

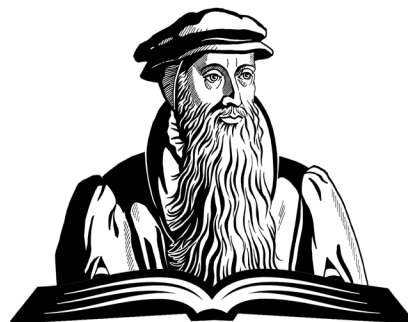
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #6, Lord's Day 4, part 2

The Doctrine of Hell



The John Knox Institute
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1. The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death (Lord's Day 1–1, Question 1)
2. The Pattern of Christian Experience (Lord's Day 1–2, Question 2)
3. The Law of God and our Misery (Lord's Day 2, Questions 3–5)
4. The Total (Radical) Depravity of Man (Lord's Day 3, Questions 6–8)
5. Man's Sinnership in Light of God's Justice (Lord's Day 4-1, Questions 9–11)
- 6. The Doctrine of Hell (Lord's Day 4-2, Question 11)**
7. Perfect Satisfaction: A Requirement for Deliverance (Lord's Day 5, Q. 12–15)
8. The One Mediator Between God and Man (Lord's Day 6, Questions 16–19)
9. True Saving Faith (Lord's Day 7, Questions 20–23)
10. The God of Salvation: A Triune God (Lord's Day 8, Questions 24–25)
11. Faith in God the Father (Lord's Day 9, Question 26)
12. The Providence of God (Lord's Day 10–1, Question 27)
13. Rich Benefits Derived from Believing God's Providence (Lord's Day 10–2, Q. 28)
14. Jesus, the Savior of Sinners (Lord's Day 11, Questions 29–30)
15. Faith in Christ (Lord's Day 12–1, Question 31)
16. The Identity of the True Christian (Lord's Day 12–2, Question 32)
17. The Unique Identity of Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 13–1, Question 33)
18. The Lordship of Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 13–2, Question 34)
19. The Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 14, Questions 35–36)
20. Faith in the Suffering Son of God (Lord's Day 15, Questions 37–39)
21. Christ—A Savior Who Has Paid the Wages of Sin in Full (Lord's Day 16, Q. 40–44)

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Sermons on the
Heidelberg Catechism
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- 22. The Threefold Benefits of the Resurrection of Christ (Lord's Day 17, Q. 45)
- 23. The Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 18, Questions 46–49)
- 24. Faith in the Exalted Christ (Lord's Day 19–1, Questions 50–51)
- 25. The Second Coming of Christ (Lord's Day 19–2, Question 52)
- 26. Faith in God the Holy Spirit (Lord's Day 20, Question 53)
- 27. The Holy Catholic (Universal) Church of Christ (Lord's Day 21–1, Q. 54–56)
- 28. The Church's Confession Regarding the Forgiveness of Sins (Lord's Day 21–2, Q. 56)
- 29. The Future of the Christian Church (Lord's Day 22, Questions 57–58)
- 30. Justifying Faith (Lord's Day 23, Questions 59–61)
- 31. The Believer and Good Works (Lord's Day 24, Questions 62–64)
- 32. Faith and the Sacraments (Lord's Day 25, Questions 65–68)
- 33. Holy Baptism and the Promise of the Gospel (Lord's Day 26, Questions 69–71)
- 34. The Water of Holy Baptism (Lord's Day 27–1 Questions 72–73)
- 35. The Baptism of Infants (Lord's Day 27–2, Question 74)
- 36. The Holy Supper of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 28, Questions 75–77)
- 37. The Value of the Lord's Supper (Lord's Day 29, Questions 78–79)
- 38. The Observance of the Lord's Supper (Lord's Day 30, Questions 80–82)
- 39. The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Lord's Day 31, Questions 83–85)
- 40. The Good Works of the Christian (Lord's Day 32, Questions 86–87)
- 41. The True Conversion of Man (Lord's Day 33, Questions 88–91)
- 42. The Transcript of God's Mind (Lord's Day 34–1, Questions 92–95)

