

Doctrine - Response and Eternal Destiny

Sign Title: Response and Eternal Destiny

November 21, 2010

Good to see you this morning! My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. If you are new, I would like to welcome you. This fall, we are in a series of studies called, "Doctrine - What do we believe?" The purpose of these studies is to review the basics of our faith. This morning, we complete the series. I don't have a lot of time today and there is a lot of information to talk about in this final message. I am telling you up front that I probably will not finish this message. If I don't finish the message, I am giving you homework. This sermon is publicly available on my web site right now. Print the manuscript. Read the rest of the message before small group this week. I love you and as your pastor, I want you to know that much of the material at the end of this sermon is very important for your life with Christ. It was never taught to me when I was growing up and I wish it was. It would have made a difference. So read and pray through the material we don't cover today. I don't want you to miss it.

Last week, we did a crazy thing. We dove into the book of Revelation. Like a pebble skipping across a pond, we hopped and skipped our way through the book looking at some of the scenes that take place in heaven. We made it to Revelation 19 and the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*. That supper will be an excellent BBQ we don't want to miss. That is the time when, quite possibly, Jesus steps off his throne and sings of his love for us, like a groom sings of his love to his bride on their wedding day. Unfortunately, we had to tie it off there last

week. I was already way over time and if I went longer you would have put me in the pastoral penalty box.

So even though last week was on Christ's return, since we were following the theme of the expanding kingdom of Christ in Revelation, we got right to the edge of Christ's return, then didn't talk about it. This morning we are picking it up in Revelation 19 where Christ returns and we will finish the rest of Revelation from there.

Revelation 19 - Christ will return!

I need to start by telling you that our picture of Christ is too small. We often think of him as a humble, Galilean peasant wearing a man dress, having photo perfect hair and looking like he could pose for a men's magazine. Even if you have a more realistic picture of Jesus than that, chances are, your mental picture of Jesus is far too small. Look at how Isaiah describes Jesus before he came to earth.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah 6:1–3 (NIV)

In John 12:41, John says that Isaiah saw Jesus! So if we think about Jesus and we think of some kind of zen philosopher, or a geeked-out college professor who gives pithy sayings and therapy sessions, we have a very skewed picture of Jesus. According to Philippians 2, after rising from the grave, Jesus ascended to the father and was given a name that is above every name. Some theologians call this the *Super Exaltation*. Jesus ascended back to where he

was before the incarnation and was even more highly exalted. Now Christ is God, he is king. He is reigning and ruling over history and over all creation. He is the center piece of the Bible. He is the focal point of history. He is the object of all devotion and glory. When it comes to seeing Jesus as he is now, Revelation 19 gives us a great snapshot, of the reigning and ruling Jesus. Lets turn to Revelation 19 and read some Bible.

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords. Revelation 19:11–16 (NIV)

It says, *then I saw heaven opened*. John gets a snapshot of the stage of heaven. What does he see? A white horse and someone riding on it called *Faithful and True*. How many of you grew up watching Westerns? You know the good guy always rides the white horse. It is biblical. The rider who is on the horse is the king of kings and lord of lords; it is Jesus. Why is he riding the horse? *To judge and to make war*. The humble Galilean peasant thing was a one time deal. Jesus humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. No more humbling himself to pay for sin. Now he is reigning, ruling and coming to execute judgement. *His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns*. If Jesus stares you down, one look into his eyes and you know you are toast. Very intense look. Jesus is not somebody you mess around with. Most kings have one crown. Jesus is stacking them up like poker chips on his

head because he has all the crowns. He is the king of kings. How is he dressed? He is *dressed in a robe dipped in blood*. That is some curious decoration on the fringe. Don't know exactly whose blood it is but he obviously is prepared and ready for battle. It looks pretty impressive.

Some of you think Jesus is no big deal. He is just one of many Gods. Smell the coffee. You're going to stand before him and his eyes are like flames of fire, his robe is dipped in blood and the armies of heaven are following him. Do you plan to stick your nose in the air and say, "Na, Na, Na, Na, you can't get me?" I don't think so. This picture should produce some fear, some reverence. This is the, *don't mess with Jesus* picture. He is packing some serious heat and he has a posse called the armies of heaven. When you show up for a battle and one team is wearing all white, you know they are fairly confident of the way things will go. This is what we have here. The outcome is very predictable when one side is wearing white.

Jesus has *a sword coming from his mouth*. This is pretty cool. All the young boys in Awana are pumped about this. They want to go home and whack their big brothers with a sword and say Jesus is their hero.

This morning we are studying the written word of God that Hebrews says is sharper than any two edged sword. Jesus is the incarnated word of God. When he speaks, that is the only weapon he needs. His words are that powerful. We used to say, "When EF Hutton speaks, people listen." The point here is, "When Jesus speaks things happen."

