

Eternal Punishment- Part 2

Matthew 25:41-46

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Let's take our Bibles and open to Matthew chapter 25. Matthew 25, we're going to start by reading verses 41 through 46. I want to commend you all for coming out on this holiday weekend, Sunday night, to learn more about eternal punishment. Some number of people in our church travelling this weekend, obviously visiting family. A number also are sick. But it's great to be here tonight and to look at an important subject. Just to give you a heads up too since you came out on this Sunday night, holiday weekend, to learn about eternal punishment, I'll let you know that starting next week on Sunday morning we're going to go through the gospel of Matthew, and Sunday nights First Thessalonians. So you can be reading ahead and praying. Be ready to learn from those New Testament books.

Let me read these verses for us. Matthew 25:41-46. "Then He will also say to those on His left. Depart from Me accursed ones into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me; then they themselves also will answer 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?'; then he will answer them, 'truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these you did not do it to me; these will go away in to eternal punishment, but the righteous in to eternal life.'" Let's pray.

Father as we come again tonight to consider this subject, this very important subject, I pray Lord that you will help us to understand, that you would give us insight, that you would clarify for us exactly what the scriptures are saying to us regarding this matter and why it's important, why it matters. So Lord we pray that you'll direct us. We thank You for this time, in Christ's name. Amen.

Now we've been considering that familiar question which is often asked by unbelievers and that is: How can a loving God send anyone to Hell? Then as we saw last time there's a new variation to that question that's being asked actually by bible believing Christians and the question is: How can a loving God send anyone to an eternal Hell? Among evangelical Christians there's a growing uneasiness with the historic Christian view of eternal punishment. And last week we considered some of the reasons for that uneasiness as it's been expressed by those who are doubting this view themselves. We saw that there are emotional reasons why they are reconsidering the view of eternal punishment. Some just find the idea of eternal punishment hard to handle emotionally. Certainly I think everybody can relate to that one. Also, there are moral reasons that are given. Some see an eternal punishment of agony and torment as being inconsistent with God's character. Additionally issues of justice are raised. Eternal punishment to some would appear to be more than what is deserved for the crime. And lastly we considered specific Biblical reasons that are given. Questions are raised about words that are used in the Bible like destruction, or perish, or fire. Those words seem to indicate an annihilation of the one judged. And the eternal aspect would simply mean that this is a final irreversible verdict. We looked at those last

time and addressed each one of those issues. And those who have a problem with the traditional view of eternal punishment have proposed alternative understandings.

One of those understandings that is more common amongst liberal forms of Christianity is what is known as universalism. This is the belief that everybody winds up in heaven. And there are a couple of forms of Universalism. One is that everyone is instantly restored to God upon death. And that is everybody when they die we just go straight to heaven. In this view either God really didn't mean what he said in the Bible about hell, or all the descriptions of hell and judgment are just pictures, or hell is what you experience here on earth when you don't listen to God. Have you heard that explanation? That hell is just what you experience here on earth?

Another view of Universalism is that people are restored to God after some form of punishment. It's a remedial kind of punishment and after they've done their time, then they get to enter heaven. So in the Universalist's view, everybody eventually winds up in heaven. Like I said, those views are mostly found amongst the liberal branch of Christianity. And the more conservative evangelical branch you will find Annihilationism or what is called Conditional Immortality, and I'll use those terms interchangeably. Most common strain of this view is that those who reject Christ face a degree of punishment after death, but eventually, and generally this happens at the last resurrection, they are annihilated, put out of existence. It's called Conditional Immortality because they say immortality is not inherent in humanity, it's only given as a gift to those who are in Christ. Only those who are in Christ are going to exist forever. Those who reject Christ will eventually go out of existence. So we looked at this last time and answered the objections. Tonight we want to look more directly at what the Bible says about this very important issue. And in reality as difficult as this subject is to think about and to talk about, it is really one of the easiest doctrines in the Bible to prove as you are going to see tonight. The Bible couldn't be any clearer than it is on this.

