

## **“Jesus Taught about Hell”**

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*Matthew 5:21–22, 27-30*

*<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

*<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”<sup>1</sup>*

Before I even get into the heart of this sermon, I have to say three things. One, I started this sermon series, “Who Is Jesus?”, about three months ago because I wanted to discuss who Jesus is and what he has done. After all, Jesus is at the heart of the Christian faith. If we understand who Jesus is, we’ll understand Christianity, the Bible, and, most importantly, God. As I planned this series, I wanted to cover the most important aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry. I won’t cover everything that Jesus did or said, but my hope is to cover the most important things about Jesus.

As a pastor, I feel compelled to present what God has revealed to us about himself in an honest way. So, my desire is to preach through all of the Bible. Of course, I want to present this material in a thoughtful and persuasive way, but I must remain faithful to the message that God has given us. I’m simply a messenger. My job is to preach the word (2 Tim. 4:2), the Bible. I don’t preach stories about my life or what appears in a magazine or newspaper this week. Yes, sometimes I will use those things to supplement what we find in the Bible, but my primary goal is to communicate what God’s written word, the Bible.

That means I have to preach things that aren’t popular. Sometimes I have to preach things that are controversial. I even have to preach things we’d rather not think about.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quoted herein is taken from the New International Version (1984).

One of those things is hell. One of the things that Jesus talked about was a final judgment. Some people will live with God forever in paradise, a new creation where there is no sin or anything evil. And some will be in hell, a place of anguish and torment and pain. Orthodox Christian faith has always taught that those who are not united to Jesus will experience that fate.

The second thing I have to say is that I realize talking about hell isn't popular. As I was studying this week, I came across these words from a professor of biblical studies at a Christian college: "In public life, references to hell stigmatize one as an intellectual troglodyte. Hell has become not simply something archaic; it has become an embarrassment. . . . The only time I can recall hearing hell used publicly in both a real and approved sense is when the families of several women killed by a serial killer told the killer they hoped 'he would rot in hell for eternity.'"<sup>2</sup> I'm not surprised by this. It seems that the only people who talk about hell these days are people like the members of the Westboro Baptist Church, a cultish, hate-mongering group that is not a church, and has nothing to do with Baptists. But what surprised me was that this same author, the professor at a Christian college, also wrote this: "I have attended church for fifty years and have never heard a sermon on hell, or an entire sermon on sin."<sup>3</sup> I don't expect to preach about hell every week or month, and perhaps not every year. But if I didn't preach about hell or sin in fifty years, I wouldn't be doing my job.

The third thing I have to say is that I don't really want to talk about hell or think about it. And, in my experience, I don't know any Christian who does. I think there's a stereotype of Christians who relish the thought of their enemies going to hell, who love to preach about fire and brimstone. In my experience, that's not true. Yet Christians are people who realize that what matters is not what we want to be true, what we'd like to be true, but what is actually true. In other words, Christians realize that there are certain realities that exist, whether we want them to or not. If hell is real, and if Jesus talked about it, we need to talk about it. I think you'll find that this church is one committed to truth. You may not like what I have to say, but I'll tell the truth.

I also realize that people have objections to hell, and if I don't address those objections, some of you might not listen to anything I say. It's best to hear objections from those who hold them. So, first, here's Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a British philosopher and an atheist. This is what Russell wrote about Jesus and hell:

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<sup>2</sup> James R. Edwards, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 146-147.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching—an attitude which is not uncommon with preachers, but which does somewhat detract from superlative excellence.<sup>4</sup>

So, Russell didn't think hell was humane. And he seems to think that Jesus was simply threatening those who didn't want to listen to his sermons. In the same essay, he writes, "I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that."<sup>5</sup> The idea here seems to be that if hell exists, God is cruel, and if God is cruel, Christians are necessarily cruel. And I'm sure he would say there is proof of such cruelty in history: events such as the Crusades and the Inquisition were performed by people who identified themselves as Christians. That seems to be a common objection, because another atheistic philosopher, Keith Parsons, writes, "If the doctrine of hell is right, and it is just that evildoers be subjected to atrocious torture for eternity, why should we have the least scruple about inflicting malefactors with far less severe pains?"<sup>6</sup>

Let me take up that second objection first: the fact that God judges all people and sends some to hell does not mean that Christians are judges who are justified in using violence and cruelty. In fact, Jesus tells Christians not to retaliate (Matt. 5:38-42). And the apostle Paul writes this in Romans 12:17-21:

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

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<sup>4</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Parsons, "Heaven and Hell," in *Debating Christian Theism*, ed. J. P. Moreland, Chad Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 540.

