

27th July, 2014.

Reading: Romans 5: 1 - 11

Sermon: Reincarnation or Eternal Life?

I read a book recently which was about a woman who had psychological problems. It was a true story. She was attending a psychiatrist in America and he was the author of the book. The woman was undergoing hypnosis as part of her treatment to help her remember various incidents from her life so that she could try and work through the various feelings and reactions which she experienced in her day to day life. Was there anything in her childhood or in her teenage years which she had never worked through and which was now causing her problems? The psychiatrist hoped to find out and then help to overcome her fears and her anxieties.

In her first few appointments, the woman, under hypnosis, was able to recall various events in her life and was able to gain some understanding of some of her issues but she made no progress in the sense that she remained fearful. She seemed be stuck.

At a future appointment, the woman regressed again and she had no difficulty getting to that point but suddenly she was reliving what was regarded as a past life. She saw herself as a child in a bygone century. From there over the following weeks, she saw herself as many different people from many different centuries and was allegedly able to recall many events and feelings which she experienced in those lives.

In each life, inevitably, she had any number of issues to deal with but when each 'life' ended, she recalled under hypnosis that she was waiting in some spiritual realm until such time as the Masters came and spoke to her and told her what she still needed to learn. She then returned to another life until it ended and then she went through the whole process again.

On waking from hypnosis, she could recall the memories but not the meetings with the Masters.

Initially, I found it all a bit disturbing because it didn't fit with my beliefs. What was even more upsetting was the thought that I might have to come back to this planet and do it all again! There's no way, I'm going through all this again!

Now, I have no idea what was going on in those sessions. However, I didn't want to just dismiss the book and so I began to think about what was happening and how I could somehow gain some understanding from what was going on, at least on some level.

As I began to process it, I came to some conclusions. What was required of the woman by the Masters, whoever they were, was that she reach a perfect state, a state in which she had nothing else to learn. What the Masters were trying to do was tell the woman how she could earn her salvation, how she could get to the point where she would be able to stay in the spiritual realm rather than returning to the physical world. The Masters would tell her each time where she had failed and what she still needed to learn and each time she was allegedly sent back to her new life to try and learn a lesson she had failed to learn in her previous lives.

It's a wee bit like the Buddhist belief in nirvana where finally a state of peace

is attained for which you've been striving for generations and which finally liberates you from the repeating cycle of birth, life and death. The goal of reincarnation is for reincarnation to be no longer necessary. As we know, eternal life means never having to die, or rather only having to die once to this life and then living forever. The goal of reincarnation is to reach eternal life, to overcome death and rebirth and there are those who see reincarnation as the way to achieving that eternal life.

The sad thing is that if we had to follow that path, we would never be free of this life. We would never reach our goal because there would always be something else we had to learn, something that we failed to learn, something that we had never achieved. We would be stuck constantly in the ever-repeating cycle of birth, life and death.

After Jesus' resurrection, He went and He preached to the souls which had been in captivity since the days of Noah. Were those people who had chosen not to go back to another life who were then left in this waiting room? Were those people who were trapped in a spiritual realm of which we have no knowledge? Were those people who for generations had been trying to attain their place in heaven by their own efforts and merits but who had never managed it? I don't know the answer but I do know that there is a great deal out there which I don't understand and don't know.

However, one thing I do know is this. We cannot and could not ever achieve our own salvation. We cannot and could not ever reach perfection by our own efforts. We will and would always fail.

In Acts 12 Peter addressed the rulers and elders of the people, after having spent a night in jail for proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. He said to them: **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."**

If we could have been made right with God without Jesus' death and resurrection, if there had been an easier way, would God not have taken that one rather than allowing his Son to suffer as He did? There was no other way. As the hymn writer wrote:

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.

He only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in.

Reincarnation, if it does happen, will not gain us entry to eternal life. We will be caught in an ever-repeating cycle of birth, life and death. Please be clear, though. I am not saying that I believe in reincarnation. I am saying that there are those who do and that therein they will not find the eternal life for which they strive. That life is only found in Jesus.

Paul writes in Romans: **If while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!** And he goes on to say that **we have now received reconciliation.**

We do not need to wait until we reach the waiting room to know what happens next. We do not need to wait until we meet with God to see if we have done enough in this life to allow us to proceed to eternal life. Our place in eternity is not dependent on our own efforts, our own achievements. Our place in God's eternal kingdom is guaranteed, through faith in Jesus and through the grace and

mercy and forgiveness of our God in Christ.

As Paul says: **O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**
Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.