

Is There Really a Place Called Hell?

In 2011, a book came out entitled, "Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived". It was written by Rob Bell, the former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids Michigan. Back then, the church was considered to be one of the fastest-growing churches in America. The book's title seemed to be evangelical and orthodox. He dealt with topics that every Christian, in fact, every person in the world would like to know about. I think every person in the world would like to know what their eternal destiny is. Am I going to heaven or hell? Of course, there are atheists who deny the reality of such places. Although I believe in their quiet moments or when faced with a tragedy, they ponder about such things.

Anyway, the book "Love Wins" is not evangelical nor orthodox. Because it denies the existence of hell. Bell claims that in the end every person on earth will be saved. No one goes to a place of eternal damnation called hell.

This morning, we're continuing our series on "Big Questions About God, the Bible, and Life." Today, we're going to look at what the Bible says about the question, "Is There Really a Place Called Hell?"

It's a big question, it really is. That's why Bell's church grew that way. Thousands and thousands of people came to his church because those people thought that he had the answer. Nothing can be further from the truth. The Bible contradicts Bell. The Bible says there is a place called hell. And let me give you the reasons why in a few moments.

Read Luke chapter 16-19-31

This is an amazing story that Jesus told. He told it to the Pharisees. He told it to burst the bubble on the false teaching that was going around that material wealth and material blessings meant that you had the favor of God on your life. It meant that you were pleasing to God and blessed by God. And it meant that you were for sure going to go to heaven when you died. And if you were poor, that meant you were being cursed by God, forsaken of God, and it was a roll of the dice whether you were going to make it or not into heaven.

And so, Jesus told this story, the story of Lazarus, the poor man, and the story of an unnamed rich man, although in seminary circles they give him a name. Because he is rich, they give him the Latin name Dives, which means "rich man." So it's the story of Lazarus, the poor man, and Dives, the rich man.

And Lazarus is so very, very, very, very poor. And Dives is so very, very, very, very rich. But everything changes after they die. And Lazarus, the poor man, becomes Lazarus, the rich man in Abraham's bosom enjoying the blessings of heaven. And Dives, the rich man, becomes Dives, the poor man in hell.

From this story we can learn lots of things, but we learn things about the reality of hell. And I want you to notice with me three truths about hell. Three truths about hell: what does God say about hell?

Number one: God says that hell is a real place. It's a real place. Verse 23 says, "In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up". Hades is another word for Hell. And I'll explain what Hades mean in a little bit.

Hell is a real place. It's not the figment of someone's imagination. It's not the concoction of some evangelist whose thinking, Hey, how can I get more people to come down the aisle? I know! I'll create a place just, out of my imagination, a terrible, horrible place called hell. And then they'll be afraid, and then they'll want to come. No! Hell is a real place, not created in someone's imagination. It was created by God. And people may want to explain it away. People may want to say, "No, it doesn't exist." People may want to say, "Oh well, it, let me tell you it's not anything like what the Bible says." But I love what Abraham Lincoln said one day. He was talking to a little boy, and he said to the little boy, he said, "Hey, little boy," He said, "How many legs does a dog have? The little boy said, "That's easy. He's got four." And Abe Lincoln said, "Yeah, but if you call his tail a leg, then how many legs does he have?" He said, "Well, then, he'd have five." And Abe Lincoln said, "No, he'd still just have four. A tail is still a tail no matter what you call it."

Hey, I don't care how you try and explain away the reality of hell. It's still hell. It's still in the Word of God. And all the theologians and all the world can't explain it away. Hell is a real place.

Now what's this place like? What does God say about this place called hell? Well, **hell's a place of eternal fire.** The rich man, Dives, when he calls out to Abraham, he says, " Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." Hell is a place of eternal fire. Jesus called it in Matthew chapter 25, when He conducts the judgment of the sheep and the goats, He says to the goats that are on His left, "Depart from Me into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." He calls hell the everlasting fire. In Revelation chapter 20, it's called the lake of fire. In Revelation 21, verse 8, it's called the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

Jesus said it's the place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Now, another word for hell is Gehenna. In the original New Testament in Greek, it is used 18 times like in Matt. 5:22, Matt. 10:28, Matt. 23:33, Luke 12:5, James 3:6 and others more. In our modern translations, they have been translated Hell. Now, Gehenna was a place in Jerusalem. It was outside the city. It was in a ravine. It was on the south side. It was the dump. That's where they brought all their trash. That's where they brought dead things, and there was always a fire taking place at Gehenna because it would burn the trash and it would burn the refuse. And any time you went to Gehenna you'd see fire. And that is the picture that is used, the word that is used for hell in the our Bible translations. So, Hell is a place of eternal fire where the worm doesn't die and the fire never goes out. And the fire is so hot. "I am in agony in this flame", says the rich man.

