

# The Echo and the Insufficiency of Hell

by John Piper

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*The sermon explores the concept of hell as an echo of God's glory and Christ's suffering, and argues that hell is just and righteous because it upholds the value of God's glory.*

**Duration:** 1:02:22

**Scripture:** Psalm 63:3, Matthew 6:33, Luke 5:1-10, Luke 16:19-26, Romans 11:22

**Topics:** "Hell And Judgment", "Gods Infinite Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker explores the theme of the echo and insufficiency of hell. He explains that hell is an echo of the glory of God's infinite worth and Christ's infinite suffering, as well as an echo of His infinite love. However, the speaker argues that hell cannot produce satisfaction in God, remorse for not having God, gospel repentance, or salvation. Instead, he urges listeners to go beyond the fear of hell and pursue a deep understanding and experience of the glory, love, truth, goodness, wisdom, power, justice, grace, and beauty of God. The sermon references Luke 5:1-10, where Jesus performs a miraculous catch of fish and Peter's response to it.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) Before I pray, which I really do want to do for my own soul, let me tell you where we're going and give you an illustration of why it's important to go there. Romans 11.22 says, Behold the kindness and the severity of God.

So I feel like I should obey that commandment, and that since God loves me, it would be good for me to behold both the kindness and the severity of God. So my task here in this session I have set for myself is to behold the severity of God. That's a command, and I would like to be faithful in obedience to beholding the severity of God.

Now, I do believe it's good for us to do that, loving of God to command us to do that, and I want to give you an illustration of that. I don't save or file many letters, but I did this one. This is an original.

I wouldn't let you look at it because it would give away identities, but here it is, dated 24 August 1992, referring to an event in 1985 by a young woman who is near our church now, not in our church, but she was in our church then. She was young. I don't remember exactly how old she was.

I think probably early 20s, and I want you to hear what she said. 1985, so she's referring to an event seven years earlier. 1985, I wonder whether you remember a very much younger me sitting in your office and telling you I was afraid God would have to use a car accident or some other awful event to get my attention, and you pointed out that the consequences of my deliberate choice to continue sinning would be nothing short than hell itself.

No one had ever before told me I was headed for hell, missionary kid that I was, saved at the age of six. It was a turning point in my life, and I have wanted to thank you and tell you that ever since. Now, here's the amazing thing.

Since 1992 when she wrote this, I have received a Christmas card from this woman every single year thanking me for warning her that she was going to hell if she didn't get out of this relationship. Let's pray. Father in heaven, there are people, young people in this room that I love on this Father's Day.

I feel very much called to father this group tonight who are on their way to hell and will suffer eternally if you don't do for them what you did for this young woman 23 years ago. And so I ask that you would come and let there be a weight of glory and an anointing upon me and upon us for the next little while so that we would be given eyes to see and hearts to feel the weight of the reality of hell and what it means for us. Please, Father, don't let any slip away beckoned by the devil into indifference.

Keep us focused. Help me not to go down any rabbit trails nor to overstate anything or withdraw, shrink back from any aspect of your counsel. Help me, I pray, for the good of these folks to behold the kindness and the severity of God.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. The theme or the title that I would give to this message is The Echo and the Insufficiency of Hell.

I'm going to tell you what I mean by each of those so if I don't finish you will at least have gotten where I was going. What I mean by the echo is hell is an echo of something bigger and original than itself. It's the echo of the glory of God's infinite worth and it's the echo of the glory of Christ's infinite suffering and it's the echo, therefore, of his infinite love.

That will be the first point I want to make. Second, the insufficiency of hell. What I mean by that is the truth and the reality of hell are insufficient to awaken saving faith in anybody or to awaken genuine evangelical gospel spiritual remorse or regret.

But rather, this insufficiency of hell points toward a very surprising source for the tears that are authentic on the way into heaven. So that's where I'm going. Those are my two points.

