

What Ever Happened to Hell?

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[0:00] Luke chapter 16. We'll begin reading at verse 19 and read through the end of the chapter.!

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.

So he called to him, Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.

But Abraham replied, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.

[1:19] And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.

He answered, Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers.

Let him warn them so that they will not come to this place of torment.

Abraham replied, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them. No, Father Abraham, he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.

And he said to him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. Church advertisements sometimes make for interesting reading.

Someone has read through a pile of newspaper church ads and found a common element that user-friendly churches want to be known for. I'm going to read five of those ads and see if you can pick up from them what that element is as I describe the preaching in their services.

[2:42] Their ads themselves describe their own preaching. Number one, there is no fire and brimstone here, just practical, witty messages.

Number two, services at our church have an informal feeling. You won't hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners.

The goal is to make them feel welcome, not drive them away. Church three, the sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short.

You won't hear a lot of preaching about sin and damnation in hellfire. Preaching here doesn't sound like preaching. It's sophisticated, urbane, and friendly talk.

It breaks all the stereotypes. Church four, the pastor is preaching a very upbeat message. It's a salvationist message, but the idea is not so much being saved from the fires of hell.

[3:40] Rather, it's being saved from meaninglessness and aimlessness in this life. It's more of a soft sell. And church five, as with all clergymen, our pastor's answer is God.

But he slips him in at the end and even then doesn't get heavy. No ranting, no raving, no fire, no brimstone. He doesn't even use the H word.

Call it light gospel. It has the same salvation as the old time religion, but with a third less guilt. So, what can preachers learn from these ads?

Well, if you want to increase your attendance, be witty, informal, positive, brief, friendly, and never, never use the H word.

Evidently, hell is unpopular today. But I wonder if there has ever been a day when it was not unpopular.

[4:53] Hell was not popular when Isaiah and Ezekiel spoke about it.

It was not popular when our Lord Jesus and his apostles warned of it. And yet, this did not silence them on the subject. When we turn to our Bibles, we find that God warns us often about hell.

Because hell is real. And I have a question for you. Would the Bible be a more loving book if it never said anything about hell?

Would it be a more loving book if all the references to hell were gone? If we knew nothing about hell until we were cast into it?

Would that make it a more loving book? Or is it not the very kindness and love of God manifest that He warns us of this reality that we might escape it?

[6:07] Or should doctors and hospitals never use the scary C word just because talking about cancer makes people with cancer nervous and upset?

Is that reason enough to not warn them about its dangers if it goes untreated? Is that reason enough to not offer them some kind of cancer treatment and cure for their disease?

Is silence on a difficult topic the loving thing to do? Is it the right thing to do? Untreated cancer leads to physical death.

Untreated sin leads to unending hell. Can you think of a more sure way to leave people on their way to hell than to never speak about it?

There's more than one way to deny the doctrine of hell as is being done today. One way is just to preach against it. But a far more usual way is to just ignore it.

[7:19] Just to let it die the slow death from neglect until no one believes in hell anymore. If hell is off limits at church, where will people learn of it?

Did you know that no one in the Bible speaks about hell more often than our loving Lord Jesus Christ? I want you to think about that.

That's got a lesson in it. That the one who created hell, that the one who knows the most about it is the one who speaks the most about it.

Because he knows better than anyone else that it's real. And he wants men and women, boys and girls, to flee the coming wrath, to not perish, but to have everlasting life.

So to speak or not to speak, that is the question. Which is the loving thing to do? Well, I'll posit that if hell is real, then the most wicked, evil, harmful thing a church can do is remain silent about it.

[8:38] I had a friend of mine in high school. He was an officer in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes with me. He went to a Christian grade school for eight years. And after high school, went off to a secular university where he abandoned the faith of his upbringing.

And years later, talking with him, he told me how cruel it was for children to be taught that there is a hell. He was clearly upset.

He says it's nothing more than a manipulative tool to control behavior by fear. And if there's no hell, I agree. I agree with my friend.

