



Who is Going to Hell?
Matthew 3:10-12
GCSP – 05/10/2008

There are many topics contained in God's Word that cause a lot of head-scratching and debate. It is not that the Bible is not clear it's only that we have a tendency to try to fit God and His Word into human logic. So when the topic of predestination comes up we rationalize that God could see into the future those who would accept His gift of salvation and thus makes His choice of who will be saved with that foresight. When the topic of eternal security comes up we try to reconcile man's free will to walk away from God with the fact that God says He will lose no one.

There are many other topics and doctrines of Scripture that well-intentioned, God-fearing men and women debate back and forth; usually ignited by a compulsion to reconcile the divine concepts in our mortal brains.

The topic we are going to breach tonight not only stretches the limits of our frail human minds and emotions, it is most uncomfortable to even think about. And if you are not careful, you will allow your emotions and your human sense of fairness to cloud and shade the truth of God's Word. So as I would ask you to do every week, try to divorce yourself from any preconceived notions you have and resolve to look afresh at the Scriptures – and believe what you read instead of reading what you believe.

The topic is hell. It is a real place. It is a terrible place. It is eternal. And hell will be the everlasting home for billions of human souls; some of which you and I know and love.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 3**.

Matthew 3:1-12

Let's pray.

We have spent the last two times together looking at the life of John the Baptist and what specifically made him great in the eyes of the Lord.

1. **John Preached Repentance of Sins (v. 1-2)**

John was great in the eyes of our Lord was he preached repentance; he was a witness to everyone he met. John boldly and urgently preached repentance of sin.

2. **John Obeyed God's Call on His Life (v. 3)**

John's call was to prepare the way for Jesus by preparing the hearts of men and women. His call was to persuade sinners to clear all of the debris out of their lives; John's call was to prepare the hearts of people so the King would have easy access.

3. **John Lived a Simple Life of Contentment (v. 4)**

John forsook the pleasures of this world. John chose simplicity and devotion to the Lord.

4. **John Was Compassionate (v. 5-6)**

We never see John saying he was too tired or he was done for the day. John had compassion and he had time for all who came to him.

5. John Was Bold for God (v. 7)

John was bold for God; meaning he was bold when God or God's Word was being violated. He was bold in correcting sinful behavior. He was bold in thwarting false teachers. He was bold in stopping or limiting the damage that false teaching inflicted upon those who didn't know any better.

6. John Expected Results from God's People (v. 8)

We should expect results from one another. We should expect good deeds and good works out of one another. We should expect to see fruit in keeping with repentance from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

7. John Did Not See Anyone as a Lost Cause (v. 9)

John was harsh when he needed to be but he was always hopeful even the stubborn and willfully blind would come to the truth and repent.

The last characteristic we see that made John great in the eyes of the Lord is he warned people about hell.

8. John Warned People of the Dangers and Reality of Hell (v. 10-12)

John didn't gloss over this fact. John did not avoid the subject like so many "preachers" do today. John first truly believed what God said about hell and then he boldly proclaimed what God said about hell. He did not shrink back or ignore God's teaching on the subject.

We are going to primarily look at another passage for the sermon tonight, but let me first draw a few things out of the passage before us.

v. 10

Those who are doomed to go to hell are the ones who do not bear fruit. As we looked at last time, bearing fruit in keeping with repentance simply means that true and genuine Christians will do God's bidding; they will be obedient to His Word. Be sure that they will fail at times and be sure that Satan will trip them up on occasion, but as a general rule, those who are genuinely born again will have evidence of God's salvation in their lives by action and deed.

I used the following Scriptures to support this truth:

James 2:17 – "Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."

1 John 3:7 – "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous."

Romans 2:13 – "For it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law."

Galatians 6:7-8 – “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

James 1:22 – “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

There are many other passages of Scripture that we could look at that essentially say the same thing. Genuine Christians will be known by the fruit, or good works, they produce.

So the fruitless trees, or the trees with corrupt and useless fruit, will be cut down and thrown into the fire. The illustration is clear; those who have no evidence of true repentance in their life, and those who only play the game and thus only have worthless acts of righteousness in their life, are those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. These are the ones who will join Satan and his demons in the everlasting torment of hell.

v. 11

Some scholars disagree on the understanding of that last phrase. Some say the fire in this verse refers to the refining fire applied to God’s true children to make them holy. Others say it refers to the fire of judgment inflicted on those who never receive the Holy Spirit; meaning those who are never truly saved. I’m not sure we can be definitive on the exact meaning Matthew intended but I lean toward the latter interpretation; simply because the prior verse speaks of fiery judgment and the following verse does the same. The context supports the fact that Jesus will separate the genuine believers from the unbelievers; one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the other receives the baptism of judgment. True repentance in the dividing line.

v. 12

Again we have a separating of the true believers from the unbelievers. The true believers will be gathered into the Lord’s dwelling place and the unbelievers will be sent to a place of unquenchable fire.

