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FBC Arlington
Summer 2023

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A Plan for First Baptist Arlington

2023

BIBLICAL CONTEXT: The Gospel of John

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

-John 20:30-31

SUMMER 2023

June 1 – August 5, 2023

Eternity: Why Does It Matter?

Core Text: John 3:16

How do we know there is an “eternity” and what difference does it make anyway? What does “life after death” really mean? Is there a real heaven? Is there a real hell? When does eternity start?

We will take the summer to explore what the Bible teaches about abundant life, meaningful life, and eternal life. There is much confusion about eternity in our culture. There is also much confusion within the Christian family about how eternal life actually begins now. Further, there are many Christians who aren’t really sure about the realities of heaven and hell. We will explore it during the summer of 2023.

Let me remind us that we are seeking to help our people develop their apologetic skills and learn how to articulate their faith in a way that is both compelling and appealing. Our conversations this summer about eternity will offer us significant opportunities to equip our people in this regard.

A Conversation About Eternity: Apologetics in the Late-Modern Era

With regard to eternity, there continues to be much debate as to how we are to understand it. We are not the first generation to ponder what happens after death. This is an age-old human question that has captured the imaginations of poets, theologians, philosophers, and just about everyone else!

However, we now find ourselves in a certain cultural context that poses challenges for traditional Christian views. And the challenges are not limited to the academy. Conversations about eternity, life after death, ultimate reality—these are “man in the street” encounters. Everyday folks, living everyday lives are engaged in some of the most substantial, consequential dialogues in the modern era. Speaking of “modern”, I want us to think together about the realities of modernism, late-modernism, and/or post-modernism as we continue our journey in developing our apologetics muscles.

Ever since the publication of Charles Taylor’s, *A Secular Age*, in 2007, many theologians, apologists, and Christian philosophers have been engaged in a significant dialogue in response to the insights explained in this landmark volume. Taylor’s argument is rooted in his philosophical discoveries regarding the human self and his Christian worldview guided by his Roman Catholic faith.

Taylor argues that the “secular age” in which we find ourselves is one that is governed by the universal acceptance of the “immanent frame” explanation of reality. In other words, the culture of today no longer accepts the reality of transcendence, and thus, only allows for all explanations of reality to be limited a frame of reference devoid of any existence of a transcendent being like God.

This “immanent frame” context creates all kinds of problems for Christians who seek to share the Gospel with unbelievers. In his book, *Churches and the Crisis of Decline: A Hopeful, Practical Ecclesiology for a Secular Age*, Andrew Root makes this exact point:

Living in the immanent frame requires *a lot* of work for us to see beyond the prescribed cultural map. It’s hard to assume that these contingent relations, which give us life, have any direct source in God’s own action. It takes a great amount of work for most late-modern Western people to assume that God acts and speaks. Confrontation with a great amount of doubt and suspicion is simply our context, the direct by-product of our frame of reference.

-Andrew Root, *Churches and the Crisis of Decline*, p. 13

The limitations of “immanent frame” thinking poses problems beyond evangelism for the church today. Churches can lose touch with the transcendent reality of God’s presence and begin to assume that its own resources are the source of its life. The main resource of the church is the presence of God through His Holy Spirit, revealed most completely in the Son of God Who is the Head of the church!

We must keep the eternal connection with our God alive in our church. Confession, repentance, worship, prayer, discipleship, the habits of the ordinances, spiritual formation, ministry, obedience to the Great Commandment, obedience to the Great Commission, encounters with the living God, communal realities of God’s presence in and through His people --- these are the true resources of the church!

So, constructing a practical theology of eternity is crucial to the continued health and vitality of the church. We must remain vigilant in instructing and guiding our people towards orthodoxy as we teach essential doctrines and connect them to practical, everyday living. Trevin Wax offers this insight in his new book, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of the Christian Faith*,

The church faces her biggest challenge not when new errors start to win but when old truths no longer wow. J. R. R Tolkien once said that the most regrettable feature of human nature is how quickly we become unsatisfied with the good. We receive good gifts from God and then grow bored with blessings. Spiritual dullness. Blurry vision. Hardness of heart. *This* is the challenge for the church.

-Trevin Wax, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy*, p. 1

Wax may be right. While our doctrinal teachings may be “old truths” – they still have the capacity to “wow” if they are taught in a way that connects them to real life. Theology has always needed to have practical application and paths towards implementation. Again, the conversations we will have this summer about *eternity* will be important in helping to shape the theological framework of our people. We will seek to help our church members move beyond the limited “immanent frame” thinking and be reminded of the transcendent nature of our faith and the reality of God’s presence in our daily lives.

