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Jesus Teaching On Hell – Fact Or Fiction?
Mark 9:42-50

USA Today in December of 2008, published an article entitled "Many beliefs, many paths to heaven?" The article began by saying that "Most American religious believers, including most Christians, say eternal life is not exclusively for those who accept Christ as their Savior, a new survey finds." According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, of the 65 % of people who held this open view of heaven's gates, 80% named at least one non-Christian group – Jews, Muslims, Hindus, atheists of people with no religion at all – who may also be saved.

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, calls the findings a "theological crisis for American Evangelicals. They represent at best a misunderstanding of the Gospel and at worst a repudiation of the Gospel."

When the above survey was released, pastors, theologians and Christian commentators complained that the survey was too vague regarding the question on access to eternal life, which 70% said was open to many faiths. In response to this complaint, the Pew Research revisited the topic again.

The new findings reinforced what was discovered before, "Americans are thinking quite broadly."

Christian believers, who named at least one non-Christian faith that could lead to salvation, included 34% of white evangelicals, in spite of the teaching of the Bible that salvation is only through Jesus.

Those evangelicals who attended church regularly made some difference. But an overall majority (54%) of people who identified with a religion and who said they attend church weekly also said many religions can lead to eternal life. **This majority included 37% of white evangelicals**, 75 % of mainline Protestants and 85% of non-Hispanic white Catholics.

Pew's new survey also found that many Christians (20%) say they are saved by their good actions; 30% say salvation is through belief in Jesus, God or a higher power alone, which is the core teaching of evangelical Protestantism; and 10% say that salvation is found through a combination of behavior and belief, a view closer to Catholic teachings.

Mohler commented this way on the findings. They are an "indictment on evangelicalism and evangelical preaching . . . we are in an age when we want to tell everyone they are doing just fine. It's extremely uncomfortable to turn to someone and say, "You will go to hell unless you come to a saving knowledge of Jesus."

It's interesting that a USA Today article, August 1, 2009 reported, using new Pew Forum findings, that 74% of Americans believe in heaven, and 59% believe in hell.

Obviously, hell is not a popular topic in the public arena, nor do pastors preach about it much, for it immediately brings up the subject that there may be some kind of an anguished state of existence that is opposite of heaven.

Jesus, though, has a different take on hell.

Notice Jesus' teaching here.

I. Responsibility (Mark 9:42).

Jesus has been talking about rewards (Mark 8:38-41). He has been using a child as an example of the kind of trust that God honors, faith that believes God is, and is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, even giving a cup of cold water in His name (Mark 8:41).

Now in Mark 9:42, Jesus continues using a child to teach responsibility for one's actions. To cause a child who believes in Him to stumble, to fall into sin, is serious business.

The millstone Jesus talks about is the one that took a donkey to turn. To be thrown into the sea tied to one of these could only have one result – drowning. The millstone tied around the person's neck was a means of capital punishment in both Rome and Palestine.

Jesus is teaching here that there will be grave judgment for those who are killing, mistreating, and abusing children in His day, and that still applies to our day. I think of the abortionists and others who sexually abuse God's beautiful children. Apart from Christ, hell fire is their destination.

Certainly, Jesus is saying as well that to cause any person who follows Him to stumble, to sin, is serious business. Each person is responsible to God for how he or she conducts one's life. A believer is not to be a stumbling block to another believer. We are to respect and honor one another. We are to respect and honor our children, and they are to do the same to their parents and to other siblings in the family.

God holds each of us responsible for our actions.

II. Accountability (Mark 9:43, 45, 47).

Jesus doesn't just teach responsibility only. He continues by instructing concerning accountability.

Jesus speaks here in a vivid Eastern way about how committed His followers need to be in their relationship with Him.

Anything that draws a person away from God must be dealt with immediately and sometimes drastically.

To get His point across Jesus uses the hand, the foot, and the eye.

If your hand offends you (causes you to sin), cut it off, for it is better to enter life cripple than having two hands and go to hell.

If your foot causes you to stumble (sin), cut it off, it is better for you to enter life lame, than having two feet, to be cast into hell.

