

# The Second Death

by David Gooding

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's judgment and the consequences of rejecting his salvation, highlighting the second death as a punishment that permits of no degree and is determined by a person's works.*

**Duration:** 1:04:56

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Revelation 21:6-8

**Topics:** "Hell"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the final destiny of those who neglect God's salvation. He emphasizes that God does not take pleasure in the death of anyone and therefore does not provide lengthy descriptions of the eternal punishment for those who reject Him. The speaker acknowledges the discomfort of discussing this topic but believes it is necessary to declare the whole counsel of God. He contrasts popular depictions of hell with the biblical description, stating that Satan and his fallen angels will be confined to the lake of fire as a permanent prison.

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## Transcript

He said unto me, they are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is a thirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He that overcometh shall inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son, but for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and forcers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. I have no need to attempt by any flight of oratory to impress upon us the solemnity of the subject we are to consider here this evening. Certainly it would in fact be more pleasant for me if I could avoid discussion of the subject, but common honesty makes it imperative that in one at least of these lectures I discuss with you what God's word has to say about the final destiny of those who neglect God's great salvation.

I must, like the Apostle Paul himself, I must be careful as a public lecturer in biblical things, not to shun, to declare the whole counsel of God. And indeed to omit this subject from our thinking would be to stultify all that God has elsewhere to say about his salvation. For six or seven evenings we have been thinking at length and in detail about the great salvation that God has provided for men and women through the death of his son.

If it were the fact that men could nevertheless neglect and reject that salvation, and still it did not really matter, then I submit to you the whole of that salvation would be stultified. Moreover, solemn as this subject must necessarily be, to wipe it out of our thinking would be to make light, to make emptiness of the love of God itself. Some of the most beautiful, some of the grandest statements of the love of God that are found in the Bible are closely coupled with this very thing.

The greatest exhibition of God's love, in fact, has been in the price he was prepared to pay in his love for men to make it possible for them to avoid this solemn and eternal destiny. For God so loved the world, we read, that he gave his only begotten son that they should not perish. And we cannot honestly have to ourselves those comforting words, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, unless we are prepared to face the whole object for the giving of that son.

He loved and he gave, but he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish. The very love of God itself, the immensity of his gift in the person of Christ, tell us in utterly unmistakable language that they who reject that love will perish. As in fact, all the world must have perished had not God given his son.

I therefore at the very beginning of this lecture ask you to face with me calmly and courageously, the description that is given us in Holy Writ of this second death. May I at once call your attention to the proportions of the length of scripture that God devotes to this subject. We read together some 10 or 12 verses, and that is remarkable.

For this book of the Revelation, as many will know, is a book that talks much of the judgments of God. From chapters 4 to chapter 19, the book is full of vivid and detailed descriptions of several series of divine judgments that shall overtake this world at the end of this age. They are told in full and at length, and there is reason for that.

They are physical judgments, temporal judgments, judgments that shall befall men in this life. Their tremendous severity is perhaps the last voice of God to men, while opportunity to be saved remains. Their severity therefore is told us, because in those judgments God will still be wishing to speak to men, and draw them to himself.

In fact, we read that out of those days of exceeding great judgment, there shall come great companies of men and women, their number impossible to estimate, who have found salvation through the blood and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus. It tells us this, that if God's temporal judgments against sin can awaken men and women to their need, and to seek salvation, then in his great-hearted love, God is prepared to use the most fierce temporal judgments to bring men to himself. Many a man or woman has known God's love in that fashion in days gone by.

There have been men whom God has had to break in their earthly fortune, in their bodily health, before they have woken up to their need to come to the Savior for eternal salvation. So then, chapters 4 to 19 in this book, detailing a whole array of physical judgments. But when it comes to that final judgment, the second death, the description is dismissed.

In about 12 brief verses. Why? Because God is not a sadist. God does not delight in the death of him that dieth.

When it comes, therefore, to the description of the final destiny of men and women who have neglected God's salvation, and they pass to that destiny of endless pain, that is altogether unalterable and unceasing. God does not enter into long and harrowing descriptions. They would be pointless.

God does not wrestle, as did some medieval theologians, in painting the horrors of the eternally damned. God tells us the uncomfortable truth, in as few words as he can. Let that not hide from us, their awful truth.

Let us pick out then, the main features of this final judgment. We read there is to be a great white throne, and from the face of him who sits thereon, heaven and earth shall flee away. It happens that the bible has told us who exactly it is that shall sit upon that throne.

It is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He himself said in the days when he was upon earth, the father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment unto the son. So then it is our Lord Jesus who shall occupy that throne.

