

Ephesians 14-05-18b

We resume our study now, we're in Ephesians chapter 4, but we're looking at the concept of what are the eternal destinations. It says here in verse 9 that He ascended, but what does it mean that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. And oddly enough, that statement that He might fill all things is woven into the understanding that is beginning to be spread around about the lake of fire.

Now you've got to hang with me on this because I had trouble following the logic when it was presented to me and I had to listen to the whole thing twice. But here's the idea, and maybe I can make more sense out of it than it initially made sense to me, that He might fill all things. God fills all things, right? This is, you get omnipresence, God's everywhere, everything is of God, you know, the people that carry this too far are your pantheists that, you know, God's in the trees, God's in the rocks, God's in the golf course, I'm going to, you know, the ninth hole is my chapel and I'm going to go play golf this morning on Sunday and that's going to be my spiritual, you know, experience for the day.

God is everywhere. God's in everything. Well, is this true? Sort of.

It is a human construct, you know, is God in the corner of my laptop screen? Well, why would He be? Does He need to be there for some reason? God is everywhere He needs to be. He can do whatever He wants to do, but the fact that you have a power doesn't mean you're constantly exercising it. This is the King Midas fallacy, you know, King Midas had the Midas touch, everything he touched turned to gold and he couldn't control it.

He tries to eat a drumstick, drumstick turns to gold, tries to lay down on his bed, bed turns to gold, tries to put on his sandal, sandal turns to gold, you know, you get the notion that this would be a real affliction if you can't control your power. One thing about God, whatever else you want to say about Him, and you can summarize His attributes a lot of different ways, but God has control of Himself. God can choose to be in a place and He can choose to not be in a place.

He can choose to know a thing and God the Son could choose not to know a thing. Remember when the woman with the issue of blood was coming behind Jesus, He's walking through the crowds and she says, I know that if I can just get near Him, He can heal me. And she comes up behind and she just touches the edge of His robe and she's healed.

And it knocks her back and she exclaims and they turn around and Jesus says, I perceive that power has gone out of me, virtue has gone out of me, and He's looking through the crowd and in Greek it says He repeatedly asked, who touched me, who touched me? In His humanity, Jesus did not know and He's still the Son of God, but He had set aside His divine knowledge so that He could live a life in human flesh that would be an example for us. We're not God. We don't know everything.

We can't look at each other's heads and see all the thoughts and intents and motivations and does this really look good on me or does it really make me fat? You ask your husband and he says, oh, it looks great, dear, and you don't look in his head and say, he's lying. This makes me look fat and I'm taking it off right now and I'm taking it back. You know, and it's a good thing

that we don't know, we don't know, you know, there's civility and courtesy and priorities and you get invited for a meal and you partake.

And I've told you the story when I went back to where I grew up in Southern California and a wonderful lady, a lady that was led to the Lord by my mother. And I went down and visited her and she invited me for dinner. And so there at her house, it's just down the street from where I used to live when I was a little guy, and very, very wonderful.

I hadn't been there in years and nobody in my family had been back there since we had moved. And so she graciously invited me. The whole family is there.

We're having this meal and it was some kind of sheep meat. And we just had never eaten that in my family. And it had, I don't know which kind it is, it's either, I don't know if it's lamb or is mutton sheep also? It might have been mutton.

Whatever it is that you serve with lime jelly, you put like green mint jelly or something with it. I don't know. I'd never seen it, never had it.

And she put the big chunk of it on my plate and I took the first bite and it sucked all the moisture out of my body. All of it, all of the moisture in my body went out through my mouth into this piece of meat and it still wouldn't chew. And it just, it was like, it was like eating, it was like finding a piece of wood in the woods that has been there and has gone dry and it's just crumbling now and it's getting ready to turn back to soil and putting it in your mouth.

It just, it was the most horrible thing I've ever put in my mouth. And there was a big plate of it. And she put this green jelly on it, which just made it worse.

But I'm a guest and I love this lady. She's like a dear aunt and she was so thrilled to have me there. And so I manfully forked my way through that piece of dead sheep and just forced it down and tried to keep a complacent look on my face and it was one of the worst meals I think I have ever eaten, everything.

There was some other stuff and, oh, you know, your mother would want me to give you more and no, she wouldn't. If she could have seen into my head, you know, this would have all been visible and it would have been awful. And I, it's, you know, this is the sort of sacrifice that people make all the time in social circumstances.

You say, thank you very much. I appreciate, you know, I can tell that you put a tremendous amount of effort into this meal on my behalf and I really appreciate it. And I do.

