

CRYING IN THE CHAPEL

AND OTHER MESSAGES

by

Angel Martinez

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CAN MODERN MAN BELIEVE IN HELL?

“And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments . . .” (Luke 16:23).

The doctrine of hell is a salute to the freedom of the will. If there were no hell, then man would not be a free moral agent. For if every man has to go to heaven, then heaven would become hell to those who do not want to go. The enjoyment of anything is conditioned by the nature of the person. If you would take a genuine Christian and place him in a night club where people are engaged in gradual self-destruction, the Christian would be in hell; though for the unsaved man, such a place would be heaven. On the other hand, if you were to place an unsaved man, carnal and selfish in his make up, in a prayer meeting, though to the Christian that would be heaven, to him the prayer meeting would be hell. For an unsaved man to be forced to go to heaven when he doesn't want to go, heaven would become hell for him.

When I was in my teens, I preached a strong sermon on hell in the course of a revival. A very suave and cultured lady came and spoke to me after the service. She pleaded with me that I not preach on that subject again. She reminded me that such a view was not consistent with the love of God for all men. God could never allow such a place to exist, and to preach such a doctrine would do injustice to the mercy of God for us.

I then responded by asking her what I should preach. She replied that I major on the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon is all the material for the minister. She did not know her Bible. She was stunned when I told her that one could not preach the Sermon on the Mount without preaching on hell. Then I showed her Matthew 5:29, 30, where Jesus said, “**If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.**”

In the attempt to discourage ministers from dwelling upon this dreadful reality, I have heard people refer to them as being “Hell, fire, and damnation preachers.” This ought to be a compliment to the conscientiousness of the minister. That proves that he is declaring the whole counsel of God. That means that he is not trimming his sails to catch the breeze of passing popularity.

Woe unto the minister who succumbs to the wants of the people instead of the will of God. We ought to obey God rather than men. Men didn't call the preacher into the ministry; God called him. His first loyalty is to the Lord. You might as well make fun of a medical doctor by saying that he believes in cancer, tuberculosis, and polio. Why, certainly he does, and he would not be true to his practice if he disregarded these dreadful realities simply to soothe the minds of his patients.

I began my ministry at the age of thirteen. As a youngster, in the course of preparing sermons, I would think some thoughts that for the moment would frighten me. Some of these thoughts I never voiced in the course of the message. I thought that perhaps it would be better to store them and let time judge their validity. I want to express a thought now that I felt was true in my teens, but then I surmised that mature reflection would eliminate it. However, after these many years in the ministry, I find it to be true. This is it, if a man believes that there is no hell, he is going there when he dies. For if there is no hell, then Christ is a liar and He cannot be our Redeemer. For a man to say that there is no hell makes Christ a liar, and He cannot be that man's Saviour.

It is not a pleasant thought that man can so sin so as to be separate from God forever. But the word of God is infallible, and its teaching is inerrant. We may not understand the ramifications of this tragic truth, but if we want to eliminate its deadly results on us, then let's quit arguing about it and head for the cross.

I. THE REALITY OF HELL

Jesus did most of the teaching on the doctrine of hell. He said more about it than any other person in the Bible.

- After the parable of the tares He said, "**The tares shall be cast into the furnace of fire**" (Matthew 13:42). He was referring to unsaved people.
- After the parable of the fish He said, "**The unsaved shall be cast into a place where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth**" (Matthew 13:50).
- He called hell "**outer darkness**" in the case of the unprofitable servant (Matthew 25:30).
- He says to the unsaved, "**Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels**" (Matthew 25: 41).
- He said, "**These shall go away into everlasting punishment**" (Matthew 25:46).
- He told the Pharisees that when they made a proselyte, they made him a child of hell (Matthew 23:15).
- He said to them, "**Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?**" (Matthew 23:33).

No one can forget the realistic description that Christ gives concerning hell in the sixteenth chapter of Luke. Remember, this is not a parable. Jesus tore a page out of the book of eternity and gave us a picture of life on the other side of the grave.

The unsaved man went to hell immediately after his death (v. 23).

- He could see in hell (v. 23).
- He could speak in hell (v. 24).
- He could feel in hell (v. 24).
- He could think in hell (v. 25).
- The man was conscious in hell; he was not engaging in soul sleeping.

