

Thoughts on the Afterlife

Part 2

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Agenda

- Assumptions
- Mysteries
- Pillars of my faith
- Heaven and hell
- Body and Soul
- Hierarchical Societies
- Jesus
- Free will
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- Prayer

Jesus

- Traditionally people believe that Jesus is God, or at least one of three “parts” of God; the “Trinity” being (1) God the Father, (2) God the Son, and (3) God the Holy Spirit
 - The idea of God in three parts never made sense to me
- Instead, I believe that Jesus is *fully human*, fundamentally no different from us, yet far more advanced in love and wisdom
- My *conjecture* is that Jesus lived as an ordinary human *long before* he was born to Mary in Israel roughly 2000 years ago
- I believe his birth to Mary 2000 years ago came only after he lived on earth (or perhaps even another planet) far earlier; that he died and went into the afterlife (as we all will do), where he excelled, becoming a very mature, loving, and wise soul who then entered the fetus of the pregnant Mary; thus his life in Israel 2000 years ago was his second time to live in a body

Jesus

- His *experience in the afterlife* explains how he knew so much about God; it explains his fearlessness and wisdom; and it explains his love for people
- I do believe Jesus demonstrated an exceptional understanding of God, and this conjecture seems to be the only reasonable way to explain how he attained that; I do not believe Jesus is God, nor do I see how he could have learned so much so quickly from anyone (on top of which that is not even suggested in the Gospels); but positing that *Jesus lived a long time in the afterlife* seems to me to be a perfect explanation for his deep, intimate, and confident knowledge of God
- I thus take very seriously the words of Jesus that I think he truly said (though separating them from other words the Gospel writers quote him as saying is not always easy)

The Wise Jesus

- I once heard Jesus referred to as the greatest psychologist who ever lived; I heartily concur
- I previously said that Jesus's time in the afterlife taught him a lot about God; it also taught him a lot about *people*
- One thing that continually strikes me as I read and study the Bible is that despite tremendous changes in technology, living standards, length of life, education, travel, communication, etc. over the past few thousand years, one thing has not changed: *human nature!*
- Jesus, on numerous occasions, is quoted as angrily saying “Woe to you!” to the scribes and the Pharisees; they are among the legal and religious elite who were very critical of Jesus; the Pharisees did believe in resurrection, so it would be natural for Jesus to speak to them about life in the afterlife

Jesus's Idea of Accountability

- On earth, we strive for a fair, moderate, proportional model of justice that leads to rehabilitation, reform, and better conduct
- Why should we expect God to take a radically different, all or nothing approach in the afterlife, as heaven and hell would be?
- Does it make any sense that our *eternal* life be determined by a few decades on earth? Of course not
- I do *not* see the death of our bodies as a great turning point when the Godly goals we strive for suddenly change; I believe that life is *continuous*, with our having the same (Godly) goals in the afterlife that Jesus taught us to follow on earth
- Living as a soul without a body will be logistically different than life on earth, but our moral compass should remain fixed as we die and transition into the afterlife
- Notice the quotations on the next slide implicitly refute the (flawed) interpretation of John 3:16, which according to many is “believe Jesus died for your sins” = “ticket to heaven”

Jesus on the Scribes and Pharisees

“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.”

“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay tithes of mint, dill, and cumin. But you have disregarded the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”

“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. And 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.’

Jesus on the Scribes and Pharisees

- There are certainly other ways Jesus *could* have addressed the Pharisees
 - He could have told them their behavior displeases God
 - He could have said they would go to hell
 - He could have told them Jews should support each other
- But he did not take any of these alternative approaches
- Instead, here and in other situations, he says they *will* be condemned, they *will* be humbled, they *will* enter the kingdom of God *later* than others (but still enter)
- To the poor, Jesus was sympathetic, but this sounds to me like the words of someone who *has been* in the afterlife, and *has seen* people judged for their sins and held accountable; *not* condemned to hell, or made to suffer *eternally*; but held to *fair accountability*, just the sort that sends a message and then allows people to reform