For those of you who are into tattoos, here is your verse. On his robe and on his thigh he has a label so there is no question about his identity, “King of kings and Lord of Lords.” Jesus has proper labeling, no truth in advertising problems here.

This part of Revelation 19 tells us a day is coming when Jesus will be so sick of sin that he is done offering chances for forgiveness and opportunities for repentance. He is going to hop on his white horse, come back and put an end to all of this and usher in a new kingdom. He will use the sword of his mouth to strike down nations and rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread out the fury of God’s wrath.

What should we think of this? This text is telling us to figure out what team we are on because when Christ returns, he is done with patience and opportunities for repentance. He is coming back and bringing down the heavy. Let’s read some more Bible.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. Revelation 19:17–21 (NIV)

This reminds me of what it was like going to high school when there was an after school fight. Maybe one of the guys from the football team was irritated by a druggie who made a move on his girlfriend. The news spread like wild fire

in the school because everybody wanted to see the slaughter at the bike racks. Here an angel calls to the birds of the air to get ready for the slaughter of God. Satan, the beast and the false prophet, the demonic trinity, have unified the nations and galvanized the unrepentant against Christ and the armies of heaven. As you might suspect, when you are fighting against a guy with eyes of fire and a sword coming from his mouth, I don't care how much Brazilian Jujitsu you know, it will not go well.

The beast and the false prophet are captured and hurled like a major league fast ball into hell and everybody else on their team gets slaughtered by the sword that comes from the mouth of Jesus. The birds feast on the flesh. The armies of heaven don't even break a sweat. What is the big idea? Don't mess with Jesus. He is coming back and all he has to do is say, "Game Over" and it is done.

Folks, Jesus is coming back. I don't care how powerful a nation is. I don't care how many nuclear weapons they pack in their pockets or who their leader is or how many are in the army. They are totally out gunned by Jesus and all it takes is a word from Jesus' mouth to finish it. That is all it takes. In this world, there are plenty of things that will crush us. The government may some day persecute us. Even today, some people die for their faith. I know it is scary to think what it might be like to stand against the power of an entire nation, but nations and governments aren't in charge. Jesus is. He is the game over guy. He is coming back to set things straight. Choose your team now that you know the truth.

Revelation 20 - One last chance

After Jesus cleans up the bad guys and stretches his kingdom beyond heaven to earth, things go well, for a while. This period is called the Millennial kingdom. I will not dive too deeply into this because we talked about it this summer; let me summarize. After the beast, the false prophet and everyone that is in rebellion against Jesus is mopped up, Satan, the source of all rebellion, is cast into the pit for a thousand years.

Jesus gets things going like they should be on planet earth while Satan is in reform school for a thousand years. This is Jesus being patient. It is Jesus giving Satan one last chance to repent. But, like the hardened criminal he is, as soon as he is out of reform school, he immediately sets out to kill Jesus and the redeemed. We are talking total satanic amnesia about what happened the last time he tried to crush Jesus.

Some of us are tender hearted. We don't like the idea of God judging. We don't like the idea of God punishing. We don't like the idea of God sending people to hell and God no longer extending his patience. Let me tell you, if someone was devoted to destroying you and your family and no matter what you did, no matter how long you waited, no matter how hard you tried or how many times you gave them an opportunity to repent; wouldn't you eventually get to the end of your rope? If they were committed to destroying you, and they never repented, eventually justice would require you take them out of the picture.

We live in the corn fields of Iowa. In this part of the country a major crime is a farmer combining in the wrong field. In the city, where I came from, the

sinfulness of people was more apparent. In the city you have plenty of drug dealers, thieves, murderers, perverts, rapists and drug lords. If you don't lock them up and take them out of the picture, things get pretty ugly around town. If you commit the same crime three times, it is the three strike law. They lock you up and throw away the key.

This is what happens here. As soon as Satan gets a chance, he is off to kill and destroy Jesus and his children as fast as he can. Jesus was patient with Satan many times but this is the end of the rope. It is game over for the last time. Satan and his armies gather around the camp of the saints to destroy them and it is a repeat performance. There is not even a fight. Fire comes from heaven to destroy all opposition. The devil is finally cast into the lake of fire where he is tormented forever.

What happens next? There is judgment for Christians and judgment for those who do not know Christ. There is Hell and the New Creation.

What judgment awaits Christians?

Christians will not be judged at the end of this life in the same way non-Christians will be. The Bible teaches this many times.

