

## Lecture 3: Contextualizing the Gravity of Lostness: Preaching & Teaching the Wrath of God and the Judgment of Man



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*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18 ESV).*

We have dealt with two Great Commission fundamentals: the glory of God and the power of the gospel. Today we deal with the third fundamental: the lostness of man. In many ways this will prove to be the most difficult of the three fundamentals to contextualize and communicate. Nevertheless, the Great Commission is predicated on human lostness. Dismiss or disregard lostness and the Great Commission evaporates like the morning dew. Apart from human lostness there is little or no reason for you and I, as Christians, being here.

In an effort to absolve our discussions from some of the baggage that attends recent discussions of contextualization I have retreated to the classical teachings of the rhetoricians of ancient Greece and Rome. Living and laboring long centuries before the neologism “contextualization” was born they nevertheless did some seminal thinking concerning the relationship between speakers, speeches and audiences. In fact, they put forward ideas that have furnished grist for the mills of students of speech and communication for two millennia. So, though we have changed the nomenclature to source, message and respondents, we are focused on some of the same basic notions that occupied their attention.

Since in this present lecture I will refer to the well known and fairly recent dialogue involving the liberal David L. Edwards and the evangeli-

cal John R. W. Stott, it might be well to note here at the outset that, though not familiar with the nuances of contemporary communication theory, Stott is an extraordinarily effective speaker. He thinks of what we might term contextualization in terms of “sensitivity”—sensitivity to both the message of lostness and the perceptions and feelings of respondents. That’s a simple way to think of it. But it is possible to be over-sensitive just as it is possible to over-contextualize. And that’s a problem, as we shall see.

Finally, I remind you again that my approach here is as much autobiographical as it is analytical. This in recognition of the astuteness of my audience and as a concession to my age. If I am able to contribute much of anything to your understanding on these subjects it will probably emanate as much from my experience as anything else.

### **A LOST WORLD’S VIEW OF LOSTNESS**

In order to underscore its importance we need to consider the view of the ordinary citizen of almost any of the world’s cultures a prominent place in our thinking every though we need not give it much space here. Very, very few people in the world think of themselves as really lost—their neighbor perhaps but not themselves and certainly not in terms of being hell-bound. Concerning university students in America, D. A. Carson says that they might show mild interest in the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus, or even in the concept of the Trinity. “But the one topic almost guaranteed to ignite their ire is sin.” Then he goes on to say concerning Paul’s indictment of sinners in Romans 3:10-18: “Even for many Christians, the catena of biblical quotations collected by the apostle Paul sounds a bit over the top.”<sup>1</sup>

I’ll let it go at that. But I want it to make clear the fact that it is precisely that attitude in both the world and, sometimes, the church that occasions most of our problems with respect to communicating lostness and that drives much of the discussion with which the remainder of this paper is occupied.

### **LOSTNESS, WRATH AND JUDGMENT IN THE WORD OF GOD**

If there is no difficulty in ascertaining the world’s attitude on lostness, wrath, and judgment, that is not true when it comes to ascertain-

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, “Conclusion: Ongoing Imperative for World Mission,” in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (ed. Martin I. Klauber & Scott M. Manetsch; Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 185.

ing God's understanding and attitude concerning lostness, wrath and judgment as revealed in the Bible. God's attitude is abundantly clear. To return to Carson once again, he says, "What we must perceive is that the unfolding of the Bible's entire plotline is bound up with human sin, and God's utterly righteous wrath against it."<sup>2</sup> And then he proceeds as follows:

What is it in Scripture that is repeatedly said to be most offensive to God, to anger God? What is it that characteristically brings down the wrath of God—in many hundreds of passages? It is not rape, or murder, or lying, or theft, even though some passages, in Isaiah and Amos for instance, display God's wrath because of social injustice. No, the thing that is characteristically portrayed as bringing down the wrath of God is idolatry. The human stance that prompts God to send the devastation of the flood, or send His covenant people into exile, is repeated and determined idolatry.

Does not Paul say as much? In his letter to the Romans, he devotes two and a half chapters to demonstrating how all humankind, Jews and Gentiles alike are wrapped up in sin. His exposition ends with the catena of Old Testament quotations...and it begins with the somber words, 'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (Rom. 1:18)<sup>3</sup>...But there is more. Jesus Christ demands that we think in terms of heaven and hell. Sheep and goats do not end up in the same destination (Matt 25:46). If the judgments of the Old Testament Scriptures seem horrific, they are considerably less than the barrage of pictures that Jesus Himself deploys to describe hell (see also Rev. 14:14-20).<sup>4</sup>

Before we finish I will call upon a number of outstanding evangelical scholars who down through the years have been used of the Lord to inform and establish my own understanding with regard to these matters. But before I do it seems necessary to deal some length with the attitudes and understandings, not only of "many Christians," as Carson says, but of some Christian scholars as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Carson, "Conclusion," 186 (emphasis mine).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-88.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 188.

## CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS—SOURCES OF TRUTH?

The Bible writers are implacably honest about lostness but as their modern-day counterparts we have serious problems with it. I recall that, in a seminary class on evangelism, we students were required to memorize a large number of Bible verses—Revelation 21:8 among them. I remember students quoting the other verses at various times, but I don't recall any of us quoting Revelation 21:8 outside of class! Similarly, whether in homiletics or another class I'm not now sure, but I recall reading Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and being informed of its impact when it was first preached. Also of the fact that it was perhaps one of the greatest sermons ever preached in America. But I don't recall anyone ever preaching like that in our seminary chapel.

But that proved to be just the beginning. Down through the years in academia, in churches, on the mission field—and in theological and missiological gatherings—lostness, wrath and judgment have proved to be problematic for most pastors and missionaries whether these topics are related to the love, justice and the sovereignty of God or to the divine disposition of people who haven't heard the gospel.

### ROLAND ALLEN ON A "FULL GOSPEL," "STERN DOCTRINES" AND JUDGMENT

Exactly a century ago the Anglo-Catholic missiologist, Roland Allen, published his now famous book on the missionary strategy of the Apostle Paul in which he severely criticized his contemporaries for not preaching a "full Gospel" "*stern doctrine*," and divine judgment. Allen wrote, "There is a tendency today to avoid . . . stern doctrine,"<sup>5</sup> adding ". . . we have lost two prominent elements of Paul's Gospel: the doctrine of judgment at hand, and the doctrine of the wrath of God."<sup>6</sup> This in turn, he said, leads to a failure to warn those who refuse the gospel of the possibility of imminent judgment and also to the devising of an "easy doctrine of evangelization."<sup>7</sup>

I do not anticipate that many will object when I conclude that, whether or not Allen's criticism of the missionary preaching of his generation was valid with respect to that generation, it certainly seems to be valid with respect to ours. That bothers me greatly. But what bothers me

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<sup>5</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 70-72.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

even more is that, in reviewing my own preaching and teaching over the years, I discover that I myself have been guilty of avoiding Paul's "stern doctrines" while at the same time encouraging mission teachers, students and practitioners to emulate the Apostle Paul. So, if I am a would-be rectifier of the problem, I am also a self-confessed contributor to it. At the same time, I am afraid that this neglect is not so much idiosyncratic as it is pandemic. Ask almost any church-goer—including evangelical church-goers—how many sermons on, or references to, John 3:36 they have heard during the past year as compared to John 3:16; how many sermons on the wrath of God as compared with sermons on the love of God; how many mentions of hell as compared to mentions of heaven; how many warnings of judgment as compared to promises of blessing. Lamentably, Allen's criticism at this point is almost unquestionably as true of our generation as it evidently was of his.

In stark contrast to this state of affairs, our *heritage* as orthodox Christians, Protestants and evangelical theologians, missiologists, preachers and missionaries includes a great biblical heritage on the holiness and wrath of God and the lostness and judgment of man.

### NELS FERRE AND CLARK PINNOCK—A LIBERAL AND AN OPEN THEIST ON HELL

I have no reason to treat these particular theologians at this point other than the fact that they vetted their views and feelings in situations that at the time were exceedingly troubling both to me and to many of their hearers. I should not have been caught off guard (but I was) when first staking out a new "parish" in the vicinity of Doshisha University—a Congregational school in Kyoto, Japan. Doshisha had been largely taken over by Higher Criticism and Universalism some years before the turn of the twentieth century. I was reminded of what I would be up against, when a rather large congregation of Japanese and internationals responded approvingly to the prominent American theologian, Nels Ferre, when he preached on the "Christian view" of hell and judgment. In his sermon at a Sunday afternoon service for internationals Ferre likened Jesus' words on hell to a loving mother's warning to her mischievous child, "Now listen to me. You just better be a good boy and do as I say or goblins will get you and who can tell what they will do to you!" "That's what a loving, caring Jesus does," said Ferre. "Jesus' horrific descriptions of hell and judgment are not to be taken literally. They are nothing more or less than warnings—though they *are* warnings—to be obedient, loving children of the Heavenly Father."

