

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 26 July 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Quality of Existence in Hell

In the year 1876, a petite, red-haired Scottish woman set sail for West Africa, in answer to God's call to be a missionary. For three years, she worked with a group of missionaries near the Nigerian coast; but she wasn't content to stay in areas where the Gospel had already been preached. She was determined to go inland with the Gospel, even if she had to go it alone. (And that's exactly what she did!) Over the next four decades, Mary went into dark, demonic strongholds, where other missionaries were afraid to go. In the villages, she fearlessly confronted the witchdoctors, and defied their deadly curses. Everywhere she went, it was a hair-raising spiritual showdown; and time and time again, Mary proved that her God was more powerful than any evil spirit. At the risk of her own life, she defended and protected women who were cruelly abused. She rescued and adopted many children who had been abandoned by their parents, or nearly murdered. (Twins were considered "devil children," and were killed just after birth.) Many a time, when enemy tribes were just about to attack and slaughter each other, Mary somehow managed to come between them, and stop the fighting. (She was well-known for sitting between the warring tribes and knitting away, while the chieftains came to terms of peace.) Most importantly, though, she took the life-giving Gospel of salvation to people who, for all their lives, had lived in fear and misery. People couldn't help but see the power and the love of God in her; and many of them turned from their worship of evil spirits, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and were gloriously saved.

Now, many people have heard of this amazing woman named Mary, who led so many souls to Christ; yet, who led *Mary* to Christ? It certainly wasn't her dad, for he never knew the Lord. He was a raging alcoholic, who wasted his family's money on drink, and died early. Her mother was a godly Christian, who taught her children about the Lord; yet, it wasn't her mother who led her to the Lord, either. Nor was it a pastor, or a Sunday School teacher. It was actually an old **widow** in her neighbourhood who led her to Christ. You see, before she was saved, Mary was a "wild lassie," who ran around the streets with the wrong kind of friends; yet, this widow cared enough for these children's souls to invite them into her home: and every time they spent time in her home, she told them that they needed to be saved. Finally, one dark winter afternoon, as the children were seated around the fire, the old woman pointed to the blazing fire in the hearth, and said, "If ye dinna repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, your soul will burn in the lowin', bleezin' fire for ever and ever."¹ Well, that scared Mary; and that day, Mary repented of her sin, and believed on Jesus Christ! Fast-forward twenty years from that moment, and that little red-haired girl was leading people in West Africa out of the **"land of the shadow of death"**; and it was all because of a widow who wasn't afraid to warn the children on her street about the reality of Hell!

In our modern humanistic society, people go to great lengths to shield themselves from unpleasant truths. Anyone who makes them feel even the least bit uncomfortable or guilty about their sin is considered "evil." People especially don't want to hear anything about the "lowin', bleezin' fire" of Hell. They accuse Bible-believing Christians of being "fear mongers" who are using "fear tactics" to manipulate

people. Yet, shielding oneself from truth does not make the truth disappear. The Bible says that there *is* a “lowin’, bleezin’ Hell”; and all who reject, or neglect, God’s offer of salvation *will* endure an unending existence in that terrible place. This morning, we will see what existence in Hell is like; and, as we have been doing in the last five messages, we will also see how a sinner can *escape* Hell. The title of this message is *The Quality of Existence in Hell*.

Read Mark 9:42-48.

I. The infernal quality of Hell

In one of our sermons on Heaven a couple months ago, we examined what the Bible says about the “quality of life” in Heaven. But this morning, we are talking about the exact opposite. We are now talking about the “quality of life” in *Hell*—except that we can’t rightly call it “the quality of *life*.” At best, we could call it the “quality of existence”—but not the “quality of life.” You see, existence in Hell is not “life”: it is an existence of ongoing, never-ending “**death**.” People in Hell are very much *alive* physically, and totally aware of their suffering; yet, their existence *is never* called “eternal life.” And why not? Because the Bible defines “**eternal life**” as **a relationship** with God, which lasts for eternity; and unrepentant sinners who die without Christ *will never* possess this wonderful relationship. They had the chance to receive eternal life while they were still on this earth: but they refused the offer.

