

RAZING HELL!

Many years ago in eastern Tennessee the story went around about a mountaineer's contact with some tourists who had camped in the hills around his area. Because the mountain folk didn't see many tourists in those days, when the tourists left, this particular mountaineer went to look around the area where they had camped. He found several things they had left behind, including a mirror. He had never seen a mirror before. He looked into it longingly and said, "I never knew my pappy had his picture took!" He was very sentimental about it, of course, and took it home. He slipped into the house, climbed up into the loft and hid the mirror. His wife saw him do that but didn't say anything. After he went out of the house, she went up to see what he had hidden. She found the mirror, and when she looked into it, she said, "So that's the old hag he's been running around with!" 1

The mirror confronted the old timers with a new view of reality, and they had trouble transitioning! Their paradigm was shattered!

We have trouble with new paradigms, too, don't we? A paradigm is a conceptual worldview, a way of looking at something, an interpretive grid. It is always somewhat traumatic when we go through a paradigm shift.

Our perspective, our paradigm on our lives and on the church will inevitably impact our priorities and our ministry. How we view the church will impact how we view ourselves and how we lead and serve as the church!

Think with me about some possible paradigms of the Church:

1. Entertainment Center: The Pastor is the Master of Ceremonies
Big question: How can we be more entertaining?
2. Self-Help Clinic: Pastor is a guru (Dr. Phil)
Big Question: How can we fix life?
3. Country Club: The Pastor is the Activities Director
Big question: What do people want?

1J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1981 by J. Vernon McGee.

4. Hospice Organization: Pastor is a Chaplain
Big Question: How can we handle the pain?
5. Museum: Pastor is a Curator.
Big Question: How can we preserve the past?
6. Business: Pastor is a CEO.
Big Question: How can we increase market share?
7. Bible College: Pastor is a Professor
Big Question: How can we get more information?
(Feed me, Seymour!)
Dave Browning, in his book *Deliberate Simplicity*, says: “Many Christians are trafficking in unlived truth.”

Today, I would like to offer a different paradigm for the Church, and ask you to see how this paradigm might cause a reimagining of our role as followers of Christ. This message is titled *Razing Hell*. I am aware that the language is bold. I know some of you parents will have conversations with your children about the meaning of these words. Just to be sure you understand what I am saying, let me give you the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary definition of the word *raze*: to destroy to the ground : **DEMOLISH** (*raze* an old building). “Raze” means to completely destroy!

What if a primary purpose of the Church on earth is to raze hell? What if pastors, leaders, and members are to be hell-razers? Would that require a change in our leadership and in our lives? It is my contention that Christians in America have become increasingly passive at the very time our enemy is becoming more active. We have retreated to our safe sanctuaries, and are not engaged in the battle.

Steve Brown recently observed, "Church becomes the place where a nice, pleasant, bland person stands in front of other nice, pleasant, bland people urging them to be nicer, more pleasant and more bland. Jesus didn't die to create nice, pleasant, bland people. He died so that sinners would find grace and forgiveness, and, in the joy and exuberance of their discovery, would find it impossible to keep quiet about it." (From Crosswalk.com.)

Leonard Sweet, in his forward to Eddie Hammitt's book, *Spiritual Leadership*, describes much of what happens in our churches with these

words: *tameness and sameness*. Ouch! Does that describe your Christian life?

Think about the Bible I hold in my hand, the textbook for all my preaching and all our teaching. Is it not, in large part, the story of men and women who razed hell in their generation?

Didn't Noah raze a little hell when he built the ark?

Didn't Moses raze a little hell when he faced down Pharaoh?

Didn't Joshua raze a little hell at Jericho?

Didn't a harlot named Rahab raze a little hell by hiding the Israelite spies?

Didn't Deborah raze a little hell against the Canaanites?

Didn't David raze a little hell when he rocked the God-dishonoring Goliath?

Didn't Elijah raze a little hell when he bested the 450 prophets of Baal?

Didn't Daniel raze a little hell when he persisted in prayer?

Didn't the three Hebrew children raze a little hell when they refused to bow down to the King?

Didn't John the Baptist raze a little hell when he condemned Herod for marrying his brother's wife?

Now I need to quote the writer of Hebrews (Heb 11:32-38):

32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. NKJV

Who were those guys and gals? Hell-razers, I tell you! This book is full of them!

“But what about the New Testament? What about Jesus? Wasn’t He meek and mild?”

Listen to the Word:

Matt 12:22-30

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. 23 And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" 24 Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." 25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. NKJV

Matt 4:10-11

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" 11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Remember how Jesus cleared out the temple (Matthew 21)? He was razing hell!

John 10:10

10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Jesus was a hell-razer! When He cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, cleansed the temple, forgave the prostitutes, fed the hungry, defended the defenseless, died on the cross and rose from the dead – He was razing hell! Paul affirms this in Colossians 2:15, speaking of the work of Christ on the cross: *Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*

Listen to the first prophecy of the Messiah, recorded in Genesis 3:15, as God places a curse on the serpent who deceived Adam and Eve:

*15 And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel."*

Listen to the writer of Hebrews again (Hebrews 2:14-15):

14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

That brings us to our text in John's letter (1 John 3:8):

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

"Pastor, that was Jesus. What about the church? What about us?"