VIDEO SERMON SERIES
Sermons on the
Heidelberg Catechism
by Rev. Bartel Elshout

- 43. The Holy Law of God (Lord's Day 34–2, Questions 92–95)
- 44. The Second Commandment (Lord's Day 35–1, Questions 96–97)
- 45. Preaching of God's Word and Graven Images (Lord's Day 35–2, Question 98)
- 46. God's Commandment Concerning His Name (Lord's Day 36, Questions 99–100)
- 47. God's Name and the Oath (Lord's Day 37, Questions 101–102)
- 48. The Fourth Commandment, part 1 (Lord's Day 38–1, Question 103)
- 49. The Fourth Commandment, part 2 (Lord's Day 38–2, Question 103)
- 50. The Threefold Requirement of the Fifth Commandment (Lord's Day 39, Q. 104)
- 51. The Sixth Commandment (Lord's Day 40, Questions 105–107)
- 52. The Seventh Commandment and Marriage (Lord's Day 41, Questions 108–109)
- 53. The Eighth Commandment (Lord's Day 42, Questions 110–111)
- 54. The Ninth Commandment (Lord's Day 43, Question 112)
- 55. Final Observations About the Law of God (Lord's Day 44, Questions 113–115)
- 56. The Prayer of the Christian (Lord's Day 45, Questions 116–119)
- 57. The Address of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 46, Questions 120–121)
- 58. Hallowing of God's "Father" Name (Lord's Day 47, Question 122)
- 59. The Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 48, Question 123)
- 60. The Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer, (Lord's Day 49, Question 124)
- 61. The Christian's Petition for Daily Bread (Lord's Day 50, Question 125)
- 62. Readiness to Forgive (Lord's Day 51, Question 126)
- 63. The Last Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 52, Questions 127–129)

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Sermon #6, Lord's Day 4, part 2
The Doctrine of Hell

Read: 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 8

Question and Answer #11

i. Introduction

- 1. The Reason for Hell**
- 2. The Reality of Hell**
- 3. The Remedy for Hell**

Introduction

Please turn with me to Lord's Day 4 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and we will read that Lord's Day in its totality, and our focus tonight will be on the last Question of Lord's Day 4. Lord's Day 4, this is the third Lord's Day that deals with man's misery.

Question #9: *Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law that which he cannot perform?* That was the conclusion of Lord's Day 3, that we by no means are able to do what God requires unless we are regenerated. So the questioner is looking for a way out, looking for an excuse.

The Answer is: *Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own wilful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts.*

The next effort to find a way out, Question #10: *Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?*

Again, a radical Answer: *By no means; but is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally, as He hath declared, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of*

the law, to do them.” That’s Galatians 3, verse 10.

And then one more Question, one more effort, Question #11: *Is not God then also merciful?*

The Answer is: *God is indeed merciful, but also just; therefore His justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.*

And so, congregation, we only considered Questions #9 and #10 a few Sundays ago, and therefore we must now focus on Question #11, which clearly deals with reality that everlasting punishment in body and soul awaits all those who live and die in their sins. That’s why I have chosen as my theme *The Doctrine of Hell*. And so, that theme already indicates what my attempt will be tonight, and that is to set before you the witness of all of Scripture—a sampling only—the witness of all of Scripture about this profound truth that is set before us in Question and Answer #11.

And so, we will look at it from three vantage points. First of all, *The Reason for Hell*. Why is there a hell? Why has God revealed to us that there is a hell? Secondly, *The Reality of Hell*. What does the Bible tell us? What does it mean to be in hell? Of course, we read to you the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in which Christ gives us a window into what hell will be. And thirdly, and lastly, *The Remedy for Hell*. Then, to again proclaim to you the gospel against the background of *The Doctrine of Hell*. So, *The Reason for Hell*, *The Reality of Hell*, and *The Remedy for Hell*.

1. The Reason for Hell

And congregation, as we look at *The Reason for Hell*, I want to focus on three or four aspects, namely, *the existence of hell in light of God’s character; in light of the very nature of sin, in light of the sin of all sins, namely, unbelief*; but also as the negative affirmation of the Father’s love for his Son, who so loves his Son that *the only appropriate punishment for rejection of his Son is hell itself*.

