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What is Paradise

I am often asked my opinion on the meaning of a specific verse about Jesus preaching in hell. It's from 1 Peter 3:18-19 which says "*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;*"

The questions we want to answer are who is Jesus preaching to and what is He saying? I often wondered why He would preach to people in hell for the first place, was He rubbing it in to them that they missed heaven? That was until I recognized other places in scripture about what hell and heaven looked like when Jesus died on the cross.

Let's first accept the idea that man was created in the image of God and was designed from the beginning in perfection until the fall and sin of Adam and Eve. This means that we were designed to live forever in perfect harmony with God and each other. Man was never supposed to die, and therefore man was never to see hell or heaven. Heaven and hell were not created for men, but because of the fall of men, both places suddenly became important.

We must also accept the idea that every human ever conceived is still alive today. Created in God's image meant that Adam and his offspring were given the gift of eternal life and will never disappear. The original sin brought physical death to mankind, but the actual person still lives forever throughout the rest of eternity. We cannot just disappear, so what is to happen now that physical death is part of being born into a corrupted human race?

That's where heaven and hell suddenly became important. Because even though they were not created for men, now they have become a holding place for the bodyless people after physical death. God has an ultimate plan of redemption for the world. It started at the fall and ends at the sound of the trumpet. There will be a completely new heaven and new earth for believers and a lake of fire for unbelievers, but until then we are stuck looking at these two holding places.

Heaven itself was locked up until Jesus was resurrected. It was this act that opened the door for everyone who believed in a Savior to follow him up into heaven. Now when a person's natural body falls off of them, they go in the spirit to where their Father has made a way. Someone born again immediately is taken to heaven, but a person with a nature of sin will be taken into hell and await their judgment day.

There's more to understand in looking at this verse of Jesus preaching in hell. We must accept the idea of what hell looked like at that specific place and time. Jesus had died but not yet been resurrected, and without His resurrection, then no person could be born again. So, this was a very unique moment in history. Peter mentions it in his letter because it was a once in a lifetime moment between the two covenants.

If this moment is before Jesus opened up the doors into heaven, that means that at this time, no one in the history of the world had traveled to make heaven their home yet. As well as no one that was conceived had disappeared into nothingness... so where did everyone go? What did God do with the people who died but could not go into heaven yet?

Heaven was empty of people before the resurrection of Christ. Believers in the Old Testament who were on the way there, couldn't get in without first being born again. So, while heaven was empty, the only holding place that was available in the old covenant was in the same place as hell. As we study this next scripture, we can see that before the resurrection, there were two holding places for people in the afterlife, and both of them were in hell.

Luke 16:19-26 "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

Both of these men had passed away, and we can see that they were in separate chambers of hell. The one rich man was in a place of torment while the once poor man was in a place of paradise, and even though they could see each other, they were separated. This unique chamber has also been called Abraham's bosom in reference to how the Old Testament saint believed in the future of a Savior. Paradise, or Abraham's bosom, was the name of this holding place within hell for every person who was destined for heaven but needed a Savior first. Until Jesus was resurrected, no one had access to heaven.

Abraham was in this room as was the thief that died beside Jesus who He promised to see him soon in paradise. Noah, Jacob, John the Baptist, and every other Old Testament saint was waiting in paradise until Jesus could take them with Him into heaven. Which is exactly what I believe happened. It was this group whom Jesus preached to in hell, and it was a message of resurrection and life, He finished with telling them to follow Him out of there! Paradise has been empty ever since that moment. Our home is now always with our Father because of the love of Jesus.

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