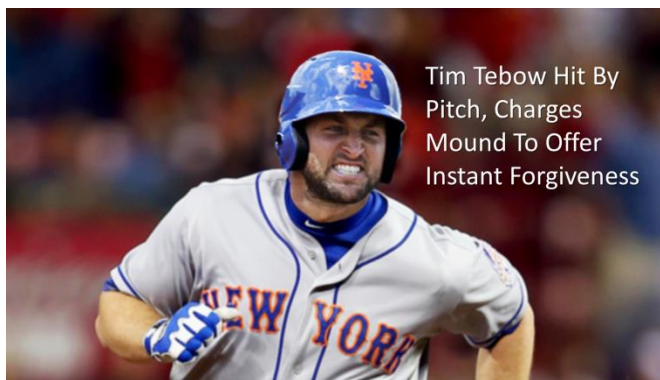
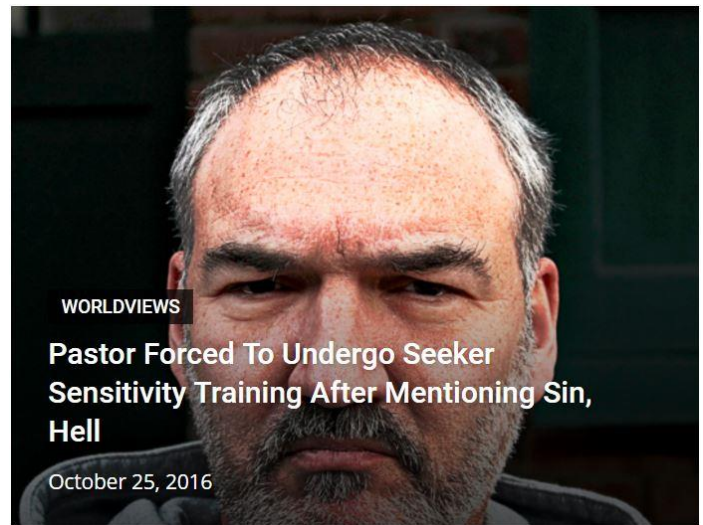


It's a sad day in the evangelical world. Last month in Seattle, Washington. According to sources, local pastor Ryan Ferguson is being required by his church leadership team to attend a six-week seeker sensitivity training course after "carelessly" mentioning "unwelcoming" concepts like sin, hell, and repentance to his congregation in a recent Sunday sermon.<sup>1</sup>

But you shouldn't be too worried. This news blurb appeared on the Babylon Bee, a Christian satire website that has "articles" like this one about Tim Tebow. But this satirical article about Hell certainly has the ring of authenticity, doesn't it? In 2013, Canadian pastor William Whatcott was found guilty of a hate crime because he distributed flyers which used the Bible to label homosexual behavior as a sin. He was ordered to pay a \$15,000 fine and tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees.<sup>2</sup>



I am not using this example to make any comments on the election. I assume you are pretty tired of that by now. But I mention it to introduce what could be called Jesus' last sermon. What Jesus said at the end of John chapter twelve was not his final teaching but it was his last public teaching--his last sermon. After so many years of teaching, healing and being among the Jews of

Galilee and the religious elite in Jerusalem, what would he say to them in his last sermon? He said some hard things. As always, he did not back down from speaking about judgment. Jesus would have a lot more to say to his disciples but this was his last time to reach the people. Let's read what he said to them.

*27 "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. 34 So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" 35 So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."*

*When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. 37 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

*"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"  
39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,  
40 "He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart, and turn,  
and I would heal them."*

*41 Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. 42 Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*

*44 And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. 47 If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. 49 For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."*

### **1. Jesus was returning to his Father.**

We know that Jesus wrestled with his mission while in the garden. While in private prayer with His father, he sweat drops of blood and asked the Father to remove the cup of suffering from him. But here just a few days prior to his crucifixion, we see the beginning of his anguish that

was announced to the crowds. *“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.”*<sup>28</sup> *Father, glorify your name.”* Immediately after, we see the echo of a sweet reunion with his Father. *Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”*

We talk all the time about glorifying God but what exactly does that mean? The voice of his Father said that his own name would be glorified again. But we must understand that the glory of both the father and the Son and inseparable. We can see part of what this means in the person of Jesus. In order to become a man, Jesus set aside his full glory as the Son of God. This is part of his prayer in John 17.

*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed (John 17:4-5).*

Jesus was looking forward to being in the presence of his Father and receiving his full glory. Hymns can be great sources of doctrine but sometimes they get it wrong. In this verse of *And Can it Be*, tell me if you see anything amiss?

