

Talk 1 – Scaring the Hell out of you!

CHECK TIME

Talk

Heaven and Hell – a weekend of comfort and distress

- We are going to spend today looking at the most popular and the most unpopular Christian teachings that we find in the Bible – *heaven* on the one hand and *hell* on the other.
- The two belong together – and as we will see they both should influence the Christian in the way he or she thinks and lives.
- My prayer that we'll get through this weekend with a foot in heaven, and hopefully not the feeling that we have gone through hell to get there!!
- I am planning to give two talks – the first on hell and the second on heaven.
- And alongside these talks I have given you two sets of Discussion questions – the first on Hell, which we'll do this morning, and the second on Heaven which is for you to do following this weekend.
- It would be awkward if Jesus decided to return after the first talk because we would be a little underdone!
- Some preliminaries before we get under way.
 - I am doing something's in these talks that I can not really do in one of our Sunday sermons – with the time limits we have to work with.
 - As you flip through the outlines – you will see that there are a lot of Bible texts referenced. It is not that easy to look at many texts on a Sunday - we will be today.
 - We won't look at them all – but I list them on the outlines so that you have a record to follow up later.
- Last, in the interests of full disclosure – I have to acknowledge that these talks have been majorly shaped by a great little book by Edward Donnelly titled *Heaven and Hell*. His structure for presenting these two important truths is immensely helpful – and I have pretty much flogged them.

Now with that all said and done – how about we pray and ask for God's help before we dive into hell!

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Prayer

Loving Lord and Heavenly Father,

We pray for our day ahead – and ask that you will help us to take a serious look at two very influential and eternal doctrines. Sustain us as we cover tough stuff and encourage us as we look toward the end times that you have in store for us.

And we ask you to do this by the power of your Spirit in the name of our Lord Jesus. AMEN.

Why talk about Hell?

- Why talk about hell?
- This is not the most rosey of subjects to chat about.
- Of all the possible topics that you could bring up in the lunchroom at work or around the dinner table - Hell would not be close to the top of the list – in fact I suspect talking about deodorant would rate more highly!
- Let me give you 3 reasons why we should talk about hell:

1. The Bible has lots to say

- First – the Bible has a lot to say about hell.
- The *Old Testament* doesn't mention the word 'hell' at all, instead it uses the idea of 'Sheol' which means grave or pit. That said, you don't have to be a discerning reader to pick up that judgement is real and that it leads to something.
- When we get to the *New Testament* we find that is not shy about mentioning hell – in fact – you might find this interesting, of the 22 specific mentions of hell – 19 of them come from the mouth of Jesus.
- He says more about hell than he does about heaven!
- The Bible has a lot to say on the topic.

2. Hell is real

- Second – hell is real
- It may not be a popular thing to say, but Hell is real, Satan is real, he really wants people to join him and people really are going there!
- It is estimated that every 1 minute and 23 seconds (on average) the population in Australia grows in number by a person. And that takes into account, that every 3 minutes and 23 seconds someone somewhere in Australia dies. That means over the course of today, while we are here at Sunset Rock an average of 206 people will die and they will go to either heaven or hell. ($12 \text{ hours} \times 60 / 3.5 = 205.71$)
- With that kind of number – should we not talk about the possibility of hell?

- I remember a few years ago at a poverty relief concert, U2's Bono from the front clapping his hands each second and saying 'every time I clap my hands a child in

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poverty starves to death’ – and someone in the crowd yelling out ‘Well, then, stop clapping your hands!!’

- Hell is real – people we know will go there.

3. There is a way to escape from it.

- Third – it is not all doom and gloom – there is a way to escape from it.
- Jesus tells us how – John 3:36
- *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*
- Friends, Hell is **not** inevitable
- But I tell you something, that is – lose the cross – forget what Jesus has done for you – and you will never lose the fear of hell.
- The good news – the resounding news which comes from the Bible – is that hell is not inevitable – in fact it is not something to be feared if you believe in Jesus.

Why we don't talk about it

Right – so those are three reasons why we *should* talk about hell – let me give you three reasons why we don't!

1 . People don't believe in it

- First – People don't believe it.
- When you look at the way our society presents the idea – it's mocked.
- Everything from Simpson's episodes, to pictures of cheeky little red devils with pitch-forks and pointy ears are used to sell products from ice cream to insurance!
- Hell is a toothless idea.