Sometimes make a joke about hell, and they laugh. Like the heavy metal band AC-DC who sang, "Well, you know, I want to go to hell. I'm on the highway to hell. No stop signs, no speed limits. Ain't nobody going to slow me down. I'm on my way to the Promised Land. I want to go to hell. It's going to be a big party in hell. All my friends will be there. We'll play poker."

Dives is not having fun in agony in this flame. He doesn't say to Abraham, "Hey, I want my brothers to come here. Make sure they bring the cards so we can play poker." It's a place of eternal fire.

It's a place, secondly, of eternal torment. The rich man is in agony. In the passage that we read, two times we read about agony. Two times we read about torment. That describes the experience in hell. Revelation 14:11 says this: "And the smoke of their torment rose up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night." - those who end up in hell. They're tormented forever and ever. No rest day and night. It's a place of eternal, forever torment, a horrible place.

Now we can understand the physical, and we think in terms of physical suffering as he's saying "I am in agony in this flame." It's physical suffering. But there's also a component, a big component, of emotional suffering that takes place in hell, because Abraham says to Dives, this rich man, "Child, remember. Child, remember."

You'll be conscious if you go to hell. You'll remember. And you will have such tremendous emotional torment because you'll remember all the opportunities that you squandered.

You'll remember all the times you stomped in the face of the Holy Spirit when He was drawing you to Himself, and you said, "Forget it! I don't want that. I'd rather do what I want to do." You'll remember all that.

"Child, remember." And you'll remember all the sin that you committed. That'll just come like a flood, as David when he sinned with Bathsheba and then killed Uriah the Hittite. And he said in Psalm 51, "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me." He said, "My sin was ever before me." And in hell your sin will be ever before you. And you'll think about it, and your conscience will convict you, and your conscience will condemn you, and it'll feel like a hammer inside constantly day and night, and night and day, "Sinner, sinner, sinner, sinner, sinner." That's what you'll feel. And there'll be no drugs or alcohol to deaden the pain. There'll be no perverted culture to tell you it's okay to do whatever you want to do. Everything will be open. Everything will be laid bare. And you will experience your sin to the full. And Daniel says in Daniel chapter 12, verse 2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake; these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt".

Everlasting contempt. That means to be loathsome. And the people in hell hate themselves, and they hate their existence. Some people believe, well, you know you just cease to exist. The Bible does not teach that. The Bible teaches that hell is forever and ever and ever. And Jesus said of that place, "In that place there shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth." A horrible place! A place of eternal fire. A place of eternal torment. A place of eternal despair. No relief. No hope. You are separated from God in hell forever.

Now, let me talk about Hades which we find in verse 23. Hades is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament word Sheol, S-H-E-O-L. Sheol was the place of the dead. That's where they went in the Old Testament. It's called the underworld. And the righteous dead went there, and the unrighteous dead went there. But Sheol is a place that has two compartments. If you think about it in your mind, this is the way I understand it. Think about two big rooms and connecting them is like a bottomless pit, a chasm where you can't get across. And the unrighteous dead go to Hades, that's the place of the unrighteous, unbelieving dead. The righteous dead go to a place that's called Abraham's bosom. It's called Paradise. And Hades is so much like hell, and Paradise is so much like heaven. Hades is not as bad as hell, although it's similar to hell. And Paradise, Abraham's bosom, is not as good as heaven, although it's similar to heaven. You say, "Why was it like that?" Well, because Jesus hadn't died yet on the cross. Nobody could die and go to heaven until Jesus actually paid the price on the cross.

And so, the righteous dead, before Jesus went to the cross and rose again, they went to this place called Abraham's bosom or Paradise, a beautiful place, a great place. But they couldn't be ushered into the very presence, the manifest presence of God, until the price was paid on the cross.

Now the Scripture says in Ephesians chapter 4 that Jesus went down into the lower parts of the earth and He led captivity captive. I believe that Jesus, when He died in between that time, His death and resurrection, I believe He went down to Paradise and He told those guys, "Hey, I'm the One that you believed in."

See, in this life, we get saved by looking back to the cross of Christ. The Old Testament believers, looked forward to the cross of Christ. They didn't have all the information that we have, but they knew that they were saved by their faith in God's promise of a Messiah. They weren't saved by their works. They were saved by faith in the coming of God's Messiah. And so, they looked forward. And Jesus said, "I'm the One that you put your faith in, although you didn't know My name." Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day and was glad." And so, He takes those in Paradise and He takes them to glory. And at present, when a person dies in Christ, he goes immediately to be with the Lord. Absent from the body; present with the Lord. But people who die today without Christ, they go to Hades, the place of the unrighteous dead. It is a place of eternal despair.

