

## **“THE LAKE OF FIRE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**December 6, 2015, 6:00PM**

**Scripture Texts: Revelation 20:9-10, 13-15; 21:8**

### **Introduction.**

Allow me a brief explanation of why this sermon tonight. First, I will not be preaching on Revelation the next four Sunday evenings and I didn't want to start the final section of Revelation on heaven with one sermon and then have a four week break. We will finish the last two chapters of Revelation starting January 7.

Second, it didn't say very much about the lake of fire in my last sermon on this text and more needs to be said since most churches and most pastors tend to pass over such topics.

And third, there is actually a connection between Christmas and hell.

### **Christmas and hell.**

Christmas is about hell, it's about the lake of fire and perishing forever. Some people say a loving God would never send people to an eternal hell. Christmas is about a loving God sending someone to save us from an eternal hell.

**John 3:16-18** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

**Luke 2:10-11** And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior. A savior is someone who saves someone from something. Only people in serious trouble need a savior. Jesus saves us from sin and death and Satan's grasp. Hell is precisely why there is Christmas. If there was no hell, there would be no need for Christmas.

Christmas is good news because it saves us from hell.

### **Trying to water down the Lake of Fire.**

Hell is an unpleasant topic, and it is usually about the first doctrine to get jettisoned when someone starts moving away from the absolute truthfulness and authority of the Bible. Many Christians and pastors and churches try to water down the lake of fire and hell. We don't want to talk about negative things like the wrath of God and eternal judgment and the consequences of sin.

The power of positive thinking movement started by Norman Vincent Peale and carried forward by Dr. Robert Schuller told us that talking about such things was a downer, it offended people's sensitivities and turned them off from the gospel.

The health and wealth preachers led now by Joel Osteen and so many others want us to smile and talk nice and cut out all those nasty parts of the Bible. They want us to smooth off God's rough edges and talk more about what we can get out of Christianity and how it will bless our lives and make us live happily ever after.

We try to water down the lake of fire by talking only about how God is a God of love. Our religion is a feel good religion.

An example of this is seen in the controversy two years ago when the editors of a new Presbyterian Hymnal asked Keith Getty permission to change a line in his hymn *In Christ Alone*. They wanted to change the line, "Til on the cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied" to "Til on the cross as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified."

Our world and even our Christian culture want to exalt the love of God and avoid any bad news. They do this to the exclusion of all God's other attributes, especially His righteousness and holiness. God has become small, more like us, more like an old grandfather.

When we lose a sense of God's holiness His judgment doesn't make sense any more. When we lose a sense of His righteous wrath toward sin, hell becomes unnecessary.

We try to water down the lake of fire because we are more concerned about what people think than we are about what God thinks. When we fear man, we try to please people and say what we think they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. Preachers that focus on numbers in the pews and in the offering plates preach what works, what makes people feel good, so more water goes on the lake of fire.

Some water down hell by saying it doesn't exist, there is no place of eternal consciousness after death. Others water down hell by saying that it's not forever. Eternal punishment becomes neither eternal nor punishment. They either limit the duration or diminish the pain.

In the end we have a brand of Christianity that was once defined as:

"A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross." (H. Richard Niebuhr's description of Protestant liberalism).

As you hear people or preachers talk about hell you can test if they are watering down hell with questions like these:

Does this view of hell diminish the threat of God's judgment?

Does this teaching soften the urgency of repentance?

Is this offering the sinner any hope of salvation beyond this life?

Does this view allow the sinner to feel more comfortable and complacent, making God appear less severe?

### **Why we can't water down the Lake of Fire.**

There are several reasons why we can water down the lake of fire and the biggest one is we don't have enough water. All the water on our planet won't touch it.

Second, we can't water down hell because we can't water down God's holiness. Hell is hell because God is God. God is utterly holy, perfect in purity and righteousness. Remember the prophet Isaiah's reaction to seeing a vision of the holy God. He immediately shrinks back at the horror of His own sinfulness in the presence of such holiness.

Third, the perfect justice of God requires that there be a hell. If there is no hell, then there is no justice in God. Hell is not a blemish on God's character, it's not proof God is a monster or mean. Hell is the necessary response to the fall and to man's rebellion against God and His grace and goodness. Just as horrible crimes on earth require justice, so horrible crimes against God require justice.

Fourth, God is infinite and eternal. Everything about God is infinite and eternal. His wrath, His justice, His righteousness. His wrath and justice will be felt forever in hell, while His grace, mercy and compassion will be felt forever in heaven.

Heaven will be completely and forever free of all sin, evil, suffering, wickedness, pain, pollution, because all of that will be forever bound in hell.

