

Waiting For Christ

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

“Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord’s message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you. ² Pray, too, that we will be rescued from wicked and evil people, for not everyone is a believer. ³ But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. ⁴ And we are confident in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we commanded you. ⁵ May the Lord lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.”

The second coming of Christ was a theme precious to the heart of Paul. He mentions the second coming of Jesus thirteen times as often as he speaks of baptism. An average of one verse in every chapter of his writings mentions the second coming.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 he said, "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." And as he now come to close this great letter to the church at Thessalonica, he says this is verse 5, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

The Thessalonians had heard the gospel preached, they had turned to God, and in so doing they automatically turned from idols - but they did not stop there. Having turned to the living God, they were created in Christ Jesus unto good works, and they had turned to the living God to *serve*. But that is not all: As they *served*, they were *waiting* for His Son from heaven.

According to the Gospel revealed to Paul, every born again believer has the hope of the coming of Jesus and every recipient of the grace of God believes in His second coming.

The grace of God that brings salvation also teaches us to look for "that blessed hope" - and if you, dear friend, do not believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ, if you do not expect Him to return to this earth, if I were you, I would take a long look at my salvation experience.

The Bible teaches us that redemption is instantaneous, and the moment we are redeemed we are just as thoroughly and completely redeemed as we will ever be; but salvation is continuous from the moment we are redeemed until we are glorified. We are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8:14-17 we have been told that we are the sons of God (v. 14), we are adopted (v. 15), we have assurance (v. 16), we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (v. 17). The Scriptures clearly teach that the Christian experience is progressive. Until we see Jesus and receive a glorified body, there is no height in the Christian life

that offers no further ground for ascension. In other words, there will never come a time, in your Christian life, where you can just sit down and do nothing for Jesus!

With that thought in mind, Paul reminded these early Christians that they were to be about the Father's business.

But that is not the end of the story, for as surely as there is a *hope* for the believer, there is a *hell* for the unbeliever.

The doctrine of hell is one of the most neglected doctrines in all of Scripture. When hell is mentioned today, it is generally ridiculed, as if the whole idea of hell were so old-fashioned that only the naive and ignorant would really believe that such a place actually exists. Natural men hate the idea of being held accountable for their lives to a holy God, because they love sin and do not wish to part with it. The carnal mind throws up objection after objection to the idea of hell because it does not want to face the reality of it. Men live their lives thinking that maybe if they ignore a difficulty long enough, it will go away. Even religious leaders are now attacking hell. Let men do what they will; the objections of the foolish will not do away with hell.

Someone asked me once, "Do you really believe there is a literal hell?" Let me answer that question from the Word of God. Matthew 5:21-22 says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Fool! shall be in

danger of the council. But whoever says, You fool! shall be in danger of hell fire.” This is the first mention of hell in the New Testament, and it is most interesting that the word fell from the lips of the Son of God. In this passage Jesus plainly signifies that there is a hell, and that hell is a place of fire. Let me point out several other occasions when our Lord used the word "hell": In Matthew 5:29 He said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” Here the Lord Jesus teaches that it is better to lose an eye - or even to be completely blind - than to have two good eyes and use them in the wrong way to commit sin that will bring damnation and the "whole body" be cast into hell. Yes, according to this teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, people who are so unfortunate as to spend eternity in hell will have a body. Some teachers and ministers spiritualize hell, but Jesus definitely spoke of hell as being a literal place, a place with literal fire, and those who go there will have a body.

I think some of the confusion is that most people dimply do not understand why there is a Hell in the first place. The truth of the matter is that God never prepared a place called Hell for humanity, as seen in Matthew 25:41 where Jesus said that Hell is a place of “everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Therefore, Hell is a place where God will deal righteously with the devil.

Second, Hell is where God will deal righteously with the condemned. Jesus made this statement in John 3:18, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe

is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Therefore, the unsaved person is referred to as the “condemned” and Jesus made this statement in John 5:28-29, “Do not marvel at this; For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and shall come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” **Although Hell was created for the Devil and his angels.** When man fell, he also became subject to eternal judgment; thus, the lost go to hell.