And the Bible here speaks of the chasm. You can't get across. See, once you make a decision to reject Christ, you end up in hades, otherwise known as hell. There's no getting out of there. And you are separated from God, and you're separated from heaven, and you're separated forever and ever and ever.

And Dives wants out. "Hey, send Lazarus over." "We can't do that. There's a big chasm." He's upset. Well, what's he going to do? He's separated. The Scripture says in 2nd Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 9 of those who reject Christ. It says, "And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." You're separated from God. And because you're separated from God, God is the God of all hope. And now you're separated from the God of all hope. And now you have no hope. And there's just everlasting, eternal despair in hell. It's awful. It's horrible.

Statesman Bernard Baruch said this: "Hopelessness is the saddest word in the English language." And someone said, "On the portals of hell are written these words: Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Hell is a real place, a place of eternal fire, a place of eternal torment, a place of eternal despair.

Truth number two: Hell is a populated place. Not only is it a real place, but it's a populated place. People go to hell! Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7, He said, "Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction; and many are those who enter by it - many!" He said, "The gate is narrow, and the way is small that leads to life; and few there be that find it." You got a small gate and few that travel on it, and you got a broad road and a wide gate and many travel on it. Hell is a populated place. Many are going to be in hell not because God wants that, but because people decide to reject the Savior. And we're going to talk about that before this message is over.

But you say, "Well, Rolly, who goes to hell? Does the Bible tell us who goes to hell?" Yes! Hell is going to be filled with bad people, with bad people. You say, "Well, that makes sense. I guess, bad people - yeah. I think I understand that." Look what it says in Revelation chapter 21, verse 8: "But for the cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and immoral persons, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Think about Adolph Hitler. Adolph Hitler was in charge of killing six million Jews. Adolph Hitler was a bad guy. He was a bad person. He was a murderer, mass murderer on the grandest scale we've ever seen. He's a picture of the antichrist. Adolf Hitler's in hell.

Saddam Hussein - bad guy! Really bad guy. He was a murderer. He was an idolater. He was a liar and abominable. That's where those people go.

Jim Jones deceived hundreds and hundreds of people. He was involved in Jonestown. He said he was Jesus. He was a false Christ, and had them drink the Kool-Aid, and nearly 1,000 people died - men, women, children, babies that died. He'll be there in hell.

Bad people go to hell. Those guys that took the planes and flew them into the World Trade Center and into the Pentagon, those guys will be there. So the bad people will be in hell. But hell will also be filled with good people. You say, "Good people are going to be in hell?" Yeah, good people will be in hell.

Jesus was telling this story about Lazarus, whose name means "God is my helper" and Dives, the rich man, and He was speaking it to the Pharisees. The Pharisees, the Scripture says, they were scoffing at Him. They were lovers of money. And as Jesus would talk, they'd go (sound) "Yeah, right. What do You know, You peasant preacher?"

You don't know anything about money. What do You have? You got nothing!" Those guys will be there.

Caiaphas, the high priest who tore his robes, who had Jesus delivered to be crucified, who got the crowd to say, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Not this man, but Barabbas." I promise you, the people would say he's a good man. He's going to be in hell.

Wow! Good people go to hell? Yeah. You know, when Jesus told that in Matthew chapter 7, when He said, "Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction; and many are those that find that," He said, "On that day, many (on judgment day), many will come to Me and will say to Me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles??" And Jesus said, "I will say to them, Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. I never knew you!" Good people who were religious but lost are going to end, according to Jesus, are going to end up in hell. Wow!

You remember what Jesus told Nicodemus? Jesus told Nicodemus, who was the ruler of the Jews. When that man came to Jesus by night, Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you. I say to you, Nicodemus, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." You can't get to heaven by being a good person, quote, unquote, "good person" by doing good works, by memorizing the Old Testament, as the Pharisees did, by fasting twice a week, by tithing on all that you have. That's what they did. By praying long, flowery prayers. That doesn't get you to heaven.

And so, hell will be filled with bad people, with the abominable and the murderers and the sorcerers and idolaters. And it will also be filled with a bunch of good people. And as Adrian Rogers used to say, "The worse form of badness is human goodness when that human goodness becomes a substitute for the new birth experience." Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And you want to just boil it down? You want to cut out all the middle men, so to speak? You know who ends up in hell? You know who populates hell? Hell is populated with all Christ-rejecting people. That's who goes to hell. It's people who rejected God's salvation. They're the ones that end up in hell. So, if you want to just put one classification on all these people, on Dives and all these people, BOOM, here it is: They rejected Christ! They rejected God's salvation!

