

Title: Love can only win when truth does not lose
Text: Mark 14.53-72
Theme: Accepting the entire truth about Christ
Occasion: Mark pm series and review of book "Love Wins"

Read Text:

Tonight, I am going to illustrate the big idea of this text by addressing a contemporary example. In our study of this gospel, we have seen over and over how Mark has labored to present to us a full and accurate picture of Christ. Two themes have been woven together. Two portraits have been merged into one person. He is Majesty and He is Mercy. He is King and He is Servant. This Son of Man, came, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many (10.45)

As we have witnessed, this did not sit well with his audience. This Son of Man revealed that they had a problem that they could not solve and they did not want to hear that. So, even though he gave clear, compelling, undeniable evidence that he was indeed the Christ, (Messiah), he was not the Christ they wanted. So, they plotted to get rid of him. They wanted a King, but they wanted a King on their terms. This King was too demanding. This narrative section has two dramatic moments. The one is public and powerful, the other is private and personal. In the first, Christ answers the question of his identity by saying, "I AM...(62). The critics feign astonishment, but inwardly are delighted because their attempts of conviction were falling apart. Now, they have the evidence that they need. He claimed to be God! And of course, we can't have that. This is the formal charge over which Christ is crucified. He is not who they think. The scene then shifts to Peter. A servant girl thinks that she recognizes him. Isn't he with that Nazarene, that Jesus guy? He assures her that he is not and you know the rest of that betrayal.

When the truth about Christ is clearly presented, it is a tough message with serious implications. Most will not accept it. Peter quickly sized up what was happening and counted the cost of being identified with one who was being so thoroughly rejected and decided that he did not want to be known as a follower of one who caused so much discomfort. The message of Christ is not inclusive. It is exclusive. His way is not a way, it is the way and what is more, the way is a narrow way, that few will travel. Following Christ puts you in the minority.

I recognize that, that is tough. I was asked by a friend, (who, by the way is not yet a follower of Christ, with whom I have shared the gospel over and over, but who is hung-up on the fact that Christ is the only way, but he cannot come up with any other means by which our sin can be forgiven) who said to me, "you mean to tell me, that every single person who does not believe in Christ, is going to hell?" I knew that in that moment, he was asking me about family members of his. I was at a funeral home for the family member of a family in our church. The person who died demonstrated no evidences of grace, no profession of faith in Christ, but whose life was essentially a selfish, train-wreck. When his daughter, whom I have never met

was informed that I was a pastor, she approached me and said, in despair, “tell me, my daddy is in heaven.”

In that moment, I wanted her to feel better. I wanted to say something that would relieve her, fact is, my own self-centered heart would have loved for me to have been her hero. But, I have no authority to make such pronouncements beyond what God has revealed. You and I have no right to alter what He has said, even if what He has said makes people uncomfortable or upset.

As Mark Twain famously said, (paraphrase) I am not bothered by the things in the Bible that I don't understand. I am bothered by the things in the Bible that I do understand.

This is not a new problem. For centuries, people have been attempting to rewrite, re-interpret, and re-invent God, Jesus, the gospel into something that is not embarrassing. Not so exclusive.

In the summer of 2008, I did a 4-week series entitled, “Post-modernism goes to church.” The series was actually a review of Rob Bell's book “Love Wins” long before he wrote it. On Friday afternoon, I threw those notes at Jan, who quickly printed them as about a 50-page booklet. It is not yet masterfully edited. It is available because the information communicated will help you understand “how we have arrived” at this point.

Post-modern Christianity reacts to the exclusive nature of the gospel by saying that it is arrogant to claim that your way is the only way. After all, God is found in all sorts of ways. When you boil it all down, you are basically left with this. Arrogance is being certain of truth and humility is being uncertain of everything except that you are certain that you can't be certain, (which itself is a certainty, and hence a bit presumptuous, and dare I say – arrogant?)

The sad state of post-modern Christianity actually undermines the very characteristic of humility they claim that is so needed. Without a proper understanding of the just and righteous wrath of God (which post-modernism has no room for, nor taste for) then the doctrine of the atonement will be redefined, rejected or ignored.

In their book, [The Lost Message of Jesus](#), Steve Chalke and Alan Mann wrote:

The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse – a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offense he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement: “God is love.” If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your

enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil.

Here the triumph of God's love over God's wrath in the death of His beloved Son is blasphemed. Here, the love of God is cheapened, and the wrath of God is wiped out, and the ground for our true humility is taken away. Without orthodoxy, there is no true basis for authentic humility.

