

“No Karma In Heaven”

Every season of Griefshare class includes a session on heaven. One of the unusual topics of that discussion that comes up more than I would have imagined is the idea of Karma and Reincarnation. You wouldn't think so but once again this week I had one person ask me if it was possible that her grandparents were in two squirrels that keep hanging around keeping an eye on her. Or if those squirrels were somehow “sent” by her grandparents to comfort her.

First, never underestimate the little things that can and do give us comfort when we mourn. Whether it is rays of sunlight hitting us during an emotional moment, or seeing two squirrels who seem to take an interest in a person, or a dream that a loved one has visited again, if that gives us some peace that is still a blessing. But I am more likely to leave such things in the grace of God category than in the ability of any loved one who has already died.

As far as Karma and reincarnation, their origins are not of Christianity or of scripture. Hank Hanegraaf, host of the Bible Answer Man speaks about this in his broadcast in May of 22. He reminds us that “Hindus believe that the ultimate reality called Brahman is an impersonal oneness that transcends all distinctions including personal and propositional differentiations. As such there is not distinction between morals and mice. The goal, according to a Hindu, is liberation from an endless cycle of death and reincarnation. Until then the Law of Karma will dictate that the deeds in previous lives will determine what we do in the next incarnation.” <https://www.equip.org/broadcasts/hinduism-and-the-hell-of-reincarnation-and-qa/>

Some who make the argument that the teachings of Jesus and Krishna are compatible often speak of John the Baptist as a reincarnation of Elijah. It has been argued that Jesus himself is cited as suggesting that Elijah is reincarnated as John the Baptist in Matthew 11:14 (“And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.”) Hanegraaf points out that Scripture dismisses this itself. When priests and Levites asked John if he was Elijah, he replied, “I am not” (John 1:21). The scriptures are clear that Elijah and John are not said to be two incarnations of the same person, but rather two separate people who function in a similar prophetic role. As Luke 1:17 puts it, John came “in the spirit and power of Elijah.”

The notion of Elijah coming to prepare the way of the Messiah is found in Malachi 4:6 “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.” John and Elijah are very similar. The both preached a message of repentance (1 Kings 18:21; Matthew 3:1-2). They both had the same fashion sense (2 Kings 1:7-8; Matt 3:4). They both lived of the Land (1 Kings 17:2-3; Matt 3:4). They were similar. However, John came in the spirit of Elijah as one would come in a spirit of grace. This spirit has more to do with purpose and message; preparing the way for the Lord, and making straight paths for Him.

In another interesting place some have argued from John 9:1-2 that the man born blind was made blind to pay off some karma like debt for himself or his parents. Jesus is quick to set this straight in vs. 3 by saying that neither his sin or his parents sin caused the man's blindness. Jesus would later go on to heal the man, effectively violating the law of karma.

Fundamentally, karma falls into the same category that most religions espouse. Some kind of works righteousness is put into practice that allows a person to save themselves. The Gospel that centers itself in Jesus being crucified for our sins is completely separate in that it alone depends on grace.

The centerpiece of the Christian faith is Jesus not self. God's grace is everything. C.S. Lewis in his gifted way tells us, “The Christian is in a different position from other people who are trying to be good. They hope, by being good, to please God if there is one; or—if they think there is not—at least they hope to deserve approval from good men. But the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us; just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright, but becomes bright because the sun shines on it.” <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/amazing-graces-how-complex-the-sound/>

The notion of karma is shattered when we see how Jesus dies to pay for our sin on the cross. Forgiveness removes all of our sin as far as the east is from the west. Karma is blown up in Jesus' cross. Jesus pays for everything. Romans 3:21-24 makes this very clear. "But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ***and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.***" Our redemption is a completed picture.

If then a Christian looks to God's Word as the truth of the matter (John 17:17 tells us it is) then karma cannot be a legitimate way of salvation. Who would want to come back to this miserable world anyway? What kind of hope would that be? Who would want to go through Jr. High or High School again? Not me. And the idea of coming back as a squirrel or any other animal is also unscriptural when one looks at the uniqueness of humanity. Human beings are made in the image of God. Human beings were set apart to rule and subdue what God created. For us it is one and done. The results of Jesus dying and rising from the grave is that we too will not only be forgiven but also resurrected with Jesus. The promise is that we will rise to heaven.

Heaven is given to us not earned. It is *gifted* to us. A relationship with Jesus is the key. We go where He goes. John 14:1-7 famously points out that Jesus is going to the Father's House to prepare a place for us and promises that He is coming back for us so that we may be where He is. Heaven is defined by being where Jesus is. And our life in heaven is defined by Jesus remaking us into His image where the old, broken, sinful person is remade into a new creation. (1 Corinthians 15). Therefore, we do not do good to earn salvation. The good we do reveals us as followers of Jesus who have already received God's grace and promises.

The Christian faith is unique. Our faith centers on the person of Jesus, not on self or in doing something. We are saved by grace and not by works. In these most basic of ways our Christian faith is unique from all other religions of the world. Therefore, there is no karma in heaven.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30