

Afterlife — Answers To Your Questions — Part 2

September 17, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds. This morning we finish our study of the afterlife where we are learning what the Bible says about life after death. Last week, I took a shot at answering some of the questions you submitted about the afterlife during this series. Today, I will handle a few more and we will wrap things up for the series.

Next week, Pastor Stephen is preaching. The week after that, I have a special message on the CrossWinds vision for the year. The week after that we jump into the book of Colossians. It will be a great study. Colossians is all about Jesus. It is why Jesus is greater than anything. Our study of Colossians will take us through the rest of 2017.

Last week, I didn't have a chance to answer the final question in your outline. I ran out of time. So without further ado, let's begin with the question I didn't get to last week.

1. How can I desire heaven if I know I won't be married to my spouse?

This question gathered 34 votes. To be honest, I think most of those votes came from one woman in our church that all know and love. That is Amber, our nursery director. She came up to me after last week's service and was angry in a light-hearted way. She said this is the question she voted for every chance she had. Amber loves her husband. They have a great marriage. She can't conceive of happiness without him.

I understand her question. I have often thought about it. I love Cindy, my wife. She is my best friend. I can't imagine the thought of not being married to her. How can there be happiness without marriage?

The first thing to understand is the Bible says there won't be earthly marriage in heaven.

And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage...", Luke 20:34–35 (ESV)

While there won't be earthly marriage in eternity, there will still be marriage in heaven. We won't be married to one another. We will be married to Jesus. The Bible describes Christians as the bride of Christ. The Scriptures say all the wonder, joy and closeness that we love about our earthly marriages was given to us by God to whet our appetite for much greater wonder, joy and closeness that will be ours in heaven when we are married to Jesus. Just so nobody misunderstands, our marriage to Jesus will not be sexual. Our sexuality is a way we can express and receive love, joy and closeness with our spouses. Marriage isn't about sex. Marriage is about the love, exclusivity and commitment of our relationship with our spouses. One of the reasons God created sex in marriage is to enrich the love, joy and closeness of marriage. Marriage is about relationship, not about sex. Sex enhances and sweetens the relationship.

Our marriage to Jesus will be about relationship. The love, joy and closeness of earthly marriage will be ours in our relationship with Jesus but in much greater measure. In fact it will be so much greater that it will make the joy of earthly marriage obsolete.

Can you imagine greater closeness, greater joy and greater satisfaction than being married to your spouse? I can't. Yet, the Bible tells us our relationship with Christ in eternity will more satisfying and more thrilling than our relationship with our spouse could ever be today. Look what the apostle Paul said about earthly marriage.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:31–32 (ESV)

Of course, this doesn't mean we won't know our spouse in heaven. We will still have our shared memories. I am sure my wife and I will still be best friends like we are today but the joy of our relationship with one another will not be able to compare to the joy found in our relationship with Jesus. I know it is hard to imagine being married to Christ will be better than being married to our spouses, but that is what the Bible tells us.

To help us grasp this concept, let's look at a verse we touched on two weeks ago. It is Psalm 16:11. It says in God's presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. Jesus is the fountainhead and source of all joy. Being united to Jesus forever is being united to pure joy. Jesus is the one who created the joy of marriage as an appetizer for the much greater joy of being with him.

While a good marriage on earth is the greatest pleasure this world can offer, being married to Christ is a much greater pleasure eternity can offer. Will we still be best friends with our spouses? Yes, but it will be even more thrilling to be with Jesus, from whom all joy and pleasure flows.

2. Will there be animals in heaven?

There were 54 votes for this question. I think the pet lovers banded together and voted for this one. Earlier in the series, we learned what heaven is like right now. In the current heaven there are angels, God and believers in their intermediate-state bodies. We have no evidence there are animals in heaven today. The thing to remember is that heaven changes. First, Christ will come from heaven to earth and reign over this earth for a thousand years during the Millennium. As Christians, we will be on this earth reigning with Christ in our resurrected bodies. Do you think animals will be on the planet during the Millennium? Of course they will! The difference is the nature of the animal kingdom will be changed.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6–9 (ESV)

Instead of eating one another, the animals will dwell together in peace. They will be herbivores not carnivores. In addition, even young children will be able to play with animals that are now considered deadly. The animal kingdom will not fight against us.

As we learned earlier in our series, after the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years, the devil that was confined to the pit so his influence was removed from the earth during the Millennium will be released from the pit. He will rebel against Christ but be decisively defeated and thrown into the lake of

fire. God will then purify this creation with fire. He will make a new heavens and a new earth. Heaven and earth will be combined together as one for eternity.

Will there be animals in the new creation?

