

Urban Legends: They're [Not] in a Better Place (Hell)

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Introduction

God will give you rest along with us when the Lord Jesus appears suddenly from heaven in flaming fire with his mighty angels, bringing judgment on those who did not wish to know God and who refuse to accept his plan to save them through our Lord Jesus Christ. They will be punished in everlasting hell, forever separated from the Lord, never to see the glory of his power when he comes to receive praise and admiration because of all he has done for his people, his saints. And you will be among those praising him because you have believed what we told you about him. (2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10 TLB)

Hell is obviously (and understandably) an unpopular subject. But just like all uncomfortable conversations, we have to have them if we hope to make things better and in this case, avoid ending up in the "NOT better place". We can think of this as a pre-emptive strike against eternal damnation. You might be surprised to know that the Bible addresses the topic on at least 50 separate occasions and that Jesus talked about hell more than He did heaven. He did so out of a great love for us – not to frighten, but to serve as a warning. So, what does the Bible say that debunks the myth that we're all headed to a better place?

Digging Deeper

Hell is not a better place because it is...

A Place of PUNISHMENT.

- As we read in 2 Thessalonians, those who believe and accept Jesus are promised rest with Him, but we are also told that God will deliver punishment in everlasting hell to those who reject Him as their Lord and Savior. Is it difficult to think of God as harsh and laying down this kind of judgment? Do you think some people prefer to identify solely with God as a gentle, loving Father (which of course He is) and glaze over the fact that He will also punish those who refuse to accept His plan of salvation? Is there an effective way to evangelize using this message of condemnation for those who refuse to accept Christ? Have you ever tried it? What was the outcome?

A Place of PAIN.

- Hell is a place where pain is the everyday, unending reality. Heartbreak, disease, physical injury, the tragedy of others; what if the worst physical or emotional pain you could fathom was never ending? While we will all face trials in this life, believers who fall victim to these earthly pains are promised deliverance in heaven. This is the hope to which we cling. It is stronger than fear and is our most powerful weapon against despair. If you are in some kind of pain today, how does hearing about the reality of this place called hell motivate you to keep pressing on? How does it motivate you to do whatever you can to try to help prevent others from ending up there?

A Place of PERMANENCE.

- As much as we rejoiced in the permanence of heaven last week, we would be wise to take note of the fact that the same is true of its antithesis. As we anticipate all the beauty, peace, light, love and mercy that awaits us in heaven, we should also consider the fact that the opposite of these things are the reality of hell. Permanent suffering without hope of relief is the only promise to be found there. But the good news is that God intended hell as a home for only Satan and his demons. He is

preparing a place for us in heaven where he desires an everlasting fellowship with us, but we must choose this life. Much like prison isn't a place to which anyone wants to go but some end up there due to their poor choices, hell is a place we come across through the decisions we make. What do you think of the idea that even the worst of sinners are given the chance to repent at the hour of their death? Do you believe the choice is ours to make even after death? Does the guarantee of permanence in the afterlife do anything to deter you (or prompt you) in your decision making now?

A Place without God's PRESENCE.

- Gnashing of teeth, fire, darkness and despair are all awful things. But what is the worst thing about hell? God is not there. If we read further in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, we learn the desperate truth that not only will those who reject Jesus spend eternity in flaming fire, they will also be "forever separated from the Lord and His glorious power." As we struggle to endure the pains of this life, we can take comfort in the fact that God is always by our side. But in hell every person who suffers will know the true loneliness of being apart from God. Have you ever felt lonely or depressed? Can you imagine feeling that hopelessness and darkness forever? Something to consider: if you really wish to spend an eternity with God, try spending more time with him right now! Eternal pain, punishment and separation from God is certainly more than enough motivation to avoid such a place as hell!

Conclusion

So what are we going to do with the message of salvation provided in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? First of all, how we respond determines whether we're on the way to heaven or hell. Then, for those of us who choose to believe, given the reality and awfulness of hell, are we willing to do whatever it takes to warn people of the danger that lies ahead? Life is made up of a series of choices but this one carries eternal significance. Will you choose the place that guarantees freedom from pain and punishment while living in eternal fellowship with God? Will you choose the truly better place?