If your eye cause you to stumble (sin), cast it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of god with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell.

Of course, Jesus is not talking literally here. He is using the strongest language to emphasize that anything which causes one to stray from the Lord must be dealt with ruthlessly, whether possessions (Mark 10:21), family (Mark 10:28-31) or even life itself (Mark 8:34-35). Or anything that keeps one from becoming a follower of Christ must be dealt with directly by HIM.

One writer has put it this way, "No sacrifice is too great to make in order to receive the life of the kingdom and avoid hell."

I trust that each of us keeps short accounts with the Lord, because we are first of all accountable to Him as His followers through faith in Jesus Christ. (cf. I John 1:9). We are also to keep short accounts with others in there are breakdowns in our relationships (Ephesians 4:26-32). If let breakdowns in our relationships linger all kinds of havoc can result with unresolved anger and the silence treatment.

III. Consequence (Mark 9:43, 45, 47).

Different sins certainly bring different consequences.

But here Jesus is making the strongest contrast that He can give.

On the one hand, there is Christ's life for the believer in Him, as He maintains fellowship with His Lord, seeking to keep anyone or anything from coming between Him and His Lord.

On the other hand, there is the ultimate consequence for the one who rejects Jesus Christ as His Savior – the individual who thinks he can get through life on his own, or who could be very religious, but has not accepted Christ as his personal Savior. Due to rejecting Christ as personal

Savior, that individual will end up in hell where the fire is unquenchable. (It's well to note that Mark 9: 44 & 45 are not in the best manuscripts. Verse 48 is in the original text).

Note the word Jesus uses for "hell" here.

It is "Gehenna," which is the Greek translation for the Old Testament phrase, "Valley of Hinnon." It was a steep-sided valley on the south side of Jerusalem. In Israel's dark days, it was a center for idol worship. Children were sacrificed there to the god Molech (II Kings 23:10). Jeremiah calls it the valley of slaughter (Jeremiah 7:31-32; 19:6).

By the time of Jesus, it had become a rubbish dump where the fire never went out. The corpses of crucified criminals were thrown there. It was a natural place to convey suffering and punishment, and when Jesus talked about hell (Gehanna) the people would think of a location that should be avoided at all costs.

Obviously, Jesus believed that hell was a literal place. In fact Jesus talked more about hell than anyone. We are not sure where hell is located, but it is a place where there evidently is a fire (if taken literally) that doesn't go out, and miraculously the fire doesn't burn up people (Mark 8:43, 48).

But let's dig it a little deeper in the Scripture regarding what happens after this life for the unbeliever and the believer in the Old and New Testaments.

1. In The Old Testament.

(1) Unbelievers.

The Hebrew word that is used is "**sheol.**"

It is a word that describes the "grave" for death.

In numbers 16:30,33, it refers to the grave.

It may also refer to the place of departed spirits, of both the righteous (Genesis 37:35) and the wicked (Proverbs 9:18). The word, sheol, in the Old Testament is basically the place where the unredeemed dead go until the resurrection at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:13).

(2) Believers.

1. Enoch walked with God, and God took him (Genesis 5:24).

2. Abraham when he passed from this life was gathered to his people (Genesis 25:8). This is an indication that those who had gone on before Abraham were still living after death – with the Lord. This was also said of Isaac (Genesis 35:29), of Jacob (Genesis 49:49,33); also said of Ishmael (Genesis 25:17).

3. Elijah went up into heaven in a whirlwind at the end of his life (II Kings 2:11).

4. Lazarus and the rich man after death (Luke 16:19-31). Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom and the rich man was in Hades. Question. Was Lazarus in heaven? Abraham's bosom is a figure of speech to describe paradise or the presence of the Lord (Luke 23:43), where Jesus told the believing thief on the cross that "Today you shall be with Me in paradise."

Where did Jesus go after His death on the cross? What did He tell His heavenly Father in Luke 23:46? "Father into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said that, He breathed His last. Jesus went into the presence of His Father which is also paradise. Some think that when Paul said that he was caught up into the third heaven in II Corinthians 12:4 that he is referring to paradise, the presence of the Lord.

