

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Leaders' Notes*

As you lead a conversation, here's some helpful notes to go along with each of the corresponding "Discussion Questions."

- 1. CARICATURE:** This is a good opportunity to let people talk about some of their own struggles they've had with this topic, things they've wrestled with, etc. and articulate the caricature many people assume when talking about hell and what it implies for the character of God (ie. vindictive torturer vs. good and faithful).
- 2. STORY:** this question is about the "story" hell fits into, unpacked in the sermon as "Heaven and Earth are: 1) Created by God; 2) Torn by Sin; 3) Destined for Reconciliation." A Key Idea here is:
  - "God's mission is not to get us out of earth and into heaven or hell, but rather to reconcile heaven and earth *from* the destructive power of sin, death, and hell. This gives rise to a radically different understanding of hell from the caricature." One helpful "prod" for discussion on this might be: "Do you remember how many times heaven and hell appear together in the same verse throughout the biblical story?" (Answer: 0) "How about how many times heaven and earth appear together in the same verse?" (Answer: around 200)
- 3. LOCATION:** this question is about the "location" of *Gehenna* / The Valley of Hinnom, and its significance for our understanding of hell. Some reminders that might be helpful for the conversation.
  - Location: was "outside the city" (of Jerusalem), vs. caricature "underground."
  - In the Old Testament, it was known for child sacrifice (idolatry & injustice).
- 4. PURPOSE:** this question is about the purpose of hell. A helpful clarification that comes up sometimes here: some people wonder, "Does this mean you're saying hell is not a punishment?" No, Scripture makes clear it is a punishment. However, we're saying it's not *torture* (which is what many people have in mind with the word punishment here). In the classic view, God's containment of evil *is* the punishment (not being allowed to enter the kingdom and being cut off from the flourishing we were intended for because of our unrepentant sin). For example, our justice system uses a similar logic keeping rapists and murders off the streets (*containing* them in jail to *protect* the flourishing of society, which the justice system rightly calls a *punishment* when the judge hands down the sentence to a convicted felon). It's punishment, but not torture. Being *tormented* by our sin is different from being *tortured* by God.
- 5. WEDDING ANALOGY:** Part of the hope here is to bring it back to a more "relational" framework (rather than the "behavioral" framework many people assume), for the nature of the choice we're presented with. The four "wedding options" were:

- “Marry Me and Bring in Your Old Lovers”: or, God *ignoring* unrepentant sin.
- “Marry Me or I’ll Kill You”: or, God *annihilating* the unrepentant sinner.
- “Marry Me or I’ll Lock You in the Basement”: or, God *redeeming* the unrepentant sinner by torturing it out of them.
- “Marry Me or Go Your Own Way”: or, God offering life with him and under the authority and rule of his kingdom, but handing over those who reject him in preference for their own independence and autonomy from him.

**6. JESUS:** The hope here is bringing it back to Jesus, letting his character and our trust in him drive our understanding of all this, and recognizing that in Christ, we find a God who is *for* us, who wants to be with us, who at the cross and resurrection displays the extravagant extent God’s willing to go to bring us home—and the question is whether we want to be with him, receiving his grace and submitting to the authority of his good kingdom, or whether we prefer life on our own terms, the sinful root that gives rise to the nature of hell.