Having said all of that let me remind you that God wants no one to go to Hell. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” **On the cross God in His marvelous grace and mercy, has made provisions all men to be saved.**

What does the Bible tell us about the nature of Hell?

First of all, Hell is a place filled with unimaginable fear. Repeatedly Jesus spoke of outer darkness, where there will be wailing, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. There is something about “darkness” that causes fear in our lives. **In addition to the fear there is physical and emotional pain.** Listen to what He says in Matthew 13:50, “And cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” And then in Matthew 22:13, “Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” **The**

“gnashing of teeth” here refers to an outward manifestation of inward and emotional pain. This truth is seen in Mark 9:18 when the father brought his demon possessed son to the disciples for deliverance, “And whenever this evil spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground and makes him foam at the mouth and grind his teeth and become rigid.”

Second, Hell is a place filled with unquenchable fire. A quick study of the scriptures will reveal that Jesus associates hell with “fire” as He often uses the term “hell fire.” In Mark 9:46 and 48 Jesus describes Hell as a place, “where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” In Matthew 13:42 and 50 Jesus describes hell as a “furnace of fire.” In Revelation 19:20 hell is described as “a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

Third, Hell is a place filled with intolerable filth. In Mark 9:46 Jesus described hell as a place where “their worm does not die.” **To understand that statement, one has to know a little of the history of Jesus’ day.** In the time of Jesus the Valley of Hinnom was used as the garbage dump of Jerusalem. It was a place where people not only threw the garbage of the city, but it was a place where the bodies of dead animals were thrown, but it was also the place where the bodies of the extremely poor and executed criminals were thrown. **To consume all this, fires burned constantly.** Maggots worked in the filth. When the wind blew from that direction over the city, its awfulness was quite evident. **At night wild dogs howled as they fought over the garbage.**

Jesus used this awful scene as a symbol of hell. In effect he said, “Do you want to know what hell is like? Look at Gehenna.” So hell may be described as God’s “cosmic garbage dump.” All that is unfit for heaven will be thrown into hell. **Because of the symbolic nature of the language, some people question whether hell consists of actual fear, fire and filth.** I promise you the reality is greater than the symbol. The Bible exhausts human language in describing heaven and hell. The former is more glorious, and the latter more terrible, than language can express.

Four, Hell is a place of eternal duration. As far back as Isaiah 33:14 hell is described as “everlasting,” “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” In Matthew 18:8 and 41 Jesus describes hell as “everlasting fire.” In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 hell is described as “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” Revelation 20:10 says those in hell “shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” What could communicate the duration of hell better than the expression "forever and ever?"

The most terrifying aspect of all about hell is its length or duration. Hell is eternal. Hell will last forever. **Can you comprehend eternity?** No mathematical equation or formula can explain it. Your mind cannot conceive of eternity, but it is nonetheless real. This aspect of hell alone should cause men to cry out in repentance.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "In hell there is no hope. The damned have not even the hope of dying - the hope of being annihilated. They are forever – forever - forever lost! On every chain in hell, there is written 'forever.' In the fires there, blaze out the words, 'forever.' Above their heads, they read, 'forever.' Their eyes are galled and their hearts are pained with the thought that it is 'forever.'" Christopher Love says, "This is man's misery in hell, he shall be in no more hope of coming out after he hath been there millions of years, then he was when he was first cast in there; for his torments shall be to eternity, without end, because the God that damns him is eternal."

Let me give you a little summary of have we have seen so far: because of sin, humanity is alienated from God. There is no doubt in the bible that heaven and hell are considered real. Jesus Christ came to overcome this alienation and make a way for each of us to be reconciled with God. **We each must make that decision and it happens through faith in Jesus Christ.** If a person does not make that decision, they remain separated from God. And that might be tolerable in this life and in a world that enjoys God's mediation. But to die in a state of separation means eternal separation, this time in a place where God has withdrawn his presence ... and that place is called hell.