The echo of hell and the insufficiency of hell. So let's start with the echo of hell. Now what I want to do here, I want to stake out simply the territory of what should be believed about hell quickly and then get to this echo point.

So five things that need to be believed about hell. Number one, it's eternal. I'm sure you've heard that.

In fact, I think I want to base all of these on a text. So let's go to Revelation 14. I don't know if anybody's read that, but I'm going to read it again.

Revelation 14, verses 9 to 11. It goes like this. An angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels, in the presence of the Lamb.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. And they have no rest day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image and whoever receives the mark of its name. That's a terrifying text.

So what I mean when I say it's eternal is simply what I believe John means when he says forever and ever. It is the strongest expression for eternity in the Greek language under the ages of the ages. Jesus said it's eternal over against and compared with eternal life.

I'm going to point out along the way, now and then, some people who deny these things that you should simply be alerted to so that you may be critical and careful. George MacDonald in the 1800s, C.S. Lewis said, was the most significant teacher in his life. George MacDonald did not believe in the eternity of hell.

He believed in hell and he believed that it was purgative or purifying, not punitive. Everybody would eventually have the hell burned out of them in hell and they would all be saved, including the devil. Now today, I'll just point out one person because he's so influential and I like him so much in many ways and he's so dead wrong on this issue that could slip up on you, namely Richard John Newhouse, the editor of First Things that I read very regularly.

Newhouse points out that Origen, in the third century, set forth a theologically and philosophically complex doctrine, I'm quoting Newhouse, of apocatastasis, according to which all creatures, including the devil, will be saved. That's what Origen believed, a great theologian in the early church. And he says, among theologians and church historians, there is today something of a recovery of Origen in recent decades, especially in the voluminous writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Then he says, Balthasar has a very careful argument, clearly distinguishing between the hope of universalism, that is, everybody is saved, and the doctrine of universalism. And he argues that we may not teach it as a doctrine, but we may hold it as a hope, universalism. To which Newhouse says, I wrote in my book, Death on a Friday Afternoon, that my essential agreement with Balthasar's position stands.

So, his position is, everywhere you read about hell in the Bible, you should say, now this is not the way he would say it, this is my parody, I hope this doesn't mean what it looks like. You can't teach that it doesn't mean what it looks like, namely that hell is eternal, but you can hope that what you're seeing is not what you're seeing. That's not helpful.

That is not helpful in the church of Jesus Christ, or in the mission of Jesus Christ, to teach the church to look at the Bible and hope against hope, it doesn't mean what it appears to mean. So my first point is, it's eternal, and there are strong words in the Bible to say so. Secondly, it involves the suffering of the people who are there.

The word used here is torment. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. And third, I take it that torment means conscious suffering.

And here you bump into another major abandonment of the orthodox doctrine of hell, namely annihilationism. Namely, there won't be conscious suffering, there will be judgment, but the judgment is you get put out of existence. I'll give you a couple of names to go with this, and you need to see from their

words why they go there.

Before I give you the names, not only do you have the word torment, you have Jesus saying, outside there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Three times he says that in the Gospel of Matthew. Weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's not unconscious. It's not annihilation. Clark Pinnock used to be a conservative evangelical, came to the school that I taught at, wrote a good book on inerrancy.

He gave a talk at Bethel one time. Where do liberals come from? And his answer was, they come from us. Which is, of course, true.

They come from MacArthur's church, my church. That's where they come from. Something happens.

They start moving. And that's exactly what Pinnock has done. So let me read you what he wrote concerning this issue.

Quote, I was led to question the traditional belief in everlasting conscious torment because of moral revulsion and the broader theological considerations, not first on scriptural grounds. It just does not make any sense to say that a God of love will torture people forever for sins done in the context of a finite life. It's time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment.

Close quote. That is tragic. John Stott, one of my great college heroes, wrote this in 1988.

