

Series: Palm Sunday 2021	Reference: <i>Various Scriptures</i>	Title: Jesus the King	Date: 3.28.2021
Website Writeup: Is Jesus King? If so, king of what? What happens to those who will not humbly bow their knee to his kingship? Is Hell real & necessary? If so, what are our misconceptions of it, and why? Join us as we explore these questions this Palm Sunday leading into Easter.			

(Outline & thoughts taken from: Alisa Childers, "Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity," Chapter 11, "Hell on Earth?")

Palm Sunday is the celebration of Jesus entering Jerusalem as King riding on the back of a donkey at the beginning of Passover. Recorded in all four gospels (John 12:12-19, Luke 19:28-44, Mark 1:1-11, Matthew 21:1-11), *it's prophecy fulfilled from Zech 9:9... "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous & having salvation is he, humble & mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

Whispers of Him as Messiah/Savior were rampant. Exodus was on their minds, they hoped this Messiah would deliver them from Roman oppression, just as God had delivered them from Egypt. The imagery wouldn't go unnoticed, a conquering king riding into a city on a donkey as a symbol of coming in peace - but conquering nonetheless. People shouting. Laying cloaks on the road before him, waving palm branches - all symbolic of welcoming their Savior king. The hopes in Him were not at all vague as they shouted the words of Psalm 118, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven & glory in the highest!*" The Messiah had come to bring peace & freedom from Roman oppression. That was their expectation, but it was not His intention...so, what did Jesus come to save them from? Sin & death, of course, but the gravest result of sin is eternal separation from God, which we know as Hell.

I'd bet the rent money most, if not all of you, have never heard a sermon on hell. A central aspect to Christian belief, necessary to understanding faith & salvation, but pastors rarely preach it. *Scripture teaches, all have sinned & fallen short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23)*, and we're saved from God's wrath through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross (Rm 6:23). The Cross isn't justice overridden, or ignored, it's justice satisfied. The problem is, not everyone sees themselves as sinful & in need of a savior, they only see others in that light. In their pride, they want to be the ones to enact what they regard as justice on others - and aren't satisfied until they draw blood & destroy lives. But God, rightly so, desires repentance & reconciliation, and willingly goes to the cross to make that possible for those who'd humble themselves before Him. Isn't repentance better? Rather than destroying someone, only driving their rage deeper to come out later? Isn't grace & mercy leading to ones repentance better than retribution & vengeance?

But some will always refuse to submit to God's way, resulting in His real & necessary wrath in dealing with sin & evil, Hell has its place. Reasonable people don't have a bloodlust, we don't want to see people punished, we want to see them repentant & reconciled. We don't like the idea of hell, but our dislike doesn't make it unnecessary.

Hell's unpopular, due to an infectious progressive gospel seeping into pulpit, tainting sermon, literature & song, making them only fraudulent imposters of gospel teaching & worship. As lies are, the progressive gospel is alluring. Those who fight against it are labeled angry fundamental bigots, or worse. While those given over to the cultural narrative, considering themselves superior in intelligence, feel it only right to release their theological grip on such archaic notions of divine punishment & eternal separation from God.

Richard Rohr, Franciscan Friar, author & heretic, says this about the concept of Hell, *"Jesus tells us to love our enemies, but this cultural god sure doesn't. Jesus tells us to forgive seventy times seven times, but this god doesn't. Instead, this god burns people for all eternity...Most humans are more loving & forgiving than such a god. We've developed an unworkable & toxic image of God that a healthy person would never trust...Why would you want to spend even an hour in silence, solitude, or intimacy with such a god?"*¹ Rohr sounds so loving, logical & correct, but notice how he deconstructs Scripture placing himself as its authority. He flies in the face of thousands of years of agreed Scriptural interpretation & authority. His ideas are floodwaters washing away solid foundation - carrying & leaving us in the desert, as his teaching dries up under the hot sun of biblical scrutiny. He's only right about one thing, he has developed an unworkable & toxic image of God - but it's not from the Scriptures.

