

Wicked Men of the Past Are Still in Hell

by Jonathan Edwards

Wicked men of the past are still in Hell because their souls are immortal, they are not in a state of probation, and their debt is what they cannot pay.

Scripture: Isaiah 38:17

Topics: "Eternal Damnation", "Hell And Judgment"

Description

Jonathan Edwards preaches about the eternal damnation of wicked men who lived before the flood and are still in Hell, emphasizing their unchanging state and the reasons why they remain in torment. He discusses the immortality of their souls, the absence of mercy in Hell, and the futility of seeking deliverance. Edwards warns sinners to take heed and avoid the same fate by reflecting on the prolonged suffering of those in Hell and the lack of hope or respite they experience.

Transcript

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(Dated June, 1749)

1 Peter 3:19, 20

By which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison, etc...

Two things it is my present purpose to observe concerning the spirits or souls of those wicked men that Noah preached to...

1. How long ago they lived.
2. How those souls are here spoken [of] as to their present state, "spirits in prison."

DOCTRINE. -- Those wicked men who lived before the flood, and went to Hell in Noah's time, are there still.

1. I would give some reasons why they have remained in Hell so long.
2. Observe in some respects in what circumstances they remain there all this while.

I. Give some reasons.

Negatively.

1. 'Tis not because Hell has been tolerable to 'em.

2. 'Tis not because they ben't convinced of their former folly...That they have not yet been brought to their right mind or to their judgment of things.

3. 'Tis not because they are careless about their own welfare and ease, and not willing to be at any possible labors or cost in order to escape, if there were any hope of deliverance. Not because they don't wish and long... not thoroughly overwhelmed... not because they ben't in earnest... that they ben't thoroughly engaged in their spirits... not yet disposed to own that the courses that they went on going weren't good... not disposed to attend to any offer of mercy... because they begrudge... would be unwilling to lay out themselves... not because they are covetous... not willing to be shown...

4. 'Tis not because they were weaker than the generality of men. Many of them were giants.

5. Not because there is not a great number of those who are disposed to unite their strength to burst prison.

Affirmatively.

1. Their souls are immortal... made for eternity... of a nature agreeable to this design...

Though they desire it, they can't return to nothing. "Seek death and cannot find it." Extreme torment, but no tendency to annihilate the soul... tendency to sink it, but not to reduce it to nothing. 'Tis not with the soul as 'tis with the body in its present mortal state... extreme oppression tends to destroy it.

2. They are not in a state of probation.

3. Their debt is what they can't pay...Great debt to Divine justice. Have not wherewith... Nothing to pay... Cast into prison till they should pay the last mite...

4. THERE IS NOT GOSPEL PREACHED IN HELL. Christ did not die for the damned... had no respect to that world... to those in this state... any more than to the devil. No means of grace Means of grace not accommodated to that state. No manner of provision made in any respect for their relief. No aid. Preaching of the Word don't reach them. The prayers of saints, of godly friends, don't reach them.

5. The place and state they are in was never designed for the exercise of mercy.

God is infinitely merciful; but the exercises of mercy are not for ever... Limited by Wisdom in various respects: has declared what the purposes of His wisdom are with respect to the exercises of His mercy. As to the kind of beings; fallen men and not angels... His declarations are according to truth... His purposes are not altered...

Hence no mercy in Hell... Though their pain is extreme... God don't pity 'em. Though their wishes for deliverance are great... though their cries are loud... though long continued... though it be exceeding intolerable.

6. By being longer in Hell, they have not become any more fit for any other state... don't make 'em better... although indeed their judgments are convinced, yet their hearts are the same. No change in their dispositions. There are no conversions in Hell. The wrath makes a great change indeed; but no saving change. The wicked in Noah's days were most of them very wicked on earth, yet, in some respects, they become worse when they went to Hell. Not fit for Heaven. Not fit to come and live in this world. Fit for no other place. That is the place provided and fitted for such.

7. The prison is strong that holds them. Delivered up into the hands of Satan... against whom they have no strength. And his cruelty is as strong as his power. And what is much more than devils, God confines them... irreversible sentence binds them. Omniscience opposes them. No escape by subtlety unobserved. Often here, in this world, persons break prison by stealth... get away by night, when no one observes them... And God's Almighty power holds 'em down. And God ever lives. He is unchangeable. He never will alter His purpose... never will forget His own Son... never will forget His righteous sentence...

II. Observe, in several things, in what circumstances they have been in, all this so long a time.

1. They have not been in a state of insensibility. "The Rich man." Not less their sensibility by long-continued torment and misery... hence not been deprived of the use of reason.

2. Have had no time of respite all this while. No rest. Rev. 14:11 -- "No rest day nor night." Both day and night are mentioned, because the night in this world is a time of rest. Have never been asleep... never find any resting-place. Never find out any assuaging medicines... any cool shadows... cooling green... never found a drop of water... never found any expedient for mitigating their torment.

