

Different Destinies

Good morning again church family, and if you are new to this place welcome and so glad to have you. What happens in church as God uses his Word and what is supposed to happen? Perhaps the greatest picture of our gathering is a halftime of a football game. The players come in and the coach points out really good things, and also warns about the enemy. And then you go back out onto the field directed, guided, perhaps even inspired. Today's halftime speech given by God in his Word through me is that of warning. It's some of the strongest language used in the whole of the Bible - he's reminding us what is at stake if we lose. We cannot lose.

And the reason we consider this is not just because it is recorded in God's Word and therefore beneficial. But because of this principle: *You cannot fully love someone without warning them of danger.* Now in your surface relationships you may never warn others. Acquaintances hear of bad ideas from their friends and never confront them. But that doesn't happen with true friends. I was reminded of this when talking to a new friend. The Bishop Slavik from the Ukraine. He and his wife had an opportunity to visit Miami. And as he was on the beach he and his wife were swimming in the ocean. But then he was curious about something. He looked around and no one else was in the water and he wondered why. Do you have a guess? There were sharks in the water. He told me they don't have sharks in the beaches of Ukraine, and it made him question the kindness of Americans who knew there were sharks but didn't warn them. Yes, you cannot fully love someone without warning them of danger.

Have you ever had this with those closest to you. It starts early. The toddler playing with the electric socket or turning the knobs on the oven. You don't watch that without doing something. It's true of most important relationships. Have you ever signed up for a fight though the heart behind it was help? You knew this could go sideways but for their good or the good of the relationship you had to say something. A few Scriptures that share with us the good of doing this, "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20) Now we understand this if we're the rescuer, but what if we are in need of rescue because we're off. Will we heed the warning or kick against it.

And another prevailing question is should this even be the work of a Christian or a church at all? After all the Bible says, "Don't judge." I think we have covered this in previous series but let me revisit it. In the context that is spoken Jesus is saying don't consider yourself holier than thou. Better and more righteous than your brother or sister for we are all broken. But God is clear in other portions of Scripture and in that passage from James we will need to judge and warn and hold accountable brothers and sisters for they may need it. Consider this passage from Jude, "21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. 22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear." (Jude 21-23)

So that is the goal of this message as we look at two different destinies. To give a loving warning about one, and a comforting reminder of another destiny. With the hope that perhaps the Spirit working in hearts will snatch some who were headed to a destiny worse than anything imagined, and give a great picture for those who remain in Christ Jesus. See if no one else does out of love I'm yelling, "There's a shark in the water." Here is how you stay safe.

In this series Edge of Heaven we are looking at Jesus end times teaching. We are consulting Matthew 24 and 25 and seeing their truths fleshed out in Revelation. This is an elongated illustration of Jesus separated sheep and goats, wheat and chaff. Though here it is the wheat and grapes. It is a teaching on hell. Which our culture wants to deny but what Jesus taught on quite a bit as main subject material. It is perhaps the most intense pictures of the Bible of God's wrath over sin. It is perhaps the most loving word possible for people who don't know they are swimming in shark infested waters of this world. A reading from Revelation 14. There it is. "It's not scary when you know the Savior."

One of the reasons I'm so excited for this series is because we get to focus not on this world but on the world and life to come. And it's not lost on me how short our time on earth compared to eternity. I've used this before along with others but I've brought this rope. It represents 10,000 years and if that is the scale. Here is your childhood, your work life and your possible retirement for 80 years of life. So what about this? I believe somewhere in you is the idea that everybody lives forever somewhere. Because of this these two different destinies are a big deal.

But what are the prevailing views of heaven and hell? What do you think or what do your friends say? This series is important because what culture believes is so far off from what God reveals. For example most people believe they are going to a heaven - there is an assumption that it doesn't matter what you believe or what you've done - we all end up in that good place. And people question if there is a hell, and have misconceptions of what it will be like. In a Pew Research study they found only 58% of people believe in a hell, 34% don't believe in one and 8% don't know. Then there are cultural perceptions of hell. Mark Twain I believe started the wrong view by saying, "Go to heaven for the climate, and hell for the company." In fact doing research I found a song that is entitled, "In hell I'll be in good company." I was trolling the internet and found that Satan has a twitter handle and in one of his tweets said, "Let's be honest, hell sounds a lot more fun than heaven."

So that is culture, that is people. But what is Biblical. SHARKS!! Consider just some of the pictures we find in the Scriptures today. Look again at a picture of hell in v.10-11, "10 they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever." This is a picture of the final judgment for those who have rejected Jesus the Messiah, and are unbelievers. There are many things to consider. First is the wrath of God over sin. If you haven't noticed he takes sin seriously. It's why the cross of Jesus is so gruesome. Jesus dies in the worst way to pay for the sins of the world. But if Jesus doesn't pay for your sin, you're left to pay forever. Again, *either Jesus can pay for your sin, or you can forever*. For God is a God of justice. Here it talks about being tormented with burning sulfur. And how long does this last? Forever and ever.

And it says it's the full strength of his wrath. Have you ever seen someone holding back the power they had. It's the father arm wrestling with his son. It's the professional basketball player scrimmaging with teenagers. I think of Dwayne Wade who leads a basketball camp in New Lenox. When playing he could dunk and dominate. But he holds back to train. See up until the final judgment God has been showing his mercy by not giving us what we deserve. But when the judgment comes the full wrath is poured out. He uses all his strength in the form of justice. And trust me when I tell you his power is beyond imagination.