It's a most cruel thing to lie and to tell children of this horrible place where unpardoned sinners suffer forever. It ought to never be mentioned in church or anywhere for that matter.

But if there is a hell, there is nothing more cruel and wicked than to be silent about it. And even to children who are born sinners, born with their backs to God and their face toward hell.

[9:58] And unless they repent, that's where they'll spend eternity. So we're back to basics this morning. Back to the basic of, is there a hell or isn't there?

And the Bible's answer is yes. And I posit this as a biblical definition. Hell is a place where unrepentant sinners are punished with unspeakable torments forever.

Hell is a place where unrepentant sinners are punished with unspeakable torments forever. Now I want to break it down this morning. First of all, hell is a real place.

A real place. No doubt you have heard people flippantly talk about hell as if it was something that they've gone through here in this life. Living with him was hell.

No, it wasn't. It may have been horribly terrible, but it wasn't hell. Because hell is a place of unending punishment where sinners go after this life.

[11:08] It's as much a place as heaven is a place. Remember, Jesus says, I go away to prepare a place for you. Hell is a place just as heaven is a place.

Acts 1.25 says that Judas left his apostolic ministry to go to his own place. Same word. His own location.

With a real address. We read it in Luke 16 in the parable that Jesus gave us that the rich man who died and went to hell begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his five brothers.

Why? So that they will not also come to this place of torment. At death, the rich man immediately, the spirit of the rich man immediately went into hell and was in torment.

But at the return of Christ, the bodies of the damned will be raised and reunited with their spirits for final judgment and then be sent to suffer body and soul in hell.

[12:21] Well, it must be a real place if there are real bodies there. Now, the Bible doesn't tell us where this place is and it's not our business this morning to speculate about that.

But what the Bible does do for us is that it carefully points out the way to hell. The road that goes to hell. It's the broad road.

It's the way that seems right to a man. It's your own way. It's my own way. It's the way of sin. It winds around and eventually it leads to that place called hell.

As much a place as this is a place. 535 South Berkey Street. So that's the first teaching of the Bible. It's a real place.

The second teaching is that it's a place of punishment. Kids, you know what punishment is. Hell is punishment. It's punishment for sin.

[13:29] 2 Thessalonians 1.9 says, They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power.

Matthew 25.26 Jesus says, They will go away to eternal punishment. So, why punishment?

Well, God is pure. He hates sin. He has promised to punish the sinner for their sin. His righteousness is His determination to punish sin wherever He finds it.

Now, sometimes God's punishment for sin begins in this life. But it never ends here. Sometimes in this life sinners get by without being caught and punished.

But God, the righteous one, says, Be sure your sins will find you out. God is righteous and hell is punishment for sin.

[14:34] It's God's payback for sin. Remember how He says in the Scriptures, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

It's God giving the sinner what He deserves for his sin. Nothing more, nothing less. And God's perfect justice will guarantee that the punishment of every sinner will perfectly fit the crime.

It's punishment under God's curse, under His fiery wrath and rage. Now, what does the Bible teach about this punishment?

And I want to be very careful to stick to the words of Scripture and not to enter into speculation. What does the Bible say about this punishment? Well, it teaches us, first of all, that there are different degrees of punishment.

Jesus talks about some being punished with many stripes and others with fewer stripes in Luke chapter 12. And the greatest punishment is going to go against those who you may not think it should go against.

[15:49] It's going to go against people who came to church often and heard the word of the gospel often and rejected it.

Jesus says it will be more tolerable for that homosexual city Sodom and Gomorrah that was destroyed by fire than it will be for those who have heard the gospel where Christ came to town and brought His gospel and people did not repent.

They just went on doing life as they had been doing life more tolerable for some that are locked away in lifetime imprisonment for their wicked crimes more tolerable for them than for some who have heard the gospel and not repented.

There are different degrees of punishment. It is separation from God this punishment. It's to be shut out from the presence of the Lord. It's to have God say depart from me.