If you were here last week, you’ll remember that we read Jesus’ promise in **John 5:24**. In that verse Jesus said, “*He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath (has) everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*” This is a simple, crystal-clear statement. Jesus says that “**eternal life**” (a personal relationship with God) begins at the instant you believe on Him and His Father. It’s like crossing a bridge over a bottomless, uncrossable chasm, into the realm of spiritual life with God. And the best part is that this spiritual life—this relationship with God—continues on past the veil of physical death, and throughout all eternity. Jesus said, “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*”

Eternal life is offered to whoever will receive Christ by faith. *Everyone* is invited to leave the realm of spiritual death, and cross over the Bridge of Jesus Christ, into spiritual life! However, those who reject this free offer from God will remain spiritually “dead” when they pass out of this world. Now, make no mistake about it: those who die without Christ will one day receive a *bodily resurrection*, as all men will receive. Jesus said, “*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*” *Everyone* who has ever lived will receive a bodily resurrection one day. However, the question is, “*Which* resurrection will you receive—the resurrection unto life, for the saved? Or the resurrection unto damnation, for the lost?” Those

who die without Christ *will* “live” again, in the sense of receiving a resurrected body one day; yet, they will remain *spiritually* “dead” to God for all eternity.

The inhabitants of Hell *will* have resurrected bodies, which will exist for the rest of eternity. However, the body that lost people will receive won’t be *anything* like the body that believers will receive. The body that believers will receive will be radiant and glorious, and without any trace of sin; but the body that lost people will receive will be just the opposite. It will be *inglorious*, and filled with sin. It will be a body that is **“fitted to destruction.”** Let’s see what Paul said about this.

Read Romans 9:14-22.

What is Paul saying in this passage? Is he saying that God has elected certain people to be saved, and others to be damned, and that those who are elected to damnation will be given no opportunity to be saved? Not on your life! God has given *everyone* the free will to receive Him, or to reject Him: and He gives us space to consider His offer of salvation, and repent. However, God will not be trifled with. God has the right to *harden* the hearts of those who have *already chosen* to harden their hearts. Pharaoh is a perfect example of this truth: and that is why Paul named him as “exhibit A” of the vessels that are **“fitted to destruction.”**

You see, when God began to pound Egypt with the ten plagues, He was giving Pharaoh space to repent. The plagues were designed to break Pharaoh’s will, and soften his heart toward Jehovah. Yet, Pharaoh continually chose to harden his heart. Three times the Bible specifically says that Pharaoh **“hardened his heart.”** What was God’s response to Pharaoh, then? His response is that eventually, *He Himself* began to harden Pharaoh’s heart. Six times we are told that *God* actually hardened Pharaoh’s heart; and one time we are told that Pharaoh’s heart **“was hardened”**—which implies that God was the one hardening his heart. *Three times* Pharaoh hardened *his own* heart; and therefore, *God* hardened his heart seven times. God said, “All right, Pharaoh. Since you have chosen to harden your heart, and have refused to repent, *I* will now *help you* harden your heart. *You* have chosen to be a ‘vessel of dishonour’; so I will now help to mould you into that kind of vessel. Furthermore, I will use you as an object lesson to all future generations. I will put up with your stubbornness and defiance, and postpone your death a little longer, so that I can *use you* for my glory. When you and your army die in the depth of the Red Sea, all the world will see my power and glory. So go ahead. Defy me. But you will *not* win.”

Folks, the bottom line is this: *there is only a limited time* to be saved! That is why the Bible says, **“Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”** God is like a potter at the wheel; and He moulds us either into vessels of honour, or of dishonour, *according to how*

we respond to Him. You can't defy God, and defy God, and defy God, and then call Him "cruel" and "unfair" when He finally says, "All right. Your time's up. I will not convict you and draw you to myself anymore. I will now fit you to destruction." God is *completely* fair. He gives us time to repent. That is why Paul said that the "**vessels of wrath**" (the unsaved) are "**fitted to destruction.**" That word "**fitted**" is translated from the Greek word *katartidzo*, which means "*to repair or adjust.*" The idea is that the potter *intended* to make a certain kind of vessel, but then re-moulded it into another kind of vessel. Similarly, the word "**formed,**" in **verse 19**, has the idea of "moulded." It is based on the word *plasso*, from which we get our word "plastic"—something that can be moulded into shape. God can make sinners into a beautiful workmanship, "**created in Christ Jesus unto good works,**" if they will believe on Him. However, if sinners refuse to repent, and choose to throw away their day of mercy, God has every right to fit them to destruction.

