

A Hell of a Motivation

Revelation 20:11-21:5

11 June 2017 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: What difference does the reality of hell make to the way that we live now?

Big Idea: The reality of heaven and hell motivate us to accept and share the gospel.

Introduction

One of my favourite quotes comes from author Douglas Adams:

“I love deadlines. I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by.”

I can relate.

During my science degree, it’s probably fair to say that I earned a bit of a reputation.

When I graduated, my chemistry friends presented me with a mocked-up Dean’s Commendation (on official letterhead) for “gallant disregard of deadlines”.

What can I say? I’m still a work in progress.

However, there’s are some deadlines that you can’t avoid, whether you like it or not, just as Douglas Adams found out.

Some deadlines just can’t be missed and there are absolutely no extensions.

If you pay your car rego late, Queensland Transport will slug you with a massive fee.

But after a few months, if you still haven’t paid your bill – so I’m told – they won’t let you re-register your car. It’s too late.

The only way to get it registered again is to start from scratch.

Life itself can feel like it doesn’t really have a deadline.

The days are long and even though the weeks are short, it seems like life just seems to roll on, one day after the next.

But sooner or later, our lives *will* come to an end and we’ll hit the deadline of the grave.

That’s one deadline we can’t avoid. We can’t avoid the deadline of death.

Amongst the people we rub shoulders with every day, it seems to be common for people to think that death's the end.

We live and then we cease to exist or we somehow just melt back into the fabric of the universe around us.

Here's a quote someone who's not a Christian, taken from an Australian survey in 2017:

*"In Australia, we are quite well off. We have got a good life. People turn to religions when times are tough and I don't think that the times are as tough anymore. People know more about religion so they're not sold on one story, they don't think, 'If I don't pray and ask for forgiveness, I'm going to go to hell.' People don't buy the story anymore. They know too much."*¹

I think that's pretty typical of what lots of Aussies believe.

The reason this person gave for why people deny hell and don't need forgiveness is that, "They know too much."

How do they know, I wonder? What evidence do they have?

Science is a powerful tool of discovery, but no one can observe what happens after death.

They certainly don't have the kind of evidence that many people demand from God before they'll humble themselves before him.

But what if they're wrong? What if hell is real?

What if we are going to be around to face the music?

We can't test it by observation, but God's told us what will happen.

The Bible says that God has appointed a day – a day of judgement.

A day when he will rightly judge the deeds of men, women and children.

It's the ultimate deadline – the absolute, final deadline that comes after the grave.

That's one hell of a motivation to think about how we live and use the time that we have before it's too late.

Today we're going to be looking at a part of the Bible that we don't look at very often.

The book of Revelation – the last book of the Bible – scares many people.

We need to listen carefully to this part of the Bible though, because it teaches us things that we mustn't forget.

The reality of heaven and hell motivate us to accept and share the gospel.

Be motivated because:

- The deadline of judgment is coming
- The dead-end of hell is real
- The delight of the new earth is better

The deadline of judgment is coming

In the final book of the Bible, John records a supernatural revelation that he was given.

He often talks about the events as if they happened in the past.

John didn't actually witness these things happening, but he was given an insight into what the future will look like.

We pick it up on verse 11, where John describes seeing a great white throne.

We don't know exactly who's sitting on the throne.

The occupant of the throne is simply called, "Him," and that's probably deliberate.

We can be pretty sure that this's God's throne though.

For a start, we know that the throne is white – a colour that always seems to mean holiness in this book.

A throne is mentioned 41 times in the book of Revelation and it's always a seat of power occupied by either God the Father or God the Son.

This is a picture of the final, cataclysmic moment for the world.

At this point, the old world – the heavens and the earth – have been done away with.

The earth and the heavens have fled from the face of the one who's sitting on the throne.

Don't imagine the earth growing legs and running away, but it's no longer before God.

I don't know if you've ever thought about the world this way before?

Most people seem to be comfortable with the world having a beginning – whether that's through a big bang or God creating it from nothing.

They're far less comfortable with the world having an end, though.

As a society, we don't think as if there's going to be any kind of set end.

And if there is, we mostly assume that we're not going to be around for it anyway.

Through John's revelation though, we see that the world as we know it has a use by date.

Then he looks and sees the dead.

It might seem like a bit of a morbid picture, but bear with me.