Emotionally, I find the concept of eternal conscious torment intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain. Scripture points in the direction of annihilation. No, John Stott, Scripture does not point in the direction of annihilation.

Your emotions do. And that's how people go there. They cannot bear it anymore.

So number one, hell is eternal. Number two, it involves suffering. Number three, that suffering is conscious forever.

Fourth, it is God-inflicted suffering. It's called wrath. Jesus said in Matthew 8, 12, the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness.

Now, C.S. Lewis and some today who are following in his train tried their best to make a case that there was a certain moral inevitabilism to your life that draws you to hell and God doesn't throw you there. And God doesn't do the punishing when you're there. You totally choose it and you totally bring it on yourself.

You are your hell. That's what N.T. Wright says and others. It won't work.

I read recently a statement to the effect that to confirm this view, sinners, if they could, would not choose to get out of hell. That's how self-imposed, not God-imposed, they're making it out to be. This is entirely being driven by making it more palatable.

Well, I want to say loud and clear, every single person in hell would choose to get out if he could. That's clearly what it says. I understand where MacArthur was going in Luke 16.

If you let me out, I'll get out. What they're trying to say is they don't want God. Well, that's clear.

They don't want God. There's a huge difference between saying, I don't want God and I want hell. Nobody wants hell once they know what it is.

That's the meaning of hell. I want out and I can't ever get out. That's what it means.

This idea of a kind of inner, necessary, inevitable, bringing upon myself, and God presumably just out there watching, is so unbiblical, I'm surprised at who's talking this way. It is punishment. It is wrath.

Number five. This is the last one before we move on to the insufficiency. And here's where I'm getting at the echo idea.

That was all just set up. The fifth thing I want to say about hell is that it is just, righteous, right. Now, at this point, we need to make some distinctions between what that word means.

There are at least two ways you can think about God being just in what he does. And the reason you have to make two ways is because he's God. He's not a human judge with a constitution that he has to obey.

God has no constitution that he has to obey. He is the constitution. If there's a law in the universe, it's owing to him.

He has nothing above him, nothing outside him, to which he brings his actions into conformity and therefore defining righteousness for God is very tricky. It's very perplexing to how to say God is righteous when you've got nothing outside God to measure him by so that you can say he measures up. He's just there.

You deal with him as he is and you learn what is from his being. So what does it mean to say then, hell, as God punishes people there, is just? Two things. It means, number one, nobody, this is so important, so important to say, we need to say it often, nobody will be in hell who does not deserve to be there.

God is just in that he sends no one to hell who doesn't deserve to be there. If he sends someone, throws someone into outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth, it's because they deserve to be there. That's the basic meaning of justice.

And here are a few texts. Romans 1.18, the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth and nobody else. Number two, Romans 2.5, because of your hard and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

And so he correlates the righteousness of the judgment with the hardness of our hearts. He's laboring to say this is right, this is just. A third text, Romans 3.5, if our unrighteousness, mine, serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say, that God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? By no means, for how then could God judge the world? I just think it can't get clearer.

Then Romans 3.5, God will judge the world. He will not judge the world in unrighteousness, but in righteousness. My unrighteousness vindicates God's righteousness in sending me to hell.

The only people who will be in hell are people who deserve to be in hell. Hold on to that if you can't hold on to anything else. Hold on to that lest you indict God.

That's the first meaning. That's the simple meaning. We understand that meaning.

Nobody should go to jail if they don't deserve to go to jail. Before I move to the second meaning of justice, let me go back to Pinnock and Stott. What did each of them say? I probably passed over it too quickly, but let me tell you that aside from the moral revulsion that they feel at the traditional biblical view of hell, they both brought up what seems to be a disproportion between a finite life of sinning and an eternal scope of suffering.

They said it doesn't work. You have 70 or 80 years in which to accumulate sins, and then it's punished forever? Doesn't sound right. Now, Jonathan Edwards thought probably more deeply about hell and more gloriously about heaven than anyone.

