

# THE HORROR OF HELL - WEEK 2

Mark 9:42-50

- ❖ Take a moment to think about what you imagined hell to be like before hearing the sermon and studying the scriptures this week?
- ❖ Share *briefly* what your concerns were/are about the idea of hell being a reality?
- ❖ Take a moment to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit's help to understand the scriptures clearly, to believe them wholeheartedly and to trust God with this difficult doctrine.

Before jumping into the topic of "hell" it is important to get a few thoughts ironed out:

- I. No one should take any delight in the idea that people are going to hell.
- II. We are not the ones who get to decide whether or not hell is real, only God gets to decide that. His ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9).
- III. God loves people more than we could ever possibly love them, and so we need to see what Jesus says about hell through that lens.

## 1. What 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews Believed About Hell

The Old Testament says very little about hell. It seems only to be referenced in the prophetic writings of Daniel 12:2, Ezekiel 32 and Isaiah 66:24. But by the time Jesus began his teaching there was a theology of hell among the Jews, which he did not correct or deny. The beliefs held at this time were that:

- Hell was a place of punishment after judgment - the Jews believed in a place called "Sheol" or "Hades" where the unrighteous went after death. It was a place of punishment that was documented in the non-canonical books (historical writings that are not considered scripture) of Enoch and Ezra and widely read and studied in the first century.
- Hell was a place marked by fire, darkness and lament.
- Hell was a place of annihilation OR never ending punishment - Jews were split on this doctrine, and the Sadducees, who were a theological minority, did not believe in either heaven or hell.

## 2. What Jesus Said About Hell

If the theology of hell at the time was too harsh, it is right to assume that Jesus would have corrected it in his teachings, but he didn't. In fact, he spoke about hell more intensely and frequently than anyone else recorded in scripture.

Jesus said that:

- Hell was terrible - one of the words he used for hell was that of a real place called "Gehenna", the valley of Hinnom, a deep glen just outside of Jerusalem. Its history is filled with horror, where children were sacrificed to pagan gods. Some also believe it was a dumping ground for sewage and refuse, where fires burned continually in order to destroy the garbage and impurities<sup>1</sup>. It was a terrible place that was associated with evil and the coming judgement of God.
- Hell was a place of punishment *after* judgment (Matt 25:4, 46, Matt 5:22, Matt 23:33) - Jesus did not mean that after the judgement every non-believer would be sent to the actual location of Gehenna, outside of Jerusalem, but to a terrible place like it, for all eternity.
- Hell was a place marked by fire, darkness and lament - Jesus likens hell to a fiery furnace and though the fire will rage it will not bring light, instead it will be a place of utter darkness (Mark 9:43,48, Matt 13:41-42,50, Matt 25:30).
- Hell was never ending (Matt 25:46).

<sup>1</sup> Don Stewart. Frequently Asked Questions: What is Gehenna? [http://www.bibclassic.org/faq/don\\_stewart/stewart.cfm?id=168](http://www.bibclassic.org/faq/don_stewart/stewart.cfm?id=168) [Date accessed: 24/10/2014].



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## 3. What The Rest Of The New Testament Says About Hell

Apart from Jesus' teachings, 2 Peter 2:4 and James 3:6 both use the actual word "hell". But the idea of eternal punishment is scattered throughout the New Testament saying that:

- I. There is a coming judgment and following that, punishment (Acts 17:30-31, 2 Thess. 1:6-9, Jude vs.5-23).
- II. God's wrath is eternal and terrifying (Revelation 14:9-11, Revelation 20:10-15).

## 4. How We Should Respond To Biblical Teaching About Hell

- I. Consider - where we individually stand before a righteous God.
  - II. Confess - repent of sin, which means actually changing, not just feeling bad.
  - III. Commit - to being a messenger of the gospel to everyone God puts on our path.
- ❖ *"I cannot believe in a God who would knowingly send a person to hell!!!!"* Q: What does this common reaction to the concept of hell incorrectly assume?
  - ❖ Q: Why is it biblical to say that God loves us more than we love people (even those who we are worried will go to hell)?
  - ❖ Q: In our struggle to understand this doctrine, how should Isaiah 55:8-9 help us to let go of trying to understand and control the complexities and instead to trust Christ with what he said in the scriptures?
  - ❖ Q: Prior to this message, was your view on hell biblical? If not, what beliefs do you need change in order to submit to the teachings of Jesus and the scriptures?
  - ❖ Q: Why is hell not a place that believers should be afraid of?
  - ❖ Q: What sort of response should the idea of hell spark in us as those who have been saved by grace alone?
    - Perhaps spend some time processing this as a group and allow time for individuals to respond to God in whatever way that works for your group. Just understanding this doctrine is not enough. It needs to impact our hearts and minds at a deep level. If this is not happening, spend some time praying that God would open hearts and minds and give us the humility to grasp all that it means for us.
  - ❖ Q: Do you think we should be concerned about people who reject Christ and are heading to hell should they not repent and believe the gospel?
  - ❖ Q: How should our concern for them impact our lives and the choices we make?