But first let me just remind you of some things regarding those who go in to hell, who go in to judgment. Remember this, that everybody has a knowledge of God built in to them. Everybody knows there is a God. God has made Himself obvious to everybody. He's built a knowledge of Himself in to every person. Romans one verses 18 through 20 would support that, that God has made Himself obvious, everybody knows that there is a God. Also, everybody has a built in sense of right and wrong. Everybody is given a conscience. So they know that they have a built in sense that some things are right and some things are wrong. Again, Romans 2:15 would say that. Everybody knows that there is a God, everybody has a sense of right and wrong. And we all work because of our own sinful nature to suppress that knowledge and silence that conscience. You see, we all know that there is a God, we all know that there is right and wrong, but in our sin we want to do what we want to do. So we got to somehow put that knowledge aside, we got to somehow silence our conscience, so that we can do what we want. We don't want to be held accountable for our actions. We don't want to come to the light because we love the darkness. As John 3:19 says.

So when a person persists in that state there comes a point where God turns them over to the pursuit of and the consequences of their sin. Again you see that in Romans one where three times it says that God handed them over, or turned them over to the further consequences of their sinful behavior. According

to Ephesians four, their thinking becomes futile, their understanding is darkened, their heart becomes hardened, and their conscience is calloused. You see, unless God miraculously regenerates a person, they will run headlong towards final judgment.

And understand that they do this with an attitude of hatred and rebellion towards God. Even the religious works of religious people are acts of rebellion against God. Because what they are trying to establish is that they are not really as bad as God says they are. So tell that to a religious worker who knocks on your door. Tell them that the very fact that they are at your door, and the reason why they are at your door, because it's a part of their religious work, it's something they are required to do. Tell them that the very fact that they are standing at your door is an act of rebellion against God. You all let them know that, because that is exactly what it is. And people, even as they know that God is judging them, they will blaspheme Him.

This is perfectly pictured in the book of Revelation which describes the coming judgment to God on this earth commonly referred to the time of tribulation. Let's just look at a couple of passages in Revelation. Revelation chapter six starting in verse 12. Revelation 6:12-17, here you'll see that during this time when God is pouring judgment on the earth, people are going to know exactly where this judgment is coming from. Revelation 6:12 says, "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" So here this judgment is going to be happening all around them and they're going to know exactly where it's coming from. They acknowledge where it's coming from. This is coming from the presence of Him who sits on the throne. It's the wrath of the Lamb, it's the great day of their wrath. So do they want to be reconciled to God? They just want to find a safe hiding spot from the judgment.

Go over to chapter 16 of the book of Revelation and you'll see how they respond more, more response to God's judgment. Chapter 16 verse eight. It says, "The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire." Here's a little foretaste of final judgment. Men were scorched with fierce heat. What did they do? "They blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues and they did not repent so as to give Him glory." They know where it's coming from. What's their response? Well, they don't repent. They blaspheme God. Over in verse 10 it says, "Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds." So here again the judgment comes, again in another foretaste of final judgment. Gnawing their tongues in pain, they don't repent, they blaspheme God.

Verse 21 says, "And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe." So people know that judgment comes from God, but rather than repent they blaspheme. Now why would we think that they would hate him any less once they're finally condemned to hell? In fact we would expect that they would be perfected in their hatred just as believers are perfected in their love for God in heaven. Now, it is true that every knee is going to bow, even those who have rejected Christ. They will bow and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, but those who are judged will do so out of compulsion. They will be forced to acknowledge the One who has the power and authority to judge them. But that's not going to change their attitude towards Him.

