

THE LAKE OF FIRE

- A. Introduction: For several months we have been talking about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Our goal is to understand why He is coming back and what His return will mean for humanity. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for a family with whom He will live forever, on this earth renewed and restored.
1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin through His death on the Cross, and open the way for sinful people to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Him.
 - a. Jesus will soon return to cleanse the earth of all corruption and death, and restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. John 1:11-12; Rev 21-22
 1. Part of the process of cleansing and restoring the earth includes removing everything and everyone that doesn't belong to God. This involves judgment. Rev 14:7
 2. The Greek word that is translated judgment in the New Testament (*krino*) means to separate, to distinguish between good and evil, to choose out the good and render a decision.
 - b. The Book of Revelation is a written account of a vision of the second coming that was given to John the apostle. Near the close of his book, John described a judgment scene. This judgment ends with those who won't be on the renewed earth thrown into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. John calls this experience the second death. Rev 20:11-15
 2. Last week we began to talk about this final removal, and the ultimate fate, of those who don't belong to the Lord. We have more to say in tonight's lesson. First, a quick review of key points from last week.
 - a. One of the consequences of sin in the earth (specifically, the sin of Adam, the first man) is that everyone dies (Rom 5:12). However, no one ceases to exist at death.
 1. When the body dies, all human beings leave their dead body behind and pass into a non-physical dimension—either Heaven or Hell, depending on how they responded to the light (or revelation) of Jesus that was given to them during their lifetime.
 2. Heaven and Hell are temporary destinations because God never intended for humans to live without their physical bodies in a non-physical dimension.
 - b. In connection with the second coming of Jesus, the bodies of all who have died (going back to Adam and Eve) will be raised from the dead and reunited with their original owners.
 1. Those who belong to God through faith in Jesus will return to earth to live here forever—once it has been renewed and restored in connection with Jesus' second coming.
 2. All who have rejected the salvation from sin offered through Jesus will be forever confined to what the Bible calls the lake of fire and the second death. John witnessed that event.
- B. In this series we have been emphasizing the importance of considering what the second coming meant to the first Christians—people who actually walked and talked with Jesus. How did they hear (understand) these passages about judgment that frighten many of us? Let's set the context for the judgment scene John saw.
1. While Jesus was on earth, He told His apostles two parables about what will happen when He returns at the end of this age. There will be a separation and removal of those who don't belong to Him.
 - a. Jesus used two illustrations to describe the coming separation that will take place—separating weeds from wheat (Matt 13:41-43) and bad fish from good fish (Matt 13:47-50)
 - b. Each parable ended with those who were separated out from the rest being cast into a fiery furnace (or the lake of fire that John saw) where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Weeping and gnashing was a figure of speech used to express disappointment, despair, and agony of spirit.
 2. This was part of the message that the apostles preached after Jesus returned to Heaven. Paul (who was personally taught the message he preached by Jesus Himself, Gal 1:11-12) wrote about this removal.
 - a. II Thess 1:7-9—(When the Lord Jesus) appears from Heaven, He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey

the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and his glorious power (NLT).

