

How Could a Loving God Send People to Hell - Luke 16:19-31
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

We come to the end of our series dealing with the questions from Rebecca McLaughlin's book *Confronting Christianity* this week. We hope you have enjoyed this series, and more important, that it has equipped you to have assurance of the truthfulness of Christianity and be bold in sharing your faith. We end our series with what may be the most difficult question, that of the Christian belief in hell. This question is not just a problem for skeptics, it is probably the most difficult doctrine for all of us. Believing that people who do not believe in Jesus will spend eternity in a place of conscious torment and punishment stretches the imagination. And it seems to be cruel which means that God has something evil in His character. Yet, the Scriptures do not lack clarity about God's justice that reaches into eternity. So as believers, we need to think deeply and clearly about this belief. And while it is a difficult doctrine, it actually tells us something deep and beautiful about God and His value of our humanity.

So, what exactly is hell. I remember as a kid watching the Bugs Bunny cartoons, and one in particular where Sylvester falls off a building while chasing Tweety. His spirit leaves his body and heads to two elevators, one going up and one going down, but the up elevator is blocked with a rope, so without thinking he takes the red elevator down. It then winds down and around in a red room filled with flames until he comes to the bottom. There Sylvester finds the devil, who is actually a huge bulldog who is all too ready to assign the wicked cat to a pit filled with flames and dogs barking ready to jump on the cat. Of course, we laughed a bit, especially as Sylvester spent all 9 lives in the period of about four minutes. But the imagery of fire, torment, suffering in a real place does arise from Biblical texts. Is this what hell is all about? Maybe, but this is not the full picture.

To understand hell, we must begin by realizing that when the Bible pictures both heaven and hell, it is trying to tell people who are confined to the temporal about realities for which they have no experience or capacity to understand. Heaven then becomes a place with pearly gates and streets of gold, and hell is a place with fire and darkness. The images are in the Scripture, and they may be presenting authentic realities, but this is not the essence of either place. So we have to ask, what makes heaven heaven, and what makes hell hell. The answer is actually simple and more glorious or terrifying than glistening gates made by a ginormous clam. Our all consuming joy and glory is God Himself. Every good gift we have on earth flows from His kindness and grace. Even things like a sunrise, holding a baby, enjoying a steak, and listening to great music are small samples of gifts that flow from the glory and character of our Creator and Redeemer. They are foretastes of something greater, and these things should lead us to praise and worship. Of course, as humans, our sinful response is to get fixated on the thing and forsake the Creator. But in the end, what makes heaven glorious is that we are finally fully in the presence of our God, the Triune God who saves and sustains us. We will find that His presence fills all of the hopes and dreams we have ever had, He will be all satisfying and beautiful. Hell, on the other hand, is the absence of God's manifest presence, the removal of all of His gifts and grace to those who have rejected Him and the redemption He provided in Christ. This is what makes hell awful. Think about every good experience and thing in your life, and then realize the source of this good. Now imagine existence where everything good is removed.

So why would God do this? The Bible doctrine of hell is an expression of God's justice, His perfect and divine declaration that God hates evil and all the wickedness and suffering that exists because of human sin and rebellion. And this is where we have to think deeply. We don't want to believe in the idea of hell, but if we are going to reject hell we also have to throw out God's justice. We live in a culture that wants to reject the idea that God judges, replacing the True God with a cheap replacement that is nothing more than Barney who just loves and accepts everyone wants to give them a hug. We actually believe that warm hugs and acceptance will change all human hearts, but the reality is that we live in a

world full of depraved people who do awful things and care little about how their violence and wickedness impact others. Hell is an extension of God's justice, and the guarantee that evil will not win, and wicked people such as terrorists and genocidal maniacs will not have the final say in human history. If there is no hell, no justice, then Hitler dies in the arms of his mistress with no eternal judgment. And in the end, this world is far worse than the world with a God who will make all wrongs right. Our problem, though, is that when we are honest, we too deserve this justice. Hell is not for "bad people". Hell is the destination for all people, because each and every one of us deserves God's justice. Our question this morning is actually the wrong one in our real world. The actual question should be, "How can a good and just God allow anyone into His presence?" But God has revealed His love as well, through Jesus, who literally went to hell for us, suffering and forsaken by His Father, absorbing the wrath of God for us. The cross, for us, is the answer to God's justice and the promise is heaven and eternal life. Not for the "good people", but available for anyone who would turn from self and trust in Jesus.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Deuteronomy 19	Deuteronomy 20	Deuteronomy 21	Deuteronomy 22	Deuteronomy 23	Deuteronomy 24	Deuteronomy 25

Reading from this past week: Luke 16:19-31

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Romans 1:1-17

Family Worship

Song - *Hallelujah for the Cross*

<https://youtu.be/710eqhcJq7Y?si=eWCv-ozDWvs-JLU9>

Gospel Project

Unit: The Rejection of Jesus

Story: Jesus Raised Lazerus

Big Picture Question: Why do people reject Jesus?

Answer: People reject Jesus because all people are born with a sin nature and want to please themselves rather than obey God.

Scripture: John 11-12

New City Catechism

Question #34: Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God's Word?
 Answer: Yes, so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God; and so that by our godly behavior others may be won to Christ.

Verse: 1 Peter 2:9-12

Scripture

Luke 16:19-31

- What happens in this story, and what does it tell us about our life beyond this life?
- In verse 26, Abraham tells Lazerus that "between us and you a great chasm has been fixed." What does this mean, and why should it be terrifying for us?
- What happens to our understanding of God and reality if we stop believing in the doctrine of hell?
- How should the belief in hell motivate us as followers of Jesus?

Prayer

Pray that God's justice would motivate us to share Jesus and do all we can to make sure our friends and neighbors miss hell.

*Pray for missionaries who care for refugees and immigrants here in our country and in difficult places around the world.