Jesus' Warnings

- The quotation about going into the kingdom sooner indicates that the scribes and Pharisees *can enter the kingdom*, which I interpret as the higher societies, *but that happens later, consistent with the idea of their needing a change of attitude first*
- The phrase “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees” shows *a minimum threshold of character* is required to enter the kingdom of *heaven, which would be the highest level*
- “greater condemnation” indicates something other than the extremes of traditional heaven and hell
- The important issues are justice, mercy, and faithfulness, all having to do with creating supportive, respectful human relationships
- To me, these quotations indicate varying degrees of reward and punishment, not the two extremes of heaven and hell

Jesus' Warnings to the Pharisees

- In these quotations from Jesus, *who* is doing the humbling and the exalting? *When and how* will some receive the greater condemnation? Why are some *delayed* in entering the kingdom of God, while others are permitted to enter *sooner*?
- There is no *time or place* for this scenario of accountability that Jesus describes if the scribes and Pharisees are condemned to hell, or if they ascend directly to heaven
- The only time and place that makes sense to me for what Jesus describes is *an afterlife that is neither heaven nor hell, but a multitude of varying states (“many rooms”)*
- These quotations indicate to me that after death we are not simply sent to heaven or hell, which represent the extremes; they indicate a more moderate, proportional model of accountability, with *varying degrees of judgement depending on our behavior*

“Woe to you”

- I do not believe God judges or punishes; God is the creator who allows his creation (us) to live as we see fit, and either reap the rewards of being good, or suffer the consequences of being wicked
 - If condemned, our condemnation is that of our fellow human beings, not God
 - Our condemnation is proportional to our evil, but is not eternal; there is always an opportunity to reform; we suffer only as long as it takes for us to confront the truth, repent, apologize, make amends, and truly change
- There are other passages that presumably take place in the afterlife in which people show regret for their actions *and others basically say “I told you so!”*
- I think my speculation of a hierarchical society, with judgement by people and the opportunity of upward mobility, fits very nicely with these “Woe to you!” warnings that Jesus gives
- I believe that in the afterlife, people judge each other, with God being above it all, yearning for each of us to find our way to the notion of living as loving people
- The consequences of evil are not hell, but they are serious; Jesus shows that being loving sometimes takes the form of issuing dire warnings; despite the angry tone, I believe that Jesus does not hate the Pharisees, or anyone else; he simply warns them, and everyone else listening in, that their conduct has consequences

No sudden transformation

- While I do believe that achieving perfect love for and harmony with others is possible, I do not believe that God is suddenly going to transform us into such a state when we die; if this were the case, why does God have us suffer “man’s inhumanity to man” for thousands of years?
- In respecting our free will, God declines to make us be the way God wants us to be; it is more meaningful for us to *earn* it
 - And that is the nature of life: we are not born knowing anything and it takes years of formal and informal education for us to learn even a small portion of human knowledge as individuals; mankind as a whole has taken thousands of years to learn what knowledge we do have; God created us but left us to make it on our own; I see God sending Jesus as God’s primary help
- The notion of going to heaven and everything suddenly being blissful is just too simplistic; it runs against the grain of the nature of life on earth

Mixed Societies

- Though I lean toward the “hierarchical” societies described earlier, it is certainly possible that we will live in mixed societies instead; that is, societies of both good and evil people together, as we do on earth
- While it is tempting to want to escape evil people, it may be that we simply have to endure them, but that has not worked out very well on earth
- But this possibility seems less likely to me; the restrictions of living in a body force us to live in a world full of good and evil people; while I cannot rule out that as the model for the afterlife, it just makes more sense to me to believe in a hierarchy of societies in which all the people have the same degree of character

Hierarchical Societies

- It makes more sense to me that God *limits* this mixing of good and evil people to a few decades in a body; dying provides an escape from evil people. but instead of sudden bliss, we live in the afterlife with people having the same degree of character as each of us has
- I thus lean much more toward believing in the “hierarchical” societies for the afterlife since it is fair, and provides incentive for reform
- This model provides an element of what the long suffering on earth yearn for: “*eternal rest*”; they will not become *idle*, but they will receive justice, peace, dignity, respect, fairness, and relief from prejudice, oppression, and hatred; they will experience an end to the struggle against all these forms of evil and that is the essence of what they mean by “*eternal rest*”
 - It will be a respite from the struggle for justice