

## Heaven and Hell and the Theme of Fire in the Book of Revelation

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### Introduction: Ice Cream and Needles

Today I'd like to talk to you about Heaven and Hell. Now there are a lot of misconceptions about what heaven and hell are. I like ice cream. So it's really easy for me to imagine heaven as a place where I can eat lots of ice cream and not get fat, get diabetes, or get gas. I mean, who wouldn't want to go to a place like that? What is hell like? Again, it's natural to start with myself and ask yourself, 'What do I fear and hate?' I hate needles. Whenever I go to the doctor, I hate shots or blood tests because I hate getting stuck by needles. So it's natural for me to think that hell is full of not only fire and whatever else is there, but needles that stick me all the time. But is that the most accurate way to think about hell? Is it right to start with you want and what you don't, raise that to the nth degree, and get heaven and hell?

Here's the problem. Doesn't that just make Jesus the gatekeeper to what you want and avoiding what you don't? Just deal with him once and then you're done with him! And the flip side of that is: What if your desires are messed up? If I'm an alcoholic, will I get more alcohol in heaven? If I'm addicted to weed, will I get more weed in heaven? Is it legal there, too? If I'm addicted to porn, will I get more porn in heaven? What if God is actually trying to fix your desires? What if you can't start with yourself, and your desires *by yourself*? Then you can't just start with yourself and your current desires. You have to start with Jesus. Who is Jesus? And what does *he* want?

Some people, especially those who have experienced enormous amounts of oppression and injustice, say that they find the idea of heaven and hell helpful. After all, it satisfies a sense of longing that we know we have for something greater, a perfect world, and some kind of consequence for good and evil. But it raises other questions. Why does God keep people in hell if they want to get out and be with Him? He says in Scripture that He desires none to be lost, and wants all to be saved (Ezk.18:23, 32 – 33; 1 Tim.2:3 – 4). So why then would God keep people in prison if they want to get out and be with Him? You could kind of understand hell being temporary, so that people get out when they have been punished enough, and maybe Hitler would be the last one out. Yet Scripture says hell is eternal, and I'm persuaded that it is (see Isaiah 66:14 – 24 quoted by Jesus in Mark 9:48; 2 Peter 2:3, 6, 12; 3:7, 9 – 10, 16). So how do we explain it?

### Rescued's Statement of Faith

I also want to say that this is a reflection on the last section of Rescued's Statement of Faith. It reads:

'God will fully heal all creation in the future when Jesus Christ personally returns. Jesus will judge all people by their responses to him. For those who consign themselves to being unhealed eternally, in hell, Jesus will continue to condemn the corruption of sin within them. For those who receive him and his full healing with gladness, Jesus will welcome them into the eternal life, love, and goodness of the Triune God.'

### Context

We're going to explore why we say it that way. To do that, we're going to look at the Book of Revelation. Revelation is the last book of the Bible. It is feared. It is loved. It attracts the interest of all kinds of weirdos. I'm not saying that you're weird if you like this book, I'm just saying you might find yourself in some unusual company. And I want to talk about fire in the Book of Revelation. So yes, we are going to cover the famous Lake of Fire passage in Revelation. But there's a lot more places fire shows up in Revelation. The author of this book seems to be the same John who wrote the Gospel of John. John, as a young man, was one of the twelve original disciples of Jesus. John, in his old age, was exiled by the Roman Emperor to an island called Patmos, off the coast of Turkey.

<sup>1:1</sup> The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. <sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia...

What kind of 'prophecy' is this? Prophecy could mean: *Foresight*: predicting the future. Like how *will* the book of Revelation come true? But prophecy more often means something else. *Insight*: tearing off the veils and seeing the truth of the situation, cutting through the appearances, lies, and fake news. The book of Revelation is primarily *insight*. John has insight about Jesus, the Roman Empire, and not just the Roman Empire, but what human power has meant throughout history and will continue to mean in the war between human sinfulness and Jesus' kingdom. Plus, the word 'revelation' means revealing. It is about insight, seeing to the heart of things. And that is what we're going to do here. We are going to see Jesus: who he really is. And because of that insight, we will have foresight - what are Heaven and Hell. But that's the big picture. I'm going to zoom in a certain thread in the tapestry: the theme of fire.

