

HELL OUGHT TO SCARE YOU

The young man I was talking to had been a Christian for several years. He had sinned a year or so before our discussion and had repented. Then about four months prior to our talk he had again yielded to the temptation that Joseph would not (Gen. 39). This time there was no repentance and seemingly no concern. Perhaps, no cessation of the sin either.

One question kept coming to my mind before we had any discussion, "Does he ever think about hell?" I wondered if he understood that if he died in this condition that he would spend eternity in hell. So, I ask if he was afraid of hell. His answer: "I guess not as much as I ought to be." I suggested that he wasn't afraid at all! Why? I'm not certain. But one thing is sure: when one can lay his head down at night knowing that he is in sin and will go to hell if he dies and not be afraid, there is little hope.

The above story could be duplicated time and again. Perhaps because we have neglected the old hell fire and brimstone preaching. Let's revisit this old subject that may be somewhat "new" to some. It oughta scare ya!

Hell Is Real

Hell is not a fictitious story or myth. It is not a condition or state of mind. It is a real place. Luke 16, which speaks of the realm of departed spirits (Hades and not the eternal abode), is a foretaste of greater things to come. The rich man spoke of this "place" of torment (vv. 23, 28). He was in a real place. It is merely a foretaste of worse to come.

Hell is just as real as heaven. They are often put on an equality as far as their nature goes (cf. Matt. 25:46). If Heaven is real, so is hell. If hell is a state of mind, so is heaven.

Jesus said we ought to fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28). In this we learn that (1) Hell should be feared. (2) It is beyond the grave. (3) It should motivate us to live so as to go to heaven. All of these point to the reality of hell.

Hell Is Terrible

It may be that some of those who believe in hell think that the biblical descriptions of it are overstated. Surely it could not be as bad as the old fashion preachers used to say it would be. The following points tell us how terrible hell really is.

1. Gehenna. The word hell (when referring to the eternal abode of the wicked) is from the Greek word Gehenna. When we understand how that word came to be used to describe the eternal damnation, we will appreciate how tragic hell is.

a. Gehenna points back to the Valley of Hinnom. “Originally the Valley of Hinnom, near Jerus, Gehenna became among the Jews the synonym for the place of torment in the future life” (ISBE 1371). “Gehenna is a transliteration from the Aram. form of the Heb ge-hinnom, “valley of Hinnom” (ISBE 1183). This valley was to the southwest of Jerusalem.

b. This valley was the seat of worship to the idol Molech. “That ‘the valley of Hinnom’ became the technical designation for the place of final punishment was due to two causes. In the first place the valley had been the seat of the idolatrous worship to Molech, to whom children were immolated by fire (2 Ch. 28:3; 33:6). Secondly, on account of these practices the place was defiled by King Josiah (2 K 23:10), and became in consequence associated in prophecy with the judgment to be visited upon the people (Jer 7:32)” (ISBE 1183). The sacrifice that was made to Molech was awful. Many texts tell of parents burning the sons and daughters to honor this idol (cf. Jer. 7:30-31; 19:5-6; 2 Kings 23:10). “The image of Molech was a human figure with a bulls head and outstretched arms, ready to receive the children destined for sacrifice. The image of metal was heated red hot by a fire kindled within, and the children laid on its arms rolled off into the fiery pit below” (ISBE 2075).

c. The valley came be used to burn the city’s trash and rubbish. It was the city incinerator. Jeremiah spoke of the valley of dead bodies and of ashes (Jer. 31:40). “Into this valley dead bodies were probably cast to be consumed by the dogs...and fires were kept burning to consume the rubbish of the city. Such associations led to the Ge-Hinnom (NT ‘Gehenna’) becoming the ‘type of Hell’”(ISBE 1393).

2. Lake of fire. Hell is described as a lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8). Imagine a literal lake that you know. Picture that

every drop of water were a flammable substance (i.e. gasoline). If that were set aflame, what would it be like to be thrown into the middle of it?

Brimstone is perhaps sulfur that melts and runs in streams. It spreads and is sticky. Picture that some sticky substance is poured all over you (i.e. honey or molasses). What if that were a flammable substance set aflame? Can you image the intense pain, the agony and the suffering? Other passages portray hell as a furnace of fire (Matt. 13:42, 50), a flaming fire (2 Thess. 1:7-9), a baptism of fire (Matt. 3:11-12), and an unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43).

3. Weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. Those who are cast into hell will be howling, crying aloud and grinding their teeth (cf. Matt. 8:12; 13:50; 25:30). What a picture of punishment!

Hell Is Eternal

The above descriptions of hell would be bad enough if it only lasted for a day or even an hour. However, the pain and suffering of hell is eternal. Jesus equated "hell fire" (Matt. 18:9) with "everlasting fire" (v. 8). Jesus contrasted the "everlasting punishment" with "eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). Hell is as long as heaven is. The smoke of torment ascends "forever and ever" (Rev. 14:10-11). It scares me to think about hell. It oughta scare you too!

Donnie V. Rader