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August 2019

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HEAVEN OR HELL? IT'S YOUR CHOICE.

I just reread two books: 23 Minutes in Hell, by Bill Wiese; and 90 Minutes in Heaven, by Don Piper. I liked the one about heaven a whole lot better. Reading the two of them back to back was like a bucket of cold water in the face. They do a wonderful job of waking you up and clarifying what is important in life. That word, “important” understates this matter terribly, but I can’t think of a word that expresses what I am feeling at this moment. If it would help, I would like to take in my hands the faces of every person that is not ready for eternity and scream: “For God’s sake, wake up, you have only a short time left!” That would probably not be a constructive strategy, but as I draw near the completion of my time on earth I am feeling such desperation for so many people that I love that it is like a constant ache inside. I think a mature Christian should be able to put this matter in God’s hands and be at rest, but I guess I’m not mature because I can’t.

“23 Minutes in Hell”

In 1998, Bill Wiese was a realtor living with his wife in a Southern California town. He was a committed Christian in a conservative church, and he was by nature shy, quiet, and introverted. At 3:00 AM on a November morning he was violently propelled into hell. God subsequently made clear to Bill that he was not being punished but that he had been chosen to go through a brief period in hell and return in order to share that horrible experience with many people who have doubts and reservations about the reality of hell. Many of those doubters are within the church as well as outside of it.

Bill’s experience during those 23 minutes was too horrible for words to convey. Some words he used about that time were: “horror, loneliness, hopelessness, suffering, fire, a cell with bars, an enormous pit, hideous demonic creatures, a stench of rotting flesh and sulfur, constant screaming and cursing, etc.” The most important point of all is that Bill subsequently found one or more Scriptures to validate each and every experience that he had. There are about 150 verses in the Bible that describe something about hell in order to warn people about the judgment to come. Let me briefly touch on some of these teachings:

How could a loving God send someone to hell?

It is not God’s will that anyone goes to hell. *God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim. 2:4). *God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but to come to repentance* (2 Pet. 3:9). Every person on earth knows there is a God by an inner knowing, the conscience, and an outer observance of the creation. (Romans 1, Psalm 19). In fulfillment of 1,500 years of prophecy, God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins (Moses, the Psalms,

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), and to provide a way to be “saved” from the punishment that we deserve and to go to heaven. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)

But many other verses warn of the consequences of refusing to receive this gift: *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides (remains) on him* (John 3:36). God does not arbitrarily consign anyone to hell, He simply enforces the decision that each person makes during his lifetime.

Blind people cannot see

You would not criticize a blind person because he kept walking into walls, you would feel compassion because there is simply no way for him to see what you see. 2 Cor. 4:4 says: *Our gospel is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* This is a judgment of God because of their refusal to repent and ask for God's forgiveness. They will remain blind until they cry out to God for mercy. Only God can open a blind person's eyes.

Some of the topics covered in Bill Wiese's book

- Do "good" people go to hell?
- Is hell a place, and where is it located?
- Is there literal fire in hell?
- Do you have a body in hell?
- Do you remember your life on earth and your loved ones?
- Is hell ever terminated or does it last forever?

Bill's ministry after spending 23 minutes in hell

After Bill's time in hell, God said to him, "Go and tell them about this place. It is not my desire that any should go there. Hell was made for the devil and his angels." Bill immediately told God he would obey, but then he thought: "Why would anyone believe me? They will think I had a bad dream, or that I am crazy." The Lord said to me, "It is not your job to convict their hearts. That responsibility belongs to the Holy Spirit. Your part is to go and tell them."

Since that time Bill has never solicited one door or one opportunity to tell his story. He simply told his story to his wife, a few friends, and his pastor. Then the opportunities started coming: small groups of laymen and pastors, churches, conferences, schools, radio interviews and his little paperback book that has gone around the world. Bill's experience is, of course, a reminder that God's Word is true, and that He means exactly what He says and will do what He has said He will do. The nation of Israel found that out when they were invaded by enemy nations, destroyed, and scattered across the earth. It is also a message of hope. God loves us and has paid for our rescue through the death of His Son on the cross. All we have to do is repent (change our minds) and turn to Him in faith. It is not God's choice, it is ours.