The later verses tell us about the power of such wrath - about the full strength. The grapes in the winepress a picture of unbelievers experiencing the wrath of God. And what does it say, "gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia." So the grapes, unbelievers were crushed by God, and the blood that splurged out - splurged almost 200 miles. To give you perspective this blood spurting is from here to about Indianapolis. So great is the strength of God's wrath, unhinged.

And how long will this be? Remember the rope? Scripture said this smoke would go up forever and ever. For all time. So what we can confidently say about hell is this: *Hell is real, forever, and remarkably not fun.* Shark in the water - watch out!! If you don't believe these words then believe Jesus, wheat and chaff, don't fear those who kill body but cannot kill soul, poke out your eye - better to lose eye than whole body in hell. wide is the gate leads to destruction, narrow the road that leads to eternal life. Rich man and poor Lazarus. These are only the words of Jesus.

But can this wrath be real? Can this be the same Jesus who we know as a God of love? Reading commentators they say, "Men protest again and again that such punishment is incompatible with the love and mercy of God." (Becker) But consider God's heart. Ezekiel, "For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!" (18:32) Yet, if we reject. He wants no one to endure this.

And if we are going to consider blood, let us consider a better picture. It's the blood of Jesus shed for us and for all on the cross. He gives his life on the cross so that the wrath of God for any and all who cling to him is satisfied once and for all. The book of Colossians speaks of this, "In him we have redemption **through his blood**, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." (Eph 1:7) That's the God I came to proclaim to you. The God who is so just he requires satisfaction for sin. But the God so undeniable good what he requires is what he freely gives in his Son. Maybe this is all new for you and you've never considered much of this. Maybe like most you thought sins could be paid for by your own good works. Let me call you again to Jesus. It's his blood or your blood that satisfies. His once and yours forever. Call on his name. Seek him and find the wonder of the peace and joy that can be ours now and forever. Yes, *Rely on the blood of Jesus to satisfy the wrath of God.*

There's another great picture in Revelation of those who are in heaven. John who is seeing the vision asks of the believers. Who are these. And the response? "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev 7:14) You have the right to be among those. Any and all who cling to the Lord Jesus have the right to be among those. For it is by faith we are saved and counted among that group. Simply believe on the Lord and receive this as your destiny. It's so better.

And let's talk about that other destiny shall we. It's glorious friends. I could tell you that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived the wonders. It's a place of no more crying, mourning, or pain. It's where we are enveloped with the love of God and full weight of his goodness. We are not going to be floating orbs of spirituality. We are not going to be chubby cherubs playing harps on happy clouds. We're going to have recognizable bodies that have now been made imperishable. And the glory of those bodies will be so far superior to the ones we have now. We will experience the best of the best forever as we are with God. This is no boring church experience where we will have to pinch ourselves to stay awake, and don't prefer the song selection. This is a feast, a celebration, a victory circle so raucous that the height of emotions cannot be contained and have to erupt in praise of God.

And one of the glorious pictures here is that of rest. v.13, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

One of the prayers we have for the Ukrainian mission field is that of peace. If the Russians no longer oppress, and they no longer have to protect their borders there could be thriving. If they weren't at war perhaps not every male would have to be in service at least 2 years. While there we prayed for the soldiers who happened to be sons and husbands who were at war, and one of the reasons there wasn't strong male leadership. So if the war was over and they were free think of how good that would be for the people. Think of how good that is for us when we are not at war. The greatest picture of this is that soldier who grabbed a lady he didn't know and gave her a big kiss.

Right now on earth we are in a war. The church on earth is referred to as the church militant. We battle for the Lord against our own sinful natures, the world, and the devil. We are treated similarly to Jesus himself in what we suffer and endure in service to him. But someday the war will be over. Someday soon we will have peacetime and freedom from trouble. And then we will be able to rest. The church in heaven is referred to as the church triumphant, and the church at peace. Because *Heaven is the place where what troubles you, troubles you no more*. And can you see it. Can you imagine waking up not battling your own sinful nature. Can you imagine every bodily ache and pain gone. Can you imagine a future that has no darkness or circumstance to fear. Can you imagine with me perfect relationships with everyone, flowing out of the most supreme relationship with God. I cannot wait. I simply cannot wait to be with the Lord. I'm so anxious to be there. Which is why I love to focus on this series and hear that we are in the end times and living on the edge of heaven.

And why? Because of our righteous deeds? No but because of the righteous deeds of Christ on our behalf. And a quick reminder that those who are in him will do the deeds required. We are reminded that in John, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit." (John 15:10) The deeds he references are deeds that simply flow from faith in Christ. It's not a salvation by works, but a reminder that those who are saved will naturally do good works. So about that.

So what homework do we have? What are our marching orders? One last story from the Ukraine. The roads are exceptionally bad. They look like asteroids hit them, and there were just chunks of concrete here and there, and holes that could swallow your car. But what I was pleased to find out is how courteous people were when driving. They would understand people

weaving in and out of lanes because of the bad roads and not get angry. In fact they have a joke that drunk people in America drive swirvy, and drunk people in Ukraine drive straight. But one of the courtesies they have that we have too is to alert of police. Very common was to flash the headlights over a police officer coming up and also for others to say thanks. It was common courtesy to warn others.

I don't know how this picture of heaven and hell have guided you. We often talk about the love of Christ. But if nothing else perhaps our marching orders this week are to share that same word of caution. *Warn people others of the danger God speaks of.* Flash your lights and have the conversation. Wake and shake them if you need to. For we are on the edge of heaven, and some the edge of hell. I know where I want all people in this church and this community. I know our God wants all to be with him. Let's share the word and warn out of love. Amen.