

WHAT JESUS SAID – THEN AND NOW

The Big Questions About Hell

Text: Mt. 13:47-52

Introduction: The parables of the Kingdom of Heaven that are recorded in Mt. 13 are filled with good news. Although the kingdom began small, it will grow large. Although its outward expression will often be hindered, it will grow from within, and will one day cover the earth. Jesus told us the Kingdom of Heaven grows one person at a time as the seed of the Word of God, particularly the gospel, falls on the fertile soil of the heart of a person who will receive it and allow it to grow by believing in Jesus and trusting Him as Lord.

And just this morning we saw that the Kingdom of Heaven is more valuable and precious than anything else and is available to all who will receive it by surrendering their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ and trusting in Him.

We did note a word of warning in the parable of the wheat and the tares that there will be a gathering of the tares and a burning with fire at the end of the age, but the more explicit description of what happens is reserved for the final parable Jesus tells in this setting, often called the Parable of the Dragnet. A dragnet was a large net like we would call a seine, with floats on the top and weights on the bottom. One side of the net was kept stationary and the other moved in a large circle, usually by a boat and brought back to meet the other end, thus encircling everything in the water and capturing it in the net.

Mt. 13:47-50 ⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

So while Jesus often spoke of the good news that takes us to heaven, He also told us the truth about the bad news – the wicked will be cast into the furnace of fire, or hell. **John MacArthur** says,

“Perhaps no doctrine of Scripture is harder to accept emotionally than the doctrine of hell. Yet it is too clear and too often mentioned in Scripture to deny or to ignore. **Jesus spoke more of hell than any of the prophets or apostles did** – perhaps for the reason that its horrible truth would be all but impossible to accept had not the Son of God Himself absolutely affirmed it. It had special emphasis in Jesus’ teaching from the beginning to the end of His earthly ministry. **He said more about hell than about love.**”

More than all other teachers in the Bible combined, He warned men of hell, promising no escape for those who refused His gracious, loving offer of salvation.”

In spite of this, hell is a subject that is exceedingly unpopular, even among Christians; yet if we follow the example of Jesus, we recognize its importance. Therefore tonight I want to address Three big questions about hell.

I. IS HELL REAL, OR IS IT A PARABLE OR ALLEGORY?

A. The story of the dragnet is clearly a parable. But it is the net that is the object of the parable. The reality being taught is the Kingdom of Heaven and the place called the furnace of fire. The fact that at the end of the age, angels are going to cast lost people into hell is the primary point of the parable.

B. Jesus spoke and warned of hell in many contexts where He was not even using parables.

Matthew 18:9 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

C. Luke 16 is not a parable, and in it, Jesus tells us about a man who died and went to hell.

Luke 16:19–31 ¹⁹ “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they

do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’ ”

1. Hell is a real place.

²² ... The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ **And being ... in Hades...**

2. Hell is a place of torment.

²³ **And being in torments in Hades,**

3. Hell is a place of flame.

²² ... I am tormented **in this flame.**

4. No one can escape hell.

²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that **those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.**

5. No one gets “a second chance” in hell.

6. God has provided sufficient evidence for everyone to escape hell.

²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘**They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.**’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, **neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.**’ ”

II. HOW CAN WE RESPOND WHEN SOMEONE SAYS, “A GOOD AND LOVING GOD WOULD NOT SEND PEOPLE TO HELL.”

False assumptions or impressions lead to this objection:

A. No one deserves to go to hell.

1. This thought comes from the philosophy of the world that says that all people are basically good.
2. The Bible, however, tells us just the opposite. The Bible says in **Romans 3:10** “As it is written: *“There is none righteous, no, not one;”*
 - a. Adam and Eve’s choice to sin allowed sin to enter the human race.
 - b. Thus sin has spread through the entire human race. **Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

c. **The Scriptural description of man (apart from Christ)** stands in stark contradiction to man's self appraisal in our modern world.

- 1) **His spirit is darkened.**
- 2) **His soul is debased.**
- 3) **His body is diseased.**
- 4) **His conscience is seared.**
- 5) **His heart is deceitful.**
- 6) **He is dead in sin.**
- 7) **He is condemned to wrath and judgment.** John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

a) **People in this condition cannot dwell in the eternal Kingdom of God.** 2 Corinthians 6:14b -15 ... what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

b) And why are people in this condition? Because we have all chosen to sin!

3. Rather than the truth being "No one deserves to go to hell," it really is "All of us deserve to go to hell."

Another misconception:

B. God made hell to punish sinners.

1. Actually, **God made hell for the devil and the angels who followed him** in rebellion against the Almighty.
2. People go there when they choose to do what the devil did, rebel against God and refuse to repent.

Another false conclusion:

C. Some go to hell through no fault of their own.

1. **People will sometimes say, "Some people are born where they do not hear what the Bible says and never hear about Jesus Christ."**
2. **The truth of the Bible is that everyone receives sufficient revelation through the created order to cause them to seek more specific revelation which would tell them how to be saved.** Romans 1:18-20 ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

3. **This revelation through creation is to all men everywhere.**
4. His existence (Acknowledgment of God) is evident among all men.
5. His creation reveals His power and His deity.
6. The testimony of creation prepares man's heart to receive special revelation (the message of the Bible.) **Hebrews 11:6 But without faith *it is impossible to please Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.***
7. **This revelation is sufficient to cause men to seek God.**
8. **A search with all of one's heart and soul will lead to more revelation.**
Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.
9. Therefore, it is correct to say that the only people who go to hell are those who refuse to respond to the revelation that God has given concerning Himself.

The realities that answer this objection:

D. God does not want anyone to go to hell.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Hear the words of Jesus in **Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!**

- E. God has gone to the extraordinary measure of the cross to keep people out of hell.
- F. The only thing God has not done to keep people from hell is to turn them into robots, taking away their freedom of choice, which they have because they are made in His image.

III. WHY DID JESUS SPEAK SO OFTEN ABOUT HELL?

- A. **To warn the lost because He loves them.**
- B. **To motivate believers.** (Did you notice that this parable was told to the disciples and not the multitude?)
 1. **To be His witness.**
 2. **To share the gospel.**