

Fake News About Hell
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 10-15-17

We're in a sermon series entitled Fake News: Replacing Lies with the Truth. Today I'm preaching a topic you don't hear many sermons about these days. That's because today I'm preaching on Fake News About Hell.

Hell is not a popular subject to preach on these days. There are a lot of different beliefs about Hell. Some people believe there is a hell and some don't. Some believe it's a literal place with real fire and some think the fire is only metaphorical. But the facts about Hell are so eternally important that we need an accurate view of hell which means we need a biblical view of hell.

Fake News # 1 – Jesus never taught about Hell

People usually see Jesus as a gentle loving teacher who only spoke about love, acceptance and forgiveness. But as I searched out what the Bible says about hell I was surprised to see that the person who said the most about hell in the Bible – by far – was Jesus Christ Himself.

If we believe He is our Lord and Savior – we must believe what He taught. If Jesus warned people about Hell – then we should warn people about Hell. We don't preach based on popularity polls or based on what people want to hear – we must preach the Word of God! And not just part of the word – but the whole counsel of God! We cannot pick and choose what we want to believe or preach – it must be the truth – the whole truth – and nothing but the truth! So help us God!

We must deal with the fact that Jesus taught us that there is a Hell. And if we cannot trust Jesus in his teaching about Hell, how can we trust anything else He said, including His offer of salvation? We cannot make Hell go away because we think we are too loving to believe in Hell.

In saying this, we claim to be more loving than Jesus - more loving than the One who took upon Himself the full penalty for our sin. Who are we to think we are better than Jesus? Or that we know better than He does?

The clearest picture of Hell given by Jesus in Luke 16:19-31 – which is a story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus who both died.

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. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 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.'

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. 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.'

Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 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.'"

This passage shows us that Jesus taught that hell is real. Let's examine the truths that Jesus presented here to overcome fake news about hell.

Fake News #2 – Hell does not exist

Many people think that when you die – it's over. This is called annihilationism – which is the belief that when people die they are annihilated – utterly destroyed – wiped out. They actually cease to exist rather than being tormented in Hell.

The problem with this is that Jesus said that the wicked will receive everlasting punishment. Ceasing to exist would not be punishment. In fact – annihilation is exactly what atheists, unbelievers and evil people are hoping for. They want to live like they want to live with no consequences. They are counting on getting away with it!

Contrary to annihilationism – the Bible teaches the everyone who has ever lived – from Adam and Eve to us today – is still alive. Luke 20:38 says:

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive.

I like the way the Amplified version says it:

To Him all men are alive (whether in the body or out of it) and they are alive (not dead) unto Him.

Everyone who has ever lived is in one of three places. If they are still in the body – there are alive on earth right now.

If they are out of the body – they are in one of two places: heaven or hell.
To be in heaven is to be alive with God.
To be in hell is to be alive apart from God.
That's why God says in Ezekiel 33:11

I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Why? Because they are eternally separated from Him. That's also why Psalm 116:15 says:

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

Why? Because they are eternally with Him.

When believers die – we are immediately present with the Lord.
When unbelievers die – they are eternally separated from God.

Saying there is no Hell diminishes the holiness of God.
Saying there is no Hell diminishes the sinfulness of sin.
Saying there is no Hell diminishes the wrath of God.
Saying there is no Hell diminishes the love of God.
Saying there is no Hell diminishes what Jesus accomplished by shedding His blood on the cross.
Saying there is no Hell diminishes salvation.
After all – Jesus died to save us. To save us from what? From Hell!

Fake News #3 – We should not talk about Hell because it scares people

Well – Jesus is our example and He warned us about the dangers of Hell. Many preachers do not want to preach on Hell because it is considered too negative. They want to present a more positive message. They think that they will reach more people this way because after all – most modern people are turned off by the concept of hell. But they ignore the fact that 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 says:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

When you take away the fear of God and the terrors of Hell – you take away people's motivation for salvation. It has the opposite effect from what people think.

What the Bible is saying here is that those who fear God are the ones who persuade others. Watering down the truth does not draw people to Christ! I believe that not preaching about hell results in more people going to hell! Jesus taught on Hell in a way that caused people to fear going there in order that they would be motivated to change. Jesus said there will be a last judgment when believers will be separated from unbelievers. They will stand before Him – believers on His right – unbelievers on His left. Believers go to heaven – but Matthew 25:41-42 says:

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... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Notice that the fiery punishment of Hell is eternal.

Fake News # 4 – Hell is temporary

That's not what the Bible teaches. The belief that Hell is only temporary - is called universalism or ultimate reconciliation. Universalism says that sooner or later everyone will be saved. They believe that even Satan and his demons will ultimately be saved. Their time in Hell will only be temporary and after they've suffered for a while – they will choose to trust in Christ. But the Bible teaches that unbelievers will be punished there forever.

Fake News #5 – Hell is remedial

The word remedial means that it is intended to remedy something – fix something – make it better. Some believe that Hell is a place to fix wicked unbelievers so that they will become righteous believers.

That's the idea behind what Catholics call purgatory. They believe that purgatory is a holding place for the departed soul who's not quite ready for Heaven. They also believe that living believers can pray for those in purgatory so that a purging process can qualify them for Heaven.

But the truth is, the minute we die, your eternal destination is irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable. Hell is not remedial! That teaching takes away from the cross and the blood of Christ. It says that what Jesus did is not enough for salvation. It says we must add to the work of Christ our own works and the works of those who live on after we die. Nonsense!