### **Jesus is the Burning One: 1:12 – 20**

Revelation opens with a picture of Jesus. But it is Jesus as the burning one, who has a sword coming out of his mouth.

<sup>1:12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden **lampstands**; <sup>13</sup> and in the middle of the **lampstands** I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. <sup>14</sup> His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a **flame of fire**. <sup>15</sup> His feet were like **burnished bronze** [bronze that has been heated up by fire], when it has been made to **glow in a furnace**, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In His right hand He held seven **stars** [fire], and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was **like the sun**...<sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven **stars** which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden **lampstands**: the seven **stars** are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven **lampstands** are the seven churches.

Why is Jesus being portrayed that way? Is Jesus literally on fire, with a literal sword coming out of his mouth? I don't think so. It's because fire and sword are references to earlier parts of Scripture. It's kind of like on websites, when you come across an HTML link, you click on it, and it takes you to another webpage. Well, when you click on 'fire and sword,' where does it take us? Back in Genesis 3:24, God stationed an angel with a flaming sword to guard the Garden. Why? Adam and Eve corrupted human nature, and God did not want people to make the sin in us immortal, by eating from the Tree of Life in a corrupted state. So God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden, he closed access to the Garden. Then God put an angel with a flaming sword at the boundary. That is the first time in Scripture fire appears, and a sword appears. Now Jesus is the one who is fire and sword. Jesus is saying, 'For you to come back into the Garden, I must burn something away from you, and I must cut something away from you, and the way I do that is by you receiving me and my word, because everything I command of you, I have done in myself. If I say stop sleeping around, you let me burn that away (fire) and cut it away (sword). If I say stop being jealous, you let me burn that away (fire) and cut it away (sword). If I say stop getting more excited about spending on yourself than you are about giving towards others, you let me burn that away (fire) and cut it away (sword).'

Many of you have had an experience of God's fire, His purifying power. Let me tell you about one experience I had, and then I'll show you in Scripture why this is true.

Illus: Right after Ming and I got married, I was struggling with fear that moving out from California to Boston was too costly. I was sitting in a church service one day when I felt the finger of God on my chest. It felt like a burning. The worship team was playing a hymn called *Be Still for the Presence of the Lord*. And I had never heard it before, but the melody and the words burned their way into my heart and mind.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here  
Come bow before Him now, with reverence and fear  
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground  
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here

Notice that the song is referring to the burning bush experience when God appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and said, 'This is holy ground.' Listen for that again in the second stanza:

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around  
He burns with holy fire, with splendor He is crowned

How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light  
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around

That phrase 'holy fire' is on point. Because Jesus was burning something away in me. At around this time, Ming and I moved from an apartment in Allston to our current house in Dorchester. Now back in California, I had a bunch of guy friends, and whenever someone in our group of friends had to move, especially if it was one of the women, or someone we knew, we would all come together and help move the furniture. It was a total guy thing to do. For us, at least. So when I found myself in Boston just married and without any of my guy friends, needing to move furniture and not sure who to call, I felt stuck. Then I felt self-pity. I felt like sucking my thumb, like a kindergartener with no friends. But as I sang, the heat I felt on my chest was burning that away. So the third verse:

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place  
He comes to cleanse and heal, and minister His grace  
No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him  
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place

He comes to cleanse and heal, and minister His grace. Now you might ask why I told you that story. 'Mako, I thought this was a message about Heaven and Hell.' Well, yes, exactly. Heaven is when people say YES to the purifying love of Jesus and YES to that process of cleansing and purifying. When Jesus' purifying cleans away all the junk from us, and you'll be able to shine like a crystal chandelier, which is what you were made for. Hell is what happens when you try to resist the purifying love of God. Let me repeat. Heaven is when you say YES to the purifying love of Jesus. Hell is when you say NO to the purifying love of Jesus, and try to escape him, but there is no escaping him.

