

The Disappearance of Hell – Part 2

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Luke

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Bible Text: Luke 21:8

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Luke 21 is where we are this evening in our study of God's word if you would join with me in turning there. Luke 21. We read beginning with verse 5 down to verse 9.

5 And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, 6 "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." 7 And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" 8 And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. 9 And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."

We are thinking specifically about false Christs, misrepresentations of Jesus, specifically today thinking about Jesus as Judge, verse 8, "And he said, 'See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, "I am he!" and, "The time is at hand!" Do not go after them.'"

Let's go to our God together in prayer this evening and ask his blessing on this time of preaching.

Father in heaven, we love you and thank you for loving us. Thank you for the mercy that we have met with in your Son. Thank you for the forgiveness of all of our sins. Thank you for the right standing that we have before you in him. Thank you, Lord, that you opened our eyes, that you granted us repentance and faith. Thank you for so great a salvation. Thank you for such a deliverance. I pray, Lord, for those in this room who have not yet been delivered from their lost state, perhaps even some who are very religious, perhaps even some who are members of this church. Lord, grant great mercy tonight and open eyes and grant life in the place of a form of godliness. Let them know the power that sets men and women free in Jesus. We pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

"Fire, fire! That is the recompense for your perversity, you hardened sinners. Fire, fire, the fires of hell! Fire in your eyes, fire in your mouth,

fire in your guts, fire in your throat, fire in your nostrils, fire inside and fire outside, fire beneath and fire above, fire in every part. Ah, miserable folk! You will be like rags burning in the middle of this fire."

Those are the words of an Italian preacher preaching to his congregation in the medieval era. Jonathan Edwards, preaching on Isaiah 33:14, a sermon entitled "Sinners in Zion Tenderly Warned." He had this to say and it's a little bit of an extended passage but listen to what he said.

"Fearfulness will surprise them because they will know that they are to be cast into devouring fire. There is nothing which seems to give one a more terrible idea of torment and misery than to think of being cast alive into a great fire, especially if we conceive of the senses remaining quick, and not benumbed by the fire. The wicked will hereafter have that to make them afraid, that they are not only to be cast into a fire, but into devouring fire; which implies, that it will be a fire of extraordinary fierceness of heat, and before which nothing can stand.

"The fire into which men are to be cast is called a furnace of fire. Furnaces are contrived for an extreme degree of heat, this being necessary for the purposes for which they are designed, as the running and refining of metals, and the melting of materials into glass. The fire of such earthly furnaces may be called devouring fire, as the heat of some of them is such, that in them even stones will presently be dissolved.

"But all this will be only an image of that dreadful fire of the wrath of God, which the wicked shall at the same time suffer in their souls. We read in Revelation 19:15 of 'the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.' This is an extraordinary expression, carrying a terrible idea of the future misery of the wicked. If it had been only said of the wrath of God that would have expressed what is dreadful. If the wrath of a king be as the roaring of a lion, what is the wrath of God? But it is not only said the wrath of God, but the fierceness and wrath of God, or the rage of his wrath; and not only so, but the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. O what is that! the fierceness and rage or fury of Omnipotence! Of a being of infinite strength! What an idea does that give of the state of those worms that suffer the fierceness and wrath of such an Almighty Being! And is it any wonder that fearfulness surprises their hearts when they see this about to be executed upon them?"

I want you to contrast the two sermon excerpts that we've just read with quotes found in Robert Schuller's book "Self-Esteem: The New Reformation." Here's what Schuller said,

"And what is 'hell'? It is the loss of pride that naturally follows separation from God - the ultimate and unfailing source of our soul's sense of self-respect. 'My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?' was Christ's

encounter with hell. In that 'hellish' death our Lord experienced the ultimate horror, humiliation, shame, and loss of pride as a human being. A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem. Can you imagine any condition more tragic than to live life and eternity in shame?"

There's no doubt that hell will include shame but it's much more than shame. Hell is not when you've lost your self-esteem. Who has the right Jesus? Who has the right conception of hell? Is it a John Stott, is it a John Wenham? Is it a Robert Schuller? Do the Universalists have the right Jesus? Do the Conditionalists have the right Jesus? Or is the Augustine's and the Jonathan Edward's and those who speak the words of Jesus when Jesus describes hell? Who has the right Jesus?

