

I've mentioned that within Matthew 25:31-46, we have the lengthiest passage on the second coming within Holy Scripture. In vv31-33, we considered the Judge and the Judged; in vv34-45, we considered the Judgment of Works; which brings us this morning to v46, and the Sentences of the Judged.

- I. The Sentence of the Wicked
- II. The Sentence of the Righteous

- I. The Sentence of the Wicked

1. V46—"And these will go away into everlasting punishment"—the punishment mentioned in v46, is described for us in v41—"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"
2. If you notice, our Savior describes the punishment of the wicked as twofold—a pain of loss and sense.
3. (1) The pain of loss, v41—"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed.'"
4. (a) They depart from God—that is, the depart from God in a certain sense (for as we shall see God is in hell).
5. But perhaps we can say, God is not in hell in a certain sense—those in hell will be separated from God's common gifts and salvation.
6. (i) Common gifts—this is oftentimes described as God's common grace—His common or generic goodness.
7. Edward Donnelly—"Perhaps you have experienced the ecstasy of love. Your heart has melted in affection towards husband or wife, parents or children. Doubtless you have warmed yourself often at the glow of true friendship. These are God's gifts...You laugh and feel happy. All of these are blessings from God...But in hell all of this will be taken from you. Everyone you love, everything you value will be removed from your experience. No sun will shine. No flower will bloom. There will be no laughter, no excitement, no fulfilment of any kind. These things are from God and to be separated from him is to be separated from all his gifts."
8. (ii) Salvation—while in this life they never desired salvation, in hell, they will be painfully mindful of its absence.
9. They will suffer under a sense of despair, and will be painfully aware that others are enjoying heaven.
10. Lk.13:27-29—"But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God."
11. Lk.16:23-27—"And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abrahah afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."
12. The account "a certain rich man" and "a certain beggar named Lazarus" is the second parable in Luke 16.
13. Notice how they both begin in the same way—v1, "He also said to His disciples: There was a certain rich man who had a steward" v19—"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purpose and fine linen."
14. Notice two things about the rich man: first, he was in agony; second, he was aware of the salvation of others.

15. Thomas Boston—"The damned shall know that some are perfectly happy, in the enjoyment of that God from whom they themselves are separated; and this will aggravate the sense of their loss, that they can never have any share with those happy ones."
16. (b) They depart with devils—"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."
17. Thus, it's no small part of their punishment, that they will spend all eternity with the other damned and devils.
18. Christopher Love—"In hell it would be some comfort of our torments had you but good company; but all the company you have in hell are only devils and damned persons like yourselves. And as it is a torment to see or feel what others suffer here, so it shall be to the damned in hell to see the torments and hear the shrieks of those about them."
19. Pink—"Think of what it will mean to spend eternity in the Prison-house of the universe with Cain, and Pharaoh, and Judas! Think of what it will mean to be shut up with the vile Sodomites? Think of being incarcerated forever with every blasphemer who has ever lived."
20. (2) The pain of sense, v41—"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."
21. (a) It's painful—fire is a common imagery associated with the punishment of hell because it represents pain.
22. I think every person has burned their finger, hand, or arm—there's fewer things more painful than fire.
23. George Swinnock—"Fire is used to describe the pains of hell, because of the violent pain and extreme torture which it causes."
24. Hell is a place of great agony and conscious pain--a place of torment--of suffering--of distress and misery.
25. This is at the very heart of what hell is--conscious torment or suffering--literal and real agony--pain and anguish.
26. Matt.13:41-42—"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."
27. They will be wailing and gnashing their teeth because of the pain—it will be unbearable conscious torment.
28. (b) It's universal—by this I mean, the pain or torments of hell with concern the whole man—body and soul.
29. As they lived in rebellion against God in body and soul, so they shall be punished by God in body and soul.
30. Matt.10:28—"and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
31. Our Savior speaks of the destruction of both soul and body in hell—both body and soul or punished in hell.
32. But before go any further, let me say something about this word "destroy"—whatever it means, it's an eternal destruction.
33. 2Thess.1:9—"These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."
34. Notice—"these shall be punished with everlasting destruction"—a destruction that is ongoing and never ends or relents.
35. R. L. Dabney—"If destruction consisted in reducing the sinner forever to nothing, it would be instant destruction, not everlasting."
36. Furthermore, the very term translated "destruction" refers to the rendering of something useless for which it was created.

