

On the End Times

By John Mark Reynolds

Worship leader:

Good morning, we're going to go ahead and get started with worship this morning. You guys can stand up for this first song. There's only a couple of songs, but go ahead and stand up.

[Musical Introduction]

"I Lift My Eyes Up" by Brian Doerksen. "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" by Robert Robinson. "Lord You Have My Heart" by Delirious. "I See the Lord" by Chris Falson.

Dear Lord, I just praise You for this morning, and um just the ability to get up and come here and worship Your name in song. And thank you for Dr. Reynolds this morning who will speak to us, and will You speak through him. And we'll each have a good rest of the day and glorify Your name. In Your name, Amen.

Announcer:

Good morning. A few announcements for you. Operation Christmas Child, if you grabbed one of those boxes, those are due Sunday in SMU, you can turn those in. On Saturday at 6:30 club the Harlica is having a vineyard prayer, praise and worship night. And Mark Williams, who's an ex-gang member, is gonna be giving his testimony. I'm told by Ryan over here that it's gonna be an incredible night. You want to be there at Calvary Chapel, 6:30 on Saturday. Also at the end of this morning, SOS will have a little presentation. It's not- if you need to leave, go ahead and

Reynolds: On the End Times

leave. But they have a three minute presentation at the end. If you want to stay around for that. And tonight, girls' volleyball team is in the final four of the GSAC Championship. They're down at Cal Baptist. Find out details and get yourself down there to support them. All right. Tyler, come on up.

Tyler:

This morning we have Dr. John Mark Reynolds of the Tory Honors Institute. This is his third session out of a four part series speaking on the end times. As much as I like the guy, I got a little be- a little bit honest with you this morning. He was a little bit rude when I arrived to chapel this morning. And I don't think he knew that I was gonna be introducing him. Maybe he should have found out who's gonna be introducing him before he uh, you know, treats other people this way, but he called me a slacker. And I was a little bit behind this morning, slept through the alarm, came a couple minutes late and he called me a slacker. Well, it's kind of interesting because two things happened. Well, one, I wanted to laugh because he's a funny guy. And so I kind of laughed. On the other hand, I wanted to fear the wrath of God because this man is genuinely a man of God that wants to do the will of the Father. So that's what I appreciate about him. He's got the both sides. And here we are. Dr. John Mark Reynolds.

John Mark Reynolds:

Last week, I promised not to identify the Antichrist by building, but now in fact, you know it is, in fact, Tyler so (audience laughing) yeah. Never get into a battle of insults with the person who gets the microphone last is the rule. It's the rule there, you come into this battle with- unarmed Tyler and so.

If you'll turn with me to Revelation the 20th chapter. They asked me in the office what I was speaking on today and I said, "Oh, Hell." And they said, "No, it's not that bad, it's only your third message." And I said, "No, no, I'm speaking on Hell today." So some of you can flee the wrath to come; sliding and gliding takes on a whole new meaning. Revelation the ele- the 20th chapter starting with the 11th verse. "And I, John, saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and Death and Hell delivered up the dead which were in them. And they were judged every man according to their works. And Death and Hell were cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire."

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, Your word is true. And we have Your own word for the existence of Hell. As we contemplate this difficult topic, may we be also filled with the joy of knowing that by Your grace, through faith, we can escape what is our just desert. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The odd thing is speaking in a Biola chapel on the topic of Hell and realizing that it's probably been a very long time since anyone chose that as their theme; probably for pretty good reason. But evangelicals, in their history, almost made a cause out of hellfire and brimstone sermons. It was, after all, in the late Victorian period when the liberal denominations, from which the founders of Biola came forth or attempted to change, that decided that the very idea of Hell was

unacceptable, that a good God would never throw nice American people like we are into a lake of fire. And so evangelicals forcefully stated just the opposite.

But of late, we have learned to mute the sound of our certain trumpet. We have learned to speak more respectfully. It was, after all, in a church in which Biola graduates are very prominently featured that I was told that the use of the word sin was unacceptable, since it was offensive to people who might come to church. I can't imagine what would have happened if I had spoken on Hell. If sin had to be changed to falling short of the mark. In other words, turned into a sort of therapeutic problem. I imagine Hell is a brief unpleasantness in which God is very, very upset with you for an extended length of time.

But no. Hell is real. And we have to deal with it. We have to try to understand why what once was one of our cardinal messages to a society has nearly disappeared from our vocabulary except when we're learning to swear. Now, it may be wondered as we approach Thanksgiving and Christmas, why we would pick such a rotten topic. But I'll remind you that the traditional church has always taken the time of Advent to preach on the cardinal doctrines of judgment and sin, and particularly Hell. Christmas, the time of the first incarnation was not before, Christmas, a time of celebration. That came afterwards, during the twelve days of Christmas, when you got all the weird gifts like Lords A Leaping; and how do you get them under the tree is the great question.