The term unquenchable has no alternate or hidden meaning; it is what it is. This fire is inextinguishable; it cannot be snuffed out but burns for all eternity. And it is also a literal, albeit supernatural, fire.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Mark 9**.

Mark 9:38-48

Many Christians, who do not want to imagine a literal fire or the literal pain of burning, try to change the pure meaning of Scripture. They somehow eliminate the fire and say it is simply an illustration of how horrible it will be to be eternally separated from God. And while the prospect of being eternally separated from God is indeed horrific, it does not eliminate the literal suffering of an unquenchable and inextinguishable fire. If it only meant eternal separation from God, God would have said that in His Bible. But instead

we have verse after verse and passage after passage that speaks of fire and torment; in the Book of Revelation it is even called the lake of fire.

We simply cannot rationalize away the reality of hellfire.

In **verse 44**, **verse 46**, and **verse 48** you have the same exact wording. Some of your Bibles may have a note that says something to the effect that **verses 44** and **46** do not appear in all the original manuscripts, or the earlier manuscripts, but that is of no importance. All the manuscripts contain what we know as **verse 48**. So whether some well-meaning scribe added this same phrase two additional times for emphasis or whether it truly belongs all three times, the fact remains.

We have already discussed the aspect of fire that is not quenched, so what does this issue of worms not dying mean?

Matthew uses a direct quote from Isaiah's prophecy when he speaks of this worm and this fire, so turn with me in your Bibles to **Isaiah 66**.

Isaiah 66:24

This phrase concerning the worm has a direct correlation to transgression against the Lord. The last half of this chapter in Isaiah deals primarily with the eternal joy and reward of God's redeemed, so as a contrast Isaiah speaks of this worm never dying in reference to those who transgressed against the Lord. When taken in this contrast and this context, the vivid, if not totally disgusting imagery, is that of the condemned being eternally tortured by their conscience and the reality of the lost opportunity to turn from their sin and turn to God. The unbelievers mind will be tormented by their sin as their eternal, supernatural bodies are tormented by the flame.

Matthew Henry says this: "*The reflections and the reproaches of the sinner's own conscience are the **worm that dieth not** (KJV); which will cleave to the damned soul as worms do to the dead body, and prey upon it, and never leave it.*"

Isaiah and Mark paint a pretty gruesome picture. Hell is not pretty though. Hell is not a place where sinners will gather to party and continue in their sinful activities. With the time we have left this evening, let's look at a parable Jesus told that is only found in the Gospel of Luke. Turn with me in your Bibles to **Luke 16**.

Luke 16:19-31

There are no two lives alike. There are no two journeys the same. There are no two histories equally played out. Even with people in the same family, each individual's journey is absolutely unique. Everybody's history with its experiences is only written once. Every life path is distinct. All of them, however, converge at death. At death everyone's destiny is divided into only two paths; two eternal destinies.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "*Every human being is in the process of becoming a noble being, noble beyond imagination; or else, alas, a vile being beyond redemption. The dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet if at all only in a nightmare. There are no ordinary people. It is*

immortals that we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit. Immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."

These are the only two realities. At the instant you die, you will be fully aware of either the horror of hell or the splendor of heaven. Erwin Lutzer writes, *"And so while relatives and friends are planning your funeral, deciding on a casket, a burial plot, and who the pallbearers should be, you will be more alive than you ever have been. You will either see God on His throne surrounded by angels and redeemed humanity, or you will feel the indescribable weight of guilt and abandonment."*

This is the story of "The Rich Man and Lazarus."

v. 19-21

We have two men who could not have any more different circumstances: One is filthy rich and the other is just plain filthy and totally destitute.

As Jesus relates this story to the Pharisees, which is His immediate audience, the initial thoughts running through their minds would be that the rich man was right with God and the poor man was receiving his just due for living a sinful life. The Pharisees judged a man's spirituality by all the externals. The more possessions you had the more you had been blessed by God. The poor were being shunned by God according to their skewered view of spirituality.