The Jesus of the Bible is the Judge who spoke of hell as a very real place of conscious eternal bodily suffering. We saw that this morning. We lamented the disappearance of hell in popular preaching and among many scholars and then we began to talk about Christ's descriptions of hell and we began with the reality of hell, that Jesus described hell as something very real and something to be feared. Tonight we pick it up there with the second category in terms of how Christ described hell. We being tonight talking about the duration of hell. The reality of hell and now the duration of hell. It's a simple point but, unfortunately, this is exactly where much of the debate is. As the title of Richard Mahue's journal asks in the The Master's Seminary Journal: is hell never forever or just a while? Universalists say, never. Some Conditionalists say, never. And some Conditionalists say just for a while. But Jesus clearly taught that the suffering of hell is forever.

Just to remind you, we're talking about final judgment here. We're not talking about the intermediate state. The Bible teaches that a believer dies and immediately he or she goes into the presence of God in their soul and when someone dies without the Lord, they immediately go to a place of conscious suffering in the soul. But there's going to be a resurrection and following the resurrection there is everlasting life, body and soul, in the presence of God for those who have been saved and there is an everlasting torment, body and soul, for those who have not been reconciled to God. That's the second death. It follows the final judgment. That's what we're asking: how long does that final judgment last? Jesus taught that it lasts forever.

For example, Mark 9:42 says this, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire." By the way folks, what does unquenchable mean? It means it is never quenched; it's never extinguished; it's never put out. Verse 45, "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' For everyone will be salted with fire." Now, it's obvious that when Jesus talks about plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand, he's exaggerating to make a

point but the point is that hell is very real and it is forever. Better to be maimed in this life than to enter into hell forever.

When he talks about the worm not dying and the fire that's not quenched, that's taken from Isaiah 66:24. Isaiah 66:24 says, "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." Now if you think about the disgusting nature of bodies that are in a state of decay, so will the wicked be forever. Daniel 12 speaks of a resurrection unto everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:1 says, "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." Everlasting blessing or everlasting shame and contempt. This is what follows the resurrection unto final judgment.

Jesus taught about that program of resurrection. John 5:28, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." If you ask, "Well, how long is the judgment? What is the duration of the judgment that Jesus is talking about?" Jesus answers that in Matthew 25. We saw it this morning but I'll remind you, Matthew 25:40, "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me,'" talking about those who enter into blessing. "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." As I pointed out this morning, you have those two references to eternity in the same sentence and you cannot make eternal life in that sentence mean everlasting life and then make eternal punishment mean anything other than everlasting punishment.

So Jesus spoke of hell as a real place and a place that will mean the punishment of the wicked forever and ever and ever. This leads us to the third thing I want us to think about when we think about hell and Christ's descriptions of hell: the reality of hell; the duration of hell; third, the fearfulness of hell. Jesus described hell in fearful terms. There are many ways that he did that but I'm just going to make it simple and break it into two categories. Why is hell to be feared? How do we know it is to be feared? 1. Because of the one who punishes in hell. Who is lord over it? Who will carry out the punishment? Well, as Jonathan Edwards referenced earlier in my introduction, it is Almighty God. This is the

punishment executed by omnipotence. It's not just his wrath but his wrath is spoken of as being fierce, raging. Jesus said Luke 12:5, "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"

By the way, for anyone who would ever want to somehow separate Jesus out from that, that Christ should not be feared in terms of final judgment, I would remind you of the description of Jesus found in Revelation 19. Turn there with me for just a moment, please. Revelation 19 and look at verse 11, "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it," who is sitting on this white horse? Let's see his description, "The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God." Do you recognize him? Who is this, beloved? This is Jesus. "And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty." Who treads out this winepress of wrath? It is Jesus. "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.' And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh." The beast and the false prophet tossed into hell. The others killed with the sword that comes from the mouth of the Son of God and they too are cast into hell, Revelation 20, following the Great White Throne Judgment. A resurrection followed by final judgment. That judgment is a forever judgment. God is the one who punishes. Christ is to be feared. He is God in human flesh. This makes hell fearful.

