

# The Reality and Truth about Hell

## Bible Reading – Matthew chapter 25 verses 31 to 46 (NLT)

### The Final Judgment

<sup>31</sup> *“But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.*

<sup>34</sup> *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. <sup>36</sup> I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’*

<sup>37</sup> *“Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? <sup>39</sup> When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’*

<sup>40</sup> *“And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’*

<sup>41</sup> *“Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’*

<sup>44</sup> *“Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’*

<sup>45</sup> *“And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’*

***46 “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”***

## **SERMON**

Last month we looked at John chapter 3.

I talked about the need to be born again; we saw what this meant; and Jesus told us clearly in that chapter of the Bible that if we are not born again ***‘no one can enter the kingdom of God and no one can see the kingdom of God’***.

We also read in the same chapter that ***‘Anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.’***

I talked about confessing our sins (admitting them to God) and repenting (turning away from them) – back to God’s ways.

In the last few weeks it occurred to me that this might have raised some questions in peoples’ minds.

Some of us might be thinking: what if I am not born again? What if I do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God and I do not believe that He is the only way to salvation? And what if I do not obey His teaching? What if there are sins in my life I have not admitted to God and what if I have not repented of those sins?

If I haven’t obeyed the Son, what does it mean to ‘remain under God’s angry judgement’?

What is my fate then when I die?

Today I want to look at God’s answer to these kind of questions.

As I said earlier I am going to share with you what many would consider is a very hard teaching.

What I want to share with you is what the Bible’s answer is to those questions.

We are getting older by the minute and, because of the rapid increase of things happening in the world that are foretold in the Bible; and because of unprecedented global chaos and financial collapse in various countries, many feel Jesus could return at any moment.

If we do not know what the Bible says and do something about it before Jesus returns or we die, it will be too late! Once we have died, there is no further opportunity to repent and be saved.

In his book 'Mere Christianity', that amazing man of God, CS Lewis, who, like Jesus, sometimes exaggerated to make a point, said this in the context of sin – things we do that are displeasing to God:

***'If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: (for example) the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronising, of being a spoil sport, and back-biting; the pleasures of power, of hatred.'***

He then says this: ***'That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.'***

I wonder if people would buy his books if he had written this today? Isn't it more likely that people would buy a book telling them there is no such place as hell and that we are all going to heaven when we die?

In any case, how could he think this? How could he write in his book that some church-goers could be nearer to hell than a prostitute? Could he be right?

Well, maybe he had just read this Scripture before he wrote down his thoughts in his book.

In Luke chapter 18 v 9 to 14 we read this

***<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'***

***<sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'***

***I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.***

I am sure that most of us prefer a comforting, reassuring message from our preachers and Christian writers and such a message is fine if it's sincere, but today I have a hard message of truth to share with you.

As you heard Michele read earlier from J C Ryle's Book - he said:

***'I entreat you to beware of any ministry which does not plainly teach the reality and eternity of hell. Such a ministry may be soothing and pleasant, but it is far more likely to lull you to sleep, than to lead you to Christ.'***

The message today is not my message but The Bible's message. I want you to check everything you hear me say each month, with the Word of God. If I am in error, please tell me so I can stand corrected and confess my sin.

In today's Bible reading from Matthew's Gospel there are some things especially worthy of note.

First, note who is speaking to us. **Jesus**, the Son of God is speaking to us, not Matthew – Matthew is the author of the book, although God is the author of the Bible.

I think you will agree that it's a good idea that we take note of what Jesus says. After all, in John 14 we read ***'He (Jesus) is the truth'***.

Men and women (us) - we can tell lies, Jesus however can only speak the truth.

Jesus is telling us clearly that there are one of only two places where we will go when we die.

You see, we live in a body, we have a soul, but the real you and me is a spirit. So when our body dies, which one day it must, our spirit and soul come out of our body, and will go 'somewhere', pending the resurrection of our mortal bodies at the last day, when our resurrected bodies will join with our soul and spirit and stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

The place we go before we are judged, will not be somewhere on this planet. And how this all happens and the detail of it all remains a mystery, but be that as it may.

Paul tells us part of this mystery in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. He says:

*<sup>51</sup> 'But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! <sup>52</sup> It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. <sup>53</sup> For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.'*

So, our natural body dies, but the real you and I will live on in new immortal bodies. The question is where we will live and what will that life after bodily death be like?

Jesus says in the passage I read earlier, that we will either 'inherit the Kingdom' or we will go 'into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.'

He then re-phrases this to say 'they (the goats as He calls them) will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous (the sheep) will go into eternal life.'

That statement should concern us all!

Because, if you or I are considered by Jesus to be a sheep, we are Ok, and we can have peace and be reassured that one day we will spend eternity in Heaven with Almighty God, Jesus and all the angels.

**BUT, if we are a goat, we need to be very concerned. We need the conviction of the Holy Spirit to bring us to confession and repentance, in order to be sure of our salvation**

Right now you might be thinking, this is a strange teaching. This can't be right. My vicar, priest, minister, pastor has never talked about this. Everybody who goes to church will go to Heaven. Surely?

Well, if that were true; if what I am sharing with you today is a lie, why does Jesus tell us about - and warn us about - the fact that anyone who he considers a goat will end up in Hell?

Let me ask you to relax for a moment, close your eyes if it helps you concentrate, and listen to some verses spoken by the Son of God in the Bible. I have chosen just five scriptures but there are many others saying the same thing about the subject of Hell.