"90 Minutes in Heaven"

As 1989 began, Don Piper was on the staff of a Baptist church in a suburb of Houston. He had a wife and three small children. On January 18, as he was driving home alone from a church conference on a narrow, two-lane road crossing a large lake, he was hit head-on by a big-rig truck, and he died.

The 18-wheeler was being driven by a young prison inmate and was going 60 miles per hour. It crushed the little Ford Escort that Don was driving and tore the car in two just back of the front seats. It also nearly tore off Don's left arm and left leg and knocked pieces of bone out of both that were never found. Paramedics reached the scene in minutes. They found no pulse, declared Don "dead", and covered him with a tarp. He would remain that way for an hour and a half.

Immediately after he died, he went straight to heaven.

While he was in heaven, a Baptist preacher came on the accident scene. He didn't know who the victim was but only that the EMT's said he was dead. Praying for dead people was beyond the scope of his theology, but God told him to go pray for the man, and to pray specifically that he would be healed of any brain damage and internal injuries. He had to talk his way past the scoffing EMT's. He had to crawl through what had been the trunk area and reach over the seat and lay his hand on the man's shoulder and start praying.

Don found himself standing in front of a brilliant, ornate gate, and he was full of joy. A crowd of people rushed forward to greet him, all smiling, shouting and praising God, and the first person he recognized was Joe Kulbeth, his grandfather. "Donnie," he exclaimed, and he embraced him tightly. Many more were greeting him, and he saw Mike Wood, a childhood

friend who had been influential in Don's becoming a Christian. Mike had been killed in an auto accident at age 19. He saw his great-grandmother, Hattie Mann, who was Native American. All he remembered of her was that she had osteoporosis and false teeth. When she greeted him in heaven she stood strong and upright and when she smiled her teeth sparkled.

Besides the many loved ones and friends who greeted Don in heaven, probably his most vivid memory was of the sound. "I can only describe it as the holy swoosh of angel's wings. A second memory remains, even today, "The single, most vivid memory I have of my entire heavenly experience. I call it music, but it differed from anything I had ever heard on earth. There were a multitude of voices and instruments offering up thousands of songs of praise simultaneously, yet it was not a cacophony but a beautiful blending of lyrics and melody that is indescribable." Don was carried along toward the very gate of heaven, when suddenly he was returned to earth.

Dick Onerecker, the Baptist pastor who had been praying for Don's lifeless body, said that he prayed the most passionate, fervent, emotional prayer of his life. Periodically, he would intersperse old hymns with his prayers. As he started to quietly sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," he heard Don begin to sing with him. Don reports: "In that first moment of consciousness, I was aware that I was singing with someone; second, I was aware that someone held my right hand in a strong grip. (Later, Don and the other pastor figured out that there was no possible way that he, the other pastor, could have reached Don's hand, which was down on the floorboard. It was all he could do to reach through the crushed top of the car, over the car seat, and lay his hand on his shoulder.)

It was 6:20 PM, six and a half hours from the time of the accident, when the ambulance finally arrived at Hermann Hospital in Houston. Word had spread, and hundreds if not thousands of people were praying for Don. His pain was off the scale. They gave him so much morphine they feared he would go into a coma, but nothing touched the pain. Only under the anesthesia for surgery that lasted 12 hours did the pain stop....while he was unconscious. Don has learned to endure pain every day, month, year, since the accident.

Don's recovery was slow and agonizing: another 12-hour surgery to connect an Ilizarov frame (a torturous frame to induce the bone in his leg to grow back. He wore it for 11-1/2 months); times of infection and pneumonia; anger at God, the doctors, the state of Texas and the prison system, at his wife and even the many friends who visited him, 35 more surgeries, months in bed in braces and crutches, relearning to walk. He wanted to die. He didn't want to live in pain and disability, he wanted to go back to heaven. An elderly pastor rebuked him for his selfishness, and he repented and started being healed emotionally and spiritually. Much of Don's book is his honest report about what a lousy patient he was.

Don didn't tell anyone, even his wife, anything about his trip to heaven for a year and a half following the accident. He was sure they would think he was nuts. Finally, he mentioned a little of his experience to his best friend who was astounded. "Why haven't you told us, Don?" When Don told him about his reservations, his friend said, "Don, this isn't about you. It's for us. We need to hear this story. God gave you a gift, and we desperately need to hear about it."