First of all, *The Existence of Hell and the Character of God*. The Question was asked, *Is not God then also merciful?* And the Answer is, indeed he is. As a matter of fact, Thomas Watson¹ called the mercy of God “the darling attribute of God.” And when you read God’s revelation of himself to Moses in Exodus 34, the very first thing he says about himself is that he is merciful. Please turn with me to that remarkable passage, that foundational passage in the Old Testament, Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7. Let’s read it together, and there we read God’s Word: “The LORD, The LORD God.” Remember, God said to Moses, “I will show you my glory” (Exodus 33:17), and he reveals that glory in a very unique way. We reveals that glory by setting before Moses his attributes. And now what does he say? The very first thing he says about himself: “Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin”—and then this sentence also—“and that will by no means clear the guilty.” And so it appears almost as if we have a contradiction here. On the one hand, God declares himself to be merciful, to be gracious, to be a God who pardons all manner of sin; and then, in the same breath, he says he will “by no means clear the guilty.”

And that brings us exactly to the tension that is expressed in the Answer to Question #11: *Is not God then also merciful?—God is indeed merciful, but also just*. Just—so in other words, what we learn from Exodus 34 is that God is the sum total of all of these attributes, and that none of these attributes of God will ever contradict each other. There is a holy and perfect consistency within

¹ Thomas Watson (1620–1686), English Puritan preacher and author. He was ejected from his London parish after the Restoration, but continued to preach privately.

the divine being. And again, you ask, “Then why? Why does God appear to contradict himself? Why does he say that he is merciful, and yet that he will by no means clear the guilty?” And God speaks thus for this reason, lest we have an entirely wrong idea of who he is. And so, even though he is merciful and gracious, he wants us to know at the same time, that he absolutely cannot and will not tolerate sin; that because of his divine being, he has zero tolerance for sin. He will by no means clear the guilty.

And what does it mean to be guilty? Guilty means that you are worthy of punishment. And you and I, we are all guilty. We are transgressors of God’s law. We are worthy of divine judgment. And God is saying, “I will not and I cannot in any way clear the guilty. And of course, how alone can this dilemma be resolved? And that is the wonder of the cross. The cross resolves that dilemma. You see, the cross is God’s ordained way whereby he, who can by no means clear the guilty, yet can be a merciful and a gracious God. And the important point here is this; that’s the point that was made in the Answer to Question #11—Yes, God is merciful, but let there be no mistake, that this merciful God, this gracious God is a just God.

So what do we mean by “the attributes of God’s justice”? What does that attribute mean? Well, the best way for me to explain that is to think of our own justice system. Why do we have a justice system in a law-abiding country as ours? Well, the justice system sees to it that we will understand that our government—should be, anyway—takes its laws seriously. So, as long as we abide by those laws, we will never be confronted by the justice system; the justice system will not pursue us. But when we violate the law, when we transgress the law, then the justice system will pursue us and will punish us in a manner that is appropriate according to the crime we have committed. And by punishing the lawbreakers, our government communicates to its citizens that it takes its laws seriously, so seriously that it will punish the transgressor. And that is infinitely more true of God.

So the justice of God, the attribute of God’s justice, is that attribute that communicates to us that God will absolutely uphold the integrity of his law, that he cannot and will not allow his law to be dishonored, that he will not allow his law to be broken. Now, had there been no sin, the justice of God would have eternally been in our favor. We would have never experienced the negative manifestation of God’s justice. But because we are now sinners, we now must deal with the justice of God. And that attribute of God demands the punishment of the transgressor.

Now we know that the justice system in our nation is very seriously flawed, that many times, the guilty go unpunished, or they receive a punishment that is far below what they should have received. And so, it is not with God. And with God, there is no compromise. God cannot and will not compromise himself. God cannot allow one single sin to go unpunished. Every single sin must be punished. That’s why God has revealed in his Word what the consequences are of our sin—not only his displeasure in this life, but if we live and we die in our sins, that the attribute of *His justice requires that the sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.* And the language here is powerful, because it explains to us very precisely why the judgment of God of that sin is so extreme indeed.

