

'Hell - How to avoid getting there.' Matthew 25:1 – 13

Synopsis of Sermon

How bad is hell? Do we want to avoid going there?Jesus was very clear that hell is **not** somewhere we want to end up. Jesus uses loads of pictures, illustrations and stories to depict hell but the overarching idea is that **hell is being cut off from God... forever**. That is bad because we are designed to be in connection with God.

People ask the question how can a loving God send anyone to hell? Well one author (Millard J. Erickson) put it this way *"...sin consists in the human's choosing to go his or her own way rather than follow God. Throughout life, a person says to God, in effect, 'leave me alone.' Hell, the absence of God, is God's simply giving that person at last what he or she has always asked for. It is not God, but one's own choice that sends a person to hell."

This passage we're looking at comes in a set of parables and warnings from Jesus about the fact that at some point Jesus will return and that will be it. He points out that **(a)** No-one knows *when* **(b)** we won't miss and **(c)** the consequences of him coming back are inescapable....he's coming to judge everyone – the living and the dead
In the context of the passage it's clear that the bridegroom represents Christ and at the end of the story there's a very definite and final outcome for the 2 groups of bridesmaids 5 in heaven 5 shut out. What did they do wrong though? Simply, they weren't prepared.

So what *is* 'prepared'? Well the bible is very clear about that, there is only one way to prepare for the judgement that's coming our way – Repent Jesus said (in Matt 4:17) 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.' In Acts 3:19, Peter, preaching to a bunch of people who'd just seen a crippled man get up and walk said, "Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away." That crowd believed in the power of God but it obviously isn't enough to just believe. They needed to repent. Repent was a command given by a Roman officer to tell his troops to turn 180 degrees.

Seems too simple so we try to overcomplicate it. Here's what *doesn't* count as 'being prepared.'

Number 1, going to

Number 2, knowing your bible inside.

Number 3, Succeeding in life

Number 4, *being good*. Galatians 3:10 says "...those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey *all* the commands that are written in the Law.""

That is what makes Jesus' offer of freedom from that curse so amazing... because we are completely lost without it.

It's quite simple. Got the lamps, need oil. Going on a journey, need petrol. Taking some pictures, need batteries. Want to spend forever with God, turn to Jesus now. Be Prepared.

Questions

Do a mind map / brainstorm / thought shower on the word 'Repent.' Include emotions it evokes, experiences it reminds you of, verses / sermons it reminds you of, etc

Use that as a discussion starter about how people feel when they think about repentance... is it viewed as a positive or negative thing? Is it active or passive? Is it a heart thing or a head thing?

Do you see the action of repenting as a once in a lifetime thing or a continuous everyday thing?

What do you think of Millard Erickson's quote? See the (*) in the synopsis

What motivates you to repent? Guilt? Love? Shame? Anything else?

If repenting really is at the heart of the gospel, how would you describe the need to repent to a friend or colleague?

Do you think there's more to accepting the freedom Jesus offers? Or is repenting all that we need to do to be prepared?

2 Chronicles 7:14 talking about the nation of Israel says, "*If My people who are called by My Name will humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*" Do you see repentance as only a personal thing or is there such a thing as national guilt and therefore the need for national repentance nowadays? Do you think there are things we need to repent of as a country? What about as a church? (That's both global church and our particular part of the church in Clifton / Rawcliffe?)