



Thru God's Eye: Life in the REAL World

Does Love Really Win? Heaven, Hell and the End of Life As We Know It

Crossroads, October 30, 2011 - Mark Bickel



TEACHING NOTES

Intro:

Worldview studies – Ultimate Things, God, Man, What Went Wrong, What is solution ... now Eternity

PRAY

Why Talk About Heaven and Hell? (<5 min.)

- **Not water-cooler conversation**
 - Most of you are not thinking about heaven and hell regularly, not a daily felt need
 - People not standing around talking about it ... actually **most don't like to talk about death, and certainly do not like to talk about hell**
 - Most people offended / put off by anyone who claims some people are going to hell – especially if you say they may be in that category ... others joke about it
 - **BUT we all face death, suddenly, at times unexpected** ... and when we do the question of what if anything comes after suddenly raises its head
 - Thus it is important to discuss these things:
 - We want to **be prepared ourselves for when the questions of eternity arise** around us
 - We want to be **ready to share the hope that is within us** and point them to the truth at when those unexpected opportune moments arise
 - Most importantly, **God says we will all die and then face the judgment ourselves**, so it is vital we understand and respond to the truths of heaven and hell very personally
- **The past two weeks ...**
 - Pastor Taylor conducted **4 funerals in 2 weeks** – some here close to those who died
 - Time for very personal reflection on what we believe about eternity and the afterlife
 - Even though we live in a culture that does not 'believe' in god, heaven, hell... **when faced with death there is still a natural reaction that wants their to be something beyond**, and that actually does want there to be some sort of justice beyond this life
 - 2 people died in the past 2 weeks that generated dozens, maybe hundreds of editorial cartoons around the world that I think do reflect our deep seated sense of eternity and right / wrong
 - **Steve Jobs** – even though I have heard be claimed to be Buddhist, which would not believe in afterlife, all the images I have seen are variations on one theme – Job's standing at the gates of heaven and peter standing there looking in the iPad book of life to welcome Steve
 - **Moammar Gadhafi** – Also a huge editorial cartoon topic, but all these pictured him burning in hell – even though many Americans do not believe in hell, and do not want to talk about hell, there is still something deep within that believes it would indeed be just for someone as evil as this to burn in hell
 - These illustrations show both our **concepts of heaven and hell** – physical places, one glowing with gold, filled with joy and home to God– the other a place of fire, filled with tortoure and horroe, home to the Devil himself ... **And who goes where** – good to heaven, bad to hell
 - But what does the Bible say ...

1) Reality of Heaven and Hell (10 min.)

- **Eternity:**

- **OT Concept** – from generation to generation, from age to age ... beyond our lifespan, dealing with all of history – since God created and controls all, he is before and after all and thus he is eternal
- **NT Concept** – Eon – the time to come – after the present time there will be another – it stretched on forever (so it is not so much a time after time, but an new era that will be everlasting)
- **NT Phrase** – The greek word for eternity shows up 70x in the NT – vast majority linked with the work life. A few others are coupled with words like fire, judgment. Thus making it clear there is some way that we, as humans, can partake in eternity ... and that there are multiple experiences of eternity available.
- **Culture Note** – this contrasts with cultural view of circular history that repeats self, with only hope to be to reach a state that escapes the endless reincarnation...

- **Eternal Life:**

- **Eternal Life in John** – ¼ of all references to eternal are in the book of John, some examples:

[Jn 3:16](#) “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have **eternal life**.”

[Jn 3:36](#) Whoever believes in the Son has **eternal life**; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

[Jn 5:24](#) Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has **eternal life**. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

[Jn 6:27](#) Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to **eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”

[Jn 6:40](#) For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have **eternal life**, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

[Jn 6:47](#) Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has **eternal life**.

[Jn 6:54](#) Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has **eternal life**, and I will raise him up on the last day.

[Jn 10:28](#) I give them **eternal life**, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

[Jn 17:3](#) And this is **eternal life**, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

- **Who Get's Eternal Life:** those who believe - but not any belief - believe in the only true God and Jesus Christ. Elsewhere in John Jesus says he is the one and only way to God ... so only those who believe in God, believe in Jesus, and come to God through Jesus Christ get this eternal life.