When I realized I forgot to bring a book along, I was going to show you. It's by John Gerstner, and it's called Heaven and Hell in Jonathan Edwards or Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell. I want to read you a quote, probably the most important quote that I've ever read on the justice of hell that Edwards would speak if he were responding to Pinnock and Stott on this argument of disproportionality between a finite life of sinning and an eternal infinite scope of suffering.

Here's what he wrote. The crime of one being despising and casting contempt on another is proportionably more or less heinous as he was under greater or less obligations to obey him. And therefore, if there be any being that we are under infinite obligations to love, honor, and obey, the contrary towards him must be infinitely faulty.

Our obligation to love, honor, and obey any being is in proportion to his loveliness, honorableness, and authority. But God is a being infinitely lovely because he hath infinite excellency and infinite beauty. So, sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous and so deserving of infinite punishment.

The eternity of the punishment of ungodly men renders it infinite and therefore renders it no more than proportionable to the heinousness of what they are guilty of." I've never seen any response to that from the likes of Clark Pinnock or John Stott or others. In other words, the length of your sin is not what makes the length of your suffering just. It's the height of your sin that makes the length of your suffering just.

The height of your sin is measured by the dignity of the one you are sinning against and it is an infinite dignity. Which brings me very close now to what I mean by the echo of hell as I move into this second meaning of justice or righteousness. The second meaning of God's being just is that ultimately the righteousness of God or the justice of God is God's unwavering allegiance to uphold the value of what is infinitely valuable, namely His own glory.

If you don't buy that, you probably will not understand or embrace great swaths of the Bible. Let me say it again. Since God has no constitution or legal code outside Himself by which to measure what is right and good in His own thinking and feeling and doing, it must be measured by Himself.

What then is righteousness in God? God's righteousness is His devotion to, His allegiance to, His absolute unwavering commitment to stand for and uphold and vindicate that which is infinitely valuable. Himself. That's the righteousness of God.

If He for one millisecond diverted from His passionate, infinitely zealous cause of holding up His glory, He would be unrighteous and unworthy of our worship. Now, given that definition, hell is just because hell does that. You've got to ask this question.

I mean, your reckoning in these days, I assume, with what you're going to believe about hell and heaven is simply massive. People will become unbelievers at this conference. I know they will.

And some will be saved. Because if you reject hell and the justice of it, you will have to pull so many pieces out of the system that if you live long enough, it will all unravel for you. Jonathan Edwards is, again, very key here.

And I'm going to read a passage of Scripture, and then I'm going to read Edwards, and we'll draw the echo part of this message to a close and then take up the insufficiency. Here's what you're going to unravel if you reject this. God did not have to create this world.

Why did He? You can try to go the open theism route and say, He didn't know what would happen. Yeah. You should laugh.

You really should with tears. I live in a city where one of the biggest churches is led by a man who is the most articulate exponent of open theism, Greg Boyd. Very sophisticated arguments against the foreknowledge of God because he knows where it leads if you embrace the foreknowledge of God.

Namely, he knew what would happen. And look what happened. Hell and millions and millions of people going there.

Why did He create a world in which that even could happen? That's what will cause some of you to become unbelievers. You won't be able to handle it. You just say, I can't, I can't, I can't believe that if God knew that it was going to turn out like this, He would make it.

May God help you. This is a lot for young people to bear. So here's the text.

I'm going to read Edwards on it. This is Romans 9, 19. This is the ultimate Bible answer to the question why God created the universe in which He knew it would turn out like this.

And you do understand, don't you, that whether you want to talk in terms of permission or causality doesn't make any difference here. Because if God creates a world in which He knows it's going to turn out like this, whether He's causing or permitting, He's ordaining. Because He didn't have to do it.

Romans 9, 19. You will say to me then, why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will? But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, why have you made me thus? Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another vessel for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show His wrath... Now, these next two verses are the ultimate theodicy in the Bible. There's nothing more ultimate in the Bible than these two sentences as far as why God would do what He's done.

