

Do You Believe in Hell?

Belcroft Bible Church

Pastor Matt White

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Please turn in your copy of God's Word to Mark, Mark chapter 9, verses 42 to 48, Mark chapter 9, verses 42 to 48. It's been a few weeks since I've been here, but that should be no shock to anybody that that's where we turn this morning. We go back to our verse-by-verse exposition of this gospel account. And, just by way of reminder, I want all of us to be clear that John Mark's purpose in writing this book is our passion as we study it. We have been years in this journey through Mark that we might—here you go—see Christ rightly, in order to submit to him and follow him fully. Today, we learn once more at the feet of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But I warn you that what he will teach us this morning deals with one of the most difficult and hated truths in all the Scriptures, the reality and ramifications of hell. You follow along silently, now, as I read our passage aloud. Hear the word of the Lord:

“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. 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 the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”

Amen.

This passage is shocking, sobering, and very scary when seen rightly because it highlights for us the eternal horrors of hell. In our text, Jesus Christ himself clearly and unapologetically confronts us with the doctrine of hell. Hell is one of the most difficult doctrines to hear, but one of the most important doctrines to believe. You cannot understand the gospel rightly without hell. You cannot understand the grace of God, you will not beg for the mercy of God, and you will not truly rejoice in the love of God without a right view of hell. One of the greatest dangers and

deceptions being hawked by the modern church and progressive so-called Christians is the denial of hell. Modern man has always hated the doctrine of hell, and rightfully so, for that is the sure destination of all who will not submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet we now live in an age where people who claim to be teachers and followers of Christ deny what Christ taught, deny the very reason Jesus came to save, deny the very holy character of God when they deny the doctrine of hell.

The Bible is clear that hell is a place where all unrepentant sinners will experience the eternal torment because of the never-ending judgment of holy God. Hell is the place where God's perfect wrath is fully poured out, perpetually, forever, upon all unbelievers. Hell is the place where all unrepentant sinners will live under—pay attention—the holy, violent vengeance of God forever and ever and ever. Our passage points us to this shocking truth. And I ask you this morning: do you believe in hell? Before you quickly answer that question to yourself, I ask you: does your life support or contradict your belief? You see, this passage and the context of it, Jesus Christ makes it very clear that people who believe in hell do not play with sin. People who believe in hell do not solicit others to sin. People who believe in hell do not pamper, they do not coddle, and they do not snuggle up with sin. Does your life prove or contradict your belief in hell?

Now, it's been three weeks since we have been in this passage, so a quick review will help set the context for us this morning. Remember where we are, here in Mark, as Jesus is only six months, now, from the cross. Our Lord's time is very short and, therefore, his teaching time with his disciples is getting pretty intense. Our passage this morning is actually in the middle of a private discipleship series with the twelve as Jesus himself teaches some of the most essential lessons for believers to live by. Mark 9:35 to 50, which is the larger context of our passage this morning, is really a teaching section where Jesus preaches a sermon series of sorts—we'll call it a sermon series titled "Critical Lessons for Every True Christian." So far, we have seen Jesus preach on how true greatness results from humble Christ-like service. We have also seen how Jesus taught that his kingdom mission and his kingdom message were far greater than any one minister.

Then, about three weeks ago, we saw Jesus instruct these men on the severity of sin and how sin is the most dangerous reality they must guard against. Last time, I exegeted this passage for us as we walked through each verse. I explained how this passage breaks down, really, in two sections based upon two serious warnings.

Verse 42 is a severe warning against soliciting other believers to sin. Then, starting in verse 43, Jesus moves from the public issue of soliciting others to, now, the private issue of ensnaring yourself in sin. Verses 43 to 48 give a shocking and severe warning against tolerating personal sin in your life. Why these severe warnings from Christ? Jesus is clear that hellfire awaits those who tolerate sin by living an unrepentant life. The radical imagery of cutting, gouging, and amputating are vivid metaphorical pictures of true repentance. And that is what Jesus is teaching here. You do not play with sin. You forsake it fully. Jesus commands that sin be taken seriously by dealing with it constantly, aggressively, thoroughly, and soberly in true, humble repentance. Why? Why? Because hell is no joke.

