

Preaching: At the heart of Life's BIG questions, LOVE WINS

Dates: 19, 26 August & 2 September

Introduction:

The book Love Wins by Rob Bell is an incendiary book. It is topical because it raises critical questions. We do not have to agree with everything he has stated, nor some of the conclusions he makes as well as the way in which he moves through logic sequences. We have chosen three topics that are responsive to his thinking, but not necessarily in support of his conclusions. But neither is this series a critique of his book. There is still a great deal of interpretation left between these lines.

The notes below are a fair reflection of the three ideas in Love Wins, but the sermon still needs to be practical, contextual and relatable.

19 AUGUST 2018 –Sermon Topic: Heaven is here, not there

Exodus 16 (manna and 'mercy') and Matthew 19:16-29

Our language, imagery and theology often speak about heaven being somewhere else. We look to the sky when we talk about heaven, suggesting it is 'up there' somewhere. When a person passes on we say they have 'gone' to heaven, indicating a journey to 'another place'. Heaven, for many of us, is somewhere else. By that same indication, where we live now is not heaven. Earth is not heaven. Earth is something else.

God moving the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land was a promise of heaven on earth (in direct contrast to the hell on earth the Egyptians had created for the Israelites), suggesting that heaven is not for when we die, but it's for now, in this lifetime. God even showed the Israelites how to live heaven on earth even in the Desert (a place which represents lifelessness) there was the possibility of heaven through community, sharing and love.

Jesus speaks of heaven now...

In Matthew 19 a rich man asks Jesus how to get eternal life.

He believed in a future state.

He thought something must be done; many think not of this, and consequently do nothing.

He was willing to do anything needful; but had not counted the cost of discipleship.

The man is wealthy and when Jesus asks him to give his wealth away, the man leaves. Coveting will not be possible in heaven so this man will struggle to live in heaven. Some things that we have in our current life, society, earth will have to be left behind if we are to realise heaven here on earth, now.

Moral integrity alone can never benefit us with God; formal obedience is not sufficient. Kingdom of Heaven requires devotion of the heart here and now, a heart devoted to Jesus.

We must make decisions to make heaven a reality, we must choose to live as Jesus shows us; with love, humility, putting others first, etc. When we choose to follow Jesus in this way we are making heaven a reality now and love wins

For reflection

- What is heaven?
- How is society stopping people from creating heaven on earth, now?
- What does it mean for us that heaven is not just for when we pass on?
- What would heaven on earth look like?
- What is your picture of heaven – empty block on the bulletin instead of call for worship so people can write or draw
- What good thing must I do to get eternal life?"
- What could you change in your life this week that would bring heaven a little closer here on earth?

26 AUGUST 2018

Readings: 1Timothy 2:1-10. Sermon Topic: What does God want?

Scripture is clear that all people (irrespective of nationality, race, culture, language, etc.) can be saved. "First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people; for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct. This is good and it pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth. For there is one God, and there is one who brings God and human beings together, the man Christ Jesus." [1 Timothy 2:1-5].

1. Our Methodist heritage teaches us the 'Four All's':

All need to be saved;

All can be saved;

All can know they are saved;

All can be saved to the uttermost.

(All must be witnesses to their salvation – Added by George Eayrs in 1909)

Scripture and our Methodist heritage point us to a theology of God desiring all people to know truth and for that truth to 'set them free' (John 8) and Paul also links salvation to knowing truth. As heaven is a reality now (see last week's discussion), salvation is to the uttermost (four all's) and we participate in making heaven a reality now, in conjunction with God, human beings are integrally involved in the salvation. We are participants in our own salvation; this is comforting because it means we have an action to make and a part to play in it – we are deeply invested in Salvation and all it means for humanity...

The 'Problem is: but what about someone who doesn't want Salvation?

We are not robots, we have free will. Does God's will over us negate our free will? Can God 'override' our free will and put us in 'heaven' if we choose a path other than salvation? What of people who believe salvation comes from another religion or simply refuse to believe in God?

'No, God does not override our free will.' The Four All's tell us that we "can be" saved – there is opportunity and invitation, not force. Paul says God "wants" everyone to be saved – again, opportunity and invitation, not force. Our free will remains.

