

Jesus on Hell

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Matthew 7:21-27
Preached on: Thursday, April 9, 2020

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

A recurring thing in my mind that has come to bear on my thoughts again and again, the world is disrupted, the world is slowed down to some extent through these national issues that we are dealing with, but the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of his people is completely undiminished and completely unhindered. The work of the Holy Spirit and his ability to convert the lost and to lead them to saving faith in Jesus Christ, to impart new life to them, all of that's completely undiminished and completely unhindered, and it's because we believe that as a church, it's because I believe that as a pastor that I feel like it is utmost importance for us to double our attention to God's word during a time like this, to seek him all the more earnestly in this time of disruption because as we've seen in my prior two messages, God is doing a work in the midst of this, God has purposes that he is carrying out in the midst of this, and the most important thing that we could do in response is to seek him in his word and to see what his word has to say to us in the midst of times like this.

So that's what we are doing this. We feel like this is the time to come all the more to God's word and to more earnestly devote ourselves to it than we do in normal times, and I'm trusting God, I'm praying that God would do a work that is beyond all that we could ask or think in the midst of this not only within the walls of our church but beyond it, that God would use this as the setting upon which he does a mighty work to display his power to bring unbelieving people to saving faith in Christ, to pour out his Spirit to bring conversion to the unsaved, and also to sanctify his people and to cause them to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. That is the most important thing that could happen in the midst of this time, far more important than the political consequences or the medical consequences of this, or the business consequences of this. We must come to the humble realization that what God is doing is foremost and our desire is to submit to him, and part of the way that we submit to him is by coming to his word with increased attention and increased devotion and increased reverence during this time and humbly ask him to bless us as we do. So that's the spirit in which we are approaching these times in these additional online services.

Now what I want to do tonight is to build on those past two messages that I preached on Sunday and Tuesday. The first message "When God Stops the World," it was an indication, we looked at Luke 13, seeing that God is graciously sending a warning to the world through this disruption, that God is warning men and showing them in undeniable

ways that they are not in control of their lives and that death is coming, and therefore it is a time of spiritual urgency for them to contemplate the deadness and the lostness of their souls and to seek the Lord Jesus Christ if perhaps he would have mercy on them in this time. Then on Tuesday, we considered the topic of "When God Stops the Church," and we saw that from Hebrews 12 that God uses a time like this to graciously bring discipline and correction upon his people, and we looked at the church at large and we looked at the church on a local level, and we looked at our own individual lives and realized that there was plenty of room for confession of sin and repentance on all of our parts, and that we could understand why God would disrupt even the operations of his visible church because there is so much that has gone astray that needs to be corrected, and he brings chastisement upon us, and one of the ways that we respond to that correction is that we turn our attention to God's word. You know, you could think about it in terms of a child with a sensitive conscience being corrected by his parents and going to his mother, going to his father and saying, "What would you have me to do in this time? I accept the correction. What would you have me to do? What would you have me to change?" Well, in a far greater way, in a far more significant and eternal way, that's what we need to do as his people is to contemplate as we go to God's word what would he have us change and what would he have us contemplate in the midst of a time like this.

Well, what we want to see here tonight and we want to build on this idea that judgment is coming, what we talked about on Sunday when God stops the world, to build on the theme that judgment is coming. We said that, we said that God's hand is in this, that God is holy and that God has a hell and that God is offering hope to the world in the midst of this as he brings these things to our attention, but what I want to do this evening is to enter into the sober topic and to expand on that idea that God has a hell and that it is real and that it is something that we need to contemplate here. And friends, you understand that it is very difficult in times of prosperity to get people to think seriously about spiritual matters. When people are content, when they are well fed, when their jobs and health seem secure to them and prosperity is abounding and blooming all around us, people are focused on this world and it is, therefore, a gracious thing from God to remove those things and to make those things unsettled in order to clear the decks, so to speak, so that people will contemplate spiritual reality, and the reality of eternal judgment, of eternal hell is something that while it may initially seem to be unpleasant, is something that we increasingly need to press home on the minds of anyone who would hear us. In addition to that, for us as believing people, it is a sobering reminder to us of the stakes that are at hand in the teaching of Scripture and what we believe and the Gospel that we proclaim. All of these things create a sense of urgency for us to go back to God's word and to see what it has to say about these matters because I would have you see it yourself from God's word. I would not want to be someone who is independently alarmist about this apart from Scripture, and I certainly don't want you to take my word for it. I want you to be able to see it from God's word for yourself exactly how this is woven throughout not only the general pages of Scripture but found rooted deeply in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

So tonight we're going to consider what Jesus said about hell. The title for tonight's message, "Jesus on Hell," and what we want to see is that Scripture declares this theme of judgment in unmistakable terms. In the book of Acts 17:30 and 31, it says this, it says

30 ... having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31 because, he has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

God has fixed a day for judgment. There will be a day when Jesus Christ will gather nations before himself and gather all men of all time, and in some supernatural miraculous way will evaluate their lives in perfect righteousness and they will give an account to him of their lives and they will be held accountable for their rebellion against him. This is a matter of great sobriety and it's a matter of great consequence and great emphasis in the Scriptures.