We are not saved by the works we do before we die and we are not saved by the works others do on our behalf after we die! We cannot pray someone out of Hell! Jesus taught that once you die – it's too late to get right with God. Jesus said that those in hell cannot pass over into Heaven. You can't get saved in Hell! There are no second chances!

Satan wants to deceive people into believing this lie. In actuality - God gives us thousands of chances in our lifetimes to get saved and avoid Hell. Today is one of those chances.

Fake News #6 – Hell won't be that bad

Jesus taught that Hell is a place of torment. In Mark 9:43-48 Jesus says three times that hell is a place where –

Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Whether it's real fire or real worms is not the point – it will be real pain! You see – heaven and hell are both real places.

But Hell is the opposite of Heaven.
 Heaven is full of love – Hell is full of hate.
 Heaven is full of light – Hell is full of darkness
 Heaven has no tears or pain – Hell is full of tears and pain.
 Heaven is a place of relationships – Hell is a place of loneliness.
 Heaven is a place of relief – Hell offers no relief.
 The biggest difference between heaven and hell is the presence of God.
 Heaven is where God is and Hell is where God is not.
 Hell is the absence of God.

Jesus taught that there is no relief or escape from Hell. John saw this in Revelation 20:12-15 when everyone who has ever lived stand before the throne of God to be judged. Verses 14 and 15 say:

The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

After that – believers will live in the New Heaven on the New Earth and unbelievers will be in the lake of fire called Hell. What determined where they went? Whether or not their names were in the Lamb's book of Life. When you stand before God's throne of judgment one day – and we all will – the issues will not be who are you or what you have done. The issue will be this - is your name written in the most important book of all: The Lamb's Book of Life.

It's interesting that the vast majority of Americans believe they will go to heaven when they die. Only one half of 1% believe they will go to hell when they die. So basically – most Americans believe in hell but almost no one thinks they will go there. But Jesus said in 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. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

That narrow gate is Jesus. He's the only way.

Fake News #7 – A loving God would never send anyone to Hell

People have redefined God's love in such a way that would never allow any thought of anyone being punished in Hell. A mistake many people make is trying to present God in a way that will be acceptable to our contemporary culture, rather than preaching the truth whatever the cost.

And people need to know that God is a God of love – but also a God of justice. The Bible says that God is just and He rewards good and punishes evil. But that does not always happen in this lifetime.

Some rewards we receive here in this life and also some punishment.

But there are many rewards that will not be received until we get to Heaven. And there is some evil that will not be punished until people get to Hell. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 says:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.

If Heaven did not exist – we could never solve the problem of evil and suffering because we could not receive lasting compensation for going through what we've gone through. And if Hell did not exist – there would be no justice for those who have been hurt, victimized and even killed.

Hell is not evil – Hell is where evil is punished. That makes Hell morally good because a good God must punish evil.

Think of Adolf Hitler. He had millions of people murdered. Yet he never really suffered for it in this life. When he saw his side was losing and that he would be captured – he killed himself.

Should Hitler be able to get away with the Holocaust?

Should Hitler not have to face God's judgment?

Should he not be punished for the great evils he committed?

It is true that Hell was created for Satan and his demons. In Matthew 25:41 Jesus said that in the final judgment – God will say to wicked unbelievers –

Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Hell was created for the devil and demons – but notice that unbelieving people are also sent there.

Millions of Americans have redefined grace to mean that God is so eager to save people from Hell that He will change His nature and His principles for their individual benefit. These people usually take one attribute of God – like His love – and make that the totality of His character.

They believe God forgives, but never judges.

That God loves everything and hates nothing.

That God accepts everyone and rejects no one.

These people usually say, "A loving God would not send anyone to hell." And guess what – they are right! God does not send anyone to hell. People choose to go there on their own. C. S. Lewis said, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those who whom God says in the end: 'Thy will be done.' All that are in hell choose hell."

If the wicked persist in wickedness, they receive only what they have chosen—separation from God. An unbeliever who cannot stand an hour or two of worship a week will surely not want to go to heaven, which is a place of constant worship.

God wants heaven to be as full as possible. Because He is a loving God, He wants hell to be as empty as possible. 2 Peter 3:9 says *God does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*. 1 Timothy 2:4 says God wants *all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*.

Many people miss the point that God hates the fact that some will live in eternity apart from Him in Hell. They miss the fact that God loves people so much that He sacrificed His only Son for us. He paid the ultimate price so we can make the ultimate choice!

How dare anyone say that God is not love! He's done everything to make it possible for you to go to heaven. On judgment day, people's eternal destiny will be determined by how they responded to Christ. That is the ultimate choice! Choosing anything but Jesus is the wrong choice!

Fake News #8 – Hell is real but only really bad people go there

Maybe we believe there is no hell, or if there is one, only the really bad people like Hitler or Timothy McVeigh or Saddam Hussein go there.

Many people think that heaven is for good people and hell is for bad people. They are making the wrong assumption that there are people good enough to get into heaven! Wrong! Actually – heaven is for saved people and hell is for lost people.

The Bible teaches that Hell is a place of punishment, banishment and destruction. That's the bad news. But here's the good news.

On the cross Jesus experienced punishment, banishment and death on our behalf.

He became sin so we could become righteous!

He was captured so that we could be set free!

He was wounded so that we could be healed!

He was betrayed so that we could be protected!

He was deserted so that we could be rescued!

He was rejected so that we could be accepted!

He was separated from His Father so that we could be one with the Father!

He experienced darkness so that we could walk in the light!

And best of all - He died so that we might receive eternal life!

He came from Heaven so that we would not have to go to Hell!

He's done everything He can possibly do to keep you from Hell.

All you must do if receive His free gift of eternal life!