

Standing in Line for Hell

By
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“The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17).

[Editor’s note: This sermon was preached just after the close of World War II.]

In recent years it has become a common thing to stand in line. With the ever increasing complexity of industrial and economic life, the necessity for routine and repetition becomes more acute. In the days of the Great Depression, the bread line and the soup line were well known terms. And with the coming of the war and rationing, standing in line became the monotonous pastime of millions of people. Uncounted thousands of working hours were lost by the American people by standing in line. And more than all the others did the soldiers, sailors, and marines have to endure endless hours of waiting in line. They had to stand in line for everything – for their food, their orders, their appeals, their clothes, their passes. Their lives seemed at times to be built around that dull, endless, monotonous routine.

I’m not talking to you today about a soup line, chow line or registration line. I’m talking to you about the oldest line, the longest line, the most crowded line that was ever stretched out across this old world. This multitude is standing in line for Hell. It is indeed a long line. As I look down into the dim, distant past, I can recognize the features of the man who heads that line. He has a fallen countenance. It is none other than wicked, murderous Cain. With a scowl on his face and blood on his hands, he plunges into Hell with his ungodly offspring following hard on his heels. Every generation since then has produced its Cains, its Baalams, its Judases, enough to crowd this line until they stumble one upon another in their frenzied rush to hell.

Some join this line for one thing and some for another. Some fall in because they think it is the road to pleasure; others think it is the road to wealth. Some think it is the way to social prestige and popularity; others think it is simply the thing to do because the crowds are going that way. But I tell, when you reach the end of the line and run the gauntlet as far as you can go, you too will find, as poor, wretched, fugitive Cain found, that the line leads to Hell. And you, too, will be crying with him at the close of the day, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.”

A few years ago when the recent war was at its worst, I chanced to be passing through Birmingham, Alabama on my way back from the West. As I passed down a certain street, I saw a long line of people, possibly a hundred or more, taking their turns at the door of a store. My curiosity was aroused and I stopped to investigate. To my surprise I discovered that they were standing in line at a liquor store. As I beheld that shameful scene, I knew that it was a typical illustration of the millions of people who are today standing in line for Hell.

I am reminded of that old story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. There was a little village that was afflicted with rats so much so that its inhabitants despaired of life. But one day a stranger stood in the street and offered to rid them of the rats for a price. The town fathers agreed. From beneath his coat the stranger pulled a peculiar-looking flute and began to play a fascinating tune. As he played, he turned and walked down the street with all the rats of Hamlin as his heels. The town rejoiced until the stranger returned and asked for his pay. When the city fathers refused to keep their part of the agreement, without a word this strange man pulled out his flute and began to play again. This time it was another, more intriguing tune. Suddenly, the children of Hamlin left their toys and

their games and followed the man down the street. The people of Hamlin called to their children, but the strange power of the flute wooed the children away and paralyzed the parents in their tracks.

In this fables there is a kernel of truth. The Pied Piper of Hell has passed through our country playing a song of enchantment. Men, women, boys, and girls have heard its bewitching strains and are milling about like dumb cattle before they enter the slaughterhouse. The devil is offering men something more exciting than they can find at church, more bewitching than they find at home, more glamorous than they can find in the Christian way of life. He has muddled their brains with pleasure and blinded their eyes to the real consequence that awaits them at the end of the line. He has men believing that they are marching to some kind of Utopia, but all the time they are just marching down the line to Hell. We have heard of the death march of Bataan during the war, of Napoleon's great tragic retreat across Russia, of the march of the Crusades across Europe and Asia. But the greatest march involving the greatest loss writing the blackest chapter and coming to the most hopeless end is the awful march of the multiplied millions who are today standing in line for Hell.

The way some preachers have preached about Hell, one might get the idea that it is not such a bad place after all. Others have spread the idea that joining the church or living a good life is all that is needed to avoid Hell. That's the tune of the Pied Piper of Hell playing the song that tickles the fancy of men everywhere. The devil would just as soon have a man from the "amen corner" as he would from the beer joint. And I want you to know that the Hell the Bible tells us about is no summer resort. It is an everlasting

burning, a place of fire and brimstone, a mad house of the wicked, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, a lake of fire, a bottomless pit.

I would to God that we had another Jonathan Edwards who would preach again to us the terror of sinners in the hands of an angry God. Ministers today spend their time philosophizing and theorizing and generalizing while their people are standing in line for Hell. We must not soft peddle the sin question. There is only one answer: the blood of Jesus. There is one required step: repent of your sins and confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior. I thank God that I can be rid of my sins. I left the crowded way. I got out of the line that leads to Hell. I am now on the straight and narrow road that leads to life eternal.

What about you? Will you join me in this march to Glory?