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Sermon Notes

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## **Hell is Eternal... But Escapable**

### **Revelation 14:9-11**

One of the most challenging doctrines in the Bible is hell... the idea that a righteous and holy God will consign people for eternity in conscious torment... few doctrines are as terrifying and sobering as this one. And few have come under such wholesale attack and disdain. This doctrine is the very reason that many in our world turn in disgust and unbelief from the God of the Bible.

This morning, my desire is to walk faithfully and carefully through the clear teaching of Revelation 14:9-11 which teaches the terrors of eternal, conscious torment in hell. I want to show how it is also taught in many other places in scripture, how it has been a viciously slandered and attacked doctrine, and yet how the truth of it is the very reason why Jesus came from heaven to earth as Savior.

More and more evangelicals are now moving toward an inclusive position on how people get to heaven. That is, that the gates of heaven are opening wider to people of other faiths and that hell is less of a threat than previously preached for Jews, Muslims, Hindus and others. For professing Christians who are not evangelicals, the consensus is fast becoming that in the end almost no one will go to hell.

[Recently, R.C. Sproul said "The prevailing doctrine of justification today is not justification by faith alone. It's not even justification by good works or by a combination of faith and works. The prevailing notion of justification in Western culture today is justification by death. It's assumed that all one has to do to be received into the everlasting arms of God is to die," There is no hell, or if there is, God would never send anyone but the worst people to hell... as long as you're not a Hitler or some serial killer, you're safe from hell!]

In 2015, in an interview, Pope Francis leaned toward annihilation for the lost sinner:

**“What happens to that lost soul? Will it be punished? And how? The response of Francis is distinct and clear: there is no punishment, but the annihilation of that soul. All the others will participate in the beatitude**

**of living in the presence of the Father. The souls that are annihilated will not take part in that banquet; with the death of the body their journey is finished."**

This topic is obviously one of the most difficult for all of us to understand and embrace... but we HAVE TO FACE IT... and Revelation 14:9-11 makes us do that

Ironically, I believe that a healthy biblical meditation on hell results in a deep joy in our salvation, and an immeasurable level of gratitude to Jesus our Savior for not only WARNING us about hell, but saving us from it!

## I. Unfolding Revelation 14:9-11

### A. Context: The Terrors of the Antichrist's Reign

1. Revelation 12: Depicts the fierce Dragon, Satan, who wages war against the Saints with vicious hatred
2. The Dragon's greatest and final attack on the human race... the Beast from the Sea, ruling over the world-wide system called "Babylon the Great"
  - a. the Beast is a man, Antichrist, who will rule over all the world; he will miraculously survive an apparently fatal wound, with the result that the whole world will worship the Beast as god
  - b. The deadly combination of governmental/military power and false religion, idolatrous worship is the worst Satanic attack on the souls of humans the world has ever seen

***Revelation 13:7-8 And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. <sup>8</sup> All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast***

- c. There will be a powerful false prophet who will lead the new worldwide religion of worship toward this Antichrist
- d. He will establish a miraculous, supernatural image... an idol... that he forces everyone to worship
- e. He also forces people to receive a mark of worship, of unswerving loyalty to the Beast, on the forehead or the hand

***Revelation 13:15-17 He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. <sup>16</sup> He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, <sup>17</sup> so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.***

- f. In the midst of this is a direct attack on Christians... the elect... who refuse to worship this man
  - g. The Antichrist will directly attack them... wage war against them and kill many of them
3. In that time, God will send three angels, one after the other, to prepare the world for the final phase of wrath and for Judgment Day... three angels with three warnings

## B. The Angelic Warnings

### a. The first angel

***Revelation 14:6-7 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth-- to every nation, tribe, language and people. <sup>7</sup> He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."***

### b. The second angel

***Revelation 14:8 A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."***

### c. The third angel...

***Revelation 14:9-11 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, <sup>10</sup> he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."***

- d. The people will be under extreme pressure to worship the Beast and his image... and to receive the mark of the Beast in order to buy or sell
  - i) Positive inducements (so-called): the power of the man's deceptive personality, and the signs and wonders
  - ii) Negative inducements: terror of the death penalty for all who refuse to worship the Antichrist

2. However... there is a far greater terror... as Jesus put it:

***Luke 12:4-5 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. <sup>5</sup> But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.***

As one commentator put it... this angel is warning any who would waver and be tempted to worship the Beast or receive the mark:

“Waverer beware! The suffering you may avoid under the rule of the Beast is immeasurably smaller than the eternal punishment you will otherwise incur.”