Now, I told you three weeks ago that, when I returned, we would revisit all of this and how it relates to what Christ says here regarding hell, and that is our task before us this morning. And since we have a clear understanding of what is going on in the text, now, I want us to consider what Jesus teaches us here about hell. Therefore, with the time that remains this morning—and I knew our time would be short because of communion, and we want to commission our precious Lithuanian couple and want to do that at the end of the service, so I need to leave a little bit of time—so I'm only going to give you three. We will return to this passage next week and probably the week after. I set out in my study this week with five points—not going to happen, not going to happen. You pray for me that we'll get through three in the allotted time. So, this morning, we're going to learn three undeniable facts about hell clearly declared by Christ. Think of this as further application from our previous exposition of this text as we dive deeper into what Christ teaches us, most specifically, teaches his disciples and us as well, about hell.

Here are three words to help guide your notes through our text this morning. Number one: real, real, real. Number two: avoided, avoided. Number three: horrible, horrible. Jesus teaches us from this passage that hell is real; hell is to be avoided at all costs; and hell is horrible. There's more here but, because of the nature of our time this morning and the topic, we will be covering this over the next few weeks as we grow in a right theology of hell.

The first fact that Jesus declares for us is that hell is a real place. In our passage, hell is mentioned three times by Christ as a real place where real people go. Notice verse 43, and I quote, *“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 unquenchable fire.”* Verse

45 says, *“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.”* Verses 47 to 48 say, *“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.”* Do not miss this: it is the sobering reality of hell that drives the shocking and radical call to amputate and exterminate sin in your life. It is the fact that hell is real that demands that sin be taken seriously. If hell is not real, then what Jesus says here makes absolutely no sense. Notice, it is a real place where real people go and a real place—pay attention. We’ll bring this up next week—where real people are thrown.

Jesus believed in a real hell and his life proved it. Jesus taught more about hell than any other person in the Bible. Remember that next time you struggle with the doctrine of hell and believing it. Your struggle is with Jesus. He taught about hell more than anyone. Jesus taught about hell more than he taught about—are you ready? —heaven. Wouldn't know that from the preaching and teaching in today's church, would you? Jesus taught about hell and final judgment more than he did in just about every other topic he talked about. Hell was a common theme in the preaching of Christ. Read the Scriptures, read the sermons of Christ, and guess what you will almost always see come up: hell. Shows you how far away the preaching of today has gotten from the preaching of Christ. Sad reality, and why our churches are a mess. Jesus believed in a real place called hell.

Listen, Jesus said hell was a place of everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46). Jesus said hell was a place of eternal fire (Matthew 18:8). Jesus said hell was a place of unquenchable fire—we just saw it in Mark 9:45. Jesus said hell is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12). Jesus said hell is a place of outer darkness (Matthew 22:13). Jesus said hell is a place of horrific torment (Luke 16:23). Jesus said hell is a place where maggots never die (Mark 9:46). Jesus said hell is a place, or better yet, a fiery furnace, he called it, where all unbelievers will be—here's our word again—*thrown* (Matthew 13:42 and verse 50). All of those descriptions, declared by Christ, demand that hell be a real place. Jesus believed in a real hell that was really bad, and that is why he spoke about it so often. This text clearly confronts us with this truth. Jesus believed that hell was real. To deny the existence of hell is to be in total disagreement with Christ. Either you're wrong or Jesus is wrong, as you both can't be right. Jesus believed in a real place called hell.

Not only did Jesus teach that hell is real, but this text is clear—number two—that hell is to be avoided at all costs. Hell is not simply a real place in the teaching of Christ; Christ brings this out severely, that hell is to be avoided at all costs. This is sobering when seen rightly. Jesus says, here, that hell is so real and so terrifying that you do whatever you must do to avoid going to hell. That's what he's teaching in this passage. Look at the text: verse 43, verse 45, verse 47 are shockingly clear when Jesus said, "*It is better.*" Do you see it? Three times in these three verses: "*It is better.*" What is better? Jesus says, it is better to live life maimed on earth than to have your whole life cast into hell. As one preacher puts it, "Better to have a maimed body on earth than a whole body in hell." Jesus says that which is most valuable on earth, your eyes, your hands, your feet, are worth losing if it keeps you out of hell.

