

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Taking Your Eye Off the Tiger

October 2, 2017

I recently read a fascinating story about a tiger that was found roaming free around the Atlanta metro area. Calls to the local authorities began streaming in as residents noticed the animal wandering through several streets. I can't imagine the fear that the community must have experienced during those hours. The relief that they must have felt when they received word that the tiger was no longer a threat and walking the streets must have been enormous.

The reason this story fascinated me was because of the questions that arise from a tiger on the loose. Why was a tiger roaming Atlanta? How did this dangerous animal get there? After the tiger was no longer wandering around, these questions became the focus of the community, and the mystery took only a few hours to solve.

It was discovered that the tiger escaped while being transported from Tampa, Florida, to Memphis, Tennessee. The truck transporting the tiger made an overnight stop in Atlanta where the animal slipped out of its enclosure. Yikes!

The part of the story that I love to think about is that the caretakers woke up the next morning and drove the truck from Atlanta to Memphis, and they had no idea that their precious (and dangerous) cargo was no longer with them. Just imagine the panic that they must have immediately felt when opening the doors to the back of the truck and finding it empty!

How could they not have noticed something so important? Why weren't they paying attention? They just kept driving down the road oblivious to the reality behind them and only saw what was directly in front of them.

This past weekend, Ben talked about heaven, and he asked the question, "How often do you think about heaven?" Many of us answer that question with the same mindset as the caretakers in the story. We don't pay much attention to it or give it much thought. We stay focused on moving forward with the day to day and the here and now. We take our eyes off of eternity, just like the caretakers took their eyes off of the tiger.

We are currently in the series "Better", and we have been learning that Jesus makes life better and makes us better at life. From Ben's message, we learned that intentionally thinking about heaven can make our lives better as well.

John 14:1-6

1“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. 4And you know the way to where I am going.” 5“No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?” 6Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

In John 14, we see that heaven is a real place with a real purpose. Jesus is there preparing for us, and when everything is ready, he will come for us. Because of this truth, we also know that our today is not our forever. Jesus has a better eternity for us, an eternity in heaven where he is in control.

Over the next four days in the LivingItOut, we will be looking more in depth at the truths that we learn about in John 14:1-6. Heaven is real, Jesus is the way to heaven, he is in control, and today is not my forever are truths that we need to never lose sight of.

Questions:

How often do you think about heaven?

How does thinking about heaven help you?

Prayer:

Thank you for making my life better. Thank you for providing me with the hope of heaven and the way there through your Son, Jesus. I pray that over the next four days as I focus on the truths in John 14, I will develop a new perspective. I pray that you help me focus on eternity and not always on the now that is directly in front of me. Amen.

This post was written by Ben Bockert, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

More Than a State of Mind

October 3, 2017

Heaven. There are probably as many ideas and mental images of it as there are people who believe in it.

To some, heaven is a physical place, an actual dot on the map. The Elysian Fields of Greek mythology were supposedly located on the western edge of the earth, while the Greek gods were believed to live on Mount Olympus. To the ancient Greeks, as Belinda Carlisle would say, “Heaven is a place on earth.”

To others, such as Buddhists, the final stage of “heaven” was not so much a physical place as it was a mental one – nirvana, or enlightenment. In the words of American philosopher Wayne Dyer, “Heaven is a state of mind.”

As for the western world, we’ve probably all imagined heaven as a palace in the sky made entirely of clouds. It might not be how you truly believe heaven to be, but let’s be honest, you’ve pictured it that way.

But what does the Bible say about heaven? Where is it? And what is it like?

Well, for starters, the Bible doesn’t teach any of the theories previously mentioned.

Now, I’m not saying that heaven isn’t built on fluffy white clouds, but the Bible also doesn’t say it is. What the Bible does say is that heaven is a physical place, rather than a “state of mind,” and that it’s not somewhere on earth, or at least not completely.

According to the Bible, just as Jesus was a real, physical person, heaven is a real place to which he ascended. The Bible does not spell out exactly what heaven is like, but we can get an idea of it from some of its descriptions. Jesus describes it as a home (his Father’s home), “with more than enough room,” where he is “preparing a place.” (John 14:1-6)

Now, I personally don’t think Jesus meant that literally (at least not completely) – I imagine there’s a whole lot more to heaven than a large home. But whether it’s a metaphor or not, it paints a heartwarming image; heaven is a home, a welcoming place, with plenty of room for everyone. If you’ve ever shared the tight quarters of a dorm room or apartment, or perhaps grew up in a small house with a large family, that last part probably sounds appealing. As for who is in heaven right now, I can’t say for certain, except that Jesus is there, and he’s preparing the place for our arrival.

So if heaven is an actual place, where is it? Obviously, it's not at the top of a mountain or floating on clouds as people may have once believed. One theory I rather like is that heaven is part of another dimension – not in the science fiction sense of “dimension,” where one could step through a portal and end up in a completely different world, but in a similar sense as one-dimensional or three-dimensional. In this sense, heaven wouldn't be something completely separate from our world, or a physical place to which we could walk (or fly), but more like another layer to our world, something we can't perceive, but that can still interact with us.