More startling to me was the reaction of my one-time colleague and professed evangelical, Clark Pinnock, at an annual conference of the

Evangelical Theological Society in San Diego many years ago. I now realize that he was probably in process of developing his Open Theism position at the time, but I knew nothing of it at the time. At any rate, as stated in a paper dismissive of evangelical understandings of divine justice and human judgment, Pinnock's position had been rather roundly criticized by three respondents, myself included. When the time came for his rejoinder, Pinnock turned toward his critics and with flushed face almost shouted, "You seem to be comfortable with the idea that a loving God would send some of his creatures to hell. If so, perhaps we worship different Gods!" Pinnock's remark was undoubtedly engendered by the frustration of the moment, but not entirely so. And since that time he has avowedly joined the ranks of those theologians who are willing to sacrifice something of the omniscience and omnipotence of God to ill-conceived notions of the nature of his love and justice.

#### **DAVID EDWARDS AND JOHN STOTT—A LIBERAL- EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE ON ESSENTIALS**

In a fairly recent dialogue with John Stott, the Anglican liberal, David Edwards, suggests that the language of the Lausanne Covenant—"eternal separation from God"—though still misguided, is preferable to the traditional wording "everlasting punishment." The traditional wording, he goes on to say, ". . . may conjure up the unchristian picture of God as the Eternal Torturer—as in the notorious sermon on 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' preached by Jonathan Edwards in 1741."<sup>8</sup> To his credit, Edwards does proceed to examine various relevant texts in the New Testament. But in the end, his bias toward the love of God and a type of universalism leads him to conclude that the lostness of everlasting punishment is not only decidedly "unchristian," it is absolutely unconscionable.

Stott responds by explaining his (tentative) espousal of "conditional mortality"—the notion that ". . . nobody survives death except those to whom God gives life. They are therefore immortal by grace, not by nature."<sup>9</sup> Then, in a kindly manner characteristic of Stott, he concludes,

I am hesitant to have written these things, partly because I have great respect for longstanding tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of Scripture, and do not lightly set it aside, and partly because the unity of the world-wide Evangelical constituency has always meant much to me. But the issue is too im-

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<sup>8</sup> David L Edwards & John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988). 291-92.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 315-16.

portant to suppress, and I am grateful to you for challenging me to declare my present mind. I do not dogmatise [sic.] about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively. But I do plead for frank dialogue among Evangelicals on the basis of Scripture. I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment.<sup>10</sup>

Even before the Edwards/Stott book was published, Dean Kenneth Kantzer, was taken by surprise when first informed of Stott's embracement of conditional immortality. Now, as many will know and I have noted here, John Stott was an extremely sensitive and kindly brother in Christ. So perhaps Kantzer should not have been surprised when Stott explained that he had been reluctant to speak on the subject in the United States in deference to American evangelical audiences.

### **DONALD A. MCGAVRAN AND THE FORMATION OF THE EVANGELICAL MISSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

Finally, it might be worth mentioning Donald McGavran in this regard. McGavran's background had led what many perceived to be a theological "softness" in his lectures and writings on Church Growth. However, in the late 1980s, when McGavran had grown weary of discussions with missiologists who did not share even his most basic understanding of "Great Commission mission," he took a different view. He urged the formation of a new missiological society where everyone would be in basic agreement on fundamental issues such as we are discussing here. Standing outside his Pasadena home he spoke to the following effect:

Dr. Hesselgrave, we desperately need a missiological society in which all participants agree on the essentials. Unless we basically agree on what it means to be lost, for example, how is it possible to agree on what is involved in fulfilling Great Commission mission and evangelizing the world?

How indeed? And by this time most of my colleagues will be aware of the fact that it was conversations and correspondence with Donald McGavran on such subjects that ultimately resulted in the formation of the Evangelical Theological Society.

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<sup>10</sup> David L. Edwards with a response from John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 319-20.

I do not cite any of these experiences with colleagues in order to embarrass anyone—or, at this point, even to take issue with them though I certainly do take issue with what I perceive to be sub-orthodox views on these subjects. I simply want to point out that, more often than not—and to a degree greater than is the case with most other theological/missiological matters—lostness, wrath and judgment occasion emotional as well as intellectual responses. And that not only among worldlings and liberals but among evangelicals as well—both leaders and laypersons. Theologians often relate these matters to considerations of the justice and the sovereignty of God. Pastors and evangelists to Bible preaching and Christian witness. Missionaries to strategies for reaching the unreached and also the fate of those who have not heard the gospel. All alike are prone to contextualize what the prophets and apostles, and Christ himself, had to say about lostness and judgment not just in ways designed to satisfy the church and the world, but also in ways designed to satisfy their own understandings and emotions. And that’s a problem.