Cut off from all His good gifts His kindness His pity. It's to be without a drop of mercy and it's hard to know what all that means because every day we're drinking in the good gifts of God.

[17:15] I say we I mean everyone is drinking in His kindness His sunshine wives husbands children friends jobs health all sorts of gifts that just pour into our laps every day.

There is no goodness in hell. There is no mercy in hell. There is nothing of God's kindness in hell. It's separation from God.

Thirdly it's painful. It's unspeakable torments. Today we have painkillers for about everything. I don't know about you but if I'm hurting I want a pill that will make it all go away real fast.

That's the mercy of God itself isn't it? To have medicine to ease our pain. From time to time though we do have sharp reminders failures of our body's capacity to feel exquisite pain.

And there are no painkillers in hell. Nothing to dull the pain. The rich man who died went to hell where he was in torment. He calls it a place of torment.

[18:30] He says I am in agony in this fire and he cries for pity but receives none. Jesus describes hell several times in the gospels as a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Why? Because of the pain that they are experiencing in body and soul. It's a place of weeping loud uncontrollable audible sobbing. It's a place of gnashing of teeth with anger and regret. It's a place where conscience continually condemns and reminds the sinner of his opportunities for mercy that he spurned.

Of Christian parents of Sunday school teachers of sermons heard of Christians that witnessed and all of it was put away and pushed away and now conscience is tormenting and teeth are gnashing and they'll be there with devils and men with wicked hearts now no longer restrained by God's grace and goodness as they are in this life.

God will take all the restraints off of wicked men and the sinner himself in hell will himself be at his most wickedness and he will be hating God and man.

[19:53] It's a place of outer darkness of total despair. Now more often than not the pains of hell are described by fire aren't they?

Fire. Book of Revelation calls hell a lake of fire a fiery lake of burning sulfur. Jesus calls it the fire of hell.

Jesus calls it eternal fire. Jesus calls it where the fire never goes out. Now fire causes pain. the rich man who died and went to hell said I am in agony in this fire.

Who's willing to hold their hand over a flame of fire for ten seconds? No. It's too painful.

We can't endure it. And so the sinners in Zion are terrified. Trembling grips the godless. Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with the everlasting burning?

[21:01] Isaiah 33. But someone says surely John the Bible is speaking figuratively when it speaks about the fires of hell. Well perhaps so.

But behind every figure in the Bible is a reality. And behind every symbol is a reality. And the reality is always more than the symbol.

And if the symbol is unbearable what will the reality be? May none of us ever know.

Punishment is painful. Hell is a place where unrepentant sinners are punished with unspeakable torments forever.

That's the third point. The punishment is forever. Forever. Turn to Matthew 25 where the Lord Jesus takes us fast forward to that day where we're all going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

[22:19] And we're taken there ahead of time. You'll be there one day. You'll see it all for yourself. But Jesus is just telling you about it first here that you might know what that day will be like.

Everybody's here. All the nations. Everybody who has ever lived anywhere at any time. They're all there. It's one huge crowd.

a mass of humanity. And then Jesus the judge starts judging.

And he starts separating this one big mass of humanity like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. You here.

You there. And when Jesus is done judging the one big mass of humanity is now separated into two groups. The righteous are on his right.

[23:28] The unconverted are on his left. And to the righteous he says come you who are blessed by my father. And to those on his left he says depart you cursed you who are cursed into the eternal fire.

prepared for the devil and his angels. And then verse 46 notice it with me. Then then they will go away to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life.

Notice that the punishment of the damned is not one day shorter than the happiness of the saved. It's the same word used for both.

Eternal punishment eternal life. Eternal forever eternity that that word boggles the human mind doesn't it?

Our finite minds can't get around that one. Just what it is to exist anywhere forever much less in hell forever.

[24:42] But however difficult it is to fathom we must believe it because the Bible teaches it they will go away to eternal punishment. So the Bible does not teach the annihilation of sinners does it?

