**Curious Faith – 060224 A voice from Hell**

- There is an unwritten rule in churches for Pastors. The unwritten rule is if you want people happy and you want them coming back, don't talk about politics, don't talk about money and don't talk about Hell. We do talk about these things at Joy Church though – but the good news is we're going to save politics and money for Mike to preach another day, the bad news is we're actually going to talk about Hell today.

Before we go there though, I want to tell you about the handout you received this morning. We are testing this out – You have a 3 day devotional to go along with todays sermon and also a fill in the blank sheet that you can use to follow along. Some people enjoy these. We gave you all one today, but in the future you can pick it up each week if you would like and it would be helpful for you to have extra thinking material during the week.

In my house growing up when I was a young girl, I was not allowed to say Hell as a kid. And I carried this forward and didn’t allow my kids to say it. Any of you grow up like that? So what we would say when I was a kid is H-E-double-hockey-sticks. Does anybody remember that? And we thought we were getting away with saying something naughty.

Or how about this, do any of you remember going to class and getting your calculator and typing seven, seven, three, four on the calculator and turning it upside down? If you're in my age range, you remember, raise your hand. Yep. I think there was actually a couple of other things that you could type in upside down, but we're not talking about that today.

The word Hell gets thrown around a lot today. One of the worst things

somebody can say is? Go to Hell. STORY Definitely not my favorite story to tell Oh and I am embarrassed to say I have done it. Not just to anyone, to my Pastor husband….ouch…….Yup….

Some people say the world is going to Hell in a hand basket. If someone cuts you off in traffic, you, not me, but some of you might give them what someone calls the WTHell hands. Some one gave me them the other day – I might have cut them off – I didn’t think so but they seemed upset.

And in some places, some people say, oh, Hell no. Oh, Hell no. It’s easy to laugh about this subject and talk about it casually but it is a very heavy, very complicated, and very scary idea.

So my goal today is to have us all get an understanding of Hell through scripture. And the big question that we're going to try and answer today in this series Curious Faith where we are talking about some of the hard questions that we might all have is why would a loving God send people to Hell? Think about it, we say God is love all the time - we talked about it last week and then we tell people and if don't know Jesus you will burn forever in hell! And Hell is where the worm never dies and there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

That doesn't sound very loving. It doesn’t sound like something that a loving God would do. If Hell is really a real place, and if I were the devil

 if Hell is a real place and if you were the devil, what would our strategy be? If I were the devil, I would try to convince you that Hell is not a real place or at least to try to convince you not to take it seriously because if I could convince you that Hell isn't real or get you not to take it seriously, then what would you do?

If Hell isn’t real, then you could live however you want. You could justify your sin. You could reject Jesus with no fear of God. If we don’t believe Hell is real, we will live a very self-centered life, craving comfort, rejecting the idea of sacrifice, avoid anything that hurts, and we will love this world that does not last.

Honestly that is what so many people do today. But Hell is actually a subject

that is found throughout the Bible. And interestingly,

Jesus talked about Hell more than anybody else, which is confusing because Jesus was the most loving, and yet he talked about Hell.

When we look at who Jesus was talking to and what he was talking about when he was talking about Hell, we will notice that every time he talked about it, he wasn't trying to scare unbelievers away from Hell. He was actually using Hell to motivate those who were spiritual to act more spiritual. It wasn't a fear tactic to scare people to Heaven, but it

was a motivating factor for other people because Jesus didn't want people to go to Hell.

One of the times he talked about it in Matthew 5:29, he gave this crazy kind of

metaphor to keep people from there. He said “if your right eye causes you to

stumble, gouge it out and throw it away.” He was using Lust as an example if we read the 2 verses prior - So in other words, like if you're lusting all the

time, or coveting, wanting what someone else has, just rip out your eye and when you walk into your lifegroup Everyone will have an

eye patch on. We would look at each other and say You too? Me too – I struggle.

What Jesus is saying is if there is something that is going to keep you from serving God, get rid of that, whatever it is, take it out and throw it away because it's better for you to lose one

part of your body then your whole body to be thrown into Hell.

Jesus did not want anyone going to Hell. In my research, I discovered the word that Jesus used as Hell in Matthew, chapter 5, is translated from the Greek word Gehenna. And Gehenna refers to an actual place in the southwest corner of the city of Jerusalem, known as the Valley of Ben Hinnom. Very interesting valley. Here is a little bit of history of it. Centuries before Jesus, the evil King Ahaz worshiped the false god Moloch, who was

known for one of the most horrific acts possible. He was known for child sacrifices.

You can read about this in Jeremiah 7:31 that says “And they have built the high places of

Topheth, this is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, this is Gehenna, to burn their sons and daughters in the fire.”