Jesus taught that there was no help in hell (v. 26). He taught that men go there for not repenting (v. 30).

The principle of hell is not only written in the Bible, it is inherent in everything that we see around us. For every good thing in life can be inverted to produce sorrow and disaster. And the better the thing is, the greater its potential for producing calamity and despair.

For example, fire is a wonderful blessing. It heats the house, it makes food edible, it produces energy for commerce. That is the heaven side of fire. But fire also possesses its hell side. It can burn the house down; it can destroy lives; it can fall on a city in the form of an atomic bomb.

Water has its heaven side — a cold drink of water, a running brook, a swim on a hot day. But water has its hell side. Some years ago in Galveston, Texas, the hand of nature reached into the gulf and poured water on the land and hundreds died. That's the hell side of water.

Marriage can be heaven or hell. A beautiful home, where two people love each other supremely, is heaven. A home where two people wrangle and endure one another is hell. The doctrine of hell is woven into the warp and woof of our existence.

The Bible teaches that there will be degrees in hell. Everyone will not suffer alike.

When I began my ministry 26 years ago, I would exhort the sinner that if he did not plan to go to heaven, his wisest course would be to live it up. Pay no attention to the moral laws; fill the cup of iniquity to the brim, because there would be no good times in hell. But more mature reflection has changed my views. Now I say, if the sinner is not going to heaven, live a good life, pay your debts, be ethical, be moral, for the hell of the good man will not be the same as the hell of the wicked man.

Jesus clearly taught that this was so.

Speaking about the scribes who devour widows' houses, He said, "**These shall receive the greater damnation**" (Mark 12:40). And when He was upbraiding the cities, He said, "**Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you**" (Matthew 11:21,22).

But let me say this, and let's not forget it, that men and women do not go to hell for anything that they do on the moral level.

If men went to hell for getting drunk, God is unjust. It would be like putting a man in the penitentiary for life for stealing a loaf of bread. If men go to hell for committing adultery or for murder, then God is unjust. It would be like sending a man to the gas chamber for running a red light. Men are not going to hell for any sin that they commit on the moral level. Men will experience hell on this earth for their sin; a bitter conscience and dull regrets testify to this for those who do wrong.

Men go to hell for rejecting Christ. Jesus placed salvation on the level with man's rejection of the way of salvation. Now there will be murderers in hell and thieves and good men, but they are not there for their sins; they are there because they would not avail themselves of the remedy of redemption. Hitler is not in hell for killing the Jews; he is there for rejecting Christ. The only sin that sends men to hell is rejecting Christ.

The reason hell is such a horrible truth is that it will put men out of position.

Man was made for God, and to have to suffer eternal separation from God forever is what makes hell. Man was made for God like the lungs were made for air. Man was made for God like the ear was made for sound or the eye for color.

Take, for example, a bird and a fish. A bird in the air is in heaven; a fish in the water is in heaven. But place the bird in the water and the fish in the air, and you produce hell for both. So man was made for God, but when a man refuses the offer of mercy, then by his own will he separated himself from God forever. That is what makes salvation so imperative.

II. THE RESIDENTS OF HELL

The child of God will not be there. No one who has ever been saved will be in hell. God will discipline His own in His own sovereign way, but He will not send any of His children to hell.

Some years ago I was preaching on this subject and the next day I received a telephone call. The gentleman at the other end of the line told me that he did not find my sermon logical. He said, "I have two sons; I love those boys with all of my heart. Sometimes they disobey me and I have to discipline them. But no matter how they hurt me, I would never send them to a place of eternal punishment. I am just an earthly father; God's love is as superior to mine as the mountains are above the earth and I don't believe that God would send any of His children to hell."

I agreed with him and said, "My friend, I did not say that God would send His children to hell. I agree with you. That is why I believe in 'once saved always saved.' I said that God would send the devil's children to hell so that they can be with their papa."

"Oh," he said, "don't you believe that all men are God's children? Didn't He make us?"

"Jesus didn't believe that all men are God's children," I replied. "In John 8:44, Jesus told the good moral Pharisees, '**Ye are of your father the devil.**' So Satan has some children. I believe that God made us, but He also made snakes and buzzards — is He their father?"