So what we want to do tonight is to build on these sobering things. The events of our world today, beloved, what is happening around us now is a foreshadowing of that greater judgment that is yet to come, and because the greater judgment, the final judgment has not yet arrived, there is time for you to repent, there is time for you to take these things seriously, to take them to heart and to ask God for mercy on your guilty soul before the final judgment comes and you're cast away and it's too late. You see, there is a warning here and the warning gives you opportunity to seek Christ and to ask him for mercy and that is an act of grace from God that there is this window of time in which he is showing that for a time he's not willing for men to perish but that men would come to repentance and that's what we want to see and why this is so urgent to not take this time of gracious warning for granted in light of the time of wrathful judgment that is coming as we'll see from God's word.

So what we're going to do is we're going to focus primarily on the Gospel of Matthew here this evening, looking at what Jesus Christ himself said about hell, and for our starting text tonight, let's go back to what I opened up with reading from Matthew 7, beginning in verse 21, and as we've done for the sake of emphasis in past messages, I want to read through that text again so that it is set well in your mind and becomes the foundation upon which we look for God's teaching through his Spirit here tonight.

Matthew 7:21,

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' 24 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be

compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall."

Friends, what I would have you see in the very general overview that we're going to take at this text for just a couple of moments here, is that Jesus is making a contrast between a wise man and a fool, and he compares the wise man to someone who built his house on a firm foundation of rock, and the foolish man being the one who built his house on the sand. We don't need a degree in construction engineering to understand that anything built on sand is unstable and is subject to destruction at any time when the forces of nature come upon it. By contrast, a house built on a solid foundation has the capacity to withstand the forces of nature because it's properly constructed according to the principles of good engineering practice. That's the basic simplicity of the metaphor, I guess.

What we need to see is that Jesus is taking those pictures from the physical realm and applying them to the spiritual realm, and the basis of distinction is not the physical foundation upon which a house is built, but rather the spiritual foundation upon which your life is built, upon which your hope is built, upon which your focus is built, and he says that the wise man is the one who responds to his word, the foolish man hears it, avoids it, ignores it, neglects it and goes on and pays a most heavy price. You see, the wise man hears the words of warning of Jesus in the Scripture and comes to him humbly in a repentant faith and asking Christ for mercy because of his sin. The foolish man hears the same words of judgment, hears the same message of salvation and yet ignores it, or denies it, or mocks it, or angrily denounces it as something that is incompatible with the general tolerance of man or whatever else might be on, you know, in their sinful minds. Well, what Jesus is showing us is that there will come a time of testing. Just as hasty construction faces a time of testing from the later forces of nature, what we see here in this Scripture is that our response to Christ and to his words faces a future time of testing and what we have based our life and hope on will be tested not by a strong storm of nature but by the even stronger storm of the judgment of Christ when he evaluates our lives.

So Christ is looking forward to that day of judgment in the passage that I just read. He is saying that men will stand before him and at that future time, he will declare to them their eternal destiny. The matters of heaven and hell are directly an issue in this passage that we are looking at and what he says is so sobering. It's a familiar passage. I've taught on it many times even here at Truth Community Church, but what it says is so sobering, my friends, because what stands out is this group of people who are shocked, who are stunned, who are astonished to realize that they are not entering into the kingdom of heaven but rather they are being cast away into eternal judgment, and Jesus says to them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." Now look, that is

sobering. That is a matter of utmost serious consequence and there is no way to laugh this off, there is no way to righteously ignore it, there is no excuse for doing that. Jesus has graciously in the first century, he graciously gave a warning about the nature of spiritual life and what future judgment would look like. He gave a preview of coming attractions and it's such a sobering picture. It's just so important to realize that Jesus says that these that are turned away, there will be many of them. This is not an isolated case. This is not something that is going to be a rare exception to expectations on that day, rather there are going to be many many many people who expecting to go to heaven find themselves instead sent away by Jesus Christ. My friends, as you're watching this, I want you to understand that this is a matter that we are to take seriously. We are to hear the words of Christ and act upon them, to turn our hearts to them in humility recognizing that in so doing we can join the wise who are responding rather than the fools who ignore it and pay such an unspeakably enormous price at the end of the age.