But we also get a sense of the fearfulness of hell as we listen to our Lord tell us what is preferable to hell. I mean, what you would rather have happen to you than to be cast into hell. We've already read it and I would just remind you: better to lose an eye, Matthew 5:29-30, than to be cast into hell; better to be an amputee, than to be cast into hell; better to be drowned in the sea with a millstone hung around your neck, than to be cast into hell, Matthew 18:6; better to suffer rejection by men in this life, than to be cast into hell, Matthew 10:28; better not to have had your reward here, better to have not had your good things here, than to have had them and then be cast into hell, Luke 16 is an example of that. What do these statements make clear to us? The things that men fear very much on this earth do not compare with the things to be feared for eternity. Men fear losing their eyesight. Men fear losing one of their limbs. Men fear drowning. Men fear other men.

Probably everybody in this room, you have feared at one time or another just being rejected by people, ostracized. On the extreme end of that thing as we're witnessing right now in our world in places like Iraq, there are people beaten, killed. Better to suffer that and spend eternity with Christ than to avoid that and to be cast into hell. Some people have a great fear of living without nice things, without temporal comforts and if you don't think people fear that, just watch what they will do to keep those things; what they will throw away as they pursue those things. So afraid of being without nice things that they will sacrifice marriage, they will sacrifice children, they will sacrifice the church, they will sacrifice all sorts of things in the pursuit of material benefit. Better to be like the poor beggar sitting outside the gate of the rich man, better to be like Lazarus and to be found in Abraham's bosom than to have been very rich and to spend eternity in hell.

It's real. It's forever. It's described in the most fearful terms. What characterizes hell? How is hell described? I want to give you seven descriptions. First of all, men are conscious in hell. If forever punishment can be described as torment, if you're tormented forever, you have to be lucid. If you're tormented forever, you have to be conscious, you have to be aware of what you're suffering. That's what torment means: you are tormented; you are aware of it. Revelation 14:11, "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night." It's not just torment, it's unending; it's constant torment, "these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

Luke 16 describes the intermediate state. The forever state is worse than that because it's body and soul but in Luke 16, you have a description of Hades. I want you to turn to Luke 16 real quickly. I want to point something out to you. If you have a pen or a pencil, I want you to underline this and meditate on this because this is meant to speak to us. This is meant to affect us. You have a description of the rich man in Hades. Let's begin in verse 23, notice what it says, "and in Hades, being in," what? "Torment." You want to circle that or underline that. "He lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in,'" what? "Anguish." Underline that, anguish. "'In this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this,'" what? "Place of torment." He's thinking. He's talking. He's aware of his past. He's somewhat aware of his brothers' present circumstances. In four different ways as Jesus tells the story, in four different ways, he describes the state of a man like this in terms of torment. In Hades, being in torment. "I'm in anguish in this flame." Verse 25, "you are in anguish." Verse 28, "into this place of torment."

By the way, you'll notice that the only way to be delivered from such a place is to listen to the word of God. He said to him, verse 30, "'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'" He's still treating Lazarus like a servant. "Send

him to my brothers. They'll listen to him. If he comes back from the dead." What was the answer in verse 31? "He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets,' if they don't hear the word of God, 'neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" That's a good word for us as we care about those who are perishing, isn't it? How do you reach people on their way to hell? What's the answer? You teach them and preach to them the word of God. You give them the gospel.

Men are conscious in hell. Men are in flames in hell. That's how Jesus described it. Matthew 25:41, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Matthew 3:12, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." And as you know, we've already seen it, you could multiply the times that Jesus said that. Hell was described in terms of fire.

Men are described as being in sorrow and pain in hell. There is this statement that you'll see again and again, "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 8:11, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." You know, the gritting of teeth? It will indicate pain. Matthew 13:41, "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 13:49, "So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 24:48, "But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Men are in sorrow, they're in pain in hell. Conscious, in flames, in sorrow, in pain. Men are engulfed in darkness in hell. Can I say to you: God is communicating to us in words that cannot capture the reality of it. It's just a way to communicate to us some sense of the reality of it so that in a way we can understand you have both fire and darkness. Matthew 8:11, Jesus described it as "outer darkness." Away with the thought that someone will be partying in hell. That you'll be with your friends. No one has ever been more alone than in hell. Outer darkness.

Men have no hope in hell. No hope of escape. We read it a moment ago in Luke 16, "Besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able and none may cross from there to us." What is Jesus teaching in that story? He's wanting us to see that there are no second opportunities. There are no second chances. This is it. It's fixed. Your eternity is fixed. And for those who enter into a place of torment and suffering, a place of God's wrath and judgment, they have had the best they'll ever have. They have had their good things. When the rich man just asked for the simple mercy of a drop of water on his tongue, the

answer was, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things." That's it. You've had your best life. That's the best you'll ever have.

