

Robert Murray M'Cheyne:

It is very interesting to notice who they are in the Bible that speak about hell. Now, some think that speaking about hell is not preaching the gospel; and others think that simple men have no right to speak of it. Now, to them who think it is not gospel preaching, I say it is the truth — the Word of God; and to them who say it is not right to speak about it, I would have them to notice who it is that speaks most about it. Let us consider:

(1) The persons in the Bible that speak most about hell.

(2) Why these persons speak so plainly of hell.

(3) The names given to hell.

(4) The hell spoken of in the Bible is not annihilation.

1. Let us consider the persons in the Bible that speak about hell.

And the first I would mention is David. He was a man after God's own heart, yet he speaks of hell. He who wrote many of the Psalms, the sweet Psalmist of Israel; he who was filled with love to men, and love to God; yet hear what he says about hell: 'The sorrows of hell compassed me about' (Psalm 18:5). Again, 'The sorrows of death compassed me about, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me' (Psalm 116:3). And hear of his deliverance: 'And thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell' (Psalm 86:13). And he tells us also of the fate of the ungodly that will not accept Christ: 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God' (Psalm 9:17).

'Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup' (Psalm 11:6). 'Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell' (Psalm 55:15). Now, whatever you think of the propriety of speaking about hell, David did not think it wrong, for he sang about it.

The next person I would mention is Paul. He was filled with the love of Christ, and he had great love to sinners. Surely that love wherewith God loved Jesus was in Paul. He loved his enemies: notice when he stood before Agrippa, what his feelings were: 'I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds' (Acts 26:29). He wished them to have the same love, the same joy, the same peace, the same hope of glory. Now, Paul never mentions the word, hell. It seemed as if it were too awful a word for him to mention; yet hear what he says:

What if God willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Romans 9:22).

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction (Philippians 3:18).

For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Do not these show you, brethren, that they that have most love in their hearts speak most of hell?

The next person I would speak of is John, the beloved disciple. He had leaned on Jesus' bosom at the last supper, and drawn love out of his bosom. His character was love. You will notice how affectionately his epistles are written. He addresses them 'beloved', 'little children'. Yet he speaks of hell; he calls it, seven times over, 'the bottomless pit' - the pit where sinners shall sink through all eternity. He calls it the great wine press of the wrath of God (Revelation 14:19). But John has got another name for hell, 'the lake of fire' (Revelation 20:14). It had often been called 'hell', but it was left for John, the beloved disciple, to call it 'the lake of fire'.

The next person I shall mention is the Lord Jesus himself. Although he came from God, and 'God is love', though he came to pluck brands from the burning, yet he speaks of hell. Though his mouth was most sweet, and his lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh — though 'the Lord God had given him the tongue of the

learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary' (Isaiah 50:4); though he spake as never man spake, yet he spoke of hell. Hear what he says, 'Whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire' (Matthew 5:22). But I think the most awful words that ever came from his lips were, 'Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell' (Matthew 23:33). Again, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire' (Matthew 25:41). And he speaks of it in some of his parables too: 'The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 13:49, 50). And he repeats the words of our text three times over. And could anything be plainer than the words in Mark: 'He that believeth not shall be damned' (Mark 16:16).

2. Let us consider, dear brethren, why these persons speak so plainly of hell.

(1) Because it is all true. Christ is the faithful and true witness. Once he said, 'If it were not so, I would have told you' (John 14:2). Once he said to Pilate: 'Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice' (John 18:37). He himself is 'the truth' (John 14:6). 'It is impossible for God to lie' (Hebrews 6:18). When Jesus appeared on earth, he came with love, he came to tell sinners of hell, and of a Saviour to save from hell; and how could he keep it back? He saw into hell, and how could he not speak of it? He was the faithful witness; so it was with David, Paul, and John. Paul said, he had kept nothing back - he had not shunned to declare all the counsel of God. Now, how could he have said that, if he had not spoken of hell as he did? So must ministers. Suppose I never were to mention hell again, would that make it less tolerable? Oh, it is true! it is all true! and we cannot but mention it.

(2) Because they were full of love to sinners. They are the best friends that do not flatter us. You know, beloved, Christ's bosom flowed with love. Out of love he had not where to lay his head; out of love he came to die; out of love, with tears he said: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' (Matthew 23:37). And with the same breath he said, 'How can ye escape the damnation of hell?' (Matthew 23:33). So it was with Paul: 'Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men' (2 Corinthians 5:11). Paul would weep over sinners; he says, 'For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ' (Philippians 3:18). His tears fell on the parchment as he wrote. Oh! if we had more love to you, we would tell you more about hell. They do not love you that do not warn you, poor hell-deserving sinners. Oh remember that love warns!