Remember the new creation is this creation restored to its pre-fall sin state in Genesis plus everything about it is vastly improved and heaven is added to earth. We simply need to ask ourselves, were animals part of God's original creation before sin entered the world? Yes. They were part of the Garden of Eden. If they were part of the pre-fall original creation, we have every right to expect them to be part of the fully restored new creation. The difference is that just as the earth will be restored to be free of sin and vastly improved, so will the animals be free of sin and vastly improved in beauty and glory.

One of the most revealing passages in the Old Testament to show God's high value for animals is Noah and the flood. When God destroyed the earth with water, he didn't simply save Noah and his family, but he saved the animals. God brought the animals from the pre-flood world to the post-flood world. It is also reasonable to think God will bring the animals from this creation into the new creation.

A few weeks ago in our studies, we looked at 2 Peter 3:5-7. In those verses, Peter paralleled God's past judgment of this earth with the flood to God's future judgment of this earth at the end of the Millennium with fire. If God carried forward the animals in the previous judgment of water, we have every reason to believe God will carry forward animals in the future judgment of fire.

This means all pet lovers can breath easier. You will be able to have a cat or dog in the New Jerusalem on the new heavens and earth. The big difference is everything about the animals in the new creation means they will be free of sin and vastly improved. I am looking forward to vastly improved dogs. I hope this means they won't shed. I am also looking forward to vastly improved cats that hopefully can empty their own litter boxes.

3. Who is the antichrist?

This question had 47 votes. In every generation, somebody is labeled as the antichrist. A quick Internet search revealed some popular targets. They were Vladimir Putin, Prince William, tThe pope, Barack Obama and Donald Trump. That is to name a few.

The term antichrist only appears four times in the Bible. All references to the antichrist are found in the letter of John. Let me show you three of the four occurrences.

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 1 John 2:18 (ESV)

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 1 John 2:22 (ESV)

...and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 1 John 4:3 (ESV)

While we tend to peg the antichrist as one person, John told us many antichrists have come and will come. The way you recognize one of these antichrists is they are people who receive the truth about Jesus but they do not confess that Jesus is from God or that he came in the flesh. They are against

Christ. This is anyone who seeks to lead people away from Christ. John's view of the antichrist is very broad. The picture John gave is as you follow the timeline of world history, various antichrists come on the scene, and with varying levels of ferocity and success, attempt to lead people away from Jesus.

Jesus also talked about antichrists. Jesus didn't use the term antichrist but what he described fits under John's definition.

And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray."Matthew 24:4–5 (ESV)

John and Jesus gave a definition of the antichrist as not one person but a series of people that lead people away from Jesus.

When we get to the letters of Paul, he didn't talk about the multiple minor antichrists but he jumped to the end of history as we know it. He talked about the one great and final antichrist. Paul also used a different term. Instead of the antichrist, he called him the man of lawlessness.

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God... The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, 9-10 (ESV)

This antichrist will not just oppose Jesus. He will set himself against all other gods worshipped on the planet. In addition, he will sit himself in the temple of God and proclaim to be God. He will be empowered by Satan to do all kinds of counterfeit signs and wonders to convince people he is god.

The picture we have of the antichrist begins with multiple minor antichrists rising up to lead people astray and persecute Christians, but everything comes to a head and the end with the great antichrist, also called the man of lawlessness, who proclaims to be god of this world.

When we get to the book of Revelation, instead of being called the antichrist or the man of lawlessness, Revelation talks about this final great antichrist as the beast. Actually there are two beasts in Revelation. Both function as antichrists.

The first is the beast of the sea, which represents a political antichrist figure. This is the one world government guy that is empowered by Satan.

The second beast is a religious antichrist. He is the man of lawlessness Paul described. He is the one world religion guy that sets himself up to be god, to be worshipped, and he performs false signs.

(The second beast) It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.
Revelation 13:13–14 (ESV)

So who is the antichrist? In a lesser sense, according to the apostle John, it is anyone who sets himself against the truth of Jesus to lead people astray. That would include Mohammed, Hitler and many others. There were many antichrists throughout history. According to Paul and Revelation, there is coming a great final antichrist who will set himself up as gGod of the world and will perform false signs and miracles to deceive people in an attempt to get the entire world worshipping him.

4. What is the mark of the beast? What is the meaning of 666?

I am going to combine these questions because they are similar. The first had 48 votes. The second 41 votes. “What is the mark of the beast?” is one of the most frequently asked questions on the book of Revelation. A Google search reveals 22.8 million hits attempting to answer the question. Every time a new payment method comes out or you get a GPS tracking chip for your dog, people wonder if this is a preparation for the mark of the beast and one world government. Once you understand the mark of the beast, you won’t be afraid of the new credit card with a chip.