Today, you won't even find homes or businesses in the valley because this place was considered cursed and cut off from God. And so nobody would go there because of its horrible history. And because of the history, this place actually became a garbage dump where they would throw their dead animals and human waste

and their sewage and the bodies of executed criminals. And you can imagine it had a horrendous smell and a smoldering fire that never, ever burned out. This valley was often referred to as the land of no more. It was the land of no more beauty, no more laughter, no more peace, no more friendship, no more joy. No more hope. It was the land of no more chances.

 So when Jesus talked about Hell, it wasn't like a dungeon in the basement of Heaven where the bad people go. No, it was actually much worse than that. It was the place cut off from everything good. It was cut off from God's presence. In its essence, What is Heaven? Heaven is the presence of God. What is Hell? Essentially, Hell is the absence of the presence of God. It's a horrible place without anything good. It's without the presence of God. The land of no more.

So back to our question, Why Hell? Why would God, a loving God – a God who is love, create, and allow a place called Hell.

We are going to look at two reasons directly from scripture. The first reason you'll probably be okay with. Hell exists for God to righteously punish Satan. It's the place to punish the prince of darkness. The problem is, I think you'd probably admit and agree that in our culture today, a lot of times when people think about Satan, what they do is they visualize this harmless dude in a red suit with a pitchfork, you know, kind of like this cartoon character, that's just like, gets on your shoulder and whispers things in your ear.

We have to understand that Satan is the embodiment of everything evil. Behind every addiction, there is Satan. Behind every abuse, there's Satan. Behind every fear. He gives a spirit of fear, pain and shame. He's called the destroyer, the deceiver, the dark angel, the accuser, the tempter, the wicked one, the thief, the father of lies. He came with a mission to steal, kill, and destroy. He wants to steal your joy. Linda’s testimony last week – the devil was stealing her Joy. He wants to kill your faith. He wants to destroy your health. He wants to ruin your finances. He wants to obliterate your marriage. He wants to take your kids from you and put them on a path of destruction.

He is the father of lies and Hell is a place for God to righteously punish the embodiment of all evil. Revelation 20:10, “and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” John shows us this and the devil, the prince of darkness, the dark angel, the accuser who deceived them was thrown into the place of punishment, was thrown intothe lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. And they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever. That sounds fair, right? When you're the embodiment of all evil, I think you would say that should be punished.

Now, the next verse that I'm going to read to you feels challenging, especially in our culture today, because, let's be honest, the Bible talks about something called sin and sin in its essence, is missing the mark. It means missing the mark. It means doing something that is not God's will. It's not God's best, it's not God's plan. It's wrong in the eyes of God and it's sin. Our culture doesn't like to use that word today. In fact, when it comes to sin, if we're going to even acknowledge that sin exists, people tend to prefer a God that just looks the other way. A God that gives you like a little wink, wink. It's no big deal. As long as you're not hurting anybody, don't let me tell you what's right or wrong. You do you, You do you. But the truth of the matter is scripture says there is a standard. The standard is holiness. And when we don't hit that standard, we sin. And here's what we have to understand. It is impossible for God to be holy without also being just. Wickedness and evil must be punished.

And you feel this way when someone does something. You say

that should be punished. So the first reason Hell exists is it exists for God to righteously punish Satan. The second reason that Hell exists, and this one is difficult for us, but Hell exists for God to righteously punish evil. And that would be for those of us who have sinned and who are without Christ, for those who sinned without Christ. And Paul tells us this very, very clearly, but there is good news in the gospel. Paul tells us that God will punish

those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and here it is, they'll be shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His mind. 2 Thess 1:9 Hell is the absence of anything good, it's the absence of God. And they will be punished by being shut out from the presence of the Lord. That is harsh. It's painful. It's not fun. I don't like to talk about it. It gives me no joy to talk about it, but if we don't accept the reality of Hell, we'll never appreciate the depth of God's goodness and His grace.

He's so good. He's so good.

I'll tell you a little story that Jesus told. I call it a Voice from Hell. Sorry, not a good story. Luke's, chapter 16 and we'll start in verse 19. It's a very interesting story. And “Jesus said there was a rich man. He was dressed in purple and fine linen and he lived in luxury every day. Let's stop for a moment. Lets acknowledge this guy was like, massive rich. We know he's

massively rich because he was wearing purple and dressed in linen. In order to wear purple, he probably was some form of royalty because this dye was so expensive that only the richest of the rich would have it. He was wearing linen. One commentary said a nice piece of linen could be sold for enough wages to pay for someone's food for a year. That's how rich this guy was. He was dressing in royalty and had massive wealth. Verse 20 says at the gate of this rich guy was a beggar, a poor guy named Lazarus, not the same

one that Jesus raised from the dead, a different Lazarus. But this guy was in bad shape. This poor beggar was covered with sores and he was hungry. He's longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked at his sores. This guy's outside, like, gimme anything. Well, sometimes what rich people would do is they would wash their hands with bread and they would take the crumbs of the bread and they'd throw it out to the dog. He's like, give me the crumbs you throw to the dogs. That's how

hungry I am.