When people die, they don't just cease to exist.

John sees people from every time in history before the throne.

When you think of resurrection, what do you think of?

Do you just think of all the people who trust in Jesus being raised from the dead to be with him forever?

The Bible tells us that it won't just be the righteous who'll be raised – it'll be everyone.

Both the righteous *and* the unrighteous.

John 5:28–29 (NIV)²⁸ “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

Acts 24:14–15 (NIV)¹⁴ However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

So, there's people from every time, every race, every people group.

All kinds of people from great and well-known to those who seemed small and insignificant.

No one is left out.

There's no jumping the line – everyone's on an equal footing.

There's no way for the rich to pay for special treatment to get around this queue.

And then some books are opened.

What are these books?

Some of you might remember the old TV show “This is Your Life” – actually it’s old enough that it must just about be time for the networks to trot it out again.

They research the life of a celebrity and then get them on the show where they gather together people from the past to speak about their life.

At the end of the show, they present the celebrity with a book that contains all the research they’ve done – a book about their life.

We’re told at the end of verse 12 that everything everyone’s done was recorded in these books.

I don’t think that there’s necessarily a great archive collection somewhere with physical books with everything from your whole life written on.

But you get the idea of the picture – everything is known to the judge and nothing’s been forgotten.

Not a single detail will be left out.

Luke 12:2 (NIV)² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

All the good things you’ve done in public will be recorded.

The details of all the people that you’ve helped, even if that was done without anyone else seeing.

But also all the things that you’d probably prefer to remain hidden.

All the things you’ve done in secret.

All the things you’ve done in the dark.

Everything will be exposed.

And everyone will be judged according to what’s recorded in those books.

We’ll all be judged according to what we’ve done.

Not judged in comparison to others – I’m not as bad as that next person.

Judged according to our deeds.

Death is often thought of as an escape, but isn’t an escape from the consequences of what you’ve done.

It's not that you die and it's all over, red rover.

You and I – everyone – will have to give an account for their actions.

Don't think that you can hide in death because even death won't be able to hold people anymore.

Death and Hades have lost their power.

And so death has to release everyone it held so that they can be judged.

Verse 13:

Revelation 20:13 (NIV)¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.

However, there is one more book and it's not like the other ones.

It's the book of life, verse 12.

The book of life crops up six times in the revelation to John.

It's often called the Lamb's book of Life – that is Jesus' book of life.

In it are written the names of all of Jesus' people.

How do you get your name in that book?

Well, it's not by what you do.

Your name can only be in that book because of the blood of Jesus.

Your name is in that book if you accept Jesus' sacrifice of himself – the shedding of his blood – as payment for your sins.

That is the only way to pass this judgment – on what Jesus has done and not on your own deeds.

That's God's grace.

There are two possible outcomes of that judgment.

Basically, everyone will either go to hell or the new earth.

The dead-end of hell is real

Firstly, there is the reality of the dead-end of hell.

John describes see a lake of fire.

That's a really vivid picture, isn't it?

In my mind's eye, I picture it in much the same way that I picture the surface of the sun – a swirling lake of red-hot, molten lava.

John describes the lake as the second death.

This's a description of the ultimate death.

Or to use language that we're probably more familiar with – 'hell'.

Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire.

Hades was the Greek god of the underworld and was later used to mean the grave.

Death dies and that's where it goes.

Fire can be mesmerising to look at – there's something captivating about sitting around a camp fire on a cold, clear winter's night.

There's a scary side to fire though too.

Thankfully, I've never been caught in a bushfire, but I've seen the photos and talked to people who have.

I can only imagine how scary it must be to see a wall of fire coming towards you, ready to consume you.

That's what hell is like.

There are lots of people who are looking forward to the party in hell.

"Turn up the heat and let's get the steaks grilling!"

They think that hell's going to be one big party, only it's not going to be like that at all.

Hell is a place of burning torment.

It's also going to be an intensely lonely place.

Being in hell means being separated from the all of the goodness and mercy of God forever.

Sin and hate and destruction will be completely unbridled and most of the hate will be directed towards ourselves.

Some of the hardest words in the Bible are found in verse 15.

They're also some of the saddest to think about.

Revelation 20:15 (NIV)¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Anyone whose name isn't written in the book of life is going to be thrown into that same lake.

