

Is Death the End? - the Reality of Hell

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon explores the reality of Hell and the moral imperatives that drive humanity towards accountability before God.

Scripture: Luke 16:19

Topics: "The Reality of Hell", "Eternal Judgment"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the grave reality of Hell as an eternal consequence of indifference to God, urging listeners to understand that death is not the end but a transition to judgment. He reflects on historical revivals that were fueled by a belief in Hell, highlighting the moral implications of our actions and the necessity of a moral compass rooted in God's sovereignty. Katz warns that the absence of fear regarding eternal judgment leads to a lack of moral sensitivity, and he calls for a restoration of the fear of God within the church. He illustrates the eternal torment of the rich man in Luke 16, contrasting it with the fate of Lazarus, to underscore the urgency of recognizing our eternal state and the need for repentance. Ultimately, Katz challenges believers to live righteously, keeping in mind the eternal consequences of their choices.

Transcript

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The reality of Hell needs to be anguished over, and to be understood as a terrible and eternal calamity. Once your life ends, there is no turning back; there is no second chance; there is no way to make amends when you realize that what you have spurned all your living days in those who have preached to you, and witnessed to you is, in fact, true. It doesn't require one to be a murderer to justify Hell. Just being a man in the world and indifferent to God is sufficient qualification. This is a real tough one. Is that our God? It sounds so vindictive. Surely there has got to be a little footnote, a little something by which God can still be vindicated. He can't be that unjust. He can't be that demanding. He can't be that absolute in determining an eternal destiny of torment, darkness and fire for which there is no remedy.

It seems that the great revivals in America in the early 18th century were based on belief in Hell. Jonathan Edwards spoke of it so persuasively, as Charles Finney did later, that people clutched the literal pillars of the church buildings they were in. They could feel the heat coming through the floor and scorching their feet. The people would wrestle with their souls over these issues. Nor did the preachers expect you to come through the same night. You may have gone home anguishing in your soul about your eternal condition, and it may have taken two or three days before there was a final breakthrough. But when it came, people were not merely saved, they were converted. Entire communities were converted. The saloons and jails were emptied. There was a sweep of God in power when men came pronouncing the reality of eternal judgment and Hell. It is recorded that Finney sent his prayer men into the communities two or three weeks in advance of his coming so that intercession of the deepest kind would precede his speaking. The results were remarkable. We have not seen anything like that since that time because we are not preaching anything like that since that time.

Psalms 73 seems to indicate that the psalmist was as well informed as any of us about the issues of eternity, of judgment and reward, but he did not understand them sufficiently. He did not yet understand them existentially, in his depths, because he was still vexed in his soul. He could not reconcile a moral God with conditions that prevailed in this life by which the wicked get away with their wicked deeds—even insulting God verbally—and even saying, "Where is God?" Yet, the righteous, who want to serve God and walk in the way, are chastened daily. They are beset with difficulties and problems, whereas the evil are enjoying life to the full.

If we grow up without a moral sense, and without having a moral sensitivity, or of being moral human beings, we are already on the road to doom. The issue of what is moral is the issue of what is human. If we dismiss God as being sovereign over a moral universe, what basis is there for morality at all? Mankind may get away with all kinds of immoral acts in this lifetime, but in the life to come, they get their just reward. That is to say, if there were no eternal judgment, this whole present life would be without reason, and men can do what they want, literally, if there is no fear of the consequence in the life to come. In His wisdom, God has designed Hell and created it not just for what people will suffer in the life to come, but that it should be taken into our present consideration; that we should walk in fear and trepidation and caution, knowing that a series of actions can bring us into that eternal state. God intended the consideration of Hell to be the most tempering, sane factor for living righteously in this life.

In other words, God has given us a counterbalancing factor in the issue of eternal judgment that compensates for any justification we could find for self-indulgence, self-gratification, lust, dishonesty, or any other kind of wickedness.