This recently released book, "Love Wins" is simply another attempt, in a long line of attempts to revise the gospel, and to present a Jesus who is different than the real Jesus. The problem has always been with these projects is that when you attempt to revise the gospel you end up losing the gospel. (Paraphrase of Mark Dever) Which is why I am compelled to speak out about this to you.

In a few weeks, we will be approaching the Easter season. Predictably, Time magazine or another periodical will seek to do a provocative cover story on who the real Jesus was. They will interview Bible-denying, gospel-trashing liberals whose bias is so evident, that their opinion does not even merit a response by me, because you, my beloved flock do not get your theology from Time magazine. I do not respond to every article, book, journal submission, because quite frankly, it is not in your world and does not need an answer. So, why am I doing this review? Many of you, have viewed Rob Bell as being "one of us." You have been influenced by his church, by his writings, and by his videos. Not only that, but Christianity in this country has an enormous amount of adoration for him. He is very influential. This book is not a minor submission to the conversation of faith, it is having a major impact, one I trust will result in greater clarity of the gospel, but not because you are going to find it on the pages of the book.

Because of how pervasive this is, not just by means of the book but because it illustrates issues that I have warned about before, I believe that it would be irresponsible of me not to address this. These types of presentations are easily misunderstood. My goal is not to convince you that Rob Bell is the devil and that we are all self-righteous saints because we don't like him. My goal is to inform you of what he believes, and to examine that in light of Scripture and to bring clarity to the issues, because, if you read his book, he is anything but clear. Fact is, he has a difficult time speaking with clarity. (MSNBC interview)

Overview

1. The book is, in my opinion, embarrassing.

I expected more. It is intellectually shallow, and the fact that so many have praise for it does not speak well for the theological condition, or even the logical condition of the writer and audience. Honestly, I got to the end of it, and I thought, "Is this it? Is this all you've got to say, to offer, to propose, to defend?" It is not robust or meaty.

2. The book deals with some serious issues in a flippant manner.

He deals with weighty issues at times in a trivial and dismissive manner. For example, in chapter 3 when he writes on his view of hell, he is explaining that one of the words for hell is the word "Gehenna" which, in Jesus's day was the city dump. He writes, "*Gehenna was an actual place that Jesus' listeners would have been familiar with. So the next time someone asks you if you believe in an actual hell, you can always say, 'Yes, I do believe that my garbage goes somewhere. . .'*" (79) (I did not leave out any words, that is how ended that statement)

3. Muddled Reasoning

His arguments are hopelessly inconsistent, so by the time you get to the end of the book it is actually a bit challenging to say exactly what he believes with any certainty because he affirms things and denies things all at the same time.

Does he believe in hell? Yes, but hell to him is "*the town garbage pile*" (80) He also believes that hell is what some experience on earth. He relates the story of seeing victims of genocide and abuse, some of whom were maimed. He says, "*Do I believe in a literal hell? Of course. Those aren't metaphorical missing arms and legs.*" (82)

In the same section he says, "*God gives us what we want, and if that's hell, we can have it. We have that kind of freedom, that kind of choice. We are that free.*" (83) Later on he writes, "*Love demands freedom. It always has, and it always will. We are free to resist, reject, and rebel against God's ways for us. We can have all the hell we want.*" (124)

4. Straw-man arguments that tend to be emotionally loaded

There are bad examples of people who call themselves Christians. There are jerks, and worse, people who have claimed that God told them to kill another person. There are tragic abuses in history from the crusades even to Nazi Germany that wrapped wholesale slaughter in religious terms. We would acknowledge that and speak out against that. That is atrocious. He relates the account of a person in his church who invited a Muslim to a service, who said that he had no interest in going to her Christian church because in his village in eastern Europe, Christians rounded up the Muslims and herded them into a building, where they opened fire on them with machine guns and killed them all. That is a Jesus that this man rejected. And, that is a version of Christianity that should be rejected because it is wrong. His argument is, how can you blame a guy like that for rejecting that kind of Jesus? Will that man be judged forever because he rejected that? How fair is that?

"Well, yea," we would be inclined to respond. But, the judgment of God is not based on whether or not we rejected caricatures, but whether or not we rejected the real One.

This is a pattern. He reacts against some notoriously bad examples, but uses that as a reason to throw the gospel overboard.

