

The Horrors of Hell

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[0 : 01] Turn with me to Revelation 14. Last book of the Bible, chapter 14, and we're reading at verse 9, and you'll find it on page 1245.

Is the page number, verse 9, chapter 14. 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 on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath.

He has 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 and 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 worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.

I confess that I hesitate before speaking about this passage.

[1 : 47] I don't hesitate because I don't believe it. I do believe it. And it's because I do believe it that I hesitate.

I don't hesitate because I'm ashamed of it. I can't be ashamed of anything in the Bible because it's God's word. But I hesitate in case I say something that will give you the wrong understanding of what is being said here.

Now, the same could be said for any passage of the Bible. I have always to be careful about anything I say about the Bible. But when we're dealing here about your eternal condition, this is something we have to be absolutely sure about.

It's something we have to be so careful about. I know that preachers in the past have fallen into two different extremes.

Some preachers have just avoided talking about this kind of passage, which is about hell. That is what this passage is about.

[3 : 14] That is what I'm going to talk about this evening. Hell. And some preachers have fallen into the trap of being so distressed by what the Bible says about hell, that they never speak about it.

Other preachers go to the other extreme, where they fall into the trap of believing that the more they preach about hell, the more chance there is of people being converted.

Neither of these extremes are good ones. Neither of these extremes are good ones. And so, whilst we are going to speak tonight about eternal punishment, I am not trying to manipulate anyone.

I'm not trying to be psychologically deceitful. I am simply going to tell you what the Bible itself says. And that's always the safe option. And for any preacher, we have to always stick to the safe option, which is to preach the Bible in its proportion and balance.

[4 : 42] But having gone this far through Revelation, and having come face to face for the first time with such a stark description of eternal punishment, we've got to speak about it.

Because God wants us to know about it. Because it is a reality. If we believe in God at all, He's not God unless He's our judge.

Unless we are all accountable to Him for the way we have lived our lives, then He's not God. But I believe tonight that there isn't a single person in the world that isn't conscious of the fact that God requires from us an account of how, and one day that we will stand before God.

The Bible tells me that in Romans chapter 1. Everything that can be known naturally about God is known.

You look in the stars. You look at the sky. You look at the mountains. Every part of God's creation tells us of the reality of God.

[6 : 08] Creation preaches that there is a God. It preaches that He is righteous. And we know within ourselves, from our own consciences, that there is such a thing as right and wrong.

And you know when you go wrong. There is something within us, a voice within each one of us, and it's where did that voice come from if it hasn't been put there as part of our humanness by the fact that there is a God.

And God has placed that voice within us to testify to what is right and wrong. I'm not saying that voice is always perfect because sin within us has distorted that voice, and it's made it sometimes difficult to hear.

And yet it's there. And I believe that every single one of you knows what I'm talking about. You can go back in your own experience to times and places where you've done something wrong, and so have I, and we know it.

You know that you've done something wrong. You have that awful, sick feeling in your heart that something has gone wrong, and you feel that sense which we call guilt.

[7 : 24] Guilt is not just a sensation. It's not a dream. It's a reality. And we feel guilty because we are guilty, and we are guilty because there's a God.

If there wasn't a God, there's no point in feeling guilty. You see the way it works? God has placed within us voices that tell us time and time again that He is there.

Now it goes on from there. Because if we are all accountable to God, it means that one day we must give an account to God.

And it's no surprise that the Bible often speaks about the day when God will require an account of every single individual, every single person in this world.

Don't ask me how that's going to be done. Don't ask me how long it's going to take. I don't know the answers to these detailed questions, but it's true.

[8 : 23] The Bible tells us that each one of us, because we are accountable and because God is our judge, God is going to require an account from us. Now, it goes on from there.

If God is the perfect judge and able to judge us perfectly as to how we have lived in this world, then there has to be punishment as well as judgment.

You cannot talk about judgment without talking about punishment at the same time. So all the reason within me says, if I believe in the reality of God at all, I believe in the reality of judgment and punishment.

And it's no surprise that that's exactly what the Bible teaches us. Here we have, if you remember, into what we were talking about previously, a chapter that contains three sermons given by three angels.

We talked about the first sermon by the first angel and the second one in verse 8. Now we've come to the third announcement, the third message that the angel preaches here in this passage, and it's a message that God wants us to know about.

[9 : 41] Now, why is it that God wants us to know? I was asking this to the Gallic congregation last Sunday evening. We were talking about Jonah and how he had gone to Nineveh, and how was it that the people of Nineveh came to repent?

What was it within them? What was it about Jonah? Well, you can say, well, it was the power of God, but I believe it was that God used a particular logical process within them to bring them to repentance and to a new life.