Here, Jesus speaks, of course, in metaphoric hyperbole to powerfully prove a point. Obviously, Jesus, as I've already taught you, is not speaking about literally cutting off the hand. For, as I mentioned to you many times, teaching you, the *hand* here is just representative of the heart. It is, as Jesus has already taught in Mark 7, it is the heart from which all sin flows. But Jesus is using severe language to highlight the severity of sin and the radical repentance demanded in dealing with it. Jesus says, tolerating personal sin is so great for your soul, it is better to lose that which is of incomparable value and necessity in life so that you do not lose that which is of eternal worth, your soul. Better to enter heaven lame than to be thrown into hell healthy, with two good feet. Better to go to heaven with one eye than to go to hell with two eyes.

Now, I remind you, Jesus is not speaking to unbelievers who are trying to earn their way to heaven through some masochistic practice or monastic lifestyle. No, remember the context. Jesus is here speaking to the twelve. He is speaking to his disciples about how true discipleship calls for the ongoing, radical rejection of indwelling sin. Jesus is so clear that you never play with sin, but you aggressively attack sin because it always aggressively attacks you. As one writer puts it, Jesus is soberly clear that we must seek to put out the fires of sin in our hearts or we will ultimately find ourselves eternally exposed to the flames of hell. Jesus is clear: sin is so severe for it seeks to attack your soul; it seeks to eternally destroy; it seeks to shackle you eternally in the dungeon of hellfire. This is the war that Paul speaks of in Galatians 5:17, where the flesh wars against the spirit, which Paul himself, in his

autobiographical section, spoke about the war in his own heart, in Romans 7. And where Peter declares so clearly in 1 Peter 2:11.

This warning is serious. For to not fight against sin and simply give in, so that you live—pay attention, I beg of you. Do not miss this—to not fight against sin and so to live an unrepentant life so that the pattern, a characteristic of your life, is ongoing sin is to live the way of an unbeliever, is to demonstrate the heart of unbelief, is to fall in line with the character of those who will go to hell. And I don't care how many prayers you have prayed. I don't care if you wrote your name in your Bible at 12 years old and what your mom and dad have told you. None of that matters. If you live in an ongoing unrepentant lifestyle of sin, you have no right whatsoever to claim to be a believer in Jesus Christ. Hellfire awaits you. That's what Jesus is saying. That's why this is so serious. He wants these men to know they're going out to be his ambassadors. He wants them to get it right as they teach others and as they deal with the sin in their own heart.

Remember the context I've taught you. What happened right before this? “Hey, Jesus, we tried to stop that guy. That guy over there that was casting out demons, right? He's not part of our group.” Soliciting him to sin. He's been called by God to do that. Trying to stop him. Why? “Because he's not part of our group.” Jesus is like, “Don't do that. And, even more, don't let sin fester in your own heart.” Scary. Serious. Living an unrepentant life is [a] clear characteristic of an unbeliever (1 John 3:4) and the fruits of those who have been born of the devil, not born of God (1 John 3:8). Doing battle with the flesh is the call and commitment of every true follower of Christ. This is what it means to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Christ. It is a war that the faithful—please do not miss this—the war with sin, the war with our flesh, is a war that the faithful followers of Christ will fight all the way to heaven. Jesus is clear: hell is to be avoided at all costs. And Jesus is clear that hell can only be avoided by true repentance and faith in Christ alone.

Look across the page, if you're there in Mark 9, to Mark 8:34 to 36, and you'll remember when we worked through that passage. And I quote it now, “*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anybody would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?’*” How? In hell. That's what he's talking about. This is the only way you can avoid hell, is by

seeing your rebellion against holy God and turning away from it. That is what the Bible calls repentance and trusting in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and him alone, turning away from yourself, turning away from all your so-called good deeds; turning away from your own dreams, desires, everything. You deny yourself. You died to yourself. You abandon yourself and you run to Christ and Christ alone. You cling to him with all your might. You beg him for mercy. You cast yourself on the goodness and the grace of God. Acts 4:12 says it so clearly: *“there is only one name under heaven given among men by which you must be saved.”* And it is the name *Jesus Christ*. Jesus declared in John 14:6 that all roads, all roads lead to hell but one. And that road is through him. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. And if anyone wants to come to the Father, if anyone wants to go to heaven, if anyone wants to avoid sin, they must come through me.” That’s what he says. This is how you avoid hell at all costs. This is the only road.

