

1 Peter 4:17-18 – Part J

1Pe 4:17 (NKJV) **For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?** ¹⁸ Now *"If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"*

This morning we are going to look at what the Bible specifically teaches about hell as a place. This is not a comfortable subject for me to teach and certainly not a comfortable subject to listen to. Previously, I provided several descriptions of what hell is actually going to be like – and none of them are attributes that are easy for people to accept. We saw that it is a place of **punishment** and **destruction**. It is a place of **banishment** where an individual is forever living in the desolation and finality of their predicament. It is a place of indescribable **suffering**. It is a place of **understanding**. Men will know why they are there and that they had just casually ignored God as they pleased. It is a place **without hope**. Once a person arrives in hell, it offers no escape. There are no second chances, no more opportunities. The moment someone dies, their fate is sealed. It is irreversible, unchangeable, permanent, final. It is an **eternal** place - one that never ends, one that is “**everlasting**”.

Each New Testament author addresses the concept of future judgment in some form or another. Most of the New Testament information relative to this future judgment falls under the first three major categories that I just mentioned – **punishment, destruction, and banishment**. Punishment is referred to as judgment, suffering, and torment by fire. Destruction is often spoken of as “**perishing**”. Banishment is the idea that someone who suffers eternal punishment will forever be separated from the kingdom of God and forever excluded from His presence. It is the idea of being cut off from something and never able to get back. In the book of [Matthew](#), the doctrine of hell is a very prominent theme. John the Baptist warned people about it and in [Matthew 3:7-12](#) warned people “**to repent**”, to “**flee the wrath to come**”, that “**every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire**”, and that the wheat will be gathered into the barn, but “**the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire**”.

In [Matthew 5-7](#) we have the Sermon on the Mount which has some very strong teaching on both the reality and nature of hell. It stands out to me that this is the first recorded sermon that Jesus ever preached. In these chapters, Jesus talks about “**hell fire**” ([5:22](#)), about someone being “**cast into hell**” ([5:29-30](#)), that hell is a place of “**destruction**” ([7:13](#)), and that people will be “**thrown into the fire**” ([7:19](#)). In [Matthew 8:12](#) Jesus depicts hell as “**outer darkness**” where there will be “**weeping and gnashing of teeth**” - obviously a place of very intense suffering. Throughout Matthew, Jesus describes hell with terms such as “**the fire**”, the “**fiery furnace**”, a place of “**eternal fire**”, and “**everlasting fire**”. Jesus teaches about hell and final judgment in several of His parables. He says that it was “**prepared for the devil and his angels**” ([25:41](#)) and called a “**place of eternal punishment**” ([25:46](#)).

In Mark, there is only one prominent passage ([9:42-48](#)). Hell is a place where “**the fire never goes out**” ([9:43](#)) and where suffering never ends. The “**worm**” and “**the fire**” are never extinguished ([9:48](#)). Jesus stresses in this passage that hell is much worse than death or some kind of earthly suffering. In [Luke 13:1-5](#) hell is said to be a place for the unrepentant. It is a place where those that are there are seen as eternally perishing, but never dying. In [Luke 16:23-27](#) and the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Hades

is seen as a place of suffering, torment, agony, and fire and as a place where there is no escape and where there is a complete exclusion from heaven and anything that is godly.

In Paul's writings there is way too much for us to cover. Paul's most explicit teaching on future judgment is in [2 Thessalonians](#) where Paul portrays hell as God's retribution on sinners, where hell is punishment and condemnation for those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel. He describes it as a place of "eternal destruction". In Romans, Paul connects future punishment to God's wrath, and that the only way to escape this wrath is by being justified by faith in Christ. He refers to the future judgment as "death" and "destruction". He talks often about being eternally separated from the presence of God. [2 Peter](#) is filled with references to the future punishment of the wicked, that it is a place of the "blackest darkness" ([2:17](#)) reserved for the wicked forever. [Jude](#) has the same type language as well. [Revelation](#) is filled with references to this final judgment. I could go on and on and on, but time simply does not permit. Suffice it to say that every New Testament writer speaks of future judgment.