Verse 22. The time came when this poor beggar died and the angels

carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died but he wasn't by Abraham side. Scripture says that he was actually in a place called Hades. Hades is known as the place of the dead or the place of punishment. So you've got the poor guy at Abraham's side and you've got the rich guy in a place called Hades. And in Hades, where the rich man was in torment, he was in agony. He was being punished. He looked up and he saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. And so He called out. Father Abraham, have pity on me, please, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in

water to cool my tongue, because I'm in agony because of this fire. This rich guy, he's hurting, he's crying out. He's in agony. Please, somebody just give me some type of relief from this suffering.

Now, the next part is really, really emotional. The next verse,

the rich guy says, I beg you, Father, please, send Lazarus, send that beggar, send him back and tell my family, go to my family for I have five brothers and let him warn them so they also will not come to this place of torment. Would you please go tell everyone that doesn't know they don't want to come where I am.

 This was a story that Jesus told and I believe there are at least four lessons from the other side. The first lesson is this, number one. The rich man was fully conscious and aware. Notice this, he had his memory, he was hurting and he was full of regrets. He was conscious and he was aware.

The second truth is the rich man's eternity was irrevocably fixed. He couldn't change it. It was too late. We could say it was the land of no more chances.

The third truth is this. The rich man knew that his suffering was just. He knew it was fair. How do we know? He complained about the pain, but he never complained about the injustice. He said, this is horrible. Please, please help me. But he didn't say this is wrong. He never said it was unfair. And then, this rich guy in the middle of agony, middle of suffering, he knew that

his brothers would be there too, unless they made a different choice.

So the fourth thing we see is this, the rich man begged and pleaded for someone to help his brothers know Jesus.

Somebody go tell them. Tell them about Jesus 'grace and His forgiveness and His goodness, and His mercy because Jesus doesn't want anyone to suffer like this.

So, if I were the deceiver, the destroyer, the prince of darkness, the father of lies, what I would try to do is I would try to convince you that Hell is either not real or it's not that big of a deal. I would try to convince you not to take it seriously, because if I could, then you would live however you want. You'd very easily justify your sinfulness. You would reject Jesus, not taking him seriously, living with no fear of God. Living a ridiculously self-centered

life, craving comfort, rejecting sacrifice, avoiding persecution, and loving this

world. Like it's all that there is. Just like so many people today.

And so, when Jesus talked about Hell it wasn't to scare bad people into Heaven. He actually used it to motivate those who were believers to act like they were believers. A lot of people would say, well, it's still not fair that good people go to Hell. It's still not fair that good people would suffer. And just like we talked about last week, we need to talk about it again because we need to understand it. That we, in our purest essence, are not good. We've all messed up. We've all sinned, every single one of us. Scripture says, Romans 3:23, for all of us, that includes you, includes me. Includes me, all of us have fallen short. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Jesus, when he was talking about lust, he said, if you've ever looked lustfully, you've actually committed adultery in your heart. So essentially, if you've lied and if you've stolen and if you've lusted, if you have gossiped ….all of us

We're not good, but God is good. He is holy and He is just, and because He is just, He must punish sin. Let me say it again. He is holy and He is just, and because He is just, He must punish sin. But He's not just just, He's also love. That's what He is. It's not just what He does. It's His character. It's what He is.

And scripture shows us this in Romans 5:8 and 9, but God showed us His great love. He showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. While we were lying and stealing and lusting, Christ came to die for us. And since we've been made right with God in His sight, by the blood of Christ, notice not by our own religious works, not by our own righteousness, but by the grace of Jesus and through His blood, since we've been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation.

There is now, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ, Jesus. Romans 8:1 Because of the death of Jesus, He paid the price for our sins, satisfying God's justice. And at the same time, displaying His amazing grace and unstoppable, unquenchable love. That's who Jesus is. He doesn't want anyone to go to Hell. He doesn't want anyone to perish. He came for the sinners, not for the righteous ones. He came for the sick, not for the healthy. He came for those who were hurting and broken. And those who fell far from God and those who fell short, and those who lied and those who lusted and those who cheated and those who stole and those who envy and those who are dead in their sins, that's who He came for. That's the grace of Jesus.

And 2 Peter 3:9 shows us the heart of God. Scripture says “the Lord is not

slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness.” Instead, He is

patient with you. He's been working on you. He's been waiting on you. He's been loving you. He's been reaching out for you. He's been sending people your way. He's been drawing you by His spirit and by His grace and by His goodness. Oh, He's patient with us! Why is He patient? Because our God is not wanting anyone to perish. He is patient not wanting anyone to perish, but wanting everyone to come to repentance. That's why a loving God doesn't send us to Hell. He sent Jesus to save us from Hell. It's very, very

clear. The devil came with a mission to steal, to kill and to destroy. But Jesus, the son of God, the lamb, the prince of peace, the lion of Judah, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the devil came to steal, kill and destroy. But Jesus said, I have come that you may have life and life more abundantly.

