

***Why Hell Matters***  
***Carmel Baptist Church***  
April 22, 2012

**Intro / Tension:**

- Good morning. Last week our pastor started a series on Heaven.
  - And there is always a lot of interest when talking about the afterlife because in general, people are curious about what awaits us when we “cross-over” to the other side.
- For instance, last week in my Bible Study Community, I asked what questions the class had on Heaven and the afterlife, and they spent the next half hour firing off a huge list of questions...
  - In fact, as we were talking, some of the class members were almost frustrated wondering why we don't talk about this subject more in church.
    - Speaking of which - Does anyone else find it weird that we are going to spend eternity somewhere and yet we spend very little time looking at what the Bible says about where we are going?
- In this series, we are going to spend most of our time talking about what the Bible says about Heaven, but the scripture is clear that there are two eternal destinies where people can go, and we want to paint a full picture of what the Bible says about the afterlife.
  - So, last week Dr. Poplin gave you Heaven...
    - And this week, I am going to ***give you Hell...***
- In all seriousness, this is a sermon that I preach with much fear and trembling.
  - Because its offensive and it cuts to the core of many of you.

**Avoiding Hell:**

- And because it is such an offensive and uncomfortable topic, what we see happen most commonly in Christian churches as well as with most Christians in general, is simply to **avoid** the subject of hell altogether.
  - They may not deny that the Bible talks clearly about Hell.
    - They simply don't feel the need to bring it up.
    - So that way, they don't have to worry about offending people.
    - And it also allows them to not focus on the immense weight that this doctrine brings.
      - So again, they just avoid it..

**Dentist Illustration:**

- I was actually tempted to want to avoid the subject the other day.
  - I am sitting in the dentist office getting my teeth cleaned...
  - And every time I am in there, we will talk about church stuff or the bible.
  - And this time I get asked, so what are you preaching on this Sunday?
    - And I was like uhhhhh, are you sure you want to ask???

- Then I told the her. And then the dentist walked in and she had a bunch of questions...
  - Before you know it, me, my dental hygienist and my dentist are talking about Hell in the dentist office.
  - The next thing I noticed was another Dental Hygienists peaking around the corner to hear this conversation.
    - She must have been wondering, who is this guy???
- Again, the subject of hell is hard and it is easier simply to avoid it.

### Transition to Big Idea:

- And because this is such a massive topic, it is impossible for me to cover it one sermon.
  - But what I do hope to do today is to challenge you to take this clear teaching of scripture seriously.
  - **I hope today might spur you on toward a more biblically informed dialog** on this important doctrine of our faith.
- So today, I will attempt to answer **TWO MAJOR** questions:
  - Which will lead to answering many other questions about Hell...
- So today, I want to examine:
  - **What does the Bible say about Hell?**
  - **Why does Hell matter?**

### Views of Hell:

- As I studied for this sermon, I was amazed by the wide variety of views on this subject.
  - The debate on Hell is intense!
- The most commonly accepted views within Christian circles are that the words the Bible uses to describe Hell are either **literally true**, or **metaphorically describing a deeper and even worse reality**.
  - Some people think that Hell refers to complete **soul annihilation** at the point when Jesus returns and judges the living and the dead.

### Erasing Hell and Christian Universalism:

- But the thing that amazed me more than anything, is that some people actually read the same Bible I am reading and come to the conclusion that Hell does not exist...
- Some people are so offended by Hell, that they have actually come up with arguments or different ways of looking at the scriptures, to actually erase Hell from Christian doctrine in general.
- You see, what you believe about hell says alot about what you believe about God.
  - Many people struggle with whole concept of Hell in general.
  - They say: *“How can a good and loving God send someone to Hell for sinning in this lifetime.”*

- I am not here to try and convince you of any one view...
  - But I am here to warn you that the view that Hell does not exist is completely contrary to what the scriptures teach!
- **This view is called Christian Universalism or Inclusive Christianity:**
  - This view was rekindled within Christian circles last year when a book called **Love Wins** came out...
    - This book was written by a popular Christian pastor, and it basically just put a new, creative spin on a very old view.
  - In this view, it is believed that every person will eventually be saved and go to Heaven.
    - This view says that Jesus is the only way to God, but that there is about a million ways to Jesus.
    - This view says that if you don't repent and turn to Christ in this lifetime, you will have countless chances to do so after you die.
      - Because in the end, the love and light of Christ will draw everyone to repentance through the grace and mercy of God.
  - This view would say that the passages of the Bible that talk about Hell are talking about a reality created by human sinfulness on earth:
    - For instance – Nazi Concentration Camps or the Rwandan Killing Fields, etc.
      - But there is no eternal reality of Hell after you die...

