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The results at Pentecost remain in Biblical history as the real proof of God's omnipotence. Changed lives were left in the wake of this divine hurricane. "They ate their bread with gladness of heart," where previously they had eaten with gluttonous acquisition and vacuum hearts. ers of God's Holy Spirit on the granite-

like hearts of unbelieving man is a manifest contradiction.

The results at Pentecost remain in Having favor with all men, they talked, prayed, cried, laughed, and worked for a world in which all could share their Pentecostal experience.

Can that happen to us today? Precisely! It not only can but it is happening . . . but only to those who can recognize it when it does happen.

## THE NATURE OF HELL

June 22, 1958

"If Christian faith did not require a belief in hell, then I would be a Christian," said a keen student. This statement represents the current reasoning among many people. Friends, today as we look at the nature of hell as taught in the Bible, let us face many of the false notions, the superstitious accretions that have gathered around Biblical sayings through the centuries and let us honestly try to separate the truth from the hearsay.

Is belief in hell fundamental to Christian faith? Anyone who knows the Bible at all must answer with unhesitating certainty, yes, belief is essential in the fundamentals. If one is to accept only what strikes his reasoning as logical or pleasing while deleting what he doesn't like or agree with, then his religion is not that which was practiced by Jesus Christ. Heaven and hell are taught as the logical ends of good and evil personalities.

### RECONCILE HELL

The very idea of hell strikes a revolting chord in the minds of many. They ask with searching pointedness, "How do you reconcile a hell of torments with a loving God?" This question through history has been raised innumerable times and the frequent raising of it has given rise to many sects and cults who, being unable to answer it honestly, decided to ignore the whole affair by denying its existence.

Yet, I can deny the fact that malignancy exists in the human body because I do not understand it and certainly do not endorse its existence. Many would

think me foolish, however, if I did deny the existence of cancer. The same is true of belief in hell. No one likes the idea but to deny its reality on the basis of dislike is absurd.

Is hell a place or a state of mind or both? In one sense of the word hell is a state of mind. The mind of man can become such a cauldron of confusion, interwoven with conflicting desires and passions, interlaced with inordinate ambitions, interlarded with the fat of foolishness inasmuch that the mind is much like hell. Sin can indwell the mind like a pestilence while all sense of decency and moral sensitivity can be lost. This, then, is hell in human form. Anyone who has tried to sail on that troubled mental sea where the waves are monotonously nauseating knows that the mind can be a tormenting prison.

### LOVE, MERCY, JUSTICE

A Christian's faith is grounded on God's love, mercy, and justice—but all three! Some would leave the impression that God is love and nothing else. God is a supreme, spiritual personality Who loves and wills that mankind should love, but to think of God merely as an exalted virtue, even one as highly exalted as love, is to miss the nature of His real self. God is a loving Father but His love has the dimension of mercy and justice. His justice sees to it that man who lives like hell shall have the appropriate place in which to live when this life is over. That is no sadistic arrangement any more than it is a gleeful fact for me to mention.

The courts of the land are based on the same principle; namely, that one who breaks the law must suffer the punishment for his breaking. Prisons are not the conceptions of evil men but of good men. If a dangerous criminal were not put away, then society would be in jeopardy. If every unregenerate person who had wilfully run athwart God and God's designs in life could roam around heaven all day, then heaven would be a chaos in jeopardy.

The logic of both places is rather apparent to those who want to see the truth. If God did not balance the books of life that are so unquestionably out of balance, if the iniquities and injustices of time were not set straight in eternity, if the oppressor shared alike with the oppressed, then, what kind of a God would He be? The delusion that all will wind up in heaven together either after second chances or no chances after death is foreign to the teachings of the founder of His faith.

#### EXPERIENCED ON EARTH

The Bible teaches that hell not only can be experienced here and now but that it will be experienced by all who are not preparing for heaven hereafter. Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus with the certain assurance as though He was looking at both places. He said, "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being tormented . . ." That passage cannot be dismissed naive fancy of allegories or otherwise.

Then what will the place in eternity be like . . . this hell? There are many metaphors and similes. Any efforts to describe the place fall short of its inconceivable nature. Some think in terms of literal fire . . . others the tormenting of incessant heat . . . still others the burning that results from a realization that one is for all times separated from that which is good and holy.

Fanciful efforts in this direction depict hell as a place of bright sunrises but no sense of sight; hell as a rose garden but no sense of smell; hell as a place of great cathedrals but no God there; a place of banqueting with all the best of foods, ex-

perly prepared and sumptuously served but no appetite there; a place of dreams and visions but no future; an existence without living; a place where man has ceased to hope.