The first thing to understand is the nature of the book of Revelation. It is apocalyptic literature. It was a common style of Jewish writing that lasted around 400 years, both before and after the time of Christ. It developed during a time of intense persecution. It used graphic language to communicate its message and give people hope in times of suffering. As we turn to Revelation 13, here what is important to remember: Satan can’t create anything. All he can do is produce a cheap copy of what he sees. In Revelation 13, Satan is attempting to imitate God and be a trinity. Just as there is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Satan will try to set himself up to be a trinity.

In Revelation 12, Satan — the great dragon, the serpent from the garden of Eden — was cast to the earth. Revelation 13 opens with the arrival of the first beast on the earth. The beast is a person who is an antichrist figure that is empowered by Satan. This first beast tries to take the place of Jesus in the world. Just as Jesus is the rightful ruler of this world — that will be demonstrated for a thousand years in the Millennium — the first beast will try to be the ruler of this

world. This first beast will try to bring about one world government but it won't work. In the millennium, Jesus will bring about one world government but it will work. Just as Christ was killed and rose from the dead. This first beast will have a mortal wound but will appear to come back from the dead as he tries to imitate Jesus. Let's see how this unfolds as we look at the first beast.

One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" Revelation 13:3–4 (ESV)

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. Revelation 13:7–8 (ESV)

So what we have is the first beast trying to imitate Jesus by appearing to rise from the dead. He is powered by Satan and achieves one world government. Everybody on the planet goes along with the program but Christians who will end up in jail or dead as they are persecuted by the first beast.

Then will come a second beast.

Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. Revelation 13:11–14 (ESV)

While many see the first beast as one world government, the second beast will be about one world religion. If the first beast will imitate Jesus, the second beast will imitate the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit's job is to point us

to Jesus, the second beast's job will be to point people to the first beast, who will try to imitate Jesus. Just as Paul told us, this second beast will perform all kinds of false miracles to galvanize the world behind him as he proclaims himself to be god. One of the ways the second beast will try to produce worldwide alignment to the first beast will be through the mark of the beast, which will be the only way to do business. It will be sort of like the sanctions we are putting on North Korea. If you can't do business, things get tough in a hurry.

Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. Revelation 13:16–18 (ESV)

The mark of the beast will be a sign given to the beast's followers that pledge their allegiance to him.

As we saw earlier, Satan is trying to imitate God. Just as God is a trinity, Satan with his two beasts will try to be a counterfeit trinity. In a similar way the mark of the beast will be another attempt to mimic what God has already done. Christians were already given a mark by God to set them apart in this world earlier in Revelation.

...saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." Revelation 7:3 (ESV)

Since God marked his people, Satan who is a cheap copycat, then marks his people with the mark of the beast.

What is clear is the mark of the beast will not be a hidden mark. It will be an explicit declaration of your allegiance to the beast. Nobody will be hoodwinked into getting the mark of the beast by mistakenly signing up for something online.

Today, when we see the security chip in our credit cards, that is not the mark of the beast. That is security against evil people. The mark of the beast will be a conscious decision to pledge your allegiance to Satan and the man that has achieved one world government from the man that has achieved one world religion. Until we have one world government and one world religion, nobody can get the mark of the beast. You can rest easy about that chip in your new credit card.

Now let's deal with the number 666. What does it mean? Nobody knows definitively. There are two schools of thought. The first school of thought realizes that God likes to do things in sevens. Most Bible scholars call seven the perfect number. A trinity of perfection is 777. A trinity of imperfection is 666. This chapter is about the trinity of imperfection. It reminds us Satan and his beasts will fall short in every way.

Other scholars understand this differently. Hebrew doesn't have numbers. They assigned numerical values to letters to do math. That is called gematria. You may have heard of this through books on the Bible code. This means you can take any word and assign the numerical values of the letters, then add them up to come up with a number. In the ancient world the number of your name was your hidden code name. You knew the number of your name and your friends knew the number of your name but everyday people didn't know what letters you used to add up the numerical value of your name.

Let me give you an example. The city of Pompeii was destroyed in A.D. 79 by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Part of the city is now excavated. Archaeologists

have a city frozen in time at A.D. 79. One of the graffiti they found written on a wall in the city said, "I love her who is number 545." Apparently a guy had some kind of relationship with a woman. He was in love with her but he couldn't use her name so he used the numerical value of her name in one language but expressed it in another language. This woman apparently also knew her number but her identity has hidden from people who saw the graffiti because they didn't know her. This is probably what is happening with 666.

Interestingly, people have noted that in Hebrew gematria the name of Nero, the great persecutor of Christians in Rome, adds up to 666. John was possibly saying the future beast will be like Nero in the ancient world. Hebrew gematria is confusing for me, just like it is confusing for you. Go easy on me after the service and don't ask too many hard questions on this one.