5. Hermeneutically flawed.

His interpretation of some key passages is horrendous. It is so evident that he brings to the text a pre-conceived view of who God is and then appeals to the passages that support that view, or distorts some that would not support it.

6. Raises questions but does not satisfactorily answer them.

The subtitle is a classic example of this: "A book about heaven, hell and the fate of every person who ever lived." Is that not a definitive statement? This is what he has promised, but when you read it, he says, "*Those are questions, or more accurately, those are tensions we are free to leave fully intact. We don't need to resolve them or answer them because we can't, and so we simply respect them, creating space for the freedom that love requires.*" (126)

Fine, if you don't think that you can answer them. But, don't claim that your book is about the fate of every person who ever lived. That is dishonest.

This is what some people say makes them "authentic." "I am not afraid to raise the questions that other people are not willing to talk about, because Jesus can handle the debate. Jesus can handle the questions. God is big enough for that. The river of Christianity is wide enough for everyone to splash around in." The entire premise is a false either/or. Of course God can handle the questions, the problem is, post-modern Christianity cannot handle the answers and because of that this brand of Christianity forfeits the right to call itself Christian.

I may authentically question the doctrine of hell. I may authentically reject the exclusive nature of the gospel, but the fact that I genuinely reject those things does not make my genuine rejection, genuine truth.

7. MAN-centered and God-dethroned.

This comes from chapter 4 "Does God get what God wants?" Because God is so loving, God gives us freedom to choose and God will never violate that freedom. If you want to live apart from him, he will respect that. But, he leaves you with the sense that you can only hold out against God so long. "*Can God bring proper, lasting justice, banishing certain actions – and the people who do them- from the new creation while at the same time allowing and waiting and hoping for the possibility of the reconciliation of those very same people? Keeping the gates, in essence, open? Will everyone eventually be reconciled to God or will there be those who cling to their version of their story, insisting on their right to be their own little god ruling their own little miserable kingdom? Will everybody be saved, or will some perish apart from God forever because of their choices? Those are questions, or more accurately, those are*

tensions we are free to leave fully intact. We don't need to resolve them or answer them because we can't, and so we simply respect them, creating space for the freedom that love requires." (126)

So much for being willing to tackle the tough questions. He likes to ask questions, but consistently steps back from the plate when the hardball is thrown to him.

7. In chapter 7, Rob Bell denies propitiation.

In denying propitiation, he denies the gospel and turns it into something else. He is basically offended at the notion that God would punish His Son for our sins. So, he takes a more soft view of the cross that says that Christ achieved victory at the cross, (which he did) but not propitiation.

In general, this book is an apology to all people all over the world who are offended, put off or disinterested in Christianity because Christians have insisted that faith in Christ is the only way to God. The defense (apologetic) for his view is heavy on emotion, and absolutely anorexic on theology.

Here is where a little history is helpful.

History

We live in a time when the prevailing system of belief is heavily influenced by post-modernism.

Modernism for the most part was characterized by man's incredible confidence in himself to accomplish anything, including world peace, prosperity, health and all sorts of societal advancements. Modernism brought us evolution, we did not need God, we had ourselves, and we could accomplish anything that we wanted to. But, the reason that modernism did not carry the day, was because our scientific advancements brought us 2 world wars, extermination camps, concentration camps, and nuclear bombs. Genocide, and Russian gulags were horrific examples of what we could become. That is why 1945 is basically the date when the world began to realize that man does not have such great potential. Mankind can be a monster. Modernism was characterized by potential; post-modernism is characterized by skepticism.

Post-modernity (1945 - ?)

Philosophically, Post-modernism is the belief that we create our own realities within our own languages. There is a real world that exists, but we cannot get outside of our languages to know it. Therefore, there are no universal truths that we may objectively know. Truth is a relative concept and is temporarily constructed and defined within each group, but there is no absolute definition of truth. There is no essence or nature to language. There are only many languages. Meaning is not a

matter of what a person meant by a statement, but is just a matter of how those words are used within a social setting or community and how they are viewed by those people at that time, in that place, but are open to being viewed differently by other people in another place at another time.

Ok, that sounds pretty aloof. But the way that comes out in high school, college and work is this: “You have your truth, I have my truth. You have what works for you – good for you. I have what works for me – good for me. Your truth is fine as long as it does not condemn my truth. If you think that your truth condemns my truth, then you are arrogant and presumptive.”