There's a difference between creatorhood and fatherhood. God is the Creator of life, but the Father only of those who have been born into His family. None of God's children will be in hell."

The open sinner will be there. We are told that men who live without Christ will be there because they rejected Jesus. The drunkard and the murderer and the liar will be there. The man who lived as if there were no God, no Christ, no church, no Ten Commandments, no cross, no Holy Spirit, no heaven, no hell, will be there. Not because of his sins, for the cross could have taken care of those, but because of his willful rebellion against Christ.

Man is the only creature that defied God. Everything else in nature obeys His voice. When God said, "**Let there be light,**" it was so. When God said, "**Let fish swim in the sea, birds fly in the air, beasts roam in the field,**" it was so. When God said to a fig tree, "**Wither and die,**" it was so. But man can shake a fist of dust in the face of God and rebel against His will and go to hell.

God does not want any man to go to hell. When an unsaved man dies, God must stand by the coffin and say, "I didn't plan it that way." "**As I live,**" saith the Lord, "**I do not delight in the death of the wicked.**" The Lord willeth that none should perish, but that all should come unto repentance. God is interested in the salvation of every person upon the face of the earth. His interest is manifested in nature, in man, in the Bible, in the cross, in the church, and God continually insists that man should come unto Him and be saved.

The good moral man will be there. The Pharisees were good moral men, but the Lord told them that the drunkard and the harlot will be in heaven ahead of them (Matthew 21:31). Men are not saved by being good. The best in human goodness is like filthy rags in the sight of God.

The Lord can accept nothing short of perfection. God is all that, and man can never be that. The Lord does not disparage human goodness; it is fine on the moral and human level. The divine ire is provoked when a fragile human attempts to substitute human goodness for divine righteousness.

We often say that man was made in the image of God, but this is not actually so. Adam was made in the image of God, but the rest of us are made in the image of fallen Adam. Only salvation restores the image of God in man.

The unsaved church member will be there. Men are not converted by the reading of the label. The reality of Christ must be inside the bottle. If the devil cannot keep you from being religious, then he will suggest that you substitute church membership for eternal salvation. Many people reject Jesus by joining a church.

The church is wonderful and has its place, but it is not identical with salvation any more than a wedding ring is marriage. The ring symbolizes marriage, but it is not marriage. The scribes and the priests and the Levites were religious men, but they were not Christians. Judas was religious, but he wasn't saved, There is no substitute for "**Ye must be born again.**"

The procrastinator will be there. This is the man who had good intentions. He came to church, he listened, but he postponed decision to a mythical tomorrow. This man was not against the church, and he did not pride himself in his moral achievements. He knew full well the implications of the gospel message. He knew full well that redemption is rooted in Christ, not in conduct. He was in the courtship period with Jesus, but he never got married to Christ. The seed of the Scripture had been sown in the soil of the soul. It had been warmed by the rays of divine love, and watered by the tears of human concern. He did not deride salvation nor vilify its message. He just waited. He said tomorrow. Oh, friends, there is no promise in the Bible of a tomorrow salvation. **“Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”** God’s clock says “now”; the devil’s clock says “tomorrow.”

I plead with you who need to say yes right now. If you plan to do it some day, do it today. All there is between you and hell is just a heartbeat. Don’t gamble on a heartbeat. Open your heart to Christ. You will never regret it; it will be the finest hour of your life.

III. THE REDEMPTION FROM HELL

The purpose of the Crucifixion is to reveal the love of God and reflect the horrible nature of rejecting Christ. Some surmise that there can be no hell since God’s love is a proven fact in the realm of human experience. But the love of God is made evident through the cross. The only way that anyone could accuse God of not having love would be for there to be no way out of hell. God doesn’t allow our sins to be enough to send us to hell. For although sin is wicked and sordid, some would find reasons for sin in the light of their environment. Sin is real, and it hurts, and sometimes it hurts for a lifetime, and it is no respecter of persons. It will hurt the saint as well as sinners, but because of the cross, it is not sufficient to send a man to hell.

