

Two Destinies  
Revelation 14:6-13  
9/6/2015

The author of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arther Conan Doyle, once tried an experiment. He sent a telegram to twelve of the most influential, popular, and respectable people in London. He did not attach his name to it. The only words on the telegram were these: "Flee—all is revealed." By the following night, six of those twelve had fled the country! It is folly to think that we have nothing to hide, isn't it? Do we not all attempt to hide from everyone else? It is as pitiful a thing as Adam and Eve trying to cover themselves with fig leaves in the garden. They were trying to hide as well. But it is no good trying to hide from the God of the universe. It can't be done. One day all will be revealed. Everything we have done will be on display for all to see. What will make the difference on that day? Will it be the amount of good deeds we have done? Or will it be the blood of Christ, which washes away our guilt and our sin?

Last week, we looked at the redemption of the 144,000. We saw that John's vision contained a transformation of the church from the fighting church to the glorified church, or, in more theological terms, a transition from the church militant to the church triumphant. All those who are part of that true church will praise God with the new song. Today, we learn that not all will be there. There are two eternal destinies, alas! It would be wonderful, perhaps, to think that no one would ever experience an eternity of punishment for their sins. But this is not what our Bible teaches us.

Before we get into an examination of our passage, a few things need to be said first. The first thing is that the doctrine of Hell should be a terribly uncomfortable topic for us. It *needs* to be uncomfortable, and if it is not, then there is something seriously wrong with us! Secondly, we need to realize that it is sin that makes Hell a reality. We were created to be in fellowship with God forever. It was our sin that made another horrible destiny possible. Thirdly, no one in this room should wish the punishment of Hell on anyone else in this life. And it is no joking matter. Some people say, somewhat flippantly, "Go to Hell." We must never say that, jokingly or not. And, fourthly, we should not speak of Hell without tears in our soul that anyone should suffer so.

The doctrine of Hell, if you'll pardon the pun, is under fire in recent

years. Most people don't believe that there is a Hell at all. Or, if they believe that there is a Hell, then they don't believe that anyone will actually have to undergo eternal punishment for “finite” sins. Or, other people put air-conditioning in Hell, making it sound much better than it actually is. Still others believe that unbelievers will simply be annihilated. Others believe that everyone will actually be saved. But, to quote Anselm of Canterbury, these people have not yet considered how great the weight of sin is. The problem of sin is not limited to what it does to us. The greatest problem of sin is that it offends an infinitely holy, infinitely eternal, God. I have used this illustration in Sunday School fairly recently, but it bears repeating. Imagine what would happen if you decided to slap a homeless person on the street. What would be the consequences? Probably just an upset homeless person. Now imagine that you slap a normal citizen. What would the consequences? Well, you might have a fight on your hands, because the citizen would probably slap back. What would happen if you slapped a police officer? Well, you would get put in jail, then. What if you slapped the President of the United States? That could be seen as an attempt on the President's life, and you would probably be executed for treason. Can we see that the same action of a slap has a completely different consequence, depending on the dignity and worth of the person we slap? So, now, if we slap the God of the universe in the face, who has infinite dignity, infinite worth, infinite holiness (and every sin we commit is a slap in God's face), then we should not wonder too much if an eternity is needed to pay the price of that seemingly small action.

So, what is Hell? Probably the most common answer we would get to that question is that Hell is an eternal separation from God. As a matter of fact, that is not true, unless we qualify it rather heavily. It is separation from the grace, mercy, and love of God. But it is not complete separation from God. Look carefully at our passage, and you will see that it is not so. Verse 9 tells us that anyone who receives the mark of the beast (and that would be every unbeliever) shall drink the cup of the wrath of God. Now, this cup is said to be “full strength.” Wine in those days was usually mixed with water, since it was usually in a concentrated form. This wrath will take the form of torment from fire and brimstone (which is sulfur). But this torment takes place in the presence of the angels and of the Lamb, as verse 10 clearly says. The fact is that Hell is not separation from God as judge. In fact, those who

are in Hell will devoutly wish that God was *not* there! Where did we get the idea that God was absent from Hell? Most likely from the words of Jesus on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We do believe that Jesus suffered Hell at that moment. But it was a forsaking of the grace and mercy of God, so that Jesus experienced only the wrath of God in judgment. God was always with His Son, even when wrath was poured out on Him.

This is the place to mention a very sobering fact. Hell must be very, very terrible indeed, if Christ was willing to experience it for us so that we would not have to. If we install an air-conditioner in Hell, and make it less terrible, then we also cheapen the sacrifice that Christ was willing to make on our behalf.