Notice the progressive Christian begins with the self, what they *feel* is right, the God-breathed Scriptures aren't their guide. This to the point that the word sin is no longer useful in the progressive Christian movement, negative terminology from ages past, like rust on old metal. A position held by those who've given up on Scriptural authority erasing any need for salvation. According to them, we're just misunderstood victims in need of further coddling by a soft-handed loving God who understands our pain. As a matter of fact God is redefined to be only loving (as humans define it), all-accepting, and never condemning of anyone or anything. He doesn't judge, he's kind, understanding, tolerant of all things, and all-inclusive. When you redefine salvation, you redefine God. And when you redefine God, you erase any need of salvation.

Underlying these errant thoughts is the destructive concept of Universalism, the idea that all people will be saved & spend an eternity with God, no matter what. Also known by the terms Universal Reconciliation, or Universal Salvation (that all people will eventually come via Jesus) or Christo-centric Universalism as Nadia Bolz-Weber (another heretic) calls it. In these views God's a cosmic hoarder, piling up people & their sin until the floor of his kingdom caves in, and it's condemned - that's no loving god at all. Universalism remakes God in our image while utilizing all the same words, justice, mercy, grace, etc..., but without any of them actualized. If we could pull the mask off that image, it would be Satan underneath. And progressive pastors, leaders, authors & theologians are doing their best to champion his message.

¹ Richard Rohr, "A Toxic Image of God," Center for Action & Contemplation, January 28, 2016, <https://cac.org/a-toxic-image-of-god-2016-01-28/>.

Scholar Michael McClymond in an interview titled, *“How Universalism, ‘The Opiate of the Theologians,’ Went Mainstream”* says, *“It’s the way we would want the world to be. Some imagine that a more loving & less judgmental church would be better positioned to win new adherents. Yet perfect love appeared in history - and He was crucified.”* We killed Him because we’re sinful beings bent towards evil & not love, which is why we need Jesus’ atoning work on the cross to do spiritual heart surgery. Hell’s not reserved for just the Hitler’s of the world, plenty of sweet moms & grannies dressed their children & baked cookies for all the little Nazi youth meetings (as Alisa Childers points out)! Sin bubbles to the surface daily in all of us in a myriad of ways, cut us off in traffic, or show us a picture of Biden or Trump & you’ll see it (depending on your politics)!

The truth is, to submit to Scriptural Authority is to walk with Jesus. A God who’s able & willing to judge sin, condemning it, and those refusing to repent of it, to Hell, is a healthy loving God. Because human desire driven by sin is a destructive juggernaut. A God who plucks the repentant from a burning fiery ring, setting them on solid ground, empowering them with His Spirit is a God who actually loves. God never forces His will upon humanity, but offers Himself as the true answer to our real need, until the point He eventually closes the door on that invitation. That door closing is hell. There’s hell on earth, so to speak, in every moment we choose to call what is wrong, right, or evil, good, and to act on those things - a foretaste of hell where human desire & sin fully reign, for which we yet have no category. All people live now under God’s common grace, the only reason anyone’s alive is because He allows it! The only reason we experience any good is because God created & wills it. And given next week is Easter, the story of Christ’s resurrection & atonement to avoid God’s wrath & hell, it’s high time for this sermon!

Maybe it’s not hell which confounds us as much as it is the eternal nature of it. If hell were only for a short time, it’d be a palatable concept. If it were geared toward instruction & rehabilitation it would be easier to swallow. If it were only allegory, whew!

Hell to many, has become a cosmic torture chamber fueled with images of Dante’s *Inferno*. A place of regret, where Satan rules for ever & everyone gets the same punishment. As heaven is actual, hell is actual, however we must to let Scripture inform our thoughts. As Alisa Childers puts it, “God’s wrath for sin ensures that his followers will not spend eternity coexisting with sin. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus, we are invited into an eternal Kingdom that will vanquish sin & death forever.”² Something we also can’t imagine.