Now some think that from Ephesians 4:9 Old Testament saints could not go to heaven until Christ died and opened up paradise or the Lord's presence (Of course the Old Testament Scriptures above (Genesis 5:24; II Kings 2:11 tell us otherwise. People in the Old Testament went into heaven). This teaching is taken from: "Into the lower parts of the earth" in Ephesians 4:9. Actually this refers to Christ's incarnation and death for us rather than Christ going to the "saved" part of Hades during His death before His resurrection and releasing the saints to go to heaven. Others teach that I Peter 3:18-19 tells us that between His

death and bodily resurrection went to Hades and offered to those there a second chance. Of course that is not Scriptural, while others say it was Christ's announcement of His victory over sin. It is better to understand these verses that Christ in His preincarnate person preached through Noah to those now spirits in prison.

So my interpretation is that Old Testaments saints at death of their bodies went in their personalities into the presence of the Lord. I would also refer you to Mark 9 which records for us the transfiguration of Christ where Moses and Elijah appeared to our Lord along with Peter, James, and John, who were with Jesus at that time. Peter recognized Moses and Elijah, perhaps by Jesus introducing them, which is not stated. Or they had instant recognition of Moses and Elijah, a supernatural miracle. Obviously Moses and Elijah were alive after their deaths living in the presence of the Lord. This was before Christ died, was buried, and rose again. Old Testament saints went into the presence of their Lord when their bodies died.

2. In the New Testament.

(1) Unbelievers.

1.Hades is a term used in the New Testament. It is used in Matthew 10:13:40-41;11:23; Luke 10:15; Revelation 20:13). Hades refers to the place of torment for the unbeliever after this life until the Great White Throne Judgment, before which a resurrection of all the dead takes place.

2.Tartarus (II Peter 2:4). Tartarus is a word from Greek mythology which describes the lowest regions of Hades where the wicked go. Wicked Sisyphus, the mythical founder of Corinth was sent there for disrespecting Zeus. Sisyphus was condemned to push a heavy rock up a steep hill eternally. Also, Tantalus was sent to Tartarus. He was the son of Zeus and the king of Sipylos. He angered Zeus by his abominable behavior and was condemned to Tartarus where he suffered thirst and hunger in the presence of water and fruit he could not reach.

In II Peter 2:4, Peter is saying that angels judged in Noah's day would receive awful retribution.

3. Gehenna – The Greek term of torment. As mentioned above, Jesus used this word to refer to hell in our Mark 9 text, which literally referred to the always burning dump near Jerusalem. It would be a place of torment (Matthew 5:22,30; Mark 9:42-48), and outer darkness (Matthew 22:13).

4. Lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15; cf. Matthew 25:41, 46a; Mark 9:43).

Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The one whose name was not found in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. From Revelation 20:10, we know that the lake of fire is a place of continual torment day and night forever and ever. Also, the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:41 & 46 tell us that this is a place of eternal fire and eternal punishment. The Gehenna that Jesus refers to is really the Lake of fire in Revelation 20.

(2) Believers in the New Testament.

1. When believers in Christ pass from this life, their personalities go into the presence of the Lord (Philippians 1:23; I Thessalonians 4:17; II Corinthians 5:8).

2. Believers will be judged for how they have lived for Christ at the BEMA seat (II Corinthians 5:10; I Corinthians 3:10-15).

3. When the Lord returns for His Church, those with Him will brought with Him to receive new bodies. Those who are alive at the Lord's coming will go to be with those brought with the Lord to ever be with the Lord, receiving new bodies as well like the Lord's glorious body (I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 3:21).

4. Eventually all believers will live with the Lord in the eternal state, the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21-22:1-5).

There is no doubt that Jesus taught that hell or the lake of fire is a literal place. It will be a place of eternal torment in darkness with some kind of a fire that continually burns and the people there are not annihilated because when resurrected, it is assumed that they are given eternal bodies that go to eternal death.