Hell is eternal because the refusal to repent is eternal. Sin is on-going in hell. To the sinner God is the enemy, hated and despised. They hate Him and choose sin. It isn't so much that they choose the fire, they don't believe in the fire and they don't believe in God, and what they do know they resist or reject. They choose darkness and sin.

Fifth, Jesus affirms hell is real by speaking about it and warning about it frequently. He speaks about hell more than anyone else in the NT. He spoke more verses about hell than He did about heaven.

Sixth, some try to argue around hell by arguing about what is literal and what is symbolic. We have talked a lot about what is literal and what is symbolic in Revelation. Is the lake of fire literal or a symbol? Jesus refers to hell as a fire in a number of places, including some parables.

I agree with one pastor who leaves the question open, but points out that either way it's really bad. If hell is literally a tormenting lake of fire then it is unspeakably horrible. And if it's a symbol then that's even worse, because realities are always greater than the symbols that represent them. That means hell is far worse than this symbol of a lake of fire (Doug Wilson).

The symbols are meant to be descriptive of something very terrible, beyond horrible. The symbols are drawn from the worst things on earth and then applied to the worst possible existence.

“Scripture employs words to convey to us the greatest degree of the most excruciating pain, the greatest depths of despair and an understanding of what is utterly loathsome.”

Don't trust anyone who tries to water down hell, they don't fear God or fear sin or take God at His Word or take the Word of God seriously enough or don't think much of the holiness of God.

### **God's rescue operation.**

Some people think the idea of hell diminishes God's love or is a blemish on God's character. But hell actually magnifies God's love. Hell makes us realize how far and to what extent God is willing to go to save us from hell. It was incredibly costly for God to do what He did.

There is a movie just out about that mining accident in Copiapo, Chile in August of 2010. 33 miners were 2300 feet below ground when the copper-gold mine collapsed and trapped them. On day 17 a drill bit reached them and a message was sent up they were all alive. At that point a massive international rescue operation was put into action involving cooperation and resources of companies and individuals from around the world, including Latin America, South Africa, Australia, the United States and Canada. NASA specialists played a key role in tending to the health and well-being of the survivors. The total cost of the rescue was over \$20 million and took 69 days.

It is one of the greatest rescue stories ever and the survivors set a record for surviving underground.

While it's one of the greatest, it pales in size and significance to the cosmic rescue operation that is still on-going, six thousand years and counting, at the infinite cost of the Son of God. Everyday across this globe of ours, hundreds, even thousands of souls are rescued from hell at the cost of the blood of Jesus.

**Colossians 1:13-14** He has delivered (rescued) us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We were buried in darkness with no hope of escape. We were covered in sin, the terrible results of which were certain death.

God's salvation is His great rescue plan put in place from before time. A small scale operation was done first when God delivered the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt and brought them out to the Promised Land. Everything in the OT was preparation for when Jesus would come down to earth to bring God's salvation to us.

He overcame every obstacle and barrier, every enemy.

Paul says in I Corinthians 15 what John says in his vision:

**I Corinthians 15:26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Indeed it is true, for here we see Death and Hades thrown into the lake of fire. The experience of death and the place of death, the place where the dead are held, are no more. All enemies and the last enemy are defeated.

There are no more obstacles to God's universal and eternal reign and to His establishing of a new heaven and a new earth, against which there can be and will be no rebellion or resistance to His perfect Law and will.

### **Implications and applications.**

Don't listen to all the voices out there of those who are trying to water down hell. It is actually one of Satan's best lies. Trust the Word of God and what it says about the existence and nature of hell. God has mercifully told us the truth and told us everything we need to know about hell, and more importantly how to avoid it.

**Matthew 10:28** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Flee the wrath to come. If we repent, if we turn from our sin, if we turn from seeking our own will and trusting our own way, if we turn to Christ then all the power of heaven that governs the universe and every detail of history will be turned not against us, but for us. And if God is for us, who can be against us!

Don't follow a defeated foe into eternal death. Follow a victorious Christ into eternal life.

May our Christmas be brighter and more joyful and more merry in the knowledge of our Savior and what we have been saved from.

**Prayer:** Holy and righteous and just God, forgive our complacency and our apathy about eternal things. Though we are tempted to hesitate to ask this, nevertheless we ask that by the vision-clearing power of your Holy Spirit you would enable us to see more clearly and stand more in awe of your righteous justice and your life-saving grace. May we have a deep and health fear of hell. May we be used of you to rescue others from it. And may we now more than ever before have a totally new love and gratitude for Christ who bore our guilt and suffered for our sin and delivered us from hell.