The Pharisees quickly and easily identified themselves with the rich man, and at the same time they also looked down upon Lazarus as being a vile sinner.

v. 22

As is appointed unto man, they both died. Unless the rapture happens before your appointed time, you will die; that is assuming you are a genuine believer. If you are an unbeliever, your death will come within seven years of the rapture. It is inescapable and inevitable. Physical death is a fact of life and each one of you will eventually face it if the Lord tarries.

For the Pharisees, here is the first horrifying twist in the story: Lazarus is carried by the angels into heaven. Not only that, it says he is carried to Abraham's bosom, meaning he is at the very side of Abraham. Abraham is the hero of the Pharisees. Abraham is who they have pinned their hopes on. Remember how John the Baptist derided the Pharisees for the way they revered Abraham and based their ticket to heaven on being one of his descendants? They still are in this story.

This was an outrage. How could Lazarus be in heaven? All the evidence of his life on earth pointed to his being a wretched sinner. God would never allow one of His children to live in such a manner.

And while Lazarus is receiving an angelic escort to heaven, the rich man is having a fancy funeral; the implication of him being buried. Only the rich received a funeral and burial in those days.

v. 23-26

There are two critical questions that come out of this story: 1) What will be the sinner's experience in hell, and 2) what takes sinners to hell, or why do they go there?

The answer to the first question: what will be the sinner's experience in hell? – is torment, agony, separation, no relief, no hope, and no end.

The prophet Daniel calls hell a place of shame and everlasting contempt. Jesus calls hell an eternal fire, outer darkness, a place of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Notice what the rich man does not say. He never complains about the injustice of his circumstances. He doesn't request to be released. He is experiencing the agony and reality of hell but knows it is exactly what he deserves. There are no atheists in hell. There are no unbelievers in hell. No one in hell can muster any valid reason for why they deserve better.

The rich man does not request a pardon, he only desires a brief and momentary second of relief. He simply wants a drop of water to cool his tongue for a brief moment. At the point of death, the rich man is immediately aware and fully conscious of his experience and why he is where he is. The first thing he realizes is his separation from God, because the Scripture says, "In Hades he lifted up his eyes." He immediately acknowledges what he failed to acknowledge his entire life; that Jesus is Lord.

The second thing he realizes is his torment. The Greek word used here literally means, torture, torment, or great pain. The rich man is in excruciating pain and agony, and again notice, he says, "**in this flame.**" The fires of hell are not figurative. Torment, agony, separation, no relief, no hope, and no end are the sinner's experience in hell.

This brings us to the second critical question; what takes a sinner to hell? Why does the rich man end up in hell?

v. 27-31

Most would say it was his sin that sent him to hell, and that answer is partially true, because hell will be filled with sinners. But heaven will also be filled with sinners, so sin is only half the answer. The real answer is simply how he responded to Scripture.

The same answer applies to each of you today. How have you responded to Scripture? Heaven is reserved for those who believe the Word of God. Heaven is reserved for those who believe the Gospel message. Heaven is reserved for those who believe that God saves penitent sinners; for those who confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead. The divine gift of saving grace that spares the guilty from eternal punishment and brings them eternal joy always comes through faith in the Word of God. This is a faith in the truth of Scripture, not some mystical spirituality or experience, or some vague spiritual feeling. Heaven is reserved for those who believe what God has clearly revealed in scripture, who believe what God has said, who respond to what God has said, who read it and understand it and embrace it.

It's all about what you do with Scripture.

In **verses 27-28**, the rich man has a complaint disguised as a request. His request is for divine intervention so his five brothers do not end up in hell with him. In that request he is really saying, the only reason I am here is because of insufficient data – I didn't have enough information to avoid this place. I did not receive sufficient warning. I needed more than I received.

Abraham's response is what we have already been talking about – they have the Bible, nothing more is needed. Everything needed for salvation is contained within the pages of Scripture; Old or New Testament.

The rich man argues, but if you send someone who has risen from the dead they will believe.

We know that's not true. Jesus rose from the dead, yet billions do not believe. Hell is real. Hell is torment, agony, separation, no relief, no hope, and no end. And hell is for Satan, his demons, and every human being who ignores or does not respond to God's Word.

It's that simple.

God is just but God is also merciful and forgiving. You do not have to end up in hell when you die. You can choose to believe what the Bible says and you can choose to go to heaven when you die. A place where there is absolutely no torment, no agony, no flames, and no separation; a place of eternal joy and happiness; a place of laughter instead of a place of weeping and wailing.

The choice is yours.

Let's pray.