And the fact that she couldn't know that I had not only never eaten that, but couldn't really get it down is beside the point. There is a different priority. The point about the attributes of God, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, veracity, you know, all the different things about God, God is in control of those things.

And it's important to remember for what I'm about to address. And I'll put it very simply. Is there a lake of fire? Yes or no? Is God in it? If you push the doctrine of omnipresence, there's no place where God is not, then God is in hell, right? Does this make any kind of sense to a rational human being? No.

Why would God be in hell? What's the purpose? Is he going to inhabit every flame? Is he going to? And anybody that's in hell? Let's suppose that there's some living person bobbing around in torment in hell. Is God in them and in all and through all? The alls in the Bible need to be taken in context. I'm here to tell you, title of the first lesson this morning, did Jesus go to hell? No.

Is Jesus as the second member of the Trinity in hell at present? No. There's not a shred of reason to believe that that is so. You can't push statements like this that say that when Christ ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

Well, the lake of fire is a thing, so Jesus is filling hell. Well, it's absurd to you and me, but it's not absurd to other people. This is where in humility, and I respect, I say if somebody wants to believe these things and push these doctrines, go, be warmed, be fed.

I am not going to try to argue. I can only go with my understanding. I can only offer you all my understanding, and my understanding is that you're not going to arrive at this conclusion if you search the scriptures.

If you look carefully and if you're willing to accept the whole counsel, you go to isolated passages and you can prove anything. And to answer a question I raised at the beginning, when there's all of these different opinions, how can you know who's right? This good friend and relative of mine that is asking questions and is really just now getting into and listening to different pastors and hearing different viewpoints and asking me, well, you know, is this right, is what this guy says, you know, is he good, is he bad, how do I know who to listen to? One of the characteristics, one of the ways that you will know is that it is going to be Christ-centered and Christ-focused. Secondly, it is going to be balanced and partake of all of the witness of scripture.

As soon as you start proof texting or taking only parts of scripture, and as soon as you only take two or three concepts and triangulate with just those two or three concepts, you know, any of us that have had celestial navigation, I know there's at least three of us that have, if you only have a couple of bearings and maybe a midshipman took them in the Chesapeake Bay and he didn't really know what he was doing or he picked the wrong steeple or whatever, and they send this down to the guy on the chart, which is me, I can show you a picture of me charting us all the way down the Chesapeake and back, and some guy up top is taking a fix, he's getting a direction, he's saying, well, I see the steeple and the bearing is 93.5, it's 93.5 to the steeple, and he sends this down to me. So I find the steeple on the chart and I backtrack that angle and it would be like this, and so I'm going back and say, okay, we are somewhere along this line because that's what the guy says the bearing is to this steeple. Well, then he turns around, he says, okay, there's a prominent peak on the edge of this little jut out into the bay and the angle to that is this, and so when I plot that back and the line crosses, I say, well, now see where these two lines cross, that's where we are, however, here's the problem, if the guy made a mistake on the bearing up here and made another mistake over there, or if you make a mistake in back plotting, you can end up with what my roommate fondly refers to as the Atlantic Rhombus, where you could be anywhere in a misshapen box, thousands of square miles large, because you had something slightly off, well, the further away you are from that point, the greater the angular error.

I say that to say this, we are safest when we seek the whole counsel of God, we look all through the Bible, and we're careful, and we're a little bit tentative, we're not going to die for any one doctrine, we're not going to create dogma and just stick to it to our living death, and that's what has been happening when it comes to eternal destination to the lake of fire, and I'm going to

summarize this for you very briefly because I want to get back to the scriptures that talk about this. Here's the idea, God is love, it's a verse, John says it, God is love, right? Kind of like God is in all, through all, and over all, right? We just saw that up above. Verse 6, one God and Father of all, above all, through all, and in all.

Jesus has risen above and now He is filling all things. You say, okay, well, I'm going to tentatively understand that to mean that everything is in God's purview, there's nothing He's unaware of, there's nothing that escapes His notice, I'm not going to necessarily go so far as to say He is physically present at every point in space and time, I'm just not going to go quite that far yet, and I'm safe in doing that because you start running into absurdities. Do the same thing with God is love, God is love and so there's a guy that is preaching and that I was asked to listen to and I listened to it twice, God is love, so that's the defining property, you can't do anything that gets away from God is love.

Well if God is love, then everything God does can't contradict love. Well what about judgment? Well God is love and so judgment has to somehow be an expression of love. And here's the upshot of it, here's the logic as I understand it.