After all, we are all trapped within our own constructs. We cannot get outside of our worlds to know if there is real truth or not, so we cannot make any value statements or any judgments about anything else. By the way, a quick word on that. Jesus chastised the Pharisees because they did a lousy job of interpreting the Bible. They were expected to be able to understand and interpret the message of the Bible (John 5.39-40). Christ is the One of whom the message is about – and they missed it and he was calling them out on it. He did not say that they were unable to figure this out because they were in their own little social construct using words that only had meaning to them based on how they were using them and that they were not expected be able to get out of their construct and enter into the construct of the prophets who also used words in their cultural context that no one else could interpret with certainty.

The emergent church movement is based on post-modernism. Philosophically, Post-modernism is the belief that we create our own realities within our own language groups. For some, (particularly those who claim to be Post-modern Christians) they claim that there is a real world that exists where there is objective truth, but we cannot get outside of our languages to know it. Therefore, in our practical day to day lives, there are no universal truths that we may objectively know. Truth is a relative concept and is temporarily constructed and defined within each group, but there is no absolute definition of truth that stands as the rule over all. There is no essence or nature to language. There are only many languages. Meaning is not a matter of what a person meant by a statement, but is just a matter of how those words are used within a social setting or community and how they are viewed by those people at that time, in that place, but are open to being viewed differently by other people in another place at another time.

There are no absolutes, no convictions, no boundaries, just talk, feeling, talk, exploring, but no arriving, journey with no destination and a lot of talk about kingdom, but no concrete understanding of the king. Emergents love talk about the mystery of God, but not the truth of God.

The church has to have doctrinal and practical walls. But, inside is a playground for joy in the gospel. What is a playground without walls? It is a haven for child-molesters.

That brings us to this book. It is an example of post-modernism attempting to talk about important issues. It raises them, but cannot answer them because that would be arrogant. It takes words that we are familiar with and gives them different meanings. This is the case with love, hell, gospel and even Jesus. In the end, this book is nothing short of a denial of the plain meaning of Scripture, the heart of the gospel and the true person and work of Christ.

Analysis

In the preface he writes, *“There are a growing number of us who have become acutely aware that Jesus’ story has been hijacked by a number of other stories, stories Jesus isn’t interested in telling, because they have nothing to do with what he came to do. The plot has been lost, and it’s time to reclaim it. I’ve written this book for all those, everywhere, who have heard some version of the Jesus story that caused their pulse to rise, their stomach to churn, and their heart to utter those resolute words, ‘I would never be part of that.’”* Now, if what he means is that the story has been hijacked by people who are liberals who deny the deity of Christ, or who are hate-mongers, who use verses to justify their viciousness, then we would agree. But he goes on a few sentences later and says, *“A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. It’s been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus’ message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear.”* (6)

The implication is undeniably clear. If you believe in the doctrine of hell, then you have embraced a misguided, toxic and subversive message that distorts not only the real message of Jesus, but the message that our world needs.

He then states that he has *“written this book because the kind of faith Jesus invites us into doesn’t skirt the big questions about topics like God and Jesus and salvation and judgment and heaven and hell, but takes us deep into the heart of them.”* (6)

He goes on to say that in many places people aren’t allowed to ask questions and debate these things, so, he is. He admits that he isn’t saying anything new that hasn’t already been proposed in the history of the church. However, he acts like what he is proposing is part of the *“historic, orthodox Christian faith.”* (8) Which it is not.

Chapter 1 starts with the story of an art show that they had at his church. One of the pieces included a quote from Mahatma Gandhi. Someone attached a piece of paper to the artwork that said, “Reality check: He’s in hell.”

Rob takes offense at this and questions on what authority could this person have

made this claim. This is his launching pad into the issue of is there a heaven and is there a hell and who goes to which. *“Has God created millions of people over tens of thousands of years who are going to spend eternity in anguish? Can God do this, or even allow this, and still be a loving God?”* (11) The rest of the chapter is basically question after question, inserted by stories that leave the reader to conclude that if trusting in Christ was only way to heaven and you had to hear that, know that, and believe that in order to get there, then that is horribly unfair and very unloving. Therefore, no wonder the world hates Christianity. Our message is awful. He then attempts to create confusion in what it means to follow Christ. He takes passages that speak about what it means to be a follower of Christ and goes on to confuse the root of belief with the fruit of belief.