So Heaven and Hell start right now. You either burn with conviction, or you burn with shame. Conviction is when you feel like you really want Jesus to change you, cleanse you, heal you. You might feel inspired and hopeful. You might feel guilt and regret. But either way, you want Jesus to change you. That's what it's like to burn with conviction, to feel the fire of Jesus. But there's another way to burn. And that is to burn with shame. I'm defining shame here as you're sorry that you got caught. You're sorry that you got caught, but you're not sorry you did it. You know the feeling? It's when Well, I'm sorry, alright – I'm sorry I got caught [EYEROLL].

So Jesus is fire and sword. If Jesus is on fire, because he purifies people like fire does metal, and his people are like the flame in a lamp, then it makes sense that he will burn up anything in us that shouldn't be in us. Jesus' fire purifies us. That's what we see.

### **Burning with Conviction: 2:18; 3:14 – 19; 4:4 – 5; 21:1 – 21**

The churches named here are more or less in a circle in the western side of Asia Minor. To the church in the city of Thyatira, Jesus says:

<sup>2:18</sup> 'And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of **fire**, and His feet are like burnished bronze...

He is in their midst, burning. And he says that he sees them, which lines up with his eyes being like fire. And he stands with authority to cast out a false teaching, which lines up with his feet being like bronze, glowing with fire.

To another church community, in a city called Laodicea, Jesus says:

<sup>3:14</sup> 'To the angel of the church in Laodicea write...<sup>18</sup> I advise you to buy from **Me** gold refined by **fire** so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup>Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

The language is slightly different, but the idea is the same. Jesus gives us himself, because he has already purified his own human nature. His new humanity is the gold refined by fire, purified of all cheap metal. His new humanity is the white garment that is purified of all stains. His new humanity is the humanity with healed spiritual eyes that becomes the eye medicine that can heal our eyes. And notice that he disciplines us, calling us to repent. So give up

your cheap cosmetic jewelry and those clothes that you think are made of nice material. Jesus has got something way better. It's himself. He comes with fire and sword. He comes with purified gold and purified things because he has purified himself for us to receive him.

In Rev.4:5, we get a vision of the throne of Jesus. And around Jesus' throne, are his purified people and the Spirit is portrayed as purifying fire.

<sup>4:4</sup> Around the throne [of Jesus] were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of **fire** burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God...

I'm not trying to explain all the imagery. Only the imagery of fire. The Spirit of God is portrayed as a seven-fold fire. Seven is the number of completion in Scripture, starting with the seven days of creation in Genesis 1. This is the complete Holy Spirit. And the Spirit is a seven-fold complete fire. That's consistent with how John the Baptist introduced Jesus: 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Mt.3:11). Then when the Spirit came at Pentecost, he brought 'tongues of fire' (Acts 2:1 – 3). Fire purifies.

At the end of the book of Revelation, the people of Jesus are portrayed as a city that is made from purified materials:

<sup>21:1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband... <sup>9</sup> Then one of the seven angels... came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup>having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper... <sup>18</sup> ...the city was **pure gold, like clear glass...**<sup>21</sup> And the street of the city was **pure gold, like transparent glass.**

Notice that in Revelation 21:18 and 21, the city is described as pure gold which looks like clear, transparent glass. Huh? Pure gold is *not* clear like transparent glass! Last time I checked, if you make eyeglass lenses out of gold, you're not going to see through them. So these have to be symbolic references to *purified people*. Gold is pure when it has nothing impure in it. Glass is clear and transparent when it has nothing mixed in with it. In my slides, this is how gold starts out: mixed in with other metals and rock. If you want to work with the gold, you have to melt it all down. The other stuff rises to the top, and you scoop it out. Then, you have pure gold leftover, and you can shape that. This is how God sees you: as pure gold. It's just you have impurities in you, and He wants to remove the impurities.

