

Weekly Bible Study Series, Vol. 11, No. 15: 23 May 2010

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HELL IS REAL!

Today's Text: Mark 9: 42-50

Extracts:

[Jesus said], **“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched- where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.... And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire”** [Mk 9: 43-44, 47]

Eyjafjallajökull [pronounced AY-YAH-FYAH-LAH-YER-KUHL] is located 125 km east of Reykjavik, the capital city of Iceland.¹ In late March 2010, the Eyjafjallajökull Volcano (E-Volcano, for short) erupted, melting ice and shooting smoke and steam into the air for as high as 5-7 km. Shimmering heat, smoke and steam hung over the volcano and in no time strong winds drove the smoke and ashes all over European skies, blocking visibility. Thousands of flights (to and from Europe) were cancelled all over the world, leaving millions of passengers stranded at busy airports, and airlines recording revenue losses expected to run into billions of US dollars.

Until the recent activity, the disruptive impact of the E-Volcano had become taken for granted. In fact, some people would have doubted its existence since it had remained inactive for almost 200 years. How many airlines would have taken it seriously if they had been warned to prepare for unprecedented flight disruptions on account of the E-Volcano? It is the same attitude that we tend to have today about hell. To those who do not believe that there is God, hell does not arise. Even for many believers, hell is so remote that they cannot conceptualize it or believe that it exists.

In this week's study, Jesus has warned us that hell is real, that it is the permanent abode for those who die in their sins. Let us hear what He has to say on the matter and get wise.

¹ Based on the following sources: Elizabeth Weise, “Eyjafjallajökul volcano briefly shuts down U.K. airspace,” <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/sciencefair/post/2010/05/eyjafjallajokull-volcano-closes-uk-airspace-for-awhile-150-lightening-strikes-at-crater/1> . May 17, 2010; and “Eyjafjallajökull,” From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eyjafjallajokull>

1. Background: Jesus gives us a glimpse of hell

In Luke's record of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made an important point. He asked His listeners, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" [Lk 6: 46]. This point is important to draw to your attention because what we are going to discuss will challenge your comfort zone. Therefore, convince yourself that *whatever* Jesus asks you to do, you should do it, even if it does not make common or logical sense to you.

In continuation of His teachings to His disciples on a variety of topics, Jesus came to the subject of hell, which is mentioned fifty-four times in the Bible!² If Jesus says that hell exists, He must be right because "All things were made through Him, and *without Him nothing was made that was made*" [Jn 1: 3]. The Father has given Him the authority to judge the world [Jn 5: 22], and He holds the keys of Hades (that is, the unseen abode of the dead, comprising heaven and hell) and of death [Rev. 1: 18]. Therefore, whether you believe it or not, whether you accept it or not, THERE IS HELL!

Here is what the Lord has said about the place according to this week's Bible text [Mk 9: 42-50]:

a) *Hell is a horrible place!*

Three times in the short passage, Jesus described hell as a place of "*fire that shall never be quenched*, where *their worm does not die*, and the fire cannot be quenched" [vv. 44, 46, 48]. Examine each of those qualities of hell:

- Unquenchable fire

The fire in hell cannot be put out [v. 43]. The imagery made sense to His listeners who, in the absence of sophisticated waste disposal in those days, were familiar with smouldering fire set on piles of decomposing garbage outside of the city of Jerusalem. In modern times, we can compare hell fire to the panic that could have set in if all the fire services in the whole world could not put out the 9/11 fire in New York in September 2001. Who has ever dared to put out fires in a volcano, such as the E-Volcano that has been spewing out hot steam in Iceland since March 2010? The 9/11 fire was put out and the E-Volcano fire will die out one of these days. But hell fire will burn forever and it is unquenchable. Can you now get the picture?

- Everlasting excruciating suffering

² 'Yes there is a Hell: At least as far as the Bible is concerned,' www.sounddoctrine.com/fifty/htm

Jesus said that in hell, “Their worm does not die” [v. 44]. The worm of any fire is what makes it burn for “where there is no wood, the fire goes out” [Prov. 26: 20]. In a forest fire, it is the dry wood and leaves that fuel the fire (with, of course, the help of the wind). When the worm is burnt up, the fire dies out. But in hell, the worm does not die. That worm is the unending supply of the souls of unrepentant sinners that are cast into hell each moment in time from the past to the present. Since the soul lives forever and hell is never full [Prov. 27: 20], it means that residents in hell will never be burnt into ashes but will live in perpetual pain and sufferings. As a result, the burning stench is unbearable!

The story once told by Jesus of the rich man and Lazarus [Lk 16: 19- 31] makes the point quite vividly. Lazarus died and was carried into Abraham’s bosom (symbolic of the heaven part of Hades). The rich man also died (in sin) and went down to Hades (the hell part of it). We are told he was in torments [v. 23]. He was conscious of his past life on earth because he recognized Abraham when he looked up and saw him. He cried out to Abraham to send Lazarus “that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” [v. 24]. Clearly, the spiritual body, the soul, has the attributes of the physical body [1 Cor. 15: 43-44]. When we die, the physical body transforms into the spiritual which lives forever either in heaven or in hell for “the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” [Eccl. 12: 7]. Therefore, those who go to hell will feel pain as if it was in their physical bodies. Ouch!

b) *Only you can choose whether or not to go to hell!*

Hell is optional in that it is your choice where to spend your eternity, whether in heaven or in hell. Jesus laid out the options as follows:

- Do you lead others to stumble?