He left his father's throne above,  
So free, so infinite his grace,  
Emptied himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race.

Did you see it? The third line is completely wrong. Jesus did not "empty himself of all but love" when he became a man. He did take on human limitations of hunger and pain. As a man he was no longer omnipresent but he was no less God than before he born. To agree with this hymn is to agree with the ancient heresy about Jesus, that he was not fully God. I am not suggesting that this is what Wesley intended in his hymn. He probably just meant it as a poetic way to emphasize Jesus' love but taken at face value, it is bad theology. As a man, Jesus laid aside his full glory and he was eager to get it back again; to be with his Father in perfect, unbroken harmony.

## **2. Satan will be cast out.**

*Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.*

If only it were that simple, right? Wouldn't it be great if the ruler of this world would be completely gone? Wouldn't it be wonderful if he was not roaming the earth looking for someone to devour, namely you and me? But he's not. So what did Jesus mean by saying that the ruler of this world would be "cast out"?

He is talking about his own death and resurrection. Satan was the ruler of this world but when Jesus ascended to his throne Satan was cast out of his. Now he obviously has power and influence. In Ephesians Paul called him "the prince of the power of the air." He is not completely cast out. That will happen on the last day, but he is a defeated foe. The heel of Jesus was bruised but the head of Satan was crushed. He is mortally wounded by the blood of Christ.

He is an enemy to whom we must submit if he is to have power over us. Think about that. As believers he can tempt us and lure us but he cannot flat out capture us. He cannot just pull us into the darkness. We have to give him permission to do that. When we give into temptation, that is when he gets his foothold. He does not have ultimate power over us but we can hand him the reigns to rule us. Sin is voluntary submission to Satan.

Dave Hart said something on this topic to me recently. He said that Satan is not very creative but he tends to use the same old trap a millions time over and over again. Dave was referring to the senior pastor at his church who had an affair. Dave gave me permission to share some of this with you. If you recall a few weeks back that I was grieving for a friend who was in a church where the pastor had a moral failing? That was Dave and Sandy Hart's church. Just three short months after they moved to Wausau to assume the position of associate pastor, the two-year long affair was discovered. Now Dave not only has to deal with helping to clean up and heal form that painful mess the pastor created, but he is simultaneously became the solo pastor responsible for shepherding the entire church. Thankfully he has a team of good elders.

That's a horrible story but it's not very creative, is it? It's just the same old lies and same old methods that have worked so well. Dave also said something profound. He said that if a woman tells a man about her struggles, she has just given him the combination to her heart and the only thing standing between her and disaster is the man's character. Satan has been cast out to some degree but the fact that he is a defeated foe makes him extremely dangerous. Another first step toward disaster is to believe that it could never happen to you. Sin is voluntary submission to Satan and he doesn't have to be very creative to trap us.

### **3. The cross before me.**

*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”<sup>33</sup> He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

How fitting that Jesus' last sermon be so clear about his pending crucifixion. And in this last sermon, the crowds grasped at least some of what he was saying. *So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”* They realize that Jesus claimed the title of Messiah but they also understood that the Messiah “would remain forever.” So on the one hand they seem to be acknowledging his claim to be the Messiah but on the other hand, they reject his claim due to a misunderstanding of the law.

They exemplify what atheists and skeptics still do today—they take the Bible out of context to make their case. Two thousand years of Christian cults demonstrate that a person can make the Bible say whatever they want it to say. A week ago I had a nice talk with Mishael, a Mexican man who runs a vibrant ministry in Juarez, Mexico and has a good partnership with Living Waters. He told me that the fastest growing group in Mexico, like in most of Latin America, is a wild Pentecostalism that has prosperity theology at the heart of it. It never ceases to amaze me at how fast false teaching can spread. Which is why it is never enough to just read and study your Bible. We must understand how to study the Bible. We need to understand that each passage has only one meaning. It can't mean something completely different for you than it does for me. We need to understand it within its proper context.

We teach these principles very clearly in our inductive Bible studies but I also try to model them as I preach. This is the reason I preach through entire books of the Bible and don't constantly jump around all of the time. The gospel of John is the 19<sup>th</sup> book that I have preached through at Grace. Sound doctrine comes not just by digging into the word but rightly digging into the word.

#### **4. The darkness is upon you.**

In response to the question from the crowd, Jesus answered:

*"The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going."* <sup>36</sup> *While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."*

This was offensive to Jesus' listeners. He told them that they were in darkness and they only had one chance to walk in the light. To walk in darkness is equivalent to going to hell. To them it was offensive and to modern listeners it is offensive and narrow minded.