You know, you think about this rich man, this guy Dives. You say, "Well, why did he go to hell? Did he go to hell because he was rich?"

No! You don't go to hell because you're rich. Abraham was rich. He was very wealthy in livestock and silver and in gold, the Bible says in the book of Genesis. So you definitely don't go to hell because you're rich. Did he go to hell because there was Lazarus in need and he never helped him? And Lazarus was just wanting crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. He's just dumped outside his doorstep. And the rich man would just step over him. Did he go to hell because of that? No! That's a bad thing. He missed an opportunity, but that's not why he went to hell. You say, "Did he go Rolly? He went to hell because he was a sinner." Well, Lazarus was a sinner, too. He didn't go to hell. Dives went to hell for one reason: he rejected God's salvation. And if you reject God's salvation, you're going to perish. That's just the way it is.

The Scripture says in 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2, speaking of those who follow the antichrist in the last days, it says, "And the antichrist will come with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish" Now watch it! "For those who perish." Why do people perish? And perish is the Greek word apollumi. It means at its very heart, "to be delivered up to eternal misery for people who perish, who are utterly lost and utterly destroyed." It's because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. But they took pleasure in wickedness. They said no to God's salvation. And that's why they perished. And that's what happens to people. When you reject God's salvation, you end up in a place, a terrible, horrible place, a place called hell. Hell is a real place. Hell is a populated place.

And truth number three: Hell is an avoidable place. Now everybody needs to listen really close right now, because some of you are thinking, Man, I don't like this sermon at all. But I'm speaking the truth. I'm not making any of this stuff up. This is the truth from God's Word. Hear this part of the message. Hell is an avoidable place. God does not want one person to go to hell, not one, not one. As a matter of fact, Jesus said that hell wasn't created for people. He said that hell was created for the devil and his angels. The Lord created that place for Satan and all those fallen angels that came into Satan's rebellion against God. We call those fallen angels, demons. And that's why the Lord created hell, this terrible, horrible place, this place of separation, this place of fire, this place of despair. He created it for the devil and his angels. And He does not want one person to go there.

Second Peter chapter 3, verse 9 says this: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."

Don't ever get the idea that God gets some kind of sadistic glee in casting people to hell. He doesn't!

When you read in Revelation chapter 20 about the Great White Throne Judgment where the Scripture says, "Death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them" - death has the bodies; Hades has the soul, and they are put back together - and the person stands before God, it's not a fun time for God. He doesn't want to be there. And I promise if you end up there, you don't want to be there either. The Bible says, "Earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them." No one wants to stand before the God of the universe. It is a terrifying thing, the Bible says, to fall into the hands of the living God, for our God is a consuming fire. And if you reject Jesus as Savior, you meet Jesus as judge, and it's awful. And the Lord does not look forward to that at all.

In Ezekiel chapter 18, God says this: "Do I have any pleasure in the death of anyone who dies? No! Repent therefore and live." God doesn't want anybody to go to hell. That's why Jesus spoke so much about hell. Did you know that Jesus talked more about hell than He did about heaven? You know why He did that? To warn people! "Hey, there's a terrible place. And you're born a sinner. And you're born on the highway to hell. And God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish." That tells me that I'm perishing without Jesus. I need to do something. I'm on the highway to hell. I'm on the broad road. I need to turn around and receive Christ. And Jesus talked about hell to warn people.

And you know what? We have a warning in this passage that I read, because it says that Lazarus died first and then the rich man died. And the rich man would know that Lazarus had died. He was out there, just laid at his gate every day. This rich man or the Lazarus was probably crippled. Somebody just dumped him at his gate. The dogs would lick him. But now he was dead. And every time you have a death, and every time there's a funeral, it's an opportunity to warn people. Funerals aren't for the person that died. That person's gone. All the opportunity for that person is over. Hebrews 9:27: "It is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment." Funerals are for those who are living.

Every time I do a funeral, I know that it is an opportunity for me to warn people about death, to warn people about a place called hell. Rarely, if ever, do you have a funeral where all the people that come are Christians, rarely you have that. And you have many funerals where tons of people come and they're lost. And so, it's an opportunity to tell people about Jesus and about salvation so they don't end up when they die in a place called hell.