Because God is love and there's some people who respond to God's love, there's other people who hate God's love. And it's like a cloying person that's like a stalker or is obsessed with you. There are Hollywood celebrities and somebody gets obsessed with them and they love them too much.

Or in a relationship, somebody is too much in love and builds too much and invests too much in the other person and the other person starts feeling smothered. But it's love, it has to be good, and it's just love and God is love and everything about God is love and nothing that God does or says or is or performs or creates is anything but love. So even His judgment is love.

And so if people find God's love off-putting, well it's still God's love. And what they end up doing is extrapolating and saying, oh by the way, here's the other verse you have to remember, our God is a consuming fire. Our God is a consuming fire.

It's what it says in Scripture, right? Do you see where this is going? Our God is love, our God is a consuming fire. So to be put into the lake of fire is to be so totally immersed in the love of God that when you don't like the love of God, this is hell for you. I'm just telling you, this is the infiltration of political correctness that everything should be positive, you should never intrude anything negative into the life of a child, don't tell them that they did wrong or they did bad.

You love them and the love will punish them. The punishment and discipline and judgment from God doesn't come because God abhors sin or that God hates disobedience. The sin carries its own consequence and its own penalty because God is nothing but love.

And when you put yourself in sin, well then you get enveloped in God's love, well that just tortures and torments you. I mean it's just a, it's really off-speed. But it derives from our passage and others like it.

Well you can make that fly if you only look at God is love, our God is a consuming fire and those whose names are not found written in the book were cast into the lake of fire and you say, well if our God is a consuming fire and these people are in a consuming fire, they must be being immersed in God and because God is love, they're immersed in God's love. So the lake of fire is

immersion in God's love. And it's one step from that to universalism and these people are going to eventually get tired of feeling bad and they're going to start feeling good about God's love and it goes from there.

I bring this up mainly as an example of why we take the time to go verse by verse, book by book, chapter by chapter and try to be comprehensive and get the full story, the full picture. Have you ever been quoted out of context? This happens especially in arguments. Well you said, well I did but if you remember the context, there were other things that were mitigating circumstances on that.

There were extenuating mitigating, if you listen to my context, but this is what happens to people who get recorded and then get fired because some comment they made is taken out of context and blared all over the news, the first thing you know they're resigning. God gets taken out of context, the word of God gets taken out of context and it gets pushed into saying and meaning things that God never intended. When it says that the Lord Jesus fills all things, that he might fill all things, what are the all things that are in view here? This is all things that are being talked about in this passage, which is the concept of the Lord Jesus as one individual man on this earth doing God's work, he has accomplished his mission and has gone to glory and now he has, in a metaphorical sense, said you are now my body, you are my presence, you are here to speak the truth, you are here to reflect God's grace and to shine a light in the world the way I did when I was here.

My body was here as one guy, I'm gone, now your bodies are all over the place and it's your job to do the same thing so that when people have a question about God, you can answer it. When people want to know about him, you can explain him. This is what Jesus did, he was the fullness of deity in bodily form.

No man has seen God at any time, but it is the Son of God, it's the Lord Jesus who has shown him forth, who has made him evident. And that's what scripture says, so when it says that he might fill all things, the plan of God centers in Jesus Christ. He is anticipated in the Old Testament, he is looked at in retrospect in the New Testament, and for us now, he's been gone now for nearly 2,000 years, but the Holy Spirit enables us to enter into the same kind of understanding as when Jesus was here explaining things to his disciples.

So it's not all that mystical, and it's not all that strange, but we wind up asking ourselves this question: well, if this is squirrely about God is love, God's a consuming fire, people thrown into the consuming fire have been thrown into God's love, and that's not what the lake of fire is, then what is it?

Well, this brings us back to a word I mentioned real early this morning, which was *apolumi*, *apolia*, and this takes us to 1 Corinthians 15, another passage, and, by the way, one that the guy doesn't go to, one of several that he does not address. He tries to explain away the wrath of God, that it's not really wrath and God's not really angry, and God doesn't really dislike sin for it being immoral. It just gets stranger and stranger, although there's a lot of truth that is stated; and the approach that you shouldn't be tangled up in traditions and just accept things because they're traditionally taught — that's healthy. And there's nothing more difficult to parse than a twisted truth. There's truth in there, and it's got the taste; it's kind of like some diet chocolate chip cookies, they kind of taste like chocolate, but they're not. It kind of tastes like cherry when

you drink the Kool-Aid, but there's no cherry in it; it's sort of, it's red, and they label it cherry Kool-Aid, but there's no cherries and it's not real.

1 Corinthians 15, 14-23. If Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, this is all of a piece with the ascension, when He ascended on high. The Lord Jesus did not dispense these grace gifts until His work was accomplished.