You see, your and my problem is that we think far too lightly of sin. We speak of it glibly. We fail to realize how profoundly offensive your and my sin is to God. We fail to realize, that every time we sin, we are committing it against the most high majesty of God. And since God is infinite in all of his attributes, infinite in his holiness, that means that your and my sin have infinite consequences. That means that if we live and die in our sins, the very nature of our sins, having been committed against the most high majesty of God, requires God’s everlasting judgment

upon the unrepentant sinner. That's how serious sin is. That's why God is not silent about the consequences of sin. That's why he has revealed to us the doctrine of hell. So that we would recognize how serious sin is in God's sight.

And yet, sadly, we live in a day where most preachers are silent on this subject. And if we are silent on this subject, if we refuse to deal with this subject, we will be guilty of what God described to Ezekiel. He said, "If you are my watchman, and if you see the danger coming, and if you fail to warn my people of the fact that my judgment is coming, they will die in their sins, but I will hold you responsible. I will require their blood from your hands. However, if you blow the trumpet, and if you warn in my name, you will be exonerated. That's the sacred and solemn responsibility that we have as ministers of the gospel. So if God is not silent on this subject, we may not be silent on it. And if Christ, of all things, the Savior of sinners, if he spoke far more frequently of hell than he did of heaven, woe unto us, if we, as the ambassadors of Christ, if we would be silent on that subject.

Oh, the Catechism says it, that God *is terribly displeased with our original as well as* [with our] *actual sins* (Question #10). And it defines our sins as *wilful disobedience—wilful disobedience. Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?* That the worst of all sins, the sin of all sins, is of course, the sin of unbelief. And that's really the mother of all sins. All sin, ultimately, issues forth out of an unbelieving heart.

And so, we're going to open our Bibles frequently tonight, so have your Bibles handy. I'm going to look at three aspects of the sin of unbelief addressed in the Word of God, but also in terms of its consequences. We're going to look at *unbelief as a sin that makes God a liar; unbelief as a sin that disobeys the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; unbelief, a sin whereby we tread underfoot the Son of God.*

Our first passage will be 1 John 5, verses 9 and 10. Please turn there with me. And there, we read the following—pay careful attention here: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." And so, the implication that John is making, how readily do we believe what people tell us? But he says, "The witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself"—namely, that we are pleasing in God's sight; and here it comes—"he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." That's profound, congregation. That tells me that we must look at the Bible as the record that the Father has given us of his Son. And if we don't believe in his Son, we are making God a liar. That's a very serious accusation. And yet that's exactly what we do—I've said this before—actually, every time we sin, every sin is an act of unbelief. Every time we sin, whether it's a sinful thought; every time we sin, we set aside the Word of God; we disregard the Word of God; and we treat God as a liar.

Let's turn to 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 8. There, we read this, and of course, in the preceding verses, it says that Christ himself will come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance of them that know not God"—and here comes the damning sin—"and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." "That obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"—not a word is said here about human inability, though here sin is called by its name. Here, we're told that when the gospel is preached to us, and if we do not believe that gospel, if we do not respond to that gospel, it's because we are disobedient to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 3, verse 36, where John says, "He that believeth on the Son hath life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," the word that's used in Greek is, again, very revealing. So, our Bible says, "he that believeth not the Son," but do you

know that the Greek word actually says, “he that refuses to be persuaded”—“he that refuses to be persuaded.” That’s the nature of our unbelief. We are not helpless victims. No, by nature, the very nature of our unbelief is that we refuse to be persuaded by the Word of God. And if you still are an unbeliever tonight, whether you hear me in person, or whether you are listening online, do you know what that means? That your entire lifetime, you have refused to be persuaded by the Word of God; that in your entire lifetime, you have turned away from the Word of God. You have managed to ignore the Word of God. This passage tells us we will be judged for that sin.

The next passage, Hebrews 10, verse 29—there, we read this: “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified”—think of baptism—“an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” My dear friend, if you have grown up under the gospel, if you have heard the Word of God; that means, your whole lifetime, the Spirit of God has been striving with you; and because of our wicked, unbelieving hearts, we resist, we are doing despite unto the Spirit of grace.” And worse than that, the Apostle uses a dramatic analogy, “who hath trodden under foot the Son of God.”

