

## Git 'Er Done

Mark 9:38-50

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 27, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

We must deal with the world the way that it is and not the way that we wish it would be. Therefore we must deal with the issue of hell. Just like cancer pretending that hell does not exist does not mean that it does not exist. It does exist and if we waste time pretending that it does not exist we will not be prepared to avoid it when our judgment comes.

Why do we pretend that hell does not exist? Oh, it is part of our confession of faith. If you ask any one of us whether or not hell exists, those of us who know our confession of faith will say yes. However actions speak louder than words. If we believed that hell existed we would be much more concerned about our personal sins. We would be much more concerned about the sins of other members of our congregation. We would be much more concerned about the faith of our neighbors and family. Our lack of concern both personally and as a congregation betrays the fact that we really don't believe in hell. Whenever someone dies we act as if they made it into heaven with Christ regardless of their standing with Christ when they died. We never think that anyone could possibly go to hell. And whenever anyone raises the issue of hell in regards to someone's death, we shake a self righteous finger at them and tell them, "It's not ours to judge." We use that statement to pretend like everything is ok. We use that statement to pretend like hell does not exist.

I think that the reason that we don't believe in hell anymore is because the majority of Americans don't believe in hell and we are going along with the crowd. Most human beings have a crowd mentality. We tend to go along with the crowd in their beliefs and actions. We feel safer doing things together with others. I think that we are hoping to tell God on the Day of Judgment, "Well everyone else was doing it!" since most Americans don't believe in hell even ones who call themselves Christians we don't believe in hell either. Some of them even offer a theological rationale for why they believe that hell does not exist. They say that a truly loving and benevolent God would not create a hell. They seem to believe that God goes along with the American Constitution forbidding cruel and unusual punishment.

The problem with not believing in hell is that such a belief does not take into account God's justice or His holiness.

Here is what I mean.

We never know the full extent of the harm that our sins cause others. If I murder someone, because I am not dead, I do not realize the full extent of the harm that I have done to the person I have murdered. I do not know the full extent of the harm that I have done to that person's family. I see things only from my own perspective.

If I commit adultery I never know the full extent of the harm that I have done to my spouse and my family. Even if they are unaware of my adultery it harms them in ways that they cannot perceive. At seminary a professor gave me a process to take couples through after one of them has committed adultery in order for the couple to reconcile. One of the steps involves the innocent party telling the adulterer the full extent of the hurt. The innocent party must explain to the adulterer the full extent of the pain and suffering he has caused otherwise the adulterer can only confess his adultery and not all of the other sins of betrayal etc. that he committed when he committed adultery. The innocent party has to tell him, otherwise he will never know. We do not know the full extent of the harm that our sins bring upon others.

We do not know the full extent of the harm that we bring to another person's reputation when we lie about them or when we reveal to people something unsavory about them, something that was not well known before. And we can never return their reputation back to its original state. Even if we admit to them what we said and try to make corrections we will never undo all of the damage to their reputation that we have done. It is just like a murder. I cannot put a person's life back the way it was after I have murdered them. I cannot raise the dead.

I do not know the full extent of the harm that I commit when I steal. I do not know what inconvenience I bring about as a result of my theft. I do not see the danger that I put people in when I steal from them. What if they needed what I stole in order to preserve their lives? Even if I pay them back or repay them they have lost the use of what I stole while it was in my possession.

Since I do not know the full harm of my sins because I cannot see the pain of another, I cannot see fully what I deserve in order to pay for those sins. This is to say nothing of the trillions of sins that I commit all of the time without being aware of them.

In addition to not knowing how much my sins affect and harm other people and therefore being unaware of what I deserve because of my sins there is also the holiness of God. My sins violate the holiness of God.

The holiness of God is what God is in Himself. In other words we know things, but God is all knowing. We have some power, but God is all powerful. We love others, but God is completely loving, etc. God has the same characteristics that we have only with Him those characteristics are perfect. Holiness is something that only God has. We are not holy unless God makes us holy.

Sinful human beings are unable to exist in the presence of the holy God. If a sinner stands in the bare presence of the holy God, the holiness of God will strike the sinner dead. The holiness of God will damn him to hell. One of the features of hell is God forsakenness. The bare presence of God is never revealed there. Therefore when a sinner stands in the bare presence of God the presence of God pushes him to the place where God is not and that is hell. It is simply the way things are. It is because God is holy.