Joshua Chatraw and Mark Allen offer an image that might be constructive for us in their work, *Apologetics at The Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness*,

A helpful way of understanding the immanent frame is to picture a two-story building. Our premodern ancestors lived in a two-story world. Humans lived on the first level but believed in the existence of a second floor—a higher realm. There was an enchanted world where higher beings were assumed to be active and relevant to the affairs of

everyday life. There was something greater beyond this life, a higher realm of existence that gave meaning and purpose to life. In contrast, today we live in a disenchanted, one-story world that denies the existence of the divine or the supernatural. In much of the West, the commonly shared habits, goals, and symbols of day-to-day life and the meaning commonly ascribed to it point us to the physical world around us and normally no further. Thus, as we inherit these habits, goals, and symbols from our culture, we consciously and subconsciously absorb (through mostly subconsciously) the drive to live for, long for, and learn of things on the first level.

-Joshua Chatraw and Mark Allen, *Apologetics at The Cross*, p. 208

The hope of this series is to remind our church family of the reality of the second floor! Our conversations about eternity should offer instruction and hope for all of us. The Bible has much to say about eternity. In fact, the Bible contains pertinent and significant information about the eternal destinations of heaven and hell. We have to talk about these destinations in our consideration of eternity.

As we lead our church through these meaningful messages about such a relevant topic, we hope to assist them in developing the skill to discuss the reality of eternity intelligently and with an appropriate level of acumen. Our society needs informed Christians who have a clear understanding of the meaning of eternity and its relevance in our everyday lives.

I fully recognize the inherent challenges we face as we seek to lead our people to strengthen their apologetic muscles. We live in a culture that no longer believes in absolute, knowable Truth. The “self” has been enthroned and Truth has been reduced to whatever seems to be true to each individual. So, we know we will be swimming against the cultural tides of relativism and secularism. However, there is much at stake for the church at this point in history. We will forge ahead with conversations about ultimate reality that will both inform and inspire our people.

As we make our way through this series, I will be preaching the first four messages that will set the stage and frame the conversation. During my time away in July, we will hear the voices of guest preachers who will add their unique perspectives to this timely topic. I will assign the texts and provide the path we will all travel over these 9 weeks. I am already praying that God will guide us, our people will be challenged, and our Lord will be magnified!

RESOURCES

Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale, 2004

Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at The Cross*, Zondervan, 2018

Edward Donnelly, *Biblical Teachings on the Doctrines of Heaven and Hell*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001

David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, Yale University Press, 2019 – I have included this volume because it represents an articulate (I believe mistaken) defense of universalism and the belief that hell does not actually exist.

Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, Zondervan, 2012

Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical Thematic and Ethical Approach*, Crossway, 2023

Andrew Root, *Churches and the Crisis of Decline: A Hopeful, Practical Ecclesiology for a Secular Age*, Baker Academic, 2022

John P. Newport, *Life's Ultimate Questions: A Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Galena Park Institute, 1989

Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1995

Trevin Wax, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith*, InterVarsity Press, 2022

N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, Harper One, 2008

SUMMER 2023
June 1 – August 5, 2023

Eternity: Why Does It Matter?

Core Text: John 3:16

June 4, 2023: *Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

We begin the series with a message on the nature of time itself --- with an emphasis on the reality of and the Biblical teachings about *eternity*. We will explain terms like “transcendence”, “immanent frame”, “late-modernism”, and “the secular age”. This message will serve as the foundation for the entire series. And – we will acknowledge that last summer was given to an examination of the entire Book of Ecclesiastes!

Daily Bible Readings

June 1:	Ecclesiastes 1
June 2:	Ecclesiastes 2
June 3:	Ecclesiastes 3
June 5:	Ecclesiastes 4
June 6:	Ecclesiastes 5-6
June 7:	Ecclesiastes 7-8
June 8:	Ecclesiastes 9-10
June 9:	Ecclesiastes 11
June 10:	Ecclesiastes 12

June 11, 2023: *The Righteousness of Judgment*

Revelation 20:11-15

We know that Hell is a controversial topic. Is Hell a real place? Does God actually condemn people to Hell? If He does, is this not a violation of the goodness of God? Even if He does condemn people to Hell, is it eternal? How can we reconcile Hell with the love of God? In this message, I will cover these questions as we contemplate the righteous judgment of our holy and loving God.