There is point therein that even amidst these solemn realities, tells us of the exceeding kindness of the heart of God. It shall not be God the father, but it shall be the son of man. To him has the judgment been given, precisely because he is man.

The one who has known life, the one who perfectly knows what it is to be flesh and blood, the one who has suffered being tempted, the one whom we have seen here on earth, weeping tears at the graveside of Lazarus, that very same one who stood outside Jerusalem city, and as he contemplated the terrible judgment that was to descend upon that city at the hand of the Romans, openly broke down and sobbed. It shall be that man that sits upon that judgment throne, feeling, loving, but now at last judge. We read that the dead, small and great, shall be gathered before him, and books shall be opened.

God speaks to us in language that we can understand. We shall not imagine, of course, great tomes made of parchment and bound in leather. God has not need of such devices by which to record things.

But records there will be, both on God's part and man's part. Psychology and psychiatry together have shown us how the human mind stores up its impressions, unbelievably, incredibly, so. By skilled manipulation, memories can be evoked from the deep subconscious, of events long since gone by, the human spirit shall take with it, into eternity, the memory of its deeds on earth.

God's record shall be there, and the dead shall be judged, according to that which is written in the books, strictly according to their works. It will not be an indiscriminate judgment, nor yet will it be a mass judgment, but individually, each shall appear, each shall give account, and every item be gone over in the record. The judgment, the punishment, shall be strictly according to the deserving.

The importance of that we shall presently see. For the moment, I want us to notice one other thing that could possibly escape our attention. When it has said that the dead shall be judged according to their works, it then adds, and if any man's name is found not written in the Lamb's book of life, he shall be cast into the lake of fire, that, that is to say, that being cast into the lake of fire, that is the second death.

We do well to get that clear. Punishment for sin shall proceed according to a man's works, but it is not that punishment that is described as the second death. It is being cast into this lake of fire, which happens to those, not whose works were bad, not whose crimes were excessive, but this is the determinant feature, their names were not written in the Lamb's book of life.

I want to emphasize that. For at the end of our study this evening, I trust we shall see the point and have the wisdom, not to begin an assessing of our works, but rather to ask ourselves what is the basic and decisive thing. Is my name written in the Lamb's book of life? If the name is not found there, there shall follow for eternity separation from God, which is eternal death.

I'm aware that the very statement of these things will rouse many a furious emotion within us. If we could sit and listen to these things unmoved, then we must be beasts, or worse. It would not be surprising if we found within our hearts a certain sense of revulsion and loathing at the idea of a destiny of eternal pain, unalterable.

It will help us of course, if at once we can disabuse our minds of all those distortions that medieval theology and some popular preaching has added to the calm words of scripture. If you go into the chapel of St. John's College at Cambridge, you will see as you come in through the door on your left, a large stained glass window of tremendous size. Among other things, it depicts in medieval fashion the last judgment.

It is grotesque and cruel. In the right-hand corner, if I remember right, there are depicted demons in green livery, with three-pronged forks stuffing people down into terrifying flames. Popular imagination seems to picture to itself the Lake of Fire like that.

It has spun its legends of a place where Satan is king, and his demons are the prison jailers, who with indescribable sadism and horror, gloatingly pile up humans in some vast furnace of a prison. That of course is not the picture the Bible paints. Satan is not king in hell, nor yet are his demons the prison wardens.

The Lake of Fire shall be for Satan and for his fallen angels, a permanent prison house to which God, in his mercy to the rest of his universe, will permanently confine him. We are not told why it is that God does not take away from these great beings the life he originally gave them. But we do read that in God's mercy, Satan shall not be allowed forever to continue those hurtful and wicked practices that have brought such delusion and misery to so many thousands of human beings.

In God's supreme mercy, there is a Lake of Fire to which he shall be eternally confined. And all who have reason, and any sense of moral judgment, shall add their deep-felt amen, when God orders that confinement to begin. It was never God's intention that in that same prison, human beings should be confined.

But if at last men and women are found to choose sin and self-will, to neglect God's salvation and go their own way, God himself shall be obliged to confine them likewise, in a confinement that originally was prepared, in the mercy of God, for the devil and his angels. But when we have disabused our minds of the crudities that have gathered round this subject from people's uninstructed imaginations, there will still be difficulties left in plenty. Nor need we be ashamed to feel those difficulties, so long as we are prepared to bring them to God's word and to the Savior, whom alone we can trust.

Some people will say outright, that surely the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God whom Christ taught us to regard as a loving Father, could not possibly send men eternally to the lake of fire. They say it can't be so. And some of them add that our Lord Jesus would not have taught that.