In fact we often read in Matthew's gospel in particular that hell is going to be a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. You've heard that expression? Weeping, gnashing teeth? You can see it all through Matthew's gospel, One place would be Matthew 25:30. The weeping we can understand. In fact the word there speaks of an uncontrollable wailing that's going to be as a result of the constant agony and torment that they're going to have to endure in judgment. But what exactly is gnashing of teeth? That's not an expression we use every day. We don't say, 'Hey, did you see Jimmy the other day? He was gnashing his teeth.' We don't...what is it? What is this gnashing of teeth? Well, it's an expression that refers to hatred and anger. You might remember in Acts chapter seven Stephen gave a speech. In fact, he gave a Bible study, he gave a sermon, and at the end of the sermon the people that he was speaking to weren't very happy. In fact, they wound up killing Stephen, stoning him. He's the first Christian martyr. But here is their immediate response at the end of his sermon. It's Acts 7:54. "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him." They were angry. They had hateful thoughts towards Stephen which led to them killing him. Gnashing of teeth is an expression of hatred and anger. David uses this expression in Psalm 35:16 and Psalm 37:12 to speak of the attitude of his enemies towards him. He says they gnash their teeth at me. It's used in Lamentations 2:16 to speak of Jerusalem's enemies gnashing their teeth towards them. It's even used to describe God's anger with Job in Job 16:9, that God gnashed his teeth in anger towards Job. So just as we saw in Revelation 16 that during the tribulation unbeliever's will be in great pain, yet they will be venting their anger towards the God who is judging them, and apparently that's what they'll be doing in the judgment of hell also. They will be weeping because of the great pain and the torment that they are suffering, but they're going to be hating God for all eternity, gnashing their teeth at Him. And this, by the way, is justification of God's judgment. A man's everlasting anger towards God justifies God's everlasting judgment on him. And just, by the way, you cannot have a Christian gospel with Universalism or Annihilationism. Because everlasting or eternal judgment is clearly what the Bible teaches. And I want us to look at three passages tonight that make this doctrine crystal clear.

We can go back to Matthew 25 for the first one. Matthew chapter 25 and that passage that I read at the beginning, verses 41 through 46. Three times in this passage you see the word eternal used. You see it in verse 41, eternal fire, and then you see it twice in verse 46, eternal punishment, and eternal life. Now some say that because the Greek word here means age or ages, the meaning is limited to age long. Coming to the conclusion then that the fire in verse 41 and the punishment of verse 46 is restricted to an age. And someday it will come to an end. Another suggestion is to deny any temporal or quantitative

value to the word and make it simply qualitative, meaning that this is a final decision, this is an eternal decision, it's final, this is it. So those are a couple of ways people try to use to explain eternal here. But what does the word mean? It is true that the basic meaning of the word would be age, but if you are familiar with the Greek language and study the use of this word you would know that was the only way they had to speak of something that is eternal. In fact there is another root word from the same family of words that this word comes from that's translated 'always'. And when the word is used as an adjective, for all you grammar people out there, when it's used as an adjective like it is here, eternal fire, eternal punishment, whenever this word is used as an adjective it always means eternal. You're not going to find it meaning anything else, anywhere else, all the places where that word is used. So that answers the question from a technical angle. But the context here also makes it clear, doesn't it? Because in verse 46 what is eternal punishment contrasted with? How long does eternal life last? Forever. Like, eternal. There really couldn't be any clearer here. You have to want it to say something different. And you have to work hard at it if you are going to ignore the plain sense of the verse. I mean it's clearly contrasting eternal punishment and eternal life. And just as long as eternal life is, eternal punishment is as well. So, it seems pretty clear right there.

Let's go back to the book of Revelation now and look at another passage. Revelation chapter 14. Revelation chapter 14 verses nine through 11. It says, "Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'if anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'" Now let me just make a little note here before we look at those verses. If God warns in advance regarding the consequences of rejecting Him, then He cannot be accused of being unjust for carrying out those consequences. This is exactly what He said would happen to those who reject Him, and he carries out exactly what He says. There is nothing unjust about that. He warned ahead of time that this would be the result. In fact, the multitude of warnings given by God throughout scripture are an act of His abundant mercy. That He's warning time and time and time again that if you go this way this will be the consequences, that's an act of mercy on His part to give all of those warnings. In fact, just go back a couple of verses to verses six and seven. It says, "I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water.'"