Listen to me, dear loved ones. There are no exit signs in hell. There are no back doors out of hell. It is eternal, it is everlasting, and it is fixed. Do not fall prey to some sort of Roman Catholic, apostate, false doctrine of purgatory. You will never get out of hell. Once you're sealed there, you will be under the wrath of God forever. That's why Jesus is speaking so severely. He understands this. He believes in it. Therefore, the gospel is your only hope. Paul declared, in Romans 10:9 and 10, that *“if [we] confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, and [we] believe in our heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Here you go, the question nobody really ever talks about: saved from what? Hell! Not—listen, not saved from a mediocre life. You want your best life now? Repent of yourself and turn to Christ. Repent of your sin and run to Christ. Or you can have your best life now and your worst life later, because that's what you'll do if you follow the teaching of Joel Osteen and all the prosperity gospel preachers. They will send you to hell on a one-way ticket following that nonsense.

We’re saved from the hellfire of God's holy judgment against sinners. That is exactly Paul's point in Romans 5:9. We are saved from the wrath of God, meaning God's righteous judgment against our wicked rebellion against him. It is God's wrath and hell that we need to be saved from. It's the paradox of the gospel. God saves us from himself. John 3:36, what? All who do not believe have the what? The wrath of God abiding on them. Romans 2:4, all who do not believe are storing up God's wrath, like a dam that's blocked up, in a flood that just keep piling logs and water. And it keeps rising with greater pressure, greater intensity, to where it one day just

bursts through and creates what? Havoc and destruction. That's the wrath of God that is being stored up upon all unbelievers, waiting to burst forth one day. And it will burst forth in hell forever and ever. That's what we need to be saved from. We need to be saved from God by God. That's the glory of the gospel.

Think Jesus didn't believe in a real hell? Why did he come to earth? He came to earth to seek and save the lost from hell (Luke 19:10). Dear friend, Jesus came to earth that you might be saved from hell. Listen, Jesus says it so clearly in Matthew 20, verse 24, that he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for sinners. What does that mean? It means Jesus came, he lived the perfect life, he died an atoning death, and was raised from the dead that you might avoid the eternal wrath of God in hell. That's why he came. That was the mission of the Father. And that is why Acts 17, verses 30 to 31 says, and I quote, *"The times of ignorance God has overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man in whom he has appointed, and this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."* Jesus is the judge. This passage makes that clear. And, in our passage in Mark 9, it is only through faith and repentance in his life that we might avoid the flames of hell. Do not go to hell. Hear me: do not go to hell. Turn today, turn back to the Lord. Run to him with all that you have, and you will find in him full forgiveness, grace, and mercy. Like the prodigal son, who kept trying to fix his own life—stop it. You can't fix it. Run to him and you will find him loving; you will find him forgiving; you will find him gracious; you will find him sufficient; you will find him complete. You need nothing else. You just need him.

I've been soaking in these Scriptures for weeks. I was telling Amy this week—she kept asking me what was wrong. She said, "You look down." I said, "I am down." There are a number of reasons for that. She said, "Why?" I said, "Because I've been reading about hell all week. I feel like I'm going to burst into tears at just, just in a moment. As a matter of fact, Sidney graduated yesterday. I feel like I wept through the whole thing. I couldn't tell if it was because she was graduating or because I'm so sensitive to this reality. Listen, this is hard stuff, people. I get it. But this is so important because we don't think about it. And, sadly, I know this to be true: some of you don't believe it. And that's why your life is what it is. Oh, you say it, obviously. "I believe it, Pastor." But your life proves you don't because if you truly believed this, you would not live in ongoing unrepentant sin. You would be rightfully afraid. It's called the fear of the Lord and it is a reverential respect for the holiness and the

eternal wrath of God that we should all have. And, then, that breeds the right rejoicing in the love of God and the grace of God. But you cannot understand that. It's why the modern gospel of the church, that's all *love*, is devoid of any saving power because you cannot understand God's love until you understand his wrath. Jesus is clear that hell is real. Hell is to be avoided at all costs.