Now, in contrast, those who believe on Christ are "**afore prepared unto glory.**" In other words, from the moment that a person believes on Christ, he is *guaranteed* that he will one day receive a glorious, resurrected body, just like Christ's resurrected body. This promise is so certain, that in **Romans 8**, Paul says that those who have been "**justified**" are *already* "**glorified.**" In other words, God sees the believer *as though he already* had his resurrected, glorified body! There is no reversal of destiny for the believer. God will not change His mind, and cast a believer out of His family, and re-mould him back into a vessel fit for destruction. No, the believer is already prepared to glory; and nothing can change that. It was God's desire, from eternity past, for *every* soul to be a vessel unto honour; and from the moment that a sinner receives God's gift of salvation, his identity as a "vessel unto honour" is sealed. But for the lost, the wrath of God is still abiding upon them; and if they would spend eternity in Heaven with God, they *must* repent and truly believe on Christ, so that God can make them into a *new* vessel. God desires to make sinners into a *new* creation—a beautiful workmanship—so that He can fill them to the brim with His righteousness.

Now, remember—when Paul speaks about "vessels" here in **Romans 9**, he's talking about *souls*; and the thing that makes us "souls" is that we have both a spirit *and* a body. God created man as a "living soul," comprised of a spirit and a body; and we will be "souls" for the rest of eternity. That is why there will be a resurrection of the body for both believers and unbelievers. But, as I said before, the question is: "*Which* resurrection will you receive?" For those who die without Christ, *their* bodily resurrection will be a horrible one. In Hell, unbelievers will have a body that is grotesque, horrible, and worm-like. In a couple past messages, we have looked at the last verse of **Isaiah 66**; but I wish to take you to this verse once again.

Read Isaiah 66:22-24.

In **verse 24**, Isaiah describes the bodies of the lost as “*carcasses*.” Yet, Isaiah says that “*their worm* [in other words, their bodies] ***shall not die***.” In other words, for lost people in Hell, their existence will be a living death! Many people today are fascinated with the pop culture of “zombies” and “living dead”; but if they die without Christ, that is *exactly* the kind of body they will receive one day! Lost souls in Hell will have *de-glorified* bodies, which will reflect the ugliness of their sin and rebellion against God.

We often hear doctors, nurses, and psychiatrists these days speak about “**quality of life**”; but what does “quality of life” mean, exactly? People define “quality of life” in different ways: but when you come down to it, there really are only two views of the “quality of life”—the view of a **saved person**, and the view of a **lost person**. Tragically, many lost people don’t consider their lives to be worth living, either because they are in constant pain, or because they are struggling with seemingly insufferable problems in this life. Their whole sense of worth and dignity is wrapped up in “how happy and comfortable *I* am.” But they are dead wrong! Folks, our dignity is based on the fact that “*God* created me to be His servant.” That’s why Paul said, “***For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain***” (because he knew that at the moment of death, he would be with the Lord in Heaven). Even though Paul was nearly blind—and even though he was constantly hated, and beaten within an inch of his life, and imprisoned everywhere he went—and even though he was chronically poor, and often hungry—he had a wonderful, joyful “quality of life.” Countless other believers down through the centuries have, with Paul, testified that they are “***troubled on every side, yet not distressed...perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed***.” A Christian’s “quality of life” is based on *Christ*, the Author of life, and not on circumstances. Those *without* Christ may *seem* to have a certain measure of happiness for a while, based on how comfortable and prosperous they are in this world; but without Christ in their lives, they have no real joy, purpose, or quality of life. And if they pass into eternity without Christ, they will be *forever* devoid of “quality of life.” They will not have the slightest shred of hope (not even a *false* hope), because they will be without God for all eternity; and they will suffer unending torment, in the “lowin’, bleezin’ fire.”

