

What If Jesus Was Serious...About Justice?

Week 8 ~ Chapters 46-51

Chapter 46 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then Finite Sins Cannot Be Punished With Infinite Torture

The main thrust of this chapter is that true justice needs to be proportional and impartial. God operates this way as an outflow of His character and as His image-bearers we ought to as well. Additionally, as we imagine what ultimate judgement (God putting everything right) will look like, we want to make sure our ideas are grounded in Scripture rather than tradition.

- *How has judgment and/or hell been a motivating factor for you? (A little, a lot, not at all?) And how has your conception of God been affected by that?*
- *Some traditions, unfortunately, feel the need to use hell as a motivator for spreading the gospel. What should our motivation be for sharing the gospel? What's your motivation for sharing the gospel? How motivated are you?*

Chapter 47 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then The Price He Paid On The Cross Was Death, Not Eternal Torture

- *"Jesus Paid It All"...what does that mean? (Paid what? And why?)*
- *In this chapter Skye gets into some technical doctrine/theology. How important do you think it is for us to understand this stuff? And why?*
- *You and I had a debt that we could not pay. (Well, we could pay it...it's just that the payment is death.) But that debt has been paid by Jesus on our behalf. How does that motivate, guide and direct you?*

Chapter 48 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then The Wicked Will Face Death And Will Pay For Their Sins

In this final section of the book (chapters 39-51) Skye seems intent on addressing and correcting two primary misconceptions...

- Eternal life, heaven, whatever you prefer to call it, isn't an automatic eventuality for everyone.
- Hell, as commonly conceived (eternal consciousness torment), isn't a Biblical idea.

His primary argument against both is two-fold: neither is scripturally founded; neither does justice to God's justice (please forgive the pun).

- *Which of these misconceptions have you been most exposed to and affected by? (Or, do you even agree that they are misconceptions?)*

- *In light of our desire to align ourselves with what is good, right, and just (as defined by God, not us) how important is it to have a handle on what Skye has been discussing in this final section of the book? And why?*

Chapter 49 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then His Parable About Lazarus And The Rich Man Isn't About Hell

Skye makes a solid case in this chapter for why the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (see Luke 16) isn't to be used to construct our understanding or doctrine/theology of "hell". Rather, this parable is in line with the rich Biblical tradition of warning about, "...*the dangerous idolatry of money and the foolishness of loving wealth more than God or the poor.*" (page 234) Just a few verses prior to the parable we read, "*You cannot serve both God and Money.*" (Luke 16:13)

Our wealth, be it a little or a lot, and our use of the resources at our disposal (financial or otherwise) are big (perhaps the biggest) factors in our participation in justice or our complicity with injustice. How we use money says a lot about what we think about God, about people (particularly the poor and needy), and about life...specifically what we believe makes for a "good life".

So while the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus may not be specifically about hell, it is very much about justice.

- *How would you describe your relationship with the poor? How would you describe your relationship with money?*
- *How can you/we participate in the work of justice with the money we are entrusted with? (Please note that I said "entrusted with", not "our money"...as we are stewards, not owners.)*

Chapter 50 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then The Lake Of Fire In Revelation Is About Destruction

The book of the Bible that probably produces the most confusion and misunderstanding is the book of Revelation. (Please note, it's not plural.) A major reason it's such a challenging book to understand is because it's a genre of literature we are not accustomed to reading. It's apocalyptic literature. (Apocalypse/Apocalyptic means disclosing, unveiling, revealing...hence the name "Revelation".) Such literature is filled with symbolic language and numbers, visions and dreams. The book of Revelation, specifically, requires a good understanding of the Old Testament (or expects its readers to have a good knowledge of the Old Testament) because it refers back to it a lot.

It occurs to me that I haven't really referenced our friends at the Bible Project for this series. I'm sure you've missed them...so I will rectify that now. Here are a couple links to their overview of Revelation. It will give you a good framework to understand a hard-to-understand book.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/revelation-1-11/>
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/revelation-12-22/>

So why is Skye bringing up the book of Revelation as he prepares to close out his book? Well, for God's justice to ultimately prevail, something needs to be done with wickedness. Revelation, in very dramatic fashion, describes that ultimate end. (Though I would hasten to say that Revelation isn't nearly as future-oriented/end times prophecy as many people tend to think. Again, I recommend the Bible Project videos above.)

- *How familiar are you with the Book of Revelation? (Please note, it's not plural.) Is it a book you tend to gravitate toward or away from? And why is that?*
- *What did you learn from the Bible Project videos that you didn't know before? Or, what new insight/perspective did the videos offer you?*
- *What do you think of the case Skye is making in these past few chapters of the book?*

Chapter 51 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then His Mission Is Accomplished Through Joy, Not Fear

As you know, this year's theme for CUMC is Joy and Justice. Joy and Justice are good words to describe the Kingdom of God and should be what people see when they encounter Christians and the Church (the community of Christ followers).

Perhaps my favorite description of joy is that it's what we experience when others are happy to see us and be around us. I imagine that everyone who interacted with Jesus got the sense that He was happy to see them and happy to be around them. Friends, this is God's disposition toward us. As image bearers of God, as followers of Jesus, this ought to be our disposition toward others as well. But it first takes truly believing that's how God feels about us and having experienced it first hand.

- *What motivated you to become a Christian/follow Jesus? What motivates you to participate in Christ's mission? (How would you articulate that mission?)*
- *What has your experience of joy been like lately? How are you/we cultivating joy?*
- *How are you/we participating in and contributing to justice?*
- *In your own words, what's the connection between Joy and Justice? (FYI...the next book/series we're going to be embarking upon also connects these two ideas...it's like we plan this stuff 😊)*

***P.S. In this final section of the book Skye spends a fair amount of time discussing various views of the afterlife. That reminds me of a really good book that you might enjoy and find interesting...C.S. Lewis' classic book, *The Great Divorce*. It's a novel, a fictitious story, so don't make doctrine out of it, but allow it to exercise your imagination.

Soul Training Exercise ~ Reflecting on Justice & Extending Joy

This week's invitation is two-fold. First, spend some time this week remembering and reflecting upon how you were disciplined growing up. When you messed up, how did your parents deal with it? What sort of consequences did you face? What lessons did you learn? Was it punitive or restorative? etc. How our parents disciplined us was our early taste of justice. Regardless if it was done well or not, it was an experience of justice. Thus, it's worth reflecting (prayerfully) upon it.

Second, playing off the description of joy being what we experience when others are happy to see us and be around us, who can you extend joy to? As you encounter various people this week, how can you express to them that you are happy to see them, happy to be around them, happy that they exist? Let's practice being the type of people who others experience joy from.

Read & Reflect on... (these are the scriptural passages Skye has at the end of each chapter)

- Leviticus 24:17-22
- Deuteronomy 1:15-18
- Romans 5:6-11
- I Peter 2:21-25
- I Corinthians 3:12-15
- II Thessalonians 1:5-10
- Luke 16:13-31
- I Corinthians 15:20-28
- Revelation 20:10-15
- Acts 10:34-43
- Revelation 22:1-5