The gift that you have right now, that you possess, the grace that was given to you specifically, you individually, you've got a kind of grace I don't have. The Lord Jesus Christ, when He ascended, as it were, from our human perspective, sat down and said, all of these individuals that are going to comprise my body on this earth down through the generations, in each generation I need some people who will have this facility, who will have this capability, who will perform this function, who will be this kind of blessing to other believers. And when your name came up and when my name came up, the Lord Jesus Christ, remember He's in charge of time, He's over all and outside, He can pause the VCR and take all the time He wants.

Have you ever frozen the VCR on a crowd shot? Maybe somebody has to get up and do something and so you just freeze it in the middle of the movie, and it's a crowd shot. And you can look at each individual face. Well, if you just played the movie in real time, it just goes by in a blur.

I like to go back and slow down stuff, like when somebody walks out a door and they're hit by a bus, and I know the actor was not hit by a bus, I want to know what is it that got hit by the bus. And so I'll go back and slow it down frame by frame, and you see the person walk out and they turn around, and then just as the bus enters the frame, you see that they've spliced it and there's a mannequin standing there. And you can see the mannequin isn't dressed quite the same, not posed quite the same, doesn't really have a face, just has a cheap wig, and it's fun.

But see, I have that power, bear with me now, I have that power because I control the DVD player or the VCR, whatever it may be. I control it. I can pause it at any given point because I'm outside the world that is being depicted in this screen.

Well, as a crude sort of analogy, that's how God is. How can God hear all the prayers of everybody in the world? Well, for the purposes of our understanding, and this probably isn't the way it actually works, but one way to sort of accommodate our understanding is God hits the pause button. And, okay, there are 11,439,000 prayers going on right now, and He can just take them in order and listen to them.

He can go forward one frame, and He is outside and beyond time, and He's in control of it, so time is not a problem for Him. It's not like, whoa, too many people talking all at once, I just can't listen to them all. He doesn't have that problem because He is over all.

That's what over all means. He is through all and in all, meaning there's nothing He cannot be aware of if He chooses to be, and He chooses to hear our prayers. He's got an infinitude of time.

He can go frame by frame through history. He doesn't have to play it in real time the way we do. We're like a golf ball rolling down a tube.

It's all sequential, and we're in the grip of gravity. We just roll at the speed of—I was thinking about this yesterday. I asked one of the girls, why is it when I hold my hand still, I can see it

clearly, but when I move it real fast, it blurs? Well, it's because there's sort of a shutter speed in our brain, and our brain can only see things clearly at a certain speed.

And if you speed it up too much, it starts to blur, and that tells you that there's a sampling rate in our brain. We can only sample time at a certain rate, and if you get things moving too fast, our sampling brain can't keep up, and it blurs or it blends. God doesn't have that problem.

So if Christ is preached, 1 Corinthians 15, 14, that He's been raised from the dead, how does someone among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. Either God can bring people back from the dead, or He can't. It's not, well, Jesus was a unique case.

He's not a unique case. He was born, He lived, and He died in His human flesh, just like us. He didn't descend to earth in a cloud.

He didn't step out of a flying saucer. He was born. He was incarnate.

He partook of flesh. He got tired, He got hungry, He bled, He bruised, and He relinquished His soul in physical death. And if there is no resurrection of human beings who die, then Jesus Christ was not raised.

There either is resurrection or there isn't. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is empty, and it's a big waste of time. Notice, it doesn't say if Christ didn't die, if He didn't accomplish the work of the cross.

It's if He's not risen. The effectiveness of our salvation isn't primarily in the death of Christ on the cross. It's in His resurrection, because that is life from the dead, if we're all going to die anyway.

And that's what Paul goes on to say. We're false witnesses of God. We've testified of God that He raised up Christ when He didn't raise Him up, if in fact the dead do not rise.

If the dead don't rise, Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. It doesn't say if Christ was not crucified.

It doesn't say if Christ didn't pay for your sins. It says if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. It's all about the resurrection.

I love that line in Shakespeare, and you've heard me quote it a dozen times or more. Life's a poor player that struts and frets his hour on the stage, shaking his fist, sound and fury, signifying nothing. It doesn't mean anything if... Think about people that were alive in 1865.

They just celebrated the opening of the 9-11 museum, and they were talking about all the people that died on 9-11. Well, in 50, 60, 70 years, all of those people would have been dead anyway. And so it isn't that they died, because everybody dies.

It's the way they died. It is the tragic nature of it. And you think, well, but there were other people that died on 9-11.