If a man were sent to hell for drunkenness, he could plead at the bar and say, “My father drank and my grandfather drank. They made me drunk when I was a little boy. As I grew, every time I had troubles, I tried to solve them through drink.” But God would say, “I foresaw that, and since My Son died on the cross, sin cannot send the soul to hell. But if you reject My Son, if you can stoop low enough to reject crucified love, and since your rejection would be your refusal to accept My remedy, then you must go to hell by your own hand.”

Let me put it this way. Suppose I were a physician, and I would diagnose the case and say to my patient, “My friend, you have a horrible disease, and there is a remedy for it, but it is very expensive. It costs a million dollars. Do you have a million dollars?”

The patient would say, “Sorry, Doc, I would love to live, but I do not have that kind of money, so I must die.”

Let’s imagine that I would say, “Now you lie quietly. I am going to see what I can do.” Imagine that I would go everywhere attempting to raise a million dollars. I would borrow, and mortgage, and finally I would raise the money. Then, after three days, I would come to the patient’s house, tired and weary, and I would say to him, “My friend, I have good news for you. I have secured the remedy for you. I mortgaged and borrowed everything I had. I will spend the rest of my life paying it back. Look! I have secured healing for you! Now take it and you will be well.”

Suppose the patient would take the bottle with the expensive fluid, look at it for a moment, then dash the bottle on the floor, and the liquid would run in every direction. Could he raise his finger in the doctor's face and say, "Doc, if I die, it will be your fault"? We would say that a man like that deserves to die. How, my friends, can sinners push God's remedy aside and blame Him for not loving them because a hell exists. A hell does exist, but so does the remedy, and God pity the wickedness of the hard heart that makes light of that provision that cost God His only begotten Son on a cruel cross. We would say that any man who refuses that remedy deserves to die forever in the pits of hell.

We do not know what hell is. The Bible calls it "**outer darkness . . . weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth . . . the bottomless pit . . . a place where memory burns for ever . . . eternal dying but never dead.**" But I think the summation of all of these is revealed by what Christ said when dying on the cross. He became sin for us and on the cross suffered hell for every man. In the midst of that experience, He cried, "**My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?**"

That's what hell is. It is eternal separation from God. How horrible! To be forsaken from God forever. To suffer eternal lonesomeness.

- No church bells ring in hell.
- No Bible in hell.
- No Holy Spirit in hell.
- No hymns in hell.
- No sermons announcing the good news of God's grace in hell.

My friend, hell is no place for human beings. God never intended for human beings to spend eternity there. God prepared hell for the devil and his angels. But if man refuses heaven, he must live somewhere forever, so he chooses hell. Don't forget it — if you refuse Christ as your Saviour, you will suffer in hell forever what Christ suffered on the cross during the hours of darkness. But there is no need for this.

The way of salvation has been provided for everyone. Come to the Saviour, and you will never know the reality of hell. God is pleading for you. Christ, with nail-pierced hands, is pleading for you. The Holy Spirit is pleading for you. The Bible is pleading for you. The saints who are gone are pleading for you. The angels in heaven are pleading for you. The church, with her hymns and sermons and services, is pleading for you.

- Every star in heaven tells you of the Bright and Morning Star who saves you from hell.
- Every flower is proclaiming the story of the Lily of the Valley who saves from hell.
- Every stone in the field is pointing to the Rock of Ages who saves you from hell.
- Every river is God's love in motion.
- Every mountain is God's love piled up.
- Every star is God's love in diamond.
- Every flower is God's love in bloom.
- Every bird is God's love on the wing.

Oh, friend, how can you dodge all these messages of affection and plunge your soul into eternal desolation? Run to the cross. Throw yourself on the mercy of the cross.

- He knows your weaknesses; He can forgive those.
- He knows the past; He can forget that;
- He knows your problems and can fortify you for them.
- He knows the future.

Only Jesus, only Jesus, can do helpless sinners good.

Tell me not, O infidel,
There is no heaven or hell.

A solemn murmur, within the soul
Tells of a world to be,
Like sinners hear the billows roll,
Before they reach the sea.

Tell me not, O infidel,
There is no saving Christ.

When seas their angry billows fling.
How sweet to lean on what He said;
How humbly to His cross we cling.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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