And that brings us to that very point I made earlier, because, ultimately, congregation, as I’ve said last week, everything in God’s thinking, everything in his action, it all revolves around his Son. And you see, ultimately, when we sin, we dishonor God’s Son. Why? Because when we sin, we disregard God’s written Word, and when we disregard God’s written Word, we disregard the living Word, because the written Word is about the living Word. And that’s why sin is so exceedingly offensive to God, because it dishonors his Son. That’s why the emphasis in these passages is on God’s Son. Ultimately—and I’ll explain sometime in the future—ultimately, God’s whole law revolves around God’s Son. The first table tells us to love God as he has revealed himself in his Son, and to love our neighbor because he bears the image of God’s Son—we were created in that image. So, when we sin, when we disregard God’s Word, when we disregard his law, we ultimately dishonor his Son. There’s nothing that offends God more deeply; there’s nothing that offends him more profoundly, as when we disregard his Son. And so, it is a Father who loves his Son; it is a God of love, who has created hell, as the only appropriate punishment for the disregard of his Son, for the rejection of his only begotten Son.

That’s why Peter writes in 1 Peter 4, verse 17, he said: “What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” And you know, Peter does not dare to answer that question, but he thinks about it. What shall be the end of them, not just of the ungodly—not of someone like Adolph Hitler, or Osama Bin Laden—but what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? Because to be born under the gospel of God, to live under the gospel of God, to have the gospel of God preached to us means we are the most privileged human beings on the face of the earth. And then to disregard it? Peter doesn’t dare to answer it. What shall be the end of that? That question affords this answer in Scripture—Hebrews 12, verses 25 through 29, it says: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven...For our God is a consuming fire.”

Our God is a consuming fire. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, found that out. They had the audacity of coming into God’s presence with strange fire, thereby disregarding the divinely-appointed sacrifice, which pointed to Christ; they disregarded it, and brazenly, they would have gone into the sanctuary with strange fire, and the fire of God wrath consumed them in a moment. For our God is a consuming fire. That’s how intensely sin offends God. Our problems—we have

wrong views of God, wrong views of his character, wrong views, therefore, of our own sinner-ship. We fail to realize that when we sin, we are sinning against the most high majesty of God. That's why, in verse 31 of Hebrews 10, the Apostle writes, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." A fearful thing to fall into the hands of a Father who loves his Son, and who will punish with everlasting punishment all those who disregard his Son, who reject his Son in unbelief. Oh, it is a fearful thing, as the rich man found out. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

2. The Reality of Hell

And of course, that brings us to *The Reality of Hell* itself. Why hell? What is hell? Hell means the everlasting separation from God and his favor—everlasting separation from God. And why is that such a serious punishment? Because God created us to live in fellowship and communion with God. God created us to find our fulfillment in a love relationship with himself. That's why God said to Adam, "However, if you violate my Word, if go against my will, if you eat of the forbidden fruit, then the very opposite will be the result; that the ultimate outcome of your rejection of my Word, by the disregard of my Word, will be separation. Instead of union, separation. And hell is the ultimate outcome. Hell means that we will forever be separated from God. Hell is a place, congregation, where you will be eternally dying without ever being able to die—everlasting separation. That's why Jesus, in the parable that we read, made that very clear. He said, "And beside all this, between us and you"—now Abraham is speaking—"there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot"—a great gulf.

Oh, hell is a place where not only we experience everlasting separation, but a place where the fire of God's wrath will burn forever. Sometimes children ask, "Pastor, will there be a real fire in hell?" And I believe when we look at all the passages, and we compare them, that clearly, Christ is himself using symbolic language. But let me assure you, congregation, that the fire of God's wrath is worse than a physical fire. Listen to what Jesus said himself, in Matthew 13:41, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." These are the words of Christ, the Savior. Matthew 25, verse 41: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and [for] his angels." That's why the statement that hell is a place where God is absent is wrong!—is patently wrong! God will be present, but he will be present in his wrath. And there will be nothing worse for a human being than to deal with God in the presence of his wrath which will burn forever; that wrath, which will never be quenched; that wrath, which will endure forever. Because the horrible thing about hell is that those who live in hell, who dwell in hell, will go on forever in their rebellion against God, and will, therefore, indefinitely and eternally perpetuate their punishment.