(3) A third reason why they spoke so plainly of hell, was that they might be free from blood-guiltiness. Jesus did not want your blood laid at his door, therefore he spoke of the 'furnace of fire' (Matthew 13:42), and of 'the worm that dieth not' (Mark 9:44). Ah! he says, 'How often would I have gathered you, but you would not! 'God would not have blood-guiltiness laid to his charge. He says, 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?' (Ezekiel 33:11). So it was with David: 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God!' (Psalm 51:14). It was fear of blood-guiltiness that made David speak so plainly. So it was with Paul; he says, 'I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men' (Acts 20:26). So it is with ministers; we must acquit our conscience, and if you go to the judgment-seat unpardoned, unsaved, your blood will be upon your own heads. As I was walking in the fields yesterday, that thought came with overwhelming power into my mind, that every one I preached to would soon stand before the judgment-seat, and be sent either to heaven or hell. Therefore, brethren, I must warn you, I must tell you about hell.

3. Let us consider the names given to hell in the Word of God.

And the first is fire; it is taken from an earthly element suited to our capacity, as Christ takes to himself a name to suit us, as a shepherd, a door, a way, a rock, an apple tree, the rose of Sharon, etc. So when God speaks of heaven, he calls it Paradise, a city which hath foundations, golden streets, pearly gates. Now, one of these names will not describe it, nor any of them; for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things God hath prepared for them that love him. So when God speaks of hell he calls it 'a furnace of fire', 'a bottomless pit', 'perdition'. Now, one of these names will not do, but take them altogether, and you may conceive something of what hell is.

The first name given to hell is fire. On the southern side of Mount Zion there is a valley covered over with vines - it is the valley of Hinnom, where Manasseh made his children pass through the fire of Moloch. Now, this is the name by which Christ calls it, 'a valley of fire'. And, again, he calls it 'a furnace of fire', the walls will be fire; it will be fire above and below, and fire all round about. Again it is called a 'lake of fire'. The idea is something like a furnace of fire; it will be enclosed with burning mountains of brass. There will be no breath of wind to pass over their faces; it will be flames of fire for ever and ever. It is called 'devouring fire'. 'Who among us shall dwell

with the devouring fire' (Isaiah 33:14). Compare this with Hebrews 12:29: 'For our God is a consuming fire. 'It is the nature of fire to consume, so it is with the fire of hell; but it will never annihilate the damned. Oh it is a fire that will never be quenched; even the burning volcanoes will cease to burn, and that sun now sweetly shining upon us will cease to burn, and that very fire that is to burn up the elements will be quenched; but this fire is never quenched.

Another name given to hell in the Word of God is the prison. So we learn that the multitudes that perished at the flood are shut up in this prison. Ah! sinner, if you are shut up in it you will never come out till you have paid the uttermost farthing, and that you will never do - the bars are the justice and holiness of God.

Another name given to hell is the pit. Ah! it is the bottomless pit, where you will sink for ever and ever; it will be a continual sinking deeper and deeper every day. Ah! sinner, is it not time to begin and cry, 'Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink?' 'Let not the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me?' (Psalm 69:14, 15).

Another name given to hell in the Word of God is a falling into the hands of God. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10:31). 'Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?' (Ezekiel 22:14). God will be your irreconcilable enemy, sinner. God, who takes no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but rather that he should live - that God, I say, will be your eternal enemy if you die Christless - if you will not believe - if you will not be saved. Oh what will you do, poor sinner, when his wrath is kindled?

Another name given to hell is the second death. 'And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death' (Revelation 20:14). This is the meaning of God's threatening to Adam: 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die' (Genesis 2:17). Perhaps you may have stood by the bed of a dying sinner, and you may have seen how he gasps for breath, his teeth clenched, his hands clasp the bedclothes, his breath turns fainter and fainter till it dies away. Ah! this is the first death: and is like the second death. Ah! the man would try to resist, but he finds it is in vain; he finds eternal hell begun, and God dealing with him, and he sinks into gloom and dark despair. This is the death sinners are to die, and yet never die.

Another name given to hell is outer darkness. Christ calls it outer darkness. 'But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness' (Matthew 8:12). 'Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness' (Matthew 22:13). You will see it also in 2 Peter 1A: 'God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness.' Again, Jude, 13th verse: 'Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.' O my dear friends! this is hell - 'the blackness of darkness', 'outer darkness', 'chains of darkness'.