“Is it what you say, or who you are, or what you do, or what you say you’re going to do, or who your friends are, or who you’re married to, or whether you give birth to children? Or is it what questions you’re asked? Or is what questions you ask in return? Or is it whether you do what you’re told and go into the city?... But maybe all of these questions are missing the point. Let’s set aside all of the saying and doing and being and cutting holes in roofs and assume its more simple than that. As some would say, ‘Just believe.’” He then gives a few more stories from the Bible that speak to this issue from which he raises more questions and never comes to any conclusion. But then at the end of the chapter says, *“But this isn’t just a book of questions. It’s a book of responses to these questions.”* I find this insightful, because he does not say answers, because he never answers the questions that he raises. He just throws them out there.

By the way, he takes issue with the phrase, “personal relationship” with God and notes that no where is that in the Bible. That is true, but why did people start to use that phrase? Because the liberals redefined all of the ones that used to be used and so new ones had to found. Granted, the phrase can be problematic, but many of the doctrines that have been associated with people’s use of it were not.

Chapter 2 is his take on heaven and how you get there.

He sets up a painting (that was in his Grandma’s home) as the accepted view of heaven and points out the flaws. Giant crosses do not hang suspended in the air, cities do not float, if you tripped and fell of the cross you would not free fall indefinitely down into an abyss of giant red caves and hissing steam. Clearly, this is, to Rob, an awful picture.

Now, remember how chapter 1 began? There was an art show at his church. What I did not tell you is that he had given a series of teachings on peacemaking and invited artists to display their works that reflected their understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker. So, he defends art that celebrates Gandhi, and is offended by a painting that depicts the cross as the only means to heaven. I only point that out because it really captures the spirit of his thinking. He is very quick to be critical of that which speaks to the exclusivity of the gospel and he is very quick to be open-

minded to all other beliefs and opinions believing that God is present in the dialogue and enjoying the debate.

The second chapter hinges upon the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. When asked what he must do to get eternal life, Jesus did not explain the gospel to the man, did not invite him *to confess, repent, trust, accept and believe that Jesus has made a way for him to have a relationship with God. Like any good Christian would. Jesus, however, doesn't do any of that.*" (63)

In other words, if the way to get to heaven is the way that we have been claiming, then how come Jesus didn't follow our plan of salvation when he had the perfect opportunity? *"Shouldn't Jesus have given a clear answer to the man's obvious desire to know how to go to heaven when he dies?"* Actually, that is exactly what Christ did. He had just spoken about the necessity to come like a child in order to be part of the kingdom, and now says that it is very hard for rich people to come like a child because they are so tempted to trust in their stuff. By pointing out to the man that God is the only who is good (and since the man had called Jesus good), Jesus was asking him if he really knew and believed what he had just said, because if he did that is called – confession. He then pointed out the man's idols – his money. He was calling the man to repent. When the man refused to repent the conversation ended. The man went away.

The rest of the chapter is attempting to remove the idea that heaven is out there, but is instead here. Now, there is certainly some truth to that, but the way he frames it, is that out there does not really matter, it only matters what is going on here. His argument is that Christians claim they are ready for the heaven that is out there, so they don't care about the hell that is going on here. What kind of a faith is that?

"A proper view of heaven leads not to escape from the world, but to full engagement with it, all with the anticipation of a coming day when things are on earth as they currently are in heaven." (56)

There is clearly some truth to that. But he is over-reaching. To the Christian being tortured in a Chinese or Middle East prison for the cause of Christ, for the believer suffering from the ravaging effects of cancer, a proper view of heaven does lead to escaping this present world. It is not either or, but both and.

There are a number of things that he says here that are corrective to some of the misconceptions of the eternal state. The problem is, he does not do systematic theology very well so, it comes out rather confusing.

In his conclusion he writes, *"Jesus invites us, in this life, in this broken, beautiful world, to experience the life of heaven now. He insisted over and over that God's peace, joy, and love are currently available to us, **exactly as we are.**"* (72)

How do you reconcile that with 1 Cor. 15.50? How do you reconcile that with

Romans 3.9-20?

So, there is heaven now and somewhere else, here and sometime else, and the invitation of Jesus to heaven here and now, in this moment and in this place. Again, his failure to articulate a clear definition of the kingdom of God and obviously the gospel of the kingdom leaves him with a very artsy, fuzzy, heaven that will be very uncomfortable for Wall Street bankers and republicans.

Chapter 3 is his chapter on hell.

