

Whatever happened to Hell

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[0 : 0 0] now there's a book published last year called whatever happened to hell written by the well known evangelist john blanchard and john blanchard didn't set out really to publish or to write that book as it appears he set out to make a modern equivalent he tells us of the rich man and lazarus by brownlow north that book that was published in the 1860s last century and what he discovered was this that when brownlow north they well he preached these sermons and then they were published in book form and when brownlow north preached these sermons in 1859 in the year of revival people knew the biblical teaching on hell they had an understanding of it it was part of the consensus of biblical teaching and doctrine that people knew but now we have almost complete ignorance about the doctrine of hell we know that fewer than four percent of people in this country read the bible on a regular basis so you can understand the ignorance there is and people have no idea what the bible says about hell john blanchard quote someone as saying at some point in the 1960s hell disappeared no one could say for certain when this happened first it was there then it wasn't but you can go back further talk of hell started to fall off in western countries about the same time science began to make an impact about the late 19th century and that's the change that has come in how has it happened well it's happened in this way charles hodge speaks about hell as a doctrine which the natural heart revolts on and struggles against under which it submits only under authority we submit the doctrine of hell the word of god and what happened towards the end of last century well they elbowed out biblical authority biblical authority was set aside man was exhausted against the bible and people began to reconceive god's moral character in terms of benevolence without judgment and you see it all happened together and so there came in to the church to the professing church the doctrine of universalism that in the end all men will be saved and of course they argued that that doctrine of universalism is something that can do justice to the reality of god's love if god's love is so great how is it not that god can save all men and will save all men so that was the argument of universalism but then we also can say that along with that trend there was the trend of undermining personal accountability and personal responsibility that has been a particular view of the last 25 years in 1981 the chairman of britain's police federation admitted long ago people in power stopped talking about the punishment of crime and began to talk of treatment as if every young thug was sick and in need of a prescription from the chemist discipline has disappeared in our schools and the concept of parental

responsibility went out with the ark and if that changed in the 1960s and onward a shift away from corporal punishment a rejection of capital punishment and all that trend has also helped to do away with the idea of hell but then there's been a further trend which is very disturbing and that has come amongst evangelicals evangelicals evangelicals in particular type areas are uncertain about the ongoing existence of those who leave the world in unbelief and of course that was a doctrine that came forward in some of the sects like the seventh day adventists and the jehovah witness and so on they in their teaching affirmed the extinction of the unbeliever now there are evangelicals who are favoring that view and that's a very alarming trend that we've seen in recent years men like john wenham philip hughes and even john stott in his essentials a book published recently he says the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should be accepted as a legitimate biblically founded alternative to the eternal conscious torment and you see they're giving place to the eternal conscious torment and you see they're giving place to that view and it's becoming more common even in evangelical circles that there's going to be the annihilation of the wicked at the end of the day that they're not going to be in hell for all eternity and you see that's what we're up against the trends that have come into the church into the thinking of many people in these days well the question we've got to ask ourselves is this what is to govern our thinking what is to govern our thinking on this solemn matter is it going to be a matter of feelings or is it the word of god that's the great question is it going