Rather their everlasting punishment. Remember Jesus said about Judas who went to his place it would be better for him if he had never been born.

That wouldn't be true if Judas was simply annihilated. But if there are everlasting punishments it would have been better for Judas who had never been born.

Nor does the Bible speak of hell being of limited duration where sinners go for a while and once purified they are then released into heaven as fit for God.

That was the Roman Catholic invention of purgatory that the fires of hell purged the sinner cleansing from sin preparing for heaven.

[25 : 50] And now Rob Bell a self proclaimed evangelical pastor of a church of some 7,000 people two hours north of here in Grand Rapids has written a book called Love Wins.

And he casts strong doubts on the Bible doctrine of eternal punishment on the basis of God's love winning in the end. And he speaks as if all God's judgments judgments are purging judgments remedial corrective purifying so even the punishment of hell must be remedial and purifying and so God's purifying love must empty hell if God's love is to win in the end.

But Mr. Bell it's heaven that demonstrates that love wins.

And it's hell that demonstrates that righteousness wins. And both must have their praise forever and ever.

You see the fires of hell are not purifying fires. They are punishing fires. They're not remedial. They're retributive.

[27 : 16] They're payback of what is due. Yes it's the privilege of believers in this life to be disciplined and to have punishments if you will that are corrective and restorative.

But not so the wicked. when God's judgments fall upon the earth the people of the world do not learn righteousness. Isaiah 26 9 No remember in 1 Corinthians 11 that Paul threatens the people there and saying the reason some of you are sick and some of you are dying is because you're sinning in the way you carry out the Lord's table.

And then he tells them that it's the privilege of believers in this life to be disciplined for our good so that we will not be condemned with the world.

1 Corinthians 11 32 It's believers who are disciplined and corrected its unrepentant sinners who are damned. There's a difference.

They go away from the judge to eternal unending punishments. And it's that very hopelessness that makes for one of hell's greatest torments.

[28 : 39] In this life when men are going through something terrible and painful they sometimes comfort themselves with the thought that this too will pass. we'll get over this we'll get through this we'll get on the other side and then it will be better.

And it provides some measure of comfort just knowing that this too will pass but the punishments of hell are never passed. Their torment rises forever and ever Revelation 14 11 they have no rest day or night and though every moment the sinner feels I can't bear it anymore more they know they must and they know they will because it's eternal it's hopeless it's too late.

Hell is a place where unrepentant sinners are punished with unspeakable torments forever. And fourthly who goes to hell? It's unrepentant sinners who are punished.

now if you have no sin then there's no need to fear hell because hell is clearly for sinners. But that is the problem isn't it that we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Hell is for sinners. Paul mentions some specific sins in Ephesians 5 and then he says this because of such things because of such things as these these sins God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

[30 : 17] The Lord Jesus mentions some sins by name. He speaks of the sin of anger and angry words spoken anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Matthew 5 22 He goes on to say that anyone who just looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his heart and unless they radically root out that sin that their whole body will be thrown into hell.

Matthew 5 29 Revelation 21 8 says but the cowardly the unbelieving the vile the murderers the sexually immoral those who practice magic arts the idolaters and all liars their place their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur this is the second death hell is clearly for sinners oh but not for all sinners not for all sinners only for unrepentant sinners unrepentant sinners for an amazing grace God has promised that all sinners who repent and trust in his one and only son shall not perish but have everlasting life even even great sinners who repent are forgiven their sins and go to heaven and in God's eyes there are no other kind of sinners but the great sinners every sin is a great offense to God but we have a great savior

God gives repentance to sinners and it's only unrepentant sinners that will go to hell hell is for those who refuse to repent refuse to confess and forsake their sins Romans 2:5 because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed and God will give to each one according to what he has done for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger who's it for for the stubborn unrepentant heart second Thessalonians 1:8 he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ so because hell is real we speak of it because it's revealed in the scriptures we preach it you say are you trying to scare us pastor well if hell is not scary

