

Jesus in Hell

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[0 : 00] Well friends, this week on ABC Radio there was a fascinating interview with the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, and it was a long interview, and the interviewer asked him a whole range of questions, and I was fascinated that the interviewer pressed Peter Jensen on the doctrine of hell and said, on radio, do you believe in hell?

And put him on the spot, and the answer was good, and you can download this interview off the ABC website, I commend the whole thing to you, but people ask, do we really believe in hell? Who goes there? Do you really believe? And the interviewer had some theological precision for an unbeliever, he said, do you believe in an eternal torment?

People want to know whether we really believe this doctrine, and I think we need to be honest and tell them about it, which is why we're doing this series.

I hope that through these talks, you will be able to stand up for this doctrine of God's judgment and punishment, and the doctrine of hell. I hope that you will be equipped to correct wrong views of hell.

[1 : 17] I hope that you will be able to actually build the knowledge and the confidence and the love of people to tell them about hell, to warn them about hell.

I hope that you will become a defender, even a promoter of hell, if only to show them the way out of hell through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I hope that you will become a promoter of hell, so that you will become a promoter of avoidance of hell, the same way a surgeon might promote cancer in order to save us from it.

So why don't we pray as we begin? Lord God, we come before you with some trembling, knowing that we really have no grasp of the weight of your anger against sin or of just the magnitude of what your Son went through to rescue us.

But we just beg you, Lord, that tonight we will get some sense of that, so that we grow on a deeper walk with you and trust you more and serve you better and glorify you more.

[2 : 25] So please do this, Father, we ask in the power of your Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, how do you imagine the vibe of the Last Supper?

How do you imagine the emotions of that meal of Jesus and his 12, his loved disciples? What do you think the feeling would be like? Would it be a happy time, laughing, eating, praying, singing? Was the Last Supper kind of like one of our camps or beach missions and the last night you're on a high and you've been together and you all know you're going to disperse? Was it like that?

The Passover was, after all, a celebration meal. Well, friends, tonight I'm going to try and offer to you an alternative, darker interpretation of that meal.

I want us to be realistic that Jesus knew he was going to die that morning and that the darkness of knowing that hung over him and the disciples could not have but sensed that.

[3 : 30] And so then I want you to see the night before Jesus died as a dark night, a night of horrors. It was really the night before hell for Jesus, the night before hell.

I think 2,000 years of Christian devotion and familiarity spoils us to the kind of, what I would like to call the twisted nature of the Last Supper.

Jesus says, or Matthew records for us, while they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat, this is my body.

You can almost hear the disciples choking on their bread. Did he say what? Then he took a cup and after giving thanks, he gave it to them saying, drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Take and eat, this is my body. Drink from it, this is my blood. But no one's taking it, no one's drinking it after he said that.

[4 : 51] Would you? Would you just keep eating the meal? All right, it's your body, it's your blood. Blood plays a massive role in biblical religion. We know from the Old Testament that the blood of animals are slaughtered and splashed over the altar for the forgiveness of sins.

Moses sprinkled blood over the people to renew the covenant at specific moments in Israel's history. And all of this in the Old Testament was a symbol of the forgiveness of sins to come through Jesus.

But it was very messy. And blood is blood. Blood is ugly. Blood is awful. Awful. Blood is grotesque. And the Old Covenant is crystal clear that blood is never to be drunk.

Genesis 9.4, God told Noah in that covenant to not drink blood. A great text from Leviticus says, and listen to the seriousness of which it takes talking about blood.

Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from the people.

[6 : 08] See, it's not a nice thing. You don't make fun about eating flesh and drinking blood. And this is just talking about animals, not people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, Leviticus 17.

And I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. So blood is serious because it's used by God in redemption, in atonement. You don't muck around with blood. It's precious. It's set apart. Therefore, I say to the Israelites, none of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood.

So that, you know, an Israelite would never drink or eat a steak like I like to eat that's very rare and has blood coming out. You know, it was precious. And so imagine the offense when Jesus says, drink my blood, eat my flesh.

