

Heaven and Hell Bible Study
Christ the King Lutheran Church
Commerce, GA

Course Introduction

Opening Prayer

Overview

In our last Wednesday Night Light Bible Study we examined the Book of Revelation. One of the themes of Revelation is that we can endure all trials and tribulations in this world. God is with us, not only in this world-but through all eternity. We heard of God's judgment against those who remain in sin, rejecting Him. We also heard of God's mercy and provision for those that in repentant faith are His children. We learned that even though this world's time is limited, God has eternal destinations for both the wicked and righteous. So with a good bit of discussion on eternity, this naturally flows into a closer examination of what God's Word says about heaven and hell.

Heaven and hell are topics that people have pondered for a long time. The concept of an afterlife is of particular interest to people as the fact is that all people experience death. Even in our modern world, heaven and hell continue to be topics of conversation and themes in many aspects of the arts including television, movies, music, and more. Unfortunately, and quite predictably, many of the popular notions about what lies "on the other side" are not rooted in what the Bible tells us. There are misunderstandings, misconceptions, and downright falsehoods that abound.

In this class we will dig into what the Holy Scripture tells us about heaven and hell. We go to the source, what God Himself speaks to us. And with that we must consider what the Bible *does not* tell us. God simply does not give us a full description of or answer to every question about heaven or hell. But we can be sure that He tells us what we need to know. When we have questions, the answers that we receive can be placed on a "scale". There are some things that we are certain about concerning heaven and hell, because the Bible is very clear in its answer. There are other things that we can be reasonably confident in based on what the Bible teaches overall. Finally, there are those things which we will not be able to answer at least until we arrive.

Some of the topics that this class will examine:

- Why is there an "afterlife" anyway?
- How does one get to heaven?
- How does one get to hell?
- False teachings about the afterlife.
- What is hell like?

-What is heaven like?

-Common questions that people have about heaven and hell. (Please submit any of these that you have)

Resources used for this class:

A Simple Explanation of Heaven and Hell, Concordia Publishing House, 2020 (you either should have or ask for a copy of this booklet as it gives an overview of what we will be learning about)
Class Handouts (these will be emailed out prior to each study, or distributed in person if we are able to begin meeting “face to face” again)

The following are some of the additional resources used by the instructor in preparing the lessons:

Death, Heaven, Resurrection, and the New Creation, by Kent Burreson and Beth Hoeltke, Concordia Publishing House, 2019

The Evidence Bible, Notes compiled by Ray Comfort, Bridges-Logos, 2011

Previous notes and sermons compiled by Rev. Aaron Reinking

Note: At least at the beginning, these studies will be live streamed via Sermon Audio. They will begin at 6:15 PM each Wednesday evening. Following each study a recording of the audio and video will be posted on our Sermon Audio page. The class is anticipated to run for 6 weeks.

https://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=ctkcommerce

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Session 1: Eternal Life and Eternal Death

In preparation for this session, read pages 3-4 in *A Simple Explanation of Heaven and Hell*

The belief in a spiritual world, with an “afterlife” is one that reaches across history, geography, culture, and religious belief. Almost all societies have had a belief concerning some type of existence beyond what we can see involving rewards for the good and punishments for the bad. Why is this? We know that while people don’t naturally know the true God, there is the “natural knowledge of God” that is obvious. The concept of right and wrong is ingrained due to God giving each person a conscience.

But could a part of this be “wishful thinking” on the part of people? Don’t people desire to think that this is something more, something better than what we experience in our world with all of its trials, troubles, wars, disease, and heartache? Why is the afterlife even necessary?

We must understand that God leaves nothing to chance. God is sovereign and has a plan. The Triune God has certain specific characteristics that are knowable. To begin to understand this question with a correct Biblical worldview, we need to go back to the beginning - specifically the first three chapters of Genesis. This is a rather lengthy, but necessary, reading to begin to answer the essential questions regarding eternity.