And now, thirdly, hell is horrible. I have heard many people say, throughout my lifetime, that they will party in hell with all their friends. I've heard people say that they would gladly go to hell rather than give up their selfish desires and dreams. Sadly, they know not of what they speak because Jesus is very clear: hell is a horrific place of never-ending torment. There will be no party in hell. There will only be never-ending punishment. Look at verse 43, where Jesus describes this literal place of hell as being a place marked by—look at the words—unquenchable fire. The Greek term used here means a fire that cannot be put out. This is an interesting description when you consider the physics of fire. Fire can only burn when it is being fueled by something or someone else. Take away the fuel and the fire always eventually stops. Jesus describes the fires of hell, in Matthew 18:8, as eternal. The Greek term there for *eternal* means unending in duration of time, a fire that never goes out, a fire that never stops.

Back in Mark 9:48, we see another description that highlights the horror of hell, when Jesus says it is a place where the worm never dies and the fire is not quenched. Here, Jesus paints a gruesome picture of never dying worms that live in a fire that is never extinguished. Let that set in. Jesus describes hell, in Matthew 8:12, as a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, meaning deep wailing and moaning, accompanied by the grinding of teeth because of the anguish. All of this paints a picture of deep emotional anguish, as well as unspeakable physical pain. That is exactly what the rich man who was in hell, in the story told by Christ in Luke 16:24, says, and I quote, *“I am in deep anguish in this flame.”* I know this is hard to hear, but we must see it rightly for so many reasons.

There are many today that want to deny the eternal nature of the torment in hell. I will speak more about that next week and the weeks to come, but I want you to listen to the clarity of Revelation 14:9 to 11. Just let the clarity and the simplicity of the Word of God, when you're dealing with “Yeah, but God would never do that!”—you don't understand the character of God. I remind you of what he did in the flood. I remind you of what he did in Sodom and Gomorrah. The illustrations just

keep going. God is far more holy than we give him credit [for]. Sin is far more offensive to God than we understand. We will be learning a lot about the character of God, but just listen to the truth of Revelation 14:9 to 11, and I quote, *“And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels.”* Watch this: *“in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”* I don't think a whole lot of explanation is needed in that passage as it pertains to the eternity of this torment. Very scary, but very clear. Forever and ever and they have no rest, day and night. You're smart enough to know what that means. You get it.

Now, back to Mark 9:47 to 48. Let me explain to you, now, what Jesus is doing here. He is actually quoting, here in verse 48, he is quoting from the prophet Isaiah. Verse 48 is a direct quote taken from Isaiah 66, verse 24. That is the last verse of Isaiah's prophecy. There, the prophet speaks of a shocking reality in the new heavens and the new earth. Some of you will have never seen this passage before. So I tell you, put on your seatbelt; hold on. The prophet speaks of this shocking reality in the new heavens and the new earth. Just as the redeemed will worship the Lord forever, so all the unbelievers will be tormented forever and ever, and they will be a disgraceful contempt upon all who look at them. I can't fully understand that, but that's what the text says. And when we get to heaven and we see God in all his perfect glory, fully understanding, fully seeing him as he is in his holiness, we will then understand. And we will understand how his judgment brings him glory. But, this side of heaven, we struggle with that. I don't think we can understand it, but we take the Word for what it is and we grow in our understanding of these things.

This is a shocking verse. So shocking that, [when] the synagogues would read this, the readers of the Scriptures, when Isaiah was read often in the synagogues, they would reorder the verses in their reading so that verse 23 was actually read last, to try to take some of the shock out. But God's Word is clear: all have rebelled against God and will be thrown into the place where their worm does not die, even though they are being covered in fire. That is what Jesus is quoting here in Mark 9:48. By now, you should be there because I want you to see it; last chapter, Isaiah 66. I'll start reading in verse 22 for context. *“For as the new heavens and the new earth*

that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain.” He’s talking to Israel. *“From new moon to new moon, from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord.”* He’s talking about the end times, how everybody will be worshipping the Lord, Israel and Gentiles together, all worshipping, all coming. Verse 24: *“And they,”* all those who come to worship the Lord, *“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.”* Not a thought we often think about when [we think about] the new heavens and new earth, is it? Sobering. Hell is no joke.

