

Review last week. God-exalting worship is the church's ultimate purpose.

- Why must we have God as the center and his worship as the goal of missions? Otherwise, the goal of missions becomes man-centered.
- How does obeying the Great Commission fill the earth with God's glory? (By Christ's power, we fill the earth with worshipers by planting local churches)
- **Missions** is the evangelism, discipleship, and church planting across ethnic, linguistic, and geographic boundaries so that every tribe, tongue, nation, and language may worship the Lord and the earth may be filled with God's glory.
- A **missionary** is a qualified Christian set apart and sent out under the authority of a local church to an area of recognized need, ordinarily crossing cultural contexts, to pursue the work of the Great Commission in planting and strengthening local indigenous churches.

As literary critic Piero Camporesi reflected on our postmodern Western culture, he commented, “We can now confirm that hell is finished, that the great theatre of torments is closed for an indeterminate period, and that after 2000 years of horrifying performances the play will not be repeated. The long triumphal season has come to an end.” The doctrine of hell is like a popular Netflix TV series—it had a good 2000-year run, but like any TV show, it had its “series finale” and came to an end.¹

What happened to hell? One witty writer said, “Hell has been Air Conditioned.” Many now favor the concept of *annihilationism* or downplay the significance of hell in the New Testament.² As a result, some have breathed in the air of the age so deeply that they have reconceived salvation merely as liberation from oppression, internal or external, instead of a rescue from the wrath of God against sin and a justly deserved sentence of eternity in hell.

¹ Al Mohler in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, edited by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Zondervan, 2004).

² Annihilationism is the belief that after the Final Judgment, God will comprehensively destroy all the damned, extinguishing their consciousness so that they altogether cease to exist instead of spending an eternity in conscious torment in hell.

Our understanding of hell affects our understanding of the church's mission. Those who deny or water down the reality of hell tend to promote and teach concepts such as *universalism*—that Christ died effectually for everyone whether they repent and believe in Christ or not. For them, the Bible does not limit salvation to those with conscious faith in Christ because that sounds scandalously discriminatory, ignorant, and intolerant.³

Does the Bible teach that there is a hell? Yes, and Jesus spoke of hell more than anyone else in the Bible. The reality of hell makes conscious faith in Christ a necessity. Hell displays the infinite worth of God, reveals the infinite glory of Christ's atonement, and fuels the urgency of missions. We should see missions as an absolute necessity and feel an urgency to send and go because hell is the destiny of all those who die outside of Christ.

^{1st.} **The Reality of Hell**. The reality of hell shows the infinite glory of God and the horror of sin. The 1689 Baptist Confession describes the reality of hell in chapter 31: “the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and utter darkness.” Hell is the place of eternal conscious torment for the wicked.

Where does the Bible teach about hell? The Old Testament speaks of where the dead reside, Sheol or Hades. Job 38:17: “*Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?*” However, the Old Testament does not describe *Hades* as a “hellish” place where the wicked suffer eternal punishment. It also speaks of *Abaddon*, sometimes translated as “Perdition” or “Place of Destruction.” Job 31:12: “*For that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase.*”

³ “Conscious” means that one has personal knowledge of, awareness of, and responsiveness to the truth of the gospel while living on the earth in this present age.

We find more explicit hints of eternal torment as we know it in the New Testament in Isaiah 66:24: “*And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.*” [Isaiah 66 likely refers to a burning trash dump, where smoke would constantly rise from the refuse, and maggots would feast endlessly on the carcasses of dead animals.](#) This text came to be closely associated with hell in the New Testament. Daniel 12:2 sentences the wicked to perpetual disgrace and shame: “*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*”

Jesus teaches most plainly about hell in Matthew 25. He will separate the ‘sheep’ from the ‘goats:’ “⁴¹ *Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’*” [What do we learn from this verse?](#) First, God prepared eternal punishment for the devil and his angels and the cursed will share it with them. Second, the punishment is as eternal as heaven. And third, Jesus describes this punishment as a place of fire, like Mark 9:48, “*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched,*” or the “*lake of fire*” in Revelation 20.

Jesus also speaks of hell in the story of the rich man and Lazarus: “*In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side*” (Luke 16:23). Jesus depicts an impious sinner tortured by an unquenchable thirst and psychological anguish. This passage points to a *conscious* and *unending* torment endured by hell’s inhabitants.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus juxtaposes “*eternal life*” with “*perish*” (John 3:16; 10:28), “*condemned*” (3:18; 5:24, 28), “*judgment*” (5:22, 30), “*death*” (5:24), and “*die*” (6:50). These descriptors are logically the opposite of the blessed state of eternal life. Eternal life is everlasting

conscious bliss, so destruction is also **everlasting conscious torment**—I went to New Orleans to help after Hurricane Katrina. The raging winds and waves destroyed entire Wards. The hurricane crumbled houses, splintered wood, shattered glass, smashed concrete, and scattered chunks of brick in its wake. The destruction left behind by the hurricane was undeniable, yet the skeletal remnants of the structures of houses were still recognizable. The materials of the homes still “existed” in some sense, but they were utterly ruined and unable to fulfill their purpose.