Don finally was convinced and his story has gone out all across the world. His experience of heaven, like Bill Wiese's experience of hell, is confirmed by the testimony of God's Word, the Bible. Don's story has comforted a great number of others, fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. His story has resulted in people being rescued from depression and suicide. And it has resulted in countless people turning to Christ for salvation. If you have never read these two books, I believe it would be worth your time to order them. And you may have loved ones or friends who would be blessed to read them. -----

MIRACLE WORK - I

The ministry of Jordan Seng is one of those things that I had never heard of. Jordan published a book, Miracle Work, in 2012 that I just discovered. "Jordan has ministered broadly through teaching, healing, prophecy and church-planting for twenty (now 27) years. He has led training conferences and seminars for every major Christian denomination and numerous mission organizations in America, Europe, Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean. He holds degrees in political theory from Stanford and the University of Chicago, and was a National Security Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. He is currently the senior pastor of Bluewater Mission, a justice-oriented church in Honolulu, Hawaii." His resume sounds a lot like mine, doesn't it? (Said Daffy Duck as he read Albert Einstein's biography.)

In coming months I'm going to share some further insights from Jordan's book. The first insight, in this article, addresses the obvious truth that we can't do any supernatural work for God – salvation, healing, setting people free – in our own power, we must have God's power.

So how do we get God's power? (The following is greatly abbreviated.):

“When I first started doing supernatural ministry, I thought the key to healing or delivering someone would be technical expertise – what to say, how to say it, whether to lay on hands, how to discern if a sickness had spiritual roots, and so on. The books I found on supernatural ministries all seemed to stress *methods*: the five-step healing model, the proper way to identify and renounce a demon, the correct use of anointing oil. I came to believe that if I failed at a healing or deliverance, it was probably because I was executing it incorrectly. But in reality, method is not nearly as important as power. It's not even close. It's not so much what you say or do when you try to heal or deliver someone; it's how much power you have when you say or do it.

“As an analogy, you might think of weightlifting. If you're trying to bench-press three hundred pounds, it will help a bit to know how to grip the bar properly and how to breathe effectively when you're lifting. But it will help you a heck of a lot more to have developed a lot of muscle. So, how do we develop supernatural muscle? Fortunately, the Bible has a fair bit to say about it although it is a subtle feature of kingdom stories.

“For instance, after Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended on him and he was “*full* of the Holy Spirit.” But then, “the Spirit led him into the wilderness” where he fasted and overcame temptation for forty days, after which “he returned to Galilee in the *power* of the Spirit” and began doing miracles. (Luke 4:1-14) Notice the progression. Jesus already had the *presence* of the Spirit, but only after his spiritual work in the wilderness did he have the *power* of the Spirit. God's presence brings the power, but we actually have to do a little work to develop in that power for ministry. This applied to Jesus, so it certainly applies to us. What follows is my best effort at explaining my scriptural and practical understanding of how to develop the Lord's power for ministry.

The power equation

I'm embarrassed by this name. It suggests a sort of mathematical precision that doesn't really apply. But I'm trying to illustrate how several different elements can combine to increase our power in the Spirit:

Authority + Gifting + Faith + Consecration = Power

So, if your power requirement is small – meaning you're not trying to do anything too daring – then you won't need much authority, gifting, faith, and consecration. But if you need more power because, say, you're trying to heal the sick or cast out demons, then you'll need more authority, gifting, faith and consecration. And as you step out into more daring ministry opportunities, your need will increase more and more. (It's probably easier to heal hay fever than cancer. And it's easier to work on a church staff in Omaha than to be a missionary in Pakistan.)

I believe that a lot of one thing can help compensate for a low amount of another. For example, if you're not gifted in healing ministry, but you do have a lot of faith, then your overall power level might still be enough to pull off a given healing. No single component determines everything.

I stress this point because of some popular misunderstandings. The most famous is what is sometimes called “faith healing” or “word of faith” theology. It claims that miracles happen when you really, really believe they will, and that's all there is to it. So, if the miracle doesn't happen, you are told that it is always because somebody didn't believe enough. Period. I think faith has an immense influence on the flow of supernatural power, but it's not the whole story, and assuming it is can do harm. Imagine a cancer sufferer who fails to see healing, and the ‘faith healer’ says, “Well, you just didn't have enough faith!” That's a devastating thing to say to a discouraged sick person. In the Bible, we read how dead people are occasionally brought back to life by Jesus or his followers. How much faith does a dead person have?