Now, let me explain the context here, give you some historical understanding that will help you understand even more the horror of what Jesus is talking about. The Greek term used, here in Mark 9, for *hell* is the word *Gehenna*. When used, this word always means *hell*. There's a number of words—we'll look at them in the weeks to come—but this one, every single time it's used, it speaks of hell, hellfire, hell torment, hell judgment. It is used twelve times, and Jesus uses all of them except one, and that is used in James 3, I think verse 9. The Greek word *Gehenna* was used in reference to a garbage dump located on the south side of Jerusalem where trash, dead animals, rotting flesh, feces, and all manner of refuse was thrown and burned. This place of the garbage dump was also the same place as the *“Valley of Hinnom.”* You can read about that in Joshua 15:8. Also called the *“Valley of the Son of Hinnom”* in Jeremiah 19:2. Also called the *“burning place”* in Isaiah 30:33. Also called—here you go—the *“Valley of Slaughter”* in Jeremiah 19:6. Here's a very interesting description: also called by the name *Topheth* in 2 Kings 23:10. You can see almost all of those names. So, if you want to really check and know whether I'm saying the truth, like Rebecca does—she looks up all these cross-references—you can go to Jeremiah 7, verses 30 to 33 and you'll see all of them listed, almost all of them listed there. There's a shortcut for you.

Now, the Valley of Hinnom was where King Ahaz and Manasseh, two wicked kings—all the kings of Israel were wicked. These guys were the worst—they set up idols in the worship of and to false gods, including altars where they would sacrifice their children to false gods. You can read about this in 2 Chronicles 28:3; 2 Chronicles 33:6; 2 Kings 16:3; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Kings 23:10; and, there again, back in Jeremiah 7:30 to 33 and Jeremiah 19:6. Now, here's what's interesting: the Hebrew word *Topheth*, used multiple times for the Valley of Hinnom in the verses just

referenced, literally means *drum*. And many theologians believe this is called the "Valley of the Drum." Why? Many theologians believe because they would beat the drums loudly to drown out the screams and the cries of their children when they threw them in the fires alive as a sacrifice to false gods. Read the passages. That's what's going on here. When Jesus says, "You will go to Gehenna," this is what he's referencing. This is what the Jews immediately would have connected, the Valley of Hinnom. And you're like, "How?" Because this is where these wicked men, wicked Israel, would sacrifice their children in the fires, drums drowning out the screams.

Now, listen, dear loved ones, before I explain this further. How arrogant, how arrogant of us to think that we don't deserve hell. You're like, "Yeah. But, Pastor, come on, we're not Israel." Amen. We're not. We're the Church. Got to hold that distinction clearly. Very important. We're worse, we're worse. "Come on, Pastor. That's really hard." That's the truth. We slaughter babies every day by the thousands and we laugh about it. We make money off of it. We have a whole political party in our government that has killing babies as a major party platform. Horrific, horrible. And we think we don't deserve hell? We have a president and a vice president that championed the slaughter of children, all while smiling. God help us. God's wrath is being stored up for this nation and our leaders. They better get ready; they better repent. And I pray you pray for our president, vice president, and all the other leaders, wherever they are, that support this nonsense and any other godless ideology or plan, because they are storing up wrath. I don't know about you, I don't want anybody to go to hell. I don't care who they are. I want all to be saved. We better pray for our president and our vice president and our neighbors and our children and each other, because the wrath of God is coming and we rightfully deserve it.

Now, Valley of Hinnom, Topheth, Valley of the Drum, idols set up where they would worship these gods, cast their children into fire. But then comes good King Josiah. King Josiah comes and he destroys all the idols. He destroys all the sacrificial places. He totally defiles the Valley of Hinnom. He destroys the altars; he crushes them; he burns them. He totally makes it so that no one can ever offer a sacrifice to a god or burn their children ever again in the Valley of Hinnom. He turned it into a garbage dump so that no child, no sacrifice, could ever be offered again (2 Kings 23:10). It is the valley of burning trash that never stops burning. And that is what Jesus illustrates when he points to Gehenna. And he says, "This will be your destination."

What happens in a garbage dump? What lives in a garbage dump? Flies. What do flies do in a garbage dump? They plant eggs. What do fly eggs birth in a garbage dump? Maggots. There's the burning of the trash in this garbage dump and there's the maggots and there's the flies and there's the stench and there's the horror. You starting to get the picture? This is hell. This is what Jesus is describing. And this is what the Jews would have seen, a garbage dump where the fire never stops and yet the worm never dies. It's a scary picture. And that's the right picture of what Jesus describes.