Read Genesis Chapters 1-3. These will be read straight through as the purpose here is not a verse by verse study of this section, but drawing the broad and key things that God is telling us here. After reading this, we will examine a few portions in more detail.

1. How long has God existed? What phrase did we hear in Revelation that points to this? What does this tell us about time and God’s intentions?

2. When the Triune God was creating the world, what phrase do we see in Chapter 1 verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31 (with an additional word in this verse)? What does this tell us regarding the original state of God’s creation?

3. Which specific aspect of creation was made in God’s image (1:27)? How did this created being receive its life (2:7)? How does this relate to eternity?

4. Genesis Chapter 2 gives us a more detailed description of the Garden of Eden. How does this relate to what we learned about the New Heavens and Earth in Revelation?

5. Briefly describe how sin entered the world based on Genesis 3. (original sin)

6. See 2:17 and 3:2 for a specific consequence that God attaches to eating of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. After God confronts Adam and Eve after their disobedience He pronounces a series of judgments. The final one is the most serious one and is followed by a casting out of the Garden of Eden. See verse 19 and explain what this means.

7. All hope is not lost, though. Read 3:15, what does this promise mean? How will it be fulfilled? If there is any confusion about what all of this means, Romans 5:12-21 gives us a very clear explanation as God revealed His Word through St. Paul. God's plan is for what to happen?

8. Finish this equation: Sin=_____.

Based on what we have learned so far, we should be beginning to understand why there must be something more than what we experience in our current fallen world. God's plan all along has been to restore His creation to a state where there is no sin or death. This includes the restoration of the natural world with only beauty and benefit, devoid of natural disasters and plagues. Also restored will be the perfect fellowship between God and mankind as well as between people (see Genesis 2:18-24 in that Adam was not meant to be alone, but have a companion).

9. With all of this being said, then, is death a natural and intended part of the world?

This is a fallen and broken world. It cannot be repaired anymore than we can "fix" ourselves. It must be replaced, just as our sin must be replaced by a righteousness that does not come from us ("alien righteousness").

10. All of us, unless Jesus returns first, will experience a physical death. Our booklet gives a good and simple definition of death. What is it? God's original design was for what two things to remain together? Will these be rejoined?

11. Even while our culture includes aspects that are accepting, callous, or even "celebratory" of death (examples) this secular worldview is not even consistent. Do we see examples where a strong "will to live" is evident?

When speaking of an existence beyond the one we currently experience, this is often referred to as the “afterlife” and we may use that terminology some in the class due to the familiar understanding of this. However, is this the best term to describe what we are talking about?

At this point take a look at the provided chart that gives a visual way to understand life, death, and eternity.

While physical death is something that everyone will experience (save Enoch, Elijah, and those on earth when Jesus returns), it is not fully an “afterlife” in the strict sense of the word. We can see that after our physical death, there is a continuation rather than simply a “hard break”. Yes, our bodies and souls will be separated at the point of physical death, but only temporarily. As Christians, we actually have eternal life right now. Our souls have been saved on account of what Jesus has done for us and the Holy Spirit has delivered. We will be temporarily separated from our physical bodies for a time, but our living soul does not die as it continues to live in heaven and then at the last day enters with our glorified body into the New Jerusalem (new heaven and earth). On the other side of the spectrum, those without Christ-who stubbornly refuse God’s gift of grace and remain in their sins are already dead (and we all start out this way due to original sin). God, in His mercy, still gives them physical life for a time (and thus time to repent and trust God). However, if they go to the grave in this state they continue in this death and experience the wrath of God upon sin. Their souls will too be reunited with their bodies, but in everlasting death as opposed to everlasting life.

We have established an understanding of how the “afterlife” is a key aspect of God’s plan for the world and reflects His will and character. It is much more than an escape hatch! We know that there are two possible eternal destinations: heaven or hell. In the next lesson we will look more specifically at how one’s eternal destination is determined.

Closing Prayer