Jesus said, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” [Mk 9: 42]. “Little ones” represents all those who are looking up to you for guidance or good examples. They could be your children or wards, subordinates or the flock of your church. When you mislead them by your words or deeds, God will hold you accountable should they stumble. You can be sure that many parents, pastors and bishops have taken front seats in hell on account of this.

- Or do you stumble on your own?

Jesus said that if your two hands [v. 43] or feet [v. 45] or eyes [v. 47] lead you to sin, you should get rid of them because it is better for you to enter heaven deformed than to be cast into hell able-bodied. In other words, self-control is essential because God hates a proud look or hands that shed innocent blood or feet that are swift in running to evil [Prov. 6: 16-19]. Therefore, the choice is yours because *God does not send people to hell; people send themselves.*

In concluding the discourse, Jesus said that “everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt” [Mk 9: 49]. In other words, those who choose to believe in and accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour will face trials and tribulations here on earth as they strive to purify their faith unto salvation. However, those who prefer not to believe will face the fire of God’s judgment. This point is underlined in the dialogue between the rich man and Abraham. He pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers that were still alive to “testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.” Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them” [Lk 16: 27- 29]. Moses and the prophets represent the word of God as recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. Therefore, if you cannot accept the truth of the Scriptures, repent and endure all the trials and tribulations on earth, the other option is hell, which is too painful to contemplate!

2. So how are you preparing for eternity?

Going by the number of people who fill up padded pews in churches every worship day, this question would be irrelevant. However, God looks at the heart, not physical appearances [1 Sam. 16: 7]. So, let me ask again: how are you preparing for eternity? Check if you belong to one of the following categories of people:

a) *Are you playing the fool?*

The fool is the person who believes in his/her heart that there is no God [Ps. 14: 1]. Atheists are not likely to also believe in the hereafter, not to talk of hell. Therefore, their conduct here on earth is likely to be governed by their definition of good or bad which has no relevance to salvation because “it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil” [Prov. 13: 19].

The word of God clearly states, “Surely, there is a hereafter” [Prov. 23: 18]. Whether fools admit it or not, they know that God’s attributes are visible in all His creations. Instead of using their creative talents to glorify God, fools become futile in their thoughts “and their foolish hearts [are] darkened. Professing to be wise, they [become] fools.”

Consequently, God gives them up to their fantasies and after death, they will face God's righteous judgment [**Rom. 1: 18-32**]. Those who play the fool till death will certainly wind up in hell.

b) *Or playing the ignorant?*

Most of us may believe in the existence of hell but are ignorant of what brings people there. The word of God makes it quite clear that those who believe in Christ Jesus should not perish but have everlasting life; but those who do not believe are condemned already [**Jn 3: 16-18**]. Even many Christians that have received water baptism know quite little of or about Jesus! They have no personal relationship with Him. They see Him as one of the leading religious leaders in human history. At the other extreme, there are Christians who claim that they can continue to sin more and more because Jesus has already paid for such sins (past, present and future!). Therefore, the question of their going to hell when they die does not arise.

Some Christians believe that there is a place called purgatory where their outstanding (venial) sins can be removed before they move into the glory of heaven. However, the word of God is quite clear that "It is appointed for men to die *once, but after this the judgment*" [**Heb. 9: 27**]. Jesus said on the cross to the repentant thief, "*Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise*" [**Lk 23: 43**]. On the other hand, as the word of God also reiterates, unrepentant sinners, such as "the cowardly, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part *in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone*" [**Rev. 21: 8**]. You are either in heaven or hell when you die. Purgatory is unscriptural. So, you had better repent and get right with Jesus before you die so as to avoid going to hell!

c) *Or playing the procrastination game!*

Many of us think we have all the time in the world because we are still young or too healthy to die. Therefore, questions of life after this life can wait until much later. Meanwhile, we can sow our wild oats, do all the dirty deals in business or church and repent later when we are old and about to die. The truth is that we do not die by age or rank because everything has its season [**Eccl. 3: 1-8**].

Take the example of the rich fool who was luxuriating in the abundance of his wealth. On the day he decided to pull down his barns to expand his estate, store up more wealth "for many years" and take it easy, eating, and drinking and making merry, God said to him, "Fool! *This night, your soul will be required of you*" [**Lk 12: 16-21**]. He became a sure candidate for hell because he had not had the time to

repent. Can you afford that? The day Jesus calls you is not the time to make excuses [Lk 9: 59-62].

d) *Or playing ready?*

Finally, Jesus told His listeners, “Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavour, how will you season it? *Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another*” [Mk 9: 50]. The peace of God comes to those who are “anxious for nothing but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving,” they make their requests known to God. With the peace of God, they are able to guard their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus [Phil. 4: 6-7]. Such are the believers who are ready to face death *at any time* since they know that sudden death means sudden glory.

Paul underlined this point in his second epistle to the Corinthian church. He recognized that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ where each of us will receive due judgment for what we have done here on earth, whether good or bad. Therefore, he had made it his aim “whether present or absent (from the body) *to be well pleasing to Him*” [2 Cor. 5: 1-10]. So, when you play ready, you behave as if you only have today, *this moment*, to live. It must not be wasted.

3. Conclusion: You only live once!

There is no reincarnation. There is no purgatory. You only live once and it can end today, this moment. Therefore, make sure that you are reconciled with Christ *every moment that you are still on this side of eternity*. That way, it is immaterial when or how death comes. You are sure that hell is not for you.

That unquenchable fire; such perpetual burning stench; that unending torment. *Tic-tac-tic-tac* goes the clock *forever*. Hell is real!