to be a matter of feelings or is it the word of god and who in all the bible speaks about hell more than the lord jesus christ when we examine the biblical teaching we find that the one who speaks most about it is our lord and savior jesus christ some people say oh i don't believe in hell i believe in the jesus of the sermon on the mount the jesus christ well there are at least three references in the sermon on the mount to hell and to destruction and when we think of the teaching of the lord jesus christ it's very staggering to see some of the facts with regard to this of 1870 verses recording the words of jesus in the new testament 13% of them refer to judgment and to hell it's the first it's the first it's the first it's the thing that jesus referred to oftenest in his teaching and after that comes angels and love but the highest percentage is on judgment and hell another fact is this that of the 40 parables recorded in the new testament more than a half of them relate to the eternal judgment of sinners relate to the eternal judgment of sinners these are staggering facts and yet things we should know with regard to the teaching of the lord jesus christ and also we must remember that it's the lord jesus christ who uses the most vivid word that we have in the new testament describing hell the twelve the twelve times of the twelve times the twelve times the eleven of them are according to jesus he speaks about this word he speaks about this word gehenna and this word gehenna comes from the valley of ben hinnom and under aas the king in the old testament there was human sacrifices offered in that valley he offered his sons and other kings and other people offered their sons as human sacrifices in that valley now when good king josiah came to the throne he brought reformation and he did away with that practice and he turned that valley into a public rubbish dump into which all the awful and filth of jerusalem was poured and therefore it became a rubbish dump and a fire kept burning on that rubbish dump to dispose of the garbage the fires never stopped burning and the worm never stopped eating and that's where the name came from the valley the valley of ben hinnom gehenna and the greek word gehenna gehenna and jesus speaks about the person whose whole body will be thrown into gehenna he says do not be afraid of those that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul but be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in gehenna that place that he has described for us and then here in this a passage that we have mentioned here in matthew chapter 25 we see jesus giving us a picture of the day of judgment and what he's speaking about is the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels and he says these shall go away to eternal punishment that's those on his left hand but the righteous to eternal life and you see eternal in these phrases is the same word it means pertaining to the age to come these shall go away and to everlasting punishment but the righteous and to everlasting life the punishment is eternal and the life is eternal there's a conscious parallelism in this he's speaking about the same thing when he says unending or everlasting and we cannot take any other meaning surely from these words than that in both cases they're the same they are unending they are unending they're everlasting they're eternal and so we find with wgt shed that the strongest support for the doctrine of eternal punishment is the lord jesus christ the teaching of christ the redeemer of men christ is the person christ is the person who is responsible for the doctrine of eternal perdition he is the being with whom all opponents of this doctrine are in conflict and how true that is those who make match of a jesus of love and a jesus of the sermon on the mount it's this jesus that they're in conflict with because if you cannot rely upon what he says about hell and eternal punishment how can you rely upon what he says about anything else you see that's the great and crucial question

if jesus makes this so prominent in his teaching he meant that we should hear it and we should listen to it and that we should obey it and he is the one who is teaching us this this teaching this doctrine we might look into what paul says about it what jude says about it what the book of revelation says about it and you can do that yourselves when you have the opportunity but we think that the main emphasis of the new testament is upon the teaching of the lord jesus christ and his teaching on this doctrine well having looked at that biblical evidence let us look at the doctrine and let us think of three things that is said about hell first of all it is a place the place we are told here prepared for the devil and his angels it's a location some people say that hell is a state of mind that you make your hell here upon earth and you make it by a state of mind but that's not true hell is a place it's a location judas went into his own place the rich man in hell lifted up his eyes now we do not know enough to say where this is there's the intermediate state and there's the final state state we were talking about that when we were thinking about heaven how that there's paradise where the souls of the believers the saints are dwelling now and there's the final state when there's a new heavens and a new earth and so there's also in the case of the wicked there's a place where they are now there's the abyss where satan is and there's the final lake that burns with fire and

brimstone as we have at the end of the book of revelation and so it's a place but then secondly it's a place that is shot through with the justice of god you see that's the important thing to remember about hell it's a place that is shot through with the justice of god you know how the westminster confession speaks about god's decree and says about his election of people to eternal life his own people his chosen ones and then he speaks about the rest of mankind the rest of the world to pass by them and ordain them to wrath to the praise of his glorious justice and you see hell is a place where the justice of god will be manifest there's a manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect and we were saying last week how the very most important thing about heaven is it is redemptive it is the end of our redemption we are called by christ we are saved by christ and at the end of it all is heaven well at the end of the wicked there's the justice of god the justice and the damnation of the wicked who remain in our wickedness and in our disobedience but you see it's something that manifests the justice of god we talk about eternal separation from god and that's only partly true because god reigns in hell god reigns in hell there's no separation from the justice of god and the holiness of god and the wrath of god yes there's separation from the love of god and separation from the goodness of god and separation from the mercy of god but there's no separation from the holiness and the justice and the wrath of god hell is required by god's holiness if god is supremely just and hell has been ordained by god then hell is just that's what we've always got to remember and the thing is this that at the end of the day the unbeliever is going to come to see it he's going to come to see it himself in hell the wicked will recognize the essential justice of their plight and to him every knee shall bow of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth and at the end of the day everyone is going to acknowledge the lord jesus christ and the wicked are going to acknowledge the justice of their sentence they're going to acknowledge it and the believer is going to acknowledge it how will the righteous rejoice in the condemnation of the wicked they will rejoice says mcchain and edwards and all the men who have spoken on it they will rejoice because they will have the mind of god we can't understand it now it's too great for us to understand at the end of the book of revelation where it speaks about the people of god praising god for his judgments how can they do it well they can do it simply because they've got the same mind as god they're one with god and they can rejoice because they are one with god and then the third thing we can say about hell and that is it is a place for unrepentant sinners you know how people say as i said already you make your own hell well there's a sense in which that is true there's a verse in psalm 7 which says he has made a pit and dug it out and he has fallen into the ditch which he made and you see we make our own hell in a sense that we rebel against god we defy god sin is the defiance of god it as it will lift up the heel against god and we would kill god if we had the opportunity you see we choose to rebel against god we go our own way we do our own thing we are selfish and we are self-centered and god has made us as creatures with a dignity with a responsibility and we commit this offense against this god who is infinite and who is immeasurably holy and you see the measure of the sin is the measure of the greatness of god we sin against a great and a holy and a mighty god and therefore sin is a terrible thing and that sin cannot go unpunished but you see we have chosen to sin