Rob Bell suggests there is a better question than, "Does God get what God wants?"; it is,

"Do we get what we want?"

He answers the following: "...a resounding, affirming, sure and positive yes. Yes, we get what we want. God is that loving.

"If we want isolation, despair, and the right to be our own god. God graciously grants us that option. If we insist on using our God-given power and strength to make the world in our own image. God allows us that freedom. If we want nothing to do with light, hope, love, grace and peace, God respects that desire on our part. The more we want nothing to do with all that God is, the more distance and space are created.

"If, however, we crave light, we're drawn to truth, we're desperate for grace, we've come to the end of our plots and schemes and we want someone else's path, God gives us what we want." Yes, salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. But we don't sit and do nothing about it. There is a proposed way of life:

- ✓ Do good to all people at all times (let love win)
- ✓ Do no harm, do no evil of any kind (let love win)
- ✓ Attend upon the ordinances of God (join other worshipers to worship God, read scripture, come to Holy Communion services, have prayer time). Let the love of God win

The above help to grow our spiritual muscles. Through the above, God's grace is received and lives are changed.

For Reflection:

- What does it mean to have free will? In what way does our will and God's will overlap?
- Is heaven already a reality in some ways in our lives, and if so, how?

Can you think of a time in your life where exercising your free-will hurt someone, or sabotaged your own life?

Take time and think about what you need to be saved from.

2 SEPTEMBER 2018

Readings (Matthew 25:31-46). Sermon Topic: Christianity is not an Insurance Policy

Introduction:

Heaven is framed as salvation. The good will get in, the bad will be kept out.

The view that being a Christian so that we can avoid hell is such an incredibly narrow view of what the Gospel is. Yet, so many people see it that way: if I pay my dues I will get into heaven. There is no life in that, there is no joy in that, there is no hope in that. Heaven on earth must be something which can be a reality in every person's life for heaven to have any real meaning.

There is more to scripture and the unfolding of God's relationship with humanity than just a ticket to heaven (or hell), but rather an invitation and practical way to realise the 'paradise' that was the Garden of Eden, a new vision of a new earth and a new heaven where love is the language spoken rather than selfishness. This practical way is realising there are hundreds and thousands of decisions to be made each day about who we follow; if we trust God really does want good for us; how we respond to people around us; if we act for justice and those in need; whether we are choosing a path of love or not. It comes from each person, it comes with every decision. The Bible puts it this way: Chose today whom you will serve! (Joshua 24:15)

There is a prepared Kingdom for people to enter (be part of)

The Judge Himself having been the witness of all the moral actions of men will require no evidence.

Then why do we live so thoughtlessly.

1. Consider the reference made to the CONDUCT of the righteous.
2. Their STATION — "the right-hand."
3. The SENTENCE.
4. The ORDER OF IT. The righteous receive their sentence first. The King will bless before He curses.

The righteous will inherit the kingdom. How astonishing the grace of God to provide such an inheritance for sinful creatures. Christ will also invite His saints to His kingdom: He will give us this invitation before He condemns the ungodly.

THE PERSONS TO WHOM THIS INVITATION WILL BE GIVEN.

1. Those who have abounded in good and charitable works.
2. They think nothing of their good works.
3. They are those whom the Father has blessed

In other words, these are people who let love wins here on earth. Those who do what is good here and now.

Are you that person?

Remember that there is another sentence at that day.

The eternal state of the wicked Includes:

1. The privation of infinite good.
2. They have lost heaven and all its blessedness at once.
3. They are strangers to the endearments and consolations of friendship

What is not done to Christ's brethren is defective of service rendered to him. We have a role in bringing God's love to people. We are in many ways the hands of God in our world. Our example is heavily influential in every area of our life. When we show love, we are choosing heaven, but we are also making it 'available' to others by showing them it is possible. When God works in our life and we acknowledge it publically, we are making it known that God working in our world is a reality. When we feed the hungry, clothe the poor, visit the prisoners, assist the widows, etc. we are bringing the reality of a loving God to others. Our hands make God 'available' and a reality for others.

For reflection

How do we (as a church, society and individually) bring God to people?

In what ways have we as individuals, and also Trinity, pushed people away, or lost an opportunity to share God's grace?