- b. Bringing judgment is a Greek word meaning that which comes out of justice. Punish is made up of two words meaning what is right and to pay penalty. Destruction means to destroy or ruin.
 1. When Jesus returns He will carry out the right and just penalty on all who throughout human history have refused Him and His offer of salvation from sin. The right and just penalty for sin is separation from the Lord, first in Hell (Hades) and then in the lake of fire.
 2. Beings made in the image of God for sonship and relationship with Him, because of their willful rejection of Almighty God, will experience ruin. They will be forever lost to their created purpose, their destiny unfulfilled.
 3. What are the fiery furnace and flaming fire? Fire is used figuratively in the Bible to describe the Lord. He is called a consuming fire, not because He is fire, but because of His attributes and actions. Heb 12:29
 - a. In the Old Testament, fire was a symbol of the Lord's presence and power (Ex 3:2; Ex 13:21; Ex 19:18). The Lord is compared to fire because of the brightness of His glory and because of the purifying effect of His power and His Word (Jer 23:29; Isa 4:4; Mal 3:2).
 - b. The Bible writers used symbols to describe the indescribable. For example, when Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured, they said His face shown like the sun (Matt 17:2). When Paul first saw Jesus, he described light brighter than the sun (Acts 26:13).
 1. In Revelation John wrote that Jesus' hair was as white as snow, His eyes like a flame of fire, his feet bright like refined brass and his face as bright as the sun. Rev 1:14-15
 2. Jesus isn't the sun or fire. His feet aren't metal. He won't be riding on a lightning bolt when He returns. These symbolic descriptions are meant to convey His power and His glory.
 4. Are people actually going to burn forever in a fiery furnace? That idea isn't consistent with the way the Bible uses the term fire in connection with God and His power and justice.
 - a. Last week we looked at the descriptions given of Hell or Hades, the temporary dwelling place of those who died without the Lord. Luke 16:19-31; Mark 9:43-48; Matt 8:12; Matt 22:13
 - b. These descriptions (darkness, flames, worms) are not literal. One, they are contradictory—both the light of fire and utter darkness in the same place). Two, the torment can't be physical since people don't have physical bodies to burn. These descriptions are symbolic and meant to emphasize the permanence and unendingness of separation from God
 - c. Hell (both the temporary and permanent Hell) is a place of spiritual suffering or mental anguish like loss and regret. The torment of Hell is the realization that you are lost to your created purpose (sonship and relationship with God) and there is nothing you can do about it.
- C. John witnessed the final judgment or formal sentencing of all those who will be forever separated from Almighty God and His family. Rev 20:11-15
1. Note that the dead will stand before God to be judged (Rev 21:11-12). Dead does not refer to everyone who has died. Only unbelievers (those who have rejected the revelation of Jesus given to them in their lifetime) will stand before God in this judgment.
 - a. In the New Testament, those who don't believe on the Lord in this life are referred to as dead—even before they die physically—because they are cut off from God who is life. Prior to physical death, this condition is reversible if you believe on Jesus. After death, it is not. Eph 2:1; Eph 2:5; Eph 4:18
 - b. John saw people who have been brought out of Hell, the temporary home of those who die without believing on the Lord, to stand before God and be judged according to their works.
 1. We said last week that the determining factor in their works is not good deeds. It's whether or not they acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord. John 3:16; John 6:29; John 8:24; etc.
 2. Because they rejected the Lord, they were never cleansed of the guilt of sin through faith in

- Christ and His shed blood, and they stand before God guilty of every wrong they've ever done.
- c. Books were opened and everyone not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire which is also called the second death (Rev 21:14-15). "The book" was a familiar cultural reference, going back to the time of Moses (Ex 32:32). To be in the book meant that you are part of God's people.
 1. This passage is sometimes taken out of context and incorrectly used to say that Christians will have all their sins exposed in front of everyone. That's not the case. Jesus died to remove even the memory of sin (lesson for another day). Heb 8:12; Heb 10:17
 2. The record books will show clearly the righteousness (justice) of forever consigning all these people to everlasting (eternal) separation from God in the lake of fire and second death.
 2. The lake of fire and the second death are synonymous terms. They are used to describe the forever state of the wicked, those who are eternally separated from God.
 - a. Hell (Hades and the lake of fire) is both a place and a state or condition of being—eternal separation from God in another dimension. This is beyond our comprehension.
 1. Remember that the Book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature. The message is conveyed in symbols.
 2. We tend to get caught up in the details (What does the lake of fire look like? Where is it?) and miss the point. You don't want to end up eternally separated from God.
 - b. Just before John described this judgment scene, he referred to the lake of fire as burning with and brimstone (Rev 19:20; Rev 20:10). Brimstone is sulphur. Brimstone is used figuratively in Scripture to denote punishment and destruction, with often with reference to Sodom.
 1. Sodom was a city dating back to the days of Abraham that was known for its wickedness. It was destroyed by fire and brimstone. Sodom was located south of the Dead Sea, a region known for its bitumen (sulfur). The area was also an active fault region. An earthquake sent this material into the air and caused a violent explosion which resulted in a rain of fire and brimstone over the entire area, destroying it.
 2. This event is connected to the Lord, not because He caused it, but because He often connected such things to Himself (especially in the Old Testament) to try wake men up before they experience the ultimate death which is eternal separation from Him because of sin.
 - c. The point for our present discussion is that the first readers of Revelation would not have been freaked out by the imagery John used. They understood that those who reject the Lord will experience eternal separation from God because it is right and just.
 3. The judgment scene John described was not new information to first century believers. Daniel saw the same thing as part of a vision God gave him about events leading up to the second coming of Jesus.
 - a. Dan 7:9-10—Daniel saw thrones set up and God (the Ancient of Days) sit down to judge, with millions of angels in attendance. He saw a fiery flame, the judgment began, and the books open.
 - b. Dan 7:13-14—Then Daniel observed one like the Son of Man come in the clouds and approach the Ancient of Days. He (the Son of Man) was given authority, honor, and power over the all the kingdoms of the world. His rule is eternal—it will never end. Notice the end result.
 1. Dan 7:26-27—The court will pass judgment (on the final wicked world ruler), and all his power will be taken away and completely destroyed. Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High (NLT).
 2. The point for our lesson is that the first Christians didn't hear John's message as scary. They understood that the Lord is going to remove from His creation all that hurts and harms and He and His family will live forever together on this earth once it is renewed and restored.
 4. Note something else in John's description of the final removal of all everything and everyone that is not of God. In Rev 20:11 John saw the earth and the heaven flee from God's presence—John witnessed earth's transformation. The old earth, in its fallen condition, passed away and was made new. Rev 21:1

