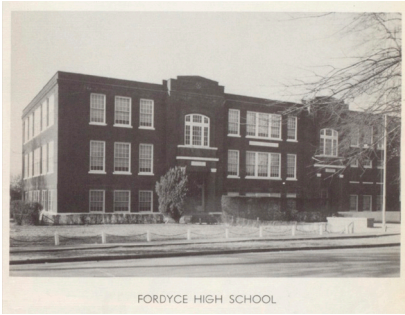


The Hole to Hell

By Jim Elliff



Some time between 1950 and 1952 I saw the hole to hell. I was three or four years of age. We were living in Fordyce, Arkansas where my father pastored the First Baptist Church.

The hole to hell could be seen on the main road leading through the residential area by the flag pole in front of the High

School. The hole was otherwise known as a concrete planter, or, as I could see years later, a concrete bench that I imagined was open in the middle. You could look down into that hole and see the flames of hell. Likely my older brother, Tom, assisted his preschool brother's imagination in order to understand that clearly. It is, in fact, one of only two or three images of this period remaining in my memory.

We came this way often, so I was attentive to that alarming object ride after ride. We moved from Fordyce to Kansas City when I was four. I'm not sure I had yet come to any other conclusion about the hole to hell than I just described when we left it behind us.

What was most amazing to see while gazing out of that 40s automobile was that the students were actually walking around "the hole" casually and even sitting on the edge of it, talking as if being that close to hell was nothing to worry about. Shouldn't they be much more careful? One slip and down they would go to burn in hell forever.

Some time later I learned that this object by the flagpole was not the hole to hell. I'm not sure exactly when. And later than that, I learned that one could drop into hell from any place. The whole world was the hole to hell. And

most of mankind is casually sitting, walking, and jumping around the lip of hell every moment of his or her life as if it makes no difference.

Despite my early misconceptions of hell, I do believe that it exists. I believe it because Jesus believed it and told us about it. In fact, Jesus said more about hell than anyone else in the Bible. This makes sense, since he holds the keys to death and Hades (Rev 1:18).

As I grew older, I was delivered from any justified fear of hell for my own future, through my faith relationship with Jesus. Now, I do not want anyone else to go there.

Like Jesus, we should tell others how to avoid the hell that Jesus said so much about. If we could see into hell through a hole someplace, perhaps our desires to do that would be greater.

The founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, said this:

Most Christians would like to send their recruits to Bible college for five years. I would like to send them to hell for five minutes. That would do more than anything else to prepare them for a lifetime of compassionate ministry.

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Matthew 10:28

This excerpt is taken from a book in the making by Jim Elliff, The Stories I Tell.

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