II. Jesus’ illustration of Hell

(Read Mark 9:42-48 again.) In this passage, Jesus cited **Isaiah 66:24** not once, not twice, but three times; and He solemnly warned His listeners that there is a real place of fire and torment for the lost. Now, Jesus *could* have used the Hebrew word *she’ol* to refer to Hell, and His audience would have understood what He was saying perfectly. As you’ll remember from recent messages, *she’ol* is a spiritual realm deep in the earth; and in Old Testament times, before Christ died and rose again to pay for our sins, *every* soul went to *she’ol* after death. *She’ol* had two compartments—the place of fiery torment for the lost; and a place of rest for believers, who were waiting for the Saviour to come and pay for their sins, so that they could go to be in God’s immediate presence in Heaven. Jesus *could* have used this word *she’ol*, and

no one would have been mistaken as to which compartment of *she'ol* He was talking about. (After all, He had repeatedly described it as the place where the “**worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.**” This left no question as to Jesus’ meaning!) Yet, Jesus *didn’t* use the word *she'ol*. Instead, He used the word “*Gehenna*.”

Now, what in the world does “Gehenna” mean? Well, “Gehenna” is the Greek form of the Hebrew words “*gey Hinnom*”; and *gey Hinnom* means “the Valley of Hinnom.” This valley is outside Jerusalem, on the southwest side; and in Jesus’ day, it was the location of Jerusalem’s rubbish dump, where people burned their refuse. Day and night the fires in the valley of Gehenna were constantly burning. Everyone knew that *Gehenna* was a place of continual fire: and therefore, when Jesus spoke of Gehenna, they knew that He was speaking about the compartment of *she'ol* where the wicked abide—the place which, in English, we call “Hell.”

Now, the New Testament isn’t the first place in Scripture where the Valley of Hinnom is mentioned. It was mentioned long before the time of Christ. Let’s go to the book of **2 Kings**.

Read 2 Kings 23:4-10.

In **verse 10**, we are told that in the Valley of Hinnom, there was a site called “**Tophet.**” Tophet was a place where, in ancient times, apostate Jews conducted heathen worship rituals—particularly, child sacrifice. In 624 B.C., **King Josiah** (the last righteous king of Judah) destroyed and defiled this place of heathen worship, as part of his reform of the nation of Judah. About a century later, after the Jews had returned to their land from their captivity in Babylon, they began to use this site of ancient heathen worship as a garbage dump; and the fires in the garbage dump of Gehenna continued to burn for the next five centuries, until the time of Christ. Do you see now why Jesus used the word “Gehenna” in His preaching? Not only did He use Gehenna as an *illustration* of Hell: He made it into a *synonym* for Hell.

However, there is an even deeper meaning to the words “Gehenna” and “Tophet.” You see, God called this valley “**the valley of slaughter.**” Why? Because countless bodies of the children of Judah were laid there after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The Jews had slaughtered *their* infants in sacrifice to Baal in the valley of Hinnom (just as people slaughter *their* infants in the womb today): therefore, God allowed *them* to be slaughtered and buried in that very place, until there literally was no more place to bury them. Their carcasses lay exposed to the elements, and to the birds and wild beasts. The LORD foretold of this mass burial in Hinnom decades before it happened.

Read Jeremiah 7:30-34.

Needless to say, the name “Gehenna” conjured up grim images to the Jews. Gehenna was simply another name for “Tophet”—the place where the carcasses of their ancestors had lain unburied after the Babylonian invasion. It was also the place where refuse fires had been burning for centuries. Centuries before Christ’s birth, the prophet Isaiah used the name “Tophet” as a synonym for the fiery place of torment, where king and commoner alike suffer eternally for their sins. In **Isaiah 30:32**, Isaiah wrote, *“For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.”*

Every day, people use the word “hell” as a curse word, or as the brunt of a joke. Little do they know the horror that awaits in the ancient place of fire and darkness of which they so speak so lightly. There is no “life” in Hell—nothing that is worthy of being called “life,” that is. There is no joy, no peace, no hope, no pleasure, nor comfort in Hell. Hell is a place of eternal, painful, tormented existence for its inhabitants; and it is “ordained of old” for all who chose to cling to their sin, and reject God’s gift of salvation. Don’t flatter yourself that “Even if I do end up in Hell, I’ll just have a big party down there with all my friends.” Hell is NOT a party! In **Matthew 13:50** Jesus called it a *“furnace of fire,”* where there is continual *“wailing and gnashing of teeth.”* The rich man who died and found himself in Hell pleaded with Abraham (whom he saw on the other side of the gulf, in Paradise) to send Lazarus to him with just one drop of water on his fingertip, so that he could put it on his tongue, because he was *“tormented in this flame.”* Yet, even this incredibly miniscule request for relief was denied to the rich man. To this day, the rich man is still crying out and wailing in anguish; but he will never receive relief. He made his choice to be rich in this world, but not “rich toward God”; and his choice to reject God can never be reversed.