### THE EVANGELICAL HERITAGE—PREACHING LOSTNESS AND PASSING THE BATON

“Evangelicalism” has been defined in various ways—sometimes in experiential and existential terms such having to do with evangelistic undertakings, concern for souls, and so on. As I noted early on in these lectures, I believe Douglas Sweeney to be more helpful when he defines evangelicalism basically in terms of a *belief system* that results in a *behavioral pattern*:

I prefer to describe evangelicalism with more specificity as a movement that is based on classical Christian orthodoxy, shaped by a Reformational understanding of the gospel, and distinguished from other such movements in the history of the church by a set of beliefs and behaviors forged in the fires of the eighteenth-century revivals—the so-called ‘Great Awakening’. . . – beliefs and behaviors that had mainly to do with the spread of the gospel abroad.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Douglas A. Sweeney, “Introduction” in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (ed. Martin I. Klauber & Scott M. Manetsch; Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 2.

## LEARNING FROM FELLOW AMERICANS

Before concluding I want to pass on the kind of teachers and teaching on these difficult subjects that have informed and molded my own thinking. Noted here are just a few that I have had the privilege of knowing, hearing and reading down through many years.

1. **William Evans.** A Presbyterian, prolific writer; and professor at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, William Evans was also a peerless preacher. He memorized the entire New Testament and was able to quote any reference flawlessly and on a moment's notice. I heard him preach a series of messages at the First Evangelical Church in Chicago in the 1940s and was motivated to buy several of his books in spite of my very meager resources as a student. It may be of special interest that Evans published one of his early books, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, in 1912—the same year that Allen published his *Missionary Methods*.<sup>12</sup> It is from that book that I draw several examples of Evan's position on our present concerns.

\*“The Cross shows how much God loves holiness. The Cross stands for God's holiness even more than His love.”<sup>13</sup>

\*The righteousness and justice of God are shown in two ways: first in punishing the wicked or retributive justice; second in rewarding the righteous or remunerative justice.<sup>14</sup>

\*In Romans 8:7 Paul says that the carnal mind is enmity with God. Reconciliation in its active sense is the removal of that enmity. In its passive sense it may indicate a change of attitude on the part of man toward God.<sup>15</sup>

\*No interpretation holding to the annihilation theory can be maintained by sound exegesis.<sup>16</sup>

2. **Billy Graham.** When I first came to know Billy Graham in the 1940s and 50s he spoke more freely, frequently and forcefully concerning judgment and hell than has been the case in more recent days. In 1949 before he became a Christian the famous track star and war prisoner, Louie Zamperini, was infuriated when he heard Graham preach the sermon “The Only Sermon Jesus Ever Wrote” only to deeply regret it

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<sup>12</sup>William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1912).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 260.

and turn to Christ for salvation shortly thereafter. In his sermon Graham had said,

Darkness doesn't hide the eyes of God. God takes down your life from the time you were born to the time you die. And when you stand before God on the great judgment day, you're going to say, 'Lord, I wasn't such a bad fellow' and they are going to pull down the screen and they are going to shoot the moving picture of your life from the cradle to the grave, and you are going to hear every thought that was going through your mind . . . And your own words, and your own thoughts, and your own deeds, are going to condemn you as you stand before God on that day. And God is going to say, "Depart from me."<sup>17</sup>

In one of the sermons included in a 1994 anthology of Graham's sermons he took special notice of the fact that the concept of hell is not exclusive to the Christian faith. He explained that the ancient Babylonians believed in a "Land of No-Return." The Hebrews wrote about Sheol, or the place of corruption. The Greeks spoke of the "Unseen Land." Classical Buddhism recognizes seven "hot hells." The Hindu *Rig Veda* speaks of the deep abyss reserved for false men and faithless women. Islam recognizes seven hells. Graham then proceeded to catalogue a long list of biblical "descriptors of hell."