Hell isn’t a part of the original creation which God called good. Matthew 25:41 says it was prepared for the devil & his angels. The new testament tells us a few things about hell... Rev 21:8 says, *“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur...”* 2 Thessalonians 1:9 speaks of

² Alisa Childers, *Another Gospel: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*, (Eugene, OR: Tyndale, 2020) p188.

everlasting destruction, being shut out from the presence of the Lord & from the glory of His might. Jude 1:7 speaks of the punishment of eternal fire. Revelation 20:13-15 states each person will be judged according to what they had done, as well as death & Hades & anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life being thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 14:9-10 speaks of drinking the wine of God's fury & being tormented with burning sulfur.

Jesus Himself described Hell in these ways...Matthew 25:46 He speaks of those who don't submit to Him as going away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. In 13:50 he speaks of a blazing furnace, and weeping & gnashing of teeth. Mark 9:43 refers to a place where the fire never goes out. Mark 9:48, the worms that eat them do not die & fire is not quenched. (Quoting Isaiah 66:24) Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 all talk about a separate place of darkness, and weeping & gnashing of teeth.

Imagery of worms, darkness & fire, all powerful images which speak strongly to a place of eternal loss & destruction. Dr's Norm Geisler & Thomas Howe say it well, "While Hell is a literal place, not every description of it should be taken literally. Some powerful figures of speech are used to portray this literal place."³ J.I. Packer says, "Hell is...the negation of fellowship with the Lord. It's the negation of pleasure. It's the negation of any form of contentment."⁴ We have no category for this due to God's common grace all experience now, we can't imagine what it would be like for sin to have full sway & be cut off completely from the love & goodness of God.

Progressive Christian leaders may say Jesus didn't talk about hell, but anyone taking the time to read the Scriptures knows He brought it up quite often! Jesus referred to it as *Gehenna*, the Valley of Hinnom, the place where people sacrificed their children to the god Molech. Jeremiah 19:6 calls it the Valley of Slaughter. A place which came to be synonymous with Hell, a place of punishment after final judgement - it was the best visual image they had, and Jesus used it often. That's hell, in which some will spend eternity. The doors of heaven will be shut which is what the parable of the 10 virgins teaches in Matthew 25 - some will be locked out of the kingdom when the time comes. This is followed by two more parables in that chapter (parable of the bags of gold & the sheep & goats) which talk about some being cast out into the darkness with weeping & gnashing of teeth. That is not the all-inclusive non-judgmental Jesus taught by the progressive Christian movement.

Jesus clearly taught there will be eternal life for some & eternal punishment for others. He'll eventually close the doors of His Kingdom forever. Childers states in her book, *Another Gospel* (p193), that the church has always agreed on three things, hell's eternal, in hell souls are conscious, and hell's torment. She brings up three misconceptions we have about Hell. Firstly, that people in hell are repentant. Secondly, that in hell the Devil's in charge. Thirdly, in hell everyone gets the same punishment.

³ Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, 1992).

⁴ J.I. Packer, "What Is Hell?" 100 Huntley, April 21, 2009, YouTube Video, 2:37, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=rMyWd4rTMDO>.

When I think of the term, ‘gnashing of teeth’ I think of someone who has deep regret. But if I applied that to what the Scriptures mean by it, I’d be wrong. Speaking about Israel’s enemies in Lamentations 2:16 it says... *“All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they scoff & gnash their teeth...”* Psalm 37:12 says... *“The wicked plot against the righteous & gnash their teeth at them...”* Interestingly, the next verse says... *“...but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.”* In Psalm 35:16 David wrote... *“Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me.”* In Acts 7 those who stoned Stephen gnashed their teeth at him in rage!

This image is different than someone regretting decisions & missing out on God’s kingdom. It is ongoing defiance, anger & willful disconnection with God as king. Hell isn’t something God glories in, it wasn’t a part of His original good creation order, it’s a necessity in which He gives people what they desire. He won’t force His kingship on humanity, it must be an act of our will, by grace, through faith, and accompanied by repentance from sin. Sin & holiness can’t mix, God can’t have sin in His kingdom, which is why Universalism’s a farce, it doesn’t work & would be hell itself.