Before the first advent, we prepared our hearts for the coming of the Christ-child by reflecting on the reality of sin and judgment. But this is very rarely done anymore. In fact, cheerfuller and cheerfuller, to make up a word, sermons now precede Christmas because we do not understand

what the first coming entailed; when a holy God, who is holy mighty and holy immortal, emptied Himself of His divine attributes and took on the form of a man and became fully man and dwelt among us. And not only did we not receive Him, but we stuck Him in a stable, and then we crucified Him. The audacity of the human species, who would take the greatest condescension ever done in the history of the world and spit on it, has perhaps been forgotten.

I want to suggest today that the reason we don't take Hell seriously is we don't understand what Hell is. My children love Disneyland. The wonderful thing about having children is that you can keep going to Disneyland. We have four children under the age of 10. My wife assures me that we're not working on another one, but one never knows. And we keep having children, partly so that we can keep riding the rides in fantasy land (audience laughing). Now, the grown up rides you can ride without too much embarrassment. But my third trip on Snow White's scary adventure and people began to look at me in an odd manner. This is why we have a two year old who's sort of prop in order to ride rides I enjoy (audience laughing).

In all of Disneyland, my children, because they've grown up in a theme park, which may work them for the rest of their lives, don't mind fast rides. They don't mind scary rides, but they are petrified of one ride in Disneyland. That fearsome ride called Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. I think it works my children just to bring up riding it. My nine year old, the last time he had a birthday, I suggested that we go ride Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. And he began to scream, "No, I don't want to go to Hell. I don't want to go to Hell." Which is somewhat embarrassing when you're standing in the middle of the happiest place on earth (audience laughing). Who is that weird parent in the Biola

Reynolds: On the End Times

T-shirt? And why is he traumatizing his child? Talking about fitting the stereotypes that we're trying to get rid of. I mean, this is not good.

Now, actually, of course, the hell at the end of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, which steams up Alvie's glasses, which is what I discovered he felt was the worst thing about the ride, is not particularly a scary place. But Alvie and Mary Kate and Ian and soon, Jane, take the idea of hell seriously because they believe it's true. I want to suggest to you today that the theology behind the ride itself, however, is what leads us - yes, there is a theology to Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. That's why you don't want to marry a philosopher. They're always thinking about things like this. That it's actually the theology behind the ride that causes us conceptually not to worry about Hell anymore. Small children may worry about hell, but we grow out of it because what we are taught about it makes no sense whatsoever.

The point of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, which fits most people's theology, sadly, is that Mr. Toad is one wild and crazy guy who breaks a lot of the rules and does bad things with his car, smashes it into a train, and goes to "hell" for his crimes. In other words, hell is a place you go to because you do bad things. Makes sense? And that's the way most of us were taught to think about hell and the way most of our peers think about hell too.

But that's a silly idea! And the late Victorians were right that we might imagine a place like hell for Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin or Pol Pot or David Letterman ever since he stopped being funny (audience laughing). We can't imagine hell for people like we are. After all, if we slide and

Reynolds: On the End Times

glide or steal spoons from the cafeteria, surely God would not damn us to an eternity in a lake of fire. Right? It's disproportional. CUT US A BREAK, God!

And we do know one thing in American culture about God - He's loving and God loves us just the way we are. The truth is, God does not love you just the way you are. He's downright irritated with you, just the way you are, because you see, Hell is not a sort of reward that comes to the end of a life misspent, a punishment; nor is Heaven a pat on the back; it's sort of divine report card that says Well done now, good and faithful servant. You get an A. If that's what Heaven and Hell are all about, then God is unjust! Because you get rewarded way more than anything you've ever done.

I noticed very few people complained about that, by the way. You have very few people questioning the existence of Heaven, even though if you're Mother Teresa, Heaven, an eternity of bliss, and the beatific vision, goodness, truth and beauty itself! What Dante saw as rank after rank of glory forever, is mildly disproportionate. And some of us, for whom our greatest good work is not throwing cold water on our roommate in the morning, need to realize that if we're looking at Heaven as our just desert, we aren't going. But then neither is Hell merely a punishment for all the naughty things you've done. You will go to Hell, short of salvation, through grace, by faith. Not because of merely what you've done, though if you understood what you've done, that would be enough. But because of who you are.