There is a death that comes to every man, then the judgment. No soul shall be absolved from facing the Judge and paying eternally the consequence of sin. The psalmist did not fully perceive that fact until he went into the sanctuary. So long as he was content to be merely doctrinally correct, he didn't see it, and he anguished, but his anguish drove him into the sanctuary to find the answer of God. "Then I understood their end" (Psalm 73:17). I took my yellow marker and highlighted "their end" in yellow. We need to be deeply aware that there is an end. It is not an end as termination or obliteration; rather, it is judgment that is eternal and does not cease in its burnings and torment. That is the end. The end is an eternal continuation of your consciousness, suffering the just reward of the evil that you allowed yourself in this life. Only now, you will find it is too late to remedy. How many people would think twice before killing some harmless Amish girls, as a man did recently, if they knew that merely to put a bullet in your own brain does not end anything? That man is currently in Hell with a full consciousness of who he is and what he had

done. He is suffering now in torment even before the Day of Judgment. Later, he will be united with his body, and stand before the Judge, and receive an eternal judgment, of which his present Hell is only the preliminary.

In Thessalonians, Paul tells the new converts that when they heard the Word of God from him, they received it for what it was, not the word of man but the Word of God, which performs a work in them that believe. It was a word powerful enough to turn them from idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son, who would come from heaven and will save them from the wrath to come (paraphrased). Those Thessalonians believed in the salvation that would save them, not only presently, but eternally, from the wrath to come. Wrath means the righteous anger of God. When He comes as Judge, in the "wrath of the Lamb" as it is described in Revelation, men who had mocked Him, and thought nothing of Him, will be looking for places in the rocks to hide, and in crevices and cracks, that they would be saved from having to see the face of the wrath of God in Jesus. It is a wrath that is not an impetuous irritation. His wrath is not like our little anger. His wrath is a deep, deep thing that has been simmering in His eternal depths through all the history of mankind. He has been watching and observing the conduct of mankind, the attitudes and the speech of billions that are contrary to Him and to His holiness. There comes a day in which He will express that wrath in judgment. He will bring it to the earth when He comes. Men who are found sinners will suffer that wrath eternally if they are not saved by the blood of the Lamb. God's wrath is fearful, and the consequence of that wrath is immeasurable. It is a justified anger; God is expressing His righteous indignation in a world that has blasphemed against Him and sinned horribly. It has taken its liberties with lust and blood and death and violence as if there were no price to pay in the life to come, as if this life were everything, and that one could get away with it. So if He did not come to bring an eternal judgment, where is there any basis for morality?

In Luke 16:19, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day." This sounds like the same kind of people that the psalmist was describing in Psalm 73, living it up and having a ball. In contrast, "there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores." It doesn't say that he ever received any crumbs or any kind of consideration from the rich man. Very likely he was completely dismissed. The rich man forsook all righteousness by failing to give out of his abundance to alleviate the distress of one as pitiful as Lazarus. That is not just a moment's inconsideration; that is the statement of all of his life. We can almost surmise that he was rich because that is the way he lived. He did not give any of his substance to the poor. He was indifferent to their plight. Did you know that the poor are poor for the purposes of God? The poor are poor as a test of the righteousness of mankind in whose midst they are placed. This rich man ultimately failed. When Jesus judges between the sheep and the goats, it will be over the issue, "What have you done for the least of these My brethren?" So there is a remarkable corollary here in the comparison of these two men: the wealthy man who lacks nothing and the poor beggar who could not even obtain crumbs.

And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, and was buried. And in Hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

Note that though this man died, his consciousness was not obliterated. It did not mean the end of himself as an entity. Death does not end; death only precipitates being cast into the place of eternal judgment

instantly. The moment he died and was buried, he was aware that he was in torment. He was in Hell, and was able to see Lazarus in a much better place and even to request of Lazarus that he be sent just to dip his finger in water and to touch his tongue because the heat and the burning was an anguish, an agony and torment beyond all consideration. The Lord is giving this as an example. Would He speak these words lightly if there were not corresponding truth? Would He exaggerate just to create fear? Would He say there is torment if there really was none?