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I think it's quite clear that God doesn't want Christians to judge others or seek vengeance. So, it doesn't follow that the doctrine of hell leads to cruelty or violence.<sup>7</sup>

Now let me address the first objection: is *God* cruel for sending people to hell? I think this is the more serious objection. But this objection is problematic for two reasons. The first this objection is problematic is that it has a wrong view of hell in mind. This view pictures hell as an underground torture chamber where God punishes people who are trapped in against their will. But that's a wrong view of hell. To show why that's wrong, I'll have to back up and tell the whole story of Christianity in some quick, broad strokes.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." That's the first verse of the Bible (Gen. 1:1). In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth to be together. God even dwelled with his people (Gen. 3:8).

But evil entered into the world. There is certainly some mystery here, because we don't know exactly where evil came from. But we do know that Satan tempted Adam and Eve and they sinned. God did not create a world that was evil, but evil entered into that world, and that evil is found within us. We can't blame God or anything else for the wrong desires that are in us. As the Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) once observed, "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"<sup>8</sup> To root all evil out of the world, God would need to destroy us all.

God made the world for himself, and he made humans to worship him. But we have all failed in many ways to worship God. Though God would have been justified in destroying all humans and even the whole creation, he is merciful. He didn't destroy his creation. Instead, he punished it in part. Because of sin's presence in the world, life is difficult and people die (Gen. 3:16-19). Because of sin, there is a division between heaven and earth. Heaven is the dwelling place of God and the earth is the dwelling place of man. Psalm 115:16 shows us this:

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 77: "If I don't believe that there is a God who will eventually put all things right, I *will* take up the sword and will be sucked into the endless vortex of retaliation. Only if I am sure that there's a God who will right all wrongs and settle all accounts perfectly do I have the power to refrain."

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007), 75.

The highest heavens belong to the LORD,  
but the earth he has given to man.

Evil, what we call sin, places a separation between God and his creation.<sup>9</sup>

But that's not the end of the story, of course. At the right time, God sent his Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus is the only person who has ever lived that is not evil (Rom. 3:9-18,23; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22). And he died on the cross, bearing the penalty for our evil. When I say "our evil," I mean the evil of those who come to trust Jesus, who are united to him by faith, who have a relationship with him, who love and follow him. Jesus takes our evil upon himself on the cross, and in return we receive his righteousness. And he also gives us the Holy Spirit, who starts to heal our evil from the inside out.

And yes, one day, there will be a final judgment, dividing those who belong to Jesus from those who do not. The people who belong to Jesus will enter into a renewed creation where there is no evil or sin. But the evil must go somewhere. And that somewhere is hell.

Hell is the removal of all evil from God's creation. When heaven and earth are joined back together in the new creation, there can be no evil in it. God must remove it. It must go somewhere. So part of the reason for hell is God's protection of his renewed creation from evil.

Hell is also God giving people over to their own desires. Those who reject the one, true, living, triune God don't want to be with him forever. They want to be their own gods, or worship false gods. They want to do life on their own terms, not God's. So God lets them pursue their desires for eternity. Hell is full of people who refuse to let God heal them of their evil.

Hell is also the punishment of evil. And I think we want that. If there is no hell, there is no final justice. If there's no hell, Hitler won. He did all kinds of evil and then checked out on his own terms, by committing suicide. If, as atheists believe, this life is all there is, and at death we simply cease to exist, then there is no justice for the ones whose lives Hitler destroyed. Of course, Hitler is an extreme case. But how many other people do evil things without being punished in this life? How many people steal, commit rape, and abuse others without getting caught in this life? Don't we want justice?

There's a second reason why the objection to hell that says God is cruel is problematic. Who are we to judge God? By what standard do we judge God? How is that even possible? The reason God is judge and we're not is because God is morally perfect and all-knowing. We are

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<sup>9</sup> See Isa. 59:2.

biased in many ways and we are certainly not all-knowing. We don't know all the evidence, and even if we did, we're not all wise. So only God is qualified to judge.

Now, with all that said, let's take a look at some of what Jesus said about hell.

First, Jesus shows us that hell isn't just for "really bad people." If we're honest, we all deserve hell. In Matthew 5, in part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that anger towards others and lust are enough to earn a ticket to hell. We heard these verses read right before the sermon. Jesus says, "I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. . . . anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matt. 5:22). If we hate others in our hearts, it's as if we wished they were dead. This dishonors God's creation. It's the power of hell at work in us and if we continue hating, we're following the path to hell. All murders begin with hellish desires within us.

Notice also that lust qualifies us for hell. Jesus says that desiring another woman or another man is like committing adultery. After all, having sex with others starts with a desire. The reason evils such as prostitution and pornography and sex trafficking exist is because there's a demand for these things. The demands starts with evil desires within us. Jesus says we are to cut out anything from our lives that lead to these desires and actions. He says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. . . . It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matt. 5:29-30). Of course, Jesus isn't being literal here. You could gouge out your eyes and chop off parts of your body and you could still have lustful desires in your heart. But he means we should remove from our lives anything that feeds the power of hell within us.