Probably the single most graphic picture of a place of judgment is seen in [Luke 16:19-30](#) and the story of the rich man and Lazarus. What we know about this particular place of suffering in this passage is that it is a temporary place – a place where those who are unsaved await The Great White Throne Judgment of God. At that final judgment, the individual will be brought before God, found not to have their name written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and there sentenced to an eternal death actually called the "Second Death". God's final judgment will be pronounced and an angel will come and cast the individual into the Lake of Fire. The horror of what that moment will be like is more than I can describe. [Revelation 20:15](#) says,

Rev 20:15 (NKJV) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

The word for "cast" is a very strong word that actually means to hurl with great force. [Revelation 20:15](#) will never be changed or rewritten. It will be the final judgment experience for the unsaved prior to being cast into the Lake of Fire. A person can live their life to the fullest, have everything that they ever wanted, be all that they ever wanted to be, and live anyway that they please. However, when they face God at this moment in time, they will be judged according to God's terms, and the individual will have no say or input whatsoever. God's judgment of that individual will be final and irrevocable.

The man in this story in [Luke 16](#) was fully conscious immediately after his earthly death. He could remember things that had happened while he was on the earth. He could talk and reason and think. All of his mental faculties were still very much intact. He could feel great pain, he experienced great suffering. He had incredible regrets about his life and what he did with it. Every perception that he had while on earth was fully functioning in this temporary place of judgment. He understood what mercy was and was crying out for it. [Luke 16:24](#) says,

Lk 16:24 (NKJV) Then 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.'

There is absolutely no way for us to capture the meaning of these words of "have mercy on me". It would be his constant, never-ending cry – something like this,

“Please, somebody somewhere show mercy on me in this place. Please, I beg you, I plead with you, I implore you please, please, please someone show me some mercy. Just give me one moment of relief from this great suffering and pain. Please, please, please show mercy on me.”

There is no way to describe the emotion of that simple request. What a change this is from the great feasts that he used to have every single day. He had servants waiting on him hand and foot, and he gave Lazarus some mere crumbs that fell from his table. In all likelihood, this man’s dogs ate the leftovers from his table and Lazarus was starving. Everything that he had, everything that he possessed, and everything that he thought was of value and important to him personally – it was all completely gone. Everything that he had previously seen as unimportant and meaningless to his life was now fully and completely appreciated. He had his reward – but it was only while he was on the earth. Now, everything was different. He had lived how he wanted to live, he did what he wanted to do, he had believed about God whatever he had wanted to believe – and now it was all much too late. **He had determined his own destiny by simply leaving God out of his life – and now his destiny could not be changed.**

I can imagine that God had spoken to him often and in many different ways. He was familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, but his heart had remained unbelieving. Because he had wanted to live as he chose to live, his heart had remained an unbelieving heart and totally unreceptive to the truth and reality of God’s Word. My understanding of this passage is that this man knew why he was there in Hades. There was never any argument from him, no accusations of God that God had made a mistake. He complained about the pain, but not why he was there. He fully knew that he had ignored God in his life and that now he was suffering the consequences of that choice, and the worst of all things is that this man was in torment. [Luke 16:23](#) states it this way,

Lk 16:23 (NKJV) And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

In v24 he said to Abraham – “**for I am tormented in this flame**”. The word “**torment**” means to be in pain and agony as if you were being tortured. It is the New Testament Greek word that reflects suffering at its greatest level, and in this case with no relief or even any hope of relief. This is what the Bible describes in [Matthew 3:12](#) as a place of “**unquenchable fire**”. It means that the fire is never quenched, never satisfied, never reduced, never put out, never extinguished. It is always burning because it is an unquenchable fire. It burns and burns and burns and it never ceases to burn, never slows down, never simmers, never cools off some – never. It is forever unquenchable. [Mark 9:43](#) says,

Mk 9:43 (NKJV) If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched--

[Luke 3:17](#) says,

Lk 3:17 (NKJV) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

[Revelation 19:20](#), speaking of the Lake of Fire, says,

Rev 19:20 (NKJV) Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

[Revelation 21:8](#) further describes this place,

Rev 21:8 (NKJV) **But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**"

[Matthew 8:12](#) calls it a place of “**outer darkness**”. It is a place of the greatest physical pain and spiritual darkness imaginable – a place of indescribable hopelessness and obscurity. It is a place absolutely and totally without any hope – a place of the most extreme and eternal outer darkness. There is no one to help. Everyone is in the same condition. There is no one to comfort, no one to help improve or make things better. It is a place totally without hope of any kind or any measure. [Matthew 13:42 and 50](#) say that it will be a place of “**wailing and gnashing of teeth**”. It is a place of weeping and wailing, of sobbing, crying, howling, and lamenting with inexpressible grief. People will be screaming with piercing, ear-splitting cries forever with never any relief. They will be gnashing and grinding their teeth because of the excruciating and unbearable pain. [Matthew 25:46](#) calls it a place of “**everlasting punishment**”.