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.
John 5:24 (NIV)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,
Romans 8:1 (NIV)

Simply put, because of Christ, all of our sins are forgiven. We are members of God's family now and forever. Nevertheless, that does not mean our life will escape review. This life, and what we do and do not do with it, greatly

matter! God has given each of us time, talents and treasures we are to use for the growth of his kingdom. We will be evaluated based on what we have done with them.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)

Matthew 25 tells us parables about the kingdom and how we are to live now to have the best outcome for eternity. For example, in the parable of the talents, one man is given ten, another five and another one. A talent is a large sum of money. The amount of talents the men were given was based on their ability. They were to make a return on the investment made in them. The men who were given ten and five talents doubled the investment and when the master returned they were put in charge of ten and five cities. The last guy buried his talent and refused to use it. He didn't even put it on deposit at the bank to gain interest. When the master returned, the master was seriously disappointed so this servant suffered loss. The point of the story is that God has entrusted each of us with time, talent, health and resources that we are to use for the kingdom. We will be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ based on what we have done with the strength and resources God gives us.

Positively, this is intended by God to be a time of great reward for us. God loves us like we love our kids. Just as we love to reward our kids for their good grades and right choices, God can't wait to reward us on that day. We need to think of this in a positive way.

Negatively, there will be Christians who are grieved at the judgment seat of Christ. Not because they are not in heaven, but because of the lack of reward they are given because of how they lived.

his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Corinthians 3:13–15 (NIV)

The Bible is clear, while our sins are totally forgiven through Christ, and we will be in heaven only because of the forgiveness that is ours through Christ, there are still eternal consequences for our good and evil choices as Christians.

I know the idea of eternal rewards offends many people. We think everyone should get a gold star on the wall chart and a free dessert in heaven. But to do so would be unjust. It would encourage Christians to waste their lives and sacrifice nothing for Christ. Remember, every sacrifice we make for Christ is rewarded by Christ in eternity with a reward that far outweighs any earthly thing we sacrifice.

If, some day, Christ puts you in a position where he calls you to die as a martyr for Christ, you must remember that the earthly loss of your life as a martyr for Christ is nothing when compared to the eternal reward you will eternally gain. It will make martyrdom look like a small sacrifice for such a great eternal reward.

Let me explain this again for those of you who are new to this concept.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8–10 (NIV)

Notice how Paul explains this. We are saved by Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We simply throw our hands up and place our trust in Christ. But in that moment, when Jesus becomes our king, we become his workmanship to serve him. He has prepared good works, for us to do. So we are saved by grace but our works are the basis for the rewards we will receive at the judgment seat of Christ.

Revelation 20 - What judgment awaits non-Christians?

After the final defeat of Satan in the first half of Revelation 20, the second half talks about the Great White Throne judgment. There is some theological disagreement about when the judgment of rewards for Christians will take place. It could be at this time or before the millennium. Either way, the Bible is clear that the basis for all judgment is our deeds.

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” Romans 2:6 (NIV)

Those who refuse the offer of forgiveness through Christ have the double penalty of God’s wrath on them. They have the wrath of God for their sin and the wrath of God for rejecting Christ’s sacrifice for our sin.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” John 3:36 (NIV)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. John 3:18 (NIV)

Now one thing we talked about this summer that was a shocker to many of you is the justice of hell. Just as there are degrees of reward in heaven, there are degrees of punishment in hell. Since this is a new concept for many of us, let me show you some Scriptural support for this.

In **Matthew 11:21-24**, Jesus told the people of Capernaum it would be worse for them on the day of judgment than for Sodom because Sodom hadn't seen and rejected Christ's miracles. There is punishment on the day of judgment that will be worse for some than others.

In **Luke 12:47-48**, Jesus says those who know the right thing to do and intentionally choose to sin will be punished more severely than those who do not know the right thing and inadvertently sin. The consequences at the judgment seat of Christ for intentional sin is more severe than the consequences for unintentional sin.

Jesus said this to Pilate when handed over to him for judgment.

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." John 19:11 (NIV)

Of course, my favorite is Revelation 20:12

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. Revelation 20:12 (NIV)

If hell was the same for everyone, why would they need to be judged by what they had done? So did OJ Simpson commit murder? Did the glove fit or did it not? Did he get away with murder? If he did commit the murder, he didn't get away with it. Unless, by God's grace he comes to Christ, justice will be served when he stands before Christ and he is justly recompensed for his sin in hell for eternity. On the other side of things, when you see someone who takes their retirement years to serve as a missionary in a foreign land, don't crinkle up your nose and wonder how they can survive without golf and Sunday afternoon

football. Everyone will be amply rewarded for their service to Jesus in a way that far outweighs any earthly sacrifices they make.

Revelation 21 - What does the Bible teach about heaven?

As we learned last week, when a Christian dies, to be absent from the body is for them to be present with the Lord. But contrary to popular belief, we do not spend eternity out of our bodies floating off in space apart from God's physical creation.

