

What Happened to Hell?

Salvation doesn't come from joining a church or being a good person.

I grew up in a church where the gospel was preached every Sunday, followed by an invitation to accept Christ. The reality of hell as the just end for those who choose a life of rebellion put the fear of God in us. But today it seems that, as a nation, we have lost that fear.

Perhaps we need more preachers like Percy Ray, an evangelist from Myrtle, Mississippi, who impacted me greatly when I first heard him in 1976 at our church in Dallas. He delivered a simple but powerful message titled "The Red Light of Hell" about a just God who would judge sin.

Though I had been born again since 1965, I was shaken. I felt as if I could feel the fire of hell lapping up around my feet when the dramatic Dr. Ray described the sounds one might hear in hell. He mimicked the tormented screams of demons and the desperate cries of lost souls.

As he spoke, the audience was captivated by the reality of eternal punishment. People screamed, cried out for mercy and later rushed to the altar to repent and receive Christ.

Years ago my husband, Eddie, and I led more than 850 people to Christ. These were not people we ministered to through an evangelistic outreach or crusade; they were all faithful members of local churches.

What does this tell us? Genuine salvation requires an understanding of our true condition and our need for a Savior. That's why it's so important that we receive the following truths for ourselves as well as sharing them with others—including those sitting next to us in the pew every Sunday:

You are a sinner, separated from God. None of us measures up to God's standards. The Bible tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NKJV). When unbelievers realize their personal sin nailed Jesus to the cross, a deep sadness comes over them and they are moved to repent.

You can't save yourself. Salvation doesn't come from joining a church, walking an aisle to sign a card or being a good person. If these were remedies for sin, we wouldn't need Jesus' sacrifice. We could do it ourselves—but we can't. The apostle Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9, emphasis added).

Christ is enough for salvation. God's Word promises that "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:8-10). When we recognize we are hopeless and helpless to save ourselves, and by faith fall on the mercy of Christ, then we receive His gift of salvation.

This is not true only for some people. The Bible assures us that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13, emphasis added). Anyone who repents of his sins, accepts Christ's sacrifice and invites Jesus into his heart is instantly transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God.

I plead with you to evaluate your own relationship with Jesus. Are you playing a Christian game rather than knowing for certain that Christ is alive in you? You can't effectively share the gospel if you don't know Christ for yourself.

Settle your doubts now. Please don't ignore my plea. Think of

Dr. Ray's description of the souls suffering in eternal torment, screaming about their fate, "Forever, forever!" Ask Christ to reveal your spiritual condition. He will! "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

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