God is FORCING A CHOICE!

If anyone should cave in and worship the Beast and receive the mark, he will suffer in hell

As I said last week, this clearly shows that these are powerfully strong, decisive acts... the Antichrist or his agents will not be slipping this mark on anyone unawares... no secret commando raids or Ninja attacks while you sleep, and behold... you suddenly have the mark of the beast

There will be no doubt what each is doing... and the ones deluded are those who delight in the lie, who refuse to believe the truth about Christ

ALSO: note that the angel says “HE TOO will drink the wine of God’s fury...”

Obviously all the people who have been condemned to be cast into hell before the time of the Antichrist never received the mark of the Beast or worshiped him or his image... they went to hell for the other sins they committed and for not receiving the atoning work of Christ

SO... how does the angel describe hell???

### C. Drinking the Wine of God’s Fury

***Revelation 14:10 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.***

1. To drink means to fully absorb or take into oneself
2. The drink is described as the “wine of God’s fury”
  - a. Wrath is a vehement hot reaction, passionate and strong
  - b. Fury is a determined indignation over a long period of time

- c. Used together, they greatly magnify the impact... God is RAGING like a burning forest fire, and it is settled in his mind over a long period of time
- 3. Its strength is also described: "poured full-strength into the cup "... nothing is held back at all... it is MIXED UNDILUTED
  - a. The wine metaphor is used to speak of a liquid that one drinks and it changes their mind, their demeanor... they become drink
  - b. The idea of FULL STRENGTH refers to the general practice of diluting wine with water or some other liquid, like a fruit juice... this wine is MAXIMUM EFFECT... staggering to consider the omnipotence of God focused, concentrated on destroying both body and soul in hell
- 4. Further description... simple prediction

***Revelation 14:10 He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.***

- a. Later in this Book of Revelation, it will be made clear we are talking about the Lake of Fire
- b. Notice also that their torment is constantly before the Holy Angels and the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ)
  - i) Heaven feels no compassion, no pity, no shame or embarrassment about the torments of the condemned
  - ii) It will not be done in a corner... God is not ashamed of what he is doing to them, any more than he was ashamed of consuming Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone, or ashamed of drowning the ancient world in the flood
  - iii) The punishment is a righteous display of the holiness of God
  - iv) I believe Isaiah 66 also makes it plain that the redeemed in heaven will also be aware of the damned

***Isaiah 66:24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."***

#### D. The Eternality of Hell

***Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."***

1. This is the hardest part of all for many... eternal conscious torment
2. The fact that there is absolutely no escape in the future
3. The escape is NOW... through faith in Christ

So... this is Revelation 14:9-11 and its brief unfolding of the doctrine of hell... now it is beneficial for us to look wider, throughout scripture to understand this more thoroughly

## II. Understanding the Doctrine of Hell

### A. Definition

Wayne Grudem: "Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked."

### B. Jonathan Edwards and John Piper on Hell

1. Jonathan Edwards, 1741 "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

O sinner! consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it apart; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.

2. Piper's comments

- a. Edwards struggled with language to describe hell
- b. Why did he wrestle with such images?

Piper: "What high school student is ever asked to come to grips with what really is at issue here? If the Bible is true, and if it says that someday Christ will tread his enemies like a winepress with anger that is fierce and almighty, and if you are a pastor charged with applying Biblical truth to your people so that they will flee the wrath to come, then what would your language be? What would you say to make people feel the reality of texts like these?"

Edwards labored over language and over images and metaphors because he was so stunned and awed at the realities he saw in the Bible. ... Edwards believed that it was impossible to exaggerate the horror of the reality of hell.

High school teachers would do well to ask their students the really probing question, "Why is it that Jonathan Edwards struggled to find images for wrath and hell that shock and frighten, while contemporary preachers try to find abstractions and circumlocutions that move away from concrete, touchable Biblical pictures of unquenchable fire and undying worms and gnashing of teeth?" If our students were posed with this simple, historical question, my guess is that some of the brighter ones would answer: "Because Jonathan Edwards really believed in hell, but most preachers today don't."

### C. Natural Human Repugnance

#### 1. Mark Twain

"Jesus was a thousand billion times crueller than ever [Jehovah] was in the Old Testament... Meek and gentle? By and by we will examine that popular sarcasm by the light of the hell which he invented."