Well, we've got more to learn from Jesus as it pertains to hell, but we've seen, for real, Jesus believes hell is real. We've seen that Jesus says hell must be avoided at all costs. And we have seen the gruesome reality of the backstop of hell, the horror of what it is. So how do we respond? Well, if you're here today and you're not a believer, repent, trust the Lord today, turn to him that you may not experience the eternal fires of hell. You rightfully deserve it, but God in his mercy has given you grace. You are here this morning, hearing the gospel. How many times have I preached the gospel this morning? How many times has it gone out? We've celebrated the gospel in communion; we sang the gospel in our songs; Walt prayed the gospel multiple times. I'm preaching it. That is God's grace reaching out to you saying, "Come, come to me and be forgiven." Oh, dear sinner, do not turn away today. Do not think for a moment, in your own arrogance and independence, that God will be kind enough to give you another breath. You could die walking down the sidewalk, you could die getting in your car, and you will stand before God and it'll be too late. Response after a sermon like this: repent and return to the Lord and find full forgiveness.

For those of us who have believed, what's our response? This will be a hard one, I know, because this is a hard sermon. But, dear loved ones, you know what the response is? Rejoice! Rejoice that you have been forgiven! Rejoice that hell is not your destination! Rejoice that you will never experience never-ending fire where worms never die, but you will experience never-ending grace and mercy and joy forever. When we get hell right, we sing like never before. That's why I was singing that first song nonstop, all week, because Christ is my only hope in life and death. Christ is my only hope against hell. Praise the Lord, we rejoice! And, as we rejoice, even as we sing, what? We proclaim to all the hope of heaven found in Christ alone so that others might rejoice the Lord with us, right?

Evangelism. Listen, evangelism is all about what? At the end of the day, it's all about the glory and worship of God. He is worthy of all our praise. If every single person on the planet got saved and we all turned and worshipped him with our lives, as we are created and commanded to do, it still would not be enough. He is worthy of that and so much more. But that's our mission; that's our motive. That's why Gedi and Joanna are about ready to come up on stage in a minute. And we've brought them here for a year or two of training so we could send them to Lithuania. Why? Simple answer: so that we might have more worshipers of God in Lithuania.

You get hell right, you want to proclaim this because there's no greater worship of God than when you realize God saves the undeserving. That exalts God. Nothing to do with us, has everything to do with him. Romans 11:33 to 36, it's all about him. It's all for him. It's all from him. It's all to him. And when that's it, that's pure worship. Response: live, live in light of hell, by dealing radically with indwelling sin. Never tolerate even the smallest sin in your mind. Put it out. As soon as it comes in, put it out, kill it. Never let any seed of sin—that look at that woman or that man? Put it out. That thought of stealing and cooking the books at your job? Put it out. That thought of frustration towards your spouse? Put it out. Fight the fight in the mind before it ever becomes a war in the flesh, in the hands, in the life. Second Corinthians 10:4 to 6, *“Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”* Because if you live a life that doesn't do that, what right do you have to say that you're a believer? Remember, your heart is the most deceptive place on the planet (Jeremiah 17:9). And it will deceive you into thinking you're something you're not. Serious, I know, church, but we seriously need to hear it and grow in it.

Let me pray. Father God, our hearts are heavy and yet, Lord, our hearts are rejoicing all at the same time. We don't want anybody to go to hell and so we ask that you help us, Lord, to be a faithful church to witness rightfully, passionately, consistently, to live lives that don't contradict, but that complement the gospel. We ask, Father, that you would encourage us, that you would enable us, that you would use us as people who have been saved from hell, as people who are ambassadors of heaven, as Jude says, plucking those out of the flames, those tinged with the smell of smoke like we once were. Help us, Lord, I pray, to have compassion for the lost as we see that we all deserve hell, me as much as anyone else. Break us, humble us, grow us, encourage us, because you are the God who rescues repentant believers from hell. Help us, Lord, to proclaim that, to live that, and to rejoice in that all the days of our life, for you are worthy. In Jesus' name. Amen.