Secondly, we’re aware, every pop-culture image of Hell has Satan enjoying himself as ruler of the Underworld. But it’s a false image, since Satan loses. Matthew 25:41 states eternal fire is prepared for him & his angels. There’s no image in Scripture of a triumphant devil reigning over lost regretful souls in the afterlife. He’s sent to eternal separation & torment as a result as well. In Revelation 20:10 it says... *“...the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast & the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day & night for ever & ever.”* How this all exactly looks, no one knows, but Satan isn’t victorious.

Our third & final misconception is that everyone receives the same punishment. We’ve all met the total jerk claiming to be a Christian. Likewise, we’ve met the non-Christian who seems like a wonderfully loving person. But, Scripture teaches salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone - not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph 2). Isaiah 64:6 says... *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”* Romans 3:20 says... *“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”*

Although Scripture teaches, we’ll know them by their fruit (Mt 7), we can’t judge whether someone’s truly given themselves over to Christ. We look for life-change, but that may take time. All we can do is believe & trust them. If someone claims to be something other than a Christian, or denies Him outright, I know they’ve rejected Christ. And...if someone claims to be a Buddhist & a Christian (or whatever else), I know they don’t know Christ, those things can’t be simultaneously true.

But does some nice Atheist who does a great deal of good in his community get relegated to eternal torment while some jerk Christian gets eternal bliss just for claiming Jesus? Well, we can’t fully grasp the concepts of heaven & hell from our vantage point. But we

do know God isn't unjust, and deals with sin in an appropriate manner. Jesus said to Pilate in John 19:11... "*...the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.*" In Luke 12 Jesus tells the story of servants receiving various levels of punishment for either willful & ignorant disobedience of the Masters will. And then in vv47-48 He says... "*The servant who knows the master's will & does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸But the one who does not know & does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*" Jesus spoke in varying degrees of sin, although we know any sin separates us from God, but God isn't simplistic, or unjust. He'll deal with all things in appropriate ways.

In an article in The Washington Post titled, *Liberal Churches Are Dying. But Conservative Churches Are Thriving*, it said, "*It was almost 20 years ago that John Shelby Spong, a U.S. bishop in the Episcopalian Church, published his book "Why Christianity Must Change or Die." It was presented as an antidote to the crisis of decline in mainline churches. Spong, a theological liberal, said congregations would grow if they abandoned their literal interpretation of the Bible & transformed along with changing times. Spong's general thesis is popular with many mainline Protestants, including those in the United Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian (U.S.A.) & Episcopal churches. Spong's work has won favor with academics, too.*"

The problem is, 20 years later, as the article indicates, liberal churches are dying exactly because they've abandoned the authority of Scriptural truth. As a result, notions of sin & hell are erased, we get to do whatever we want & God gets redefined into what we want Him to be. The end result is either a total abandonment of faith, or a wishy-washy Universalism which never delivers on justice, grace, salvation, mercy - it just makes it hell for everyone. We won't do that at Six:Eight, I will preach truth in the face of death.

Be it unpopular, Heaven & Hell are both real & necessary. God is patient, His offer extends for eternal life under King Jesus. Make no mistake, the day He came into Jerusalem on the back of that donkey He laid claim to kingship. But a kingdom beyond Rome, or space & time, encompassing the world & eternity. As *Philippians 2:9-11* says... "*God exalted him to the highest place & gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" Some will do that from the vantage point of total reconciliation & peace with God in heaven. Some will do that in eternal torment in hell. It depends on our response to Jesus now.

Hell wasn't a part of the original good created order, but it's reserved for those who refuse to bow their defiant will to Jesus. And if they won't now, why would they in the future? And, what would it communicate about God if He simply looked the other way on our self-centered, self-serving sin, allowing it into His kingdom? There'd be no peace there... (to learn more read *Another Gospel*, by Alisa Childers)