

Kaleidoscope

Myth-busting – ‘You will be spending eternity in heaven with Jesus’

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- When I was a young Christian, about 30 years ago, I was taught that the kingdom of God meant one thing and one thing only. It was the place those of us in Christ go to spend eternity with him when we die.
- Jesus hardly ever spoke of going to heaven when we die, because that is not what the Christian hope is about.
- Jesus spoke about this thing called the kingdom of God. There is nothing in the gospels he talked about more. It is mentioned over 100 times in the gospels.
- The "gospel" I was taught back then, and which is believed by the majority of Christians today, is too small. It is not biblical, not Christian, and is not what Jesus was about.
- It is not good news and it short-changes what the Gospel of Jesus really is.

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- So, what is this Gospel, and how have we got it so wrong?
- We don't have time today to go into it all, so by the end of this you might have more questions than answers.
- But let's go into what we can say.

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- From creation in Genesis to new creation in Revelation, there is this theme throughout the Bible of God one day renewing everything.
- It is about heaven coming here.
- One day a messiah would come.
- The New Testament reveals that person as Jesus who said the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of God is the reign of God.
- The great Christian hope - the Gospel - is that God is in the process of renewing the whole of creation and will one day complete that renewal when Jesus returns and heaven and earth are joined in wonderful union at the end of all things.
- It is at this time that those in Christ will be transformed into the likeness of

Christ, but much more than that, the rest of creation will also be renewed.

- It will be a time when there will be no more tears, no more pain and no more death because the old order of things will have passed away (Revelation 21)
- Renewal is what the human heart longs for, not a disembodied place up in the sky where we go and escape from the big bad world.

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How did we get here?

- The "gospel" most of us have been taught – separation of soul and body - has more in common with Greek thinking than with what we see in the Bible.
- N.T. Wright says that Greek-speaking Christians influenced by Plato saw the material world as deceitful and something which had to be escaped from. The idea was that we are basically souls trapped in skin and bones.
- But this is not what the New Testament teaches.
- The New Testament is very Jewish, and the Jewish conviction was that the people of God would be bodily resurrected at the end of history. Then Jesus was bodily resurrected and the first Christians realised that he was the forerunner of what would one day happen to the rest of us.
- It is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that we see the Good News. In Jesus, the kingdom of God, the reign of God, has come to earth.

Why is this important?

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- The reason this is so important is because of its profound implications for mission.
- If the Gospel is really about going to heaven when we die, then evangelism – the effort to help as many people as possible get there – will be paramount.
- But if the Gospel is actually much bigger than that; if it is actually the other way 'round – about heaven coming here, as Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer, then that changes everything.

- It means this world matters and it means working for the anticipation of the new world that Jesus is bringing.
- It means the alleviation of poverty is a Gospel issue, that care for the environment is a Gospel issue, and that works of justice are central to the Gospel, not an optional add-on.
- It means that the kingdom of God is a kingdom in which the poor and outcast are lifted up, where the last are first and the first are last (Matthew 20:16).
- It is a kingdom in which the love and peace of Christ come to rule over all of existence. And it has already started.
- This is the Good News which needs to be the subject of our evangelism.
- If our eternal destiny in a disembodied place in the sky is what really matters, then we won't worry about the poor or the environment because those things are passing away.
- But if Jesus is in the process of making everything new, then to ignore the poor and the environment is to ignore the heart of God.

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- Our eternal destiny is not "up in heaven" when we die.
- Our eternal destiny is right here, on a renewed, physical earth, in our renewed, physical body.
- One day it will be a reality, in that wonderful day when Jesus will complete all things, when death will be no more and the old order of things will have gone forever.
- That is the great Christian hope.

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