So here you see this offer, this warning, in the midst of all of His judgment. So God is warning when He talks about the consequences of rejecting Him and we need to look at what He says. Look at what it says here in verse 10. Unbelievers will be tormented. They will be tormented with fire and brimstone. Tormented. It is a present tense word. It speaks of ongoing action. It's speaking of the ceaseless infliction of unbearable pain. Those whom God will force to drink from the cup of His anger, the cup of His anger here is described. They will drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is mixed in full strength. Mixed in full strength, literally mixed, unmixed, meaning there isn't any mercy mixed in. This is

pure, 100% wrath. The drinking of the cup of wine of the wrath of God, the cup of His anger, those who God forces to drink from that cup will know torment that never diminishes. It's torment that never diminishes. Verse 11 makes it even more clear when it says forever and ever. This is going to go on forever and ever. That's just another word that means eternal. Used frequently in the book of Revelation, this phrase forever and ever. In fact in verse nine of chapter four, it's used to describe God. It says, "And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever." Forever and ever means eternal. It's used to describe God and His eternal nature. It's used to describe Christ in chapter one verse 18 where Christ says, "I'm the living One. I was dead and behold I live forever more." Again, that's the same word, forever and ever. Forever and ever means eternal. And no matter how much you try to manipulate the word or try to reduce it to symbolic language, what is being said here is really crystal clear. In fact the terms here are just being piled on top of one another.

First He started with tormented, and then He adds forever and ever, and the He says in verse 11 they have no rest day and night. By the way that refers to a conscious ongoing conscious existence of the unbeliever. They're going to experiencing this. They are not going to have any rest day and night. They must be experiencing some kind of conscious existence that knows no rest. None of this makes any sense if a person just ceases to exist. Day and night just highlights the fact that there will never be any let up to the severity of their torment. People in hell are going to experience torment all of the time with no hope of it ever ending. Now, our human sensitivities cringe at the very thought of this kind of eternal punishment. I mean you should be having an emotional reaction when you think about this. But it is the clear teaching of scripture. And if we don't affirm this already some day we will, that all of God's judgments are righteous and true. For God to condemn someone who rejects Christ to eternal torment forever and ever, no rest day or night, is a righteous and true judgment. The angel who made this announcement would strongly disagree with those today who deny eternal punishment because he proclaimed eternal punishment.

Let's look at another passage. It's in Revelation chapter 20 verses 10 through 15. It says, "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown in to the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown in to the lake of fire." Lake of fire here is obviously the final form of judgment and it lasts day and night forever and ever. According to verse 10, again, it's said to be a place of torment. A place of unbearable pain and agony. And notice something important here when the devil is thrown in to the lake of fire, as verse 10 tells us, the beast and the false prophet are already there. When did they go

there? Well they went there 1000 years before the devil went there. Back in chapter 19 verse 20 we're told that "the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive in to the lake of fire which burns with brimstone." So here, chapter 19 verse 20 we're told that the beast and false prophet are thrown in to the lake of fire and then, chapter 20 verse seven it says when 1000 years are completed, Satan will be released and then he eventually gets throw into the lake of fire.

So, it's been 1000 years since the beast and the false prophet had been thrown into the lake of fire and they are still there when the devil is thrown in. The beast and the false prophet are two people., two humans. The beast we commonly know as the antichrist. These are two humans who are still being tormented after 1000 years. They weren't annihilated by the lake of fire. They're still there when the devil is thrown in. And they will continue to be tormented day and night forever and ever. Again, day and night just speaks of unbroken continuity. It's not like you get a break at night time and then in the morning the torment starts up again. It's day and night. And it's forever and ever. Another way of saying it is everlasting, it's eternal, literally to the age of ages. This is speaking of ceaseless torment. One writer said this, "there would be no way possible in the Greek language to state more emphatically the everlasting punishment of the lost then that used here in mentioning both day and night and the expression 'forever and ever' or literally to the age of ages." So it's being stated very clearly, very strongly, couldn't be stated more strongly. This is the fate of those who are judged. This is the destiny of the devil and his evil angels as we saw in Matthew 25:41. This is the destiny of all of the devil's followers including the beast and the false prophet. Everyone not written in the book of life is thrown into the lake of fire where they are going to be tormented forever and ever.