They maintain that our Lord pictured God as a loving Father, who to the end of time and throughout all eternity, would welcome home his prodigal sons. They say that our Lord taught of a God so loving that he would never, ever, banish a creature of his to eternal pain. They say that these ugly doctrines of an eternal lake of fire, were the invention of Christ's apostle, and therefore are not necessarily true.

Such a statement, of course, merely shows the fearful ignorance of the Bible, of the person who makes it. It is the fact that the one who speaks most of eternal wrath and judgment is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. There is far more about eternal perdition in those lovely gospels that record the works and words of our Lord Jesus, than ever you will find in the writings of his apostle.

It was Jesus himself who said that for some, eternity would mean a suffering, in which their world dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. It was the loving heart of Christ, who told us that it would be better to be maimed physically with permanent physical disability throughout the whole of life here, rather than end in an eternity of weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. We cannot possibly hide behind that untruth.

It was our Lord, pre-eminently, who warned us of eternal perdition. But then somebody will say, but I can't believe it. God just would not do such a thing.

So to argue is to close our eyes to the lessons of history. All of us presumably have read at some time in the Bible, the story of the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. The New Testament points the lesson that is to be drawn.

It says that in suffering that vengeance of God, they are set forth to the rest of mankind, as an example of eternal judgment. The judgment that befell them was admittedly a physical judgment. As far as we can later deduce from the words of Christ, it does not mean that the men of Sodom are permanently and necessarily lost to God.

The judgment that befell them was a physical judgment. But it came down in all its awful severity, so that in the early stages of human experience on earth, there might be put before our eyes an actual example. They might serve as an example of eternal law.

It were foolish to say God will not do it, when he has given us such pointed illustrations and examples to assure us that he will do it. There are folks who would take the Bible and believe in an eternal heaven because the Bible says so, who nevertheless refuse to believe in an eternal hell, though the Bible says that as well. To be sure if the Bible is not to be believed when it talks of hell, then how could it be believed when it talks of heaven? The Bible does not say that men and women who refuse the gospel shall be annihilated.

And I for one must record my gratitude that it doesn't so say. Think of what an awful thing that would be, I put it to you. If it were the fact that men who reject salvation are annihilated at death, then it would mean that this world is just a crazy lunatic asylum, a savage jungle, in which the most terrible monsters of men can work their destructive will, bringing misery to millions upon millions of people.

Themselves die painlessly and peacefully in their beds, and that be the end of it. What a monster of a God your God would be, if that were the truth. Shall Hitler not face again the five million jewels he had gassed? Will you tell me that the millions of women that he stripped stark naked and shot and gassed shall find no sense of satisfaction in the judgment of God, because unpunished Hitler has been annihilated? I wouldn't worship a God like that.

That common thief dying by the side of Christ on the cross had sense to see more, as he watched the innocent Christ die grouped with common criminals. Said he to his fellow thief, man don't you fear God? If there's a God in heaven at all, and here on earth the innocent suffer along with the guilty, then there must be a resurrection in which our throngs will meet with perfect justice. Oh but you say then, can it not be that the wicked dead will be raised and punished suitably for their wickedness, and then when their punishment is over, be annihilated? Doubtless well meant.

That suggestion makes God more of a monster than the first suggestion. Suppose millions of years of suffering could eventually cancel out the sin of a man like Hitler, till at length everybody, God included, would be satisfied that he had paid in full all that his crimes deserved. Then why should God annihilate him? Would he not then, if God be a God of love at all, be instated in God's heaven? Why annihilate him? Well then you say perhaps, perhaps then there is hope that after endless or exceedingly long ages of suffering, the wicked will be absolved and be brought at last to God's heaven.

That too rests on an impossible hope. It rests its hope on the fallacy that human suffering can expiate the guilt of sin. That is not true.

If human suffering could expiate human sin, then calvary has been a stone in a teacup, and altogether unnecessary. But our Lord himself reminded us of this serious fact, that human suffering will never expiate human guilt. If men and women were ever to be saved from the guilt of their sin, a more than human sacrifice must be given.

That sacrifice was the sacrifice of God's Son. God was not doing idle things at the cross, playing around with unnecessary. God's Son suffered those awful anguishes of the cross, because there was none other good enough to pay the price of sin.

He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. All who will trust that sacrifice shall be eternally saved. But those who neglect or reject that sacrifice, not a billion, billion, billion years of suffering would expiate their guilt.

But then you say, then everything is out of proportion. You say it is utterly unfair that people shall all be consigned to one common end that you call the lake of fire, when their misdeeds vary so much. But then that objection too is false.

