

## **Love Wins**

*by Rob Bell*

I have known a little about Rob Bell for some years having watched some of his short videos produced earlier this century. They were interesting, entertaining, informative and something to get one talking.

The book is very easy to read with well spaced paragraphs and a clear font. This is important if one wishes to get anything out of a book. It has to be easy to the eye as well as the head. It is revealing, challenging, scary and makes you think about what one has learnt over a lifetime of church and 'religious' teaching.

Whilst fundamentally it is a story about Jesus love for us and the world, Bell suggests from the start that over time the central story of the Bible has been hijacked and focuses often on hell and damnation, rather than Jesus' love and heaven. Many have been put off or left the 'church' following revelations that 'If you don't do this or don't do that, you will not be loved and will NOT go to heaven' and in fact he indicates that today's culture tries to tell us that, by the church's teaching, very few are likely to arrive in 'heaven', wherever it is!

There is no shortage of Bible references as Bell emphasises Jesus' teaching on 'eternal life' and uses the story of the rich man asking "What do I need to do to obtain eternal life". It comes down to the fact that heaven is there, here and now, not some dreamy sleepy ethereal floating in the clouds sort of place.

There follows thirty pages on the subject of Hell. Bell points out that there are very few references to Hell in the Bible. The word 'Sheol' is used as to a place where some people go when they die as in Ps 18, or 'depths' as in Ps. 30. And there is reference to the 'pit', in Ps. 103. Bell goes on to talk about hell in the here and now rather than something in eternity.

There is reference to the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, and when they both die the rich man goes to a place called Hades and Lazarus is 'carried' by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man asks Abraham to get Lazarus to get some water, and later to warn his family as to what is in store for them. Jesus, says Bell, is drawing a picture of the rich man who is dead but hasn't died; he is in Hades, but still hasn't died the sort of death that actually

brings life. Reference is made to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and how God punished them to 'teach and correct'. According to the prophets, God crushes, refines, tests, corrects and rebukes but always with a purpose.

Another chapter asks 'Does God get what He wants?' Bell starts by quoting several excerpts from church websites, such as 'The unsaved will be separated forever from God in hell' and 'Those who don't believe in Jesus will be sent to eternal punishment in hell'. Bell follows this by noting that so often, further down on the same websites, there are references to the mighty, powerful, loving, unchanging, sovereign God, full of grace and mercy. The God who created the world, and everything in it, and with whom everything is possible. A powerful argument is presented; one that it is difficult not to agree with.

In 'Dying to Live', the ancient rituals of sacrifice and cleansing are discussed and Bell highlights that the writer of Hebrews insists Jesus was the last sacrifice ever needed. Paul writes to the Colossians and says that through the cross, Christ was reconciling "to himself, all things, whether things on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

In 'The Good News is Better Than That', Bell retells the bible story of the two sons, one who asked his father for his share of the family inheritance. Bell dissects this story to remind us that the Father has always been there. We have always had whatever we ask for, and there are no favourites; the second son is loved just as much. His father was always with him. As is our heavenly Father.

In the last chapter, entitled 'The End is Here', Bell reminds us of the invitation, one that is offered to us with each and every breath, to trust that we are loved and that a new word has been spoken about us, a new story is being told about us. Love is what God is. Love is why Jesus came. Love is why he continues to come year after year to person after person.

Depending on one's own chapter in life, 'Love Wins' can be invigorating, scary, challenging and sobering, depending on how you are already enshrined in tradition and life's concepts. I would recommend it to anyone searching for answers to life's end – where do we go next?

Review by John Parsons