Jesus is the Son of God, their teacher, savior, and friend. Even as a symbol, it's not pious. It's ungodly, the way Jesus talks.

[7 : 20] It's a grotesque image. And he commands them. He forces them to do the horrible. He says, take and eat. This is my flesh. He forces the cup into Peter's mouth and says, take and drink.

This is my blood. It's a grotesque image. There's no wonder why the early Christian church in the first century was accused by pagans who really had no standards anyway, but accused of being cannibalistic.

Pagans spread the rumor that this sect of Christians in their secret meetings ate flesh and drank blood and drank blood and they are the sickest of groups, the worst of groups.

I mean, you just imagine doing it at one of your own dinner parties or invite some Jewish friends, Orthodox Jewish friends over to a dinner party and say, this is my blood. It's not funny. If we strip away 2,000 years of Christian devotion, at one level, never was there a more grotesque and sick meal than this one.

Now, Jesus must be God and there must be some glorious wisdom in his action or otherwise Jesus is completely offensive and he's a disgusting teacher and to be rejected.

[8 : 39] And so the dark night goes on. They go outside and Jesus says to them, verse 31, You will all become deserters of me because of me this night.

This is the end of the party. You will all run away. You're all going to betray me. Why? Because of Zechariah 13, the prophecy of Zechariah 13, which Jesus quotes, where God says, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.

They will desert him, Jesus says, because God himself is going to wield a sword of judgment against the good shepherd.

God himself is going to strike the son with all his anger against human sin. This is going to be God's means for Jesus' blood to be poured out for the forgiveness of sin as God the Father strikes the shepherd.

And Jesus says to them, though they miss it, he says, after I'm raised, I'll go to Galilee ahead of you. But they seem to be hurt because he's accused them of being weak or of betraying.

[9 : 53] Jesus has said, you know, you will betray me. And Peter says, I won't desert you. Jesus says, you will desert me three times. Peter says, I won't. And they sort of agree to disagree, it seems.

Now, friends, I think it's very easy and a bit too easy, I think, for us to sort of psychologize what goes on with Peter that night.

You know, we create these devotional stories, how Peter went from wimp to the warrior of the day of Pentecost. We like to kind of make these links between times when we have fallen away or

walked away from Jesus for a period, just like Peter did.

And sort of we use that as a model for us to sort of show our acceptance. But I think the bottom line is this, that the theological interpretation of what happens to Peter and the disciples is God's wrath is going to be poured out.

God is going to strike the shepherd in judgment and punish his own flesh and blood. The wrath of God is going to be revealed in a magnified and focused way like a laser on his son.

[11:07] And I think if you knew that the terrors of the judgment of God, you would run as well. If you knew that God's wrath was going to be poured out, you would run as well.

So tonight I'm actually going to defend Peter because I think I too would run from the wrath of God wherever it's being poured out because I'm wise and I think you're wise as well.

You rightly avoid pain, don't you? You rightly run from pain. The wrath of God is the reality to which all human pain is a shadow. Peter himself was the one when he met Jesus, he said, Lord, get away from me.

I'm a sinful man. He ran away from Jesus at that point because he sensed the judgment he deserved. He rightly wanted to distance himself from the Holy Son of God.

I think if we have times of trial, we don't have the same excuse that Peter had. Peter's not a model of wimping out and coming back.

[12:11] He's a model of running away from the wrath of God. You see, we know as Christians the only place to run from the wrath of God, as we'll see, is to the cross, to faith in the blood.

But the hard thing is where do you run if you're in AD 33 and the wrath of God is going to be poured out on the cross? You can't run to the cross the first time it happens because the wrath of God is there being poured out.

And so the only thing Peter can do is run. The only thing he can do is flee. If you are wise, you would flee God's judgment as well. And it appears that even Jesus himself wants to flee or desires, if at all possible, to flee what is to come.

This is what happens in Gethsemane. The gardener of Gethsemane, he takes his closest disciples, Peter, James, John, and says to them in verse 38, I am deeply grieved, even to death.

