

22. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost, the one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting damnation.

(Transcript of message preached by Pastor Rick Minett on September 11, 2005 at Grace Community Church)

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who 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, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

As you know, our nation and most especially the Gulf Coast region, has been fixated on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and rightfully so. Lives have not only been lost, but others have been devastated in ways that you and I can probably hardly imagine. This single storm has changed people, families, states, and literally a nation. For centuries to come, people will still be talking about Katrina; at least in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and probably Texas as well. Only four weeks ago I was in Louisiana, near New Orleans and life was normal. People were doing all the things they normally do, parents were enrolling their kids in school, students were driving back from all around the country to get ready for their next semester at Tulane University or LSU or a number of other Louisiana colleges, just as our son, Scott, did. Little did they know that their world was literally going to be "rocked" shortly. All of that goes to show us that we live in a world filled with uncertainties. Who can guarantee what tomorrow will bring? It doesn't matter if you have the riches of Bill Gates, much of life is out of your control, and ultimately there are very few things that you can be certain of in life. And maybe that is why it is so important to know and truly seek to understand the things we can be certain of in life. See, just as there are "uncertainties" there are "certainties" as well. There are some things we can be sure of; things that are steadfast and sure; things that we need to understand. With that being said, I want to suggest that there are six things that we can be sure of—six things that we really need to try our best to understand—because each of these are coming our way just as sure as Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast.

Death Is Certain

None of us really want to talk about it, do we? Just the thought of it can shake some people to the core. It reminds me of the story about three buddies who were brave enough to talk about the subject one day over lunch. One man said, *"When you are in the casket and family and friends are standing over you, what would you like to hear them say about you?"* The first guy said, *"I'd like to hear them say that I was a great doctor and a great family man."* The second guy said, *"I'd like to hear them say that I was a wonderful husband and school teacher, and that I made a huge difference in the lives of children."* And then the two asked the man that originally brought up the question, *"What would you like to hear others say about you when they are gathered around your casket?"* He thought about it for a moment and said, *"I'd like to hear them say: 'Look, He's moving!'"*

Years ago there was a section in "Reader's Digest" called "Children's Letters To God." One little boy wrote: "Dear God, what is it like when you die? Nobody will tell me? I just want to know, but I don't want to do it. Your friend, Mike." That's how a lot of people feel. They may want to know about it, but they surely don't want to do it. HL Mencken said, "Death is a universal conspiracy not to be mentioned." But it must be mentioned and it must be talked about and it must be understood, because each and every one of us are going that way. We've been told all of our lives that two things are certain: Death and taxes. Well, if you are clever enough or unscrupulous enough, you can probably avoid taxes. But it doesn't matter who you are or what you have or what you don't have, death is certain. One day, each and every one of us will die.

Eternity Is Certain

In Job 14:1-2, Job says, *"Man who is born of woman is of a few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue."* And then Job asked God this question in verse 14, *"If man dies, shall he live again?"* Like Job, people through the ages have been asking that question. "When we die, is it all over? Do we cease to exist or does life continue in another dimension, another state of being?" The Bible gives us an answer to those questions. The Apostle Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians 15. In verse 53, he says, *"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."* The key word here is "must." We don't cease to exist. Whether we want to believe it or even accept it, we are different than the rest of creation. We are eternal! In Ecclesiastes 3:11, Solomon tells us that God *"has put eternity in our hearts."* And the reason He has is because we are eternal beings, and deep in our heart of hearts we know it.

What we are experiencing in the here and now is just temporal, a journey, a pilgrimage that is leading us to what we shall be. Paul says it this way in 2 Corinthians 5: *"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* Consider the contrast here between the terms "tent" and "house." Most people don't live in tents on a permanent basis—yet most of us have probably spent a night or two in one. When the boys were younger we would make those occasional trips to the State Park, spend an hour or two attempting to put up our tent that the box cover made look so easy to assemble,

and we would spend a night or two with mother nature. Frankly, I am glad tents are temporary. I'd much rather spend the night in my own home and in my own bed, how about you? The Bible says that right now we are living in "tents," but that will all change in eternity.