We cannot comprehend just how holy God is. We have not seen His bare presence. Since we cannot comprehend God's holiness we do not understand the violation of God that our sins bring to His holiness. We therefore cannot understand why God would condemn us to hell, but He will when we violate His holiness with our sins. That is just the way that holiness is.

Therefore when God does condemn people to hell it is in order to pay them back for every last bit of the harm that they have caused others. When God does condemn people to hell it is exactly what we deserve for violating His holiness.

If you do not believe in hell then either your God is not holy or your God is not just. And if your God is not holy and your God is not just, then you do not have much of a God.

Anyone can go to hell, even any of us. And it is permanent.

Our Lord warns us that in hell the worm does not die. When our Lord talks about the worm He is talking about the decay of those things that are dead. Hell is a perpetual death except that it is a death that you experience. Most of us assume that after a person is dead their experience of pain has ended. They sure do give no indication of any more pain. Hell then is the experience of the process of dying, but it never ends. Think of the pain and suffering that some of your loved ones have endured while they were dying. Hell is that condition never ending. The worm does not die.

Our Lord warns us that the fire is not quenched. The typical images that we associate with hell have to do with fire. It is an eternal burning. In another place our Lord calls it the eternal fire. It is the

condition of your body dying and it is the condition of eternal burning. It is a burning without end or relief. It is permanent. There is no way to escape it once you are there. There is no way to alleviate it. You cannot ask anyone for help. You cannot ask father Abraham for help. The rich man in our Lord's parable was in hell and he asked Abraham for help and Abraham could not help him. You therefore cannot ask other people for help when you are in hell. There is no one to help. So do not assume that you go to hell with your friends. I think that some people know that they are going to hell, but they assume that their friends are going to hell also and that there will be a big party in hell and that it won't be as bad as our Lord has said it would be or at the very least if they are suffering in hell at least their friends will be there to alleviate their suffering. But you have no friends in hell. The selfish and self centered go to hell and they will have no time for you.

God will not answer you in hell. God will not answer your prayers in hell. It is too late to repent of anything in hell. There is no mercy or grace in hell. There is only justice in hell and a relentless dealing out to you everything that you deserve. And if you think that you have been a decent person and that hell will not be so bad because you do not deserve to have too much punishment dealt out to you, the rich man in our Lord's parable thought the same thing and he wound up in eternal misery. Thinking that you are not so bad is a guaranteed ticket into hell, because when you think that you are not so bad you are dealing with things the way that you wish that they would be and not the way that they really are.

So now we get down to our Lord's exhortation: It would be better for one who causes one of these little ones to sin if a large millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the depths of the sea.

In other words if you lead a small child into sin, you deserve hell and because you deserve hell, it would be better for you to have a millstone hung around your neck and have you plunged into the sea than it would be to go to hell.

Our Lord demonstrates that He is talking about hell in His next admonitions: if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than it is to have two hands and be cast into hell. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life lame, than it is to have two feet and to be cast into the fires of hell. If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life one eyed, than it is to have two eyes and to be cast into hell.

How many of you have heard sermons on this passage and the preacher told you that Jesus was overstating the case in order to make a point? How many of you have asked a pastor, "Pastor, does Jesus really expect us to cut off our hands and feet and gouge out our eyes?" and had the pastor answer you, "No, Jesus does not expect you to cut off your hands and feet or gouge out your eyes. He is overstating the case to make a point." And how many of you have listened to such sermons and such answers and taken comfort in them and kept your hands, your feet, your eyes, and your sins? We preachers even give a fancy name to what Jesus is doing in this passage. We call it hyperbole which simply means that Jesus is overstating the case to make a point.

And I agree! I agree that our Lord is using hyperbole. I agree that He is overstating the case in order to make a point. The problem is that what He says is true! The troubling thing about our Lord's exhortation regarding cutting off our hands and feet and gouging out our eyes, is that the statements are all true. It is better to enter life maimed than have two hands and be cast into hell. It is better to enter life lame, than have two feet and be cast into hell. It is better to have one eye and enter into life than to have two eyes and be cast into hell. Hell is permanent.

And do not misunderstand your Lord. He knows the dead will rise and those who enter into life will have two hands and two feet and two eyes. But think of it! If you had an alternative between entering life lame or having two feet going to hell, which would you choose? If you had a choice between entering life maimed or having two hands and going to hell, which would you choose? Is it better to have two eyes and be cast into hell or have two eyes and enter into life?

