he didn't try to get to heaven. He's going because he tried the wrong way. Just like a tare, the same image.

The image of darkness here is set in contrast to the king's presence. It's in opposition to the pleasant surroundings of the feast that we just talked about. Because this man is not just thrown into darkness. He's thrown into outer darkness. And he's not just tossed into the night, but he's tossed into the night that's outside of all of this because the point is that the kingdom is warm and inviting and beautiful, and it's peaceful. and joyful and happy. But this man is excluded from all of that right now. Because he tried to get in the wrong way, this is what people encounter in hell. In Hell, you're in a place where you don't get to experience God's joy anymore. You don't get his peacefulness anymore. Because your sin has driven God to the point that He's now said, "Okay, that's enough, I'm finished with you, get out of my face." Second Thessalonians one, verse six, says that when Jesus returns, he will repay with affliction, those who afflict you. And as He does, those He punishes, will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power. And when it says that he will throw them away from his presence, that means away from his loving presence, or away from his gracious presence. Because what that verse is telling you is that you had a chance to take advantage of God's grace here, but you didn't. And you had the opportunity to experience His mercy in this life, and believe and come running to Christ, but you said no. And so now God will say no to you. Because He will turn you away.

I really can't say enough about this. But there's a common misconception in the church today that we believe in what is called post mortem evangelism. And what that refers to is the idea that people get to hear the gospel a second time after they die, and be saved. That's wrong. It's never taught in the Bible, you never see that idea in Scripture. Because you get one chance, one shot, one opportunity to believe and that's it. And if you don't, the door is closed forever, because God will shut you out of His presence. And it might add to this idea of being thrown out of the presence of God is something that's kind of been debated by theologians throughout the years. Because it's raised some questions. I remember when I was in seminary, and we were in theology class studying the doctrine of God's Omnipresence because someone surprised us when they asked the question is God in hell? And I didn't know what to say. We didn't know what to think about that, because there's passages like this, that seem to imply that He's not. But the problem with that is that if God is not present, who's doing the punishing there? And if the Lord is not present in this place, who is dealing out retribution because Satan doesn't do it. Satan is the one being punished there. And the demons aren't judging the wicked, the demons are being judged. The idea is that God in some sense of the word is in hell, punishing the lost.

If you want to write this passage down, Revelation 14, verse 10, says that those who worship the beast will be tormented in the presence of the Lamb, which implies that they will do it face to face with Christ, they will be tormented in a way that he can see it. Matthew 10 verse 28, also says, "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. This whole idea of Hell being a place where Satan and the demons run around with pitchforks poking everybody, it's just false.

They aren't said to judge people, God is, so when it says that the Lord will throw you out of His presence in Second Thessalonians, it doesn't mean every vestige of His presence, but the good side of His presence and the kind side of His presence and the side of His presence you want to be on. You could look at it like this when the government sends someone to prison. It rejects them, right? It cuts them off from society, but at the same time, it also clothes them and feeds them and houses them as a way of punishing them. That's what hell is like. Hell is a place where God rejects His former relationship with you and starts a brand new one that is miserable.

Just a quote from Jonathan Edwards sermon again. It paints a vivid picture of what this man experienced in the parable, but Edward says this,

The wrath of God is like rapid waters that are damned for the present. They increase more and more and rise higher and higher till an outlet is given and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and Mighty is its course when once it's let loose because God is coming to a moment when He can't stand your sin anymore. As He watches your depravity go on, His patience is coming to a point where it will break forth like a hurricane. Because there's nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the water of wrath back. If God should only withdraw His hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness of His anger would rush forth with inconceivable fury and would come upon you with omnipotent power. And if your strength were 10,000 times greater than it is today, 10,000 times greater than the strength of the stoutest, it would not be able to withstand it. The bow of God's wrath has bent and the arrow made ready on the string. And Justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strange the bow and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God and that of an angry God without any promise or obligation that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. The God that holds you over the pit of hell and abhors you and is dreadfully provoked. Because His wrath towards you burns like fire, He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to cast you into fire. You are 10,000 times more abominable in His eyes and the most hateful, venomous serpent in ours. You have offended him infinitely. And there is no reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell, since rose this morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not been damned since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking His pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending a solemn worship. A there is nothing else that has to be given as a reason why you did not this moment drop into hell, but God's mercy.

Edward says, "Oh sinner, consider the fearful danger you are in. It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit full of the fire of wrath that you are held over in the hand of God, whose wrath is provoked. You hang by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it and nothing to lay hold of you to save yourself, but His kindness. Oh, repent and turn to the Savior." And we can say more about that, I would encourage you if you've never read that sermon before to go home and read it today. Because he goes on to offer hope, which is what I want to talk about now.