37. Man was originally created to glorify and enjoy God—hell is the destruction or destroying of this blessed purpose.
38. Charles Hodge—"To destroy is to ruin. The nature of that ruin depends on the nature of the subject of which it is predicated. A thing is ruined when it is rendered unfit for use; when it is in such a state that it can no longer answer the end for which it was designed. A ship at sea, rudderless, with its sides battered in, is ruined, but not annihilated. It is a ship still...A soul is utterly and forever destroyed when it is reprobated, alienated from God, rendered a fit companion only for the devil and his angels. This is a destruction a thousand-fold more fearful than annihilation."
39. Matt.10:28—"and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
40. (i) Hell fire destroys the body—that is, the torments of hell have physical aspects to it—it is bodily pain.
41. This means that every faculty of the body will have its torments—the eyes, ears, mouth, nose, hands, and feet.
42. George Swinnock—"Hell has a universality of torments; thick darkness for the eyes, hideous yelling for the ears, loathsome brimstone for the smell; and every sense molested and offended in the highest degree, every part tormented in flames."
43. (ii) Hell fire destroys the soul—that is, the torments of hell have spiritual aspects to it—it's spiritual pain.
44. This means that every faculty of the soul is tormented—the mind, affections, and will, these will have their own agony.
45. This is likely the meaning of those words of Jesus in describing hell fire—"where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."
46. By "their worm" He likely refers to their conscience, which will gnaw at them as a worm gnaws upon flesh.
47. Christopher Love—"By the worm that shall never die is meant that gnawing and horror of conscience that shall seize upon a damned soul because it lies under the wrath of a revengeful and angry God to all eternity...As worms are continually gnawing on a carcass, so shall sin gnaw on the conscience."
48. (c) It's eternal, v41—"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire" v46—"And these will go away into everlasting punishment."
49. This no doubt is the greatest tragedy of hell fire—it will last forever and will never cease—it's eternal.
50. The torments of hell would be bearable, if only, one day, even if it were in a hundred zillion years, they would end.
51. Christopher Love—"Beloved, when a man lies upon a sickbed, here is his comfort: though he has grievous pain, is sadly afflicted, and cannot rest night nor day, yet he has hopes it will not last long. Either he shall be cured or killed, and so his pains shall be ended. But this consideration cannot comfort you in hell. You are there in pain, and you shall be there forever in pain."
52. He then gives an illustration in an attempt to describe eternal--he says what if all the mountains on earth were made of sand.
53. And you piled them on top of each other until the mountain reached heaven itself—and every thousand years a little bird took a single grain of sand from the mountain.
54. How long would it take until the mountain was consumed and taken away—and yet, even this would be a blessing to those in hell.
55. Love—"It would be happy for man, if hell were no longer than this time; but this is man's misery in hell, he shall be in no more hope of coming out after he hath been there millions of years, then he was when he was first cast in there."

56. Thus, before I come to my second and final main heading, I want to provide three arguments in favor of eternal, conscience torment.
57. (i) Hell lasts as long as heaven, v46—"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life."
58. (ii) Hell torment never ends, Rev.14:11—"And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night."
59. (iii) Hell fire is never quenched, Mk.9:48—"Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched (put out)."
60. (iv) Hell varies in degree, Matt.10:15—"Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

