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COMMUNITY GROUPS

RIVERS CROSSING CHURCH

Community Group Discussion Guide

May 7, 2023

Ask Me Anything Week #4 / Pastor Paul Taylor
How Could A Loving God Send People To Hell?

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. Icebreaker Question | What's your favorite board game or card game, and why?
2. How would you summarize your beliefs about heaven and hell? Do you primarily think of heaven and hell as a literal place or as an eternal reflection of a person's relationship (or lack thereof) with God? How did you arrive at this understanding?
3. The Christian doctrine of hell challenges us to consider and hold together many attributes of God, namely His love, justice, holiness, and anger/wrath. Read John 3:16-21, 35-36 together and then discuss the corresponding questions.

John 3:16-21, 35-36 (NIV) – ¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God... ³⁵The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

a) How do you see these different attributes of God working together in this text?

b) Many people struggle to believe that a loving God can also be a judging God. "If God is truly loving and perfect, shouldn't He forgive and accept everyone?" When responding to that question, Pastor Tim Keller shares...

"...that all loving persons are sometimes filled with wrath, not just despite of but because of their love. If you love a person and you see someone ruining them—even they themselves—you get angry...The Bible says God's wrath flows from love and delight in His creation. He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying [His creation's] peace and integrity." – Tim Keller, *The Reason For God*

Do you find Keller's words helpful when connecting these two attributes of God? Why or why not?

DIVING DEEPER

4. Read 1 Timothy 4:1-6, 2 Peter 3:8-10, Romans 1:18-25, and the quote by C.S. Lewis together. Then discuss the corresponding questions.

1 Timothy 4:1-6 (NIV) – ¹I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— ²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

2 Peter 3:8-10 (NIV) – ⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Romans 1:18-25 (NIV) – ¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

“[Hell is] the greatest monument to human freedom...There are only two kinds of people—those who say ‘Thy will be done’ to God or those to whom God in the end says, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice it wouldn’t be Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it.” – C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

a) What stands out to you from these Bible passages?

b) What do you think of C.S. Lewis’ remarks? Do you find them to be a compelling defense to the question – Why does a loving God send people to hell?

5. **Luke 16:19-31 records one of Jesus’ many teachings on eternity. Pastor Paul used this text during his sermon. Read this passage and discuss the corresponding questions.**

Luke 16:19-31 (NIV) – ¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ ²⁵“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ ²⁷“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ³⁰“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ³¹“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

a) What picture does Jesus paint of the reality of hell?

b) While Jesus certainly spoke about God's love and mercy, He also routinely talked about God's eternal judgment of sinners. Biblical scholars believe that more than half of Jesus' parables were about eternity and God's coming judgment.

Why do you think Jesus choose to speak on hell so much?

6. While this week's Ask Me Anything question was – Why does a loving God send people to hell? – Pastor Paul argued that a *better* question to ask is – How could a holy God allow me or anyone into heaven? Read Romans 3:21-28 together.

Romans 3:21-28 (NLT) – ²¹But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²²We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. ²³For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. ²⁷Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. ²⁸So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

a) How are God's love and justice seen on the cross?

b) According to this passage, how is anyone saved from hell?

c) Does reflecting on the reality of hell reignite your thankfulness toward God?

TAKING IT HOME

7. When speaking about those who hadn't professed faith in Jesus, the Apostle Paul shared that he had "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" in his heart (Romans 9:2). Having studied and now talked about the Bible's teachings on hell, do you sense any greater urgency to share your faith in Jesus Christ with others? Why or why not?

PRAYER REQUESTS

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RIVERS CROSSING - THINGS TO KNOW

1. Alpha at Rivers Crossing | Whether you're skeptical, exploring faith, or wrestling with doubt, Alpha is a safe place for you to bring your questions and connect with others. Our next Alpha class will take place this summer, from June 15th - August 3rd. Learn more about Alpha and register for the summer class at the link below:
<https://riverscrossing.com/alpha/>
2. Preteen Extreme | Who is ready to Race to the Extraordinary this summer at Preteen Extreme? Sign your preteen up now for an experience they'll remember for a lifetime at Preteen Extreme on Saturday, June 17th at Camp Kern. They will conquer an obstacle course, seek out the cross, work together to canoe, aim at archery, grow in community with their small group, and much more! Learn more and register at <https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1639769>
3. New Community Group Leaders | Interested in leading your own Community Group or have anyone you believe would make a great Community Group leader? If yes, we'd love the opportunity to connect with you or them and share more about our vision for groups at Rivers Crossing. We're always looking to create more space for people to experience and grow in the extraordinary life together!
New Group Leader Interest Form:
<https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/people/forms/414625>.
4. 2023 RC Students Summer Camp | Next summer (June 19-24, 2023), RC Students is going to Eagle Sky of the Ozarks for camp! We truly believe that Summer Camp is one of the best ways for your Junior High or High School student to get connected in RC Students. They'll build lasting bonds with other students and their leaders that will continue throughout the year. Most importantly, your student will have a week to focus on connecting with Jesus in a new way. Learn more and register below:
<https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1450605>