These are all but fumbling words trying to carry the import of its negative, life-denying, eternity-extending nature. Just to say that God and Christ and these good, dear-loved ones who have gone before will not be there would make it hell enough to me were there no aggravating, penitive features at all.

#### INHABITANTS OF HELL

Wherever and whatever hell is it is bound to be the habitat of all those whose lives are conditions for its occupancy. Just think of it: the cheats, the liars, the money-crazy, obsessed, the unclean, defiled, the successful failures, gangster, mobster, prostitutes, thieves, infidels, atheists, cynics, fools. Thinks of it: suppose you had to spend one month exclusively in company with this kind with not one good person there to say an encouraging word, everyone of whom was there to degrade, or cheat or render bodily harm or mental anguish. What kind of a month would that be? Multiply those thirty days by eternity and something of its freight will weigh upon your thinking.

An old legend says that a man dreamed that he died and went to hell. There, in the inferno of trying to escape torment, once out of desperation watched a spider as it let itself down on a silken thread. The man clutched at the silken thread and tried to climb it in hope of escape. In the wild fancy of his dream the thread supported the weight of the man as he climbed. But another tortured soul, seeing his escape, caught him by the ankle with the hope of pulling up and out too. Whereupon the first man seeing what was going on, kicked the second fellow free so as not to impede his escape and in so doing the web broke and both fell back to their former predicament. Just a legend? Yes. But much real truth since it is primarily selfishness that estranges us from our God and causes us to send our souls away from God.

Lest some of you who hear this message fail to hear my next sermon on the nature of heaven, then let me close this message on hell by saying that every person who enters hell must do so by going past Jesus Christ who stands at hell's door warning, rebuking, loving and calling to heaven instead.

### THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

There stands that old rugged cross, antiquated by the blood stains of the stranger of Galilee, it stands as a road sign with one of its cross beams like an index finger pointing straight up to heaven away from hell. My, what an arresting thought, that no one need enter that door of hell, that

the Son of God has taken up permanent sentinel duty at hell's door seeking to save up all from our own fool-heartedness.

But Christ will not stand astride the door and bar one's entry any more than He will stand at heaven's door and force one in. If He did so, it would rob one of his freedom to choose his own destiny.

I know no better way to say than this: last night when better than an inch of rain fell on the earth in less than an hour it looked as though nature was crying her eyes out. But all that rain—those tears—would not exhaust God's tear ducts when He sees men and women for whom His Son died, turn their backs on Him choosing to enter hell instead.

## "THE RAMPARTS WE WATCH"

Dr. John W. Raley

President, Oklahoma Baptist University

Scripture: Psalm 33:12, Isaiah 51:1

July 4, next Friday, this country will celebrate the 182nd anniversary of its birth into the family of nations. But to return to the sources of our inspiration, we must go back 156 years before the immortal documents celebrated today were proclaimed.

On the fourteenth day of January at four o'clock in the morning, 1620, approximately one hundred people stood on the prow of a little ship and looked across the dark water to the dim shoreline. This intrepid little band had risked their life capital and pledged their sacred honor to develop a civilization in which they could live, work, and worship as they pleased.

Suddenly, as they watched the shore line, a flame burst from the blockhouse; and with growing despair, they saw the work of their hands, the supplies and the seed—their most precious possessions—go up in flames. They were thousands of miles from home with no friends on either side of the dark water they had crossed.

They were men, in modern terminology, of the "underprivileged class;" and certainly they faced the prospect of living in a "backward, undeveloped country"

with no seventeenth century Point Four program to tide them over.

### PROFOUND PURPOSE

And yet, they had everything necessary for the conquest of a vast land and the establishing of a new civilization in the world. They had a great idea and a profound purpose. They believed that every man was endowed with a divine right to live, to grow, to think, to learn, to work, to be, to become, and to contribute of his own life in his own way to the wealth and wisdom of the race, and they were determined to fulfill their destiny.

The governing document of the founders of this nation is steeped in the philosophy of Christianity. Conceived in the highlands of their minds, it is an abstract of Christian principles stated in political terms. These new political doctrines, so disturbing to old world autocracies, were not new at all—they were simply the stated convictions of men whose minds were steeped in Biblical lore and whose education in Christian schools prepared them for their hour. From the glow of an enlightened conscience, they spoke their lines on a world stage through the