Those weren't the only people that died. Did you ever think what would it be like if you lost your husband or your brother or your father or your mother on 9-11, but not in the building? They

died in Topeka, Kansas, of cancer. They died in Walla Walla, Washington, because they got hit as a pedestrian by a car.

Well, where are the memorials? Are you just as bereaved? Are you just as tragically bereft of that loved one, as somebody that lost him? Why did they get all the attention, and the guy that died in Topeka on the same day doesn't? Death is a tragedy, and it is the victory over death that is the real salvation. If the dead do not rise, Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, and you're still in your sins.

Then also, and here's the critical verse, then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. Apollumi, perished. Apollumi means wiped out, gone, means you're not there anymore.

This is annihilation. If Christ is not risen, those who have fallen asleep in Christ, you think about somebody you knew who was a Christian, and they're dead now, grandma, grandpa, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. They're gone, and they're never coming back.

It doesn't say they're floating around in the presence of God. It doesn't say they're sitting on a cloud playing a harp, or they're just kind of hanging around the bus depot waiting until the day when they can come down and jump out of the ground at the resurrection. They're gone.

They have perished. Apollumi, they are no more. Lack of existence, that's what Apollumi is.

Apollia. If in the presence of God, if in this life only we have hope in Christ, if this is just kind of a L. Ron Hubbard Dianetics thing, if this is just a Scientology thing, if this is just sort of another way to get by in life, if Christianity really is just a psychological crutch to help us through the tough times and give us hope and so on, if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. It's pathetic.

If Christianity really is the way to get by, it's a good old boys club and down at the church we all kind of help each other and we're accepting of one another. It eases my mind to think of the great beyond. But if we're just going to die and turn to dust and never come back, it's pathetic.

And Paul's right. It would be pathetic if that were the case. It's not just that, well, thank God I don't have to carry around the guilt of my sins.

Thank God I can have love and share. It is the resurrection that counts. It is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. He is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, this is Adam in the garden, whereas by one man sin entered the world and death through sin, so the death passed upon all men for all have sinned.

It was by one man. Now, how much participation did any of us have in Adam and Eve reaching out their hand, eating the forbidden fruit, and getting kicked out of the garden? Hands up anybody here that voted for that. Hands up anybody here that said, well, put me in there and I'll do the same thing.

We didn't. We had no, you know, that's way before my time. This is kind of like people that take a lot of credit for being native Texans.

And listen, I'm proud to be in Texas. A lot of us came here voluntarily because we love this state. We love what it stands for, but there's people that say, well, you know, I'm, I'm a native Texan.

What did you have to do with that? That was, you know, I'll credit your parents for having the good sense to live in Texas. You know, some of my, uh, one of my daughters is native Texan. The it's neither one of their fault.

They had no say so whatsoever that they're a Texan or an Okie. I know, listen, if I had had a choice, you think I'd have been born in California? No way. I get far away from there as I can.

I'm halfway across the country and that's not far enough. You can't take credit for it or blame for stuff that happened before your time. So what is this in Adam all die? Why do I die? Because Adam fell.

I mean, boo on Adam, but I wasn't there. Well, God says, look, yeah, the fall and the corruption and the death that came through Adam is credit to you. But guess what? The last Adam, the Christ who came and died and paid the penalty.

You also get that free, no charge. You get the corruption and the condemnation and the death without your participation. This is why he is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Because in the same way that we didn't ask for condemnation in Adam, we don't have to ask for the penalty for sin being paid. What we do have to do is either opt in or opt out of living with God in eternity. Now let's say we opt out.

Now we're back to our concept of the lake of fire. We say, look, I don't like people telling me what to do. This whole idea, this is Satan's problem.

A third of the angels that fell with him just disagreed with the notion that they had to always do everything God's way. Why do we have to, why can't I, Satan says, I will raise my throne up above the stars. I will be like God.

Let me do the policies. Why can't we just have a separate alternate system? It always has to be God's way. And there's people that just grate and grind and chafe under God's righteousness and God's presence.

They don't like it. They don't want it. And God says, guess what? You don't have to endure it.

I've taken care of the sin problem. I have made resurrection and eternal life available. You can opt in or you can opt out.

If you opt out, fine. People say, well, no, if I opt out, it's eternal conscious torment and bobbing flames and fire forever and ever. Look at what the Bible says.

Those who have fallen asleep in Christ, if there is no resurrection, have perished. What does John 3.16 say? God so loved the world. It doesn't say he so loved the elect or he so loved the believers.