You know the old saying is that you should avoid talking about religion and politics, right? Based on what we all just experienced the past few weeks, I think it would have been easier to tell someone they were going to hell than to disagree with their political candidate. But this was their last chance to place their faith in him. What was their response?

#### **5. They would not believe.**

*Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, , 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

*"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"*

Sharing your faith with others is hard. As we talked about last week, you can be persecuted for it. You can be shamed and hated or just plain ignored. But there is something comforting about knowing that people constantly rejected Jesus also. If they rejected Jesus while staring him in the face, how much more sense does it make that they would reject or message about him 2000 years later. And in this case, their lack of belief was a fulfillment of Scripture. It was a quote from Isaiah 53. This was the great "pierced for our transgressions" passage, which begins like this.

Who has believed what he has heard from us?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?  
2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,  
and like a root out of dry ground;  
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
and no beauty that we should desire him.  
3 He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born it was prophesied that he would be rejected by men. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, people would not believe in Jesus. This was John the gospel writer making these connections between passages like Isaiah 53 and the crowds

final rejection of Jesus. But then he said something completely radical. It's not just that they would not believe, but...

**6. They could not believe.**

*39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,*

*40 "He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart, and turn,  
and I would heal them."*

This was also a quote from Isaiah, this time from chapter 6, which was Isaiah's commissioning. Most of us even forget this is part of Isaiah 6. First, Isaiah is purified for his work.

*6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."*

Then immediately after his sins are atoned for, God spoke to him.

*8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"  
Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."*

This is the great missionary passage—"Here I am, send me!" Countless missionaries have been called to foreign fields with these same words. Now from this point forward we assume that good things would come. Isaiah was purified and ready for service. But his message was a shocking one.

*9 And he said, "Go, and say to this people:*

*" 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' "*

*10 Make the heart of this people dull,  
and their ears heavy,  
and blind their eyes;  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears,  
and understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed."*

It's a tough passage to swallow because it appears as if the message itself causes them not to believe and that the Lord does not want them to believe. He wants dull hearts and heavy ears and blind eyes "*lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*"

Lest you think that John is misquoting the Isaiah passage, Jesus quoted it in Matthew 13 to explain why he taught in parables. And Paul quoted it in Acts 28 to explain why so many rejected the gospel. It is the gold standard for explaining unbelief.

It's a difficult passage to be sure. Personally, I am convinced that it is a divine hardening. Now you might take the position that since they hardened their own hearts first that God eventually

hardened them as well. I see two issues with that position. The first is that the text does not seem to be saying that at all. It's just an inference. And second, if their hearts were already hardened, what would be the point of God hardening them? It just reminds us that everything is grace. In our flesh we will always reject Christ. Left alone we will never decide that Jesus is the right option.

### **7. Loving the glory of man.**

Whatever you think about this passage there were still some who placed their faith in Christ right then.

*42 Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*

So the question is whether or not this was real faith or not. There were so many throughout Jesus ministry who followed for a while and then fell away. We are told that this group "*loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*"

A simple way of saying this is that they were people pleasers. How easy it is to be enslaved to the opinions of others. Every last one of us cares what other people think to some degree but the questions to ask are how much do you care and why do you care? For example, I don't make ministry decisions in order to be liked by everyone in our church. I really don't think I am swayed by public opinion in that sense. But if I discover that a whole bunch of people actually don't like me, then that's a good reason to care what others think. If that many people don't like me then I need to take a good hard look at myself. I need to do some serious soul searching. And that's what trusted friends are for.

When Ryan was played 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade basketball, he was one of the worst players on the team. We didn't win the MVP award that year but his coached did give an award for the best learner. Ryan was a very eager learner. Every time he went to the bench he would ask one of the coaches what he could have done differently. He was always learning, always pushing himself.

As Christians, do you think we could ever be that eager to learn and grow? Are we willing to take a risk and ask someone to share an area of growth that they see in us?

Rich Maurer  
November 11, 2016

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<sup>1</sup> <http://babylonbee.com/news/pastor-forced-undergo-seeker-sensitivity-training-mentioning-sin-hell/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/canadian-supreme-court-ruling-has-implications-for-christian-witness>  
"If criticism of homosexual behavior is construed as criticism of homosexuals then a "simple reading" of the Lev. 18 and context clearly shows that the passage "could objectively be viewed as hate speech." While Canada's Supreme Court justices may not understand what is in the "holy text" used by Christians, homosexual rights activists certainly do—and they will expect the legal system to consistently apply the logic of the Court's ruling."