Okay, you might say, if it's not the faith of the recipient that counts, maybe it's the faith of the minister. Yet, when Jesus went to his hometown, “he could do no mighty miracles there” because the people “took offense at him, and he was astonished at their lack of faith.” (Mark 6:1-6)

1. *authority*

Authority can be defined as our right (actually our privilege) to wield the power of the Lord, as the Lord directs. When Jesus first sent out his twelve disciples, he “gave them authority toheal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers,

drive out demons” (Matt. 10:1-8) When they returned, they exclaimed, “Lord, even the demons submit to us by your name!” We can speak in the authority of Jesus’ name when we are working in obedience to him. Jesus says to us, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you” (John 15). In short, obedience to God increases our authority to wield his power. If addiction controls you, it’s unlikely that a spirit of addiction would feel intimidated by your command, no matter how many times you spoke the name of Jesus. Remember the story in Acts 19 when the seven sons of Sceva tried to cast evil spirits out of a demonized man.

2. *gifting*

“God gives specific gifts to different people that they might all be used harmoniously in the body of Christ to serve one another and to serve the world. There are many lists of gifts in the Bible, such as prophecy, healing, tongues, helps, teaching, encouragement, giving, mercy, arts, craftsmanship, and others (1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Romans 12:6-8, Exodus 31:1-5, and others). We are told that “All can prophesy,” and of course all can give and teach and help and encourage, but if you have a spiritual gift, you will experience more power than where you don’t.

“How do you get a certain spiritual gift if you don’t already have it? (1) Ask for it. The Bible gives examples of people who received an impartation from God by prayer or the laying on of hands. (2) Borrow it. That is, take along with you someone in your fellowship who is gifted in areas where you are weak. (Note from Glenn: God was so gracious in raising up two friends, Fred Feller and Lynne Cumming, who are tremendously gifted in healing, words of knowledge, prophecy and wisdom, so that we traveled together to Mexico, Haiti, Israel, the Amazon, and other places as a team for 25 years.)

3. *faith*

“My definition: “Miracle working faith is the faith that God is genuinely eager to give to us for the goodness of miracles.” The role of faith is mentioned in at least 27 miracle accounts in the Gospels. First, in the moment of ministry, stoke your own faith. Coaches tell athletes to focus their minds before the game. When ministering, Jesus sometimes tells people “Don’t be afraid; just believe!” Before my healing teams step into a ministry session, I’ll tell them, “Get your faith on!” It’s not emotionalism, it’s resolve. Second, since faith is a collective thing, try to maximize your faith environment when you minister. Fuel their faith by biblical teaching, by sharing stories of how you have seen God heal, and especially by people who witness to their own healing.

4. *consecration*

“Consecration refers to the way in which we dedicate ourselves to the things of God through specific sacrificial acts. Times of praying, fasting, and giving are the prime examples. Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness. He went into the mountains for whole nights of prayer. He laid down his life in loving sacrifice to his Father. Acts of consecration must be truly costly. King David once said, “I cannot make a sacrifice that costs me nothing.” There are many examples in scripture: the sinful woman poured out a costly jar of perfume on Jesus; the disciples “continued in prayer together” for ten days before being empowered by the Spirit on Pentecost; the great American revivalist Charles Finney moved in such power that sometimes people would start sobbing in repentance as soon as he walked into the room. He said that when his power waned, he “would set apart a day for private fasting and prayer, and then the power would return upon me with all its freshness.”

Important concluding observation from Jordan Seng:

“A friend recently asked me a subtle question: Is it more important to pursue supernatural power for ministry or to just pursue God and let the power flow as a byproduct? I believe that God has worked it out so all the things that develop supernatural power in us are also things that draw us closer to him. Submitting to god’s **authority** increases our power, but it also tightens our walk of obedience with him. The use of **spiritual gifts** boosts power, but it also increases our awareness of God’s grace in us and encourages us to work together in unity with our brother and sisters. Increased **faith** brings power, but faith is also the bedrock of our relationship with God. **Consecration** amplifies power, but it also exercises our devotion to our Father in heaven.

“Working for spiritual muscle will also get you a healthier spiritual heart.”

WHEN IN A FIX, PHILIPPIANS 4:6

Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God Bless

Glenn

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