



## “Hell”

By: Doug Warren

### **Is Hell a Real Place? [And if So How Can a Loving God Send People there?]**

Right in the middle of wrapping up the summer and beginning to try and get ready for autumn my daughter blind-sides me with a heart-felt question, “Is Hell a real place, Daddy?” I get asked questions all the time and sometimes it is easy to give the answers I have learned from the Bible mechanically, but one look in her searching eyes and I knew this was not going to be easy. Pulling her onto my lap, with tears in my eyes I began to tell my little princess one of the hardest realities in life.

I would like to invite you to listen in so to speak to a father who loves his daughter enough to tell her the truth even when it is painful. I recognize that I can’t answer all your questions any more than I could my pleading seven-year-old’s. But I can tell you what Jesus said and beg you to listen and consider the weight of these realities that are so difficult for us to hear and speak.

The first thing that is important for us to see as we look at the hard reality of Hell is that God is good and just. He never demands punishment that is beyond what is just. He is not arbitrary or whimsical. He never gets carried away like Daddy sometimes does out of anger or frustration or tiredness. God is the One who created everything—everything—and He alone has the right to set the rules. He told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed Him it would mean death. The lie of Satan has been the same since the beginning of time, “You will not surely die!” That is the lie many believe today about Hell; there’s no such thing.

Eternal death, Hell, is more awful than we can begin to understand, but it is the just and right punishment for disobeying God. Disbelieving the punishment is also tied to doubting God’s goodness from the very beginning. Before Satan came right out and called God a liar, he first cast doubt on His goodness. He asked, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” Instead of focusing on all the abundant provision God had given us, we are often tempted to look at God’s limits as unfairly restrictive. He is not seeking our denial, but our good.

It is essential to God’s justice that He must punish evil as surely as He will vindicate the innocent. This too is for our good. The God who says, “Vengeance is mine” is not a God of malice, but of justice and mercy. He executes justice in punishing the wrongdoer and mercy in bringing retribution to those who have been injured.

We also need to recognize that Jesus Himself spoke more about Hell than He did about Heaven. If we are to consider Jesus honestly we must not glide over His difficult teaching on this subject. Again and again Jesus warned about the perils of Hell. It was central to all His teaching on the Kingdom of God, that all of humanity would ultimately be divided into two groups, one for blessing and one for cursing. Here is a passage typical of what Jesus said about Hell:

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“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” Matthew 25:31-46

Please recognize that I am saying these things as one who understands that I deserve Hell for my sin against God. As I told my daughter, this is not a truth just for others, but for me most of all. If God dealt with me only on the basis of my efforts to obey Him, I would go straight to Hell and God would be completely justified.

God is not only the God who designed Hell as the just punishment for traitors to His kingly rule, He is also the King who went to Hell in the place of His beloved people. That is what Jesus did. He became sin for all who would trust in Him for rescue from the fiery pit. He took on that punishment in place of any who will repent and believe in His pardon. Any objections to the horror of Hell must reckon with His unmerited grace to endure it for any who would humble themselves and live.

As I told my daughter, Hell is real and the loving God of the universe does send people there, but He is good and gracious, and even though we both deserve to go to Hell, He has provided our rescue in His Son. Instead of an eternity in Hell, we can experience the wonder of knowing God forever face to face because of what Jesus has done. Repent of your sin with me and trust in God’s wondrous provision. He is the only One who can save us from what we deserve.

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