### **Transition to What Bible Says about Hell:**

- If this is true, wouldn't you want to know it?
  - And if it false, and there is a hell, wouldn't you want to know that too?
- So all this begs the question: "Who are you going to listen to, to answer your questions about the afterlife?"
  - Are you going to listen to ideas created by man about the afterlife?
  - Or are you going to listen to what God has revealed in His Word about the afterlife?
- ***Are you starting to see why this study matters?***
  - Again, my hope today is spur you on toward deeper biblical reflection and dialog with one another.
  - Start talking about this in your SBSC's, small group. Or with friends.
- Whatever you do, I want to encourage you to stay in the scriptures...
  - You may not always like what you read but at least you can trust it.

### **So, What does the Bible Say About Hell?**

- In summary it says the following:
  - Hell is a place of punishment after judgment.
  - Hell is described in imagery of fire and darkness, where people lament.
  - Hell is a place of annihilation, destruction, and never-ending punishment.
- *Just an FYI - This is just about the time you wish you had hit snooze...*

## Defining Hell:

### Next Question: Why does the Bible use different words to describe Hell?

- This is very important: The Bible uses different words that are translated into Hell to **delineate between what we might call, for the lack of better terms:**
  - **The “Intermediate Hell” and “Eternal Hell.”**
- Last week, Dr. Poplin talked about the “Intermediate Heaven” and “Eternal Heaven.”
  - The Intermediate Heaven is the place you go when you die in Christ.
    - And the “Eternal Heaven”, or the New Heaven and New Earth is the physical, eternal Heaven established when Christ returns.
      - Well, the same is true with Hell.
- There are four words between Greek and Hebrew – the original languages the Bible was written in – that are translated into the word HELL.
  - Hades / Sheol / Tartarus = Intermediate Hell
    - This is the place where the souls of people who die apart from Christ go, while awaiting final judgment when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.
  - Gehenna = Eternal Hell
    - This Eternal Hell is also referred to as the “Lake of Fire” and “Second Death.”
      - It is the place people go after the final judgment.

### Gehenna Description / Illustration:

- I want to focus for a second on Gehenna...
  - This was the word most commonly used by Jesus to describe Hell.
- Let me start by saying that **words are important.**
  - The writers in scripture used words very carefully when trying to describe something...
- The word Gehenna literally means the Valley of Hinnom.
  - This is a valley on the southwest side of the city of Jerusalem.
  - It is believed that this valley was a garbage dump in the time of Jesus.
    - It was a place where they would burn trash and where animals would be fighting over scraps of food.
- So when Jesus was teaching about hell, we can imagine that he would use this physical reality to describe a much greater spiritual reality.
  - And the fact is, Jesus often would use physical realities to describe much deeper spiritual realities.
    - If you would like an example, feel free to take your pick of any of Jesus’ parables...
- So if you were using the city dump to describe Hell, a place where they burned up trash and animals were fighting over scraps of food, it makes sense you would describe Hell as a place of ***everlasting fire and gnashing of teeth.***

- ***But what else do we know about Gehenna or the Valley of Hinnom?***
  - In 2 Kings 23, we see that it is the place where child sacrifices were offered to the Ammonite god Molech.
    - Many years later, this valley was declared to be the “**the valley of slaughter**” by the prophet Jeremiah.
      - We are told that this valley became the burial place of the criminals and the unrighteous in the community.
- With this in mind, it is no wonder that it later became the city dump.
  - *What else were you going to do with the “valley of slaughter???”*

### **Key Biblical Passages on Hell:**

- With this understanding of what these words for hell mean, lets hear what the Bible has to say about it.
  - The fact is, I can sit here and describe hell all day long, but I think you need to hear it for yourself.
    - I really think this is one of those times we just need to hear what God’s word plainly says about this sobering subject...