They have had much to goad 'em, in exercising their invention. Necessity is the mother of invention. But their inventions have not saved them... have had nothing to divert them.... no amusement to take off their attention....

3. Have not forgotten things that were so long ago, or when they were on earth. "Son, remember."... Will remember over all at the Day of Judgment. Have not forgotten pleasant circumstances they lived in ... swam in delights... their lives were long... the wickedness they committed... the opportunities they had... the warnings... Noah's preaching... their folly... the thoughts they had concerning God and His testimony.

4. Their misery is not grown more tolerable by their being so long used to it.

5. The great additions that have been made to the numbers from their time has been no comfort to 'em.

6. They have had no hope all this while... have none now... though their torments have been so long continued.

This is verified concerning all that go down to the pit of Hell. (Isa. 38:17-19) -- "They that go down to the pit cannot hope for Thy truth."

USE:

May be of warning: Let sinners in these days take warning. Those that now live in unbelief and impenitence are in danger of the same.

1. Let me call upon [you] seriously to consider how long a time those who have been spoken of have already worn out [themselves] in Hell: they have been there 4000 years. How many ages? How many and

great changes, and successions, and transactions? How many generations have passed? How many successions of those who had come into being, gradually grown up, and grown old, and then died?

Not only have many generations gradually come upon the stage and have died; but many great and populous nations have come into being, and have flourished, and made a great figure in the world for many ages, and then by degrees have dwindled and wasted, swallowed up by other nations and come to nothing, and nothing of them now know but by history. And some of them very ancient and powerful, so that even the very history of them is almost come to nothing and vanished; and all since they have been suffering the flames of Hell, without any cessation or rest. The world has been peopled... subdued... many mighty princes have appeared and made a good bustle, and none... whose memory is now almost forgotten... Very great and magnificent cities... and not 'tis hardly to be known where they stood. Many kingdoms, yea, many great monarchies.. Those four monarchies of the world. How many things have worn out! The strongest fortunes.... strongest empires... most durable monuments.... pillars of brass... monuments of marble stone... Languages used as the common speech of large countries. Such things have gradually perished, and length of time worn 'em out; but yet the torments of the "spirits in prison" yet remains... not come to nothing... are as fresh and lively and in as great vigor as the first moment.

The souls who are the subjects of these miseries were sinners, and their miseries immortal. Since they have been in Hell there has been a long series of wonderful dispensations of God towards His Church and the whole world. After the flood, the nations degenerated... fell off to idolatry... Abraham was 'called'... children of Jacob became a great nation... Christ was foretold of old, from time to time.. anciently prefigured... and in the fullness of time Christ actually came into the world... all these ancient prophecies and ancient types were fulfilled... the Jews, God's ancient people, rejected... Gentiles called... prophecies were given ... a mighty change made in the Roman kingdom... Antichrist arose... reigned for long time... but at length the Reformation came... During all those mighty changes on earth those souls spoken of in the doctrine, continued without ease day or night or one minute's respite, wrestling with the mighty torments of Hell; and so they continue still... torment not abated. These great and mighty changes on earth have not affected them to cause any change there. There have been many good times on earth: days of great good; but...

2. How we may suppose the things which they remember of their past lives now affects them... their worldly enjoyments... the length of the time of their past ease and pleasures... they lived long lives... their past opportunities... their long warnings... the preaching they had... their folly and stupidity... obstinacy...

3. How many since have followed their steps and have gone to Hell in like manner. 'Tis not the manner of men to take warning by those that perish before them... Those that are gone before can see the folly of those that come after, whom it will do no good. The rich man in Hell. Those that went to Hell in Noah's day, see the folly of those that come to 'em from generation to generation. But those that follow after don't see the folly of those who went before, and so they follow them...

4. They that have worn out so many ages in Hell, are never the nearer any end of their misery. he time is very long that they have suffered.... many tedious days... tedious years... and tedious ages one after another... They must wear out another space of time as long as this in Hell flames, and another after that... Soon the time will come when they will actually have worn out a million such as... yea, a million and millions... God foresees the time... knows the particular passage of the day. Yea, as many such ages as there are particles of dust on the globe of the earth... And even then NO MERCY. It will be without end. FOR EVER, YEA, FOREVER. Therefore take warning. If you neglect to take warning you will go to Hell...

and the time will come when you will have been as long as they now have been... and you must also be there millions of millions... and you will be your wishes, and cries, and strength, and entreaties will be in vain. You in like manner will reflect on and curse your folly.