But let me just say that there are five descriptions of hell we've talked about this morning. If you've been taking notes, and you want to write those down, in case you missed one of them hell is Gehenna, it is a lake of fire, it is a place where the worm will not die, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, and is a place of outer darkness. Which is quite a list. And the frightening thing is that we could say more about it. Because Hell is a prison as well. It's also called a pit. It's referred to as a furnace and these types of things. But let me just quickly move on to one question that always comes up when you talk about the doctrine of hell. And that is this, how do I stay out of

this place? I hope you've been asking the question as you've listened to all that. Okay, Pastor Jeremy, that's terrible. I get the idea. Hell is bad. But what do I do to avoid it? What do I have to believe or think to keep from going there? Do I have to give a bunch of money to the church? We just talked about the building fund. Will that help? If I write a check for \$100 or \$1,000? Or a million dollars? Will that keep me out of hell? What about if I give my life to missions? There's a phrase in ministry called "running to the cloth." And what that phrase means is there's times when people feel convicted over their sin, and they run to the mission field, only to run right back a few years later. What about if I become a nun? What if I take a vow of monasticism and fast and pray and live the rest of my days in a commune living on bread and water? What does God want me to do to stay out of hell? And let me answer that question by taking you back to the passage that we started all this with. Look back in Hebrews two, verse 17. This has been the reason we're talking about that this morning. Because this is what you have to know to stay out of hell. You have to remember this. "Therefore, He [Christ Jesus, our Lord] had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. I've already told you that that word, *propitiation*, refers to someone who bears the wrath of God. And that means all this wrath we've been talking about this morning, all this anger that I've mentioned in these different passages, it's all wrapped up in this word. Because the author of the book of Hebrews put this in here to say, this is what Jesus came to do. He went to the cross, He went to Calvary, in order to satisfy that anger towards you and spare you from it, so you wouldn't have to go to hell. It's been said, for every one look at yourself, take 10 looks at Christ. And for every one glance at your sin, take 10 more because you need them. Because that's where your hope is found. Jesus died to save you from the punishment that your sins deserve. Because He is your propitiation, He's your wrath bearer. None of that other stuff will help you. None of those other things like writing checks, or becoming a missionary, or being a monk will satisfy the wrath of God on your behalf. Because God's wrath is infinite. It's endless. So the only thing that can pay for that now is an infinite person. And that's what you have in Jesus Christ, He's the Son of God. He's the holy one sent from heaven. He's the only one that can spare you from this.

The Jews had a tendency to forget this. That's why we're making a big deal of it in the book of Hebrews, because they looked at the sacrifice of Christ and they were tempted to say, "That's not enough." They would look at what the Lord did on Calvary and say, "I need more," which is why they kept giving animal after animal after animal in the temple. And that's why they kept bringing sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice, because they thought that when they sinned, they needed to offer God something better than Christ. But they're wrong, because there is nothing better. There is no greater Saviour than this. And you need to remember it because, like this man in the parable of the wedding feast, you don't want to try to get into heaven with your clothes, they won't work. You need to go in with His clothes of righteousness, which we just sang about. And like those hypocrites in the parable of the wheat and tares, you don't want to try to get into heaven by faking it. You don't want to pretend. When you stand before His throne, when you're raised, there is no hiding anymore. You need to put all that aside as well just come to Him as you are. Listen, friends, you're a sinner, you're not an angel. And you are a bad person, not a good person. But God knows it. No surprises. And the good news is that Jesus died to save bad people. He came for sinners, which means if you see yourself that way, you're in the right place. If you think you're a bad person this morning, you're exactly where God wants you to be. All you need to do now is come running to Christ. And He will save you because you don't have to go to hell today. If you don't hear anything else we're talking about this morning, please hear me say this. You don't have to end up in this place. Jesus came in order to give you deliverance, if you would trust in Him.

Now, I've been saying a lot about the sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," but I told you before, Jonathan Edwards preached that in the 18th century in Connecticut when the first Great Awakening broke out, and in fact, some said he could hardly even finish the sermon, because the reaction of the congregation was so strong. But the ironic thing about the message is that he had already preached the same sermon several weeks before, at his hometown, and it had no effect. Same message, same notes, there was no response whatsoever, because the congregation didn't believe it. Or if they did, it was kind of like they shrugged it off. Because they said, "We can worry about hell later. We'll do it on our deathbed." And friends, I tell you that because I don't want you to respond that way to this message. You don't want to put off trusting Christ until later because you don't know when your deathbed will come; it come today, it could come tomorrow; it could come in in a few moments. So you need to come to Him right away. Will you do that this morning? Let me pray that you would let's pray for the Lord to bless our time in the Lord's Supper.

Heavenly Father, we come do this morning, on one hand with heavy hearts because the doctrine of hell is heavy. And it's supposed to be. This is something that needs to weigh greatly on all of our souls because we were all going there at one time, whether you're a believer or unbeliever, whether you are saved or lost, everyone was headed to hell. The only difference was Christ. And Father, this is so simple. It's such a simple message, but we want to muddy the waters and change it, and knock the edges off of it because it is so offensive nowadays. Father, help us not to do that. Lord, You are a God of great holiness, and perfection, and righteousness, and we don't want to ever forget it as a church. We see so much unholiness among us, it's becoming normal. Nowadays we see so much sin in our world, that it doesn't seem to have any effect in our hearts anymore. We just go on as if it's nothing. But to You it's not nothing. You remember all of it, and judge it one day. And that's why a Saviour has come. That's the message of our church, Lord, and message of our hearts as believers. And Lord, I pray You would help us to proclaim that boldly to a lost and dying world. Thank you for Jesus. Thank You that we have a propitiation, all these other false religions and all these other cults and all these other self-righteous ways of trying to get into heaven at all fails. And yet you've given us the one thing that works and we're grateful. Our hearts are truly thankful for the Saviour. Lord, I pray that our church will be built on this doctrine, that He would be the hope that we confess. And as we come to the Lord's table, Father, help us also take this in a reverent manner. Every time we have an ordinance, it's a serious thing because we are remembering what our Saviour has done like You have commanded, may Christ be glorified. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.