II. The Sentence of the Righteous

1. V46—"but the righteous (will go) into eternal life"—let me say a few brief things by way of introduction to this phrase.
2. First, the same Greek word rendered "everlasting" in v46a, is the same Greek word rendered "eternal" in v46b.
3. Second, the Greek text actually has the word "life" first—"but the righteous into life eternal"—or life that's eternal.
4. Third, the word or concept of "life" is basically opposite of "punishment" and refers to the quality of life.
5. I mean, let's face it, the wicked will live or have life in some sense for all eternity—they do not cease to exist.
6. But the life of the righteous in heaven (that's eternal), is a specific or certain kind of life that never ends.
7. (1) Eternal life is a possession—it's true that our Savior speaks of eternal life as something we will enter at the day of judgment.
8. And yet, other Scriptures clearly describe Christians, or believers, as presently possessing eternal life.
9. Jn.3:36—"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
10. Notice believers are presently in possession of eternal life, that is, they've already begun to experience it.
11. The "life" that is eternal fundamentally entails knowing, loving, serving, worshiping, and adoring God (and every Christian does these things now).
12. (2) Eternal life is a promise—notice our Savior speaks of an aspect of "life" that is to come—"he who does not believe the Son shall not see life."
13. They knew nothing of "life" here in this world, and so, they shall know nothing of this "life" in eternity.
14. In other words, there's another aspect of this "life" that awaits Christians, and this is what our Savior means by "eternal life."
15. Jn.17:3—"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."
16. This is what true "life" entails, to know God through Christ, and this knowledge has its beginning here and comes to a completion in heaven.
17. Thus, true "life" what we might call "spiritual life," has its beginning on earth when a person comes to know God.
18. Now, I trust it's evident that the knowledge referred to by our Savior was a savingly and loving knowledge.

19. This is what we might refer to as true knowledge—it includes the whole soul—the mind, heart, and will.
20. Those who know God, know who God is, they love Him, and they seek to walk in His commandments.
21. Thus, our Savior says, the righteous "will go into eternal life"—they will enter a unique state of life (or put another way—they will uniquely know God).
22. And so, I want to end by answering the question—how will the life that we have then, differ from that which we have now?
23. (a) We will know God perfectly—by that I mean, we will know Him as fully as a redeemed creature can.
24. Here of course, though we know God truly and personally, our knowledge of God is far from perfect.
25. 1Cor.13:12—"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."
26. That is, just as God knows us perfectly, so we shall know God perfectly, which must be understood in a qualified sense.
27. The point being, our knowledge of God will no longer be fuzzy, but we shall see Him clearly (as if face to face).
28. Some of you will know, this refers to the beatific vision—that blessed sight of God we will have of Him in heaven.
29. We will behold the glorified GodMan with our glorified bodily eyes, and we shall see God clearly with our spiritual eyes.
30. (b) We will know God increasingly—that is, our understanding and thus love for God will always expand.
31. I say this because God is incomprehensible—He's too vast and immense to fully comprehend or grasp.
32. Thus, while our knowledge of God will always be perfect, it will never be exhaustive or comprehensive.
33. Rev.22:1—"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb."
34. This water proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb, because eternal life comes from God through Christ.
35. And it's described as a pure river because it never ends—our knowledge of God, enjoyment of God, and adoration of God, will always increase.
36. (c) We will know God immutably—by this I mean, eternal life can never be lost or forfeited—it's eternal.
37. This of course was what God promised Adam in the garden—eternal life if he obeyed and death if he disobeyed.
38. The promise of eternal life was symbolized in the tree of life—if you remember Adam was removed from the Garden so that he would not eat from this tree.
39. Gen.3:22—"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And no, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever' – therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden."
40. Thus, while Adam was created with life (he knew God), he was not created with eternal life (as eternal life is eternal – it can never be lost).
41. This is what Adam was promised—to know God perfectly, increasingly, and immutably for all eternity.

42. Prov.3:16-17—"Length of days is in her right hand. In her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. And happy are all who retain her."
43. Rev.22:2—"In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."
44. In the gospel of God, access is given to the tree of life, and this life is within the Son—you have to come to Christ.
45. And those who come to Christ have eternal life, and thus in this sense, they begin to eat from this tree now.
46. But they shall perfectly, increasingly, and immutably eat of it for all eternity, in the new heavens and earth.
47. V46—"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (or, life that's eternal). While collar