So my plea with God and my plea with you is that he might bless this time in his word and bless it to your hearing, that if you are slumbering in a false conversion that God would graciously wake you up; that if you are hardened that the Spirit of God would soften you as you see the great consequences of the things that we are discussing here today. So there will be many for whom judgment will not go as they had expected and Christ is telling the visible church, those who consider themselves Christians to pay heed, to pay attention during this time. He is warning them of a danger that is ahead and it behooves us all to take it to heart, and it reminds us of a most simple reality, that not everyone who calls themselves a Christian truly is saved, not everyone who believes that they have been saved actually is. There's a disconnect, there is a self-delusion that operates in the hearts of men that we're vulnerable to and that is dangerous, eternally dangerous, my friends, and so I plead with you to hear and to not lightly dismiss the things that are taking place.

Let me call a little bit of a time out here and just say this. Over the, you know, the 25 years or so that I've had one involvement or another in pastoral ministry, I've baptized dozens and dozens of people, and as I look back over my records and the subsequent course of some of those lives, it's just evident that those people were baptized on the basis of a mistaken view of their conversion. They leave the church. They abandon Christ. They have no interest in righteousness. They go back to their former way of life. You know, there's no way to judge those things in the moment, there's no way you baptize people based on, you know, the testimony, the credible testimony of their lips, but sometimes it shows up in later lives that these people didn't understand their true situation because those who were truly converted continue in the faith.

Well, it's just a sobering reminder, it's another picture that's given to us that when these things happen, we're seeing the reality that not everyone that claims to be a Christian in the moment actually is, and far more important than the way that this is borne out in the life of, you know, of a pastor's ministry is what the consequences of that are for the final day of judgment and what it means for people later on. Christ shows us plainly that simply claiming to be a Christian does not make you one, being born into a Christian family does not make you a Christian, and I just want you to see the stakes could not be

more high and they could not be more high for you to take these things into your heart and to receive what Jesus says and to ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and discernment about your own soul. We are forgetting about what's happening in the world around us today, we're forgetting about everybody else that's looking at us or sitting next to us, and Scripture is speaking directly to you today and my prayer is that God would bless this word to your heart for the eternal well-being of your eternal soul.

So Christ has given a warning. He says that "not everybody who calls Me Lord will actually enter into heaven." Well, he goes on and he shows that there are also those that he will turn away because they are not those who do his will. People call him Lord but it's an empty faith. People claim to do works in his name but they were empty works. "Lord, we prophesied in Your name. We cast out demons in Your name. We did many miracles in Your name. Lord, how could You send us away after all that we have done?" Doesn't that just sound like charismatic ministry today? It grieves me to contemplate the consequences of Jesus' words for that whole realm of so-called evangelicalism, but what we need to see here is that it is possible, Jesus says there will be many who will have done works and had done them in his name and yet he'll send them away, and the reality, the explanation for that is this, is that those works were not flowing from a new birth that had taken place in their hearts; they were not works that were done in response to the saving work of God in a life; they were works that were done in human pride or for the sake of projecting human merit before God, and Christ rejects it all and shows us that this possibility, this reality that will take place is that there will be those with empty words before him, "Lord, Lord." Empty. Faith without works is dead. Also the possibility of people coming, showing their works before him and he says, "No, it's empty because it wasn't premised on a repentant faith in Me to generate the motivations for it all." And what we see here is this and it's very sobering. You know, people I think tend to take Jesus too lightly and people forget that Jesus Christ rules over eternal judgment, that Christ has the authority and all judgment has been handed over to him, and your eternal destiny is going to be determined by what Jesus Christ does with you and there is no way around that. All of us are being funneled toward one destination, one common outcome of our lives, one common meeting point where we gather before the throne of Christ and he either admits us into his kingdom or he sends us away.

So it's very sobering to realize and Jesus claimed this authority for himself. He asserted this authority about himself. In the book of Revelation 1:18, Jesus said, "I have the keys of death and of Hades." The entrance to heaven comes through him alone. It does not come through Peter. It certainly does not come through Mary. It doesn't come through any other human agency or any institution like the Roman Catholic Church. Eternal life is found in Christ alone. He said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." So do you see, my friend, how high and lofty and exalted this makes Christ, and how much we need to respect, revere and fear him in light of the great authority that he has over our lives? Our eternal destinies are in his hands and Christ has said many will be deceived about the reality of their salvation, and that many will be sent away and many will be like fools on that day, having not taken the words of Christ to heart.

Well, my friends, what God has given us here on this Thursday evening, April 9, 2020, God has given us another opportunity, God has given you another opportunity to take the words of Christ to heart. And you know, I think about the young people in our church that are often sitting over to my right, sometimes off back to the left and maybe you're gathered around a screen watching this with your parents or something, how important it is for you as you enter closer and closer to adulthood and your understanding of these things is growing, how important it is for you to humble yourself before the word of Christ and to not take anything for granted about the condition of your soul, and to heed the words of Christ in what's being said here tonight.