- \*Revelation 20:15—the Lake of Fire.
- \*Psalm 11:16—a horrible tempest.
- \*Psalm 18:5—a place of sorrows.
- \*Matthew 13:42—a place of wailing.
- \*Matthew 8:12—a place of weeping.
- \*Matthew 13:41-42—a furnace of fire.
- \*Luke 16:23—a place of torment.
- \*Revelation 20:11-12—a place of filthiness.
- \*Revelation 16:11—a place of cursing.
- \*Matthew 8:12—a place of outer darkness.
- \*Revelation 14:11—a place of unrest.
- \*Luke 16:27—a place where people pray.
- \*Matthew 25:26—a place of everlasting punishment.
- \*Matthew 25:41—a place prepared for the devil and his angels.
- \*Luke 16:2—a place where one begs for a drop of water.
- \*Isaiah 33:11—a place where one's breath is flame.

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<sup>17</sup> Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* (New York: Random House), 373.

\*Luke 16:2—a place where one is tormented with fire.

\*Revelation 21:8—a place where one is tormented with brimstone.

\*Luke 16:25—a place of memory.<sup>18</sup>

As I say, these examples are taken from sermons some of the earlier sermons of the famous evangelist. But I would argue that they are all the more representative and significant because they are sermons preached when Graham was in his prime.

3. **Carl F. H. Henry.** My late colleague on the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Carl F. H. Henry, was well known as one of the premier theologians of the twentieth century. He was also known for advocating a comprehensive Christian world view inclusive of social and political dimensions. Perhaps somewhat less known was his profound interest in world mission and evangelism—an interest fueled in part by the fact that his wife Helga is the daughter of pioneer Baptist missionaries to Gabon, but also by his dedication to a biblical theology of mission.

Two somewhat extended quotations from the voluminous works of Henry reflect his commitment to Allen's "full gospel" in the one case, and his "stern doctrines" in the other. It is, I think, of special interest that the first quotation is on a topic of such importance to Henry that he addressed it at the annual dinner of the Evangelical Theological Society (1969) and also assigned a title that is reminiscent of Allen's impatience with the theology of some of his contemporaries. The title is "Justification by Ignorance: a Neo-Protestant Motif." Henry said,

the lifeline of the Protestant Reformation was its rediscovery of the Scriptures—truth that God offers to penitent believers, hopelessly guilty in their strivings to achieve salvation by works, the benefits of Jesus Christ's meditation [sic., "mediation" is intended] on the Cross. God acquits sinners, solely on the ground of a righteousness which He himself provides, a righteousness made known by intelligible Divine revelation and embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, righteousness available to sinful men by faith alone.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *The Faithful Christian: An Anthology of Bill Graham* (comp. William Griffin & Ruth Graham Dienert; New York: McCracken Press, 1994), 183-84.

<sup>19</sup> "Justification by Ignorance: a Neo-Protestant Motif?" An address by Dr. Carl F. H. Henry to the annual dinner meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on Monday night, 29 December 1969, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Later published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (1970): 3-13, quotation from p. 3.

As for the second quotation that follows, it is excerpted from Henry's classic five-volume tome on revelation and, I think, representative of the forthrightness with which he handles "stern doctrines" which, though unpopular, are nevertheless biblical. He says,

"There are scholars who consider the eternal punishment of the wicked to be inconsistent with the nature of God. These critics tend to subordinate to divine love all the biblical passages about God's wrath, and ignore the fact that Jesus said even more about the pangs of hell than about the bliss of heaven, and moreover makes their duration coextensive and unending."<sup>20</sup>

4. **R. C. Sproul.** Finally, I make mention of the founding pastor of St. Mark's Church in Sanford, Florida. "R.C.," as he is sometimes referred to, has long had a reputation for being uniquely gifted as a Christian apologist and Bible expositor. I had known Sproul from a distance for many years, but shortly after he started St. Mark's while I was on a writing sabbatical in Sanford, it was my privilege to sit under his ministry on a number of occasions. As a result I took a special interest in his writings and recalled several relevant portions from one of them when restudying Allen's book.

For example, when writing on the essentials of the Christian faith, Sproul speaks concerning the holiness of God and notes that the biblical word "holy" has two distinct meanings. The primary meaning is "apartness" or "otherness." It points to the profound difference between God and his creatures. The secondary meaning has to do with his pure and righteous actions. God always does what is right; never what is wrong.<sup>21</sup> Against that backdrop Sproul's comments on punishment and hell become especially meaningful and even arresting. He writes:

"Perhaps the most frightening aspect of hell is its eternity. People can endure the greatest agony if they know it will ultimately stop. In hell there is no such hope. The Bible clearly teaches that the punishment is eternal. The same word is used for both eternal life and eternal death."<sup>22</sup>

"Punishment implies pain. Mere annihilation, which some have lobbied for, involves no pain. Jonathan Edwards, in preaching on

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<sup>20</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, "God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses," *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979), pt 3, bk 4, p. 597.