Ezekiel chapter 3 says, "I have appointed you a watchman on the wall. And if you see someone going in the wrong direction, and you don't warn them, God says, "I will require their blood. Their blood will reveal on your hands."

Why? Because you knew that they were wrong, and you didn't say anything because you didn't want to offend anybody. You didn't want anyone to get mad at you, anyone to think, Oh, he's not a very nice guy. Who is a nice guy who lets people go to hell? You know, we have that bumper sticker, "Friends don't let friend drive drunk." Somebody's got another bumper sticker out. It says, "Friends don't let friends go to hell." And so, you tell people the truth. And I look at every funeral as an opportunity to talk to people about their souls. And listen. If you have a situation for a loved one and you need somebody to do a funeral, you know up front that if you get me to do the funeral, I'm going to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And if you don't like that, then don't get me to do it. People need to know, and they need to be warned. And Lazarus died. And it was a testimony to Dives that, "Hey, buddy, I don't care if you have a gazillion dollars in the bank. Riches do not profit in the day of wrath. Prepare to meet your God, Dives." But he didn't prepare. God didn't want him to go to hell. He gave him an opportunity. God wants everyone to repent and believe, to repent and believe in Jesus and to receive Jesus.

Dives has a conversation with Abraham. "Send Lazarus." First, he wants Lazarus to come and just a, just a drop of water on his tongue, just to find a little bit of relief, just a, a smidgen of relief. And they say, "We can't do that because there's a separation, there's a chasm." He says, "Well, then, send Lazarus back to my brothers. I have 5 brothers, to warn them of this place." And Abraham says, "They have Moses and the prophets. They don't need Lazarus." He said, "Oh now they're not going to listen to Moses and the prophets. They need a sign. Show me a sign. And if you bring Lazarus back from the dead, then they'll repent." And Abraham says, "No, they won't. If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen if someone comes back from the dead."

And you know what happened next in the ministry of Jesus Christ? He raised Lazarus from the dead. Oh, what a co-incidence that this man in Luke 16 is named Lazarus. "Send Lazarus back from the dead and we'll believe." And Jesus raises four day-old dead Lazarus in John chapter 11. He raises him from the dead. And, WOW, no one could argue with that miracle. This is amazing. And people began to believe.

And what about the Pharisees? They had a little meeting after Lazarus was raised from the dead. And you know what the result of that meeting was? "We need to kill Jesus! Because if things keep going this way, all Israel is going to follow Him, and we will lose our place and our position of authority and respect in Israel."

And listen. You mark it down. Religious folks, all they're interested in, is their place and their position, and they don't give a rip about God, and they don't give a rip about the truth. And when the truth hits them square in the face, they reject it.

When Jesus rose from the dead, you know what the soldiers told the Pharisees and the high priest? "The stone was rolled away, and we saw an angel, and we shook for fear. We were like dead men." They got together with them and said, "Listen. You just tell. Here's some money. You just tell everybody that the disciples stole the body away." Well, those soldiers knew that wasn't true. And the Pharisees and Caiaphas, he knew that wasn't true. They poked out their own eyes. They would not believe. "Oh, send Lazarus back from the dead and then we'll believe." "No! If you don't believe Moses and the prophets, you won't believe even if someone comes back from the dead." Jesus came back from the dead. They wouldn't believe.

Now, how does a person keep out of hell? By repenting, turning, and receiving Christ. That's how you do it. Jesus died so that you wouldn't go to hell.

Some people get the idea, "Well, you know, I just can't understand this concept of hell. And, Rolly, the reason, the reality of hell is so hard for me is because to me God is love. And I just can't wrap my mind around a God who is love who would send people to this terrible, horrible, awful place that you've been describing through the Scripture, this place called hell. I just can't see it." Well, here's your problem: You got a twisted understanding. God doesn't send anybody to hell. People send themselves to hell.

No one will ever point their finger in the face of God and say, "God, You sent me to hell." No! You sent yourself to hell. You refused the love of the cross so as to be saved. You said, in effect, in your heart to God, "Not Your will, but mine be done." And so, you know what God says to you at the Great White Throne Judgment? He says, with tears streaming down His face, "Not My will, but yours be done. You didn't want Me. You rejected My salvation. You didn't want the only thing that would cleanse you of sin, the blood of My only Son. And you said no. So it's not My will, but it's yours be done." And that's the reality of hell.

Listen. Two things in closing, two key questions. Two big questions:

Number one: Are you certain you're going to heaven? Are you certain that you've received Christ, who died on the cross and rose again from the dead? The Bible says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

Are you certain?

And number two: Do you care enough to tell others about the love of God so that they can avoid hell?