### **Burning With Shame**

But what happens if you want to hold onto the thing that Jesus wants to burn away and cut away from you? This happens:

<sup>14:9</sup> Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, <sup>10</sup> he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with **fire** and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'

Notice: Fire is the *presence* of Jesus in Revelation 14:10. It is not separation from Jesus. Have any of you ever explained hell as separation from Jesus? I have. But this text says that the fire is the *presence* of Jesus. Repeat after me: 'Heaven is the presence of Jesus. Hell is also the presence of Jesus.' Jesus is doing the same thing to everyone. He is trying to burn away the impurities in us, with our partnership. So what makes Heaven Heaven and Hell Hell? Your attitude. I wrote a little skit with two characters – Jesus and a person who rejects Jesus – because this is actually how I imagine the conversation playing out when the person meets Jesus face to face.

*Jesus:* Hello there!

*Person* (rather taken aback): *You...so it's true...*

*Jesus:* Yes, it is me.

*Person* (sighing): Well, I hope you're going to treat me well for all the good I did? Lots of ice cream?

*Jesus:* I think you have the wrong idea about what's going on here. I don't have ice cream.

*Person:* What do you mean? I don't understand. I did a lot of good on earth.

*Jesus:* You did do some respectable things, because you were made in my image and you retained a sense of goodness that comes from me.

*Person:* What?! That goodness came from *me!* So I should be able to get all the ice cream I want now, right?

*Jesus:* I'm afraid you have the wrong idea. I am only offering myself.

*Person:* You? I don't want you. I thought there was some reward involved.

*Jesus:* There is only me. Everything else is connected to me, so if you don't receive me, everything else here will be a terrible hardship to you.

*Person:* What? How could you treat me like this?

*Jesus:* You feel I have wronged you?

*Person:* Of course! Look at all the good I've done!

*Jesus:* Indeed, but there are many things you did that are not good, and much good you failed to do. That points to the need you have to receive from me a new human nature, the human nature I lived and died and rose again to create in my own physical body. Will you receive me now?

*Person:* No! I'm *offended!* How can you say I need to be healed? Transformed? I'm not that bad.

*Jesus:* You are indeed. You have trained yourself to become addicted to ice cream, and much more: flattery, money, quite a bit of lying and alcohol and porn, and independence. Something in you is resisting me: your corrupted human nature. It's diseased and broken. I can heal you.

*Person:* I'm resisting you, because you never gave me what I wanted in life. Even now you're not giving me what I want, and what I deserve!

*Jesus:* I think you're mistaking me for someone else. I'm giving you what you *need.* You need to be loved by me and healed and transformed by me.

*Person:* I refuse to believe that! That is insulting!

*Jesus:* It is the truth. I only tell the truth.

*Person:* Look at how you're treating those people over there. Why don't you treat me better?

*Jesus:* I treat all people the same. I give myself to them, and ask that you give me your very self. They have chosen to say 'yes' to me.

*Person:* Even my wife? You took her from me! Twice. At her so-called 'conversion.' And then she died. You took her. Now I demand that you give her back to me. I want to see her.

*Jesus:* She is not yours.

*Person:* She loved me, until you started taking her away from me!

*Jesus:* You never actually married her. You were just living together. And you manipulated her.

*Person:* Yeah, well, she was still mine. You had no right to get her to want more.

*Jesus:* I helped her want what was better. You are addicted to 'options.' You wanted to treat her as 'an option.'

You want to treat me as 'an option.' You want to be in control of all your 'options.' You're addicted to 'options.'

*Person:* I... I... I... Look, I'm changing the subject. You stole her from me! Give her back to me the way she was.

*Jesus:* No. You would do her evil. You're trying to possess her, to make her weak again like in the days when she just accepted your ego. But that is not possible, for she is now who I made her to be. She does love you, but only because she shares my love for you. She would say the same things to you that I am saying to you now. Would you like to hear her now?

*Person:* No! I don't need her! And I don't need you! Leave me alone!

*Jesus:* I will not leave you alone. I *cannot* leave you alone. It is not my nature. I love you.

*Person:* You love me? You're stalking me!

*Jesus:* For all eternity, I will call out to you to surrender yourself to me, to let me burn away the thing in you that should not be there, and replace it with my very self. That is my love.

*Person:* Nothing you do could make me love you. You're repulsive, and the closer you get, the more I hate you. Stop! You're tormenting me!

*Jesus:* *You* have made it so.