5. The torment that those spoken of in the doctrine have endured for so long a time, is but an imprisonment in order to execution. "Spirits in prison." "Chains of darkness." There is another day. Their misery is great now. We learn by the parable of Dives and Lazarus... I know nothing by which it can be determined that the misery will not be a thousand times as great... They 'tremble.' The chains are strong. There is not hope... no relief to them.

6. The means and opportunities they enjoyed were nothing to yours. Little revelation of a future state.

7. God has an appointed time to wait on you. 'The Spirit will not always strive.'

8. Consider the sudden, unexpected manner in which they were destroyed (Luke 17:26, 27). ... You will probably be surprised as they were. They had as much reason to flatter themselves as you, (Job 27:20). -- "A tempest stealeth him away in the night."

DIRECTIONS:

1. Avoid those things by which the men that went to Hell in Noah's time undid themselves... particularly sensuality, (Gen. 6; Luke 17:27). ... So it was with Sodom. Violence. "Evil imagination." They would not hearken. They grew hardened to long-continued calls and warnings... habitually made light. Is their not reason to apprehend that this is the case with many here? You must reform your life... thorough reformation...

2. You must in this respect be as Noah was in the generation of those souls that are "castaways;" particularly

1. You must avoid those liberties of young people that are customary.

2. Another thing that is apparently become customary, and doubtless is very provoking to God, is pride and extravagance in apparel. Not that I condemn all adorning the body. 'Tis evident by Scripture that some moderate degree of this is lawful. Oil that makes his face to shine, (Ecc. 9:8; Mat. 6:17; Pro. 31:21, 22; Exo. 3:22). But ye 'tis apparent that there is a most sinful extravagance in this kind, (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4; Isa. 3:16, 18 etc.). Appears to be very provoking to God... when persons go beyond their rank. One end of apparel seems to be to distinguish. (Pro. 31:22, 23). Common people to show an affectation to be like those of high rank; country towns to affect to be like the metropolis. When they go beyond their estate, disable themselves from paying their debts; deprive themselves of other things more necessary and more profitable; disable themselves much from deeds of charity. An affection to distinguish themselves in imitating the fashions of the more gay part of the world. Complying with the general customs of a country in clothing is not vulgar. On the contrary, 'tis not decent to be singular. But some fashions in themselves are ill... extravagance... very costly... immodest...

All this care, and pains, and cost to adorn themselves shows persons to much affect outward ornament... seem to show that they make much of themselves... all that which tends to encourage a general excess. Such things as these have been condemned by wise men of all nations.

'Tis a time when the nations here have got to a vast excess. The land is become exceeding extravagant. More so than in England in proportion to our ability and ranks. Prevents great good that might be done... is continually running in debt. The main thing that brings our greatest national calamities.. particularly the present state the country is in with regard to a medium. *2* And is the main source of that general injustice that has been so long complained of... keeps the country in constant distress... maintains constant injustice... threatens us with ruin... We in this town *3* are evidently got to a great excess. Boston is extravagant beyond London. And we, considering all things, I think beyond them... how far below we fall short in rank... state... education and our situation in the world... far beyond them.

I had occasion to observe the people at Portsmouth, in both the congregations in that place. That is a place very much famed for politeness, and is a city much like Boston in many respects. I judged the apparel of our congregation was fully as costly. Many things that might make it proper for them to go beyond us.

Such excess in gaiety and costliness of apparel is a manifestation of great vanity of mind. It seems to show a great senselessness of our own vileness... becomes us to go modestly ... modest apparel would better become such sinful creatures. Do not consider the end for which clothing was given... to hide our shame... that deformity that is the first of sin... senselessness of what our bodies are coming to ... shows vanity of mind, as it shows the heart to be set on that which is exceeding vain and empty... great want of a sense of the worth of those spiritual ornaments that are infinitely more valuable.

If persons had a proper concern for their soul, there surely would not appear very much affectation to...

If religion should greatly revive it would undoubtedly make a great alteration.

This is one thing, among others, that tends to prevent its reviving.

God has of late awfully testified His displeasure for the extravagance of the country's manner of living.

3. You must not only seek, but strive. You must make it a business... main business... thorough... How plain the necessity of it! How often the Word of God! How plain by experience! On many accounts necessary... How much you have had to convince you of the necessity! And are you, after all, in any sense awake? And how can you excuse this folly?

4. Be seasonable.

The sinners of the old world perished by the Flood because they were not seasonable. They doubtless, many of them, used means afterwards. Had need to make haste... So we are directed from time to time. "Haste"... "escape for thy LIFE." On many accounts necessary. How many have we reason to think perish through delay!

5. Not only engage in but go through that great work that is necessary in order to your escaping eternal damnation.

Do in this respect as Noah did for the saving himself and his house from the Flood.

6. Don't waste time in halting between two opinions.

How there seem to be some things that give special encouragement.

Isa. 55:6, 7.

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