

Home Group study: week beginning 27th July 2020

Jesus Christ: Dangerous Revolutionary 2

3: Hell

Have you ever been anywhere that seemed like 'hell on earth'?

Where was it, and why was it so awful?

Read:

Matthew 25: 32-46

In his sermon on Sunday Matt told us Jesus says more about Hell than the whole of the Old Testament tells us about it. Think of at least two reasons why this might be.

Discovery

Who are the 'sheep' and who are the 'goats' in this passage? How does Jesus decide which are which?

When is this event going to take place (v31)? (See Matthew 12: 36, Acts 1: 10-11).

What will happen to the 'sheep' and the 'goats' (v46)? How is this reward for the sheep described (v34)? And how is the punishment described (v41)? Who is the punishment prepared for? What does that tell us about our enemy, the devil?

Understanding

John 3:16 famously tells us that:

'whoever believes in him (Jesus) shall not perish, but have everlasting life'.

There is nothing conditional in this verse; we believe in Jesus and we are saved from eternal punishment. Yet Jesus himself seems to be saying something else in the Matthew passage. What is Jesus saying? Does this suggest we only get to heaven by our works? If we believe all scripture to be true (which we do), how can we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

We find it very difficult to cope with the thought of Hell. Do we believe Hell is a real place? Do we think that Hell is simply eternal separation from God (please excuse the word 'simply': it's not 'simple' at all!)? Does the Christian get eternal life while the non-Christian just disappear into oblivion, maybe after a time of punishment? What does Jesus say (v46)?

Read:

Revelation 20: 11-14

Compare this passage with the Matthew passage. What do the two passages have in common? In what ways does the Revelation passage explain the Matthew passage?

The Revelation passage reveals more about the 'eternal punishment' mentioned in Matthew 25: 41. Jesus has made it clear in Matthew 25: 46 that the 'goats' will suffer that punishment for eternity. Take a moment to contemplate that.

The punishment for those who do not accept Christ sounds brutal and inhumane; the question is so often asked, 'why would a loving God condemn people to eternal punishment?' So is God the God of Love 'brutal' and 'inhumane'?

Ezekiel 18 says, in **v23**:

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord.
Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

and **v32**:

For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord.
Repent and live!

Ezekiel makes it clear that 'the Sovereign Lord' is saying these things and it is clearly God's desire that **no-one** should perish. Referring again to **John 3: 16**:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

and continuing into **v17**:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but to save the world through him.

What do these verses tell us about God's love for mankind and his attitude to punishment?

There is probably not time to do this now, but it's worth reading through the whole of Ezekiel 18 sometime. In it you will discover the Gospel of repentance, forgiveness and eternal life is not just for the New Testament. Rather God had to endure the agony of seeing his own son sacrificed in order to fulfil his purposes and desires: which were to save us and give us eternal life.

Application

However hard it is for us, we need to understand that Hell is real. If we believe in eternal life, we have to believe that punishment for the 'wicked' is also eternal.

It is not God's intention that anyone should go to Hell, and we need to grasp the reality of how awful Hell is. As Matt said on Sunday, some people are quite happy with the prospect of going to Hell as they think it will be one long party and time of debauchery while us Christians float around ethereally on our clouds playing the harp. Revelation 20, where John is shown the reality of Hell, show that that delusion, no doubt created by Satan himself, could not be farther from the truth.

We need to understand how urgent it is that our friends and family know the reality of our loving Heavenly father. His love is offered to all, but if people prefer not to accept it, He can't force them to love Him; love can never be forced on anyone. So He has to let them go to their fate: reluctantly and with great sorrow.