Not only is hell not for the "really bad people," but hell could be filled with all kinds of very religious people. We see this in Matthew 23. In that chapter, Jesus pronounces seven "woes" on the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders. He curses them because they are hypocrites. They "have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23). At one point, he says this (Matt. 23:13, 15):

<sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

<sup>15</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

The Pharisees do not enter the kingdom of God. Even worse, they multiply. They make converts who are twice as much the “sons of hell” as they are. In verse 33, Jesus says, “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?” Jesus has already called the Pharisees “sons of hell,” and now he is calling them “sons of Satan,” the true snake. In John 8:44, Jesus makes that abundantly clear. And Jesus says they are hell-bound. The only way to escape being condemned would be to repent of their sins and put their trust in Jesus, but they reject him.

So, hell isn’t just for the Hitlers of this world. It’s for those who hate and lust and act as if they are religious when they’re not godly at all. That’s enough to condemn us all. But Jesus is that way of escape.

And while we’re looking at Matthew 23, note that after Jesus says all these harsh words to the Pharisees, he laments over Jerusalem. Look at verse 37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.” Jesus took no joy in telling the Pharisees about hell. He had to warn them of the path they were taking, but they were not willing to listen.

Speaking of woes, look at Matthew 18. We see here the idea that hell is protection. This is the second point I want to make about Jesus’ teaching regarding hell. The first is that it’s not just for “really bad people.” The second point is that hell is the removal of all evil from the world. It is for the protection of God’s people and the new creation that he will make one day. We see this in Matthew 18:1-9:

<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

<sup>2</sup> He called a little child and had him stand among them. <sup>3</sup> And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>5</sup> “And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. <sup>6</sup> But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

<sup>7</sup>“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! <sup>8</sup>If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. <sup>9</sup>And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

Jesus’ disciples want to know who will be greatest in his kingdom, and Jesus says that all who come to him with a childlike faith enter the kingdom of God. Jesus is commending a child’s ability to trust. He’s not commending childishness, or immaturity, or ignorance. The who humbles himself or herself like a child will be great in God’s kingdom.

But then Jesus says this, in verse 6: if anyone causes children who believe in Jesus to sin, they will face something worse than drowning in the sea. Those who tempt such children face eternal punishment, as do all who lead others into sin, which is implied in the next few verses. In fact, it’s likely that “these little ones” doesn’t mean children per se, but children of God, regardless of age. Those who would cause God’s people to sin will be removed from his creation if they do not put their trust in Jesus and repent.

In verses 8 and 9, we see the same language that we saw in Matthew 5: it’s better to cut off a part of your body than to go into “the eternal fire” of hell. In Mark 9, we find a parallel passage, and Mark adds, in verse 48, that hell is “where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” (This is a quote of Isaiah 66:24). The picture is a grim one. The point seems to be that anything that leads us into temptation should be removed, and the people who lead others into temptation are removed from earth and cast into the eternal fire.

I think this shows us that hell is not necessarily a place where God tortures people. It’s better to think of hell as the place where God places all the evil in the world that he will one day remove from it. One day, God will remove all the evil from the earth. That will include all of our sin. But it will also include removing all the people who reject Jesus. If God is going to dwell with his people in an evil-free, sin-free world, he must remove all the evil. It has to be taken out.

At this point, it’s worth talking about the world “hell.” In these passages, when we see the English word “hell,” it’s a translation of the Greek word *γέεννα*, or *Gehenna*. This Greek word is itself a translation of a Hebrew phrase: the “valley of Hinnom.” This was an actual place. It was just south of Jerusalem, outside the city walls. In the Old Testament, it’s called “the

Valley of the Son of Hinnom” (Josh. 15:8; 18:16). It was known as the place where some of the wicked Israelites worshiped idols. As part of this worship, they even sacrificed their children. In Jeremiah 32:35, God says of the people of Judah: “They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.”

Manasseh, one of the most wicked kings of Judah, did the same, sacrificing his own sons. We read this in 2 Chronicles 33:6: “He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.”

This place was also known as a place of judgment, where God would judge the unfaithful people of Judah. One of the good kings, Josiah, tore down the idols that were there (2 Kgs. 23:10). God promised future judgment in Jeremiah 7:31-32 and 19:1-9. And surely this was a place of slaughter when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C. It was probably a place of slaughter when the Romans destroyed the city in A.D. 70, something I talked about last week.

So, Jesus’ audience would know what “hell” was. In their minds, it was associated with idolatry, wicked practices, and judgment. Some people say it was also a place where people burned their garbage.