One of the more serious omissions in the church worldwide, as I have the privilege to observe it in my travels, is this one thing: the absence of the fear of God. There seems to be so little fear in God's people because, I believe, there is so little fear of the eternal consequence of their disobedience to God and their failure to be serious servants in the high calling of God. We are told in Hebrews, "Let not many of you be teachers of the Word, for teachers of the Word come under a double judgment." The fear of God needs to be restored to the church, and it will not be restored until we reckon on the foundational fear itself, the fear of eternal Hell as torment, which this rich man is now experiencing. And what answer does he get to his request of sending Lazarus that he might touch his tongue?

But Abraham said, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they who would pass from here to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, which would come from there."

Mark the word fixed. Fixed is finality, absoluteness, no further recall, no opportunity to amend or alter the condition that has come. It is fixed, permanent, enduring, and eternal. There is no possibility ever again of communing between these two spheres. You are fixed in Hell; he is fixed in heaven. There is nothing that can be sent to you and no relief that can come to you. This is your eternal state. You lived it up in this world and enjoyed luxury. This beggar came to your gate and you couldn't even find him a crumb, because you are unrighteous, because you have no consideration for God, because you did not even understand that this beggar was at your gate because of God. He was not an accident. He was someone God allowed to suffer poverty and to be a beggar to test you, to save you, if you could yet recognize it, from an eternal fate and anguish beyond all description. If you had recognized it, God was trying to speak to you and show you your ungodliness and your unrighteousness, by which you gathered for yourself remarkable wealth and lived high on the hog and had every advantage, while you left this guy to wither at your very door step, and you spurned God's attempt to bring you to conviction about righteousness. The purpose of this life on earth is not to acquire immeasurable wealth and a soft and comfortable lifestyle of luxury. The purpose of this life is to fit yourself for eternity, to walk righteously with God and to know Him, and to believe His judgments and His laws; to serve Him, and to walk in the way everlastingly and receive the reward of another kind. If we really believe this, we ought to be pleading with men lest they be cut off in their youth and be plunged into eternity without remedy.

The rich man continued,

Then he said, "I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house (for I have five brethren), that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Abraham saith unto him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And he said, "Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." And he said unto him, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

In other words, you will soon have company. Your five brothers will join you, but there will be no comfort in that. You will all suffer the same affliction; you will be under the same torment, the relentless heat which is described as fire. It may be fire of an entirely other kind because they are not consumed by it, but they experience the heat and the torment of it. They have forsaken every warning; they have not been willing to receive testimony; they have spurned people who have spoken to them about the Lord. They would not hear, they would not consider, and now when the time came and their iniquity was full, they find themselves in Hell, conscious and aware of who they are and where they are, and suffering torment. So, on that basis, I have to believe that the man who shot the Amish girls and killed himself, in that moment awakened to find that he is not really dead. He is physically dead, humanly speaking in the world, but he is eternally and consciously alive, and he is in Hell right now, in torment even before the judgment that will be pronounced on him eternally. And it is fixed. If he but knew it, even suspected it, would he have gone ahead and plotted the entire thing without a thought of what the consequence would be eternally? Should we not be warning mankind of the consequences of their God-rejection?

There is something grievously lacking in the church because we have not been vexed over the issue of the disparity that the rich are having a ball while the poor are seemingly being vexed and chastened. A just and righteous God will bring to recall every episode, every indulgence, every sin, every lust, and every disregard of Himself and His way. Justice and righteousness will be served to the letter.

We are all accountable before God. We can't find justification for evil and wickedness on the basis of the past, or that we were deprived, or that when we were kids we were molested, or we lacked this or we lacked that. There is no excuse. We are responsible before God. He would have given us every grace to live righteously before Him, for he said to Abraham, "Walk thou before Me and be thou perfect, for I am God Almighty." That is His statement to every son and daughter of Abraham: "Walk before Me, not before the world, nor its style. Be perfect. It is going to be hard, but I am God Almighty. I will give you every grace, that when I come in the day of My appearing, you will not be ashamed. You will be able to face Me without fear. You won't look for cracks in the rock in which to hide. You will be looking forward to seeing Me. You are longing for My appearing because you look to receive a reward, not a penalty." How lopsided we have been! Let us give the things that are eternal the kind of consideration they deserve. Let us cease from giving undue attention to things in this life which are only momentary and a vapor.

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