In all the cosmos, human beings are the one creation that we know of other than the angels who have dared to say I AM GOD, I can run my own life! And we have made ourselves unfit to

breathe the air of Heaven. Your problem isn't what you've done. It's who you are. And nothing that you can do can fix that problem any more than an ant can by self will make itself an elephant. You are deeply and permanently flawed. And it may not be your fault. And you may rail against your parents. And if you want to rail against your parent, rail against Adam and Eve, who got us in this mess in the first place.

But you are totally depraved by nature, not merely by action. And so Hell turns out not to be as in Mr. Toad's Wild Ride a sort of punishment, in which case even a Hitler gets more than he deserves. It becomes the only place that you can live if the course of your life has made you a creature unfit for heaven. And so human existence, biblically, can best be thought of as a brief and shining opportunity not to do some good works, but to be transformed, to be changed. If we will not die to who we are in this life and allow God to transform us from within, then we cannot live in Heaven, and are fit only for Hell.

We must be changed. We must be transformed. You see, everybody in the end gets what they want. And if what you want is to be God and you won't say that out loud because you're at Biola and you have good evangelical jargon. But if you want to be responsible for your own salvation and to run your own life and to make your own decisions like I often do; and by your own effort and hard work, just do more and more good things, then God will provide you eternally a place where you can do that, where you can be your own master. And there is only one place in all of God's cosmos where people can say "I am" to the Great I Am. And that is Hell.

Reynolds: On the End Times

You see, your life ultimately hardens you into a pattern that is sealed at your death. You become something that is immortal and unchangeable. And however pious you may be on the outside, if on the inside, you have not received a new heart, if you haven't been transformed, then you have hardened into a creature in rebellion to almighty God. And a God who is love can do NOTHING other than separate Himself from you. Because in the verse we read, before the presence of a perfectly holy God, before perfect beauty, before perfect goodness, even heaven and earth cannot stand; they flee away. And so if He allows you into His Heaven, or the new earth that He is constructing for you to live in, it would be for you a greater hell than Hell, because you will have been hardened into a creature who constantly says "I, I, I" in a city whose builder and maker is God, not you or me.

I once had to work in a screw factory. It gave me meaning to the idea of being screwed on a daily basis. And I thought, what a great job. I will sit and make screws, and that's what I did. I took a little piece of metal, stuck it in a machine and hit a little lever. And I will be able to think and study and contemplate while I make screws. And this is a perfect job because they're paying me a lot of money. Now, there is something discouraging about this job, because when I looked at the people who had been there 50 years, they were sort of hunched over and dried out, and they seemed to be incapable of carrying on a conversation with anyone. You would say hello to them and they would say, "Must make more screws, must make rage, must make machine parts." That was a little worrying. But I thought in my 20 year old arrogance that they simply came without the intellectual resources that I was bringing to the task.

And so I put on the earphones and I began to make screws. And I thought to myself, after a long period of time, I'm running out of things to think about. It must be time for break. And I looked down at my watch and discovered that 15 minutes had passed, only three hours to go. By the end of the day, I hated myself. And I realized why everyone brought a radio to listen to while they work. Because a whole day stuck with my own thinking and hearing my own voice made me realize what many of you already know that I am a terminal bore at long lengths of time. Why Hope married me and stays with me is why I think she will be canonized after her death.

What was the point of this? I discovered that left to myself, I am not very interesting. And I think that when you think of Hell, you want to imagine being with yourself by yourself for all eternity, thrown on your own resources, separated from God. And when we think about Hell as being separated from God, we sometimes only think about Sunday morning and the religious thoughts we have. But being separated from God means having only those resources that come from you and being separated from all goodness, truth and beauty. God left as your own creator and your own end to think about what you can think about forever and ever, world without end. Amen.

We don't need literal fire in some ways to have a lake of fire. We need only be trapped with ourselves and no God with whom to converse. Man was not meant to be alone. And yet most of us in pushing aside the people around us, the immortal souls created in the image of God, or manipulating them and using them for our own ends, for our own desires, and in trying to manipulate God in order to get some kind of reward at the end, are guilty of declaring ourselves God. And so we will go to a place where we can continue to do that without hurting anyone other

than ourselves. And that place is Hell, which I like to think of as Selco Fasteners without end. Forever and ever. Trapped in the utter loneliness of a place where one is left with self alone.

We cannot see the enormity of our peckish eye in the face of the I Am, but we are a sour note in the great music of the spheres. But in God's hands, God, the master composer, even this crushed note is transformed into beauty. The place where the damned go, the pit. If go there, we must. Is the great bass note of God's justice. It is the place where every man goes to find his place and his own level. If you will not be transformed, if you will be who you are, then you will descend to that place.