So Jesus Christ turns away those with empty words, he turns away those with empty works who do not do his will. Those people are going to be shown to be impostors, false converts, those who never knew Christ in the first place, and the nineteenth century commentator, J. C. Ryle, said this, he said and I quote in light of these words of Christ he said this, he said, "Do we truly repent, truly believe on Christ and live holy and humble lives? If not, in spite of all our privileges and profession, we shall miss heaven at last and be forever cast away. We shall hear those awful words, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me.'" That's how serious this is and I'm going to quote from Bishop Ryle a few more times before the night is over.

Friends, let's just be clear. No one is saved by their works. That's not what we're talking about here. We're saved through faith alone, in Christ alone. But Scripture equally teaches that true faith, real, genuine, saving faith produces a changed life that is manifested in genuinely good works as Scripture defines them. Our social relationships are changed. Our doctrinal beliefs are changed. Our moral behavior is changed as the letter to 1 John teaches us. So there is a genuine transformation that takes place because in true salvation God has taken a man, taken a woman, taken a boy, taken a girl, taken them out of death and transformed them into life. He has imparted a new nature to them. He has made them a new creation, a new life principle animates everything about their being, and because there is a new life within, there is an outward change that takes place in actions and in words, and there is an internal change that takes place in true salvation of a love for God's word both written and Incarnate; you love Scripture and you love the Savior and your life reflects that in what you do. So there is this genuine change that takes place without which a profession of faith is empty. Faith without works is dead, James 2:17 says.

So we contemplate these things from Christ and we realize that in the end Jesus Christ is going to turn away from entrance into his kingdom everyone who does not genuinely love him, that is not genuinely submitted to him, that has not genuinely entrusted their souls to him, that has not repentantly come to him asking for mercy and for salvation. You see, this excludes everyone who is casual, this excludes everyone who is indifferent, and this excludes so many people who have heard the word of God who can easily say that, "You know, Christ died for me," without the reality of a genuine change inside their lives, and it's people like that that these words of Christ are directed to.

So Christ turns people away because these people do not love him, and think with me here, they do not really love him. Some of you watching, you don't really love Christ, you just go along for the ride, you think about things in just outward morality terms or things like that, but a true heart, love, affection for the Lord Jesus Christ, yeah, that's foreign to your soul. You're in danger if you do not love Christ. The Scriptures say, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed," 1 Corinthians 16, I believe it is. And yet if you do not love the King, why should the King let you into his kingdom? On what grounds would Christ share his kingdom with those that are hostile to him? That makes no sense and yet this is one of the basic ways that people go into error in their minds and delude themselves about the reality of their salvation. And yet despite all of these things and despite this text that we have seen in Matthew 7, men and women will still, will still reject the warning. They will still dismiss the threat of judgment and they callously and superficially and foolishly have it in their minds that somehow in the end Jesus is all love and peace, and therefore all will be well in the end. In their minds, there is no place for a literal hell for literal sinners to be sent for literally all of eternity. They just don't contemplate that because they think it doesn't fit with their view of the world and their view of Jesus, and for some, it's so horrible to contemplate that they just push it out of their minds and don't even think about it. They deny it without even seeing what Scripture actually says about it.

Well, it's our responsibility here this evening, it's my privilege here this evening to show you what the Bible actually says and what Jesus himself actually said about these important matters, and so we're going to see three things here tonight about hell and about Jesus and what he taught about hell, and the first one is this and is simply stated: hell is real. Hell is real. There is a literal place of future punishment that exists where many many people will be cast and spend there is eternity in this awful place of judgment. Hell is real. It is not a fiction. It is not a fable. It is not the creation of fundamentalist preachers. It is the clear teaching of the word of God by which I mean the 66 books of the Bible, and it is the clear teaching of the word of God by which I mean the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ himself. Jesus teaches repeatedly, my friends, over and over again Jesus assumes the reality of a literal hell in the things that he teaches. I want to show you this primarily from the Gospel of Matthew.

Turn to Matthew 5 with me, a little earlier in the Sermon on the Mount that we were looking at from Matthew 7. Now we want to look at Matthew 5:22 and the course of tonight's message will start to accelerate now after all that introduction. Matthew 5:21, Jesus said,

21 You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good for nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; [here it is] and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

The fiery hell. Jesus' warning here would be meaningless if hell was not an actual place; if it was only a metaphor of some kind, his teaching would be meaningless. Jesus is showing us that hell is a literal place and that's what gives such weight to his warnings against the sin of anger to realize that a man with an angry spirit is someone who is guilty enough to be cast into hell.

