

Don't Go to Hell

Mark 9:38-50

INTRO:

Anthony Price once said, “**The Devil himself had probably re-designed Hell based on information he had gained from observing airport layouts.**” *If you have ever been in an airport, you probably agree!* This morning we are not going to think about airports, but we are going to think about hell.

Jesus warns about the dangers of treating that which God had lovingly given and created as garbage. Hell, the place of total separation from the presence of God, is not a place you want to go. We are not to treat those whom God created and those for whom Jesus died as garbage.

ME:

I wonder, **why and Jesus is talking about hell and treating others like garbage?** I'll understand that soon enough.

YOU:

Do you like thinking of garbage? Do you like thinking about hell? Well, if you do or you don't, that's what Jesus brings up this morning. Let's listen to him in prayer and then in Mark 9:

Let's pray together...

GOD:

Mark 9:38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

42 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around Mark 9:42 your neck and you were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell., 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. 49 "For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how

can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

WE:

The best known biblical image of hell refers to the deep, narrow gorge southeast of Jerusalem called *Ben Hinnom*, more specifically, the Valley of Ben Hinnom. This is where unfaithful Israelites offered up child sacrifices to the gods **Molech** and **Baal**. This place was condemned by Josiah as an eternally unholy place as seen in *2 Kings 23:10*. The valley was later used as a garbage dump by the people of Jerusalem. The Greek word, *Gehenna* is used in the New Testament as a place of final and eternal punishment. *Gehenna* comes from the Hebrew name for this valley.

Because of its association with the place to deposit the bodies of those slain in battle by God’s judgment, the valley was also an image of hell.

Hell is a place to rot, a place of mutilated bodies and disgust and loathing.

The Hebrew Bible adds to this the image of burning. **Is the burning related to the idea of purging? Is this a sacrificial fire destroying something that is offensive to God?**

The New Testament defines evangelism as **“Saving some by snatching them from the fire”** as seen in Jude 23. Jesus speaks of **“fiery hell”** in Matthew 5:22. Jesus sees himself as a rescuer from hell and he is never

said to be one who condemns people to hell, but as one sent to urge people to avoid hell. *We see that this morning in a very dramatic way!*

So, hell is a dump, *Gehenna*. Jesus is the one who seeks and saves the lost, to rescue them from the tragedy that is . . . hell. *We see this today in Mark!* Bleak and devastating alternatives are given to us by Jesus today. Jesus tells us to make a choice. Decide today where you will be. It is better to mutilate and maim yourself than to end up in hell. Jesus says cut off your arm, pluck out your eye and throw them all in the trash to keep yourself from Gehenna!

This is kind of, well, severe!

What in the world does Jesus mean? Scholars tell us Jesus is using hyperbole – exaggerating, overstating things to get our attention. Rabbinic teachers often do that then. If so, Jesus has our attention!

It is much better to go to God's Kingdom missing an eye, or an arm, than it is to find yourself with eye and arm in the fires of hell.

We don't talk much about hell, **do we?** Hell is not a feel good, uplifting biblical theme. But we cannot deny that Jesus is talking about hell in this passage in Mark. He doesn't really call it hell, though. He calls it the Aramaic name for a place called *Gehenna*. It is a real place just outside the walls of Jerusalem. Jesus is not referring to the place that Dante spoke about in his *The Inferno*.

Jesus is talking about Gehenna, that garbage dump we already thought about. After the years of use for pagan idolatry, it became the town dump. Garbage bones, decaying things filled this valley. So Jesus says it would be better to pluck out or off the offending body part than be thrown into garbage dump of Gehenna.

Garbage was different then. There were no straws or paper products or styrofoam. SO Gehenna smelled! It stunk! People just dumped their primitive, rotting, trash in this valley.

I remember talking to church members over the past twenty one years who had been put in a nursing home. They would sometimes say they had been dumped there until they died. For them they felt like they were left to rot on the trash pile in Gehenna. **Have you ever been anywhere, or had time when you felt like you were in Gehenna, other than in airports?**

Jesus says that no child of God's creation and love is meant for Gehenna. Jesus stares our hellish possibilities in the face and rebukes them. He talks of things that are stark, because life can be just that . . . it can be **stark**. And this is how Jesus challenges us with this warning.

In his Divine Comedy, Dante had these words inscribed over the entrance to hell:

***“Through me is the way to the sorrowful city.
Through me is the way to eternal suffering. Through***

me is the way to join the lost people. . . . Abandon all hope, you who enter!”

Does that sound inviting to you? *Me either!*

We should remember what is in the Apostle’s Creed. When we say it together, we say that Jesus was **“Crucified under Pontius Pilate, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. He rose . . .**

Jesus was the one who descended into hell. Not just when he died, in those few days before resurrection but also throughout his ministry. After all, he entered those places that we avoid. He boldly went into those places that we locate out on the margins, on the outskirts of town. These are the nursing homes, the places for people with mental illness, the town dump. In Mark’s Gospel we have seen Jesus confronting demons, rebuking possessive devils, healing, casting out all that **degrades** and **dehumanizes**.

You see, in Jesus we don’t have to resign ourselves to saying they have dumped me here; this is the end of the line. We can, in Jesus, choose to treasure the gift of God that is given to us in our lives, our responsibilities and in our responsibilities.

The church is to be made up of those who treasure their lives and are determined not to let our lives slide into nothingness and despair just because of some aspects of our lives that we find difficult to control.

The church is to be those kind of place that keeps entering Hell, keeps trying to salvage lives, to rescue people, to tell them, to remind them that they are loved by God. That they are beautiful and that they are not destined for the garbage heap of the world. Like Jesus and with Jesus we can be instruments of bringing people back to life. We are the ones who incarnate and embody “**Kingdom of God is here!**” Message of the Gospel.

Our lives should proclaim that the world needs to turn around, come forward, be saved! Come join the great kingdom!

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Don't go to hell, unless it's to bring someone else out!

YOU:

What will you do? Choose today whom you will serve. Decide now, right now, that you will protect the good life God has given you in his grace.

Who do you know that needs to hear that message? What is the Gehenna that you need to crash into so you can bring someone and redeem them with God?

CLOSE:

Jesus is later put up on a cross overlooking Gehenna. He saw Gehenna clearly from Calvary. His deepest and darkest experience of Gehenna was

that cross on Calvary. It is a symbol of what Jesus does during his entire ministry. He goes to hell, that he might defeat hell and win for God a kingdom made up of those the world once considered garbage.