What was Jesus trying to do to that guy? The same thing he was always trying to do. Purify the sin out of him. But what was the guy trying to do? Hold on to his sin! So when Jesus wants to burn away your sin and calls for your

partnership because he does everything with your partnership, but you try to hold on to your sinfulness, well it's going to feel like torment.

What if you have cavities, but you're in so much denial that your dentist comes to you. Then you fight and scream, 'No, no, no! I'm perfectly fine.' But then your dentist doesn't leave. Or what if you have an addiction, but you're in so much denial about it that the therapist comes to you. He locks the door to your own house and says, 'I am not leaving until you and I deal with this.' But then you say, 'This is not a problem. This is me. This is who I am.' And the therapist says, 'No: This is a disease. This is not who you are meant to be.' Why does the therapist stick around and insist? Because of love. Why does it feel like torment? Because love speaks the truth and calls for healing.

What is it like when you are cornered, and you know you're defeated, but you still keep fighting. Ever see kids do that? They say, 'I'm never giving up!' What do you do? You just contain them. And that's what the Lake of Fire is. Here is the dreaded passage:

20:10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of **fire** and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever...<sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.<sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of **fire**. This is the second death, the lake of **fire**.<sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of **fire**.

What is the Lake of Fire? When you read that, the first thing you do is not to assume that it's literal. Assume that it's a literary reference, like an HTML link to another webpage. Click on it, and where does it take you? Well, what earlier episode in the Bible does this sound like? Who else was cast into water when others were delivered? Pharaoh and the Egyptians were cast into the Red Sea when God delivered Israel. The Lake of Fire is like that. Satan and his followers are cast into the Lake of Fire when God delivered those who follow Jesus. Except it's not a whole Sea. It's just a Lake. Somehow it's a little more contained. And it's not water. It's fire because Jesus continues to call out for people to receive purification from him, but they hate it. So this is how God defeats evil. It's being cornered and contained with no other place to go. 'Are you saying that the lake of fire won't be a literal lake of fire?' I'm saying that we don't know enough. Plus, do you think Jesus has a literal sword coming out of his mouth? I don't think so. It doesn't mean he's less serious about burning sin and cutting sin away from us.

[Also, Jesus sent the demons in the pigs into the Sea of Galilee (Mt.8:32; Mk.5:13; Lk.8:33), which was also a reference to the Red Sea victory in Exodus. Notice also that the main title for Jesus in the book of Revelation is 'Lamb of God', which echoes the Exodus event, and 'Lamb' is also his main title in John's Gospel, and the main image applied to him in John's crucifixion narrative in John 19:17 – 42.]

I also want to point out that the unified church believed this for over a thousand years.

- Irenaeus of Lyons was a Turkish guy who was mentored by another Turkish guy, Polycarp bishop of Smyrna, who was mentored by the apostle John. So Irenaeus was only one degree of separation from the apostle John. Irenaeus became a bishop in what is now Lyons, France from 177 – 202 AD. He said this: 'God... inflicts blindness upon those who do not believe... just as the sun [blinds] those who, by reason of any weakness of the eyes cannot behold his light; but to those who believe in Him and follow Him, He grants a fuller and greater illumination of mind.' (*Against Heresies* 4.29.1; cf. 4.39.1 – 4). If you've ever had your eyes dilated, and then walk out into the daytime, your eyes will hurt like crazy! But is there something wrong with the sun? Or is there something wrong with your eyes? It's your eyes. If you had healthy eyes, you'd receive the sun with joy and thanks. The same is true with Jesus.
- Anthony the Great, in the 3rd to 4th centuries, was an Egyptian monk and founder of monasticism. He said, 'God is good, dispassionate, and immutable... Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind.' (*Philokalia*, Vol.1: On the Character of Men, 150)
- Augustine of Hippo, was ethnically Berber and what we would now call a Libyan. He became a bishop in North Africa during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, said, 'O God, *you are the consuming fire* that can burn away their love for these things and re-create the men in immortal life.' (*Confessions* book 5.3) 'I have been divided...until I flow together unto You, *purged and molten in the fire of Your love.*' (*Confessions* book

11.29) To explain that, he also said, 'Every inordinate affection is its own punishment.' (*Confessions*, book 1.19). You could say, 'Every inappropriate love is its own punishment.'