Now later in that chapter, we see that a man with a lustful heart is also guilty enough to go to a literal hell. Look at verse 27. Jesus goes on and says,

27 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

Jesus here is showing that even internal sins create guilt before God of such consequence and such degree that men are guilty and liable to eternal judgment, and he's warning them that there is a place in hell for angry people and for lustful people even if they are outwardly moral. That has nothing to do with it. Jesus looks on the heart and says, "If your heart is like this, you are guilty enough to go to hell." And so serious is the warning that he uses a sense of hyperbole that says, "If there is something in your life, if there is a sin in your life, it is so important for you to repent that it would be like it would be better for you to cut off a body part and go without your right hand during this brief earthly life rather than to carry that sin, carry that body part into eternal hell."

And friends, here's what you have to see, this is what you must understand no matter what you've been taught to the contrary in the past, we are seeing the clear words of Jesus Christ on the pages of Scripture here tonight, aren't we? This is undeniable. Jesus talks about being sent into the fiery hell. Here's what you need to understand, my friend, Jesus Christ means what he says. It is impossible for God to lie. Jesus Christ when he speaks about the fiery hell, he's not bluffing. He's not trying to scare you only to remove the reality of the threat at a later time. No, the threat is real and the threat will be executed in future eternal judgment on everyone who rejects Christ. And so Christ isn't bluffing. He means what he says here and we need to get past our natural inclination to marginalize his words and to take him at his word and to understand that when he speaks of a literal hell for literal sinners, for literal sins in their lives, he means it and there are actually going to be countless numbers of people cast into hell. Why? Because hell is real. It is a real place where people are really in danger of really going. I don't know how many different ways I can say it but as I say it, there's a mental prayer in my mind that the Spirit of God would be merciful to you and would convict you of the reality of these things that you might flee to Christ for mercy as a sinner who is in danger and needs deliverance from a very real threat your eternal well-being.

Let's go on and see what else Jesus had to say about this. Look at Matthew 12:36. Jesus tells us that God will judge sinners with exacting provision, with a frightening provision. Matthew 12:36 says this and this is Jesus Christ speaking. He said,

36 ... I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

Wow. Wow. That stops us in our tracks, beloved. You think of the many ways that so many people and probably many of you, and I can only quote it here to make the point, how flippantly people will say, "Oh my God," use it in such a casual flippant way, the name of God being used in terms like that. It's those kinds of careless words, that kind of irreverent flippant use of the name of God that would be included in the fact that Jesus says that every careless word is something that will be given an account to on the day of judgment. And when you think of the careless threats that we make, the flippant things that we say to people, the cutting words, the sarcastic words, the unedifying things that we say, the way that we turn away from people in anger, oh, oh, to realize that every single one of those sins is enough to send someone to hell and then you realize that we all have an accumulated weight of guilt of that in the thousands and tens thousands and hundreds of thousands of times throughout the course of a 70 year life that we're like that, every careless word we're going to give an account for? You start to realize that hell must be a place of such judgment to realize that what we take casually, not God. God views it with utmost seriousness and says there will be an accounting for that word if you don't repent.

So hell is a very real place. Jesus warns us, he premises his teaching on it. And you know, without going into a lot of theological detail here right now, the fact that hell is real and that real people will really go there, that is a refutation of the doctrine of Universalism that says that all people will be saved in the end. That could not possibly be true. That cannot possibly be reconciled with what Jesus Christ said. It is a contradiction of man over the word of Christ and the ironic thing is that contradiction is the kind of careless talking and teaching that will be given an account to on the day of judgment. There are men who casually dismiss it, there are men who write books defending that kind of theology and they will give an account for every page of their published work that they took royalties from as they denied the words of Christ.

Hell is real, that refutes Universalism. It also refutes the false doctrine of annihilationism, the idea that sinful souls will simply be punished and then cease to exist. That's not true. The Bible refutes the Catholic teaching of purgatory, you know, the idea that you suffer in a place for a few thousand years but in the end it all comes out okay for you. That's not true. That's not true and we see that in our second point here that we're about to look at. Hell is real, secondly, what we need to understand is that hell is painful. Hell is painful and I don't want to be overly dramatic here, I just want to let the word of God speak for itself. Jesus Christ speaks of unspeakable torment for sinners in this place of judgment that is called hell.

Look at Matthew 13, beginning at verse 41. Jesus had just said in verse 40,

40 ... the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire [and watch what follows]; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A picture of misery. A picture of consciously felt great pain, weeping, gnashing of teeth. This is the nature of punishment in hell and it is painful. It is an infliction of judgment from God upon sinners who have violated his eternal law. This is serious. I don't know how else to say it. This is a matter of profound consequence and I am in no position nor would I even want to apologize for the words of Jesus here. I believe Jesus when he says this and I uphold his righteousness and the righteousness of God as he reveals his intention to judge men for their sins.