And I'll tell you what it was. I think the question within these people was, if God was really going to destroy us, why did he send Jonah?

In sending Jonah to warn us that we had 40 days left, there must be the possibility that God might have mercy upon us.

And that is exactly the reason why I believe there is so much warning in the New Testament about hell, not least coming from Jesus himself.

[10 : 46] How many people, they read through the life of Jesus, and they're quite content to talk about his miracles and his teaching and the Sermon on the Mount, but when they come to passages like Matthew 25, where Jesus tells them straight, he tells them in no uncertain terms that there'll come a day when they will be judged and when those who are on the left side, God will say to them, depart from me into eternal darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now, why does he say that? I'll tell you why he says that. To warn. And every warning is an announcement of the grace and the mercy of God. But it is also the truth.

And that means that if we don't listen to that warning, then God's word will be fulfilled. And one day, every single one of us will stand before God and give an account of what we have done with our

lives and particularly what we have done with the gospel.

Every single one of us. And those who have died outside of Jesus, there is no more mercy left for that person.

That's what the Bible says. And that's why the Bible is so clear about warning. Because we, so that we will never be able to turn around to God and say, you never told me this.

[12:19] He has told us. And some of you have heard it time and time again. This is one more time. And I hope and pray that this will be the moment that by listening to the warning one more time, that you will come running to Jesus.

Because that's the only place where you can have that change of life that will bring you into his kingdom. Well, may God's word speak to us this evening as we turn to it and as we remind ourselves once again that Jesus speaks about two ages.

The Bible tells us that there is this life and the life to come. You read the teaching of Jesus very, very often when he says he uses these words both in this life and in the life to come.

And the life to come is marked by our death in this world. When our death happens the life that we live now comes to an end and the life to come begins.

And for the believer the Bible tells us it's life with Jesus. The believer goes straight to heaven to be with the Lord. That's what the Apostle Paul makes clear about and that's what Jesus himself says.

[13:46] For example when he died himself just before he died he said to the thief on the cross today you will be with me in paradise. But the gospel of John also makes clear that there will not just be the resurrection of those who have believed in Jesus but there will also be another resurrection.

Truly truly I say to you do not marvel at this listen to this for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out.

Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Now these are the words of Jesus. These are the words of Jesus who millions of people celebrate and who millions of people hold as the greatest hero that ever lived.

You can't have half of Jesus. You have to listen to his entire message otherwise you can't cherry pick what the Lord says. You've got to take the whole thing.

[14:55] And the whole of the teaching of Jesus includes. I remember going to hear Rico Tice when I was in Aberdeen. And Rico Tice was the man from London, all souls in London, who came up with the course called Christianity Explored.

It was him that wrote it. And it really is a study into the life, into the gospel of Mark. And the idea is, of course, and it's a very good one, something like similar to what we do here in the Cabaret.

We invite people to people who want to find out more about the Christian faith. And I remember him saying that he begins by asking honest questions, questions that they would love to ask God.

So they discuss these questions. Then they move on to the life of Jesus. They go through the gospel of Mark. So far, so good. They discover more and more about the teaching of Jesus, the miracle of Jesus.

And the big question, who is the person of Jesus? But he says the make or break time comes when you arrive at Jesus teaching about hell.

[16:05] Always, always, he says, the group of people reduces whenever whenever you come face to face with Jesus teaching on hell.

There are some who can't cope with it. For them, they don't want to hear anymore. And they're off. And maybe tonight's going to be the same with you. Maybe you've been coming here and you've been listening to the gospel.

Maybe you're interested in the gospel perhaps for even some years. And maybe this is the point at which you it's either one way or the other.

Well, it is either one way or the other. It's all or nothing. That's what the gospel demands. It's all or nothing. Let's then see how this passage describes everlasting punishment.

And let's think about four things from this passage. Let's first of all notice that everlasting punishment is torment.

[17:16] Torment. Verse 10. He will also 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 his holy angels and in the presence of the lamb.

God. Now I don't deny for a moment that like so much of the book of Revelation this description is symbolic.

I don't deny that for a moment. But that doesn't make it unreal. That doesn't mean that everlasting punishment is anything less than real conscious everlasting torment.

I don't know what the mechanics or the biology of that torment is. I don't know how it will be worked out. You see there are so many people I wonder if there's anyone here tonight and you're saying I hope the minister tells us what hell's going to be like.

I've heard so much about it. I've heard of it as a place of darkness and a place of punishment and even a place of fire. I hope it's going to tell us what it's really like. I have no more words further than what the Bible has.