He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believeth in him should not apolumi, should not perish, should not cease to exist, but have everlasting life. There

is life and there is non-life. There's not really, really good life and really, really tortured, tormented life.

And I'm sorry, that's what the Bible says. It's apolumi. It doesn't say that they should not fry in hell but have everlasting life, should not perish.

It's John 3.16. It's the most well-known verse in the Bible outside of maybe Psalm 23. Should not perish, should not cease to be. And the lake of fire, what do you do when you throw things into the fire? Look, I'll show you something.

I've got my, some of you all have seen this, this wallpaper on my laptop. We cleaned out the barn at my parents up in Rogers County, Oklahoma. Stuff had been accumulating in there for 40 years.

And furniture and old lumber and detritus from the ages and other preceding ancestors that had passed away. Cleaned it all out, put it, the stuff that was not going to be saved or donated or taken home, put it all in a big pile on the south side of the barn and we burned it. And it was a big fire.

That picture that you just saw is a wall of flame and Patty took a picture of it. It was just nothing but flame. It was, as it were, a lake of fire.

It was a pyre of fire. It was a pyrrhic funeral for everything that had been in the barn that had no reason to continue to exist. There were old baby beds and chairs and all kinds of stuff in there.

If you go now to the south side of the barn and look where this gigantic fire was, there is grass. Really kind of healthy grass because the carbon and stuff went into the soil. But the stuff that was in that fire is no more.

What happens when you throw things into Gehenna, into the burning trash pit valley outside Jerusalem? What happens to it? Can you go there and visit the trash from Jesus' day in Gehenna now, which is still a trash pit valley outside Jerusalem? What happened to the stuff that gets thrown into the fire? Why do you throw it into a fire? What is the purpose of a fire? What does a fire do? Our God isn't an everlastingly tormenting fire, is He? Our God is what kind of fire? Consuming fire. Our God is a consuming fire. Fire consumes that which we don't want to keep around.

I don't want firewood, I want heat. So I put wood in the fire, I burn it, I get heat, the wood is no more. Wouldn't it be great if there was one eternally burning log you could put in your fireplace and it just burned forevermore.

There is no kind of fire in human experience that just keeps on burning endlessly. And the notion that the lake of fire is eternal conscious torment just isn't biblical. Where do they get it? They get it from places like Revelation where the people who take the mark of the beast are said, I think in Revelation 9 or 14 or somewhere over there, it says, as many as took the mark of the beast were tormented in the presence of the holy angels and the lamb.

As many as took the mark of the beast were tormented in the presence of the lamb and the smoke of their torment ascends day and night forever and ever. Day and night forever and ever. In the presence of the holy angels and the lamb they are tormented.

What the heck does this mean? Well, I'll give you a couple of real quick things. Torment means to be really uncomfortable. It doesn't mean livid, flaming, skin falling off, Freddy Krueger, oh my gosh, it's an eternal scream.

Torment is used all through the New Testament. The ship on the waters when the disciples, it says the wind and the waves were tormenting the boat. It talks about people who had diseases that came to the Lord Jesus for healing and it said people who had diseases and were tormented came to Him.

Well, these people are not in living, screaming, flaming, uncontrollable pain when they come to the Lord Jesus. They're afflicted and it's a bad, I'm not taking away from it, it's a bad affliction, but they're not just lividly screaming with their flesh falling off their bones in unbearable pain. Tormented means really uncomfortable.

This disease is making me really uncomfortable. This storm is making us veteran sailors really uncomfortable. But it's not unbearable discomfort.

It's not something just beyond the pale and we have this traditional view of hell that it's just this one big never-ending scream of burning flesh pain. That's not what is being talked about. The people, by the way, when you go to that verse in Revelation where it says those who worship the beast and take his mark, it's in the present tense.

Those who are worshiping, those who are taking the mark, are tormented. And day and night is a measure of time that pertains while you're in the tribulation. And it is in the presence of the Lamb and the holy angels.

Why isn't in the presence of everybody else? Why is it just the Lamb and the holy angels? Because during the time of the tribulation, who is the agent and the instrument of God's judgment on the earth? It is the angels who are at the four corners holding the winds. It is the angels who are released. It is the scorpion angels.

It's the demon angels. It's all these others. Angelic instrumentality is used to inflict judgment on the tribulational period.

And the Lamb is the role that the Lord Jesus occupies when He unrolls the scrolls, when He breaks the seals. He is the Lamb in judgment. And this guy that says the lake of fire is a lake of love.

I don't know how he comes to this. But he also says it must be love because see he calls Jesus the Lamb and lambs are just soft and fuzzy. And listen, this is the Lamb that was slain and He's not too happy about having been slain.