- **Heaven**

- **Word Heaven:** shows up close to 500x in the ESV
 - **OT** – Lord creates heaven, does things in the heavens ...
 - **Gospels** – Kingdom of Heaven, Father in heaven
 - **Epistles** – our citizenship, hope in heaven, Jesus will come from heaven
 - **Revelation** – Describes heaven, what it looks like, what is taking place there
- **Descriptions of Heaven:**
 - Jesus says he is preparing a place for us
 - Place where we live forever, in resurrected body, with saints from all time and nations
 - New heaven and New earth
 - Place of true rest
 - No tears, eternal joy
 - Wedding of lamb, feast
 - Home with God, Christ ...
 - City ... with gold, gems, great gates
 - No sun or temple needed – God is their light and temple

- **Hell**

- **Word Hell:** shows up close to 14x in the ESV
 - **OT Concept:** Sheol
 - **NT Word:** Virtually entirely in gospels, Jesus talking about Hell
 - **NT Concept:**
- **Descriptions of Hell:**
 - Fire
 - Darkness
 - Weeping, Wailing, Gnashing of Teeth
 - Separated from Heaven / God ... no way between the two
 - Satan thrown in abyss

- **Literal or Figurative**

- **Are the descriptions Literal or Figurative? Are the places literal or figurative?**
 - Some would argue many of these passages should be read figuratively, not literally
 - Not sure that is true of all of them, but certainly true of some ... that begs the question how to read a more figurative / metaphorical passage
 - Lets look at the passage most often used at funerals – **Psalm 23**
 - God in shepherd ... leads us beside still waters
 - Is God standing on the grass of heaven with shepherds crook? Does he lead me to literal stream for me to bow down and drink up the water? No
 - But what does this mean – there is a real God who is really concerned about me and my struggles, even when I am facing death itself – he is a God who really cares, comforts, protects ... and refreshes as a good cold drink on a hot day...

- **Same with heaven and hell passages**
 - They are an attempt to help us picture things beyond our understanding
 - Literal place called heaven and hell
 - Heaven will be greater than we can imagine, with riches and comfort beyond compare, as if at wedding feast, mansion of gold, etc
 - Hell will be place of great terror, like being burned alive, for all eternity
- So even if we grant at least some descriptions are metaphorical – they are still there for a purpose – to communicate about real places, true realities ...

- **Summary and Implications:**

- Bible contradicts life ends at death, reincarnation, and annihilation
- All will die and then face judgment
- Based on our belief in Christ people will go immediately to heaven or hell
 - We did not look at this, but I would also claim there is not evidence of purgatory or some other intermediate state where we work off sins or have second chance to repent
- Heaven and Hell are real places and they last for all of eternity, forever

Tough Questions

- These truths have led to a number of really tough questions for non-Christians and those in the church
- I want to discuss 3 of them that you will likely encounter
- {NOTE: for each question, start with story, then ask group to respond, then give Biblical Principles}

2) What About the Pygmies in Africa? or the Newborn Baby? {>5 min.}

- **Example: Questions at Drexel**
 - Night in dorm sophomore year – reading “Lord’s of the Earth”
 - 3 different people ask how loving God could send innocent Africans who never heard of Him to hell
- **No One is Innocent**
 - **Romans 3:23 and 6:23** say that all have sinned, all fall short of the glory of God
 - God just if he condemn 100% of all of us!
 - Also, sin is part of nature and true from birth
- **God is both Merciful and Just**
 - Just – can not / will not overlook sin – no one gets a free ride
 - Mercy – sent son to die for all who would believe, desires all men be saved
 - Two are not opposed, both always true of God
 - **Exodus 34:6-7** - The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”
- **Jesus is the Only Way to God**
 - Jesus is way, truth and life – no other way to God
 - No other name given under heaven where by you must be saved
 - **Acts 4:12** - And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
 - so just being sincere or religious, or even believing God not do it (even demons believe and shudder!)
- **Mysteries, Miracles, and Trust**
 - In the end the complete answer to how the mercy and justice of god meet in these situations is a mystery ... God has not given us all the answers!
 - But God can also work beyond our imagination to remain true to all the aspects of Himself ... example of stories of tribes deciding they want to know God and a missionary showing up at that very time – thus God honors sincerity and people who respond to what is seen in creation by sending someone to show them Jesus ... also stories of visions ...
 - Do these kind of questions shake my faith in God, or force me to trust Him in spite of my questions? ... Again, we are not left clueless or needing blind faith, but we are also not given all the answers we would like ... Do I believe God is God and do I fully trust him?