One of the most amazing things about our passage is that the message about Hell is part of the eternal good news. Now, let's stop for a second there. Notice that the text says “everlasting gospel” in verse 6. Most of that everlasting gospel has to do with a description of the two final destinies. In other words, the doctrine of Hell is part of the good news! How is that possible? A couple of illustrations should help here. John Blanchard tells the following story:

The hazard warning lights were on, but were ignored by most drivers. At 6:15 a.m. a truck carrying huge rolls of paper was involved in an accident, and within minutes the highway was engulfed in carnage. Dozens of cars were wrecked. Ten people were killed. A police patrol car was soon on the scene, and two policemen ran back up the motorway to stop oncoming traffic. They waved their arms and shouted as loud as they could, but most drivers took no notice and raced on towards the disaster that awaited them. The policemen then picked up traffic cones and flung them at cars' windscreens in a desperate attempt to warn drivers of their danger; one told how tears streamed down his face as car after car went by and he waited for the sickening sound of impact as they hit the growing mass of wreckage further down the road.

Warning people about Hell should be a bit like what the policemen experienced. Throwing traffic cones at drivers' windshields was probably being interpreted as being unkind and unloving. But the policemen were trying to save people's lives. As a minister of the gospel, I implore you to be warned about the road to Hell and flee from it to Jesus Christ! He is the only

person who can save us from wrath, who can save us from Hell. All we need to do to go to Hell is to do absolutely nothing, and that is because Hell is our default destination.

The most terrifying thing about Hell is that it is eternal. There is no end to it. We need to be confronted with this terrifying reality. James Joyce has said it probably better than anyone:

What must it be, then, to bear the manifold tortures of hell forever? Forever! For all eternity! Not for a year or an age but forever. Try to imagine the awful meaning of this. You have often seen the sand on the seashore. How fine are its tiny grains! And how many of those tiny grains go to make up the small handful which a child grasps in its play. Now imagine a mountain of that sand, a million miles high, reaching from the earth to the farthest heavens, and a million miles broad, extending to remotest space, and a million miles in thickness, and imagine such an enormous mass of countless particles of sand multiplied as often as there are leaves in the forest, drops of water in the mighty ocean, feathers on birds, scales on fish, hairs on animals, atoms in the vast expanse of air. And imagine that at the end of every million years a little bird came to that mountain and carried away in its beak a tiny grain of that sand. How many millions upon millions of centuries would pass before that bird had carried away even a square foot of that mountain, how many eons upon eons of ages before it had carried away all. Yet at the end of that immense stretch time not even one instant of eternity could be said to have ended. At the end of all those billions and trillions of years eternity would have scarcely begun. And if that mountain rose again after it had been carried all away again grain by grain, and if it so rose and sank as many times as there are stars in the sky, atoms in the air, drops of water in the sea, leaves on the trees, feathers upon birds, scales upon fish, hairs upon animals – at the end of all those innumerable risings and sinkings of that immeasurably vast mountain not even one single instant of eternity could be said to have ended; even then, at the end of such a period, after that eon of time, there mere thought of which makes our very brain reel dizzily, eternity would have scarcely begun.

Remember the rich man, who was suffering in Hell? He longed for a single drop of water with which to cool his tongue, but it was not possible. We

have such a small amount of time in this life. This earth is like a portal with two doors. We can catch glimpses every now and then of both eternal destinations. Sometimes our situation looks more like Hell, and sometimes it looks more like Heaven. How foolish are those people who think that they would rather be in Hell! Oftentimes, it is because they do not understand what Heaven and Hell are really like. Our passage does not give us much of a description of Heaven. There are many places in the rest of the book of Revelation that will do that for us. But here we have several important things to notice about Hell.

Firstly, it is the place of wrath. As we have mentioned, God's wrath dwells in Hell. It is a place of punishment. Secondly, it is a place of torment, as verse 10 says. Fire and brimstone are mentioned. Perpetual burning with no end is one way to describe Hell. Thirdly, it is a place where there is no rest. Verse 11 says they have no rest day or night. There is no let-up in the judgment. Remember that this is because of God's infinitely holy character against whom people sin.

Our passage ends, however, on a note of profound hope. It is a call for endurance, as verse 12 says. The people who are called to endurance are those who believe in Jesus Christ, and who therefore keep His commandments. These people are blessed. Verse 13 is one of the most beautiful verses in all of Revelation, and it is all the more beautiful because of the terrifying picture of Hell just before it in the text. Blessed are those who die in the Lord, that they may rest. You see, there is no rest in Hell. But in Heaven, there most certainly is rest from our labors. The effects and rewards of our works will follow us there. Salvation is not one of those rewards. As we have said on numerous occasions, the only way to Heaven is by believing in Jesus Christ. Specifically, it is by believing that Jesus Christ experienced Hell in our place so that we would never need to experience one real second of it. Now do you see the glories of the gospel? How can we possibly see the glories of the gospel, unless we have a true glimpse of that from which we are saved? Salvation from deepest peril can only be appreciated by those who recognize the peril from which they have escaped. And that is why I have said so much on the subject of Hell. Modern man does not wish us to think about Hell at all. Modern man wishes to get rid of Hell so that he can enjoy his sin. The Bible simply does not let us do that. Just because modern man wants to get rid of Hell does not mean that Hell

will simply vanish. It is a very real place. Above all things, I would want every single person in this room, and anyone who hears this message to escape from that terrible eternity, and instead know a life of salvation, which leads to the exact opposite: a life of pure bliss in the new heavens and the new earth.