Worship Team

When you have Jesus, there are side effects. There are side effects of love and joy and peace and the presence of a good God. Jesus came that you would have life. That's why he came. And that's why, with everything in us, we want you to know Him. Want you to know him.

I didn't, for so long. I knew some things about God. I tried to be good enough for Him. You ever like, try to be good and then you realize you suck? The harder I tried, the worse I got. And

I couldn't be good enough. And that's why I want you to know just how good He is. That even though we've been wrong and sinful, He still loves you. Just like you are. That's how much he loves you. And he didn't come just to keep you out of Hell. But He came to give you life. Eternal life. The goodness and the grace of God. That's how good He is.

And God wants you to experience that, to not worry about your eternity, not even to struggle and worry in this life. To come to a place of full surrender and full submission, trusting that Jesus was enough, that His presence sustains you, that His grace carries you, that when you're hurting, he can give you a peace from Heaven that you cannot even explain. And even when you fall back into the same old sin, His grace covers your sin because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And so when you start to take eternity seriously, the presence of God in Heaven or the absence of God in Hell, it changes the way you live today because you don't just live for today. But you live to glorify God forever. The devil wants to take from you, steal from you, kill you and destroy you. But Jesus came with something better. He came to give you the presence of God. He came to give you life.

Pray

Father, today we ask that the life of Jesus would spread across hearts, that we would experience your goodness today here in the room and

and those of you that are watching online, I am guessing that many

of you are a lot like me, that the weight of the present moments, the problems that are before me, the challenges with people that I'm dealing with, all that I have to do, it often robs me of the reality of eternity. I typically don't think a lot about what's eternal. But when I do think about what's eternal, it changes how I live today. If you find yourself being consumed by what's in front of you, but forgetting what lasts forever, and you want the presence of God to help you live today in a way that would impact eternity, I want us to think about it. We're going to ask that God would put eternity in our hearts, bring eternity to our minds. When He does that, it changes our priorities. It changes how we treat people. It changes what we do about stuff. It changes how we feel about stuff. It changes what we worry about and what we don't worry about. It changes how we forgive. It changes how we live.

If you are a follower of Jesus today and you want the reality of eternity to change how you live today, lets ask God to make that a

reality. Would you lift up your hands right now? Just lift up your hand, say, yes, God help me to live for what lasts forever. I have my hand up.

Father, I pray and I would hope that everyone who's a follower of Jesus would have this in the cry of our hearts. Just like the rich man saying, hey, hey, go tell my brothers about Jesus. God give us an urgency to share the love of Jesus. If there's someone in your life, you're a follower of Jesus and there's someone that you know that's not a follower of Jesus, just maybe, just in your mind or even just whisper that name before God right now in prayer. Just take them before God,

Ask him - God use me, use somebody, draw this person to know Jesus. Help me to be a witness. Help me be a light. God, help me to be so surrendered to you that what's temporary

doesn't drive my actions. But God, may my heart be motivated by that which is eternal.

Change how we think Lord, change how we love. Give us a passion to share the love of Jesus in all that we do.

As we continue praying today, some of you, if your life ended sooner

rather than later, you know you'll spend eternity somewhere. And the last thing I want to do is use Hell as a motivator to try to scare you into being a follower of Jesus, because that's not

what Jesus did, but I would like to put the reality of eternity in front of you and say, what do you think?

Do you want to stand before God based on your own merits, your

own works, your own righteousness, or do you want to trust that the perfect work of Jesus, the son of God is credited to you as righteousness. God is love. And He loves you so much that He sent Jesus, His son, perfect in every way, to die on a cross. And he was raised again. So whoever knows him, experiences him, your sins will not be counted against you. There's no condemnation. You are set free. Jesus paid the price. The devil, he wants to take from you. But Jesus came that you would have life.

Those listening this morning, here or on line, later in the week, next month, next year. Those of you who say I want His life, what do we do? We just step away from that which separates us from God. We ask for forgiveness from our sins and we trust that Jesus is enough and when we call on Him, God forgives our sins and He makes us brand new.

Just pray aloud after me – no ones prays alone here

pray Heavenly father, forgive me of my sins. Save me. Make me brand new. Fill me with your spirit so I can love You and know You and serve You and share You with others. Give me the life of Jesus so I can share His

life and share His love. Thank you for new life. I give you all of mine, in Jesus' name.

We love you and there is nothing you can do about it! Share Jesus with your friends and family, invite them to church, pray for them – there is an urgency – the best is yet to come. Stay and have a burger/hot dog – wish Josh and Sherry and Natalee well…