### **What Jesus said about Hell:**

- ***So, what does the Bible actually say about Hell?***
  - Lets start with Jesus...
    - That’s always a good place to start in general.
  - What did he say about hell?
- As stated earlier, Jesus would make references to **fire, darkness, destruction and eternal punishment** when talking about Hell:

### **The Fire of Hell:**

- When referring to Fire, Jesus is making a direct reference to the eternal punishment and torment that comes from sinfulness and a refusal to turn from sinful ways to trust Christ as Lord.
- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives a series of parables referring to the FIRE of Hell.
- In **Matthew 13**, Jesus tells the *Parable of the Weeds*:
  - Jesus tells that at the end of this age, He will return to judge the world, the righteous and unrighteous alike.
  - He finishes the parable by saying:

*<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*
- HE WHO HAS EARS, LET HIM HEAR!
  - He wants us to take note of this doctrine...

- Again, in **Matthew 25:31-46**, Jesus tells another parable about the coming judgment upon his return.
  - This time, He refers to the righteous as Sheep and to the unrighteous as Goats.
  - He will say to the Righteous: *‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...’*
  - And he will say to the Unrighteous: *‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Skipping down to verse 46) <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’*
  - **Did you hear the destination of the unrighteous?**
    - A place of “eternal fire” and “eternal punishment.”

### The Darkness of Hell:

- Jesus also refers to Hell as a place of darkness.
  - This darkness refers to a place void of God’s presence that leads to unbearable sorrow and loneliness.
- In Matthew 22, Jesus tells a parable about a **Great Wedding Banquet** hosted by a great king, referring to God.
  - Everyone coming to this banquet had on wedding attire, but one person showed up, not having on wedding attire on, and **Matthew 22:13-14** - *<sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen.’*
  - **Did you catch that?**
    - Someone thought they were going to get in to the banquet, but didn’t...

### The Destruction of Hell:

#### Next, what does the Bible say about Destruction and Annihilation in Hell?

- This is a very disturbing teaching of scripture...
- In Matthew 10, Jesus actually commands that we tell people to BE AFRAID of God, the one who can destroy your body and soul in Hell. He says: **Matthew 10:28** - *<sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*
- The “him” being talked about here is God... We are to fear God...
  - *Do you know what the most common command in all of scripture is?*
    - **“Do not be afraid!”**
  - And the fact is, we don’t need to be afraid of anything else in this world, if we have a proper fear of God!
- Sometimes, I fear Christians have a very misconstrued view of what it means to fear the Lord.

- Every time I hear Christians refer to fear of the Lord, it has to do with a reverent “awe” of God. And this is absolutely true.
- But is much more than that.
  - A proper understanding of fearing God, is just that.
    - It means we should have a healthy fear of God.
  - Because God is the righteous judge and is well within His rites as God to cast you from his presence forever...

### **The Apostle Paul speaks directly to this point...**

- Although Paul never actually uses the word Hell in his letters, he makes it clear that God is a righteous judge and the destiny of those who deny him is an eternal removal from His presence.
- In **2 Thessalonians 1:5-9**, we read:
  - <sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—<sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,*
- *“They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord...”*
  - **In this statement we learn a lot about the goal of our faith...**
    - The goal of our faith is not just heaven, but is being in the presence of our Lord.
  - So it makes sense that Hell is to suffer eternal separation from the Lord’s presence.

### **Lazarus and the Rich Man:**

- One of the questions that came up last week in my Bible Study class was:
  - **“Will people be aware in Hell?”**
    - Of the separation and torment?
    - And the answer is unfortunately, YES.
- Again the scripture is clear.
- In Luke 16, Jesus tells us about a **poor man named Lazarus** that dies and goes to be with Abraham in Heaven, **and a rich man** that was evil in his life that dies and goes to Hades:
  - This teaching shows the agony of the torment in Hades.
    - The rich man just wants someone to touch his tongue with water to get a moment of relief...
  - The rich man wants out, to go be where Lazarus is...