[20 : 15] we have chosen to rebel we have chosen to go our own way we have chosen to live our own life and in the end we are going to get what we choose another writer modern writer john benton wrote a book called how can a god of love send people to hell and what he answers is this god does not send people to hell god sends sinners to hell god sends unrepentant sinners to hell that's the thing we've got to remember who will be in hell unrepentant sinners there'll be saved sinners in heaven in hell there'll be unrepentant sinners those who continued in their rebellion those who chose to go their own way those who defied god they chose that way and you see the verdict has gone that way our lord jesus christ put it beautifully when he said this is a verdict light has come into the world but men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil you see it's the way that the human heart is set upon evil set upon rebellion and when the light comes into the world they reject it when the savior comes to deliver they reject it dr packer says nobody stands under the wrath of god save those who have chosen to do so the essence of god's action in wrath is to give men what they choose in all its implications nothing more and equally nothing less you see it's a place for unrepentant sinners for unrepentant sinners for those who have not given up the rebellion for those who have defied god for those who have gone on in their own way these are the people who will be found in hell it's a place for unrepentant sinners and then finally it's a dreadful place it's a dreadful place it's unimaginably dreadful we cannot describe it we do not want to go into all the details today there are many things spoken about hell but there's two in particular i think that gives

us an indication of what it's like and that's the ones that Jesus kept repeating and that is where the fire never goes out and where the worm never dies just like the Gehenna in Jerusalem the fire never goes out our God is a consuming fire the fire of His wrath and that fire is not quenched it will go on to an ever ending eternity because the wrath of God is against the unrepentant sinner and so hell is a place where the fire never goes out but also where the worm does not die and what does that refer to well it refers to the conscience the conscience of the sinner will make the sinner acutely aware that he deliberately freely gladly chose the lifestyle that led him to hell that he is here because of his willfulness and obstinacy that's part of the suffering of hell that when the sinner arrives in hell

he'll recognize that his lifestyle brought him there and that will go on throughout eternity that is the worm that never dies the accusing conscience well if that's the doctrine of hell what should we think today about it well surely if you're a child of God if you're a Christian today the first thing you must think about is profound thankfulness profound thankfulness show gratitude in your life by your love to the person who has delivered you from this hell remember how Paul puts it in writing to the Thessalonians Jesus who has delivered us from the wrath to come how can we thank Him enough for something that we richly deserved and He has delivered us some that's what we must how we must react as the people of God to this doctrine the awfulness of it what we deserve and we've been delivered from it and then a second thing we must have as this profound concern for others remember how Jude speaks about snatching others from the fire you see we must be concerned for those who are around us think of the rich man in that passage we read how he thinks of his brothers who haven't yet left this world that they may not come into this place go and warn them go and tell them and that must be the attitude of us here upon earth that we must warn those who are our near and dear ones those in our family in our circle that there is such a place and that they must escape from the wrath to come and of course we must preach about it you see there's not enough preaching about hell and we think of a man like Robert Mary McChain and people think of him as the saint and a man who had a true love for God and for Christ and for sinners what happened when he came near the end of his life his short sojourn here upon earth well he began to preach more and more about hell in order to warn his people to escape from the wrath to come if you take up McChain's basket of fragments you will find the last four sermons in that book of sermons are all to do with hell future punishment eternal