What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction in order... Here's the purpose. This is the most ultimate verse in the Bible. In order to make known the riches of His glory for the vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand for glory.

Here's Edwards. It is proper and excellent... This is very heavy, so please tune in if you can at this hour of the night. Be glad that for you, it's not 11 o'clock.

It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth. And for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God's glory should be complete. That is, that all parts of His glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionably effulgent or radiant.

That the beholder may have a proper notion of God. It is not proper that one glory should be exceedingly manifested and another glory not at all. Thus, it is necessary that God's awful majesty, His authority and dreadful greatness, justice and holiness should be manifested.

But this could not be unless sin and punishment had been decreed so that the shining forth of God's glory would be very imperfect. Both because these parts of the divine glory would not shine forth as others do and also the glory of His goodness, love and holiness would be faint without them. Nay, they would scarcely shine forth at all.

If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God's holiness in the hatred of sin or in showing any preference in His providence of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God's grace or true goodness if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. How much happiness soever He bestowed, His goodness would not be so prized and admired and the sense of it not so great.

So evil is necessary in order to the highest happiness of the creature and the completeness of that communication of God for which He made the world because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God and the sense of His love and if the knowledge of Him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionably imperfect. End quote. That's as ultimate as you can speak and I think he's right.

So, two implications about hell as an echo. One, how infinitely valuable and worthy must be the glory of God if spurning it for lesser things merits everlasting torment. Hell is meant to serve as an echo of the infinite value of the glory of God such that if you turn away from the glory of God as your treasure and your life and embrace the broken cisterns of the world, hell defines the heinousness of that sin and the greatness of that glory.

That's the meaning of hell in this room right now. Or, it defines how wonderful and terrible are the sufferings of Christ. Think about this.

Oh, how we love to sing about our Redeemer, do we not? How does God help us weigh the price of our redemption? He does so by ordaining hell. It would be unspeakably magnificent that three hours on a cross could deliver one person from everlasting torments. That would be an unspeakable suffering on the cross if one person were saved from everlasting torments by three hours of agony of our Lord Jesus on the cross.

He did not save one person. He saved millions upon millions upon millions of people whose debt to God melts up infinitely to the sky as hell bears clear witness. And therefore, what happened at Calvary is beyond all imagination in its greatness, all imagination in its beauty, all imagination in its love.

Hell is all about echoing faintly the glory of Calvary. That's the meaning of hell in this room right now. To help you feel in some emotional measure the magnificence of what Christ did for you when He bore not only your eternal suffering but millions of people's eternal suffering when His Father put our curse on Him.

What a Savior is echoed in the flames of hell. So that's what I mean when I say hell is an echo of the glory of God and His worth and an echo of the Savior's sufferings and therefore an echo of the infinite love of God for our souls. Now, one last thing.

The insufficiency of hell to save anybody. Let me be brief and tell you a discovery that I made 16 years ago. I learned it from Edwards, but not directly.

I learned it from David Brainerd directly. Then Edwards unpacked it and then I saw it in the Scriptures. Sometimes you learn in one direction, sometimes you learn in the other.

So I'm going to try to show you what I got from Brainerd. Some of you don't know who David Brainerd is. David Brainerd almost was Jonathan Edwards' son-in-law.

He loved Jerusha. She was 17. He was 29.

And they were about to marry and David Brainerd had tuberculosis. He was coughing up blood for years in the wilderness while he served as a missionary to the Indians in and around Cross Weeekson. He died in Edwards' house with Jerusha taking care of him.

It's a very poignant love story. Edwards stood in awe of David Brainerd, the young man, and he therefore devoted a huge block of time to publishing his journal. After the Bible and William Carey's inquiry, it may be the most influential missionary book in the world for Christians, the journal of David Brainerd.