3) Is God a Torturer? {~5 min.}

- **Example: Love Wins by Rob Bell**
 - “God loves us. God offers us everlasting life by grace, freely, through no merit on our part. Unless you do not respond the right way. Then God will torture you forever. In Hell. Huh?”
- **Creating People for Destruction**
 - **Romans 9** – God has right to create some for destruction ... sounds cold, but I can not allow my prejudice to shape my interpretation ... God even reminds us here in particular that He is God, and thus there is a point where we can not question Him
 - Note: this is one passage There are many, exponentially more, on the love of God for man, and even the desire for all men to be saved ... so let’s not get hung up on some sadistic picture of God ... but this passage does exist, so we can not dismiss it either
- **Redemption of the Remnant**
 - Interestingly, one of the point Rob Bell makes strongly is that God is a God of redemption – judgment in Scripture is rarely final – meaning he redeems some out of Sodom and Gommorah, He tells Israel before defeating them and taking them captive that He will save a remnant and they will return
 - One application of this is that God always gives us a second chance, and that even after death he must give second chances
 - While I agree with the first part – God does often give us many opportunities to repent, he is not obligated to
 - And more importantly, I think the application that God’s judgments are never final misses the point of the redeemed remnant. While it is true God will eventually bring back His people to the promised land, those that continued to rebel and did not head God’s warning died or where taken captive when God destroyed Israel. For Israel as a whole there was a promised future, but for the individuals judgment had indeed come.
 - The point is two fold – no one escapes the judgment of God, and that in the ends God’s will and His kingdom will prevail.
 - Also, the overall picture of God will be one of great mercy and forgiveness ... but along the way some will reject that, and after warning them at some point God will call them to account
 - **II Cor 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
- **Broad and Narrow Paths**
 - As for how many will be saved versus lost – no exact numbers are given ... but Jesus’ description is
 - **Matthew 7:13-15** - ¹³“Enter by the narrow gate. **For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.** ¹⁴**For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.**

4) Do We Need to Apologize for Hell? (<5 min.)

- **Example: Emerging Church Comments**
 - Not necessarily deny hell, but say we should not talk about – negative, should not scare people ...
- **Avoiding the Topic of Hell**
 - Jesus not avoid this topic – state it clearly ... give strong warnings – just 2 examples:
 - **Matt. 5:29-30** - ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.
³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.
 - **Matt. 10:28** - ²⁸ 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.
 - Note: Jesus also talks of many other things, and through NT gospel shared many ways. So Hell is not the only message, not even primary (heaven discussed much more). BUT there are times and places to focus on Hell in our presentation of the gospel. And I certainly do not avoid or apologize
- **Avoiding the Reality of Hell**
 - What are you more concerned about – offending someone by mentioning Hell, or seeing someone loose their soul and go to hell because no one ever told them the truth about the danger they are in
 - We don't go around talking about setting people's homes on fire, but if someone's home was on fire we need to tell them – even if we have to wake them rudely in the middle of the night to get them out before being consumed.

4) Conclusion: The Offer of Heaven! (< 5 min.)

- We talked a lot in the second half about Hell, but as mentioned a few minutes ago, the NT authors actually talk much more about heaven!
- While it is true there will be some who choose the broad path, who will not repent, who will rebel against God til their death and will face eternal judgment ... The offer of God is salvation, and heaven
- **The constant message of the Bible is NOT you are doomed ... but rather YOU CAN BE SAVED!**
- The question is not what will happen to the pigmy in Africa or the newborn child who has not yet heard about Jesus ... **The question is what will YOU who now have heard do with him!**
- And the related question is **will you make yourself open to God using you in the lives of others** to offer life eternal to them. What could be a better gift and comfort in the face of someone's death than to see someone left here on earth decide to bow to Christ and be given eternal life themselves!

II Corinthians 6:1-2 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Pray

NEXT WEEK: let's get practical! "Opening Eyes: Helping Others Discover Life in the Real World!"