Listen to this from the lips of our Lord:

Matt 16:17-19

17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Luke 9:1-2

Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. 2 He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 10:17-20

Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

18 And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Matt 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Let's be absolutely clear: When we make disciples, true disciples who are obeying their Lord's commands, we are razing hell!

Listen to James:

James 4:7

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Here is Peter's word:

1 Peter 5:8-9

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. Jesse Duplantis has said that many of us are not resisting the devil, we are assisting him!

And let's not overlook Ephesians 6:10-13:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The church should be hell's greatest nightmare! Instead, we are often not even on hell's radar! I would suggest that much of the church's activity today is absolutely fine with Satan! It poses no threat to his kingdom!

My burden today is that we become aggressive in the face of a deadly foe!

We should be razing hell with the word of God (*It is written*).

We should be razing hell in prayer (*Thy Kingdom come*).

We should be razing hell with our outreach to our world (*Make disciples*).

We should be razing hell together (Lev 26:8 *Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight.*)

Authentic community makes us five times more effective!

I spoke recently with a friend I had not seen in some time. We spoke about Ridgecrest's ministry through our Remington's facility, which was at one time Missouri's largest nightclub. My friend referred to it this way: "Oh, that's the bar that got saved!" Hallelujah! We have been razing a little hell at Remington's!

George McCloud issued this summons to Christians:

I simply argue that the cross be raised again, at the center of the market place, as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves, on a town garbage heap; at a cross-road of politics so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek; and at the kind of place where cynics talk smut and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died, that is where Christ's men ought to be and what church people ought to be about.

Neil Cole, in his book *Search and Rescue*, reminds us of what we already know: "Hell is already consuming lives all around us!" It is time for the church to wake up, to answer the bugle call to battle! Read today's newspaper; listen to any newscast; look at any community. You will see HELL in our midst! Satan is alive and he is robbing, he is killing, he is destroying lives, families, even churches! I am saying it is time for us to rise up and raze hell!

I am advocating that we examine everything we are doing, personally and corporately, to see if it has the potential of razing hell! I am suggesting that we reimagine ourselves as hell-razers, willing to charge hell under the banner of the cross! It is time to write a new story for your life, an amazing

adventure that is cosmic and eternal in its significance! I was born in 1948, but I am not to old to raze hell!

C.T. Studd (1860-1931) was an English missionary who faithfully served His Savior in China, India, and Africa. His motto was: "If Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."

Expressing the aggressive leadership that was his in spiritual endeavors, C.T. Studd wrote:

"Nail the colors to the mast! [Do you understand that language?] That is the right thing to do, and, therefore, that is what we must do, and do it now. What colors? The colors of Christ, the work He has given us to do — the evangelization of all the unevangelized. Christ wants not nibblers of the possible, but grabbers of the impossible, by faith in the omnipotence, fidelity, and wisdom of the Almighty Savior who gave the command. Is there a wall in our path? By our God we will leap over it! Are there lions and scorpions in our way? We will trample them under our feet! Does a mountain bar our progress? Saying, 'Be thou cast into the sea,' we will march on. Soldiers of Jesus! Never surrender! Nail the colors to the mast!" C. T. Studd wrote this poem also:

FORWARD, EVER; BACKWARD, NEVER!

"Some wish to live within the sound
of Church or Chapel bell;
I want to run a Rescue Shop
within a yard of hell."

Over the next weeks and months, I will be seeking to equip every follower of Christ to effectively raze hell. My teaching will aim for transformation, not simply information. I will take the time to go beyond encouraging and challenging by seeking to give very practical tools and training. I believe God is going to change our lives and change His church in the coming days. I issue this warning: This is war! A peacetime mentality will not suffice! If we take seriously this call from God, we will invite attack from our adversary. Be ready! Next week we will look at Revelation 12:11 and answer this question: How can I be an overcomer when it comes to Satan?

Let me close with these words from a song I have sung for years:

I've Already Won the War

Verse 1

This old world's a battlefield, where we must fight each day
To overcome the evil one and send him on his way
My Commander is Almighty God, and there's no greater near or far
I may lose a battle now and then, but I've already won the war.

Verse 2

When you're afraid and all alone, and it seems that no one cares
When the daily task of getting by, has caused you to despair
Just take God's word into your heart, and on His promise stand
You may lose a battle now and then, but the victory's in God's hand.

Chorus

You can have this confidence, that'll help to see you through
If you'll just give Him residence, and let Him live inside of you
He didn't say that it's easy, but salvation's worth the scars
You may lose a battle now and then, but you've already won the war.

I may lose a battle now and then, but I've already won, the victory's mine
I've already won the war.