But even in descending to that place, even in being cast into that lake of fire, your ugliness will be transformed into a hymn to God's justice. And so, though you will not hear the great cosmic choir, the hallelujahs without end that makes Handel's Messiah sound sickening by comparison; though you will not hear it, even in hell, you will praise Him! Because you will demonstrate that every person, every man finds his own level in God's justice; and that if you will not accept the freely offered gift of His Son to transform you by faith through grace, then you will glorify Him by finding your own home and your own niche. You will be the bass in a universe of singing.

And what have we missed in hell? That's what we'll discuss next time. But we have missed the great Heaven of heavens, which will loom above our miserable souls in Hell, rank after rank of glorious angels, saints and the redeemed. So what can we make of this? We must decide today what we want. We cannot become fit for Heaven whatever we do. It is not mere goodness we

Reynolds: On the End Times

need or good at. We are unfit to breathe the very air of Heaven. It would be a greater hell to us than Hell itself.

The glory we have rejected would burn us with a fierce flame. His grace, grace alone that transforms us and makes us new men. We become like Him. First born of many brethren. So Hell. That awful place. It's a place for the old men. Shadow world for the dark people who will not change. The joy is that the possibility of this transformation and escape is freely offered. We need only come to the altar and die now.

We shall bow before Him. Here to become like Him or there to be sealed by the searing vision of the true Judge into the fixed mold of the self-image we have created. What will you have today? You can have life now and so die. Or you can die to yourself now and so live forever. Not because you are being rewarded, but because Jesus will transform you after His own image and so make you fit for His company forever.

Someone once said, where's the joy in this message? And I will tell you where the joy is. The truth is that if we don't change, that if we don't accept by faith through grace God's work for us, and do not allow Him then to work within us once we have been legally acquitted beyond our deserts, we will be damned. But if we will allow ourselves to be changed, then beyond all hope, beyond all reasonable expectation, we get Paradise.

Paradise.. Don't you get tired sometimes at this point in the semester? Don't you long for home? At least for a place like here is where everybody knows your name. You just want to be where

you fit. And that's the story of humanity. Man living in middle-earth caught between Heaven above and Hell beneath, no longer able to live in this place that God created for him that was so good and that he destroyed. And so we can't live here. We can't be gods. And yet we aren't devils.

And so nothing ever satisfies us. No relationship. Not even as wonderful a relationship as I have with Hope can in the end fulfill us! Because our hearts' true home is here but we can't live here because we've ruined our home. We've defiled ourselves and our nest. We cannot fit in any place in all of God's cosmos. And then God comes in the first incarnation and lives among us and experiences that death and that dying and that separation from God. My God, my God, why have Thou forsaken me? And in hanging between heaven above and earth below on a cross, He provided by Himself a once-and-for-all full and satisfaction for the sins of the whole earth, and made a gateway to a new middle earth, a new Jerusalem, a new Heaven, and a new place for us to live.

Where is the joy? It is it- within. Where is the kingdom and the power and the glory? I will tell you that, dimly, I have seen it. And as Christ has changed me, faintly, I have heard the songs of Heaven. And sometimes, when I'm teaching and I see the souls of my students who are being transformed into Christ-likeness; or when I hold my wife; or when I lift my children. They are glimmers of Paradise. So often mistaken for Paradise itself that it can be nearly a trap or a delusion. But everything you've ever loved, every joy that you've ever had, is just an echo of the empyrean of the Heaven without end that God in His mercy and His grace, wanted us to live in in the first place. And He wants to transform us. Being a Christian is not stale and static death. It

Reynolds: On the End Times

is a transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And it is every joy you have ever known and every pleasure you have ever had, a hundred fold.

Thomas Cranmer, the great reformer and a hero of mine, was faced with a choice between the joys of this world and death at the stake, fire and flames. And then the terror of that choice he recanted his belief that salvation is by faith alone. And he signed a statement giving up on that great doctrine of the church (inaudible). He realized that the joys that he was trying to say were actually escaping him. And that what he really wanted, his heart's deepest longing, the heaven for his soul was before him. And so when they got him off to preach a sermon that would save his life, a sermon recanting the great truth of salvation by faith alone, of the transformation by God's grace, not by works, lest any man would boast.

Instead, he preached a sermon that defied the authorities that would kill him. And as they dragged him to the stake where he burned in Oxford, England, he placed his right hand, the hand that had signed away his soul into the fire first that it would burn because he realized that he could burn away what he was now, and live forever; or enter a fire that would never be quenched and never be put out. And so Cranmer died that he could live.

My call to you today is to die so you can live. To be crucified with Christ, buried with Him and resurrected; to accept the free gift of God and to be transformed within, so that you can escape the place where forever you will be alone, and go to the place where goodness, truth and beauty are forever in your sight. Thank you and God bless you.