[18 : 59] The Bible is horrible enough when it describes how about this depart from me said Jesus into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

That's enough for me not to want to go there. It's enough for me to be horrified to run in the opposite direction and when I read that he will be tormented with fire and sulfur I don't want to waste my time thinking I wonder if the fire is the kind of fire that we have in this world.

I wonder if it will be a burning sensation. I wonder if it will be agony. And all of these questions that we like to ask. Do you know why you're asking that question? Do you know why?

Because you're twisted mind. I'm sorry if I'm insulting anybody. But if by insulting someone I can get them to think about where they stand before God, so be it. Maybe one day you'll come and thank me for that.

If I can... What you're asking is this. I wonder if hell is just a wee bit less of suffering than I've always thought it to be.

[20 : 07] maybe it's not as bad as it sounds. Maybe it's tolerable. Maybe it's the kind of place that won't be quite so unpleasant after all.

And the reason you're saying that is so that you can continue in this life rejecting God, running away from God, disobeying God, living life for yourself, and refusing to bow to him as your Lord.

Well, that's why I was hesitating at the beginning, because I hope that I will never ever give the impression of eternal punishment as anything but the most horrendous.

The picture that the Bible gives is one of torment. And that's enough. I don't want to know any more than that. Torment. Torment.

But it also is quite clear that it is conscious. And there are some people who believe that death is annihilation.

[21 : 11] There are some people who try to make out that the Bible teaches that unbelievers will be annihilated. In other words, that they just go out of existence altogether.

Body and soul is just completely sent into oblivion. But that's not what the Bible tells us. The Lord himself, in Matthew chapter 25, he says, you will go away into eternal punishment, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now, the description of weeping and gnashing of teeth is one which is conscious. There's a consciousness. It's not annihilation. And the chapter that we read in Luke chapter 16, where the rich man and Lazarus went to hell, he was conscious of where he was.

He was conscious of the suffering. He was conscious of Lazarus and the great contrast that there had been between what he had been in this world and what Lazarus had been in this world.

And now it was reversed. And he didn't go to hell because he was rich and Lazarus didn't go to heaven because he was poor. There's only one way in which a person will go to heaven and that is if they're believing and trusting in Jesus.

[22 : 26] And there's only one way in which a person will go to hell and that is by rejecting Jesus and by not trusting in Jesus. That's the first thing then. Hell is torment.

I'm not going to press any of these. I'm just going to let the Bible speak for itself and let God speak to our hearts. It's all I can do.

then it is wrath full strength. Wrath full strength. If anyone worships the beast, we'll come on to that in a few moments time, in his 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.

God's love. For a lot of people, this again is a distasteful picture of God. They say, well, I like to think of God as love. I like to think of God as kind and compassionate and pitiful.

I like to think of God as merciful. Isn't that what the Bible teaches? Surely, that is what we rather God was. It's not about what we'd rather God was.

[23 : 44] It's about God as he describes himself in the Bible and we have to take the whole description which begins with a God who is ultimately holy and people like you and I who are ultimately sinful.

That means we have broken God's law and that means by logic we are under God's anger. Now, again, we tend to think that anger is an outburst of temper because largely when you and I come across someone who's angry, they're sinfully angry.

The person who goes into a rage, the person who gets out of bed the wrong side in the morning and is in a grumpy mood, the person who gets into an argument and is determined to win, the person who flies off the handle, all of these are sinful outbursts of anger.

But whenever we come to think about the anger of God, you can never think about it in terms of sinfulness because God's anger is always measured, it's always righteous, and it's always a good, there's always a good reason.

There won't be a single person, listen to this, on the day of judgment when God says to some, depart from me into outer darkness, not one of these people, there will be crying, there will be utter despair, of a kind that you have never ever seen in this world before.

[25 : 13] there will be a darkness and a hopelessness and an emptiness and a resignation to a whole eternity of darkness and misery.

But let me tell you this, not one single person will be able to turn round to God and say, you are being unjust, your anger is not warranted. Nobody will be able to say any such thing.

But the way it describes it here is anger, full strength. There's two words in the New Testament for anger. There's a word called orge, and that means a kind of settled, silent anger.

And there's a word called thumos, which is God's final, ultimate outburst. I don't mean an outburst of temper, I don't mean an uncontrolled outburst, but it is an outburst.

It is released in its full measure, because the time has come for final and ultimate judgment and punishment.

[26 : 23] That's the way this passage describes it. It describes it as thumos, God's final outburst that's released against all those who have lived in sin.

It's also an undiluted anger. Notice the terms that it uses. He will also drink the wine of God's wrath. In those days they would drink wine mixed with water. It would be a regular drink with a meal.