He takes on the phrase “turn or burn” by saying, *“fury, wrath, torment, judgment, eternal agony, endless anguish. Hell. That’s all part of the story, right? Trust God, accept Jesus, confess, repent, and everything will go well for you. But if you don’t, well, the Bible is quite clear... Sin, refuse to repent, harden your heart, reject Jesus, and when you die, it’s over. Or actually, the torture and anguish and eternal torment will have just begun.*

That’s how it is – because that’s what God is like, correct? God is loving and kind and full of grace and mercy – unless there isn’t confession and repentance and salvation in this lifetime, at which point God punishes forever. That’s the Christian story, right? Is that what Jesus taught?” (74-75)

For the rest of the chapter he challenges the biblical and traditional view of hell. He mentions the references to hell in Mt.5, 10, Luke 12, Mt. 18 and Mk.9. He dismisses them all as simply references to *“the town garbage pile.”* (80) And then, what does he do with them? - Nothing!

This is not a careful study of the Scriptures on this issue. A careful study reveals that if you are dismissive of hell, then you have to be dismissive of the teaching of Christ. They stand and fall together. If you deny the eternity of hell, you deny the eternity of heaven (eternal state). They stand or fall together - Mt. 25.46

He tells of heart-wrenching grief from places like Rwanda. He speaks of horrible things that people do and says that hell and sin are good words because people do cruel things.

“And that’s what we find in Jesus’ teaching about hell-a volatile mixture of images, pictures and metaphors that describe the very real experiences and consequences of rejecting our God-given goodness and humanity.” I.e. hell is here. It’s only imagery language to describe the pain that people are in, like the pain of a wife who just found out that her husband was unfaithful. *“Gouging out his eye may actually have been a better choice.”* (Than the pain that he inflicted on others) (84)

He refers to the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus that Christ told in Luke 16 (85). Earlier (80) he referred to it as a parable. If you take it as a parable (which I am not entirely convinced that it is) then any 1st year Bible college student knows

that parables are given to punch home a surprise message. The details are not to be pressed into specific meanings. He uses this account as an example of people in hell can communicate with people in bliss. And the story ends with Jesus saying something about resurrection.

He goes on to say (86) *“Whatever the meaning was for Jesus’ first listeners, it was directly related to what he was doing right there in their midst.”* In other words, it has nothing to do with a literal hell or something that happens after this life, it was a story *“for them”* that *“moves from then to now.”*

“The chasm is the rich man’s heart.” No it isn’t!

Here is a classic statement on the social gospel (86)

“The gospel Jesus spreads in the book of Luke has as one of its main themes that Jesus brings a social revolution, in which the previous systems and hierarchies of clean and unclean, sinner and saved, and up and down don’t mean what they used to. God is doing a new work through Jesus, calling all people to human solidarity. Everybody is a brother, a sister. Equals, children of the God who shows no favoritism.”

This rich guy was rich and was not nice to poor people. So, *“he’s in Hades, but he still hasn’t died the kind of death that actually brings life.”* (88)

His conclusion is that Luke 16 is *“a nuanced, shocking story about rich man and a poor man”* (p.88) designed to show that it really is bad to fail to love your neighbor.

Over and over he contrasts the people who are concerned about systemic, corporate and social evil and those who are just concerned about personal evil. He is dismissive of the latter and exults the former. (89)

“Many people in our world have only heard hell talked about as the place reserved for those who are ‘out’, who don’t believe, who haven’t ‘joined the church.’ Christians talking about people who aren’t Christians going to hell when they die because they aren’t ... Christians. People who don’t believe the right things.” (93)

I think that was the point of John’s gospel - that you would believe the right things (Jn. 20.31)

He then moves into his view that there are chances to turn around after this life is over. He misuses Ezekiel 16, which speaks of the restoration of the nation of Judah and the restoration of other nations and cities (even Sodom) as proof that the people who died in Sodom will be restored. That is not the point. (Jude 7)

He goes to say that, *“judgment has a point, and consequences are for correction.”* (100)

He confuses church discipline with the finality of hell (100 and following)

Turn to Matthew 25. (note verse 41 and 46). He ignores 41 and basis his view on hell on v.46 (eternal punishment - aion (eternal) - he takes as an time of intense experience - not eternity; (punishment) kolazo - he says is a term from horticulture that "refers to the pruning and trimming of the branches of a plant so it can flourish." (different word than John 15.2) kolazo does not ever mean pruning for flourishing. It is only a word for punishment. There is no question as to what this means. He gives it a definition that it never had.

