

Confession: I don't want Trump to go to heaven

Hearing Trump admit that he might not be first in line at the pearly gates was surreal.

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Century illustration (Source images: Getty and White House)

I recently found myself agreeing with President Trump.

"I want to try and get to heaven, if possible," he told the hosts of Fox and Friends, while discussing his motivations for trying to broker an end to Russia's war in

Ukraine. “I’m hearing I’m not doing well. I am really at the bottom of the totem pole.”

A reporter at the *New York Times* called the moment “[soul-searchingly self-deprecating](#),” acknowledging that Trump’s public reckoning with his own mortality is quite rare.

Hearing Trump admit that he might not be first in line at the pearly gates was surreal. This is a man who carries himself as if he were the Messiah, as if he’s God’s emissary sent to save the world. Everything he does, by his own description, is the biggest, the best, the most beautiful. He doesn’t usually acknowledge changing course—what some people call “lying.” He’s fickle and temperamental and seems to rule by capricious whim. He makes people’s lives harder. He says things that are cruel and callous. And at the end of the day, he gives himself a giant thumbs up. (You’ve seen the pictures.)

And yet his candid admission of “not doing well” in terms of getting into heaven was, I’m sorry to say, humanizing.

For him, anyway. For me, it was the opposite. *No*, I thought, *you’re not doing well at all. You’re not getting in. No questions.*

But then, as so often happens whenever I’m being too sure of myself, I got the feeling that I was being laughed at by the only person who gets to decide Trump’s eternal fate. And wouldn’t you know it, that person is a master storyteller.

As I gloried in the anticipation of Trump’s eternal demise, I realized that I sounded like a character from one of Jesus’ parables. “Thank you, God, that I’m unlike that corrupt narcissist!” I proudly prayed, echoing the Pharisee who congratulates himself in Luke 18 for not being like a tax collector.

As soon as I made that connection, the parable got to work on me. And it didn’t feel very good.

That’s the point of the parables: to shock us, to wake us up, to force us to question our own moral superiority.

The obnoxious thing about Jesus’ topsy-turvy imagination is that it’s actually the tax collector—at least the one who owns up to his lack of goodness, to the fact that he is, to borrow Trump’s language, at the bottom of the totem pole—who will enter the

Kingdom of God ahead of me. I love these sentiments a lot more when they don't challenge my personal opinions. It's lovely to think that the poor and the disenfranchised and the disabled will be the first to enter God's eternity. It's frustrating to think that modern-day tax collectors—real estate moguls, say, or billionaires—might beat me to heaven. It's infuriating to think they might get there at all.

Of course, when they get there, they might not be "them." When I first started questioning my assumptions about hell, I did what many people do when they're trying to end a discussion: I went straight to Hitler. "If there is no hell," I asked one of my theology teachers, "then doesn't that mean Hitler is in heaven?"

"If Hitler is in heaven," she answered, "then he isn't Hitler."

Who knows what any of us will become when the exacting love of God burns away every last shred of hatred that polluted our earthly being?

But I don't want Hitler there. And I don't want the other guy there either. Surely, God would agree.

If there's anything I know about God, it is that God is love, that the very essence of God's being consists in pouring out love on all of us, lovable and unlovable alike. I don't like talking about hell, and I don't think God does either. In fact, I think God, [like Pope Francis](#), hopes hell is empty. God is as crazy about Trump as he is about you or me. God loves Trump the way that God loves any other annoying kid—we can't understand why, but their parents insist on keeping them.

The part of me that doesn't want Trump in heaven is the part of me that I need to work on. I need to repent of hoping that God hates the people I want him to hate.

To be fair, there's probably a long list of people that Trump doesn't want in heaven with him. That list likely includes any politician he's ever christened with a nickname, immigrants, all Democrats, the "woke," trans people, and people who believe slavery was bad. Trump seems to love walls, boundaries, and dividing people from others. I'm guessing if he had his way, heaven would look a lot like his America: an exclusive club for winners. But God is not a god of walls, and he's certainly not the god of winners. In fact, in the loser Jesus' dying flesh, God "has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" between various groups of people (Ephesians 2:14).

Maybe the question isn't whether God wants Trump to go to heaven (God does) or whether I want him to; it is whether Trump himself really wants to go there. The same parables that teach me that God loves the people I hate would, if Trump listened to them, teach him that God is crazy about the people Trump hates. There's just no way around it. The kingdom of God will be filled with people we are surprised to see. For me, that means folks like Trump; for Trump, that means folks like Biden.

The question each of us needs to ask about our eternal destiny is not whether we are okay sharing eternity with God, but whether we are okay sharing God's eternity with the people God chooses, without consulting us, to lavish love upon. If we aren't prepared to spend eternity with our enemies, then maybe we, like Trump, are in danger of not making it there.

If, on the other hand, we are prepared to spend eternity without walls, then we ought to anticipate our own hoped-for future by living in a way that reflects that vision of heaven here and now.

Yes, President Trump, I'm speaking to you.