The water wasn't all that good in those days, so they had to take wine as a kind of an antiseptic. water. They would always mix it with water. Wine was drunk mixed with water. Not this wine. This wine is poured full strength.

It's wrath full strength. Then thirdly, eternal punishment will take place in the presence of the lamb. Now remember what the lamb was, or rather who the lamb was. he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb.

[27 : 30] Now you remember who the lamb was. The lamb was no one less than Jesus himself. And in other words, even although this is symbolic, what it tells us of is that there will always be a consciousness of those in hell about Jesus.

He says that himself in Luke chapter 16. You remember when he said that that enter, strive to enter through the narrow gate, because I tell you the day will come when the gate will be closed and those on the outside will be able to see inside, just like Lazarus was able to see, or rather like the rich man was able to see the place which somehow or other he was able to see the joy and the happiness that was being enjoyed by Lazarus.

Jesus tells us that those who are in hell will be able to somehow or other they'll be able to perceive I don't know how there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth said Jesus when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob taking their places when you will see the son of man taking his place now these people were all Jews they all prided themselves in their religion they thought they were right with God because they went to the synagogue every Sabbath and because they kept they believed they kept the law they knew God's word they knew the Old Testament and they believed that by good works by keeping God's law they could earn their way into God's favor and they had every expectation after all surely God was not going to welcome the pagans into his kingdom rather than the Jews they could go back in their history to God calling Abraham and Isaac and Jacob they were his people his chosen covenant people and they said because we are sons of

Abraham surely we will be with God at the final judgment we will be in the kingdom of God not so said Jesus in fact you'll get the shock of your lives because you'll see the very people who you trusted in and they will be there they will take their place and you will be on the outside what's more those of you who have said to me Lord Lord did we not preach in your name did we not follow you while you were in the world did we not marvel at your miracles did we not listen every day to your teaching did we not sit at your feet and Jesus will say depart from me I never knew you why if they were so faithful in following him while he was in the world well I'll tell you why because that was it it was one thing it was easy enough to follow and marvel at Jesus when he was in the world it was a different thing to take up the cross and follow him by faith and it's the same with ourselves those of us who are in a tradition where we've been brought up with the gospel and people have prayed for us and preached to us and they've witnessed to us and one day if you do not come to Jesus you will see those very people I believe the very very people who you loved in this life your husband your wife who prayed for you your husband who prayed for you for years your mother who prayed for you for years and I'm not trying to be overly emotional this is a reality your grandmother who prayed for you your ministers who preached to you some of you have grown up in this congregation you've been here for decades and you go through different ministries and each one of them has said the same thing and they have pleaded with you and you didn't listen you said you put it off to another day well I believe that this is what it says in the presence of the lamb you you know what that means it means the lamb who was slain and who's now alive again that's what it tells us in revelation chapter 4 what does that tell me here it tells me that you'll be able to see the marks in his hands where he gave himself for sinners like ourselves and this is the most awful thing about a lost eternity that there was salvation all the time you

[31 : 42] I saw the most horrific thing I think we've all been so horrified by Burma this week who knows how many hundreds of thousands have lost their lives and you know what one BBC comment I couldn't help but being touched by this thing he said he said the awful thing about this tragedy is that people will die when help has been there all the time and that's the awful thing about hell salvation has been there all the time and you will never forget it you will never be allowed to forget it you will see continuously the Lamb of God who gave his life for sinners like you and you'll never reach him that's why you need to come to him now while there is still a hope while the invitation is still given that's why you need to come to him now the

Lamb's presence the Lamb's presence and then fourthly it's eternal that means it's ceaseless the smoke of their torment goes up forever forever it's one way it's not a return there's no coming back to this world there is no second chance it is eternal this raises a question that I think it deserves to be at least touched on if you'll forgive me for just taking a wee bit longer and the question is this and it's a very real question something that even Christians struggle with why is hell eternal after all punishments in this world somebody commits a crime they get put to jail for say four five years let's say and then they get released back into society their debt has been paid why is it that when it comes to the

Bible and when it comes to God that hell is pictured as a place that is endless and ceaseless is that not unfair well you know it always amazes me how people are so quick to point the finger at God as being unfair it's quite astonishing how we can think that our sense of justice is greater than God's the fact is that the justice that we exercise in this world is only a tiny reflection of God's perfect justice in other words I'm not saying that the justice that we have in this world is wrong it isn't but it's all we can do to punish a person for the wrong that they have done but it's a different thing altogether when God condemns a person when