Remain here and stay awake with me. The burden of what Jesus is about to go through, to be struck by his father, it's a huge burden on him and it weighs heavily on him.

[13:32] So he seeks support from his friends. It shows that Jesus didn't cruise through his life. He didn't cruise through the cross and the resurrection as if it was just an easy thing to do.

It was massively difficult. And his prayer is just stunning and revealing. Jesus prays in verse 39, throwing himself on the ground, my father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want, but what you want.

There are a lot of prayers in this reading tonight that are sort of not very godly, not very pious. Jesus prays to the father. He knows he's about to pay the ultimate price and so he checks with the father. Is there not any other way? Does it have to be this way? If there is any other way to rescue people from hell, to rescue God's people, his sheep from hell, show it to me right now.

Is there anyone else who could do it instead of Jesus? Is there another person or is there an angel or someone else who could be the one who is the sacrifice of a time and who will be struck?

[14:46] No, the way God has revealed the covenant is he must strike the shepherd. I think this is a very clear answer to this prayer. Not only does it show the pain and cost to Jesus, but it shows the answer to that so common question, is Jesus the only way to God?

Is Jesus' death and resurrection the only way to God? Well, we see here Jesus himself begged the father to show him if there was another way and there was no answer because there was no other way.

Jesus prayed, if there is another way, father, let us take that way. But there was no answer to that prayer because there was no other way. Only one who was both fully God and fully man could take the punishment, could atone for sin.

Jesus needed to be one of us to kind of represent us, the righteous one for the unrighteous, the new Adam. But he also had to be fully God. One man can die for one man, but only the one who is God can redeem many.

Only the one who is fully man, fully God can pay the infinite price of hell. And so the immortal one must die. The immortal, eternal son of God is the one who will pay, in effect, the infinite price by dying.

[16:11] And so while disciples sleep, Jesus prays this three times. He wrestled with the father for an answer to this question. Verse 42, he prays, my father, if this cannot pass, unless I drink it, your will be done.

And I think this increases what we'll see in a minute on the cross. This increases the pain of Calvary because we see here the intimacy between the son and the father. The son and the father work together in glorious submission and obedience to his father's will.

The son loves and trusts the father and wants to redeem us and so submits to the will and plan of his father.

Now it's worth asking this question, what is this cup? Jesus said earlier, I read it, verse 39, let this cup pass from me. Or verse 42, must I drink it?

You know, if this cannot pass on, so I drink it. What's he talking about when Jesus says, I must drink a cup that I don't want to drink. I must take this cup from the father.

[17:24] Well, we know in the Bible, friends, that a cup is a metaphor for fate. You know, and we use that today, you know, someone's cup is their destiny or their cup to drink is their fate that they must receive.

But we actually know from the Old Testament prophets, a deeper meaning than just fate. Let me just give you a couple of texts. Psalm 75 is a great text.

Verse 6. No one from the east or west or from the desert can exalt a man, but it is God who judges. He brings one down. He exalts another.

And here's the image. In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours it out and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.

The cup is an image of the justice and judgment of God against the wicked of the earth. Or again, Isaiah 51 verse 17.

[18:31] And this is talking about Israel after they were brought back from their punishment in exile. And Isaiah says, awake, awake. Rise up, O Jerusalem.

You have drunk from the hand of the Lord. You have drunk the cup of his wrath. You have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger. So it talks about, again, this cup is the cup of the judgment of God that when he punishes people, he makes them drink of his wrath like a bad alcoholic drink when you're already sick down to the dregs.

If you've ever been drunk to the point of sickness, you will know how horrible that is and disgusting that is. And remember, we said last week that Jesus fulfills all these images of wrath and judgment from the Old Testament are fulfilled in him and his teaching and in his death.

One last text. Jeremiah 25. We're going to be crystal clear. What is this cup Jesus is going to drink? Well, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Jeremiah.

Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. So what's Jeremiah's ministry?

