

Hebrews 12:29

Hell

Main idea: Hell is real, and Jesus conquered it.

One game that I've often played with the youth is called "Two Truths and a Lie."

- Sadly, much of what Christians commonly believe about hell is like that game.
- Today we'll look at what Scripture actually says about hell and how it's not bad news, but good.

Truth #1: Hell is real. [Psalm 9:17]

- The Bible uses the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word Hades. [word study 1] [word study 2]
- Together, these are the words most commonly translated as "hell."¹
- So hell is real.²
- In fact, hell is so real that we experience it even now, in this life. [Psalm 18:5]
 - David stated that he was in hell when abandoned, betrayed, and crushed by his own sins.
 - We've all had moments of forsakenness, of despair, where it feels like God is absent.³
- But part of the gospel is that this hell can be escaped. [Psalm 16:10] [Psalm 86:13] [Jonah 2:2]
 - David, Jonah, Jesus, and many others are all shown to escape this hell.
 - So the truth about hell is that it is the real experience of separation and hopelessness without God, but that it can also be escaped.⁴

Truth #2: Jesus conquered death and hell through His death on the cross. [1 Corinthians 15:55-57]

- We're probably all familiar with how Jesus quoted Psalm 22 from the cross. [Psalm 22:1]
- But Psalm 22 ends not with despair but with hope. [Psalm 22:31]
- The Bible is clear that Jesus conquered death and the grave, that is hell.⁵
- By grace, through faith in Jesus, we receive heaven with God forever.⁶

The Lie: Hell is separation from God. [Psalm 139:8]

- This is the most commonly believed lie about hell.
- Many people think hell is God abandoning people forever.⁷
- But Scripture says the opposite! [Hebrews 12:29]
- Now, to be clear, this is a different hell from Sheol.
- You see, this hell is the fire of God's presence.⁸
 - The same fire that destroyed Sodom also filled the disciples at Pentecost.⁹
 - Interestingly, we see both of these places that we call hell in one in the end. [Revelation 20:14]
 - Hades (the first hell) is thrown into the lake of fire (the eternal hell), or better known as God, who is a consuming fire.

¹ Gehenna and Tartarus are the only two other words ever translated "hell." Gehenna is touched on later in this sermon, and Tartarus is only translated as "hell" once in the Bible, talking about the place where fallen angels are kept for judgment.

² Matthew 5:29, Matthew 10:28

³ Psalm 42:11, 2 Corinthians 4:8

⁴ Romans 6:23

⁵ Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 1:17-18

⁶ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁷ Which is understandable, based on verses such as 2 Thessalonians 1:9. But it should be noted that "eternal" should more often in context be translated as "age-enduring."

⁸ Fire, in the Bible, purifies. Proverbs 17:3

⁹ Genesis 19:24, Acts 2:3

- So, you see, the lake of fire is not the absence of God; it's the burning reality of His holy love that consumes everything that is not of Him.¹⁰

There's another common word in the Bible that's often translated as hell, which is Gehenna. [Matthew 5:22]

- Gehenna was a real place on the earth. It was a place of fire and judgment, an image of how God's love burns away sin.
- There's a vivid picture at the end of Isaiah in which all flesh goes to Gehenna and watches while all flesh is burned forever. [Isaiah 66:24]
- Gehenna actually still exists today. [photo 1] [photo 2]
- In the end, our "hell" is consumed by the love of Christ. [Revelation 21:4]

So, the two truths:

- Hell is real, and we experience it even now.
- Jesus conquered death and hell through His death on the cross.

The lie is that hell is God's eternal abandonment.

The truth is, as Jesus said, "It is finished." [John 19:30]

And as He also said, "As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself." [John 12:32]

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:12-14, Revelation 20:10, Revelation 20:15