



FRIDAY 5/29/20

SERIES: Choosing Faith Over Fear

Speaker: Nat Crawford (w/Arnie & Cara)

Title: Choosing Faith Over Fear: An Interview with Clay Jones

Nat: Today I am excited, because I am here with a special guest author and professor, Clay Jones. Clay, thanks for joining me and our listeners today.

Clay: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be with you and your listeners today, Nat.

Nat: Yeah, we're excited! Clay, obviously I know you, you've been one of my professors, when I was at school at Biola, but some of our listeners may not be familiar with you. Do you want to take just a couple of minutes and talk to them a little bit, about who you are, what your area of passion is, and what you're up to nowadays?

Clay: Sure. I became a Christian in 1969. I was 12, two days shy of being 13. I began to get into apologetics, and by the time I was 14 or 15, I really was interested in talking to Jehovah's Witnesses. By the time I was 16 or 17, I'm not quite sure of the years, I was going into Kingdom Halls to find them. And I just kept, got a Bachelor's in Philosophy, and a Masters in Divinity. One of my major professors was John Warwick Montgomery, and then a fellow named Walter Martin, who was a cult expert. And I got my doctorate from TEDS, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

But you know, my passion, in 1981, the Lord began to reveal to me the glory that awaits us in Heaven forever. And that was huge. It absolutely, you know, I mean transformative. And so I did spend a lot of time studying the glory that awaits us in Heaven forever. Then I began to be interested in where we came from. I knew where we were going. We're going to go to Heaven and will be with Jesus forever. I knew where we're going; where did we come from? And so I started studying the sinfulness of humankind. And I spent about 20 years, studying genocide and mass murder. And by the way, every genocide researcher and victim I've ever studied agrees, that it's the average normal member of a population, that commits genocide.

Once I understood the depths of human sinfulness, and the glory of what God had for us in the future, frankly, the problem of evil just went away. And I realized some people go, that's crazy. That's not possible. This couldn't, well, anyway, I'm just telling you that's the way it happened for me. I just, and I as you know, now that I've been teaching, "Why God Allows Evil" at Talbot Seminary for years now, and I think a lot of the students would agree. But anyway, what I'm doing right now, is I'm transitioning and starting a nonprofit. I'm hoping to speak a lot and keep writing, and that's what I'm doing presently.

Nat: You know, you cannot turn on the TV today, or open up social media, without hearing about COVID 19. And you hear it, you're hitting things from both sides of the spectrum. You're having some people saying, "Oh my goodness, this is the end of the world. Panic." You know, shut everything down; put your head in the sand. On the other side, you're hearing people saying, you know, "You're not going to die. Don't worry about it. Chill out." So you're, I mean it's a time where people are very uncertain about how to respond to COVID 19. So from your perspective, how should Christians respond to COVID 19?

Clay: Well, I think one - and actually I wrote a blog about this recently - one, it's scaring a lot of Christians, because it's unsettling their worldliness, and that's actually eternally valuable. You're not supposed to be comfortable in this world. Because again, John said, *if you love the world or the things of the world, the love for the Father will not be in you*. So if the Lord uses trials to unsettle our worldliness, then that's good. And I think a lot of people need to stop, and they need to go, wow, this is scary, because it's endangering things that I really love. Well, you need to then maybe stop and pray and do something like repent, and say, Father, forgive me. Forgive me. I've been in love with this present world, and this has served as a wakeup call for me. I'm sorry that I've been in love with this present world. Because I think that's the starting place. And then I think Christians need to then, of course, focus on Heaven and, you know, the fact that you're going to live forever and ever and ever and ever and ever. And I could say that forever, because you're going to live forever. Or Christianity is not even a true religion, and you ought to be doing something else; we ought to just, you know, do what the world does, get the biggest big screen TV we can, and drink our brains out, because how are you going to deal with this? Well, you know, I mean, I think the key for us is, well as it says in Colossians Chapter Three, it says, *If you've been raised with Christ, seek those things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above and not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*. Now listen to this. *And when Christ who is your life appears, you will appear with Him in glory*. See, there it is again. And so we Christians need to make sure we're not loving this world. Realize, *endure hardship as discipline*, Hebrews Chapter 12, *endure hardship as discipline; God is treating us as sons*. And then we need to focus and realize, just remember the fact, that God is going to take care of us. And we're going to live forever and ever and ever. [Right]. So there's my, well, it's more than two bits. There's my four bits.