And I just want to read you a few quotes from Brainerd's experience with the Indians that gave me this discovery about the insufficiency of wrath and hell. August 9, 1745. He preached to the Indians and then he made this observation.

There were many tears among them while I was discoursing publicly, yet some were much affected with a few words spoken to them in a powerful manner which caused the persons to cry out in anguish a soul, although I spoke not a word of terror, but on the contrary, I set before them the fullness and all sufficiency of Christ's merits and His willingness to save all that would come to Him and thereupon press them to come without delay. So notice, without a word of terror, they're trembling and they're weeping for their sin. August 6, same year.

It was surprising to see how their hearts seemed to be pierced with the tender, melting invitations of the gospel when there was not a word of terror spoken to them. November 30, he preached a sermon to the Indians from Luke 16, 19 to 26, the rich man and Lazarus. And this is what he said.

The word made powerful impressions upon many in the assembly, especially while I discoursed of the blessedness of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. This, I could perceive, affected them much more than when I spoke of the rich man's misery and torments and thus it has seemed usual with them. They have almost always appeared much more affected with the comforting than the dreadful truths of God's word.

And that which has distressed many of them under convictions is that they found that they lacked and could not obtain the happiness of the godly. Now, that's what I mean by the insufficiency of hell. At least, we haven't given any biblical support for this yet.

Brainerd's experience was, as he did evangelistic preaching to Indians who'd never heard the gospel or the stories of Jesus in their lives, as he tried to tell the stories and make plain who Jesus was, what cut

them to their heart, what he said was not a discussion of hell but a discussion of the tenderness and sweetness and graciousness of a Christ ready to save and receive. Is that just his experience or is that to be expected biblically? Now, you've got to understand, Brainerd and Edwards were two peas in a pod theologically. This is not something Edwards would disagree with.

That's why I wanted to bring my book along because I'm going to open it right now and read you a quote where Edwards says you cannot scare anyone into heaven. You can scare them away from hell into a quest but nobody becomes a Christian out of mere fear of hell. You know that.

Well, Brainerd seems to be saying a little more. Let's put a Bible text on it. I'm going to just tell you the story instead of reading it.

Maybe read a verse. Luke 5, verses 1-10. You know the story.

Jesus has been sitting in a boat teaching the people on the land and when he's done, they go out into the deep and he tells them to drop their nets and they protest like this, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing but at your word, even though you're not a fisherman you're a carpenter, we know fishing, we will do what you say and they let down their nets and the nets are so filled with fish that they're breaking and the boats are sinking. Now, for that kind of recalcitrance at the front end, this was a very gracious miracle. Don't you think? These ragtag doubting disciples and he gives them two boats full of fish.

What is Peter's response to this? It's very unlike contemporary American responses to grace. Here's what he said. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, depart from me.

I'm a sinful man, oh Lord. My point here is, that's the Indians, is it not? Jesus didn't say, you're a sinner and you're going to hell. He filled two boats with fish and Peter was on his face.

I deserve to go to hell. My life is so out of sync with this kind of favor and this kind of grace and this kind of patience with my mouth. I am on my face and you better get out of my sight, Jesus, or you're going to get dirty.

That's a beautiful response to grace. So it looks to me like Brainerd's experience was not extraordinary, not exceptional, but perhaps normative. My point is, this is starting to get at my discovery 16 years ago, is that genuine gospel spiritual contrition or sorrow or sin is a sorrow at not having holiness.

But at that point, when you say it like that, it's dangerous, because you could go two ways with that. Contrition that is saving, spiritual, evangelical contrition is a brokenness at not having holiness or being holy. But you can weep over not having holiness for two possible and very different reasons.

One is because the judge tells you that since you don't have holiness, you're going to jail. You may weep right then, not because you love holiness, but because you love freedom to do more unholiness and it's being taken away from you. So to say that evangelical contrition or brokenheartedness is owing to a failure to be holy isn't saying enough.