God's rectitude in the punishment of sinners the eternal domination of the wicked a matter of praise for the redeemed and the mental agonies of hell and this is McChain a tender loving McChain the man who loved his people so much that he was concerned that they be delivered from this as their destiny and there are those today who would say that a sermon like Jonathan Edwards sinners in the hands of an angry God was the product of a sick mind but you see it's not the sick mind it's a sick mind of our society today a society that has rejected the authority of God a society that's putting more weight upon the opinion of man than the eternal truth of God you see it's time for us and John Blanchard dedicates his book to the next generation of preachers who are going to find it even more difficult than the present generation of preachers to hold on to the preaching of this doctrine because it's fast disappearing from the professing Christian church today to the detriment of our spiritual condition then what about the unbeliever well you know what this doctrine is saying to you and it is in the Bible for the simple reason that you might be delivered from this destiny you see people say we shouldn't disturb you people say we shouldn't awake people out of their slumber we shouldn't labor to make people alarmed but you see if there's a destiny awaiting you that's of such terrible such a terrible condition then it's our duty to do it it's out of love that we ought to do it and to say that this lies at the end of every sinful life that this lies before every unrepentant sinner so what's the great need today well surely the great need today is to become a repentant sinner because no repentant sinner will go to hell it's only unrepentant sinners who will go to hell and therefore if we're going to avoid hell there's one way open to us and that is to become repentant today to acknowledge that we've defied God to acknowledge that we've rebelled against God to acknowledge that we have pleased ourselves and we're going in our own way and to submit to that God to yield to Him and to acknowledge that He has the right to reign over us because if we don't do that in time then this is awaiting us in eternity it's the unrepentant sinner who goes to hell but you see there's a way back to God and there's a way to escape hell and that way is to become a repentant sinner to choose not to retreat from God but to choose to repent before God to come away from being self-absorbed and self-orientated to become centered in God and in Christ that's the change around that we need to make if we're going to be delivered from hell

and that's what we're called upon to do today in the light of what awaits the sinner the unrepentant sinner and you see as Jonathan Edwards says the longer sinners live the more wrath they accumulate you shouldn't go another day not another hour not another minute in that way of rebellion in that way of departure from God everything in the word of God everything in the teaching about hell is calling upon you with urgency to give up your rebellion today to listen to the overtures of the gospel to believe the light that has come into the world to receive the Lord Jesus Christ and to accept the offer of salvation and to repent so that you can be delivered even today some going to that place we've been describing and oh there are degrees of suffering in hell we can't go into these things today but you see there'll be degrees and the hottest hell will be for those who heard the gospel and rejected it

Bishop Ryle put it well when he said the saddest road to hell is that which runs under the pulpit past the Bible and through the midst of warnings and invitations yes you see you've been hearing these things from your youngest days you know them they are there in your mind but the thing is putting it into action believing it sufficiently to take action this day to turn from your sin and the course that you're on and to turn to God to face in the other direction to become a repentant sinner to become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and then you're on the road to heaven you've turned round and everyone needs to turn round because you see if you go in the way of nature then that's where you're going to land but if you turn round today and believe in Christ hear his pleading hear his crying hear his offer hear his invitation hear his warnings why would he have warned you so much in his word if he didn't love you if he wasn't concerned that you would be delivered from this end he has done it in love and we owe to him to hear his voice today and to turn and to become a repentant sinner and then we will be on the road to heaven may God bless to us our meditation let us pray our blessed and eternal God we pray it out solemnize us with a thought of these things they are too great for us but oh we pray that they might have an effect upon us upon our lives upon the way we live we cannot afford to go on living for self and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath may our feet be turned today to thee and to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ help us to give up our rebellion and our self pleasing may we change our lifestyle today into the way of pleasing thee and living for thee humble us we pray thee oh God and teach us these solemn things out of thy word that the reality of them may be with us in these days that they would not fade away from our minds that we might hear more and more and we might believe and that we might be affected by it oh grant thy help to us we pray thee for we ask it in Christ's name and for his sake amen