Nat: Yeah, that's good. No, but that's terribly practical. Clay, I think one of the hardest parts of this COVID 19 is managing our response. But it's not just the response to the virus - the thing that's going on outside - it's our response to people that we know. So let me ask this question two different ways. First, how should we respond to Christians in this time, who don't have a Heavenly perspective, so they're not focused on the truth and the things that matter? But the other side of this is, though we are restricted, based on, you know, social distancing and things like that, how should we respond to nonbelievers during this time?

Clay: Well, you know, I think the things, that we've just discussed, is what we need to tell the

Christians who aren't abiding in the Word. Say, you know, you need to focus on Heaven. I think they need to watch this, our conversation, Nat, [Bingo], because they've got to abide in the Word. They've got to have the Word of God flowing through them, not just occasionally. Well, Hey, I read a few verses in the Bible yesterday, and so I'm good for the week. Or I, you know, I go to church on Sundays, and I hear some Scripture quoted, and so that really is enough. That's not enough. You know, David says in the Psalms, so well, Psalm one, you know, Blessed is he *whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.* My brothers or sisters in Christ today, if you're not doing that, you're not going to have a prosperous life, and you're not going to be able to handle this very well. And so yeah, I would start off by saying Christians need to be in the Word. You need to make, you need to force your thoughts sometimes, to say, no, I'm going to trust God. Like I say, I encourage you sometimes to quote verses in a loop if you really get scared, and then focus, you know, again, focus on Heaven, because Heaven's the answer here.

But to Christians that aren't walking with the Lord as they should be, that's just really rough. I've got to the point where with some of them, now I'll say, you know, if you've been a Christian for like 20 years, and you've been going to church for 20 years, and you've been hearing the pastor tell you, you should read the Bible, and get into it, and meditate on it, and you're not doing that, there's something desperately wrong with you spiritually. You need to change. And disciple and discipline, guess what? News flash, those words are more, there's more in common between those two words, than just their spelling. I mean, we need to discipline ourselves. Sometimes people want to go, no, God needs to do it. Well see, that's just spiritually lazy. That's the lazy man's way out, where he goes, Oh no, God just needs to bring me closer to Him. In other words, don't make me work; I'm not going to work. Well you need to work. And I don't have any magic bullets for people who call themselves Christians; I'm not saying they're not, I don't have any magic bullets for them. If they come to you and they say, Hey, I'm desperate. Well, I would share with them the kinds of things we're talking about today.

As for the non-Christian, I would tell them the Gospel. You can live forever and ever and ever and ever. So, I think that's about the best I have to say on that.

Nat: Yeah. I think this is a unique opportunity, where we're there, as suffering people, their ears are at least more attuned to advice out there. Now, it doesn't mean that they're necessarily looking for this option. However, people are in a place where they're looking for true hope, and they're trying everything, whether it's Netflix, or Amazon, or alcohol, or pornography. I mean, the reality is, they're turning everywhere to just kind of deaden the pain, or to find some sense of comfort, and maybe a glimpse of hope. But the reality is, it's always going to fall flat. So this is an opportunity, brothers and sisters, to go out and live out the Great Commission: To go out and make disciples, who make disciples. And when they are listening, and the soil is ready, scatter that seed and water, just like Paul said, and let the Holy Spirit do the saving. It's not up for you and I to save, but it's for us to go out and to be part of the process, to just scatter seed and water and share that Gospel.

Okay. So you said something that I think that people are going, I don't even know what that's going to look like. That's Heaven. Clay, people have no, I mean I was a pastor for a little over five years, and we would get into end of life discussions, or health scares, and I'd say, well, you know, are you prepared, and are you excited for the potential of Heaven, and where that's going to lead? And they'd go, it actually kind of, some people say, well, it kind of bores me. Like, I don't want to sit up in Heaven all day long, strumming a harp, and God's up there in a rocking chair. So can you give us the Reader's Digest version of what Heaven is going to be like?

Clay: Yes. Let me start off by telling you what it won't be like. And in my book, *Why Does God Allow Evil?* I go through six - six, there it is - I go through six lies about Heaven: Heaven is white; We're not going to know anyone; All we're going to do is sing all day; It's going to be full of nerds and prudes and it's going to be boring, those kinds of things. And I debunk them. I think some of Satan's best work is to make Heaven look like a place you don't want to go. And I had an undergrad come up to me years ago, and she fought back tears, as she confessed to me that she was afraid she didn't want to go to Heaven. And I realized that a lot of people are actually very afraid of Heaven, because as you said, you know, they're afraid they're going to be sitting on clouds, strumming harps, sporting flightless wings, and singing all day. That's not what the Bible teaches. And I call what I think, this is some of Satan's absolutely best work - best in the worst sort of sense - when it comes to damaging Christianity, is making Heaven look like a place that you don't want to go. You don't want to be there. I call it in fact, *Extreme Makeover, Metaphysical Edition*. He's making Hell look like a place that you would want to go. In fact, Mark Twain said, "Choose Heaven for the climate and Hell for the company." Like you're going to just have a big party down in Hell. There's no party in Hell. But anyway, our actual occupation, and I end *Why does God allow Evil?*, my last chapter is on, your occupation is not singing. You will not be singing 24/7, 52/forever. You will sing sometimes, but that'll be just spontaneous praise. This will not be difficult. The Bible doesn't teach that. It doesn't even teach the seraphs who sing, you know, *Glory, Glory, Glory or Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty*, they don't even do that all the time. Your occupation is reigning with Jesus, Revelation 22:5, God's going to put you in charge of things in His Kingdom, and that's your occupation, ensured.