- John of Damascus, a Syrian priest who lived in the 7th and 8th centuries under Arab Islamic conquest, said, 'In eternity God supplies good things to all because He is the source of good things gushing forth goodness to all... After death, there is no means for repentance, not because God does not accept repentance – He cannot deny Himself nor lose His compassion – but the soul does not change anymore... people after death are unchangeable, so that on the one hand the righteous desire God and always have Him to rejoice in, while sinners desire sin though they do not have the material means to sin... they are punished without any consolation. For what is hell but the deprivation of that which is exceedingly desired by someone? Therefore, according to the analogy of desire, whoever desires God rejoices and whoever desires sin is punished.' (*Against the Manicheans* 94.1569, 1573)

So, there's a sampling of Christian leaders spanning Asia Minor, Eastern and Western Europe, Egypt, Lybia, and Syria. That last quote by John of Damascus also addresses this question: **If people are in the Lake of Fire, can they ever get out?** I believe Scripture answers that with a *no* (see Isaiah 66:14 – 24 quoted by Jesus in Mark 9:48; 2 Peter 2:3, 6, 12; 3:7, 9 – 10, 16). And in the Rescued Statement of Faith, we answer that this way: 'For those who consign themselves to *being unhealed eternally, in hell*, Jesus will continue to condemn the corruption of sin within them.' The reason why hell is an eternal condition is because the soul does not change direction any more. When you meet Jesus, you either say yes or no to him. What happens from there? Well, let's use an emotional analogy. If you are being pursued by a stalker who says, 'I love you, I love you, you were made for me and I am for you,' but you just want that person to leave you alone, what happens? Every step that person takes towards you drives you further away. Is there anything that stalker can do to make you love them? While they are pursuing you? No. That's why hell is eternal. To the person in hell, Jesus is the stalker. He keeps saying, 'I love you, I love you, you were made for me and I am for you.' And he will never leave that person alone. He will be like a doctor who says, 'Let's do this surgery and get the cancer out of you!' But the person will say, 'That's not a disease! I'm perfectly fine!' He will be the counselor who says, 'That's an addiction, let's free you from it.' But the person will say, 'I'm fine! That's just how I am! Leave me alone!' Jesus will say, 'I forgive you for what you've done to others, and especially to yourself.' But the person will say, 'I didn't do anything wrong! YOU'RE DRIVING ME CRAZY!!! You are tormenting me!' Jesus will say, 'You have made it so.' So can people ever get out of hell? No, because the love of Jesus has become torment to them. And healing love is all Jesus has for them.

### **Application #1: The Urgency to Consider Jesus or Present Jesus**

Now let's make this practical. Where is the urgency? Some of you might have heard preachers say, 'You better come to Jesus now, because when you leave here, you might be hit by a car. And do you know where you'll be then?' And some of you Christians might have been told in youth group that you'd better tell your non-Christian friends about Jesus because they might die in their sleep tonight. Now I appreciate the sense of urgency that that communicates. But it's misplaced. That makes Jesus sound like he's selling afterlife insurance. It doesn't take sin itself seriously. And it sounds like after you die, Jesus changes his mind. So it makes Jesus sound like one of those commercials: 'Offer only valid until December 31, 2016.' But does Jesus change his mind like that? Does he become someone else?

The right sense of urgency is like this: 'Sin is an addiction, and the longer you indulge an addiction, the harder it is to break. So I really want you to consider Jesus now, look at him now, listen to him now because you are more free today than you will be tomorrow.' If you don't know Jesus, and you're listening, you might be saying, 'Great! I can just wait until I'm on my deathbed to come to Jesus.' But here's the thing: You don't know what kind of person you'll be years from now. You ever notice how the older people get, the more stuck in their ways they become? The same thing is true spiritually. If you're here, then something drew you here. And I plead with you to take the time to consider Jesus, explore Jesus, and get to know Jesus. Because you are more free to do so now than you will be tomorrow.