And He comes back with His robes dipped in blood and with a sword issuing out of His mouth. And that's not a sword of love. That is a sword of judgment on those who choose to reject.

And what happens to people who go into the lake of fire? They get exactly what they want. What is the common teaching today from materialism, from secularism, from humanism, from science? When you die, what happens to you according to science, according to the best understanding that atheistic materialism has today? What do they tell you? What's going to happen if you walk out here and get hit by a bus and there's no mannequin to take your place?

What do they say is going to happen to you? Are you going to wake up in some giant unconsciousness somewhere? What does science say? There's going to be a cascade that tells every cell in your body that you're dead. You're going to die.

You're going to decompose. And that's it. You don't go anywhere.

You're nowhere. You cease to have conscious experience of this life. Right? Isn't that what they say? And that's what they choose to believe.

And guess what? That's exactly what God is going to give them. He's going to wake them up at the end of the millennial kingdom and say, Hey, I opened the books and I see that you're one of these that doesn't want to chafe eternally under my presence and power. You don't like the system of righteousness that I set up.

It abrades you. It grates you. It causes you torment.

So into the lake of fire you go. This is a place of destruction and they are destroyed from before the face of God and they are no more. And isn't it wonderful that people get exactly what they choose? You chose to be no more.

You are no more. It's wonderful. It's God's grace.

God is gracious even in judgment. And in that sense, a loving God casting creatures into the lake of fire, which includes by the way, the fallen angels, and he cast them in there. Why? He loves them enough to not have them in a burning lake of love forever and ever and ever.

He loves them enough. You know, there are people who, who I think perhaps rightly recognize that there is a time to let someone go. Do not resuscitate.

You're in the advanced stages of cancer. It is a screaming agony. Every breath you take every moment that you're awake and you have a DNR.

Do not resuscitate. When it's my time to go, I just want to go. Please let me go.

And if you love your loved one enough, you do that for them. You don't say, I just want you to be here for me. One more minute, one more hour, one more, one more day, be here for me.

I'm going to feel bad when you're gone. You're not going to feel half as bad as that person feels staying alive and struggling with intense, unavoidable, irreducible pain. And if you love them many times, you have to let them go.

We do this when we let our pets, we put them to sleep. I don't want this animal to suffer because I love them. Well, God loves the world and he offers them eternal life.

If they reject that, if they refuse it, if it just is too much for them, God says, fine, you're going to the lake of fire and you're gone. This also, by the way, purges the new creation so that there isn't something that is going. What happened in Canaan when they didn't drive all the inhabitants out? It re-infected them.

They became as bad as the Amorites and God had to judge his own people because they got re-infected with what they were supposed to eliminate. God has no such problem. God will eliminate all of those things that partake of that rebellious sin of the high hand.

I don't believe in you and I hate you. It's gone. It will be no more.

Now, will there still be room for free will in the eternal future? Yes. Is there potential for us to mess up the way the angels did, the way Cain did, the way people throughout the Bible have done? Yes. But is it a sin unto death? No.

John says when there's a sin unto death, you don't need to pray for that. Pray for people who have sinned but are restorable, are recoverable. God will work it together for good.

There is restoration. The healing leaves from the tree of life that come out of the new Jerusalem, why is there a need for healing? Well, somebody is not where they need to be. Somebody is not at a restored point that they should be at.

Healing leaves come forth. How can there be any such thing as healing if everything is this golden traditional perfection? People have over-perfected heaven and they have over-tragified hell. Hell is the final elimination of those things that offend in God's eternal kingdom.

And He's just going to eliminate them. They will be gone. And God is fair.

And God always has a purpose and a point. What's the point of torturing somebody endlessly for all eternity? And which would you feel better about? I heard a... and I'm running a little long this morning, but let me just tell you one quick story. I heard about a veterinary and a lady had taken her dog to be put down.

The vet did not put the dog down. The vet kept the dog and used it for spare parts. Used transfusions from this dog to help other dogs.

And he felt like he could help other dogs because this dog had healthy organs. Whatever was wrong with this dog, he could keep the dog alive and use its organs to repair other dogs. And in the vet's mind, this was a good thing.

But he kept the dog alive. Well, the lady found out because one of the people who worked at the vet clinic spilled it. And this dog had been alive like eight or nine months after it was supposed to have been put to sleep, after its owner was told it had been put to sleep.

And this dog, who was suffering, had been kept alive all of this time. Now, the lady, when she put old dog Trey, what she thought was to sleep, it was a hard choice to make and she missed the dog, but she felt like it was best. When she found out the dog was actually in living conscious torment, now she's calling lawyers.

