

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Matthew 13:47-51

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INTRODUCTION

- A. A drunk man got on the bus late one night, staggered up the aisle, and sat next to a woman who was clutching a Bible.
She looked the wayward drunk up and down and said, "I've got news for you, mister. You're going straight to hell!"
The man jumped up out of his seat and shouted, "Oh, man, I'm on the wrong bus *again!*"
- B. Jesus shared a parable about hell with his disciples in Matthew 13:47-50.
 - 1. He concluded by asking if they understood-v.51.
 - 2. Do we understand what the Bible says about hell?
- C. A "Time Magazine" poll conducted a few years ago revealed that 63% of Americans believe hell is a real place, but only 1% believe they will end up there.

I. IS HELL A REAL PLACE?

- A. Jesus believed it was. It's been said that Jesus spoke more about hell than he did about heaven. What did he say about it in this passage?
 - 1. First, that all people will be brought to judgment some day. This was a drag net designed to catch all the fish, not a hook and line on a single pole.
 - 2. Second, that there will be a separation of people some day.
 - 3. Third, that saved people will go to heaven but lost people will go to hell.
- B. C. S. Lewis believed hell was a real place.

"There is no doctrine that I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture, and specially of our Lord's own words; it has always been held by Christendom, and has the support of reason."

II. IS HELL LITERALLY ON FIRE?

- A. Preachers of the past thought it was....Charles Spurgeon...

"There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you have a real body, a fire exactly like that which we have on this earth except this: it will not consume you though it will torture you. You have seen asbestos lying amid coals but not consumed. So your body will be prepared by God in such a way that it will burn forever yet without being consumed, with your nerves laid raw by searing flame yet never desensitized for all its raging fury. And with the acrid smoke of the sulfuric fumes searing your lungs and choking your breath you will cry out for the mercy of death, but it shall never, never, no, never come."

- B. Some people say the fire of hell is symbolic not literal. Why?
 - 1. First, because the Bible is full of symbols. For example, Jesus said he was the "bread of life". He didn't mean he was a literal loaf of bread. It was symbolism.
 - 2. Second, because literal fire doesn't make sense since the Bible says it's a place of darkness-Matthew 8:12.
 - 3. Third, the word Jesus used for hell, "gehenna" refers to an actual place southwest of the city of Jerusalem. It was the city dump that was always on fire to consume the refuse. Therefore, Jesus was saying that hell is like the fires of the city dump.
 - C. Even if the fires of hell may be symbolic we can still draw several important conclusions about it.
 - 1. Fire in the Bible is symbolic of God's judgment which everyone someday will face-Hebrews 9:27.
 - 2. Even if the fire is symbolic, hell is still a real place.
 - 3. Finally, the symbolism of hell does not mean it's not a horrible place to be in.
- R. C. Sproul... ***"But remember, if it's symbolic, it's symbolic because the reality is too awful for words. It's not better than this; it's worse."*** Then he said,

"Whatever hell is, it will be so bad that the people in hell will pray for fire and brimstone as a relief."

D. Even Billy Graham is uncertain about the literal nature of hell being on fire.

In Time Magazine on November 15, 1993, he said, ***"I think that hell essentially is separation from God forever. And that is the worst hell that I can think of. But I think people have a hard time believing God is going to allow people to burn in literal fire forever."***

A few years before that Billy Graham said in his book, "A Biblical Stand for Evangelists", 1983, pp 45-47..... ***"When it comes to a literal fire, I don't preach it because I'm not sure about it."***

III. DO SINNERS STAY IN HELL FOREVER?

A. Some say no because they eventually will be annihilated. Why?

1. To protect God from the charge of being cruel and vindictive. After all, would a God who tells us to love our enemies send his to eternal punishment?
2. Because there seems to be scriptural evidence—Psalms 37:10, 18-20; Isaiah 1:28; Galatians 6:8.

B. Some say sinners will get a second chance to be saved after they die-I Peter 3:19. The word "preach" used here does not mean "convert" but "announce".

C. Jesus, however, says hell is forever and irreversible-Matthew 25:46 and Mark 9:47-48.

IV. WHY IS HELL NECESSARY?

A. Its necessary for the devil, who it was created for in the first place-Matthew 25:41.

B. Its necessary for those who do not trust Jesus to pay for their sin-Romans 6:23 and II Thessalonians 1:5-9.

CONCLUSION

A. Paul "Red" Adair was the oil field firefighter first made famous by a 1968 John Wayne movie The Hellfighters. After the first Gulf War, he led the effort to cap the Kuwaiti oil wells set ablaze by Iraq. Adair was a brash, fearless fighter. He joked in 1991 that it would be no different after he died. "I've done made a deal with the devil," he said. "He said he's going to give me an air-conditioned place when I go down there, if I go there, so I won't put all the fires out." Adair died at age 89 on August 7, 2004.

B. Hell is no joke...

- 1 It's a real place.
2. It's a terrible place.
3. It's an eternal place.
4. It's an avoidable place.