**‘I Never Knew You’**

In some recent polls as many as 85 percent of Americans claim to be ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual.’ These nebulous terms should alert us to the religious pluralism that’s pervasive in our culture. One catch phrase that has become popular is this: “Worship God as you perceive him to be!” Everything is subjective and Jesus’ own words, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,” are often scoffed at. Many in our culture will not accept the fact that there is only one way to be right with God (John 14:6).

One of the clearest teachings of scripture is that there is a great day of judgment coming. The apostle John writes the following words in the New Testament book of Revelation. “And I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life….And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:12, 15) Jesus, himself described this as “…that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:42) The reality of eternal punishment for non-believers is taught at length by Jesus and the language of scripture leads one to believe that Hell is even more ghastly, more frightening, than anything our minds can completely fathom!

Eighteenth century pastor and author, Jonathan Edwards, is probably most well-known for his sermon entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” In that sermon Edwards describes eternal punishment in a way that was shocking then and is still shocking today. He writes, “[I]magine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven…or [in] a great furnace where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, as full within and without as a bright coal of fire, all the while full of quick sense (i.e. your senses very awakened to everything, you’re experiencing); what horror you would feel at the entrance of such a furnace! And how long would that quarter hour seem to you!...And how much greater would be the effect, if you knew you must endure it for a whole year, and how vastly greater still if you knew you must endure it for a thousand years! O then, how would your heart sink, if you thought—if you knew—that you must bear it forever and ever!...That after millions of ages, your torment would be no nearer to an end, than ever it was; and that you never, never [would] be delivered! But your torment in Hell will be immeasurably greater than this illustration represents.”

The biblical teaching on Hell is truly frightening! This is one reason why it’s so necessary in our day to reawaken the church and the world to the reality of Hell taught so clearly in the Bible. We need to be awakened from our lethargy, complacency and busyness. Sadly, even many who sit regularly in the pews of Christian churches need to hear this truth as well. Jesus taught that, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21) Jesus was not teaching salvation by works, but rather he was teaching that those who are truly Christians show that they love Jesus by seeking to be obedient to the truths of scripture. In fact it was Jesus who said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

The sermon from Jonathan Edwards that I quoted above was preached on July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut, as Edwards sought to awaken people in his own day to their spiritual lethargy and complacency. Toward the end of the sermon Edwards said these sobering words: “There is reason to think, that there are many in this congregation now hearing this discourse, that will actually be the subjects of this very misery for all eternity….It may be that they are now at ease, and hear all these things without much disturbance, and are now flattering themselves that they are not the [ones], promising themselves that they shall escape.” This is still true today. If you haven’t given your life to Jesus Christ, don’t wait. He has promised that he will not turn away any who come to him (John 6:37).

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.