

THE END #4: "AFTER DEATH ... & BEFORE THE END"

Some Pastoral Reflections About Processing New Ideas

- It takes time – often years – to seriously consider new biblical interpretations (e.g. judgment, hell & heaven) and see if they are true.
- Sometimes we as pastors preach things that are just our views – not the elders' or the church's. And it's okay if people disagree. In fact, the process of thinking and discussing and being humble and loving together has potential to make us spiritually strong, regardless of our conclusions.
- Biblical scholars have different and well-documented views. Also, sometimes truth is on the side of the majority - and sometimes it's on the side of the minority!
- All we can do is try to be as humble and open as possible – and know that *how* we handle disagreements may be more important to Jesus than what we conclude in the end.

What Happens to a Person Between Death and the Return of Jesus When We Will Receive New Bodies?

- If Jesus doesn't come in our lifetime, each of us will die. We also have loved ones and friends who have already died - some have loved God, some have not, and some seem in between somewhere.
 - ▶ Philippians 1:23 "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." ▶ 2 Corinthians 5:8 "We ...would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." >> We are "with Christ" in some way!
 - ▶ Luke 23:43 (Jesus to repentant thief on the cross: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Also Stephen in Acts 7:55)
 - ▶ Two figurative portions: Luke 16 parable of Lazarus and the rich man - both are conscious after their deaths – one "with Abraham", the other "tormented" in hades (the place of the dead); and Rev. 6:9-11 – vision of martyrs worshipping God before the Judgment Day.
- Some possibilities:
 1. *Souls are conscious and waiting in the presence of God until our resurrection.* However, we don't know what existence is like without our bodies (eyes, ears, brains, skin, etc.!) (2 Cor. 5:24)
 2. *Souls are in a different timeless dimension with God, so they really aren't "waiting" as we know it.*
 3. *Souls are given a temporary bodily existence to enjoy God, but are still waiting for their resurrected bodies later.* (Randy Alcorn in "Heaven".) Rev. 2:7, 6:9-11; Luke 9:28-36; 16:22-23; Gen. 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11-12
- Note Paul's body/soul ambiguity in the "third heaven" - 2 Cor. 12:3!
- What about those who don't love and obey God? Only one text hints at this intermediate state – Luke 16 rich man parable. Dangerous to build a whole doctrine on one text – and it's likely a parable. Note that he was having a rational conversation while tormented!
- Paul Stevens summary: "Upon death the saints enter a deeper degree of communion with Christ, while for those not in Christ disembodiment means entering a deeper degree of darkness."

- My view of the lost: In light of the fact that Scripture is almost completely silent about this . . . and if we are right that hell (which is the "Valley of Hinnom") is a metaphor for the absence of God . . . and if all the other suffering descriptions like darkness and fire are metaphors for the absence of God and are tools to warn people of this awful result . . . and if the final judgment is still in the future where the hearts of the unrighteous will be shamefully exposed before God, and they will experience punishment by final death and destruction . . . and if God is not only just but merciful - and he does not take delight in the punishment of the wicked - and in fact, he loves even those who reject him *then I think it's reasonable to believe that those who have rejected God will get what they chose – life without Him – but that this will be experienced in a different spiritual soul dimension that will not require them to wait consciously for years and years until the judgment day. God will be both just and merciful to the end.*

Can We Know When Jesus is Going to Return?

- A summary: Mark 13 – "the Olivet Discourse" overlooking the temple.
- Jesus (vs. 2) "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." Disciples ask, "When will these things happen?" (See Matthew 24:3, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?") They thought all three would happen at once.
 - ➔ Deceptive teachers who claim to be the Messiah (5-6); wars (7-8); and earthquakes and famines (8). Don't mean the end is near (7); birth pains (8).
 - ➔ Suffering from persecution (9). Don't pray to escape it – use it as an opportunity for witness! ➔ "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." (10) ("nation" = people-group with own language/ culture. Joshua Project: 16,000 people-groups; 40% still unreached. Caution about holding Jesus to this exact definition before he can return!)
 - ➔ These last days (from Jesus to now) will be hard. Family members will betray one another (12) to the government and only those "who stand firm to the end will be saved." (13)
 - ➔ Jesus warns of the "abomination of desolation" (Daniel 9:27) in the temple. "Flee to escape it!" Hard for "pregnant women"! Prophecy fulfilled in 70AD - Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem and temple.
 - ➔ Prophecy takes a turn in 19 - those days of "distress" will be "unequaled" in history and future. Great cosmic changes will occur in sky (24) (literal or figurative?) ➔ "Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (26-27) Jesus is prophesying two events – the destruction of the temple and his coming at the end. Probably seen as one - they are all part of the last days after his resurrection. Note dual fulfillment in 30-32: "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." And "But about that day or hour no one knows"
- Summary of "Can we know?":
 - (1) The signs of the end have been with us for a long time. (Number of earthquakes is constant – even decreased last 30 years).
 - (2) Jesus gave general signs because his primary concern was how they and we were to live.
 - (3) Don't try to guess! – not even the year!!