But hell is also a place—and that's implied by the railing and gnashing of teeth—where the voice of one's conscience will never be silent. Never again will someone in hell be able to silence that voice. That's why—and listen carefully to what I'm saying—there will not be a single unbeliever in hell. What do I mean by that? "I thought you said that the people who go to hell are unbelievers." Yes, that true, but once they're in hell, they will no longer not believe. Those that are in hell, they now believe there is a God, but hell is a place filled with human beings who have believed the truth of God too late. That was the story of the rich man. He believed it too late. And so, he pleaded with Abraham, he said, "Please go and warn my brothers." And Abraham said, "No, they have the

Scriptures. They have everything they need to know. They have the Word of God, and if they take the Word of God seriously, they will never end up in this place where you are.” And so, again, there will never be anyone in hell—the untold millions that will occupy that place that God has prepared for all who have rejected his Son in unbelief—they will all believe in God. But they will hate him. They will curse him forever, and they will forever, and forever be reminded of what they heard in this life. That’s why Jesus said—again Christ—“Where the worm dieth not.” A worm that will gnaw, and gnaw, and gnaw forever, and the fire is not quenched. That’s why, in John 12, verse 48, Jesus issued this warning, and he said this: “He that rejecteth me”—listen carefully—“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” Oh, what shall that be? What shall that be?

Jesus talks about children of the kingdom, who enjoyed all the privileges of God’s revelation; who enjoyed all the privileges that God had given to the people of Israel: “The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and [there shall be] gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12). Weeping—the weeping of rebellion; the weeping of anger; the gnashing of teeth, knowing full well that you deserve to be there; knowing full well why you are there; knowing full well that you’re getting what you deserve—weeping and gnashing of teeth. Never, will you ever be able to ignore the Word of God again. It will burn in your conscience forever. Never will you be able to forget a single sermon you’ve heard in this life. Oh, God forbid, God forbid that that would be our future—a place where we will be separated from God, forever, radically; a place where his wrath will burn forever; a place where the voice of our conscience will never be silent; and a place where we will eternally suffer body and soul.

Again, Christ makes that clear. There is a physical component to the suffering; not just spiritual, but physical. The rich man died and was buried, and in hell, he lift up his eyes, we read, being in torments. And in verse 24, he says, “Cool my tongue for I am tormented in this flame.” Verse 25, “Thou art tormented,” Abraham says. So three times Christ uses the word “torment” to underscore that, in hell, the ungodly will suffer in soul and body. Because, we sin in soul and body, and so our punishment will match the crime. That’s why Jesus had to suffer in soul and body, to save sinners such as we are.

3. The Remedy for Hell

And so, having looked at *The Reason for Hell*, and *The Reality of Hell*, a few words about *The Remedy for Hell*. A remedy, congregation, a remedy provided by the God who has no pleasure in the death of sinners. If God had pleasure in the death of sinners, if he was an evil being who delighted in sending people to hell, he would have been silent about the reality of hell. He would have been silent about the existence of hell. But he is a God who has no pleasure in the death of sinners. We read it to you from Ezekiel 33:12. And that verse explains why the Lord said to Ezekiel, “You are my watchman. You have to be faithful. You have to blow the trumpet when you see danger coming.” And why did Ezekiel have to do it as God’s watchman? Because the Lord says this about himself: “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” And what God is doing here, he is swearing an oath; he’s swearing by his own name. “As I live”—“as surely as I am God, so sure it is that I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from this way and live.” And God is saying, “If that’s not true, that I have no pleasure in the death of sinners, if that’s not true, then I cease to be God. But as surely as I am God, as surely as I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that they would turn from their way and live.”