Many cults, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists (as well as an increasing number of so-called “evangelicals”) reject the idea of “conscious, eternal torment,” because they think that a loving God couldn’t possibly cast someone into a fiery chamber. In my conversations with Jehovah’s Witnesses, I have personally heard them use **Jeremiah 32:35** as their “proof text” to show that God is too loving to cast someone into eternal fire. Let’s look at that verse, and see what they’re talking about.

Read Jeremiah 32:32-35.

How do the cults use this verse to show that God wouldn’t cast people into a place of eternal, conscious torment? They focus in on the statement, *“Which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind”*; and from this statement, they conclude that since God didn’t command the nation of Israel to burn their children in fire, then it surely wouldn’t come into His mind to punish sinners with eternal fire.

Now, this interpretation of **Jeremiah 32:35** may sound compassionate; but it is a false interpretation, and a false compassion, built on man's sinful, faulty reasoning, and not on Scripture. Mankind, in his self-righteousness, minimalises his sin, and reasons that he isn't bad enough to be punished with eternal torment; therefore, He concludes that it would be "unjust," "sadistic," and "cruel" of God to cast them into Hell. But God says very differently. God has revealed His character to us: and justice is just as much part of His character as love is. God *is* love: and He loves us so much, that He sacrificed a part of Himself—His own beloved Son—on the cross, to pay the eternal penalty for our sins, so that *we* wouldn't have to pay for it eternally in the Lake of Fire. However, the same justice that drove God to sacrifice His own Son demands that He punish sinners eternally if they *reject* His gift of love. The Bible says that those who reject Him ***"shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night."***

III. The injunction to turn off the path to Hell

My friend, if you have never taken Hell seriously before, it's time to get serious about it! Jesus said, ***"If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."*** Obviously, Jesus didn't mean that we must literally chop off parts of our bodies in order to evade Hell, because the sin problem is not in our physical hands or eyes, but in our "heart"—our innermost being.

Read Mark 7:14-23.

In these verses, Jesus affirms what the prophet Jeremiah said. Jeremiah wrote, ***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"*** The heart is a continual fountain of sin; and therefore, chopping off your physical hand cannot take away your sinful desires. You may literally pluck out your eye if you wish: but that won't stop the heart's desire for adultery. You could even cut out both eyes; and though you would not have to deal with physically seeing moral filth anymore, it still wouldn't keep your heart from imagining evil. What you and I need is to receive a *new* heart and nature—one that is created in righteousness and true holiness. What did Jesus mean, then, when he said to "cut off" your hand? He was saying, "Abandon whatever sinful pleasure is keeping you from repenting and receiving eternal life—at all costs!" Christ was using extreme language to drive home the seriousness of our sin, and of our desperate need to repent and be saved. Do *you* wish to

receive eternal life, yet you don't want it enough to give up some sinful things that you love? Then "cut off" that sinful pleasure by running to Jesus! Turn your back on your sin, and run to Christ without delay! He will forgive your sins, and give you a new heart, and eternal life!

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I urge anyone who is unsure of where he stands with God to come forward in this invitation time (or just after we dismiss), and speak with me, or with some other member of our church, about salvation. Don't put it off! Christ is speaking to your heart this morning; and now is the time to respond. And Christian, I would urge you to be bold as you share the Gospel with people. You don't have to have a seminary degree, and know Greek and Hebrew, to share the Gospel with someone. Be like that widow in that little cottage in Dundee, Scotland, who cared enough about the youth in her neighbourhood to tell them the uncomfortable truth that they needed to hear—that there is a "lowin', bleezin' fire" in the next life for those who reject the Lord. Be filled with God's Word; be filled with the Spirit; be bold; open your mouth; and tell others how they can be reconciled to the King!

¹ Edgar Enoch, *The Missionary Heroine of Calabar* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1937, p. 8); cited by Robert Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook o Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 434.