The amount of suffering that will be necessary is strictly determined, the Bible says, by people's works. He that knew his Lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with many strikes. He that did not know his Lord's will and therefore failed to do it, shall be beaten with few strikes.

And we may be certain that a God of infinite love shall not allow one thwab of pain that is avoidable. But the mistake in the reasoning is just here. Eternal death in the sense of eternal separation from God, is a thing that permits of no degree.

You can't really be half alive and half dead. You are alive or you are dead. God is willing to save all who will come and hunt them to his bosom.

But if an otherwise good person, decent and generous hearted, has the folly to neglect the salvation God has provided, then there is only one alternative that permits of no degree, that is banishment from God's presence. See it is not true to say that if you are not going to believe the gospel you are going to be damned and therefore you might as well sin as much as you can possibly sin. That is not true.

All who reject this gospel shall suffer banishment from God's presence. That is the second death. Thereafter the amount of punishment must be determined according to people's works.

Only we must remember even there that God's standards are not necessarily ours. We dismiss as terribly awful the whoremonger, the murderer. We would shrink at the fearful crimes that a savage commits in the wilds of the South American jungle.

But I fancy in God's standards the man who is decent but knows all about the gospel and in a very polite way says, no thank you God, is a far worse criminal than the savage. But you say then that raises a point. You say all shall be lost who don't receive salvation, that do not believe in Jesus Christ.

Then what about the savage? What about the people that have never heard the gospel? Now therein is a very curious thing. They who have tried to help their fellow men and women in these subjects most will perhaps recognize the truth of what I say, that there is somehow a curious dodge in the human mind. That when it is faced with these solemn alternatives that either we receive Christ and live or we reject him and die eternally, we suddenly develop an interest in the heathen and become missionary spirited.

Ah, we say, ah, ah, but now what about the heathen? When perhaps we weren't at all interested about the heathen before. Let's be careful that that isn't just a naughty dodge of the human heart. We may less content that the God of love who gave Christ to die will do absolute justice, and indeed he will do veritable goodness by those heathen who have never heard.

None shall ever be held responsible for rejecting what he never knew. And our Lord himself indicated that God is not able merely to assess what people have done with his truth that they possess. He is able to assess what they would have done had they known about Christ.

Do you not remember what he said to the Pharisees? He said, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, the men of Tyre and Sidon shall rise in the judgment and condemn this generation. How is that? Well said Christ, you men of Capernaum, you have known me. You have heard me personally.

You have seen my miracles, and still in your offensive self-righteousness you deny the need for personal regeneration and salvation. Knowingly you reject me. I tell you, he said, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, because if they had known what you know and seen what you see, they would have repented.

Only divine omniscience could know that. But God does know that. He shall deal with men accordingly.

Men who have responded aright to the evidence of God in creation, and in their ignorance yet have cast themselves believingly on the great God behind creation. Whosoever like that calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Though they never heard once the name of Jesus.

The man who lived in ancient day under the law of ten commandments, and knew he couldn't do them, and confessed himself before God a sinner, and with earnest heart cast himself on the mercy of God, as did Israel's king on that famous occasion. They shall be saved. Though they never heard the name of Jesus, or heard of his cross and sacrifice, but alas for many men and women even in this country, that have heard a thousand times over the name of Jesus, and his solemn affirmation, you must be born again.

And if you ask them kindly and in friendly fashion, tell me, are you born again? They'll say, no I'm not. I wouldn't like to say that. Well why aren't you? Do not believe Christ, who says you must be born again,

else you will never see the kingdom of God.

And they shrug their shoulders and go. They're apparently unconcerned. No, God shall see to it that the thing is in proper proportion.

Somebody says, but I still object. It is altogether wrong that one little human life, it's brief enough, for 70 years, though it were full of sin from one end to the end, it is utterly unfair that a tiny little life like that should bring an eternity of suffering. That I must say is a very big difficulty at first sight.

Oh how brief life is. How very brief if such eternal solemn things hang upon the decision of a few brief years. Is it fair? But even now, science itself has begun to warn us that we oughtn't to think in these matters with our own puny minds, and contradict the loving warnings of the Saviour.

We cannot begin to conceive of eternity. We cannot begin to conceive of the relation of time to eternity. Most of us, lesser breeds, are completely confused when the scientists, the mathematician, tell us that time is relative, and inform us that if you could travel through space at the speed of light, and you left earth and traveled away four years and came back again, you might find yourself as you thought, just four years older.

But the inhabitants on earth, 60 or 70 years older, our minds boggle at that kind of thing, but the best brains among us tell us it is so. Time is a relative thing. We cannot begin to imagine what the relationship of eternity to time is.