**Talking to His disciples in Matthew 10 v 28, Jesus said:**

*<sup>28</sup> "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

In Matthew 13, Jesus speaks to the crowds again – the parable of the weeds in the field. His disciples ask Him to explain it to them and he says this: (Matthew 13 v 40-43)

***<sup>40</sup> “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom.***

***Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!”***

Now, in Luke 13 v 23 – 28 we read the following:

***<sup>23</sup> Someone asked Jesus, “Lord, will only a few be saved?”***

***He replied, <sup>24</sup> “Work hard to enter the narrow door to God’s Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. <sup>25</sup> When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ <sup>26</sup> Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ <sup>27</sup> And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’***

***<sup>28</sup> “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out.”***

In Matthew 5 and verse 20, Jesus warned the crowds that even their religious leaders were hypocrites, He gave the people a warning:

***“Unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!”***

My last Scripture is where John the Baptist confronted the ministers of the day and gave them a stark warning in Matthew 3 v 7-12, it says:

***<sup>7</sup>When he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee God’s coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. <sup>9</sup> Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes,***

***every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.***

***<sup>11</sup> "I baptize with water, those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater, that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>12</sup> He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire."***

What will Jesus do? The Bible tells us here that He will burn the chaff with never-ending fire!

These are difficult words to hear aren't they, BUT they are the truth of God's Holy Word!

Believe me, there are scores of other scriptures that tell us the same truth – that many people are heading for Hell when they die. If you would like to take away a book that lists many of these scriptures, then please help yourself to a free copy when we have finished.

An old friend of mine – a Jehovah's Witness who does not believe in Hell - said to me many years ago 'How could a God of love send anyone to Hell?' It was a good question. At that time it stumped me. I had no answer for him.

I later turned to the scriptures. And there I found in 2 Peter 3 v 9: The Lord does not want ***'anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'***

So, God wants all to come to eternal life and spend eternity with Him and so it is clear to me that it is not His will that anyone should go to Hell. The truth is that **we** condemn ourselves to that place through unbelief and our sinful lifestyle.

In the reading today, Jesus said this ***"Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons."***

Clearly, Hell was originally created by God to be the place where Satan and his demons would spend eternity. If we are not following God, but are following some other god, or if we are an atheist who does not believe in God, then the only place such a person will spend eternity is Hell – unless they repent.

According to the Bible, according to Jesus, there is no other place for the dead – just Heaven or Hell.

So, which are we, 'Sheep or goats?' How can we be sure? Who can be saved?

Well there is hope isn't there? There **is great hope** in Christ. As the Bible says in Colossians 1 v 27, '**Christ in you, your hope of glory.**' – Jesus Christ alone can save us, but we have an important part to play.

Last month we talked about what we need to be and do to be sure of our salvation. This month I felt God tell me to talk about what happens when we die, if we are not saved.

So let's be clear about how we can know we are saved; - that Heaven is our final resting place:

Only one faith, one God, leads to everlasting life. Jesus alone is the way, the truth and the life. No man or woman comes to the Father, the one true God, (the God of the Jews and the God of the Christians), except through Him. As I have said to you over the past few months, In order to see and enter the Kingdom of God we must be baptised for the repentance of our sins, be born again of the Holy Spirit, and believe and trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation.

As C S Lewis was saying, in effect in the earlier quote, 'Just because you go to church does not guarantee your salvation'.

No, we have to believe and obey and follow Christ. We are not to resist or neglect any part of His teaching simply because we may feel uncomfortable with it!

From our love of Christ will flow the fruit of the Spirit which - in a word - is 'Christlikeness'.

And so it will be natural to Christ's followers to 'give to the hungry something to eat; give to the thirsty something to drink. To invite in the stranger or clothe the poor; to look after the sick and to visit prisoners.'

These things will be natural to those who will inherit eternal life. After all, Jesus said in Matthew 7 v 20 concerning His true followers: '**by their fruit you will recognise them**' and what is that fruit? – Christlikeness; the willingness and commitment to do what Jesus would do, every chance that we get.

Last month I reminded you that Jesus said 'narrow is the way that leads to eternal life.'

That road isn't an easy one. We are sent many challenges along the way. As I close, I want to say that in the very last book of the Bible, Jesus gives his disciple John a vision. In chapters 1 to 3 of the Book of Revelation, He gives John a different message to seven of the very first churches that were established on earth. You might think they had got it all together. After all

some of those early Christians probably walked around with Jesus – they listened to him teaching. But only one of those seven churches was commended by Jesus for doing what was right – to the others, Jesus gave a stark warning. How much more so, would he warn our churches today?

He told the church in Ephesus:

***4 “I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first. If you don’t repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches’ (in other words, your church will be no more!)***

To the church in Smyrna:

***“Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.”***

The Church in Pergamum had some members who practised sexual sin and ate food sacrificed to idols. To them Jesus said:

***“Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against you with the sword of my mouth.”***

In the church in Thyatira, there was a woman teaching them to commit sexual sin. Jesus said:

***‘I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to turn away from her immorality.***

***22 “Therefore, I will throw her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer greatly unless they repent and turn away from her evil deeds. 23 I will strike her children dead.’***

To the church in Laodicea He said:

***“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!”***

To the Church in Sardis, He said:

***“Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God. 3 Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don’t wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.”***

So even back then, in the days of the early Church, Jesus warned them that just because people go to church does not mean they are going to Heaven. As I have said, it's about belief, confession, repentance and a life-style of obeying and following Christ.

I will close now with a word of encouragement which Jesus Himself spoke to the people in that same Church in Sardis:

***<sup>4</sup> "Yet there are some in the church who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine."***

And He says the same thing to the rest of the Church today - to true believers, who confess and repent of their sins and obey and follow Him. 'Your name is written in the Book of Life. YOU are Mine!

Let's make sure we – each of us individually - are one of His!

Amen

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