- a. The Bible originally had no chapter and verse divisions. Those were added centuries after the Scriptures were completed to serve as reference points. The Chapter 21 heading is actually an artificial break in the text. Try to ignore it for a moment.
- b. Following the final judgment scene, John saw the new earth and witnessed God come down to live with his people forever and heard a voice proclaim: There will be no more sorrow, tears, or pain because the old world and its evils are gone. Rev 21:1-6
1. Then God said: He who overcomes will inherit all these things and I will be his God and he will be my son. Rev 21:7
 2. Jesus used the word overcome seven times in letters to specific churches at the beginning of Revelation and stated the blessings that will belong to those who overcome (2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21). Overcomer meant one who stays faithful to God no matter what.
- c. John made it clear that no source of sin or corruption will be present on the new earth: But cowards who turn away from me, and unbelievers, and the corrupt, and the murderers, and the (sexually) immoral, and those who practice witchcraft, and idol worshippers, and all liars (deceivers)—their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death (Rev 21:8, NLT).
1. The Lake of fire and the second death is about upholding justice. But is it also about removing from God’s creation everything that hurts, harms, corrupts, or destroys. In the context of the ungodly being cast into a fiery furnace (mentioned at the beginning of this lesson), Jesus said: Then, the godly will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom (Matt 13:43, NLT).
 2. John, in his vision, heard beings in Heaven proclaim the following when Jesus took control of the kingdoms of this world: The nations were angry with you, but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your prophets and your holy people, all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest. And you will destroy (remove from contact with your family) all who have caused destruction on the earth (Rev 11:18, NLT).
 - A. The point is not: Where is the lake of fire? Is it real fire? The point is that this is the final end of those who reject the Lord—eternal separation from God and all that is good.
 - B. It serves as a warning to those who reject God, but it also assures His people that true freedom from all that hurts and harms awaits us in the life to come.
 3. For those who know the Lord, there is nothing to fear about the second coming of Jesus. Jesus specifically said: He who overcomes (stays faithful to me) shall in no way be injured by the second death (Rev 2:11, Amp).
- D. Conclusion: People struggle with the question of how a loving God can consign anyone to Hell. But the issue is—how can a loving God not remove all that hurts and harms from this world for His family’s good?
1. There are many things in this life that don’t seem fair or make a lot of sense. But when we see the end result of God’s plan and how things ultimately turn out, we will praise God for His work in this world.
 - a. John witnessed numerous beings in Heaven praising God for his righteous judgments and decisions. Rev 15:3; Rev 16:7; Rev 19:2
 - b. Although the ultimate reversal of life’s hardships, injustice, and pain is after this life, the knowledge that all will be made right gives us hope and reassurance right now.
 2. Paul made this statement to a group of Christians who were suffering persecution at the hands of their own countrymen. He encouraged them that all will ultimately be justice.
 - a. II Thess 1:6-7—For God’s justice will repay trouble to those who have troubled you, and give relief to all of us who, like you, have suffered (J. B. Phillips). This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels (NIV) to forever remove the ungodly.
 - b. When you know that God sees and that all will ultimately be made right in the life after this life, it can help you deal with the injustice and unfairness of life.