I don't know what is and it's only proper and right to be afraid of something as dangerous as eternal punishments Jesus himself tells us I'll tell you someone to be afraid of you should fear him who after killing the body has power to throw you into hell yes I tell you fear him fear him sinners outside of Christ have an amazing capacity to remain at ease under God's wrath it should amaze us that anyone outside of Christ can lay their head on their pillow and sleep at night they are one breath away from everlasting torments and they sleep scripture says they're like a man sleeping on the top of a mast in the open ocean as it heaves back and forth and as they sleep at any moment it could toss them into the bottom of sea fear hell yes you ought to fear hell

[34:34] God is to be feared whose wrath is as great as the fear that is due him Psalm 90 and verse 11 Jesus has a question for you who have not repented of your sins he asked it of the Pharisees in his day he's asking it today how will you escape being condemned to hell how will you escape if you neglect so great a salvation so great a savior the Lord Jesus himself a Gallup poll found only 4% of people in the United States thought that they might end up in hell how many are in hell today who never thought they'd end up there who thought they were good enough to get into heaven or thought that later I'll repent and get right with God but they procrastinated too long and now it's forever too late it's appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment after death it's too late to repent every second three people are slipping out of life into eternity in heaven or hell it will take about one minute to empty this room that's how fast people are dying every day one minute this room is dead one hour 11,000 people 260,000 people every day out of life into eternity one of two places heaven or hell and the

Bible says there's one safe hiding place from the coming wrath it's to be found hidden in the Savior's side to get into Christ himself that's the one who saves us from the coming wrath the Lord Jesus not only came to warn us about hell he came to save us from the coming wrath and he did it by bearing that wrath himself on the cross Romans 5:9 since we have now been justified by his blood how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him salvation from God's wrath is through him through Christ and it takes hell to exegete Calvary it takes hell to further explain to us what took place on Calvary's middle cross hell is the place of outer darkness and despair so when Christ bore our sins in his body to the tree a strange darkness covered the earth from twelve noon till three in the afternoon darkness of God's judgment falling darkness of soul and then again hell is the place of separation from God of being shut out from the presence of God and so on the cross Jesus felt the forsakenness of hell in his soul and cried my God my God why have you forsaken me and hell is the place of punishment for sin of retribution of getting what sin deserves and so on the cross Christ died for sins the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God stricken smitten by God and afflicted he was wounded you see he's punished wounded for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed hell is the place of

God's undiluted wrath with nothing of mercy mixed in and so on the cross the father put the cup of God's wrath into the hands of his own son and he drank that cup down to the dregs and said it is finished finished he died under God's curse God's wrath for cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree he saves us from the coming wrath by suffering it himself in our place hell is the place of unspeakable torments of body and soul and so on the cross it pleased the Lord to crush him and to cause him to suffer who can understand a tenth of Christ's sufferings and torments on Calvary is it nothing to you all you who pass by look around and see is anything is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me that the

Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger that was Jeremiah's cries as Jerusalem was suffering God's anger for her sins what must have been the suffering of Jesus on Calvary when he took all the sins of all of his people of all time and suffered the pains that they deserved hell came to

Calvary that day demanding what the sinner owed and oh what a savior is Jesus Christ to have paid in full in his own body and soul I can I can never understand what he saved me from what he suffered on the cross unless I understand something of the hell that I deserved oh that men would seek the

[40:48] Lord while he may be found he'll save you right now if you repent and cast yourself upon God's mercy and Jesus Christ do it my sinner friend believer I've got a question for you do you believe that we too need to hear about hell is it not in our Bibles for us as believers to read well what should this basic Bible doctrine do for you believer well at least two things it should make you a more thankful worshipper of the Lord Jesus every day you wake up outside of hell you owe it to Jesus Christ I should be in hell today and forever if I got what I deserved I would be in hell and if you came and saw me a billion billion years from now I'd still be in hell I'd never get out of hell that's what my sin against the holy God deserves but Jesus God's son took my place and I don't come to appreciate that until