Our Lord's statements are true! Hell exists. It is the frightful necessity of having a holy and just God. It is the frightful prospect of our sinful lives that we might actually in fact go to hell. What do we do? Do whatever it takes. No matter what it takes, do whatever it takes. If it means selling all you have and giving it to the poor, then it is better to enter life impoverished than it is to have great wealth and be cast into hell. If it means selling all you have, get it done now. You do not have time to waste. If it means cutting off a hand or a foot, then cut them off. If it means gouging out an eye, then gouge it out. You don't want to go to hell do you?

Since our Lord is talking about those things which cause us to sin, let us lay the hyperbole aside and talk frankly, shall we? Since sin is what damns, then lay aside your sins. Remove from your life whatever it is that causes you to sin. If your home causes you to sin, sell it and get rid of it. If your computer causes you to sin, get rid of it. If your television causes you to sin, get rid of it. If your sin of a special variety find an accountability party and have your computer report to him your whereabouts online. Have your spouse turn on the parental controls on the television or computer or mobile device. Get an accountability person who has your permission to check up on you from time to time without prior notification. If your possessions cause you to sin, get rid of them. If your cars cause you to sin, get rid of them. If your clothing causes you to sin, get rid of it. If your friends cause you to sin, get new friends. Hell is at stake. Hell is permanent. There is no price on this earth too high to pay in order to get rid of those things which cause you to sin, that cause you to go astray from your Lord.

Git'er done!

Git'er done even when it is something simple like giving a cup of water to someone because they are a disciple of Jesus.

Do you remember Naaman the Syrian from your Sunday School days? Naaman, the Syrian, was the commander of the Syrian army in the days of Elisha the prophet. Naaman was a valiant warrior and had won many battles on behalf of the king of Syria. Naaman had a problem. He had leprosy. Naaman's wife owned a slave girl from Israel who knew about Elisha the prophet. She recommended that Naaman go to Israel, visit Elisha the prophet, and be healed of his leprosy. Naaman took her advice and went through some political rigmarole which I will not get into and finally wound up in front of the home of Elisha, the prophet.

Elisha knew that Naaman had come to his house, but Elisha did not bother to go to see him. Rather Elisha sent one of his servants to tell Naaman, "Go, wash seven times in the Jordan River and you will be cleansed." That was it. It was just that simple. Just do that and you will be cleansed. You would think that Naaman would be glad it was that simple. Instead Naaman gets angry. He says that the waters of Syria are better rivers than the Jordan. He wanted to know what made the Jordan so great that he could not go home and wash in the waters of Syria and be cleansed. Naaman was also put out by the fact that Elisha did not bother to come and see him personally and wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of his God in dramatic fashion. He expected something great and wonderful. Instead he got something humble and simple.

Fortunately for Naaman, he came equipped with a supply of wise servants. His slaves came to him and said, "If the prophet had asked you to do some great thing in order to be cleansed, wouldn't you

have done it? How much more when he simply tells you to wash and be cleansed?" Naaman shows his wisdom when he listens to his slaves, goes down to the Jordan, washes seven times, and is cleansed of his leprosy.

What God is doing for Naaman is he is giving him something simple to do in order for Naaman to understand that he is not earning his purification from the Lord. If Naaman were earning, his purification from the Lord, the Lord would have asked him to do some great thing in exchange for his purification. Since Naaman is a sinner the Lord knows that there is nothing that Naaman can do to purify himself of his leprosy. He deserves far worse than his leprosy and so the Lord lets him suffer with it. The Lord commands Naaman to wash in the Jordan so that Naaman understands that his purification was not an accident or happenstance, but rather that the God of Elisha had purified him just as He promised He would.

Naaman got 'er done and was purified of his leprosy.

And what about you, you people who want to avoid hell? Do what it takes to avoid hell. Do whatever it takes to avoid hell. Do what it takes even when it is humble, menial, and simple. Do what it takes even if it is giving a cup of water to someone because that someone is a disciple of Jesus. Giving the cup of water is something anyone can do. You are therefore not earning your way out of hell and into life by giving the cup of water. The fact that you are giving the cup of water to a disciple means that you believe the message that that disciples of Jesus bears, which means that when you enter into life and avoid being cast into hell because you gave the cup of water to someone who was a disciple of Jesus, everyone will know including yourself that it was Jesus that saved you. After all, you did not give the cup of water to just anyone. You gave it to a disciple of Jesus. And you did not give it on accident. You gave it on purpose because he or she is a disciple of Jesus. When you do that, you shall certainly not lose your reward.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.