How long is eternity? The old preachers used to say: "Close your eyes and think of a beach. Now imagine a seagull swooping down on the East Coast and picking up one grain of sand in its mouth and flying all the way to the West Coast and dropping that grain of sand there. Then it flies back across this great land, picks up another single grain of sand, flies back across again and deposits it on the western shore." And they would conclude, "When that bird has deposited all of the sand from the East Coast onto the shores of the West Coast, eternity has just begun."

Resurrection Is Certain

Death is a universal fate because we are all ancestors of Adam, but it is not the end. A resurrection follows. Death is merely the vehicle that moves us from our "tent" to our "home." The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, so Paul confronts them in 1 Corinthians 15 by saying, "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty."

1 Corinthians 6:14 tells us that just as God raised the Lord by His power, He will raise us up as well, and Romans 8:11 says, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Furthermore, Ephesians 2:6-7 tells us that God will raise us up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." No power on earth will keep you bound – one day there will be a resurrection!

Judgment Is Certain

Many pagan religions are built on a system of reincarnation, and at the heart of this lie of the adversary is the notion that you'll never have to face the judgment of a Holy God. In other words, you just keep cycling through human existence again and again, avoiding judgment. But the Bible refutes that clearly in Hebrew 9:27. It tells us that each of us have not only been appointed to die, it also says, "but after this the judgment." The sobering verses that we read earlier in our text from Revelation 20, remind us of three important truths: (1) God will judge. (2) He will judge everyone according to their works. (3) He keeps a record that's all inclusive of every word, every thought and every deed.

Bible theologians have disagreed exactly who will stand before God at "The Great White Judgment." Some say that both believers and non-believers will have to give an account for their lives here. Others say that this is only for non-believers, since believers have been already judged at what is called the "Bema Judgment." And though they may differ with regard to the "where" – they all agree on the "what." In other words, everyone will give an account for his or her life on planet earth. It's unavoidable, inescapable, and inevitable. Ultimately all men will give an account and God will reject those who have rejected Him, and one day He will forever destroy evil by setting it in a place where it belongs.

Hell Is Certain

Hell is not a popular doctrine. Preachers don't want to preach about it because people don't want to hear about it, but that doesn't change the fact that it is a reality. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "...broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it" (Matthew 7:13). And the reason that it is broad is not because it is God's desire or will for any man or woman to go to hell; it is broad because there are so many who have chosen that path by their own volition.

Researchers for "biblehelp.org" have concluded that 53 million unbelievers will die this year on planet earth. That translates to 145,000 per day, over 6,000 per hour, over 100 per minute, or nearly 2 per second that will be bound for a place called hell. I don't know how correct these statistics may be, but this I know: The Bible says the way that leads to destruction is broad! Is that God's desire? Of course not! It breaks His heart that His creation, by and large, has rejected Him by rejecting His Son. That's not His will. Matter of fact, 2 Peter 2:9 tells us that God "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God asks this question in Ezekiel 18:23. It says, "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord God, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?" In verse 32, He answers His own question. It says, "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!" And just in case someone misunderstood, God repeats Himself in Ezekiel 33:11 when He says, "Say to them: As I live," says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?" No one has to die in his or her sins! No one has to spend eternity in hell! There is a way of escape, and frankly it couldn't be easier. All one needs to do is repent and place his or her faith in Christ as our Savior.

Let us never forget that hell was not created for man. In Matthew 25, Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...'" But then scripture says, beginning at verse 41, "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...'" And verse 46 concludes, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

When Lucifer was in heaven he was called the "Son of the Morning" and the "anointed cherub." But his own beauty led to pride which ultimately led to his downfall. Isaiah 14 tells us that he said in his heart, *"I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High."* He essentially said, "I will choose my will rather than the will of the Almighty!" And in a moment's time, by that act of rebellion, hell became a necessity for Lucifer and the angels that would follow him. Before this hell didn't exist! Hell was made purely and wholly only as a place of eternal separation for Lucifer and his demonic host, but because generations have said the same thing, because generations have said, "My will, not Yours, O God," hell had to be enlarged! Isaiah 5:14 says, *Therefore hell has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure; their glory and their multitude and their pomp, and he who is jubilant, shall descend into it. People shall be brought down, each man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled."* C.S. Lewis said, "There are only two kinds of people in the world. Those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God ultimately says, 'Thy will be done.'"