It's just a theory, but I think it's an interesting one.

Of course, if heaven is another dimension layered over ours, could that make it a place on earth? Well, yes, no, and possibly. The short answer is “I don't know.” The long answer that we don't have time to properly discuss is “yes and no simultaneously.” Although Jesus frequently talks about entering the Kingdom of Heaven in a future sense, by saying things such as that he's preparing it for us, when asked by the Pharisees, “When will the Kingdom of God come?” Jesus responds by saying, “the Kingdom of God is already among you.” (Luke 17:20-21)

However, while heaven isn't necessarily on earth yet, the Bible predicts a time when it will be. Although our afterlife is eternal, heaven in its current form isn't necessarily. Revelation 21:1,3-4 says, *‘Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”*

So whether heaven is another dimension to our world, or something else entirely, it is a real place where Jesus is preparing for our arrival. And although heaven isn't a physical place on earth right now, we can look forward to a day when it will be, when we enjoy resurrected bodies and we can live in perfect community with God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and each other.

Questions:

Do you believe heaven is an actual place, or do you find yourself thinking of it more as a “state of mind”?

What do you think of the idea that heaven, or the spiritual world, is another dimension?

How can we prepare ourselves and strive for heaven while we are living on earth?
How can we live like the Kingdom of God is already here, as Jesus says?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we know your home is more complex than a castle in the clouds, and that it is more real than a state of mind. We thank you, Jesus, for welcoming us into your home and for preparing a way for us by bearing the cost of our sins. We live in anticipation of the day when heaven and earth are one, and we can spend eternity in perfect relationship with you. Please give us the strength, wisdom, and determination we need to faithfully strive and accomplish your will until that day arrives. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

This post was written by Payton Lechner, a regular contributor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Look at the Birds

October 4, 2017

Would you recognize the signs that you are a control freak? Here are some clues: You correct others when they are wrong. You always try to win the argument or have the last word. You refuse to admit when you are wrong. You judge or criticize others. You drive with rage.

While you may not be a control *freak*, we often spend our time, mental energy, and physical effort focusing on the things that are out of our control. While it may start on a small scale, ultimately we might try to control our eternal destination. What are some areas of your life that you try to control? Are those areas really within your ability to control?

Psychology Today says, "Control freaks experience consequences ranging from constant irritability to uncontrollable anger. In addition to wreaking havoc on your mental health, being a control freak also wastes time and energy, both of which are finite resources." How do we give up control and regain our emotional, mental, and physical health? To whom should we give control? John 14:1 says, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me [Jesus]." Jesus puts himself on the same level as God. He is in control and is worthy to be trusted and given control of all areas of your life.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:25-27: ²⁵*"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life - whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?"* ²⁶*Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?"* ²⁷*Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"*

You matter to God. He desires a relationship with you. God wants you to spend your eternity in heaven with him, but he left that decision up to you. Will you give over control of your life to God?

Questions:

On a scale of 1-10, how much of a control freak are you? How is this rating affecting your emotional, mental, and physical health?

What are some areas of your life that you try to control? Are those areas really within your ability to control?

What do you need to change in your life to give control over to God? Share one step you can start this week with a friend or relative that will help keep you accountable.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for caring about me. Thank you for providing for my needs. Help me to recognize when I'm being a control freak. Help me to release control of things I cannot change over to you. Amen.

God's Unbroken Promise

October 5, 2017

In the early afternoon of May 27, 1943, a 26-year-old Army bombardier sat nervously aboard a bomber plane named *Green Hornet*. To the dismay of its reluctant crew, the rickety Army Air Forces B-24 had been commissioned to carry out a search and rescue mission, near the remote South Pacific island of Palmyra, in the midst of World War II.

Moments later, the crew's worst fears were realized when both of the plane's left engines cut out, and the *Green Hornet* began spiraling toward the ocean below. Amazingly, the young bombardier and two fellow crew members survived the ensuing crash. But what followed can only be described as "Hell on Earth."

Now lost at sea, the men lay helplessly on a pair of two-foot by six-foot life rafts they had strung together in makeshift fashion. Adrift in the middle of 65 million square miles of ocean, the men were subjected to the alternating discomfort of searing sun and bone-chilling nights, along with the constant, unwelcome companionship of ravenous Mako sharks. With his sustenance limited to the occasional albatross and small fish that he could catch with his bare hands, the bombardier dwindled to just 65 pounds. After 33 days, one of the trio died. On the 47th day, the bombardier and his remaining companion were rescued... *by the enemy*. For the next two years, the bombardier was held captive in a series of Japanese POW camps where he endured unthinkable physical and mental torture at the hands of his captors. For years afterward, he struggled with terrifying flashbacks and bitterness from the experience and sought refuge in alcohol to suppress his demons.