2. It is objectionable

- Second, we don't talk about hell because it is objectionable. It is not polite, it is affronting.
- I was chatting to a nurse in a doctor's surgery a little while ago – and the conversation went like this...
- She said: What do you do?
 - I said: I am a minister?
- Oh, like the go-to-church and talk about God kind of minister?
 - Yes, got it in one!
- I used to go to church and do all that kind of stuff – she said
 - Why did you stop?
- I got too busy.
 - Yes I have heard that before.

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- The she said - My brother has become one of those 'born-again' Christians. He is always talking to me about hell.
 - I said – maybe, he is worried that you could be going there!
- He just goes on and on about it – he sounds too serious. He shouldn't worry I plan to go to heaven!
 - Really! – I said
- Heaven sounds like a really nice place, but all that 'hell stuff' is just offensive.
 - I think your brother has a point!
 - I thought of inviting her along to this weekend!
- C.S. Lewis once famously wrote about hell '*There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity*' (in book: Problem of Pain).
- We don't talk about hell because it is objectionable.

3. We have a person-centred view

- The third reason we don't talk about hell is this. We have a 'person-centred view' of the world.
- A mark of the fall - right back in Genesis 3 (which we read) - is that people refused to believe.
 - The serpent said to the woman – 'You will be like God' (Gen 3:5) – and she listened to a snake instead of the creator
 - It didn't quite work out as she planned!
- Unbelief is itself a sin. Our deepest problem is person-centredness.
- We make ourselves the centre of the universe and expect that everything else should revolve around us. It is pervasive, it is poisonous, it is unfounded – and it is the air that we breathe.
- And yet, Person-centredness is at the root of the objections *to hell*.
- Let us quickly show you how.
- Have you ever had a conversation with someone when they have said 'the important thing is that I am happy'?
- The reason why 'happiness' is the goal of life is because the person seeking happiness has placed themselves at the centre.
- Hell rips this view at its core. Damnation, fiery pits, worms that gnaw at our flesh – that is not a happy place and so we must not think about that! Talk to me about heaven instead.

PAUSE

Hell is...

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- So, what is hell?
- Well it is not that difficult a concept to grasp.
- *Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.*
 - *A place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.*
 - In fact, most world religions have some concept of hell.

 - But of all the world religions ‘Hell’ is most clearly explained by Jesus – the one who saves us from it.

 - So, let’s turn and see what the Bible says.

a. A real place

- Hell is a real place, created by God.
- It is not a metaphor, not a symbol, not an expression of discontent, not a state of mind.

Luke 16:28

- In Luke 16, a rich man totally ignores the beggar Lazarus – he dies and goes to hell where he was in torment and cries out to Abraham to send Lazarus to ease his torment. When that is denied, he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to tell his five brothers so that they did not also find themselves in hell.

Acts 1:25

- In Acts 1 – we are told that Judas Iscariot needed to be replaced because, after betraying Jesus and committing suicide, he went to ‘where he belonged’ – I cannot imagine that was a happy place.

- In the NT there are two key words used to talk about hell.

γέεννα - Gehenna (Valley of Hinnon) – ‘hell’

The first is ‘Gehenna’. The idea being - *an eternal home for the wicked.*

- It is thought that the word developed to mean ‘hell’ because it was taken from a place south of the city of Jerusalem – the valley of Hinnon which was the place where human sacrifices were offered to false gods (in the time of King Manassah – 2 Kings 16:3, 21:6)
- By the time of New Testament, that valley was the place where dead bodies were thrown along with the city’s trash. Fires were set there and kept continually burning to consume the waste. A place of ceaseless anguish.
- Gehenna is mentioned 12 times – interestingly only once outside of the gospels.

*[Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; Jas. 3:6
καταράω 2 Peter 2:4 – only use to say ‘put in hell’]*

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ᾍδης Hades (world of the dead)

Parallels the Hebrew 'Sheol' (used in the LXX)

The other word is 'Hades'. The idea - *a place in the underworld – the region of the departed.*

- It is mentioned 9 times – only once on the lips of someone other than Jesus.
[Hades - Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Lk. 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13f]
- Hades parallels the Hebrew word 'Sheol' which appears something like 65 times in the OT to talk about a place of death.

- So, the Bible speaks of Hell as a real place.

b. a place of punishment

- It is a place of punishment.
- And when we say punishment – we don't mean remedial type punishment – that which aims to correct bad behaviour.
- When one of my children clonks the other on the head with some toy – I don't send them to hell to have a good long hard think about what they have done!!