Or to put it another way, anyone who doesn't trust in Jesus now, will be going to hell then.

Because at that point – at the time of judgment – it's too late.

There's no time for repentance – the time to turn back to God is now.

By the time you reach that final day, the time for coming back to God will have been and gone.

And that's profoundly sad.

Yet at the very same time it's just and fair.

In acting this way, God is giving sinners exactly what they want – the opportunity to live without God.

Sin is rejecting God as God and setting ourselves up as god to do things our own way.

God allows those who want that to do it for eternity.

It's natural justice – the sensible punishment for that crime.

Over the centuries, teaching on hell has been greatly misused in all sorts of ways.

Today, lots of people don't think that hell is anything more than a story to control people who are young, naïve and gullible.

Yet hell was something that Jesus thought was important to talk about a lot.

Most people know Jesus talked a lot about money, but the topic of hell doesn't come in far behind.

There are something like 1870 verses in the Bible that are recorded as the direct speech of Jesus.

13% of them are *specifically* about judgment and hell.

The word *Gehenna* is used to describe the great burning rubbish heap of hell.

Eleven out of twelve times the word *Gehenna* is used, it's on the lips of Jesus.

Jesus tells us that hell isn't a party, it's a dead-end with no escape.

It's sobering to think that after the deadline of judgement, it's the final destination for anyone whose name isn't in the Book of Life.

Hell is real and the consequences of what we decide now will last into eternity.

The delight of the new earth is better

There's a very different outcome for everyone who's name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

At the beginning of chapter twenty-one, John tells us what he saw next.

There was a change of scene as he was shown a new heaven and a new earth – a replacement for the broken world that passed away in chapter twenty.

Then he saw the Holy City – not the old Jerusalem – but the new Jerusalem (Jerusalem Mark II) which comes from God.

John describes it like a bride.

On his wedding day, the groom often rolls out of bed and has a leisurely morning with some mates before rocking up at the church.

It's a very different story for the bride.

She's probably up before the sun because there's so much to be done – hair, makeup, flowers and photos.

She wants to look her absolute best when she arrives to join her waiting groom.

A bride is a very different picture to fire... I hope.

It's no accident that this vision of the new heavens and the new earth comes right after the description of hell.

We're meant to compare them.

The people in hell are separated from God.

In the new heaven and new earth, God isn't far away, he's with his people, verse 3.

Verse 4 is just too good not to read:

Revelation 21:4 (NIV)⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

Compare that with the world that that we see around us, that we experience every day.

No more tears because there won't be anything or anyone to hurt us.

That aching feeling of grief that you get in the bottom of your stomach will be a thing of the past.

It's difficult to imagine life without pain, but our hearts yearn for it.

The new earth will be a delight, paradise returned.

There's a very different outcome for those trusting in Jesus.

When I think about this picture of the new heavens and the new earth, it makes me want to say, "Bring. It. On."

"Come, Lord Jesus, come."

Conclusion

Science can't tell us what will happen on the other side of the grave.

God wants us to know though.

These two possibilities for eternity look completely different.

That's why he showed John these things and directed him to write them down, verse 5:

Revelation 21:5 (NIV) Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Having the curtains to give us an insight into the future should cause us to stop and think.

That final deadline – the Day of Judgement is close – closer than you probably think and getting closer all the time.

We don't know exactly when it's going to be.

It might even be today.

Feel the weight of this– it's heavy, weighty, significant.

It's a matter of life and death.

It's a hell of a motivation to think wisely about how you're going to respond to this news today.

If you're not following Jesus, then I am so glad that you're here with us this morning.

I realise that you might be feeling fairly uncomfortable with all this talk about hell, that it's a massive turn-off.

The 2017 McCrindle Faith and Belief in Australia report found that:

The biggest blocker to Australians engaging with Christianity is the Church's stance and teaching on homosexuality (31% say this completely blocks their interest). This is followed by, 'How could a loving God allow people to go to hell?' (28%).²

It's pretty uncomfortable stuff, isn't it?

You need to hear that the loving God of the Bible doesn't want people to go to hell.

It's not too late, you've got until that final deadline – but none of us know when it will be.

So I'd urge you think carefully about what you've heard this morning not matter how uncomfortable it makes you feel.

It's just too important not to.

If you're not trusting in Jesus – then you are heading for an eternity of misery.