For those who may not recognize this story, it's the true account of Louis "Louie" Zamperini, popularized in author Laura Hillenbrand's 2010 novel, "Unbroken." Few, if any, among us will ever endure anything resembling the horrors that Louie Zamperini faced during - and after - his time in captivity. But we all encounter challenges that test our limits - and our faith. Serious health issues, relationship problems, job loss, addiction, and money woes, in the absence of faith, can all cause us to tumble into despair. And when we are in the crosshairs of these present-day issues, we can all-too-often be left wondering what is left of our tomorrow.

As is so often the case, however, we can be comforted in the knowledge that whatever we are facing today, it is temporary. God has something better for us. As Jesus assures us in the Gospel of John, today's tribulations are not our eternal state.

John 14:1-3

1“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

With faith in God, we discover the key to something even more comforting than hope. We unlock the doorway to realizing that whatever we are facing today is only temporary. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we are promised eternal life with him.

Fortunately for Louie Zamperini, his story did not end with the struggles he faced following his release from captivity. Shortly before his death in 2014, at the age of 97, Zamperini discussed his reluctant journey to faith in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network.

“They say there’s no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole,” Louie said, referencing the well-known aphorism about seeking a higher power in times of trouble. “Well you can multiply that a few times on a raft.”

In fact, Zamperini said he prayed often during his time lost at sea, and later in captivity. Still, he had not accepted Christ as his Savior. It was only after reluctantly attending a crusade by evangelist Billy Graham in 1949 that Louie came to faith. “Here I was preferring my rotten life to the light. Then I started having a flashback to the life raft and prison camp, all those thousands and thousands of prayers, ‘God spare my life through the war, and I’ll seek you and serve you.’ I kept thinking I came back from the war alive, and I never even thought about those prayers. I never tried to keep one prayer.”

That evening, Louie gave his life to Christ. The next day, as he read from the Bible, he felt a visceral change. As Hillenbrand wrote in “Unbroken,” “In a single, silent moment, his rage, his fear, his humiliation and helplessness had fallen away. That morning, he believed, he was a new creation.” In the years that ensued, Louie overcame his demons and even returned to Japan to forgive the captors who subjected him to unconscionable torture during the war.

Louie’s remarkable story demonstrates God’s unbroken promise: Whether in this life or the next, we can be assured that our faith will be rewarded with eternity in his light -- in heaven.

Questions:

Have you ever suffered troubles so deep that you became convinced they would be permanent? Knowing what we've learned during this week's portion of the "Better" series, how would you act differently today?

What steps can you take to keep God present and remember that through his Son, we are offered room in the Father's home?

To whom can you provide the comfort of knowing that our troubles of today are not our forever destiny? If you know someone who is hurting, reach out to them today.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank you for all the experiences you grant me in this life – both good and bad – and for your assurance that my current situation is not my forever destiny. I ask that you provide me the wisdom to trust in you always, particularly in troubling times, and the devotion to take comfort in your heavenly promise of eternity with you. Amen.

Friday

October 6, 2017

Do You Know the Way?

We will never know what heaven is really like until we get there, and while it is fun to imagine what our heavenly homes will look like, or what kind of jobs we may have there, we must be mindful that not everyone will be there. Fortunately, Jesus made it very clear how we can get to heaven. Before Jesus died, he addressed his closest friends and assured them, as well as us, that he is going to heaven ahead of us and preparing a place for us there.

John 14:2-4

²My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going."

If this passage is confusing, you are in good company. Even Jesus' closest friends were confused as to what and where Jesus was referring when he made this statement.

John 14:5

"No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

I empathize with Thomas, as he may have been feeling the same frustration I feel when I am lost and can't figure out how to get to where I want to go. It is more difficult to get lost today with phones and GPS navigation; but even with the help of technology, my wife and I have been in plenty of arguments about which way to turn and whether I should listen to Siri.

Thomas, like some of the other disciples, didn't understand at the time that it was better for them in the long run for Jesus to leave them in order to prepare their place in heaven. Jesus had spent three years giving them directions to his Father's house. He gave them, and us, one very clear piece of information.

"Everyone who is nice will go to heaven?" Not quite.

"As long as you don't kill anyone or steal anything, you'll get into heaven?" No, that wasn't it.

"Anyone who goes to church will go to heaven?" That's not it either.

John 14:6

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

We cannot earn God's love. Not by being nice or trying to be a good person, whatever that means.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The only way to heaven, to get to the Father, is by believing in his Son, Jesus, that he was who he said he was, and that he died for our sins and rose again. And through our faith in Jesus, we have access to the glory that *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

If you made a decision this week to follow Jesus, to believe that he is the only way to heaven, pray this prayer:

Prayer:

God, I admit that I am a sinner saved by grace. I believe that Jesus is your Son, whom you sent to take my place on the cross, and whom you raised from the dead. And I want to confess that I am placing my faith in you, trusting you with my life. Amen.

If you made that decision for the first time, be sure to tell someone - your Campus Pastor, a trusted friend, or get in touch with us at lio@cedarcreek.tv.