And then, comes this amazing plea, lest we doubt him, lest we doubt him, he says, “Turn ye,

turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” That’s what God is saying through the ministry of his Word. He’s saying that to every unrepentant sinner. He, as it were, pleads with us, he says, “Sinner, why will you not hear me? Why will you not consider what I have revealed in my Word? Why will you ignore the reality of future punishment if you should die in your sins? Because I have no pleasure in your death? Therefore, turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?” It’s so clearly implying, if we ignore this, if we do not turn, if we continue on our own way, we will surely die, we will surely perish. That’s why Spurgeon² famously preached a sermon that he entitled, “Turn or Burn.” Turn or burn—that’s exactly what God is saying: turn or burn, “O why? why will you die?” That’s why Jesus, when he stood before Jerusalem, knowing what would happen to that city, he was weeping, weeping. Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is the God who spoke through Ezekiel, and said, “I have no pleasure in the death of sinners.” By the way, congregation, the ultimate proof that God has no pleasure in the death of sinners, is that he gave his only begotten Son, that he gave him to be a sacrifice for sin. And so, Jesus looks at that city, knowing that in their wicked unbelief, they would reject him. And he weeps over that city. We read in Luke 19:41, “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!”

That’s what makes the gospel of the cross to very, very precious. We will never value that gospel; we will never value the wonder of the cross, unless we believe in the Doctrine of Hell. As we have explained to you in the last few weeks, if you ever want to see how God views sin, then consider how he dealt with his Son. There we have a window into hell itself. Christ was not merely nailed to the cross. He was not merely rejected and despised of men. He was rejected by his own Father, and he cried out in that bitter agony, as we saw together, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). And thereby teaching us, that’s what hell is, to be forsaken by God, to be forever forsaken by God, and he, as the Savior of hell-worthy sinners, experienced the reality of hell. He was forsaken of God. And we also saw that when he came out of that, he cried, “I thirst,” indicating that, not only did he suffer spiritually, but he suffered physically as well. He suffered in body and soul. He endured the reality of hell itself. And so, on the cross, Christ—reverently speaking—Christ became the lightning rod for the wrath of God. God’s wrath, to which he has been provoked by our sin; God’s wrath which is a response of all of God’s attributes towards sin; that wrath that spent itself upon his only begotten Son. He became the lightning rod. And he endured in the place of hell-worthy sinners.

That’s why, when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, that’s not just a casual thing. That’s not just something that’s superficial. The Holy Spirit will show us the real nature of sin. He will teach us to view sin as God sees it. And he will convince us of the fact that your and my sin has made us worthy of hell. And when that dawns on us, then we marvel at such a Savior; then we marvel at a Savior who was numbered with the transgressors; then we marvel at a Savior who was wounded for our transgressions, who was bruised for our iniquities; and we marvel at a Savior who willingly descended into the depths of hell itself, who left heaven to experience hell, so that hell-worthy sinners would be able to go to heaven and to be forever with God.

There’s a remarkable prophecy in Isaiah 28:18. Open your Bibles and turn with me to Isaiah 28, verse 18, which so beautifully explains what happened on Calvary’s cross. Here’s the prophecy, verse 18 of chapter 28: “And your covenant with death shall be disannulled”—in Adam, we made a covenant with death. The Lord says it will be disannulled, “and your agreement with hell shall

2 Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892, was an English Particular Baptist preacher, who remains highly influential among Christians of various denominations. He is known as “Prince of Preachers.”

not stand.” That’s a remarkable language. Again, this is God’s description, you see. God is saying, by nature, we have made a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell itself. That’s who we are. God is saying, there’s a day coming that that covenant will be disannulled, and the agreement with hell will not stand.