If you go on in Matthew 13, you see this in verse 49. He says,

49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gave a picture of what that eternal torment will be like and we see it in very graphic terms if you'll turn to the Gospel of Luke 16 for just a moment. Luke 16 beginning in verse 23. I'm picking up in the middle of this segment about the rich man and Lazarus, assuming that you're somewhat familiar with the story, so for the sake of time I'm not going to review it all. But Jesus had said that the rich man in this story died and he was buried and then he woke up in his place of punishment, and what does it say in verse 23 there?

23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he made dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

And so you see the words that Jesus himself used. Remember, my friends, these are the words of Jesus Christ himself. I'm not making this up. I'm not creating this out of thin air, I am simply taking you to the words of Scripture that are recorded for us of what Christ himself said, and I know that the Spirit of God is bearing witness to the truth of his word as I do so.

Hell is real and hell is painful, and the words that are used, weeping, gnashing of teeth, agony, flame, they all speak to a conscious experience of torment among those that are sent there by God as punishment for their sins. Let that sink in. Let the reality of that sink in. Hell is real. Real people that you and I know and interact with on a day to day basis are going there and it's going to be a place of conscious pain and torment for them. It's almost too awful to contemplate except for the fact that Scripture teaches this repeatedly and obviously intends us to understand and to heed it and to take it to heart.

I quote again from Bishop Ryle. He said this, "Let the ungodly man tremble when he reads the parable. Let him see in its fearful language his own certain doom unless he repents and is converted. Let him know that he is sowing misery for himself if he goes on still in his neglect of God. Let him reflect that his end will be to be gathered among the bundles of tares and be burned. Such a prospect ought to make a man think. We must not misinterpret God's patience with the ungodly."

God allows men a period of time. He gives us a period of life on earth of a few decades and during that time we enjoy the benefits of his common grace. We enjoy a good meal. We enjoy a friendship. We enjoy a beautiful sunset. And in the midst of these kind of blessings from God upon undeserving people, people are lulled into a false sense of security thinking that there will never be an accounting for their rejection of a holy God, and never an accounting for their refusal to heed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What Scripture is showing us is there is a time of accounting that is coming, however, and it may come upon many in a sudden way without further warning, without further opportunity to repent and receive Christ. So we must understand that though there is a relative calm in life at the moment, Scripture is teaching us and warning us that there is a future judgment coming upon many unsuspecting people, and what we have in this time of national distress that we are going through, God has added a providential circumstantial warning designed to wake people up to make them think outside the bounds of normal life and to contemplate where things are going in their lives and what the outcome of their sinful course would be, and that's why we said on Sunday that it is a gracious act of God to stir things up in such a way so that people would contemplate spiritual realities, come humbly to his word and learn these things and repent while there is time lest they enter into that future judgment. Far better for us to have several months of national disruption and to see a great harvest of souls brought to saving faith in Christ than for us to continue unmolested in our material prosperity and to just find out that in the end it was just the Niagara River carrying great masses of people to the Falls and over they go to certain destruction. God's diverted the river for a short time, diverted it away from the Falls for a moment that people might be able to step out, as it were, of sin to repent and to come to Christ in faith for salvation and deliverance from that certain judgment that is about to come. But friends, eventually the river is going to carry its current toward that certain fall of destruction and we're talking about these things, beloved, because Christ is offering you mercy in the midst of it that you might be delivered while there is still time for you and it's my privilege to be able to say these things and with far lesser and with greatly flawed but mercy all the same, reflecting the mercy of Christ. That's why we're talking about these things. It is that Christ is offering

mercy to you through his word to wake you up and to stimulate you to flee to him and to cry out to him for grace and kindness and love and mercy on your undeserving soul, because hell is real and hell is painful and it is your certain destination to go there unless you find your refuge in Christ alone. So my friend, heed the words. Don't dismiss this. Christ has said so much about it that we cannot avoid it, we cannot deny it nor should we. He has spoken these words to us in grace for us to hear and he has spoken them in grace, seeking your blessing and seeking your eternal well-being as he does.

Now we've talked a lot about repentance in the midst of this, to repent of sin and to come to faith in Christ. Well, just for a moment let's answer that question, well, what is repentance? What is repentance? Well, to paraphrase the Shorter Catechism, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, repentance means that a sinner feels a grief and a hatred over his sin. He turns from his sin as he trusts in the mercy of God offered to him in Christ and he turns with the full purpose to pursue new obedience to Christ as his Lord. You see, as we've considered these things about sin, about our careless words, our sinful thoughts, our sinful anger, our sinful lust, our sinful conduct, and we see something of the nature of the eternal consequences that God will bring upon those who are guilty of those things which is all of us for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, my friend, what I want you to see is that repentance recognizes these realities and there is an inner working in your heart that says, "I hate that. I hate the sin that offends God. I hate the sin that threatens my soul. I hate it for its inherent guiltiness. I hate it for its inherent blackness that it is against God. I hate it not only for its consequences but for what it is, and that it has dominated me and that I have loved and sought it and pursued it in my life." Repentance looks at sin in that way and says, "I reject that. I turn from that. I know that that's what my life loved but no longer. That's no longer what I want. I turn from that in order to embrace Christ as He is offered to me in the Gospel." That's repentance.