### **Application #2: Do You Desire Jesus?**

The second application is to reflect on whether you really want Jesus. Maybe you've called yourself a Christian because you prayed a prayer when you were five. But I don't care what you call yourself. I care about whether you want Jesus. Do you really want him? That's the whole question. That's why this life overlaps with heaven and hell because we are partnering with God to shape our own desires. That's why, when we present Jesus to other people and say, 'I'd like you to get to know Jesus,' we have to include this very central piece that Jesus heals us, and heals

our desires. So we either burn with conviction and a desire to change, or we burn with shame and a desire to hide from Jesus. But either way, we burn. Either way, Jesus is touching us. It's just our attitude towards him that makes the difference.

**Summary: Comparison**

To make this as clear as possible, I want to make this comparison. Among Protestants, the dominant approach to hell and all Christian life is what I'm calling 'the legal view.' Not everyone, but most Protestants, especially here in the U.S., believe in 'the legal view.' But at Rescued, we are persuaded of 'the medical view.' Let me compare the two:

	LEGAL	MEDICAL
Jesus saves us from	God	The corruption in us
Salvation is	God changing His mind about us	God changing us
Hell is	A prison	A rehab center (where you don't want the treatment!)
You want	God	Not God
You're there	Against your will	Because of your will
God's nature is	Two Faced: Love and Wrath	One Face: Love only

So HELL IS THE LOVE OF GOD. Yeah, sure, hell is the wrath of God against *the cancer in our bodies*, and *the addiction in our hearts*, so to speak. But hell is the love of God FOR US, FOR OUR PERSONHOOD. Just like the surgeon's wrath burns against the cancer in your body because he LOVES YOU. The counselor's wrath burns against the alcoholism in you because he LOVES YOU. The surgeon and the counselor want to destroy the problem WITHIN YOU and see you set FREE. God is a surgeon and counselor. He wants to JUDGE THE SIN IN US AND DESTROY IT, ABSOLUTELY, WITH NO MERCY WHATSOEVER. In fact, God has already judged the sin in Jesus and destroyed it completely! He is the surgeon who became the patient, so He could give His new humanity to everyone. He wants to HEAL EACH AND EVERY PERSON. And hell is a personal condition in a person which makes that person experience the love of God as torment. They try to get away from God for all eternity. But God will be everywhere, 'all in all' (Eph.1:10; 2:22; 4:6, 10), so there will be no getting away from Him.

I hope this is a good explanation for why we say this in Rescued's Statement of Faith:

'God will fully heal all creation in the future when Jesus Christ personally returns. Jesus will judge all people by their responses to him. For those who consign themselves to being unhealed eternally, in hell, Jesus will continue to condemn the corruption of sin within them. For those who receive him and his full healing with gladness, Jesus will welcome them into the eternal life, love, and goodness of the Triune God.'

Please come talk to me if you have questions!

For a fuller treatment of the theme of fire and the topic of hell throughout Scripture, see my papers:

- The Theme of Fire in the Pentateuch
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/pentateuch-theme-fire.sg.pdf>
- The Theme of Fire and Purification in Isaiah
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/isaiah-theme-fire.sg.pdf>
- The Theme of Fire in Matthew's Gospel: What is Divine Fire?



- <http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew-theme-fire-and-darkness.sg.pdf>
- The Theme of Fire in Luke – Acts
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/luke-theme-fire.sg.pdf>
- The Theme of Fire, Offering, and Cleansing in the Epistle to the Hebrews
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/hebrews-theme-fire.sg.pdf>
- The Theme of Fire in Second Peter
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/peter2-theme-fire.sg.pdf>
- The Theme of Fire in the Book of Revelation
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/john-revelation-theme-fire.sg.pdf>
- Hell as the Love of God
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-hell-as-the-love-of-god.pdf> is a lecture I've given that includes theology, church history, and biblical interpretation
- Hell as Fire and Darkness: Remembrance of Sinai as Covenant Rejection in Matthew's Gospel
  - <http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew-theme-fire-and-darkness-as-hell.pdf> is a long essay exploring fire as a literary theme throughout the canon; for shorter explanations, see the above pieces