Death won't free you, it'll be a place where you carry on your own eternal self-destruction.

Become a follow of Jesus today while you still have the chance.

As that he would write your name in the Book of Life.

Come to him in humility and he will show you grace.

If you're a Christian, how will you respond to what you've heard this morning?

Who are the people you're closest to, whom you love and care about?

Your family. Your friends. Your neighbours. The 20, 30, 40 people that you work with.

They're headed to one of these two places and without Jesus, it's not the good one.

Do you realise that most of them probably don't even know it?

Sure, they might have some vague awareness of heaven and hell, but they probably haven't ever thought that it actually has anything to do with them.

One of the songs we sang this morning captures well the reality if we're not following Christ, a reality that we aren't even aware of at the time:

*I once was lost in darkest night
Yet thought I knew the way
The sin that promised joy and life
Had led me to the grave³*

Do you know what's worse? Most of them couldn't care less.

They thinking nothing of the cost because they don't know or they don't really think that it'll happen to them.

As the song goes on:

*But as I ran my hell-bound race
Indifferent to the cost*

That doesn't change the fact that these deadlines – first of death followed by the day of judgment – are fast approaching.

I might not be very good at keeping them, but deadlines are important.

They help us to focus on what's important.

Deadlines help us to be realistic about the short time we have and help us to focus on how we can best use that time.

Deadlines give us motivation, something to work towards.

It's the things in our lives that don't have deadlines that often don't get done, even if they're important.

I doubt many of us would get around to paying our electricity bill if there wasn't a deadline.

On these cold winter mornings, I need a deadline just to get out from underneath the nice, warm covers.

Jesus has set deadline for all of us.

Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.

The good news is that we can come to God before it's too late and he will show us mercy.

I don't want you to leave here today feeling guilty.

Ask for forgiveness if you need to and know that God will graciously forgive you for your failings, but don't let the Accuser guilt you into doing nothing.

I read a passage like this and it refocuses and refines my perspective on the world.

And it motivates me.

It's my hope that as you meditate on the reality of heaven and hell this week, that you'd be motivated too.

In God's mercy, he might even give you the privilege of letting your words be the ones that he uses to save others.

We've got a number of opportunities coming up in the next few months – things you can invite people to.

There's going to be a men's golf event in October – it might seem like a long way off but starting thinking about who you can invite now.

Next week, there's a few people are heading up to the Riverwalk, looking for opportunities to share this life-saving message.

And there's an opportunity here every week at church.

You don't need a formal opportunity to have lunch or coffee with someone and find out how they're really going.

Let me let you into a secret: we're all struggling.

We all try to hide it, but we're all struggling with something.

Life's never as rosy as it looks on Facie or Insta or around the watercooler at work.

We all need Jesus.

He's the only one who can heal our hurts, overcome our fears, remove our guilt and give us hope is Jesus.

Most importantly, only his blood can save you from eternal destruction.

Hell is real. Time is short. God is good.

¹ Faith and Belief in Australia: A national study on religion, spirituality and worldview trends. McCrindle p.11

² Faith and Belief in Australia: A national study on religion, spirituality and worldview trends. McCrindle p.10

³ Jordan Kauflin, *All I Have is Christ* (Sovereign Grace Music)

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Big Question: What difference does the reality of hell make to the way that we live now?

Big Idea: The reality of heaven and hell motivate us to accept and share the gospel.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think this quote reflects the general mood in Australia at the moment? What are the consequences of this?

*"In Australia, we are quite well off. We have got a good life. People turn to religions when times are tough and I don't think that the times are as tough anymore. People know more about religion so they're not sold on one story, they don't think, 'If I don't pray and ask for forgiveness, I'm going to go to hell.' People don't buy the story anymore. They know too much."*⁴

2. Will only righteous people be raised from the grave?
3. On what basis will those who come before the throne be judged?
4. Why is hell such a sad outcome?
5. What's one thing about the new heavens & new earth that you're looking forward to?
6. Does this passage make you feel guilty? Do you think that's the right response you should have?
7. What's one practical steps you could take *this week* in an effort to help one person move towards Jesus?
8. Pray for two people who you would like to ask the Lord Jesus to save.

⁴ Faith and Belief in Australia: A national study on religion, spirituality and worldview trends. McCrindle p.11