

## Starting Point:

- The Holiness of God two weeks ago. He is not like us, and in his perfection, we can't come into his presence.
- Our fallen and sinful nature. We are dead and condemned because of sin- Adam's and our own.
- In the Old Testament, there's a lot we could go to, but honestly our clearest picture of hell comes from the New Testament, and specifically from the mouth of Jesus himself.
  - "The Greek word gehenna is derived from Hebrew gehinnom, meaning "valley of Hinnom," also known as the "valley of the son of Hinnom" (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Neh. 11:30; Jer. 7:31–32; 19:2, 6; 32:35). Located west and south of Jerusalem and running into the Kidron Valley at a point opposite the modern village of Silwan, the valley of Hinnom once formed part of the boundary between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Josh. 15:8; 18:16; Neh. 11:30). During the monarchic period, it became the site of an infamous high place (called "Topheth" and derived from an Aramaic word meaning "fire place"), where some of the kings of Judah engaged in forbidden religious practices, including human sacrifice by fire (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 7:31; 32:35). Because of this, Jeremiah spoke of its impending judgment and destruction (7:32; 19:6). King Josiah put an end to these practices by destroying and defiling the high place in the valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10). Probably because of these associations with fiery destruction and judgment, the word "Gehenna" came to be used metaphorically during the Second Temple period to refer to a place of punishment by fire for evil spirits and the wicked dead (1 Enoch 18:11–16; 108:3–7, 15; 2 Esd. 7:36–38)."  
**-The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated) (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 373.**
    - So Jesus builds on this history to explain the picture of hell. It's going to be obvious though, that Jesus means something so much more when he talks about hell.
    - There are two other words used in Scripture- sheol, and hades- but they don't necessarily mean the same thing as hell. These words can refer simply to the realm of the dead in general.
  - But we're talking about hell here- the place of torment where sinners go if they are redeemed by Christ. There's a foundation for why hell exists in the Old Testament as well. Let's just look at two passages.
    - **Psalm 11:5-7**; *5 The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. 6 Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. 7 For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.*
  - But let's think specifically about Jesus before we look at his teaching on hell.
    - **Mal 4:1**; *"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.*

- And then just consider one of the first things we hear about Jesus, from John the Baptist.
  - **Mt 3:11–12.** *“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*
    - This is what we need to see because it’s often overlooked about Jesus. The clearest picture of the reality of hell comes from our Savior, who saves us from it.

### **Jesus’ Teaching on Hell:**

- **Matthew 5:21-22;** *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.*
- **Matthew 10:28** *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*
  - We fear being hurt and going through the agony of death in this life, but it doesn’t compare to the agony awaiting in hell.
- **Mark 9:42-48;** *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’*
  - This is an eternal suffering. And sin is the reason hell exists.
  - In light of our sin, and God’s holiness, hell doesn’t just make sense. It’s appropriate.
  - “It is suitable that God should infinitely hate sin, and be an infinite enemy to it. Sin, as I have before shown, is an infinite evil, and therefore is infinitely odious and detestable. It is proper that God should hate every evil, and hate it according to its odious and detestable nature. And sin being infinitely evil and odious, it is proper that God should hate it infinitely. If infinite hatred of sin be suitable to the divine character, then the expressions of such hatred are also suitable to his character. - J. Edwards, “The Eternity of Hell’s Torment” from **Matthew 25:41-46.**
    - 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. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44 Then they also*

*will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

- **Matthew 13:36-43**; *Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*
  - "No matter how we analyze the concept of hell it often sounds to us as a place of cruel and unusual punishment. If, however, we can take any comfort in the concept of hell, we can take it in the full assurance that there will be no cruelty there. It is impossible for God to be cruel. Cruelty involves inflicting a punishment that is more severe or harsh than the crime. Cruelty in this sense is unjust. God is incapable of inflicting an unjust punishment. The Judge of all the earth will surely do what is right. No innocent person will ever suffer at His hand." -RC Sproul
- **Luke 16:22-31**; *The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.' "*

### **From Revelation:**

- **Re 14:9-13**; *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels*

*and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.” 12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”*

- The contrast between those whose torment goes forever and ever, and those who die in the name of the Lord, who receive rest.
- So, annihilationism doesn't make sense in light of these passages that emphasize the eternal nature of their tormented existence.
  - “Perhaps the most frightening aspect of hell is its eternity. People can endure the greatest agony if they know it will ultimately stop.” -RC Sproul.
- **Re 20:7–15.** *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*
  - “No matter how we analyze the concept of hell it often sounds to us as a place of cruel and unusual punishment. If, however, we can take any comfort in the concept of hell, we can take it in the full assurance that there will be no cruelty there. It is impossible for God to be cruel. Cruelty involves inflicting a punishment that is more severe or harsh than the crime. Cruelty in this sense is unjust. God is incapable of inflicting an unjust punishment. The Judge of all the earth will surely do what is right. No innocent person will ever suffer at His hand.” RC Sproul.
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### **Summary:**

- A progression from God's Holiness to our Sinfulness to Perfect and Righteous Judgment
- Jesus emphasized the reality of Hell more than anyone else in Scripture
- It is eternal
- It is for those who reject God through Jesus

And Turning to the Question of God's Sovereignty, we look at one the most famous sermons in American History. Jonathan Edwards rightly highlights that hell is a display of God's own sovereignty. And we want to think about that next week. If God is sovereign, how do we understand man's fallen and condemned nature, and this terrible torment in Hell.

Jonathan Edwards:

From Sinners in the Hands of Angry God”:

- “There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God.”—By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but God's mere will had in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment.”
- “Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf; and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.”

RC Sproul:

- I suspect they are symbols, but I find no relief in that. We must not think of them as being merely symbols. It is probable that the sinner in hell would prefer a literal lake of fire as his eternal abode to the reality of hell represented in the lake of fire image. If these images are indeed symbols, then we must conclude that the reality is worse than the symbol suggests. The function of symbols is to point beyond themselves to a higher or more intense state of actuality than the symbol itself can contain. That Jesus used the most awful symbols imaginable to describe hell is no comfort to those who see them simply as symbols.

Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it: the creation groans with you; the creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; the sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies. God's creatures are good, and were made for men to serve God with, and do not willingly subserve to any other purpose, and groan when they are abused to purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end."

- It is suitable that God should infinitely hate sin, and be an infinite enemy to it. Sin, as I have before shown, is an infinite evil, and therefore is infinitely odious and detestable. It is proper that God should hate every evil, and hate it according to its odious and detestable nature. And sin being infinitely evil and odious, it is proper that God should hate it infinitely. If infinite hatred of sin be suitable to the divine character, then the expressions of such hatred are also suitable to his character. Because that which is suitable to be, is suitable to be expressed; that which is lovely in itself, is lovely when it appears. If it be suitable that God should be an infinite enemy to sin, or that he should hate it infinitely, then it is suitable that he should act as such an enemy. -J. Edwards, "The Eternity of Hell's Torment"