<sup>21</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1998), 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

Revelation 6:15-16 said, ‘Wicked men will hereafter earnestly wish to be turned to nothing and forever cease to be that they may escape the wrath of God.’<sup>23</sup>

“Hell, then, is an eternity before the righteous, ever-burning wrath of God, a suffering torment from which there is no escape and no relief. *Understanding this is crucial to our drive to appreciate the work of Christ and to preach his gospel.*”<sup>24</sup>

### LEARNING FROM A GIFTED JAPANESE EVANGELIST

I have echoed the importance of learning ways of communicating biblical truth to respondents of another culture by learning from effective teachers and preachers native to that culture. And in previous lectures I have provided some examples of this. Now I offer yet one more.

Early on in church planting in Urawa, Japan I was blessed to have the services of a number of Japanese pastors, teachers and evangelists. One such was Rev. Hashimoto, an expert in Japanese religions. One Sunday he spoke from Luke 16:19-31. Good. I had been a pastor in the States and had not gotten around to dealing with that passage in five years. Given its nature I probably would not have gotten around to deal with that passage in Japan for, perhaps, three or four terms or more! So I was anxious to know how Hashimoto *Sensei* would deal with this difficult passage? What would he say? Well, as I recall, he first spoke about Luke and his Gospel; about Jesus’ knowledge of these matters as the Son of God; and about parables and why this might be something more than a parable.

But it was when he got to the text itself that the message began to grip his audience. In order to understand why, I suppose that at the least one would have to know something about the Japanese myth, Buddhist karma and hells, local notions and circumstances of wealth and poverty, and ancestor reverence as well as the array and range of Japanese emotions that accompany these matters. But perhaps even the their importance will be sufficient for my present purpose. At any rate, summarizing Hashimoto’s sermon on Luke 16:19-31, he said something like the following:

My dear friends, can’t you imagine this state of affairs? For long months and quite frequently the rich man probably hurriedly and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. (emphasis mine).

disgustedly passed by the wretched and starving beggar Lazarus as he went out and in through the huge gate that closed his stately home off from the gaze of ordinary people. To discourage him from coming, the rich man showed nothing but disdain for Lazarus. Dogs licked Lazarus's sores, but the rich man not only refused to help, he often motioned him to get out of the way.

Eventually, both men died and went to Hades, the place of the dead. Now this is especially important for reasons you need to understand. They both went to the same place, but the Lord Jesus says that they were separated by an uncrossable gulf. Lazarus was at rest alongside Abraham, the great man of faith in the Old Testament. But the rich man was in a place of flames.

In thirst and torment, the rich man, recognizing Lazarus, called out to him for to bring even one drop of water and put in his tongue. Abraham responded that neither of them could go from one side to the other. The gulf between them was impassable. It was impossible for Lazarus to take even a drop of water to him or help him in any way.

In desperation the rich man—now himself a beggar—urged Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his five brothers to believe the gospel and be saved so as not to come to the place of flame and torment. Abraham replied, 'Let them listen to what Moses and the Prophets have to say in the Bible.' The poor rich man replied, 'No, but if someone returns from the dead they will repent.' 'No,' said Abraham, 'If they won't hear Moses and the Prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.'

Dear friends, let me tell you what the Lord Jesus is telling us Japanese in this text. He is telling us exactly what Christian pastors and missionaries have been saying. Namely, that whether American or Japanese, whether rich or poor, all ultimately go to either heaven or hell depending on whether or not they repent of their sin, believe the gospel, and live according to it.

He is also saying that decision must be made during this life. After death it will be too late. And, finally, he is saying that, if it were possible for them to return and talk to you, your Japanese ancestors would plead with you to follow Christ and be saved. They can't come to you, but the Lord Jesus tells this story because he does not want you to be lost. In fact, he not only warns you, he himself died for your sins, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and lives forevermore to be your Savior and Lord.

## CONCLUSION

My conclusion is as short as it is simple. Neither you nor I nor any Christian minister or missionary who would be faithful has a choice. The Bible is so clear and lostness is of such gravity that we must teach and preach it with passion and purpose. The gravity of lostness can be proclaimed in the manner and style of Jonathan Edwards. It can also be proclaimed in the manner and style of Hashimoto *Sensei*. *But to be faithful to Great Commission fundamentals, it must be proclaimed.*



**L-R: Dr. Robin Hadaway, Mrs. Gertrude Hesselgrave,  
Dr. David Hesselgrave**