Death in that sense is not annihilation but eternal separation from God forever, while being in place of torment forever. For a dead person is either alive in heaven through faith in Christ, or alive in Hades waiting God's judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Now there are some today who believe that God is love so everyone will eventually go to heaven. It's called universalism. Among believers there is a debate regarding whether or not there is everlasting punishment for the unbeliever. Some evangelicals believe in the **annihilation of the unbeliever**. Those who believe in annihilation of the unbeliever are also called "**conditionalists**." Conditionalism is the view that human beings are not naturally immortal. God, who alone is inherently immortal, grants the gift of immortality or eternal life only to believers in Christ. Unbelievers because they lack the gift of immortality, after judgment will be done away with. They will not be punished eternally as the Bible teaches.

I like what D.A Carson writes: Despite the sincerity of their motives, one wonders more than a little to what extent the growing popularity of various forms of annihilationism and conditional immortality are a reflection of the age of pluralism. It is getting harder and harder to be faithful to the "hard lines" of Scripture. And in this way, evangelicalism itself may contribute to the gagging of God by silencing the severity of His warnings and by minimizing the awfulness of the punishment that justly awaits those untouched by His redeeming grace."

But notice fourthly in our text

IV. Challenge (Mark 9:49-50).

Christ ends this teaching on responsibility, accountability, and consequence with challenges for believers to live pure lives. There is a different kind of fire than what the unbeliever will experience eternally. This is the fire of purification, the sifting that a believer may go through as he experiences the various challenges and trials of life (I Peter 1:7; 4:12).

There seems to be three different aspects to Christ's teaching about the fire of purification.

1. Everyone will be salted with fire (9:49) – experience challenges and trials.

This may refer to the testing that the disciples will experience, and what all believers in Christ will experience in the challenges and trials of life.

2. Salt must remain pure (9:50) – pure – holy in life .

"Salt is good; but if the salt become unsalty, with what will you make it salty again?"

This is a challenge to believers to keep their lives pure before the Lord and before others. This includes ones' mind, one's words, and one's actions. The challenge from above about one's hand, foot, and eye.

3. Have salt in yourselves and be a peace with one another (9:50).

This is the challenge to keep a dynamic on-going relationship with the Lord and with others. Be at peace with others individually, in one's family, in the church, at work, in the neighborhood, and at school. Yes, seek to reach out to others who are bound for the lake of fire, with the message of God's peace in Christ for them.

It's well to keep in mind here that God's love extends to everyone, and He does that through us not through angels or any other means. We are the channels of God's love to others who are bound for hell.

God never sends anyone to hell. John recorded these words of our Lord in John 3.

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17).

Then Jesus goes on. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.(John 3:18).

What is Jesus saying here? The issue at stake is what an individual does with Jesus Christ, who is God's Son, the God-man in flesh, the Savior of the world, proven through His death, burial and bodily resurrection.

For everyone is under condemnation? How so? By being in Adam. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive. Why do people sin in thought, word and action. Why do we see people doing unrighteous acts. Why is power abused in our land? Why is there immorality and wickedness? People are under condemnation. They are sinners before God. God didn't decree them to condemnation. They are that way because of being in Adam.

Christ has come to snatch some from condemnation to justification. Those who respond in faith to Him will receive His eternal life and forgiveness. They can be salt for Jesus.

Those who reject Jesus continue on their way to eternal hell. They send themselves to hell.

Now the believer can be salt for the Lord. Bring God's tastiness and purity to those needing to know the Savior personally.

The KEY is to "GET OUT OF THE SALT SHAKER!! Who are you going to touch with Christ's love this week who needs to know the Savior personally? You can start by praying, or keep praying for an individual you know who needs to know Christ personally. Pick up a track on your way out today. Give it to someone this week. Let's be alert to those around us.

Hell is real. That's where the devil, his cohorts and all those who reject Christ are going.

Heaven is just as real, but the place to be with the living and eternal God forever. Christ has won heaven for us through His death, burial and bodily resurrection. That's what the Good Friday Easter Season is all about. Hell has been defeated. Heaven has been won for us who claim Jesus as our personal Savior and live for HIM!!

Let's tell someone this week that Christ has won heaven for them. Praise the LORD!!