Likewise, man can experience everlasting ruin in hell while still existing. He cannot fulfill his purpose of willingly and happily glorifying God and enjoying him forever.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul teaches most directly concerning hell. Look at 1:5–10. (1) Hell is the result of God’s righteous retributive justice on sinners: “⁶ *God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you.*” (2) Hell is punishment for those who do not know God and for those who do not obey the gospel (1:8; 2:12). (3) Hell is eternal destruction (1:9; cf. 2:3, 8, 10). (4) Hell is depicted as separation from Jesus’ saving presence: “⁹ *shut out from him.*”

God teaches us about the infinite value of his glory through the infinite torment of hell. People have the highest degrees of blameworthiness when they commit evil against one with the highest dignity. Jonathan Edwards wrote, “Our obligation to love, honor and obey any being is in proportion to his loveliness, honorableness, and authority... God is a being infinitely lovely, because he has infinite excellency and beauty (...a being of infinite honorableness and infinite authority)...So, sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous and so deserving infinite punishment...” **Hell shows the infinite value of God’s glory and the infinite offense of our sin. Those who minimize the reality of hell diminish the worth and glory of God.**

Ask: How would downplaying or denying the doctrine of Hell affect the mission of the church? (diminishes the urgency; stifles our passion for God's glory; elevates the glory of man).

The reality of hell also shows the infinite worth of Christ's atonement and necessity.

2nd. The Necessity of Conscious Faith. The reality of the gravity of sin and hell shows the necessity of Christ's atonement and conscious faith. By "conscious faith," I mean that a person must have personal knowledge of, awareness of, and responsiveness to the truth of the gospel while living on the earth in this present age to be saved.

The Bible teaches that Christ's death is the only way God deals mercifully with sin.

So, the cross is the only way sinners can be made righteous before God. Turn to **Romans 5:17**.

If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Sin and death came through one man, Adam. Life and righteousness come through one man, Christ. Adam's sin led to the condemnation of all those united with Adam, and Christ's obedience led to righteousness for all united to Christ—"those who receive the abundance of grace" (v. 17). His grace must be received, and there are those who receive his grace and those who do not. Christ is the sole Mediator in the universe between God and man.

Turn to Revelation 5:9-10: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Only by his atonement does every nation and tongue become part of

his eternal kingdom, and only Christ is worthy to take the scroll and open the seals. Christ is the only way to God.

What does this mean for missions? Well, it means that *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). No one is saved outside of the work of Christ. We must announce his gospel to all the nations: *“Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:46-47).

Ask: Does that mean someone must hear the Gospel to be saved? First, remember that there are no innocent people in this world. As Romans 3 teaches, *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together, they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”* No one will ever be condemned to hell by God for not hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. God condemns people to the punishment of hell for rebelling against him. God would have committed no injustice if he had determined to leave the whole human race under sin. **But God has determined to save some. So yes, someone must hear the gospel and respond with conscious faith.**

Again, “conscious faith” means people cannot be saved without specific knowledge of Christ. Yet, many reject this notion. For instance, **Vatican II of Roman Catholicism** appropriated the “anonymous Christian” as the doctrine of the Catholic Church in the 1960s, teaching that Jews, Muslims, and even Atheists could be saved even while rejecting Christ. However, the Apostle Paul says in Acts 17:30 that the *“times of ignorance”* for the Gentiles have passed with the coming of Christ. God will not allow *“the nations to walk in their own ways”*

(14:16) but “*commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed*” (17:30-31).

Now, turn to Romans 10:9-17:

Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

From verses 13 to 15, Paul answers every question in the following verse and then asks the next logical question. **So, in verse 13, who does Paul say will be saved?** “*Those who call on him.*” **But who will call on Him?** “*Those who have believed.*” (v. 14a). **But how will they believe?** They have to hear! (v. 14b). **How will they hear?** Someone must preach the gospel to them (v. 14c). **How will someone preach it to them?** They must be sent (v. 15). We understand the necessity of conscious saving faith when we examine the text in reverse order: We must send (v. 15), those who preach (v. 14c), that people may hear (v. 14b), so that some believe (v. 14a), and call upon Christ (v. 13), and thus are saved (vv. 9-10). **Salvation comes by faith, and faith comes through hearing the Word of Christ.**

Jesus supplies us with another example. Jesus says, “*I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd*” (10:16). **But how will these Gentiles hear his voice?** John 17:20–21: “*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be*

one.” His sheep will hear his voice through the voice of his messengers. They must hear and believe!

Ask: How does the necessity of conscious faith in Christ show the infinite worth of Christ? First, hell shows the infinite seriousness of sin. Second, hell shows the necessity of Christ’s atonement and demands conscious faith in Christ. All of these truths together show the infinite worth of Christ. All these doctrines work together. *If you downplay one, you lose the other. These truths should propel us to proclaim Christ to those who have not heard of him. Trusting in God’s ultimate sovereignty (My sheep will hear my voice, and none shall be lost), we should feel a sense of urgency in missions.*

In Matthew 9, Jesus described the lost crowds as those without a shepherd, and he had compassion for them and prayed to the Lord of the Harvest for more laborers. *May we see as Jesus saw, feel as he felt, and do as he did. May we burn with the desire to bring the lifesaving Gospel to perishing men and women.*