And by the grace of God, if you are a believer, today, you are the recipient of that blessed reality; and by the grace of God, you have put our trust in this Christ, who suffered hell itself for hell-worthy sinners; and by the grace of God, you have trusted in that Savior, and you will never have to go to hell. And the cross tells us that that sacrifice was perfect, that that sacrifice was well pleasing in God’s sight. That’s why, when Christ said, “It is finished,” God rent the veil, symbolic of that separation (John 19:30; Matthew 27:51). He rent it to demonstrate that because of what his Son had accomplished, that hell-worthy sinners can now be reconciled with God. That’s the promise of the gospel: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” to be a sacrifice for sin. And then, these wonderful words, “that whosoever believeth on him should not perish”—should not go to hell—“but have [eternal and] everlasting life” (John 3:16). And as offended as God is by sin, as offended as he is by unbelief, so pleased he is that a guilty sinner takes refuge in his only begotten Son. You cannot dishonor him more than by rejecting his Son, and you cannot honor him more than by believing on his Son. And that’s why the very God against whom we have sinned, whom we have provoked by our sin, that’s why he is so ready to forgive the sinner that believes in his only begotten Son. That moves him to the very depths of his being, and he will freely and graciously and unreservedly pardon such a sinner. That’s why Paul could say, in Romans 8, verse 1, “There is therefore”—and the “therefore” points to Christ; the “therefore” points to the cross; the “therefore” points to all that he accomplished—“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ.” And that’s why part of the gospel is the urgent warning that we must flee the wrath to come. That’s a loving warning: flee the wrath to come. Because it is coming, and we will ignore it at our own peril.

Just like the people in Pompeii, when, on August 24, AD 79, suddenly Mount Vesuvius erupted, and it was all over. It buried that city in twenty feet of ashes, and people perished. Yet there had been warning signs. Things were happening. That mountain had not erupted for centuries. Yet, the people who had lived in Pompeii their whole life, they knew something was happening. The ground was trembling. Strange things were happening all around Vesuvius, and they warned the younger people. But you see, it was the pleasure haven of the Romans. That’s where they went for a weekend away. That’s where they came to indulge themselves in the pleasure of the flesh, and there is abundant evidence of that, how they lived. Sexual immorality flourished in that city. And the older people said, “Something is happening. We don’t trust it. There’s something going on with the mountain.” And the younger people laughed. They ignored it. They went on merrily. And then the eruption came—so powerful, so dramatic, that when they unearthed Pompeii, they literally found people trapped, trying to flee the wrath to come. But it was too late. They had ignored the warnings, and they perished. God forbid that we would ignore the warnings of his Word, the warnings of a God who has no pleasure in your death, sinner, but that you would turn unto him and live.

It is that God who speaks in Psalm 2. We sang that Psalm together, and that concluding verse is so profound. The Psalm ends, “Kiss the Son. Kiss the Son.” And that implies that the Son is so near to us in the gospel, so near. You cannot kiss somebody unless they are very near to you. “Kiss the Son,” who draws so near to us, “lest he be angry.” And I think that refers to his Father. “Lest [his Father] be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.” That means

when his wrath is kindled suddenly, like when Vesuvius erupted suddenly, and God's wrath, as it were, descended upon that wicked city, "When his wrath is kindled but a little." Kiss the Son. And then this beautiful final line, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

That's it, congregation. Blessed are all they. You and I are hell-worthy sinners, and the gospel is preached to hell-worthy sinners; Christ is preached to hell-worthy sinners; and the gospel promises that if hell-worthy sinners repent, and turn from their wicked ways; if hell-worthy sinners come to this Christ, and put their trust in him, you will be blessed indeed. Woe unto us if we have neglected so great a salvation. How shall we escape? Paul says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation. God forbid that that be true for any of us. And that we all might experience in our life, experientially, this truth, that when we kiss the Son, when we put our trust in him, then we shall be blessed indeed. Amen.

Let's pray.

Lord, wilt thou bless thy Word? We have spoken on thy behalf. We have communicated to the congregation what thy Word has to tell us about the everlasting punishment that awaits the unrepentant sinner who lives and dies in sin. O that we would not ignore it, like the people in Pompeii so foolishly did, and they perished. For thou art the God of whom we have heard, that thou hast no pleasure in the death of sinners, but that they would turn unto thee and live. O that we would hear thy voice today while thou art yet proffering peace and pardon, lest we perish in the way, having hardened our hearts. O God, bless thy Word, that thy children may marvel at thy grace, for we too were a hell-worthy people, and yet, we have been saved by a Savior who experienced hell on our behalf, so that we could be reconciled with thee. O that our life would be a life of gratitude for such utterly undeserved salvation. Go with us now as we go homeward. Protect us in all of our ways. Grant what's needed as we engage in our daily calling. Bless our children in school. Bless our Providence Christian School. Forgive us our sins. We ask it in Jesus' name only. Amen.