



8: Man

We are thinking about how the gospel should be proclaimed and focussing on the content of the message. We have already concluded that at the heart of the gospel message there are four essential points.

- God: there is a God and we are accountable to Him.
- Man: we have sinned against God and deserve His judgement.
- Jesus: we can be saved by Jesus.
- Response: that way of salvation is open to anyone who trusts Him.

Now we are looking at each of these points in turn to think about it in more detail. This week we have come to the second point. It concerns man and his need of salvation.

Last time we thought about God and concluded that it is ridiculous — no blasphemous — that anyone should question or argue with Him. The only appropriate response to God is awed worship. But what happens when we do argue with God or refuse to worship Him? The Bible answers that question very clearly.

Creation Groans

When Adam sinned, that had consequences for everything in creation.

“To Adam He said, “ Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:

“ Cursed is the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat of it
All the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return.””

Genesis 3:17-19

It is not merely that God introduced toil and trouble as a punishment for sin, it is reminder that when sin entered us, sin entered the world. The relationship between creation and Creator was disrupted. The results are potentially catastrophic.

“My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit.
Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid;
Be very desolate,” says the Lord.
“For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

Jeremiah 2:11 – 12

The essential idea is that creation ought to be terrified that God might snap and rip everything to shreds.

Why has God not ripped everything to shreds?

The extent of the disruption sin has caused to the universe is perhaps best spelled out in the book of Ecclesiastes.

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher;
“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Ecclesiastes 1:2

The world is broken. We keep thinking we can fix it but we never will, the damage has been too great. So Paul tells us:

“The whole creation groans and labours...”

Romans 8:22

Death

“The wages of sin is death.”

Romans 6:23

In this context, of course, what is in mind is not physical death but separation from God.

“But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”

Isaiah 59:2

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the
Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

James 1:17

Death — separation from God — means the absence of everything that is good: everything that brings comfort, pleasure, joy, peace.

Try to describe what the complete absence of good might be like.

Hell

The word Gehenna, which we translate hell, is a reference to the valley of Hinnom on the south side of Jerusalem where the Jews offered their children in sacrifice to Molech. In Jesus' time they considered the place to be cursed: it had become a dumping ground for all the filth and the dead animals of the city. When the pile of rubbish got too big, they set the whole thing alight. A desolate, stinking, smouldering, sometimes blazing place of neglect, decay and destruction. A spiritually dark, oppressive place. Jesus uses the word Gehenna in these passages:

“...whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire... If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

Matthew 5:22 - 30

“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.”

Matthew 10:28

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves... Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?”

Matthew 23:15 and 33

“...where, ‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’”

Mark 9:48

The Bible speaks of a furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42) and of a lake of fire (Revelation 20:14 - 15). The terms prison (1 Peter 3:19), abyss (Luke 8:31) and tartarus, (2 Peter 2:4) are also used. From the fact that these terms are all places and knowing that the Bible also speaks of those who are excluded from heaven as being outside and as being cast into hell, we can be sure that hell is an actual place.

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19 - 26), whilst it is a parable, does tell us some things about that place. It is a place of conscious torment It is a place of fire. It is a place of anguish. Once you are there, there is no way out.

“And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

Revelation 14:11

“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. 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.

Matthew 18:8 - 9

From these words of Jesus, I can now know that it is better never to hold my children, it is better never to run my fingers through my wife's hair, it is better not to be able to brush my own teeth, it is better never to be able to drive a car, it is better to be paralysed and never to feel anything from the neck down and it is better to have stage III anaplastic oligodendroglioma than to find myself outside the kingdom of God.”

Matt Chandler
The Explicit Gospel, IVP

Wrath

Let there be no confusion, none of this is about any mere relational tiff between God and people who have offended Him. The groaning of creation, death and hell are all expressions of God's wrath.

God's wrath must not be confused with human anger that waxes and wanes with changing circumstances. It is His consistent, unchanging response to all that is not holy. Every violation of God's law, everything that falls short of loving Him with all our hearts, everything that does not exalt His name, everything that is not done in passionate pursuit of His glory, warrants His eternal wrath.

Revelation 19:15 speaks of the fierceness of God's wrath

“He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

Revelation 19:15

Its consequences are illustrated in Revelation 16

Goodness And Severity – A Balanced Gospel

“I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew 3:11 - 12

Paul tells us in Romans 11:22 to note both the kindness and severity of God: mark it down, remember it, think about it.

What can happen when our presentation of the gospel fails to take note of God's severity?

What is your response to those who say, “It's not fair?”

How is that statement – “it's not fair” – in itself a belittlement of God's name?

What is your response to those who ask, “How could a God of love consign sinners to hell?”

What is the correct response to the severity of God?

Not much good news here but why is all this a necessary part of the gospel?

Dead In Sin

But we must not forget that Heaven is not a place for those who are afraid of hell; it is a place for those who love and worship God. Knowledge of and belief in Hell are unable to create worshippers — you cannot scare anyone into heaven — because man's predicament is greater than just the fact that he has sinned and is under condemnation.

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

Ephesians 2:1-3

How, in your experience, has the the Bible's teaching about wrath and hell been misused?

Why is it not possible to scare anyone into heaven?

What did Jesus come to save us from?