We should remember this because if the city of God, the new Jerusalem, which is the same thing as the new creation, is going to be a place where there are no idols, no false gods, and no atrocities like sacrificing children. All those things will have to be taken out of the city and judged. (See Revelation 21-22.) Idols need to be removed because they are against God, who alone deserves worship, and they are bad for us, because they take us away from God. The best thing for us is the true God, and any god substitute, whether it’s money or entertainment or power or anything else, is bad for us. So it must be removed. And it is placed in *Gehenna* to be burned. Again, the removal of evil from God’s place is to protect the place and the people in it. At the same time, hell is a place of judgment for those who have rejected God.

There’s a third point that I want to make about Jesus’ teachings on hell. There are no repentant people in hell. Those who are in hell go there because they don’t want God. God therefore gives them over to their desires. And once in hell, those desires don’t change.

We see this in Luke in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, found in Luke 16:19-31:

<sup>19</sup> “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

<sup>22</sup> “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

<sup>25</sup> “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

<sup>27</sup> “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

<sup>29</sup> “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

<sup>30</sup> “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

<sup>31</sup> “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

There’s a lot in that passage, so I don’t have time to unpack everything there. But keep in mind that this is a parable, a story. We can’t press the details of the story. For example, people who are in hell can’t talk to people who are in heaven. But the main point is that there was a rich man who ignored a beggar named Lazarus. The rich man didn’t love his neighbor, and we can assume he didn’t love God. So when he died, he went to Hades, the realm of the dead.<sup>10</sup> Lazarus, the beggar, goes to be with Abraham, one of the great believers in the Old Testament. And what does the rich man do? Does he say, “God, I’m sorry, please forgive me!”? No. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus to him to give him some water. He’s not sorry for the way he treated Lazarus. Instead, he continues to see Lazarus as someone less than him, a mere servant. So the rich man never really changes. We also see that there is a chasm between heaven and hell. After death, there is no second chance.<sup>11</sup> There is no way to go from hell to heaven. We also see that the place

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<sup>10</sup> The Greek word here is not γέεννα (*Gehenna*) but ᾗδης (*Hades*). The Hebrew equivalent is *Sheol*. Roughly, this is the grave, the place where all dead people go. But through the Old Testament, *Sheol* took on the notion of the place of damned. The point is that this is not the final hell, the lake of fire. Hades is the intermediate state, the state between death and the final judgment for all those who have rejected God.

<sup>11</sup> See also Heb. 9:27.

of judgment, where the rich man is, is a place of torment. And finally, we see that Scripture is enough to warn people about the dangers of this reality. God has revealed in the Bible that people need to repent and put their faith in Jesus.

This passage shows that no one in hell is repentant. C. S. Lewis captured this truth very well, as he often does. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis writes,

I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*. I do not mean that the ghosts may not *wish* to come out of hell, in the vague fashion wherein an envious man ‘wishes’ to be happy: but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved just as the blessed, forever submitting to obedience, become through all eternity more and more free.<sup>12</sup>

Since people don’t want to walk down the narrow path of self-abandonment, or selflessness, they don’t want to repent. Those who refuse to repent now stay on that selfish path forever. God gives them over to their desires. As Lewis writes in *The Great Divorce*, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.”<sup>13</sup> The trajectory to hell begins in this life, and it keeps going beyond it. We all know John 3:16, but the verses that follow it are very important in this respect. John 3:16-19 says:

<sup>16</sup>“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. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. <sup>19</sup>This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

And then, in verse 36, we read: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” The one who rejects Jesus

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<sup>12</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 114.

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 72.

already stands condemned and God's wrath remains on him. The one who turns to Jesus in faith is not condemned and God's wrath has already been satisfied.

That brings me to a very important point. Hell is a matter of justice. Because God is a perfect judge, he must punish all evil. And all evil will be punished ultimately and finally in one of two ways. One of those ways is the final judgment of all those who reject God. All evil will be removed from the world, starting with Satan and ending with every person who hasn't repented. But for those who are in Christ, their evil has already been punished. When Jesus died on the cross, the sin, the evil, the rebellion of all those who will ever trust in Jesus was punished, once and for all. We cannot claim that God is unjust. We cannot claim that he is distant. God knows evil; he entered into it; he suffered it on the cross. He has provided a way for us to be forgiven. He has given us an opportunity to stop our self-destructive ways.

If you are here today and you don't know Jesus, I plead with you to run to him. You can trust Jesus. He went through hell on the cross so that you don't have to go to hell forever.

If you are a Christian, let God continue to remove the hell out of your own heart. Let God drive out all the sin within you. Pray that he would do this. Take steps to remove the things that cause you to sin.

And if you are a Christian, you would do well to be like Jesus. Jesus warned others about the reality of hell. It is real and it awaits many. Be like Jesus and tell people to flee the wrath to come. But make sure you do that like Jesus, telling people to repent while lamenting. Do it with tears in your eyes. Tell people there is but one way to rest in peace.