One thing is clear, when it comes to the mark of the beast, it will be obvious. Nobody will get it by mistake. It is a pledge of allegiance to the world ruler enacted by the one leading a worldwide religion. RF chips in your dog and security chips on credit cards are the beginning of tighter control on commerce, but they are not the mark of the beast. We don't have a worldwide religion or government. We have smaller antichrists but the great antichrists, known as the man of lawlessness or the beast, have not arrived.

5. How do I deal with people who say they can communicate with the dead like psychics and mediums?

This was a write-in question, but more than one person asked it. People are wondering what to think about our local psychic cottage. First, you need to know the Bible strongly condemns spiritism, mediums, the occult, psychics,

horoscopes, tarot cards, astrology, fortune tellers, palm readers, seances and Ouija boards.

“A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.”
Leviticus 20:27 (ESV)

There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God... Deuteronomy 18:10–13 (ESV)

Some psychics are simply tricksters and Internet junkies. It is amazing how much information people can find with a quick Internet search of a phone number from caller ID. This is how many psychics find names, addresses, birth dates, marriage dates and the names of family members.

It is also undeniable that some psychics know information that it would be impossible to know from searching the Internet. Where does that information come from?

Some psychics claim they know your personal information by talking to the spirit of your dead relative. The problem is the spirits of deceased people are not wandering the earth. They are either in heaven with God or they are in hades in torment awaiting final condemnation in the lake of fire. The only disembodied spirits wandering the earth are angels and demons. I am confident God will not allow his angels to speak through psychics. The only option left is demons. Demons speak through psychics, not your dead relatives.

The Bible shows this taking place.

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. Acts 16:16–18 (ESV)

Psychic information is not harmless entertainment. It is Satan trying to gain a foothold in your life. Clearly we should avoid the psychic in Arnolds Park, except for praying for that psychic's repentance and salvation.

Even if we avoid overt psychics and mediums, there are ways to get involved in the occult of which many people are not aware.

One time I remember going to Toys-R-Us to buy a jogging stroller when my kids were little. I was shocked to see a bunch of Ouija boards in the game section of the toy store. Ouija boards are made by Parker Brothers, but they are not toys. They are channeling devices. Channeling devices are ways the occult requests spirits to manifest their presence in the physical world. Channeling devices have a long history. We find them in ancient Egypt and other ancient culture. The modern Ouija board was created in the 1800s by a spiritist. The board has the alphabet, numerals and a Yes, No and Maybe on its face. It is used in connection with a pointer. The pointer moves to reveal hidden answers.

I have never played one but my high school English teacher one day started explaining to class how he played one the night before but he couldn't understand how it worked and why it knew so much information about him. That is one English class I remember!

I later researched this topic and learned that playing with the Ouija board is engaging in an occult practice. It is not an option for Christians. If you are at a party and somebody takes out one of these boards, leave the party. It is a gateway for demonic influence in your life. I don't care if you can buy it at Toy-R-Us and it is made by Parker Brothers. Avoid it. If you have one, confess use of the board as sin. Trust in Christ's forgiveness, then burn the board. Whatever you do, don't get rid of it by giving it to a resale shop.

6. Does the nation of Israel have a special destiny?

This question had 29 votes. To answer this question, let's turn to the book of Deuteronomy.

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Deuteronomy 7:6–8 (ESV)

God's purpose is to bless the world through Israel. He has already done that by extending salvation to the world through the Jews (John 4:22). Jesus is Jewish. The Bible is a Jewish book.

One of the ways to prove that God has a special destiny for Israel is to simply compare what happened to every other people group in the ancient world. Where are the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hittites? They are all gone, but we still have Israelites. God continues to preserve them because they are his chosen people.

Today, Israel is in a state of rejection when it comes to Jesus. The Bible tells us God still has a special place for the Jewish nation. One day they will turn to Christ en-mass.

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Romans 11:25–29 (ESV)

Conclusion

That ends our series. I hope you were encouraged as we answered your questions on everything from animals in heaven, to the antichrist to psychics.

As we leave this series, I want to leave you with one amazing truth from this series. As Christians, everything about our lives is continually getting better. First, God saves us. We become new people with new desires. When we die, Paul said to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, which is better by far. Instead of death being a great defeat, it is a huge victory. When Christ returns, we get our bodies back and rule this planet with Christ. When the new heavens and earth comes, we will rule with Christ in our physical bodies over the entire universe. All of this is because of God’s amazing grace to us through Jesus. We deserve none of it.

As we leave this series, I hope you are greatly encouraged with the truth of what happens to us in the afterlife.



encouraged

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