This doctrine of eternal punishment couldn't possibly be any clearer. Is this doctrine meant to frighten us? Absolutely. In fact that is what Jesus said, you ought to fear Him who can not only kill you but after killing you cast you in to Hell. It ought to frighten us. Is this teaching supposed to sober us? Completely. Is this understanding meant to motivate us? Totally. It ought to motivate us to warn people that if they continue on rejecting Christ, this is what will happen to them. And we ought to communicate it in a way that we don't want to see that happen to them. We don't want to see them go to Hell. We don't want to see them judged forever and ever. I mean if we understand what this is saying and we really believe it, then we ought to care about people that are headed in this direction, shouldn't we? Even those that you might not naturally be attracted to, like those religious workers who knock on your door. I inevitably take them to John 8:24 where it says if you don't believe that I am, you don't get your view on who Christ is right, you will die in your sins. I'll tell them that. And I'll also tell them I don't want to see that happen. Because if you die in your sins this is what happens to you. You face eternal judgment, torment, day and night, forever and ever. Should this motivate us? Totally. You can't study this doctrine and just go, "oh, that's interesting," and close your Bible and move on. It's got to motivate you in your life.

Is this instruction meant to humble us? Absolutely. Because this is what every single one of us deserves. This doctrine should be a serious cause for self examination. You don't want to have a false sense of security. True Christians should have security like we talked about this morning, but you don't want to have a false sense of security. There's going to be an awful lot of religious people cast in to the lake of

fire. An awful lot of people who are going to stand before the Lord and they are going to say, "Lord, Lord" and He's going to say, "I never knew you. Depart from Me." I can't imagine anything more frightening than at that moment to realize that you're not going to heaven, you're going to eternal punishment. Apparently, according to what Jesus said in Matthew, there's going to be many people facing that. You don't want to have a false sense of security. A lot of religious people are going to be in the lake of fire. Those who are self-righteous should be absolutely fearful of this judgment. And those who have been graciously saved and given eternal life should be profoundly thankful, and greatly humbled knowing that I deserve to be tormented day and night forever and ever. That's what I deserve. That's what you deserve. That's what everybody deserves. To be tormented day and night forever and ever. That God would save us should greatly humble us. And if I understand this, how can I possibly take sin lightly? How can I possibly commit the sins that I know are sins, where I presume upon God's grace? When I understand what God thinks about sin, this should change my whole attitude towards those sins. This is a teaching that is very important, it's very necessary. Not one you want to think about, not one you want to talk about, but I guarantee you people are thinking about this, because they can't help but avoid it. Everybody knows that there is a God. Everybody has a conscious. Everybody knows that they are accountable. Everybody's thinking about this. You want to talk about a subject that everybody's thinking about? Pull this one out. Everybody's thinking about this. Most people are trying as hard as they possibly can to push this aside. But they can't, and when you talk to them about judgment to come, they're conscience is on your side. They're conscience knows that there's a right and a wrong and they're conscience knows they've done things wrong. And they know that there is a God and they know that they are accountable to them. They're conscience is on your side when you talk to them about final judgment. You have an ally in their conscience. You don't need to convince them of sin and judgment. Everybody knows about that.

This is a subject people think about, and like I said, it might not be this thing that we want to talk about but people are talking about it and they are coming up with other ways to deal with it. Either Universalism or Annihilationism. And don't you know that unbelievers love both of those options? They would prefer the Universalism, because heaven, it does sound like kind of a nice place, but they'll take Annihilationism over eternal punishment. To just go out of existence doesn't seem so bad compared to being tormented day and night forever and ever. So, you might not want to talk about this but people are thinking about it and people are coming up with ideas for how to deal with this. We need to know the truth and we need to tell people the truth because it is a merciful, gracious thing to warn people of the sure judgment that is to come. And to tell them exactly what the Bible says. Somebody once accused Martyn Lloyd Jones of trying to scare people into heaven. And he said, "That's okay, because if you won't respond to God's love, maybe you'll respond to His wrath, just so long as you respond." Just so long as you respond and recognize that you need a Savior. God caused this teaching to impact every one of our hearts and motivate us to live holy lives that are a testimony to our Savior. Let's pray.