Retributive

- The punishment in hell is not remedial – it is retributive.
- It is inflicted as recompense for evil done.
- There is no cleansing involved there. No improving. No opportunity to come back out to apologies to those hurt by bad behaviour or action (c.f. Luke 16:19-31 – Rich Man and Lazarus). There is no future benefit.

Terrible

- The punishment in Hell will be terrible.
- **Matt 8:12** says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth
- **Mark 9:43** says it would be better to cripple yourself and cut of appendages that cause you to sin, than to be thrown into hell.
- And **Rev 14:10** talks about being under God's wrath and being tormented with burning sulphur.
- The picture of Hell which the Bible describes is terrible.

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Just

- And the punishment in hell is just.
- It is judged by God to be the right judgement for the crime.
- Unlike our court system, always at risk of a flawed human judgement, God never gets it wrong.
- In truth, with full knowledge of all that has occurred, and in all righteousness, God judges justly.
- Hell is a place of just punishment. And it is not our place to tell God whether he has got it right or wrong.

Everlasting

- And just when you thought there could be no more – the punishment in hell is everlasting.
- This is where our annihilationist friends have so much difficulty. Scripture quite clearly paints a picture of ongoing, unceasing, everlasting punishment.

2 Thess 1:9 – talks about punishment with everlasting destruction for those who don't know God.

Matt 25:41, 46 – Turn to this passage with me – Context here is that Jesus is teaching again in a parable – this time about a king and his subjects.

- He divides them into two groups – the sheep and goats. The sheep were the ones who cared for those in need, the righteous ones.
- The goats were the ones who did nothing for those in need.

[READ Matt 25:40-46]

– Jesus says to the unrighteous ‘depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire’.

Now you could say, like the annihilationist does, that the destruction and the fire that is present in hell consumes those who are thrown there such that they are wiped out and become no more.

The problem with that view is addressed in this passage.

In verse 46 – Jesus talks of *eternal* punishment and *eternal* life. The word behind that ‘eternal’ word is the same in both cases (*αἰώνιον*) - it means, unending, everlasting, for all time). If you want to say that eternal punishment is a wipe out that ceases with annihilation, then you have to re-examine how eternal life is something that goes on and on for all time.

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You can look for yourself at how Jude (and 2 Peter) talks about the everlasting nature of punishment in hell. (Jude 7, 13, 2 Peter 2:9 – note NIV2011 leaves out ‘continuing their punishment’)

c. a place for the devil, his angels and the unsaved

- Friends, Hell is a real place – a place of punishment. It is also a place for the devil, his angels and the unsaved.
- Look again at **Matt 25:41** – *This eternal fire is prepared for the devil and his angels.*
- The beginning of the Bible introduces us to the devil in the form of the serpent in Genesis 3.
- At the end of the Bible it tells us his ultimate fate - **Rev 20:10** sees the devil defeated and thrown into the lake of burning sulphur.
- What matters to us, is not where the devil or where his followers might be, but whether *we* might follow. And the end of the Bible tells us about those last things as well.
- **Rev 21:8** sends the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderer, the sexually immoral, those who practice the magic arts, the idolaters and all liars into the same fiery lake of burning sulphur that the devil was sent into.
- Hell is for the notoriously wicked.
- If you think that makes it sound more interesting – you are getting the wrong idea.
- Here is where reality TV has served us so badly!
- On our screens we watch people being sinners – and we call it entertainment. But we are on *this side* of the screen. It’s their problem not mine.
- I suspect, if you think about what each of the seven deadly sins are – then you will find that there is a reality TV show which champions each one.
[pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth]
- Reality TV makes sin fun but also removed.
- But let me tell you your problem with hell – it is same as my problem with hell.
- We are on the screen.
- It is not just ‘interesting people’ who will find themselves in hell – it is the outwardly upright, the decent, the good citizens, the diligent student, the reliable employee, the good bloke, the compassionate sister, the well-deserved retiree who will all find

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themselves in the same place as the devil and his angels – *if* we have never trusted Christ as Saviour.

- Let's assume that from this point you were never to commit another sin – even if that were possible, you would still be on your way to hell.
- But for one thing - Jesus.
- Back to where we started - Jesus says 'Whoever believes in the son *has eternal life*, but whoever rejects the son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him.' (John 3:36)
- Suck those words in my friends. Feel the weight. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life.
- Whoever rejects him doesn't.
- Whoever hears the word of Jesus and believes God – puts their trust – puts their life in his hands – has eternal life. They will not be condemned – they have crossed over from death to life. (c.f. **Jn 5:24**)

Friends – hell helps us check our motivations.