Men will receive perfect justice in hell. The Bible indicates, again, in way I cannot fully understand, I don't know how this can be so but it will be so that there are varying judgments being executed in hell. Matthew 10:14, "And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town." There are other statements in Scripture that would indicate that what you're going to have in the final judgment will be absolutely just based upon the individual lives that have been lived, based upon individual decisions that have been made. In fact, not only will what we know about enter into that final judgment, but all the things that no one has known about except God will enter into that final judgment. Romans 2:15 says, "They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." Don't you love that? When according to my gospel.

You see, declaring the truth of God's judgment, beloved, is a part of preaching the gospel. Flee from the wrath that is coming! Wrath is coming! Flee from it! "Where do I run?" Run to Jesus and be saved because a day is coming that if Christ's blood has not covered all of your sins, one day even the secrets of your heart are going to be made manifest and you'll be judged based upon what no one has known but you and God. Revelation 20:12, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done." If it was just a one size fits all judgment, there would be no need for that.

So do you think that you've escaped? Is there someone listening to me that you think that you've escaped the consequences of sins against God when you have not repented of those sins by turning to God's Son for forgiveness? Do you think God hasn't taken notice? Do you think he doesn't see? Do you think he doesn't care? Do you think he doesn't hate your sin? Do you think it's not worthy of death? Eternity will show that he has not turned a blind eye to justice. It is the beauty of our God that he is a God of justice. Absolute perfect justice.

Finally, men will have their memories in hell. They will know what they've rejected. They will know what they have spurned. They have a knowledge of a life that was wasted, an eternity that was forfeited. They will know what it means to spurn the love of God that is offered to men in his Son. That's what the gospel is, it's the offer of God's love to sinners. It is amazing, unimaginable grace and mercy. What does someone deserve who would spurn that? Who would reject the Son of God? Those who were being addressed by the writer of Hebrews, they were warned about that very thing. Hebrews 10:26, "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses

dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Understand that when you read those sorts of things, you're getting the New Testament writers' understanding of what Jesus taught about hell. Real. Forever. Sorrowful. Painful. Dark. Without hope. But perfectly just. And you will know if you end up there, you will know it's perfectly just and you will remember the times, the opportunities that you had to receive the grace of God and you will know the absolute justice of God punishing you when you have rejected so great a salvation.

What about the population of hell? Who's going to be there? One writer said it very well, he said, "Just because hell was not popular doesn't mean it will be unpopulated." Who will be in hell? Anyone and everyone who has not embraced God's remedy for the sins of mankind. You see, God has made a way for us to be forgiven. God has made a way for us to be reconciled to himself. God has made a way for us to be, imagine this, called one of his children, to share in the inheritance of his Son who came from heaven to earth and died on a cross for sinners, has been raised from the dead, offers life in himself. Anyone who rejects that grace, who dies impenitent, rejecting God's good love, mercy and grace. They will be in hell.

Jesus said in John 3:36, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." We know that but I want to give a special warning tonight because Jesus gave special warnings about this. There is a particular kind of person that this might apply to in this room tonight and that is the person who rests in the name of Jesus while they reject the rule of Jesus. They imagine that they're going to be in heaven because they can use his name but they know nothing about his rule. They have never rested their entire future on his perfect merits, on his finished work, and they have never bowed their knee and received him into their hearts as Lord. They have a form of godliness but they know nothing of the power of God transforming a life and making a new creation. Jesus warned about this.

Look at Luke 13:24. What did our Lord say. "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'" I just want to underscore something here, you see this in the warnings that Jesus gives: you have people who used his name, related themselves to him but what was the clear fruit in evidence present in their lives? They were workers of evil. Their life reflected the fact that Jesus was not their Lord.

Next verse, "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out." Obviously he's not talking about sinlessness. He's talking about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. You're not talking about people who weren't sinners but you are talking about men who had genuine saving faith and whose lives reflected it. There were those fruits of real faith present in their lives. "And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Or take Matthew 7 for example, verse 22, you know this one well, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you.'" I never knew you. It's not that you had life and lost it. You never had it. And then he says this, "'depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" I hear what you're saying but look at your life. He tells the truth about what was true all along. In fact, he goes on to say, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." You might love preaching but do you love Jesus? You might love information but is he your Lord? Because if you hear his words but you do nothing with them, you fall into the category of the person being described whose house falls.