I believe that hell is a literal place; though I find myself increasingly in the minority. But that's okay. I don't talk about hell because I want to, I talk about hell because Jesus did and because it is in God's Word and because we are to preach the "whole counsel of God" and not just the parts we want to hear. Whether we want to recognize its existence or not doesn't change the fact that it is real, and what the Bible tells us about it is horrifying at best. For example, the book of Matthew describes it as a place of "outer darkness" where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." In Mark 9, Jesus calls it a place of "endless fire" and a place "where the worm does not die." It's a gruesome picture—an eternal body that burns, but will not be consumed; an eternal body that is eaten by maggots, but won't die. Luke 16 tells us that it is a place of great remorse; in other words, man's memories of "what could have been" will haunt him throughout eternity. Luke 16 also speaks of intense and unsatisfied thirst, as well as misery and pain. And maybe worst of all, is the eternal separation that Revelation 21 talks about. Forever man will be separated from love ones, from laughter, from liberty; most of all, from love itself because the Bible tells us that God is love.

Dear one, God hasn't left eternal matters up in the air for us to just somehow figure out on our own. He has left very clear instructions in His Word regarding eternity, heaven, hell, and the way that we might escape hell through salvation in His Son. We need to be "saved" from something. And that something is horrible, it is eternal, and it is irreversible. Hell is a stark reality whether or not we are comfortable with the concept or not. But greater still is the reality of Jesus Christ who came to save us. Nobel said, "Every man ought to have the chance to correct his epitaph in midstream and write a new one." That's why Christ came. That's the "good news" of the Gospel!

Heaven Is Certain

Again, In Matthew 25, Jesus said, *"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Even though hell was never in God's original blueprints, heaven was! Hurricane Katrina reminds us that we not only live in an "uncertain world" but we also live in such an "imperfect world." But the day is coming for those who have put their faith and trust in Christ when they will live forever in a perfect world. That's what heaven is! In heaven we will know perfect peace. The reason we will know perfect peace is because everything that strips peace from our life will be gone. In heaven, there will be no more sin, no more suffering, no more sorrow, and no more separation. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."* In heaven we will possess perfect knowledge. Think about all the things in your life that just don't make any sense to you. In heaven, all your questions will be answered. In heaven there will no longer be confusion and ignorance, and there will be no more need to walk by faith rather than sight. 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."* In heaven, we will live in perfect comfort. Our tears will be wiped away and there will be nothing to make us sad and nothing to disappoint us. Revelation 21:4 says, *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* And lastly, in heaven we will finally know perfect joy. The day is coming when we will finally be free from evil forever! We will never be tempted again, have a selfish desire again, or have a sinful thought again. We will be liberated from our flesh and finally able to be absolutely righteous, holy and perfect before our God. Psalm 16:11 says, *"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* That's our future: Perfect peace, perfect knowledge, perfect comfort, and perfect joy! But we prepare for it now. The old sages used to say, "A wise man prepares for the inevitable." Death is the inevitable and we need to prepare, because just as a resurrection is certain, so is a place of everlasting life and a place of everlasting damnation.*

There is an old legend about a swan and a crane. A beautiful swan touched down on the banks of the water next to a crane that was wading about seeking snails, and the crane said, "Where did you come from?" The swan replied, "From heaven." "And where is heaven," asked the crane. "Heaven!" said the swan, "You've never heard of heaven?" And then the swan went on to describe heaven. She told all about the streets of gold, the gates of precious stone, the river of life, and so much more. For over thirty minutes she told the crane all about the grandeur of Glory, but the crane never lifted his head. Instead, he said, "Are there any snails there?" "Snails!" replied the swan, "Of course not! There are no snails in heaven." "Then," said the crane as he continued searching through the dirty water: "You can have heaven. I want snails!"

Hell will be filled with people who will get there only to realize that they are there because of their needless search for snails. That is all the pleasures of this world are worth when compared to the glory that awaits those who have placed their trust in Christ. I hope you aren't searching for snails. God offers you much more. He offers you things you can be certain of; things like His grace, His mercy, and His love.