

The Gospel Message

The bible describes God and heaven as holy – “holy” just means “perfect”.

Now it's really important to understand that God can't let anything imperfect into heaven, otherwise it just wouldn't be heaven.

The bible also says that all of us have a body and a soul. At death our body is either buried or cremated, but our soul, which is the real you, lives on forever – either in heaven or hell; so unfortunately we've got a bit of a problem because the bible says that if we've broken just one of God's laws eg: if we've lied once, or cheated once, hated once – just once, like we all have – let's be honest, then our soul becomes imperfect and we cannot enter heaven.

Do you know anyone who has never broken any of God's laws? The answer is obviously 'no'! So here's our problem – all people have broken God's laws, therefore all people have got imperfect souls. So if at death your soul could either go to heaven or hell, but to get to heaven you must have a perfect record – and none of us have one – then sadly all of us must be headed to hell.

Now that might seem harsh and you might ask the question “how could a loving God create a place like hell, let alone send someone”.

So let's look at it this way.

- think of someone you love very much
- now imagine that this person is brutally murdered
- the Police catch the murderer, and the murderer pleads guilty in court, but to your horror, the Judge says “this is a really bad thing you've done, but because I'm a loving Judge, I'm just going to let you off”

You'd be very angry wouldn't you? Why? Because you know when someone has broken the law they must be punished, otherwise there's no justice.

So you see, here it's not a '*love*' issue, it's a '*justice*' issue.

Let's consider three questions to help us understand why there's got to be a place called hell.

1. Have you ever told a lie in your life?

Well the answer is surely 'yes' – even if only a 'so-called white lie'.

If you've lied once, then you're guilty of being a liar.

2. Have you ever taken anything that's not yours eg: have you ever gone to work late, or left early and got paid for it? Have you ever used the boss's telephone or photocopier without asking permission, or knowingly taken an office pencil home – this is stealing of course.

Most people have taken something that's not theirs, which makes them guilty of being a thief.

Now do you think God is going to let a bunch of thieving liars like us into heaven? Not likely, because if he did, he'd be the same as the unjust Judge who failed to punish the murder of the one you loved – we can't have it both ways.

But many people say 'now wait a minute – I'm a good person and there's a big difference between lying, stealing and murder'. 'I've never murdered anyone'. But what's interesting is the way Jesus redefined murder –he said that "if you hated a person in your heart, you've murdered them in your heart".

and

3. Have you ever hated anyone? The truth is most people have had anger or hatred towards someone in their hearts, which in God's eyes makes us guilty of murder.

So you see this is the bad news, for the sake of justice there has to be a place called hell.

There is good news and this is where Jesus Christ comes in.

The most significant thing that distinguishes Jesus from everyone else is that he is perfect. Unlike us, he's not broken any of God's laws so he has a perfect record, a perfect soul.

Picture the scene before Jesus came to earth over 2000 years ago. Jesus looked forward in time and saw you here today – he turned to God the Father and asked "Father I love the people in the world and I don't want them to go to hell for breaking your laws – is there a way for them to be forgiven"?

God the Father looked at his Son and said "Jesus, there is only one way – go to earth and become a human being but live a perfect life, then die a cruel death on a cross to take the punishment of the people in the world who justly deserve it for breaking my law. When you do this I can make it possible for them to be forgiven the day they ask you to exchange their imperfect record for your perfect record".

Jesus willingly agreed and over 2000 years ago he came to lay down his life for us to pay the price for all of God's laws that we've broken and there is no greater love than when someone lays down their life for another.

But there is still something that we must do to be forgiven – there are three major events in everybody's life; there's birth and death – ultimately we have no control over these, but the third major event is the day when we ask Jesus to forgive us, when we ask Jesus for his perfect record.

Now there are some popular misconceptions about this, but in the bible God's gift of forgiveness is clear; we're not forgiven by being Christened, or baptised, or confirmed. Not even by praying occasionally, or going to church, or by believing in God, or by trying to be good. These are all good things but none of them give us forgiveness.

Jesus said that there are two things that we must do to be forgiven.

First, we must be willing to turn away from anything we know is wrong in our life and say sorry to Jesus.

Notice the word "willing".

There may be some things in your life that you feel powerless to give up in your own strength like addictions, or habits, or other complicated things – well that's OK because God will help us – as long as we're willing and want to turn away from those things.

The second thing we must do is to surrender to Jesus. Now surrender means this – if God made you and the entire universe that surrounds you, don't you think he deserves to be the central person in your life. Surrendering to Jesus is when we acknowledge him as our Saviour and humble our lives to Him in service.

When you were born it's like God opened a book about your life.

Now bear in mind that God sees everything that you do – He knows every attitude, every thought, every motive and every reaction.

Every time we break just one of God's laws it's written down in that book.

You can imagine that by the end of our lives there's a whole library written against us, but when you turn and surrender to Jesus, something incredible happens. It's like Jesus takes your book and stands at the top of a cliff and tears out all the pages, the whole record of the things that you've done wrong and He throws them into the deepest sea. He promises to never remember those things again.

Jesus then takes a copy of His perfect record, which you've asked Him to give you, and he places it inside the cover of your book with your name on the spine.

That book is then stored like a precious library book in heaven. The miracle is that your book is not touched again between the point in which you asked Jesus to forgive you and death. Even in that time you may make mistakes and break God's laws again.

Becoming a Christian doesn't instantly make you perfect, nor does it mean that you can say a quick prayer and return to your old ways.

Remember God forgave you forever when you asked for Jesus' perfect record. All He asks is that you surrender everything to Him and let Him daily refine you for your wrong doing.

When you die you will go before God on Judgement Day and God will command His angels to get your book.

He'll look inside that book and say "this person was perfect". You'll probably say to Him "no I wasn't, I broke your laws – don't I justly deserve to go to hell?"

Jesus will say to you "for the sake of justice, you do deserve to go to hell, you did break my laws and some many times, but you my beautiful child have my perfect record which I gave you when you turned and surrendered to me on earth and I forgave you – WELCOME TO HEAVEN".

That is why Jesus is so amazing.

He made it possible for everyone in the world regardless of what mistakes we've made to be forgiven and one day to enter heaven.

But say you never turned and surrendered – think about what would happen when you die. You'll go before God at Judgement and God will say to you

"I'm sorry I can't let you into heaven – I have to send you to hell. You never asked me to forgive you. I loved you so much that I tried six ways to get through to you:

1. I died on the cross to take your punishment
2. Someone explained to you in a simple way that you could be given
3. There were churches throughout the world – some were good and some I was ashamed of – you could have found a good one
4. I gave you a conscience so you could tell right from wrong
5. I created a world around you that was so awesome, how could you not wonder about me, and
6. Finally, I rose from the dead to prove that I was God and that everything that I say was true but you still did nothing

I'm sorry I can't let you into heaven – I have to send you to hell".

So how about you, if you die tonight – where will you go?

Remember to get to heaven you need a perfect record which you can never have unless you ask Jesus to give you His. To receive this free gift you only have to do two things:

1. Be willing to turn away from the wrong way, and
2. Surrender to Jesus.

Unless you do these two things it's impossible to be forgiven and it's impossible to get into heaven which is so sad – because this is the very reason Jesus died for you.