- But the parable tells us that there is nothing that the rich man could do to ever leave Hades and join Lazarus in Heaven.
  - Across this great chasm...
- The rich man wants Abraham to send someone to tell his family not to make the same mistake he made so they won't suffer the same fate.
  - But Abraham says no... They were given Moses and the Prophets – the Bible they had at the time – just like you, and they have to decide based on what they were given.

### **Peter and Jude:**

- *So we have heard from Jesus and Paul... What do other Biblical writers have to say about Hell?*
- **The Apostle Peter and Jude, the brother of our Lord**, give a very similar laundry list of descriptive words to describe what Hell is going to be like.
- These are the words they use:
  - A place of Destruction and Condemnation,
  - A place of Suffering,
  - A place reserved for the ungodly,
  - A place of Gloom and Darkness
  - And a place of Punishment of Eternal Fire.
- ***Can I stress anymore that this is not a place that you want to be!***

**The Apostle John**, may paint the most horrifying picture of Hell in the book of Revelation:

- John tells us that when judgment day comes, every name of every person who has ever lived will be written in one of two books.
  - One is the book of death; the other is the book of life.
  - With that in mind, John writes:  
**Revelation 20:10-15:** ***10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. ... (Jumping up to Verse 14) 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***
- ***Did you catch that?***
  - All those who were in Hades – the “Intermediate Hell” – were thrown into the Lake of Fire – Gehenna, the “Eternal Hell” – where Satan is condemned.
  - Again, people that die apart from Christ, whose names were not found in the book of life, share the same fate as Satan.
    - ***“and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever...”***

**Okay, One Final Question on what the Bible says about Hell:**

- ***Does the Bible say that I can repent and be saved after I die?***



- Okay, just so we are clear where people are getting this view of Christian Universalism, I think it is only fair to examine exactly what the bible says about it.
  - I want everyone to open their bibles and we are going to quickly run through every single biblical passage that people will be given an infinite number of chances to repent and come to Christ after death.
    - Okay... Ready?

*(Awkward pause...)*
- Okay - You can now close your Bibles.
  - **Because there are none!**
  - Not one single passage that remotely says that you will have a chance to repent when you go to Hades or Sheol or Tartarus, or Gehenna.
  - And here is the really scary part...
  - The Christian Universalist view hinges on the necessity of being able to repent and turn to Jesus after we die.
    - And the Bible is completely silent about this.
- The thought that someone may end up banking on a second chance after they die is absolutely terrifying!
  - **Friends, it is not just dangerous, it is potentially damning!**
    - *Is it really worth the risk?*
- The scripture is clear. That those that don't trust on Christ as Savior could be in danger of hearing the scariest words in the Bible, when Jesus said in **Matthew 7:22-23**:
 

*<sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

### Transition to Romans 9 / Nature of God:

- Please hear me... I wish to God that the Universalist view were right.
- **If it were my choice, I wouldn't have set it up the way God set it up...**
  - I truly wish that everyone ended up in heaven.
  - I wish that there would be no more pain or suffering or anguish.
- But the fact is, I am not God, and you are not God, and it is not our choice.
  - Heaven and hell were created by God.
  - Which means He gets to create the rules on how you get into heaven and hell.
    - The rules were not created on man's terms, but on God's terms.
- **Do you see why what we believe about hell impacts what we believe about the very nature of God?**
- The prophet Isaiah speaks to this issue from God's point of view. He writes:
 

*<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

- And in **Romans 9**, Paul illustrates this point when he talks about God as a Potter and humanity as pieces of clay.
  - Using this illustration, if God is the Potter, then He probably knows exactly what the pot should look like.
  - But the way it typically plays out is that we as pieces of clay like to talk to other pieces of clay and tell each other what we think the Potter should look like.
- Every time we say, *“I won’t believe in a God who would send people to hell,”* we are saying that “our ways” and “our thoughts”, are higher than Gods’.
  - That our sense of justice is more advanced than God’s sense of justice.
    - Do you not see the arrogance of that statement???
- By questioning God sending people to Hell, it shows a complete lack of understanding of how bad sin is, and how Holy and Just God is!
  - If we have a high view of God’s holiness and just nature,
    - Then it will lead to a high view of sin,
    - Which will lead to an appropriate view of hell.
  - If we properly understand God’s view on sin, then hell makes perfect sense.
- And if the prophet Isaiah was right, and lets just assume he was.
  - Do you not think that the God of the universe, that created everything,
    - Whose ways are higher than our ways as far as the heavens are higher than the earth...
    - Might just have a more highly developed sense of Justice and Holiness than we do?