[19:48] It's to take the cup of the message of judgment to the nations and to Jerusalem and they will drink it. So Jeremiah says, verse 17 of chapter 25, I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it, Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing as they are today.

You can already see what Jesus is going to go through when he drinks this cup. He will be an object of horror. He will be the recipient of scorn and cursing from people around him and also a recipient of the fury of God against human sin, the fury of his father.

Jeremiah goes on. This gets quite violent or gross in the images. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, Drink, get drunk and vomit and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.

But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, This is what the Lord Almighty says, you must drink it. See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my name.

And will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the Lord Almighty.

[21:17] God is a God who must punish sin. He is a holy God. He is a righteous God. In him is light. There is no darkness in him at all. And so his son takes his cup, takes his sword of punishment.

And so this bitter cup is the cup that Jesus knows he must take. And so it's very important to see in this narrative of Matthew, there are two cups. And the question is, you know, which cup will you

drink?

Will you drink the cup of the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sin? Or will you drink the cup of God's wrath and punishment? You see, you must drink one of those two cups.

You must choose one of those destinies, one of those fates. Jesus drank deeply from the cup of wrath so that you could drink from the cup of his blood and be forgiven.

Well, let's see that as it unfolds on the cross. And we're not really going to go into it closely. I just want to draw your attention to how these themes play out when he's actually there on the cross.

[22 : 28] So going into chapter 27, you know, we're skipping the trial. We're skipping the blaspheming against him, the taunting, the spitting and the cruel beating him up.

In the account of the crucifixion, you see, it works on two levels. There are kind of two levels of punishment on Jesus. One is the punishment he receives at the hand of wicked men.

Of the cruelty that they do to him. Of the taunting and the torture that they put on him. And then at a deeper level, through the first level and beyond the first level, there's the punishment that Jesus will receive from God the Father on the cross.

And we see this deeper level in a couple of ways, a couple of main ways, in the eclipse and in the cry. We know from scripture, I've already quoted it, 1 John 1.5, the God who created the world and said, let there be light.

God is light. And in him there is no darkness at all. And then we read in verse 45 of chapter 27, So we have here, God the Father turns his face away from his son, turns his loving, eternal stance of love toward the son and turns it away, represented by the darkness over Calvary.

[24 : 15] And then we have the cry. At the end of the time of darkness, at about 3 o'clock, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama savaktani.

That means, that is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? This was a troubling phrase for me when I was a new Christian, reading the Bible and thinking, why is Jesus the man of faith, saying to God, why have you forsaken me?

I was so uncomfortable with this until I understood it in terms of the story of salvation, the story of redemption.

Jesus is drinking the cup of the wrath of the Father. At this point, the Son is forsaken by the Father. And so he quotes Psalm 22 to say, you know, why have you forsaken me? He's drinking full the cup of the wrath of the Father. At this point on the cross, Jesus, the eternal Son, is experiencing hell.

[25 : 25] He is in hell. He is separated from his Father. So hell, as we defined last week, is sort of not just a place, but really it's a relational state of being, of being cast out from God, where he says, depart from me, you cursed one.

To use the language of Matthew 25. Jesus is cast away from God in the darkness and forsaken by God for us. And so God both turns his face away from the Son and pours out on the Son all his anger against our sin, all his fury against our autonomy, all his wrath against our rebellion.

See, it's stunning to think that 30 years before the crucifixion or 1,000 years before the crucifixion happened, or even about 10,000 years before the crucifixion happened, in fact, for a whole eternity. The Father and the Son were delighting in each other for an endless amount of time in the fellowship of the Spirit, one eternal God of love and of relationship and of community.

That is who the Son is. Jesus is. And now, and yet at this point on the cross, for the glory of each other and for the purpose of rescuing you and me, Jesus undergoes the horrors of hell, of being cast out from relationship, of being alone.

[27 : 03] Jesus drinks the cup down to the dregs. And it's the final expression in the end of the love Jesus has for the Father and of his obedience to the Father to go through this for us.