The invention of hell is "the prodigious crime" of the Bible

#### 2. Charles Darwin

"I can hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so, the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother, and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine."

#### 3. Clark Pinnock

Canadian theologian who wandered far from his evangelical roots:

"I was led to question the traditional belief in everlasting conscious torment because of moral revulsion and broader theological considerations, **not first of all on scriptural grounds**. It just does not make any sense to say that a God of love will torture people forever for sins done in the context of a finite life.... It's time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment."

#### 4. John Stott

"Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain."

#### 5. Rob Bell

- a. In 2011, published a book called *Love Wins...*

“a book about heaven, hell, and the fate of every person who ever lived.”

Kevin DeYoung summarized it: “Here’s the gist: Hell is what we create for ourselves when we reject God’s love. Hell is both a present reality for those who resist God and a future reality for those who die unready for God’s love. Hell is what we make of heaven when we cannot accept the good news of God’s forgiveness and mercy. But hell is not forever. God will have his way. How can his good purposes fail? Every sinner will turn to God and realize he has already been reconciled to God, in this life or in the next.... In the end, love wins.”

Clearly hell is a challenging topic, and many thinkers and skeptics have rejected the notion of hell

#### D. Christ’s Emphasis on Hell

1. Jesus Christ taught more about hell than anyone else in the Bible
2. the following is a partial listing of Jesus’ statements about hell

***Matthew 5:22 Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, 'is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.***

***Matthew 8:11-12 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup> But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

**[the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds] *Matthew 13:41-42 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

***Mark 9:43-49 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' <sup>49</sup> Everyone will be salted with fire.***

**[The Rich Man and Lazarus] *Luke 16:23-24 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'***

## E. Scriptural Teachings About Hell

1. the purpose: punishment for sin... both sins of commission and of omission

***Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."***

Note sin of omission in Sheep and the Goats:

***Matthew 25:41-42 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink***

2. the percentages: the majority of the human race

***Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

3. The Lake of [Eternal] Fire

***Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.***

***Revelation 20:15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***

4. shut out from God's loving presence

***2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord***

5. excluded from heaven

***Matthew 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

***Matthew 22:13 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'***

***Matthew 25:11-12 Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' <sup>12</sup> "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'***

6. A conscious torment

***Luke 16:23-24*** *In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'*

7. eternal punishment

***Matthew 25:46*** *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

In other words, it is as ETERNAL as heaven is... annihilation cannot be possible

***Mark 9:43*** *...hell, where the fire never goes out.*

***Revelation 14:11*** *And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night*

8. eternal regret

***Matthew 13:50*** *there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

***Luke 16:25*** *"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.*

9. utter darkness

***2 Peter 2:17*** *Blackest darkness is reserved for them.*

***Matthew 22:13*** *cast him into the outer darkness.*

#### F. Refuting the Foolish Statement: God Doesn't Send Anyone to Hell

1. this statement is made by evangelicals who affirm the doctrine of hell, but who try to separate it from God
2. they say "God doesn't actually send anyone to hell; rather they go their of their own free will; for all their lives they have chosen to go their separate ways from God, and now He is merely giving them what they have always chosen."
3. this view makes human choice the final determiner, as though God were somehow powerless to overturn human will
4. the fact of the matter is, people never choose hell... as rebellious idolaters, they choose their own earthly pleasures
5. on Judgment Day, when the issues of heaven and hell are clear, people will be terrified of hell and be screaming not to be sent there; no one will choose it

6. Christ Himself will dispatch His angels to bind them and cast them into the Lake of Fire... many verse speak of this action on Christ's part

***Matthew 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

***Matthew 22:13 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'***

***Matthew 25:30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'***

7. as we've seen, Christ isn't embarrassed or ashamed to do this... it is simple justice at this point

### III. Application of this Doctrine

#### A. personal fear and motive for repentance

1. we ought to learn to fear God who has power to throw people into hell
2. this fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
3. it should lead every non-Christian in the sound of my voice to FLEE TO CHRIST as the only refuge for their souls
4. Christ is offering to anyone who will believe in Him an eternal pardon for all sins and freedom from hell.

#### B. gratitude to God for our salvation

***Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus***

1. the more we meditate on this terrifying doctrine, the more grateful we will be to God for our precious salvation!!
2. We deserved hell!!! And we are getting HEAVEN!!!
3. Also this meditation has the power to drive all complaining and whining away from us...
  - a. Stop complaining about your bodily aches and pains! God has rescued you from hell!!!
  - b. Stop complaining about your temporary financial setbacks! God has rescued you from hell!!!