Now we're getting really close to the discovery. Well, what must be said? Where does brokenness, where does Peter's self-abhorrence come from? Where does the Indian brokenheartedness and weeping come from? The only true sorrow for not having holiness comes from love for God's holiness, not fear of its consequence. Let me say it another way, more precisely.

True remorse, true brokenness, true contrition at not having holiness is over not enjoying God and living out of that impulse. It's a brokenness that I have failed to enjoy God and I have failed to walk in the enjoyment of God. You say it another way, to cry over punishment one is about to receive for wrongdoing is no sign of hating wrongdoing.

I have had people in my office crying, crying about divorce and crying about various kinds of pain in their life. And what I'm looking for is evidence that the tears are owing to a failure to enjoy God, not a failure to be hurt by the consequences of their sin. That's not spiritual.

Unbelieving people cry when their marriages don't work. Unbelieving people cry when their kids go to jail or they go to jail. There's nothing spiritual about tears.

And so a counselor has to penetrate and go in and seek to get into the heart and discern are these tears coming from the fact that these folks have seen the glory of God, seen the holiness of God, seen the beauty of God, have fallen in love with the beauty of God and are broken hearted that they're embracing something else and they want the treasure again or not. That's really important to discern. And now we're at the discovery.

Here's the discovery. This means that true evangelical contrition, repentance, brokenness must be preceded by and awakened by delight in God. Very strange, very strange, very paradoxical to truly weep at not having God's holiness.

You have to long for God's holiness and to long for God's holiness. You have to see it is beautiful and desire it, which means paradoxically that in order to weep at not having God, you have to have first seen and delighted in God, which means that pleasure in God produces pain at not having God. It's the only pain that matters.

I don't care about any other pain ultimately before that one is dealt with. It had never occurred to me before 16 years ago that I must have pleasure in order to have pain. I must discover God as my treasure and my pleasure else my tears will be having to go to hell, not a failure to have him.

And having him is the only thing that honors him. He's not honored by your desire to get out of hell. He's honored by your desire to be at home with him and love him.

So my discovery was that true remorse and true contrition, true repentance flows from falling in love with all that God is for us in Jesus so that when we don't have it or acting out of accord with it, we're broken hearted. Summary statement. Hell cannot produce satisfaction in God and so it cannot produce remorse for not having God.

And so it cannot produce gospel repentance and so it cannot save and so it is insufficient. I'm going to read that summary again because that's what I've done the last 20 minutes or so. And then we'll close.

Hell cannot produce satisfaction in God. Only a sight of God, especially God in Christ, especially God in Christ at Calvary. Hell cannot produce satisfaction in God so it cannot produce remorse at not having God, which is the only kind that matters.

And so it cannot produce gospel repentance and so it cannot save and so it is insufficient. I'm not surprised that Brainerd has his experience. You want to bring about tears? People need to know about hell, but that will never produce them.

That will never produce tears. Not if they don't see Christ. Not if they don't see the glory of God.

Hell is powerless to produce what needs to be produced for salvation. It just scares people in the right direction and then serves magnificently as an echo of his infinite worth and Christ's infinite suffering and their infinite love. And so my concluding plea to you is don't let the fear of hell be the endpoint of your pursuit of repentance.

Don't rest till you have gone beyond the fear of hell to the living waters and drunk deep at the glory of God, the love of God, the truth of God, the goodness of God, the wisdom of God, the power of God, the justice of God, the grace of God, the beauty of God. Taste and see that the Lord is good. The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life.

Father, I pray that we would believe biblically and rightly about this awesome and terrifying truth of the everlasting conscious suffering of God imposed just and righteous hell. And I pray that we would recognize that in all of our living and all of our evangelism, this doctrine, this reality is insufficient to awaken gospel tears and gospel repentance, which will only come when we have so shared, so lived and so preached that the pleasure of people in knowing you is awakened so that the failure to have you will break their hearts. In Jesus' name I pray.

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