I see what was my place my place was the place of torment and he stepped in and took my place then be amazed my soul at what he suffered for you did he suffer hell's torments for me that I might go at last to heaven saved by his precious blood oh then will I not love and adore him more you see what hell does is it teaches me that it's no small thing that Jesus did for my soul it's not a small thing oh we speak so flippantly so if Jesus died for me he suffered for my sin he took the hell that I would have endured forever and ever that's what he did for me and that's my reality every day on my good days on my bad days that's the reality I live with I deserve to be in hell but because of Jesus I'll never be there if you're in Christ that's your reality every day you to in hell today but for Jesus sake I'll never be there and so whatever else is going on that day this much is true and should color everything else and so he's worthy every day of fresh praise from my heart for his so great salvation let's praise him more for saving us from eternal hell and then if you're a believer it should make you more a earnest witness to those who are still on their way to hell Paul said knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men Paul said brothers my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved is there somebody in your life that you could say my heart's desire in prayer to

God is that they might be saved is there no one in your acquaintance that you're praying for every day that you're laboring to bring the gospel to them to invite them to Christ to invite them to church to do something for them have you been saved from eternal torments and are there not others around you who in the words of Jude still need to be snatched from the fire and need to be saved too it is written I believe therefore I have spoken do you believe hell is real therefore speak speak if others insist on going to hell let it be over our prayers and efforts to warn them to flee the coming wrath and over our invitations to come to a merciful Savior that they might not perish but have everlasting life if

I was asleep at night and you drove by my house and you saw that my house was on fire and you stopped and came and rapped on my door as loud as you could and screamed as loud as you could fire fire well that would greatly inconvenience my rest and if there was no fire at all and that was just a cruel April fool's joke I would be very but if my house really was on fire and due to your warning I had time to flee I would be your debtor for the rest of my life the danger of hell is real to all outside of Christ then let us in mercy warn them Christianity today held an interview with Dr.

[45:51] Martin Lloyd Jones just before his death the preacher of London and they asked him what words would you want to leave with the evangelical church before you die flee the coming wrath flee the coming wrath he thought we lived in a world where no one's taking the coming wrath seriously and things like yesterday don't make people take the coming wrath seriously signs all over the world saying the Bible teaches that May the 21st is the day of the coming wrath and it doesn't come and we write off these religious kooks all of them there's no such thing as a coming wrath we're travelers we're journeying we're traveling rapidly through this world on into eternity and the whole of our life here is like a night stay in a hotel

I've stayed in all sorts of hotels nice ones comfortable ones some scary ones but you know if I'm going somewhere it really doesn't matter if it's just a night we put up with a lot don't we it's where we're going folks we're going to eternity it's only for a night that we're here what matters most is where I'm going to live forever don't be like the millions entirely consumed with the comforts of this life entirely forgetful of where it is that they will spend eternity when they get to their last day in the words of John the Baptist flee the coming wrath let's pray!

Lord Father in heaven you know how hard it is for our finite minds to understand the doctrine of hell and it is a comfort to us to know that your understanding no man can fathom that this is not a doctrine that our minds can fully understand you don't ask us to understand it you ask us to believe it and to answer appropriately to flee it thank you for warning us thank you for not being silent on such an important topic take away from us all of our fear of men all of our fear of being counted a fool for Christ's sake because we believe in hell and we're not afraid to speak of it thank you Lord Jesus for what you suffered!

we rejoice with trembling and it does cause us to tremble when we think what you suffered and make us to tremble more for those who are still under wrath who have no savior and we're going to stand in that day alone and be set upon the left hand side will help us to get in their way help us to get in their way with our prayers help us to get in their way with loving words of warning to them gospel and treaty and so we ask you to take this truth of your word one that we naturally shirk from but one we believe to be for our profit for our correction for our rebuke for our training in righteousness speak it to our hearts and receive a fitting response from each soul here this day make it a saving word to many make it a sanctifying word do us good by it we pray in Jesus name amen may may