- c. Stop complaining about your feeling of isolation and rejection! God has rescued you from hell!!!
- d. This doctrine has a paradoxical power to make you incredibly happy!

In Charles Dicken's classic, *A Christmas Carol*, after Scrooge wakes up from his terrifying third vision in which he is cast into hell, he realizes he is not in hell after all but is alive and has a chance to live a new life... his joy is absolutely immeasurable!! He begins leaping in his bed, shouting for joy, spending money for the poor and needy hand over fist!

Such should be your joy at your deliverance from hell!!!

C. worship to Christ for His incalculable courage

- 1. Christ actually drank the cup of hell for you, in your place, if you are a Christian
- 2. Christ's willingness to take the cup of hell from God's hand and drink it to the dregs was the single most courageous action in history
- 3. WORSHIP Christ for it!!!

D. motive for personal holiness

- 1. hell is God's response to ALL sin

***Ephesians 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.***

- 2. Therefore, understanding hell should cause Christians to hate sin more and fear it more and flee it more
- 3. This is especially true of SEXUAL SIN... as Jesus taught

***Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.***

- 4. If you are involved in secret sexual sin... internet or otherwise... YOU MUST FIGHT!!
- 5. According to Jesus, fear of hell is a proper motive for fighting sexual sin

E. sorrow for the lost

1. both Jesus and Paul wept for the lost

***Romans 9:1-4 I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- <sup>2</sup> I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, <sup>4</sup> the people of Israel.***

2. the doctrine of hell should cause us to grieve for lost people and fear for their souls

F. zeal in evangelism and prayer

1. understanding the incredible immensity of the doctrine of hell, and that MOST people around us are on the road to destruction should motivate us to greater faithfulness in evangelism

Example from the life of Hudson Taylor... spoken at a missionary convention, Taylor told this very moving story:

While traveling by boat one day, Taylor entered into conversation with a Chinaman who had once visited England, where he went by the name of Peter. The man listened attentively to the missionary's account of Christ's saving love and was even moved to tears, but refused the immediate acceptance of the gospel. A little later, evidently in a mood of great depression, Peter jumped overboard and sank. In agonized suspense Taylor looked around for assistance and saw close by a fishing boat with a dragnet furnished with hooks.

"Come!" shouted Taylor to the fishermen. "Drag over this spot. A man sank here and is drowning!"

The Chinese fishermen answered with no emotion at all: "It is not convenient"

"Don't talk of *convenience!*" cried the missionary. "A man is drowning."

"We are busy fishing and cannot come," they responded.

When Taylor urged them to come at once and offered to pay them, they demanded to know how much. His offer of five dollars was refused. He then said: "Do come quickly and I will give you all the money I have -- about fourteen dollars." Finally, the boat was brought and the hooks let down. Less than a minute was required to bring up the body but all efforts at resuscitation failed. His life was gone.

To Hudson Taylor this incident was profoundly sad in itself and pathetic in its parabolic significance. Were not those fishermen guilty of the death of the

Chinaman, in that they had the opportunity and means of saving him but refused to use them? Most assuredly they were guilty. "And yet," says Taylor, "let us pause before we pronounce judgment against them, lest someone greater than Nathan answer, '*You are the man.*' Is it so wicked a thing to neglect to save the body? Of how much sorer punishment, then, is he worthy who leaves the immortal soul to perish. The Lord Jesus commands *me*, commands *you*: 'Go into *all* the world and preach the gospel to *every* creature.' Shall we say to *Him*, 'No, it is not convenient?' Shall we tell *Him* that we are busy at fishing or other business and cannot go?"

#### G. trusting in the justice of God

1. finally, considering the doctrine of hell causes us to reflect on the justice of God
2. it is a non-Christian who accuses God readily of wrongdoing, saying "How could a loving God send anyone to hell?"
3. however, we must understand that the justice of God is infinite... He is perfectly committed to upholding His law... all sin MUST be punished, either at the cross or in hell
4. our instinct of JUSTICE is like a flickering candle flame to the raging inferno of the sun... God's justice is like the MAJESTIC SOARING MOUNTAINS

***Psalm 36:6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep***

5. God is LOVING toward all He has made... but He doesn't just love people... He also loves RIGHTEOUSNESS... and hates wickedness.
6. The doctrine of hell teaches us to revere God's justice... so perfectly addressed at the cross