God condemns a person the punishment is a perfect punishment it is an ultimate punishment and here's the point God's punishment lasts as long as the guilt lasts do you see the reason can you see the connection you see when you come to think about it that's what punishment is it's punishment for guilt now in this world in society you send a person to prison and that's as much as you can do because we also think in terms of well maybe that person is a reformed person or that person's debt to society that's the way we think in terms but when you come to God doesn't take any of that into consideration God's punishment is only and exclusively punishment and he punishes the guilt now ask you a question when does guilt disappear answer never you think about it a person even a person is sent to prison goes to prison for theft say for example theft he comes out of prison is he now innocent no the guilt is still there even although he's been in prison the prison has not removed the guilt he's still as guilty as he ever was and you and

I are as guilty as we ever were before God you don't need to look down on people poor people go to prison you don't need to look down on them because we're all in the same boat and when it comes to God when we stand before God God will punish perfectly and it has to be eternal because it has to last as long as the guilt but you know there's another way don't you you know that the son of God became guilty for us the son of God took upon himself the weight of our sin and when he suffered and when he hung on the cross God's anger was released against him and that's why there is only one way of escaping this awful day and escaping this awful place

[37 : 57] I'm not saying that we should be converted just to escape but it's a good start I'm not saying that we should be converted just simply out of fear alone but it's a good start it's very often the way that God begins to work in our hearts and he begins to show us that although we think we're going to live forever in this world we know deep in our hearts that we're not going to live forever and that one day we are going to die and after that the judgment says the Bible after that we must we have all to stand before do you think that that is just a dream do you think that that's just some kind of notion it's not it's a reality and if we die outside of Christ the reality for each one of us for any one of us will be eternal punishment for which there is no return that's what it says endless endless so what's the answer the answer is found in the next verse 13 we've already spoken about it blessed are the dead who die in the

Lord remember we said what this word blessed meant it meant a state of supreme happiness and that's God's promise to all those who trust and follow Jesus a state of supreme happiness well you can say the very opposite when it comes to those who have died outside of the Lord their state will be a state of supreme misery and I don't want to give one moment more in thinking of that condition because I want us to think tonight of Jesus I would want us to come to Jesus to run to Jesus to trust in Jesus to call upon Jesus to ask him to forgive your sin and to cleanse you and to make you into a new person that's what he promises to do why in the face of such dire warning will you not come why for me as a

Christian I can't understand it I honestly cannot understand I suppose it's difficult for me when I try to step into your shoes and I can't do that I don't know your fears and your doubts I don't know the things that are holding you back I don't know the questions that come flooding into your mind but I know this that there's a way around them and the way is by coming to God and even if you're coming to him for the first time and saying God I don't know all of this I'm not sure of all of this but I know I need you and I need you to teach me what the truth is I need you to take me to the next stage he'll do it he will do it ask and you will receive says Jesus only he can do it so come to him come to him in the secret of your bedroom this evening go home tonight and go to the Lord right away and ask him Lord have mercy on me even if you think you don't know the right words to use God knows your heart he knows your heart don't worry about using the right words don't worry about your understanding and you say well

I I have all this mess in my life you don't know the kind of things that I've done in my life I'm sure I don't know the kind of things but God does Lord you have searched me and known me you know my sitting down and rising up the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin there's not any sin that Jesus blood can't cleanse from and you need to come now you need to come while there's while there's still time you need to come because God invites you to come if anyone worships the beast don't be put off by that description if anyone worships the beast and its image I don't know I don't worship any beast if that's what you think you really haven't begun to understand don't you see that here is just a description of the very same description that's given in the whole of the New Testament about those who are either on one side of Jesus or on the other either you're for

Jesus or you're against him that's what he says you're either on the right hand or the left hand do not the fish the parable of the ten virgins the part of the sermon on the mount the two men one of whom built his house on the rock and the other built his house on the sand and this here is just another description of the fact that there are two kingdoms in the world there are those who follow Jesus and those who do not and here those who don't follow Jesus or the other if you're not for me says Jesus you are against me come to the only place where there is forgiveness and newness of life and mercy and promise and where you know that if you were to die you would go to be with the [43 : 38] Lord I hope tonight that I have not misrepresented this passage I hope I haven't watered it down I hope I haven't distorted it in any way and if I have I hope the Lord will forgive me but that still doesn't give you an excuse you must get right with God let's pray our father in heaven once again we ask that your word will go into our hearts in power and the power of the Holy Spirit we

pray that you will change us and bring us to see how much we need you and how much our future depends upon the blood of Jesus Lord we pray that you will show us how to trust in him pray for anyone tonight that's on the point of committing themselves to Jesus we pray that tonight they will do so because you are a gracious

God in his name Amen heaven