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:14, when Christ returns, Christians who have died, will return with him. Picking back up in Revelation 21, God will recreate/renew this creation. The New Jerusalem, will come down from heaven to earth and be the capital city of the new creation. Heaven and earth will be combined as one. The dwelling place of God will be with man forever. We will have our indestructible resurrection bodies and we will live forever in joy, peace, worship and service to the lord of lords and king of kings, Jesus.

What will this new creation that combines heaven and earth be like? Remember what we learned last week about the story line of the Bible. It is a beginning, middle, beginning story line. The new creation will be similar to this creation but vastly improved and completely free from sin. Things will work flawlessly because Jesus is fully in charge. Satan, all rebellion and all the rebels that follow him will be in eternal torment to the glory of God bound from the new creation never to taint it again.

What does the Bible teach about hell?

Amazingly, about 13 percent of Jesus' words were about hell and judgment. The Bible doesn't give us as detailed a description of hell as it does heaven, but the descriptions of hell and the fate of its inhabitants are still graphic. Many times it is described as fire; touch the stove this week and think of hell. It is described as darkness; not a place where you regroup to party with your friends. It is described as a place of punishment, exclusion from God's presence, a place of restlessness and a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. In short, it is not the place you want to visit either eternally or for a vacation, no matter how cold it gets this winter in Iowa.

There is a long history of discussion in Christianity about how literal to take these descriptions of hell. Evangelicals usually follow John Calvin in seeing them as metaphors trying to describe indescribable punishment because the hideousness of hell is beyond description. So while I like Gary Larson and the Far-Side cartoons, hell looks much worse than anything he depicts.

Maybe the best description of hell is the way Jesus frequently described it when he analogized it to Gehenna. Gehenna was a place outside the city of Jerusalem where horrible religious practices took place. Children were sacrificed at Gehenna to pagan gods. Sex and orgies of every kind took place there. The place developed a reputation as the part of town nobody wanted to go to. Because Gehenna was so disgusting, people eventually turned it into a garbage dump. It was the place people threw fecal matter, their garbage, even dead bodies of humans and animals were tossed in. The worms would eat everything

and there was a continual fire burning as things decomposed. People would look out of Jerusalem and see the smoke of the burning by day and the glow of the fire by night. Occasionally, the wind would change direction, and everyone would grab a cloth to cover their mouth and try to keep from hurling because of the smell. That is what Jesus said hell is like. For the people in that day, Gehenna was the most disgusting place they could conceive of and that is how Jesus described it. Welcome to eternity in your new home.

An erroneous mistake many people make about hell is they think Satan rules there. This week, in my research, I found where that idea came from. It has its origins from a book from the Puritan era called *Paradise Lost* by John Milton where he said Satan ruled in hell. Got to break the news to you. Satan is not in charge of hell. Satan is eternally tormented in hell. Guess who is in charge? Jesus. As we saw earlier, Jesus is just as much in charge of judgment and punishment in hell as he is in charge of glory and worship in heaven.

Conclusion

Last week we saw the ever expanding kingdom of Christ in the book of Revelation. This week we saw how that kingdom expands beyond heaven, Christ will return to earth, set things straight, rescue those who trust in him and restore everything to the way it was intended to be, only better.

Right now, it may not feel like Jesus is in charge of your life. It may feel like Satan is able to celebrate victories in your marriage, in your finances and with your children. No matter how bad things look on earth, one of the purposes of the book of Revelation is to tell us the truth about the way things are in heaven

and how history will unfold. Jesus is the king of kings and lord of lords. All he has to do is get on his white horse and open his mouth to execute justice, bring judgment and establish his kingdom. One day, he will. The reason he hasn't done that yet is, he is patient. He is giving people an opportunity to repent.

On the day Jesus returns, all that will matter is whose side you are on, the devil's or the Lord's. When Christ returns he will either hand out the punishment that will fit the crime of our lives or if we are forgiven through Christ, he will hand out the rewards for how pleased he is in our service to him. Ultimately everyone is either brought into the presence of Jesus or banned from his presence forever. Ultimately, everyone will bow the knee to Jesus. Either because they want to in heaven or because they have to in hell. Make your choice, choose your side. Suffer well if he puts that in your life. Serve well with the strength he provides. You know how the story of this planet ends. Look forward to your reward. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for being on the throne. Thank you for reigning and ruling. In the middle of our busy lives, we often miss the big picture of who you are and the position you have. Thank you for not returning yet. Thank you for being patient with us and bringing us to see our sin and giving us the opportunity to repent and bow our knee in worship. When life is tough, we thank you that we know how the story of this planet ends. Thank you Jesus for being the lord of lords and the king of kings who will return, who will enact justice, who will bring about righteousness and who, through your grace, will bring us to reign and rule with you over the new creation in the end. Amen



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