"In a good number of English translations of the Bible, the phrase "aion of kolazo" gets translated as 'eternal punishment,' which many read to mean "punishment forever," as in never going to end. But 'forever' is not really a category the biblical writers used." (103)

This is really astounding. Out of the 7 different translations that I own, no one translates it as he has. His view is linguistically unsupportable. It is also very deviant to say that this is a category that the biblical writers did not use because these are the words of Christ, and finally, if eternity does not mean forever, then heaven is not forever. (same verse, same word - 25.46)

"To summarize, then, we need a loaded, volatile, adequately violent, dramatic, serious word to describe the very real consequences we experience when we reject the good and true and beautiful life that God has for us. We need a word that refers to the big, wide, terrible evil that come from the secrets hidden deep within our hearts all the way to the massive, society-wide collapse and chaos that comes when we fail to live in God's world God's way. And for that, the word 'hell' works quite well. Let's keep it." (104)

Chapter 4 - Does God get what God wants

Essentially this chapter ignores the justice of God and speaks of God as being all loving and all powerful. The very tension that he cannot explain when pressed as he was in the MSNBC interview. The question that he is attempting to answer is: How can an all powerful God want all people be saved and it not happen?

He totally ignores the 10,000 lb. elephant in the room if he takes that approach. How can an all powerful God even allow evil in the first place?

He points out how narrow-minded and unwelcoming it is for churches to believe in the doctrine of eternal hell and challenges them on how can God be powerful, want all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2) and not get what he wants. He demonstrates from the Bible that God is powerful and not helpless and that Jesus teaches that God doesn't give up until everything that was lost is found (112).

"Now back to those church websites, the ones that declare that ultimately billions of people will spend eternity apart from God, while others will be with God in heaven

forever. Is history tragic? Have billions of people been created to spend eternity in conscious punishment and torment, suffering infinitely for the finite sins they committed in the few years they spent on the earth?" (112-113)

Later he speaks about God's ability to save people after death. 2nd chance for salvation. He then goes on to say, why stop there? *"why limit that chance to a one-off immediately after death? ... As long as it takes, in other words. At the heart of this perspective is the belief that, given enough time, everybody will turn to God and find themselves in the joy and peace of God's presence. The love of God will melt every hard heart, and even the most 'depraved sinners' will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God."* (117-118)

He defends this view by saying that there were people in church history who talked about this. The stream of Christianity is wide enough to hold all of these various points of view - even heresy apparently.

The chapter ends with a reference to the final 2 chapters of Revelation that leave us with a picture of the New Jerusalem with gates always open - always ready to receive.

Universalism is all over this and it continues

Chapter 5 - Dying to Live

He speaks of sacrificial rituals in the ancient world and that Jesus fulfilled them all. Really? What about the temple prostitutes? Did Jesus fulfill those too? His reasoning is that all of these were attempts to get to God and because of that they had meaning and value. What do you do with the fact that God commanded Israel to destroy the Canaanites because of their idolatry? What about babies that were sacrificed? This is not political and religious correctness, this is sheer lunacy! (134-135)

He wants to prove that Jesus has reconciled everything. It is already done. He did this by destroying the things that separate us, like death. And here (p. 137-139) he attempts to replace the gospel as the good news of propitiation with the "good news" of victory.

"This is especially crucial in light of how many continue to use the sacrificial metaphor in our modern world. There's nothing wrong with talking and singing about how the "Blood will never lose its power" and "Nothing but the blood will save us." Those are powerful metaphors. But we don't live any longer in a culture in which people offer animal sacrifices to the gods. People did live that way for thousands of years, and there are pockets of primitive cultures around the world that do continue to understand sin, guilt, and atonement in those ways. But most of us don't. What the first Christians did was look around them and put the Jesus story in language their listeners would understand... The point, then isn't to narrow it to one particular metaphor, image, explanation or mechanism. To elevate one over the others, to insist that there's a

'correct' or 'right' one, is to miss the brilliant, creative work these first Christians were doing when they used these images and metaphors. They were reading their world, looking for ways to communicate this epic event in ways their listeners could grasp." (139-140)

His view of salvation is that *"When we say yes to God, when we open ourselves to Jesus's living, giving act on the cross, we enter in to a way of life. He is the source, the strength, the example, and the assurance that this pattern of death and rebirth is the way into the only kind of life that actually sustains and inspires."* (147)

Just say yes to God.

Chapter 6 - There are Rocks Everywhere

Exodus 17 - Moses hit the rock. 1 Cor. 10 - The Rock was Jesus. They didn't know that at the time, just like a lot of people don't know that they are being saved by Jesus. They call it something else. But that's okay, everything is Jesus. It doesn't matter what you believe. There are rocks everywhere. (big idea)

Minor problem: the people who drank the water were saved from physical death for the moment, most of them died in unbelief. The rock did not save them because they never actually trusted in the one that the rock pointed to.