PAUSE

Profitable for the believer

- Right, have I scared the Hell out of you?
- Let's now turn our attention to thinking about how understanding hell is profitable for the believer.
- John Piper writing to pastors exhorts them to *feel* the truth of hell and he says '*When the heart no longer feels the truth of hell, the gospel passes from good news to just news. The intensity of joy is blunted and the heart-spring of love is dried up.*' (Book: Brother, we are not Professionals)
- Thinking about Hell is profitable for the believer because it will promote growth in us.
- Let me suggest four quick ways:

1. Commitment – to put sin to death

- First it should promote in us a *commitment* to put away sin.

Matt 5:29-30

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- In the sermon of the mount in Matt 5 – Jesus calls on his disciples to take radical action to ensure that they do not find themselves thrown into hell.
- In relation to adultery he says to men even if you look at woman lustfully you have committed adultery – so cut out the offending eye fellas – to stop you lusting.
- I suggest if you are going to do that that you work out which eye is the one that does not lust and make sure you keep that one!
- Hell here, is the incentive to ensure you continue to work at putting sin to death.

Saved by faith?

- Yes – we are saved by faith – and it is in Jesus that that is possible. The criminal on the cross demonstrated that for us when he trusted in Jesus and finds himself in paradise. (Lk 23:48)
- Hell is an incentive to ensure you continue to work at putting sin to death while you continue to trust in the one who has removed the threat of hell from you.
- Because Jesus has dealt with the consequence of your sin, then do something about ensuring you put the kinds of sins that you did yesterday to death so that you are not plagued by them today or tomorrow.

2. Contentment

- Second, Hell should promote in us a profound *contentment*.
- No matter what the life circumstance, no matter what the suffering we endure today, no matter what the illness or hurt is that we carry – Hell presents a picture which is far worse.
- Hell helps us to look around and see how blessed we are – even in this fallen state.
- Many of you know I have travelled to India a few times.
- A few years ago I opened a house in a leprosy village for a family of five – three generations were to live there – elderly mother, her son and his wife, and their two kids. The house was a room and off the back was a 1 metre square space with a bench on one side – that was the kitchen. No bathroom, no flooring, no windows, just a hole in the wall with bars on it. The house cost \$2000 to build.

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- And the smiles on their faces. Across the road was the cardboard tent they had been living in for the previous five years.
- I cannot imagine living even in their *new* home. Yet that would be the Hilton, compared to hell.
- Hell helps us to look around and see how blessed we are – and should promote in us a profound contentment.

Phil 4:11

3. Christ

- Third, Hell should lead us to appreciate more the love and work of *Christ*.
- How much have we been forgiven – and at what cost?
- Jesus knew what hell was like, yet he not only humbled himself to become man, but he humbled himself to the point of death (**Phil 2:1-11**) – knowing he was to go there.
- How much have I been loved – the answer – a ‘hell’ of a lot!
- Hell should give us new insights into the value of Christ’s death on our behalf. And hell should help us to realise that is it not a small thing when Jesus says ‘*Come to me all you who are burdened and I will give you rest*’ (**Matt 11:28**)

4. Concern

- And finally, Hell should swell up in us a desperate *concern* – that is to call people to Christ.
- The very content of this doctrine demands of us a response. People we love, people we know are heading to hell.
- There is a healthy activism that it should press upon us.
- We can and should work hard and make sure we are ready to do evangelism - have all the right arguments, all the right training – but it means nothing if you are only ever talking to the mirror.
- At some point we have to talk about Jesus.

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- A friend of mine is an excellent evangelist – he teaches me things everytime I talk with him. He is also a new Christian. His zeal, passion, boldness, enthusiasm leave me for dead. But by God’s grace, he calls people who were once dead to life in Jesus.
- His theology at points is flawed, his techniques don’t always work, and he does not always have the answers – but he is doing it. And under God, he is saving people from hell.
- Hell should swell up in us a desperate concern – that is to call people to Christ.
- Friends, let us be a church of people who are commitment to putting sin to death in our lives, who are content in the circumstances in which we are in, focused on Christ and what he has done for us, and concerned about those around us who do not know the what is coming after they die.
- Let me pray.

Closing Prayer

Commitment – to put sin to death
Contentment – in what we have been given
Christ – thankful for what he did for us
Concern – to call people to Christ