And I think the cross then becomes not just an image of salvation, but actually a very vivid image of how the Father feels toward those who aren't forgiven.

The anger that God feels against sinners through the cross, it's a very vivid image of that, an example of that. We'll talk more about that in a minute.

We just need to feel the weight of this, friends. Jesus is forsaken for us. Do you feel how much it cost the Son of God to save you, that he had to go through hell so that we would not have to go to hell?

May we never are tired of this story. And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. What a precious thing it is to be counted among those who have been bought by this blood.

[28 : 21] It's just a precious thing to be covered by the blood of Christ, to know that God will not punish you. In fact, he cannot punish you because he will not punish you twice.

If he has punished the Son instead of you, then you are saved. You can have assurance of your forgiveness. God may discipline you. He may chasten you. He may refine you through suffering, but he will not punish you if you are in Christ because your punishment has been placed on Christ.

So you must never say as a Christian, God is punishing me. You can be absolutely sure that you are forgiven, not only because of the physical pain of the cross, because of the relational pain, the spiritual judgment that Jesus received on your behalf, the blood he poured out for you.

There is now no more need for us to run from the punishment of God because we can run to God and to his Son to faith in his blood.

Well, friends, some just final reflections and applications. There is a hell because if there was not a hell, the cross would not be necessary, would it?

[29 : 38] The cross was necessary because hell, judgment, punishment is the reality that those who have sinned are facing. We need a Savior to atone.

The cross is the message of our salvation. It's a positive message of redemption, but it's also a negative warning of the judgment to come, isn't it?

It's an image of what the anger of God is like. As we share with people, with our friends, of the hope we have, of what Jesus has done on the cross, we need to talk about hell as well.

If we are to love them, we should be warning them that if they do not receive God's gift of forgiveness, if they do not receive, you know, Jesus as the one bearing their punishment, then they may as well picture themselves on that cross, separated from God forever.

It's either Jesus or them. It's Jesus or you. It's Jesus or me. Which cup will you drink? What was a day of hell?

[30 : 54] One day of hell for the eternal Son of God will be endless punishment for God-forsaken mortals. What was a day, one day of hell for the eternal divine Son of God for the immortal one will be an eternity for God-forsaken mortals.

And what was a day of hell for the eternal Son of God will be an endless heaven of praise and contemplation for those who have been redeemed by that blood.

We'll spend eternity praising the Lamb that was slain. The cross was necessary. So, friends, it's necessary for us to tell people about how they believe unless someone tells them of the cross, unless someone warns them of the judgment to come.

Hell must be real because Jesus pleaded with his Father. He pleaded for another way. But there was no other way. The holiness, the justice, and the righteousness of God must be satisfied. Sinful men can invent all sorts of schemes and systems to find another way. But we know from Gethsemane that there's no other way. So, friends, let us, let us, moved by the sacrifice of Christ, motivated for the glory of Christ, commanded by the word of Christ, and fearful of the judgment apart from Christ, let us tell people about the cross and about how the cross rescues us from hell and of what Jesus went through to go through the experience of hell so that we could be redeemed.

[32 : 38] May our lives be lives of telling people of Jesus and of warning and sharing the only way out of hell through the blood of Christ, through the cup of his blood.

Lord Jesus, we just thank you so much for the pain and we think of the spiritual and relational pain of being separated or to be made to receive the punishment from your Father.

Dear God, it's hard to find words to describe what that, the pain of that, what that must have been for you, Heavenly Father, and also for you, our Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus, we rejoice that you are now risen from the dead, renewed to fellowship with your Father in an even more glorious way as Saviour and as Ascended King and Victor.

and so Lord Jesus, I pray for each one of us here that we would be partakers of the cup of your blood that we might seek to hide in you lest we risk having to face your judgment without a Saviour. And so God, I pray that you will help us to believe in the reality of what you went through and convicted by it to treasure you and to walk closer with you and to speak boldly of you.

[34 : 06] So Father, work this in us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.