Now there's a couple of aspects about that that I should mention just briefly. The Holy Spirit is the one who must produce that in your heart. You cannot make yourself repent. You need the help of the Holy Spirit and he needs to do a work in your heart even to enable you to repent like that. 2 Timothy 2:25 speaks that perhaps God will grant repentance to them in the context of which he is speaking there in that text. Perhaps God will grant repentance to them. God must grant repentance to a person in order for them to repent, and just to stretch this out and to tease out that thought just a little bit, you must understand that you do not have the intrinsic power in your heart to repent on your own anymore than you could just by the sheer power of your human will cause yourself to grow another six inches right on the spot, you know, and you just say, "I'm going to commit my will to it and I'm going to grow six inches." It doesn't work like that. You don't have the power to do that. In the same way, the dead sinful heart of man does not have the power to produce his own repentance. He needs the help of the Holy Spirit to do even that, and yet at the same time God commands us to do this, God commands us to repent. We saw in Acts 17, God's commanding men everywhere to repent. Jesus said in Luke 13, "Unless you repent, you will likewise perish."

So you realize that God is giving you a command to repent and yet you find within yourself that you don't have, and by the testimony of God's word, you don't have the

power to do it. You're dead in your trespasses and sins and you start to realize how desperate it is. You say, "Well, what can I do then?" Well, you go to Christ and you cry out for mercy. You realize how desperate your situation is and you ask Christ to save you and you seek him and you ask him to give you a mercy that you do not deserve and a repentance that you cannot produce in your own power. That's why it's so foolish for people to say, "Well, I'm going to live a life of sin and then I'll repent on my deathbed." They assume that they can just turn repentance on and off at the beckoning of their own will. It doesn't work like that and that's why you have to seek Christ while he may be found. Today is the day of salvation. Don't wait. Don't hesitate. Seek him. Christ said, "Come to Me." It's a command. It's an imperative. "Come to Me and I will give you rest." You have to go to Christ and not rely on the power of your own heart to produce this saving response that would deliver you from a hell that is real and a hell that is painful.

Well, there's one more point that we want to see from the words of Jesus tonight and it's this, it's that hell is eternal. Hell is eternal. It never ends. It never stops. The pain of hell that's described as a gnashing of teeth, of weeping, of agony, that is the lot and condition of those who are there forever without end, and Christ taught this clearly. Jesus makes clear that hell is eternal. It never never ends.

Look at Matthew 25 with me. Matthew 25, beginning in verse 41, Jesus speaking about that final day and he says in verse 41.

41 ... He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me'

There are those dreadful words again. He said it in Matthew 7, he's saying it again in Matthew 25 functioning almost like bookends to his public teaching before the account of his trial and execution that is recorded. He says many will be told, "Depart from Me," here in verse 41 he says to those on his left,

'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

And look at verse 46. He says,

46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Believers have eternal life and they will be with God forever. The parallelism of the passage shows us that in like manner, in like manner of the eternal nature of the consequence, the wicked go into a punishment that is eternal as well. The righteous, those saved by Christ, they will live in heaven forever. The wicked, those who die without Christ, they will live in hell forever. It's eternal.

I quote once more, this time I just want to call attention to the language of our Confession of Faith. Here at Truth Community Church we use the London Baptist Confession of 1689 and in chapter 32, the second paragraph of the Confession says this answering the

question what happens to those who are sent away? "The wicked who know not God and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ shall be cast into everlasting torments and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." They will be cast into everlasting torments and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. This is echoing the language of the inspired word of God in 2 Thessalonians 1, from the words of Jesus' Apostle Paul, his representative. The Apostle Paul said this in 2 Thessalonians 1, beginning in verse 6, he says,

6 ... after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when [watch this, 2 Thessalonians 1:7] when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day,

Eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.

I quote again from J. C. Ryle one last time for this evening, anyway. He said this and I quote, he said, "Who shall describe the misery of eternal punishment? It is something utterly inconceivable. The eternal pain of body, the eternal sting of an accusing conscience, the eternal companionship of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels, the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised, the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future. All this is misery indeed. It is enough to make our ears tingle and our blood run cold and yet this picture is nothing compared to the reality."

It's all sobering, isn't it? Hell is real. Hell is painful. Hell is eternal. All certified to us by the words of Jesus himself and affirmed elsewhere by other pages of Scripture and other passages of the inspired word of God. This is Jesus teaching us on hell.