The Holy Spirit continued these warnings throughout the New Testament all the way to the end. 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived," and folks, every time God's word says to you not to be deceived, your ears better perk up because here's an area where people are deceived. "Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." They won't. Why would anybody be deceived about that? Because, you see, there are people who would teach God's word in a way that would lead people to believe that people living that kind of lifestyle will still be in heaven, that that's what a transformed life looks like, that that's what salvation in a life looks like. Paul reminds the Corinthian church, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." Ephesians 5:5 says, "For you may be sure of this," you may be sure of this, you may be certain of this, "that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." All the way to the end, Revelation 21:8, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Who will populate hell? Everyone who hasn't been reconciled to God through God's Son. But there is a special warning for those who are religious and imagine that they can rest in Jesus' name while they reject Jesus as Lord, as though that's what real saving faith looks like, as though that's what spiritual life looks like.

Final point tonight: the alternative to hell. Hell is real. Hell is forever. Hell is awful. Hell is painful. Sorrowful. Regretful. I don't want to go there. How do I escape it? The alternative to hell is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. God has made the way for you to escape it. He's told you where to run. Imagine a scene of chaos and it looks like there's no way out and then someone says, "There's the way out!" What would you do. Run. Run to the way out. The way out is Jesus. The alternative is to be awakened to your sinfulness, Awakened to the reality of eternity. Awakened to the true beauty of God as compared with the ugliness of sin. Awakened to the passing nature of the pleasures of sin and the everlasting nature of the pleasures that are at God's right hand. The result of that awakening will be that you depart from a pursuit of sin to pursue the one who died for sinners. You trust in him. He has finished the work. There is nothing left for you to do. It's perfect. It's complete. But you will know the one who has trusted in that complete and finished work because they love the one who died to give them life. They love the Son of God. The alternative to hell is the free gift. The free gift. The free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ and people receiving that free gift rejoices the heart of God.

Ezekiel 18:30, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live." Would you do that tonight? Would you turn and live? I beg you to. In fact, I say to you that God through me, begs you to if you haven't already. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ." What does it mean to be an ambassador for someone? It means you announce his message. "We are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us. We implore you," we beg you, "on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." If you've not trusted in Jesus, I beg you tonight. I beg you tonight to be reconciled to God. Put your faith in Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon, preaching a sermon entitled "The Fruitless Vine" had this to say as he closed that sermon,

"I confess, I should dread above all things the unutterable hell of hells of hypocritical apostates, of men that stand in the ranks, profess to love God, prate godliness, that sit in the pews and uphold Christianity, that take the sacrament, and speak about communion, that stand up to pray, and talk about being heard for their faith, who are all the while committing abominations, and under cover of their professions are cheating the poor, robbing the fatherless, and doing all kinds of iniquity. I confess, I as much dread the excess of their damnation, above the damnation of others, as I dread to be damned at all. It is as if in hell another hell had been made, to

damn those that sin above others, to damn them after being damned—for hypocrites, for men who have been with us, and not of us; who professed to be Christ's, and yet have been mean deceivers after all. O! sirs, if ye would not make your chains more heavy, if ye would not stir the fire to a more furious heat, if ye would not make your yells more hideous, quit your professions this night, if ye are not worthy of them. Go out of this place, and send in your resignation to the church; or else, sirs, be honest, and bend your knee before God, and ask him to search you, and try you, and make you sincere and upright before him. Be one thing, or else the other; do not cloak yourself in the robes of sanctity to hide the corruptions that all the while fester beneath. Stand out, bold, brave sinners; and do not be mean, sneaking sinners, that wear the masks of saints. 'What is the vine more than any other tree?' Without fruit it is worse than any other. It must perish more dolefully, more horribly than any other, if there be on it no fruit brought to perfection."

We've said often in this church, we hear the gospel often: are you real? Have you just been wearing the mask of a saint? Or do you know the reality of eternal life? God takes no pleasure in your perishing. He begs you through me to be reconciled to God this night.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, thank you for your mercies, the grace that is found and known forever in your Son. Open the blind eyes. Unchain the slave. Call men, women, young people out of the grave and join them to your Son by faith and let us who know Jesus be convinced of the brevity of life, the certainty of death and a forever judgment and with hearts that reflect yours, let us serve well as ambassadors of Christ. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.