### **Transition to Gospel:**

- Again, if I were God, I would not have set it up the way He did.
  - And my guess is that none of you would have either...
- But you know what else I don’t think we would have done.
  - I certainly don’t think we would have ever thought to redeem and rescue humanity the way God did.
    - Would you have thought to rescue sinful humanity by sending your one and only Son to earth:
      - Where He would be mocked and ridiculed,
      - Beaten and tortured,
      - And then die on a cross for the very people that were persecuting Him.
        - I definitely don’t think any of us would have done that...

### **Why does Hell Matter?**

- It is only through the lens of this counterintuitive Gospel message of grace that we can answer our second major question...
  - **Why does Hell Matter?**

## **Hell Matters... Because it's not about Doctrine, it's about Destinies!**

- It's about real people!
- Do you see how easy it can be to get caught up in the debate about hell, while completely losing sight of the horrifying reality that real people are going to spend a real eternity in a real hell?
- The first thing my Dentist said to me – *after telling me I have no cavities, which is nice* – is that she thinks of her cousin that died last year of a drug overdose.
  - She wonders what happened to him... And it breaks her heart to think about it.
  - She said that someone trying to comfort her family, told them that now he is in a better place, but the fact is, we don't know.
- Again, it is easier to either deny hell or avoid it...
  - Hell is personal... And it is scary.
  - And that is why it matters...
    - Because it is not about doctrine, it is about destinies.

## **Next, Hell Matters because it Leads us to an Urgency in Evangelism:**

- Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:**
  - <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.***
- Paul goes on to say that it is not just the "FEAR" of the Lord that compels us.
  - But three verses later, he tells us that it is Christ's "LOVE" that compels us to share the good news with others...
    - That there is forgiveness of sins in Christ.
  - Paul tells us we are Christ's Ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us.
    - He says, I implore you on Christ's behalf, **be reconciled to God!**
    - For God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

## **Next, Hell Matters Because – Hell Magnifies the Beauty and Power of the Cross:**

- To know how bad hell really is, shows you how powerful the cross truly is.
  - That on the cross, Christ conquered sin, death, hell, and Satan.
  - That on the cross, Christ reigns victorious over the power of hell.
  - And that because of the cross, we share in Christ's victory over hell.
- *Do you see how hell is actually part of the gospel of Christ?*

## **And Finally, Hell Matters Because You Still Have Time:**

- And here is the really good news... what you believe about hell matters because if you are listening to my voice right now, that means that you still have a choice.
  - There is still time for you to change.
  - There is time to repent and trust Christ for salvation,

- And receive the full, abundant life that the Lord Jesus has for you.
- **Again, this is not about doctrine it's about people's destinies.**
  - It's about your family and friends.
  - It's about the guy that sits next to you at work.
  - About the girl that sits next to you in class.
  - And it could even be about the person sitting right next to you in church this morning.
- What you believe about hell matters so I pray that you leave here today with a higher view of hell.
  - I pray that you leave here with more of a desire to study what the Bible says about hell.
  - And not just because hell gives you a better picture of heaven.
    - But because of a high view of hell gives you a more glorious picture of our Lord Jesus Christ and his cross.

### **Close on Big idea:**

- Last week Dr. Poplin talked about people that are so heavenly minded that they're not of no earthly good.
  - And as he correctly stated this is never the case.
    - We need to know what is to come.
- ***Because what we believe about there determines how we live here.***
- Last week Dr. Poplin told us that we are to live in light of heaven.
  - Today I'm telling you to live in light of hell.

### **Closing Prayer**