Now let me just say this as we kind of wrap things up here this evening anticipating another time in God's word tomorrow on Good Friday, is to understand this, that no one should hear a message like this and ignore it, for one thing, and secondly, it's important for you to vindicate in your own mind the righteousness and the goodness of Jesus Christ. I realize, of course, that the consequences of what Jesus teaches on this are just, they take your breath away. We realize how serious and how sobering this is. We realize how vast the consequences of it all are but, my friend, you must understand that no one should step up and make accusations against God or against his Son for unkindness or unfairness or anything of the sort, especially those of you that have heard these things here tonight, because what has God done for you? God did not simply at your first sin, so to speak, snap his fingers and immediately cast you into this place of punishment. Instead what God has done for you even this evening is that God has brought you a warning in the context of a greater warning, of a broader warning, I should say, a greater warning in the context of a smaller warning would be the way to put it. The smaller warning is the

circumstances in which we find our lives in this time that make us sensitive to spiritual realities, God graciously sent that to get the attention of some sinners just like you, and then he brings this greater warning from his word warning you about the consequences of eternal wrath, and the only thing that keeps you from salvation in Christ would be your own rejection of these words. Christ graciously offers you mercy. He says, "Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." There is no greater agitation of the one who understands the fearful prospect that he deserves eternal hell and that it's a real place and a painful place and an eternal place, and he goes to Christ and flees for salvation and says, "Lord, have mercy on me the sinner," like the publican in Luke 18. Christ graciously receives every sinner who comes to him. He says, "The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."

So for you here this evening listening tonight, Christ has sent you a warning from his word to recognize the reality of hell and a simultaneous invitation to flee to him for salvation and he promises that he'll never turn you away. What complaint, then, do you have? What complaint would you possibly have if you reject that offer of salvation and you turn away in stubborn rebellion and you find yourself in that coming future day, you find yourself sent away and you find yourself in this miserable place of punishment, a real hell that is painful and eternal? Part of the agony at that time for those who would reject Christ in response to a message like this is the realization that God came right to them and spoke words of hope, spoke words of salvation directly into their ears and warned them of the consequences and yet they hardened their heart and turned away. Everyone should understand that God's justice will be vindicated and there will be no accusation of unfairness, unkindness or unrighteousness that would be upheld against a holy God in light of the fact that he has warned us in multiple ways about what is to come.

So my friend, I plead with you to take these words to heart. Those of you that are outside of Christ, I offer to you the words of Christ in John 5:24 where he said this, he said,

24 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

You see, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a promise of a better life now, it is a promise of deliverance from a future judgment that you deserved, a judgment that Christ paid the price to be able to offer you freely and without cost. The judgment that he suffered on behalf of sinners at the cross which we will remember tomorrow evening, is the basis upon which he can offer this. The price of sin has been paid in full for those who believe in Christ. Christ bore eternal wrath from his Father on behalf of sinners just like you who would come to him in humble repentant faith, pleading for mercy and he delights to give mercy to those who come to him just like that.

So there is mercy in every word that we have seen in Scripture tonight because God has warned us about the consequences of our sin. Mercy, mercy, mercy shown to us but, my friend, you must understand that there is a time where mercy will be withdrawn and

judgment will come and while you hear these words of mercy, and while hope is offered to you now, you must understand the urgency of it that we saw on Sunday from Luke 13 where Jesus Christ spoke. He is warning you that time is brief and that you are not in control. He warns you that unless you repent, you will also perish. And so, my friend, the question comes down to you in the solitude of your own heart vertically before a holy God, you have to decide tonight are you going to be the wise man who builds your life on the word of Christ and receives him for salvation from this hell of which he speaks? Or are you going to be the fool who turns away and ultimately faces the destruction of your life falling down upon you and casting you into this place called hell which is real, painful and eternal? My friend, I beg you, I exhort you, I encourage you, I call upon you, answer well because this is the great question upon which your eternal destiny hangs.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, the Gospel alone is good news. It far transcends the current problems of our nation. We thank You for warning us in Your word about the reality of hell, and we know that the time is brief. We are not in control of our own lives as circumstances have shown us so clearly.

Father, I pray for each one under the sound of Your word that You might use it and in the power of Your Holy Spirit in the hands of Your Holy Spirit, that You would work saving faith into the hearts and saving, a saving repentance in the hearts of those who have been deceived until now. O Lord, have mercy on them.

For those of us that are in Christ and we have Your Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, O Lord, we're reminded of how great a peril that You have delivered us from, how lovingly and how graciously and how kindly You worked to save us when we deserved that destination ourselves. And so we honor You and we thank You, we thank You not only for the initial salvation but for the faithful way that You keep us and that You will certainly deliver us, having pardoned us from sin and giving us a peace that endures, Father, we are safe in the hands of Christ not by what we have done with the works of our hands but by the work that He did with His hands when they were nailed to the cross and He bore our sin on our behalf. Father, we commit the outcome of all these things to You, praying that You would bless Your word to everyone who hears it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.