

## **PUNISHMENT FOR THE WICKED (2)**

**WDXE – October 23, 2011**

Jesus teaches the world that the wicked will suffer punishment after their life on earth is done. Jesus Christ teaches that physical Death is NOT the end of existence. There is an eternal place for the wicked; and there is an eternal place for the righteous.

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Welcome to these few moments with the Bible.

Hades is NOT eternal. Hades is a temporary place; it is the name of the place where both righteous and wicked departed human spirits await the great Judgment Day. Eternal life and eternal punishment begin after Judgment Day, but Hades is where departed spirits reside until that Day. The Old Testament word for this place is "Sheol." *Sheol* has the same meaning as the New Testament word *Hades*. The word *Hades* literally means the "unseen" place, or that which is "hidden". It is an appropriate word because earthly humans cannot see that place. Hades is hidden from our view.

Jesus told of the death of two men, a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. (You can read this in Luke, chapter 16.) When those two men died they both went to a place called Hades. But they were not in the same place. Lazarus was in a residence called "Abraham's bosom", a place of comfort. But the wicked man was in place of "flames", a place of torment and suffering.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he forgave the sins of the thief who was also crucified and who was hanging from a cross close to Jesus. Jesus' words to the thief were, "Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43.) We take that to mean that the thief was forgiven of his sins. Jesus was dying for that thief and for you and me at that very moment. Evidently "paradise" was a place like the place where Lazarus was in comfort, "Abraham's bosom." Perhaps it is another name for that location of comfort.

There seems to be yet a third residence in Hades. For the apostle Peter says that the angels that sinned against God were “cast down to Hell.” (2 Peter 2:4.) The Greek word translated “hell” in 2 Peter 2:4 is the word “tartarus.” This is the only place in the New Testament where we find this word. Tartarus is the place where wicked angels are kept while they too await the great Judgment Day. It is described as a “gloomy darkness.” Those angelic beings are said to be kept in “chains of gloomy darkness.”

There are two popular doctrines in the world that relate to the problem of the suffering of the wicked. First, some people, like the Universalists, teach that all humans will eventually be saved and that there is no eternal punishment for the wicked. Jesus’ teaching about the rich man who died shows this doctrine to be false. Jesus taught that the rich man could not pass from torment over to comfort because of the “great fixed gulf” that stood between. No passage between the two was allowed. You see, we make our choices of destination while we are still alive in this world. On the road of life, Jesus taught there are two gates through which we can pass. One gate is wide, the other is narrow. Walk through the broad gate and you enter a broad avenue that leads to destruction. This is the road of sin. Satan leads the way. However, enter through the narrow gate and you will enter into a narrow road that leads to eternal life. Jesus said that many people travel the broad road, but only few travel the narrow way that leads to life. (Matthew 7:13.) Are you one of the few who are on the road to eternal life?

Notice that Jesus taught that the broad road of sin leads to destruction. The word “destruction” reminds me of a second false doctrine about the punishment of the wicked. There are some people, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who teach that the wicked will be annihilated, that is, they will cease to exist. These people believe that God will show one last act of kindness by causing the wicked to go out of existence. They take Jesus’ word “destruction” and say, “see the wicked will be destroyed...that means they will go out of existence.” However, this is NOT the meaning of the word “destruction.” That word means “ruin”, not annihilation. The destiny of every human being is eternity somewhere. Once born, a human will live forever. This is the nature of God and He has given it to His children. When God breathed the spirit of life into the nostrils of the first man, God gave

him eternity. This is what it means to be a human. God did not breathe the breath of life into any other living creature. Eternity is within humans. Residing inside your fleshly body is your eternal spirit. However sin brought about the death of our fleshly bodies. But God has arranged to give us a new body at the resurrection of the dead. This new body is for the righteous, the forgiven, the blessed. It is not for the wicked. The destiny of the wicked is ruined. Friend, please accept God's forgiveness and live accordingly. Your destiny is to live forever. Don't ruin your destiny by your stubborn refusal to follow God.

A third false doctrine about the punishment of the wicked is the Catholic teaching of purgatory. They teach that the wicked can be purged of their sins after their death and entrance into torment. In other words, according to this teaching, the rich man of Jesus' story can eventually leave torment and enter into the place of comfort. And how can this happen? The living relatives and friends of the departed can do good works in the wicked man's name so that eventually his sins can be purged. The Bible does not teach this. In fact, the Bible teaches the opposite. "Eternal punishment" means eternal punishment. In describing the division of people at the great Judgment Day, Jesus said, "and these shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:46.) Furthermore, the rich man in torment asked Abraham to send Lazarus to cool his tongue with a drop of water. Abraham then explained, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' (Luke 16:25-26.) The great expanse is fixed. There is no travel once we enter Hades. Where will you be? Will you arrive to a place of comfort and rest, or will you open your spiritual eyes in torment?

The choice is ours because God our Creator has given his human family a way to be free from the consequences of our sins. The way of escape from our sins is not a way of violence. It is a way of peace. It is not a way in which our fleshly desires are satisfied, but it is a way of hope in which the restlessness of our hearts will find repose. Jesus said, "come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden light." (Matthew 11:28-30.) Yes, the wicked will be punished. But there

is a way open for you in this life to escape the penalty for your sins through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus went one day with three of his disciples up on a mountain in Galilee. There before their eyes those three men watched as Jesus' body began to change. His garments became as white as light, and as bright as the noonday sun. Suddenly there were two men who stood with Jesus in the brightness of his glory. The three apostles listened as Jesus and those two men talked about what would soon happen to Jesus in Jerusalem. The body of one of those men had been dead and buried for 1400 years. His name was Moses. The other man had been away from the earth for over 700 years. His name was Elijah. Elijah did not die as we know death. God sent a fiery chariot and swept him off the earth. A younger prophet by the name of Elisha saw the old prophet's glorious departure. After 1400 years, Moses was still Moses, and after being gone 700 years Elijah was still Elijah. They had not lost their identity. They stood on the earth and talked with Jesus around the year 30 A.D. Moses and Elijah were still alive, even though long since gone from the earth. (You can read about this in Matthew, chapter 17, and also in Mark and Luke.)

Every human has an everlasting spirit. Many of you are like Moses. You will die and your body will be buried, but you will still be alive in spirit somewhere. Many of you may be like Elijah. It may be that the Lord Jesus returns to earth while you are still alive and in your body. And so, like Elijah your body will not die, but you will be changed in the twinkling of an eye, just as Elijah was. The Bible says that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 15:50.) Therefore, your body will be changed and you will take on a body like those who have died. You will be given a resurrected body, a body that can live as long as your eternal spirit. That which is true for the righteous will also be true for the wicked. The wicked will receive a body that cannot perish in the torment of hell. The punishment of the wicked is an eternal punishment.

Jesus showed us what Judgment Day would be like in Matthew 25:31. He will separate the righteous from the wicked. The wicked will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. Jesus has come to save the lost from these consequences. Are you saved from the wrath to come?