When we pass out into that realm where the end is seen from the beginning, and the beginning from the end we've gone, then those kind of difficulties disappear. Because our minds are finite, and if we try and think along that, we are bound to make mistakes. Is it not our wisdom to trust the Lord Jesus? He came from eternity into time and has gone back into eternity.

And the Saviour who died for us on the cross, constantly affirmed that once man passes the boundary of time, his condition is fixed. As the book of God ends, it issues once more that solemn warning. It says the time is near.

The dawn of eternity almost breaks for us. So near it is, says the New Testament, that it's almost too late to change. Him that is filthy, let him be filthy still.

Him that is righteous, let him be righteous still. It's almost too late to change, but thank God not completely too late. Once time's boundary is passed, the saved shall be eternally saved, thank God, but the lost shall be eternally lost.

You say that's unfair? I don't think it's unfair, it's cruel of God. Why shouldn't he give them a chance to repent? Surely when they wake up in those eternal miseries, they will repent. How do you know? How do you know? Therein is the very solemn thing.

We are given no indication in scripture from God that there's anybody in hell who has repented then of his sin. If God's love in Christ, in this life, doesn't melt a man's enmity and bring him to the Savior for salvation, I very much doubt whether God's eternal wrath will melt him and change his opinion. You say but our Lord himself told of people who come when the door is shut and they knock on the door and say Lord let us in.

You say surely there are people who have repented. Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that God will be in his heaven and have people knocking on his door really repentant of their sin and he refused to save them? Not so, not so. They certainly regret they are not in heaven.

When our Lord replies to those people, depart from me I never knew you, we do not hear them say well Lord can't we come and know you now. They're like Esau. When he saw that he had let his blessing go he wept bucketfuls of tears for the remorse that now his blessing was forever gone.

But the bible says he never changed his mind, he never changed his mind. Doesn't it stand to reason that if men and women in this life can reject the love of God in Christ, in spite of all the pleadings of God's Holy Spirit, there's very little likelihood that they'll ever change their minds in eternity. You see it is not the situation that God said look you must take my salvation and if you don't I shall pour on you eternal wrath.

It is that men and women are perishing anyway. God in his mercy has done a colossal thing in his attempt to save them. If having seen God in Christ they don't want to be saved, there's no reason to think that in eternity they'll change their mind.

Then that makes our own personal decisions at this very moment exceedingly important. I come to where we started, solemn as this is, yet we cannot avoid it. But we can turn to the brighter side of things.

There is no need for any to perish. There is no need for any one of us in this lecture theater tonight to perish. Everything necessary has been done.

We could be saved if we are not saved. We could be saved this very moment. So perfectly has the work been done that every soul in this lecture hall could go out of the doors tonight, saved eternally.

We need not complain against God. If it be that any of us is not sure, then allow me please to tell you my friend, in God's name, you could be sure. You could be sure before you leave this hall.

You might go in the deep peace of God and peace with God. But alas how often it happens that when people have been confronted with these realities they go out and for the next day or two they, feeling their solemnity, they try their best to improve. They try to live a bit more zealously for God, as if it were necessary for them to persuade God to love them and to persuade him to save them.

And all the while they stand away from God's salvation. Let us grasp at this moment, none of us in this hall has anything to do to persuade God to love us. You don't have to beseech and implore God to save you.

You don't have to honor or merit his salvation. The salvation is this very moment complete. The work has been done.

There is no need to perish. As I live, saith the Lord, there's no need for you to perish. Perishing is such a ghastly thing that God hasn't let it depend on our works whether we perish or not.

He has given his son, and if as bankrupt sinners we receive his son, then God himself says that we shall never so much as come into judgment. The issue is already settled. We have passed from death unto life.

There is therefore now no condemnation for such people. They are eternally saved. Their name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

The wonderful thing is that we do not have to wait. We can know it now. Rejoice said the Apostle Paul writing to some Christians once.

Rejoice. Your name is written in heaven. Rejoice said our Lord Jesus to his disciples.

In this your name is written in heaven. They knew it. They knew it.

Therefore the eternal tellers of God's law left them quite at peace. But similarly, is it also settled in this life. If a man do not believe the Savior, he is condemned already.

The issue is settled either way in this life. Therefore though it be a lecture and not a sermon, allow me please, in as much as I love you, to ask you personally and point blank, are you certain your name is in the book of life? May I implore you that if you are not thus certain, to make it your immediate business to find God's salvation, that the name be written there at once. For in that coming day God himself has said it, that if a man's name be not written in that book of life, he shall be cast into the lake of fire.

That is the second death.

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