And this is awful, right? Why would you think any different about God? It's one thing for God to take our loved ones who have rejected him and have said, no, I do not want eternal life with you. I would really prefer to just go. I'd rather not exist and have to exist under your regime.

And God says, fine, and lets him go. We sorrow over those people, but it's a sorrow that is manageable, like putting your pet to sleep, letting a loved one go at the end of a long life and maybe a disease, a wasting disease, let them go. What if you found out that the hospital is keeping grandpa alive for spare parts? What would be the purpose of God torturing people eternally? God always uses discipline to turn people.

We saw this in our Old Testament study Friday night, right? He puts his people into challenge from the Syrians, from the outsiders. He lets them have famine or being surrounded and besieged. Why? Turn ye at my reproof.

Turn at my reproof. Why do we discipline children? We put them in uncomfortable circumstances of various kinds to change their minds, to get them to recognize what's important. When there's a potential for turning, God will allow that which is uncomfortable, that which is torment, that which is punishment.

But it has a purpose. What is the purpose of eternal conscious torment for people that are never going to turn? It has no purpose. It sounds just vengeful and vindictive, and it far outweighs.

So whatever they did in their life, is the compensation for that eternal screaming without end? I don't care if you're Hitler. I mean, seriously, 10 million, billion years in the future, you're still on fire with every nerve screaming in your mental ears, and that's not even the beginning? It makes no sense, and the Bible does not teach it. And I'm here to tell you, search the whole Scriptures.

Get the whole counsel of God. It doesn't teach it. The Lord Jesus paid the penalty for all the world's sins in three hours on the cross.

All the world's sins were poured out on Him and judged, and He paid that penalty, and believe me, it was horrific. But all the world's sins, every bad thing, people burning babies with cigarettes, all the other awful things you've ever heard, you know, child abuse of the most heinous sorts, slavery, and abuse of every shape, size, and description, the Lord Jesus bore the penalty for that in the three hours of darkness. And I think it had to be dark, because it probably so distorted and twisted His features that nobody could look upon it.

God couldn't even look upon it. It was so horrific. But it had a point, and it had an end.

And at the end, the Lord Jesus was asleep in the heart of the earth for three days, and early in the morning on the third day, He arose. And that's the victory. That is the resurrection.

And that is the gift that He offers us, is life from the dead. And that's the point of our salvation. It's not, well, God needs to punish sin, and God needs bloody sacrifices.

God wants to impart eternal life, and that's what this is really all about. When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive. Death held us captive.

Sin held us captive. The Lord Jesus has taken that whole thing under His control. Life and death and the consequences of sin are all totally under God's control.

That is why He is over all. That's why He is above even the heavens. Why did the Lord Jesus have to ascend above the heavens after His victory on the cross? Because there are sinful angels who dwell in the heavens, and He had to be above that, had to be able to take control of that.

When you're above a thing, you control it. And there is a component of the work of Jesus Christ that even extends into the heavenly creation. And we don't know what that is, and the Bible doesn't say, but it's there.

That's why He is above the heavens, that He might fill all things, things in heaven, things on earth, things under the earth. And He's given us these great gifts. So the thing to remember in the days ahead is what a privilege we have.

The Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead. Eternal life is our secure possession in the future, and this life is preparation for it. You go to kindergarten and grade school to learn the skills that will take you through high school, to learn to be an adult, to learn to function in the world and know how to do math.

If you want to build a doghouse, you can figure out how much lumber to buy because you learned math. You want to communicate with people, you can do so because you've learned your language. This life is learning the skills and the enablements for resurrection, for life with God.

And the individual struggles and challenges we face uniquely qualify us. We have unique gifts, we have unique challenges, we have unique experiences, and God has an endlessly various future in His kingdom for which we are being prepared. That's why the Lord Jesus ascended on high.

That's why He gave gifts. That's why we're here. And that's why our study of the Word of God and our experience in living it out is so essential.

That's why we're here. That's who we are. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

We'll pick up next time in Ephesians 4.13. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the gifts that have been given to us from You through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You most of all for the confident expectation we have of life beyond this life, life that is free of the earthly and the mundane and the temporary, the corrupt, the fallen, the things that fall short of Your glory.

We know that one day we will be in a position to reflect Your glory, to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus and in Your presence, qualified to serve, qualified to experience and fulfill all of the potentials that have been created for us in the magnificence of Your plan and purpose. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will keep us mindful of these things and help us to remember our identity in Christ and our opportunities. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.