Mt 25:46 (NKJV) **And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.**"

As we saw last week, the word “**everlasting**” is the strongest known expression in the Bible for absolute endlessness, time without any end, eternity forever and forever. There are no interruptions, no pauses, no intermissions. The punishment, the destruction, the damage, and the utter ruin are from everlasting to everlasting. They never cease, they never end.

[Mark 9:44, 46, and 48](#) say that “**Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.**” The word “**worm**” signifies a maggot – a worm that preys on dead bodies only. A maggot eats and eats and eats until all of the body is gone. The flesh is eaten, the bowels are eaten, the organs are eaten, the eyes are eaten. All flesh is devoured, but in hell, the worm never dies! The question is whether this is really a worm or not. The key to understanding this is found in [Mark 9:43-49](#) where metaphorically the worm represents the fact that the lusts and desires that a lost person has had on earth will burn perpetually and never subside. It would be like always being incredibly thirsty, but having no water. Those sinful lusts and sinful cravings, those sinful desires – they will not die. In [Mark 9](#) the passages are talking about your hand causing you to sin, your eye causing you to sin, and your foot causing you to sin. It is referring to people who simply cannot stay away from things that they know to be sin, people who lust for sin and crave sin and the satisfaction that sin brings to them.

The picture is that in hell there will be increased desires, increased lusts and cravings – but no relief, no satisfaction. I.e., the alcoholic will crave his drink more than ever before, the drug addict his drugs, the immoral their sex and pleasure – but they will NEVER be satisfied ever again. In hell, the longings for those sinful things that we craved while on earth will be much stronger than while on the earth, but they will not be satisfied. People will only have the strongest of cravings, but never any relief or satisfaction. The wanting of these things will be unbearable, agonizing, excruciating, painful, awful. Whatever sin, whatever sinful desires a lost person now craves will be immensely intensified and magnified over and over and over, but with no fulfillment. Hell is a place of no hope, no fulfillment, no satisfaction, no

pleasure, no happiness, no gratification of any kind. Nothing will ever satisfy – nothing, and no lust will ever die – never.

For me, the worst of all attributes of hell is the fact that once there, it is irrevocably fixed. It is permanent, eternal. There is no possibility of escape, no leaving, no getting out. You cannot just pick up your suitcase, call a hell taxi, and leave just because you do not like the accommodations. I remember when Brenda and I first moved to the seminary in Texas. We got there late one evening and we were fully prepared to spend our first night in our newly rented house. However, it was not in a place that we liked and not the kind of place where we wanted to live. So, we just called up the rental agency the next morning, cancelled our stay, lost our deposit, and went apartment hunting. No big deal – right? But not in this place. It is a place of loneliness, no friendships, no relationships, no communications – just despair and hopelessness and anguish and misery and depression and pain and suffering as cannot be imagined. Abraham told the rich man – **“There is a great gulf between us and you, and it is fixed.”** Right now your future is somewhat under your control. You can control where you go, who your friends are, where you live, where you work, and what you do with your life. For the most part, it is under your control, but not there – not at all. There a person controls nothing whatsoever. He can make no decisions.

We see in this passage in [Luke 16](#) a man who finally understood that his highest priority in life should have been his relationship with God, but now it was eternally too late. Can you just imagine what it will be like for someone the very moment that they die and find themselves in hell? Personally, I cannot. Can you just imagine what will race through their mind and the incredible and fearful apprehensions that they will have of all that awaits them without any relief?

The Bible is very clear that **“today is the day of salvation”**. The foolish man says, *“I will wait and do it tomorrow or next week or just later – but not now.”* I have no doubt in my mind that millions and millions of people have intended at some time to come to Christ, but they kept saying *“Not today, maybe tomorrow”*, and tomorrow never came. And they passed into eternity without Christ who was their only hope – and now they are hopelessly and irrevocably lost without Christ and will remain in hell for eternity. **YOU HAVE TO DECIDE TO FOLLOW CHRIST THIS SIDE OF ETERNITY.**

People are living under the false illusion that they can simply come to Christ whenever they please, but that is a very frightening misunderstanding. A person has to come when God draws, or they can never come. The Bible says in [John 6:44](#),

Jn 6:44 (NKJV) No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

When the Spirit of God is moving on a person’s heart, it is a solemn moment that may never happen again, so the best thing that they can do is to respond to the Spirit of God and be saved. Unfortunately, I have known many people that seemed to pass by their last opportunity. So often when I am in one of the airports, there is a last call that goes out. *“Passenger Jones, this is your last and final call for Flight 1301 to New York.”* It was the last call, all aboard – and the doors were shut and they could not enter. I thank God that He is gracious, longsuffering, and patient with us all, but the Bible is clear that there are limits to that patience. Our responsibility is to simply respond when He calls.