He argues for an open universe, where because God is so big, anything can happen (159).

"As obvious as it is, then, Jesus is bigger than any one religion. He didn't come to start a new religion, and he continually disrupted whatever conventions or systems or establishments that existed in his day. He will always be transcend whatever cages or labels are created to contain and name him, especially the one called "Christianity"." (162)

"He is for all people, and yet he refuses to be co-opted or owned by any one culture. That includes any Christian culture. Any denomination. Any church. Any theological system. We can point to him, name him, follow him, discuss him, honor him, and believe in him - but we cannot claim him to be ours any more than he's anyone else's." (163)

In other words, I can believe any thing I want - and that is Jesus, except that by faith alone in Christ alone is salvation.

(165-6) *John remembers Jesus saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This is as wide and expansive a claim as a person can make. What he doesn't say is how, or when, or in what manner the mechanism functions that gets people to God through him. He doesn't state that those coming to the Father through him will even know that they are coming exclusively through him. He simply claims that whatever God is going in the world to know and*

redeem and love and restore the world is happening through him."

He calls this exclusivity on the other side of inclusivity. It is actually absurdity. Does this mean that the religion of the Pharisees is good? Were they in reality following Jesus when they were crucifying him?

(170-171) *"The last thing we should do is discourage or disregard an honest, authentic encounter with the living Christ. He is the rock, and there is water for the thirsty there, wherever there is. We are not threatened by this, surprised by this, or offended by this. Sometimes people use his name; other times they don't. Some people have so much baggage with regard to the name 'Jesus' that when they encounter the mystery present in all of creation-grace, peace, love, acceptance, healing, forgiveness [tsunami's - I threw that in] the last thing they are inclined to name it is "Jesus"."*

So, take Acts 4.12 and throw it away. Peter was not filled with the Holy Spirit after all - eh?

Chapter 7 - The Good News is Better than That

The good news of how big the heart of God is is better than the old story of God as judge for your sins.

"Hell is being at the party. That's what makes it so hellish. It's not an image of separation, but one of integration." (181)

"Hell is our refusal to trust God's retelling of our story."(182)

Referring to the gospel:

"It begins with the sure and certain truth that we are loved." (183)

It begins with man is loved, not God is righteous.

"We are now invited to live a whole new life without guilt or shame or blame or anxiety. We are going to be fine. of all the conceptions of the divine, of all of the language Jesus could put on the lips of the God character in this story (prodigal son) he tells, that what he has the father say. 'You are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'"(184)

Is this for the guy who raped his daughter while singing hymns? Is this for the guy who maimed children in the Rwanda genocide? Is this for Himmler who masterminded the final solution to deal with the Jewish question in Germany during W.W.II?

The real gospel does not make for good art in his mind. We need something more attractive. You can have all of the cool decor, coffee bars, lighting, trendy facilities, but until you change your message, the world is not going to be very attracted to

your message.

“Let’s be very clear, then: we do not need to be rescued from God. God is the one who rescues us from death, sin, and destruction. God is the rescuer.” (194)

What does he do with Revelation 6.15-17?

Response

1. Grieve for Rob Bell. Pray for Rob Bell. He is blind.

He is a false prophet. He is a heretic. He is telling people like the false prophets in the OT that God is not going to punish, that they are fine. Unless Rob repents, Rob will suffer the very thing that claims does not exist.

2. Warn with long-suffering, humility, deep concern for those who believe this.

If they really believe this, then they are not followers of Christ.

3. Pay careful attention to doctrine.

4. Demand Expository preaching in your church.

Topical preaching imports our views upon the Scriptures. The Evangelical church has had a steady diet of this junk food and no longer even knows who to read the Bible properly. Expository preaching (where the main point of the text is the main point of the sermon) starts with what the Word says, not with what I want to say and how I can find or twist a verse to support it. A generation raised under topical preaching will be ready to accept anything from the speaker as long as his arguments are emotive and subjective. Expository preaching teaches objective truth and illustrates logical thinking.

5. Love Christ, the gospel, and the church. While we must deny what is false, we must embrace, declare and live with joy that which is true.

There is no hope in the cotton candy of Rob Bell. It is sweet but will not save. But the real Jesus does. Romans 3.21-26