4. I come now to show you that the hell spoken of in the Bible is not annihilation.

Some people think that though they are not saved, they will be annihilated. Oh it is a lie; I will show you that:

(1) First of all, by the cries of the damned. 'And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me - for I am tormented in this flame' (Luke 16:24). And, again, look at the words in Matthew 22:13: 'There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Oh! these plainly show us that it is no annihilation. In hell the multitudes will be bundled up together in the great harvest day. 'Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them' (Matthew 13:30). There will be bundles of sweaters, bundles of Sabbath-breakers, bundles of drunkards, bundles of hypocrites, bundles of parents and children; they will be witnesses of each other's damnation.

(2) Hell will be no annihilation, when we consider that there will be different degrees of suffering. 'It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you' (Matthew 11:22). And it is said, the Pharisees would receive 'greater damnation' (Matthew 23:14). Every man is to be judged according to his works.

(3) It will be no annihilation, if we consider the fate of Judas. 'Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed; it had been good for that man if he had not been born' (Matthew 26:24). Judas is wishing he had never been born. I have no doubt he wishes to die, but will never be able to die. So it will be with all here who shall go to hell - all unworthy communicants. Ah! I tell you, if you die Christless, you will wish you had never been born, you will wish you had never seen the green earth or the blue sky. Ah! you will wish you had never been. O dear brethren! better never to have had a being, than to be in hell. Ah! there are many in hell today who are cursing the day they were born.

(4) It will be no annihilation, for it is an eternal hell. Some weak and foolish men think and please their fancy with the thought that hell will bum out, and they will come to some place where they may bathe their weary soul. Ah! you try to make an agreement with hell; but if ever there come a time when the flame that torments your soul and body shall bum out, then Jesus will be a liar, for three times he repeats the words of our text, and says, it shall never be quenched.

It is eternal, for it is spoken of in words never used but to denote eternity. 'And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever' (Revelation 14:11). Ah! you see it is for ever and ever. Again, 'And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever' (Revelation 20: 10). Compare this with Revelation 4:9, 10: 'And when those beasts gave glory and honour, and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever...' So you see the torments of the damned are spoken of with the eternity of God. Ah! if ever there come a time when God ceases to live, then they may cease to suffer.

Again, the eternity of hell and the eternity of heaven are spoken of in the very same language. 'And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever' (Revelation 22:5). The same words that are used for the eternity of the saints, are used for the eternity of the damned. 'They shall be tormented for ever and ever.' O sinner! if ever there come a time when the saints shall fall from their thrones, or the immortal crowns fall from their heads, then you may think to leave hell; but that will never, never be - it is an eternal hell, 'for ever and ever'; eternity will be never-ending wrath; always wrath to come. Oh that you were wise, that ye understood this, that ye would consider your latter end.

I shall now apply this: First of all, to you that are believers. Dear brothers and sisters, all this hell that I have described is what you and I deserved. We were over the lake of fire, but it was from this that Jesus saved us; he was in the prison for you and me - he drank every drop out of the cup of God's wrath for you and me; he died the just for the unjust. O beloved, how should we prize, love, and adore Jesus for what he hath done for us. Oh we will never, never know, till safe across Jordan, how our hell has been suffered for us - how our iniquity has been pardoned! But, O beloved! think of hell. Have you no unconverted friends, who are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath? Oh, have you no prayerless parent, no sister, nor brother? Oh, have you no compassion for them - no mercy's voice to warn them?

Secondly, to you that are seeking Christ anxiously. I know some of you are. Dear soul, what a mercy in God to awaken you to flee from this fiery furnace! Oh, what a mercy to be awakened to flee, to be in earnest! Ah! your unconverted friends will tell you there is no need of being so anxious. Oh, is there no need to flee from the wrath to come? Oh learn, dear soul, how precious Christ is; he is a hiding place from the wind, and covert from the tempest. All the things in the world are like speck of dust, all is lost for Jesus. He is all in all. He is free to you, beloved; take no rest till you can say, 'He is mine.'

Thirdly, to you that are unconverted. Ah! you are fools and you think you are wise; but oh I beseech you, search the Scriptures. Do not take my word about an eternal hell; it is the testimony of God, when he spoke about it. Oh if it be true - if there be a furnace of fire, if there be a second death, if it is not annihilation, but an eternal hell - oh is it reasonable to go on living in sin? You think you are wise, that you are no fanatic, that you are no hypocrite; but you will soon gnash your teeth in pain; it will come; and the bitterest thought will be, that you heard about hell, and yet rejected Christ. O then, turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? Amen.

Sabbath, 15th July, 1842.