Daily Bible Readings

June 12:	Matthew 5:17-30
June 13:	Matthew 7:1-14
June 14:	Luke 16:19-31
June 15:	Revelation 14:1-13
June 16:	Revelation 20
June 17:	Reflection

June 18, 2023: *A New Heaven and A New Earth*

Father’s Day

Revelation 21:1-8

God's glory is on display through His creation. Indeed, the earth and all that is in it belongs to Him! However, we live in a fallen world as a result of human sin. The brokenness of our sinful state has even affected creation itself. But the day is coming when God will bring forth a new heaven and a new earth! Our eternal destination as believers is to live fully in the presence of God in His New Creation. Just as we have been designed for life on this earth, we are already being prepared by God for our eternal life in His New Creation!

Daily Bible Readings

June 19:	Philippians 3
June 20:	Romans 8:1-30
June 21:	Colossians 1:1-23
June 22:	Luke 6:17-26
June 23:	Revelation 21
June 24:	Reflection

June 25, 2023: *For . . . So . . . Loved . . . Whoever . . . Eternal Life!*

John 3:16

God's love is on full display through the amazing gift of His Son! In Jesus, we find forgiveness, hope, freedom, salvation, redemption, rescue, redemption, and ultimate restoration. This is all only possible through accepting Jesus as our Savior and embracing Him as our Lord. This means we recognize the seriousness of the saving act of God that necessitated the sending of His Son, the death of His Son on the cross, the resurrection of His Son from the dead, and the ascension of His Son back to the Father. It truly is an "all-or-nothing" reality.

Daily Bible Readings

June 26:	Ephesians 1:1-23
June 27:	Ephesians 2:1-10
June 28:	John 3:1-21
June 29:	1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5
June 30:	1 Corinthians 2:6-16
July 1:	Reflection

July 2, 2023: *The Power of God and the Wisdom of God*

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Guest Preacher: Curt Grice

The hope of redemption is connected to and emerges from the story of the Gospel itself. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the message of the cross is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. Humanity might seek to offer a message of salvation rooted in the power of mankind and the wisdom of mankind---but, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is truly the only answer for humanity's dilemma, which is eternal lostness without Jesus!

Daily Bible Readings

July 3:	John 18:1-27
July 4:	John 18:28-40

July 5:	John 19:1-27
July 6:	John 19:28-42
July 7:	John 20
July 8:	Reflection

July 9, 2023: *Eternal Life: Discover It! Declare It!*

John 4:1-26

Guest Preacher: Dr. Gary Stidham

The Gospel is good news! The beautiful story of redemption is an eternal story on display in history. God’s love is never in doubt. He has made it possible for human beings to be redeemed from their sin and live forever in His presence. God’s gift is eternal life! We must claim this gift for ourselves . . . and then share it with other sinners!

Daily Bible Readings

July 10:	Acts 8:26-40
July 11:	Acts 10:1-23
July 12:	Acts 10:23-48
July 13:	John 4:1-26
July 14:	John 4:27-42
July 15:	Reflection

July 16, 2023: *Living Hope!*

1 Peter 1:3-9

Guest Preacher: Connor Torrealba

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is an eternal message with eternal ramifications—both for those who believe and those who do not. For those who believe, we have found life through the new birth made possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This living hope is eternal! Our inheritance is an eternal one, preserved by the power of God!

Daily Bible Readings

July 17:	1 Peter 1:1-2:3
July 18:	1 Peter 2:4-25
July 19:	1 Peter 3
July 20:	1 Peter 4
July 21:	1 Peter 5
July 22:	Reflection

July 23, 2023: *The Eternal Love of God*

Romans 8:31-39

Guest Preacher: Katy Reed-Hodges

God’s love is powerfully on display through His Son. His redeeming grace is thorough and all encompassing. Once we are claimed by Christ, there is nothing in life or death that can separate us from Him. Our redemption is secure and our eternal relationship with our Lord is settled. This is truly good news!

Daily Bible Readings

July 24:	Romans 1:1-17
July 25:	Romans 1:18-32
July 26:	Romans 2:1-16
July 27:	Romans 5
July 28:	Romans 8
July 29:	Reflection

July 30, 2023: *Death Has Lost Its Sting!*

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Guest Preacher: Luke Stehr

In many ways, death is the great equalizer. We all will experience it. However, the good news of Jesus Christ has forever changed how believers view and experience death. In spite of its tragic reality, the eternal good news of the Gospel has removed the stinger from death. It no longer holds a victorious posture. Death has been dealt a deadly blow by the resurrection of Jesus---- and it will be finally defeated by the glorious return of Jesus. So, Paul can confidently ask, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Daily Bible Readings

July 31:	Romans 3
August 1:	Romans 4
August 2:	Romans 6
August 3:	1 Corinthians 15:1-34
August 4:	1 Corinthians 15:35-58
August 5:	Reflection