And by the way, one more thing about, I could go on, but one more thing. Heaven is most often compared in the Old and New Testaments to a banquet. That's the imagery, is to a banquet. And I think we need to really wrap our minds around that, and enjoy that, because I like banqueting, frankly. That's one of my favorite things. That's not all we're going to do, of course, like I say, we're going to be reigning with Jesus. But Satan has done a lot of things. For instance, they say, you know what I'm saying is lies, Heaven is white. When you look around, every time on television and commercials Heaven is portrayed, it's white. In Revelation, it's portrayed as jewel toned, not white. So I mean, and I could go on, but the bottom line is, we're going to be able to enjoy each other. We're going to be able to banquet together. Yes, we're going to have things that God wants us to do, and we're going to reign with Christ. Again, Revelation 22:5. That's what we have to look forward to. But like I say, Satan has done some of his best work.

By the way, in my chapter, in my next book, *Immortal: How the Fear of death Drives Us and What We Can do About It*, my last two chapters in that book are about Heaven again, about how to focus on Heaven, about how to set your hope fully on the grace that's coming to you in Heaven, and then the last chapter is about what it means to be glorified. That you're going to be resurrected, you're going to be perfected, you're going to be resplendent, beautiful, and I think even luminous, and you're going to be renowned. That's good, you're going to be renowned in the Kingdom. And so anyway, so that's where all of that is going. And so I really, you know, if you want to think more about Heaven, my two books, the book on evil, and then like I say, the book *Immortal: How the Fear of death Drives Us and What We Can do About It*, is going in the right direction. That'll help you focus better on Heaven.

Nat: Right. So let me just ask the question, not that you have to summarize the whole book, but why does God allow evil?

Clay: Well, great question. And in fact, I even have my short answer, I think at the back of the book. But the short answer to that is, God wanted to create beings with free will, and you cannot create a being with free will, and not allow them to use their free will wrongly. That's as logical as it gets. You can't tell your daughter that she can go out on a date with a punk down the street, and then chain her to a heavy kitchen appliance; that's not giving her free will. Free will entails, this is logical, you can't give people free will and not allow them to use it wrongly. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, used their free will wrongly. They rebelled against God. God then cursed the Earth and kicked them out of the Garden of Eden, you know, enabling every kind of pestilence. Then Jesus came and died on the cross for our sins, so that we could be forgiven. And now those of us that come to Jesus, and trust in Jesus, can have eternal life, the eternal life that Adam and Eve had in the Garden. We're going to have that times a million, because honestly, it's going to be much better than what Adam and Eve had, Pre-Fall.

And I submit to you, one of my biggest things now, is that why God is allowing all this evil here, is because he wants to give us free will, and yet we won't sin in Heaven. And I always, you know, I use the analogy, I said, would you like to see me jab this pen into my eye? Because I could just jab it right in my eye, but I'm not going to jab this pen in my eye. And the reason I'm not going to jab this pen into my eye is because that would be a very stupid thing to do. And I'm too smart for that. [Right] And I submit to you and I realize this is a lot to unpack - obviously my book unpacks it a lot more - this is just real quick. But I submit to you that we're learning that here, that evil and rebellion against God is as stupid as sticking a pen in your eye. JP Moreland always puts it - he's always more indelicate than me - he says, how many of you would like to get a spoon and go out onto the lawn and chow down on a heaping pile of dog poop? You know, but nobody would, because we're too smart for that. But think about it just for a minute. You don't give pens to babies. Why not? Because they jab it right in their eye. And also you don't let babies play around dog poop. Why? Because they crawl right into it. They don't know better. We are learning here that sin is stupid, and that's eternally valuable knowledge, so that God can then release us in His Kingdom, where we can do what we want to do forever and ever and ever and

ever. So there's my short answer to why God allows evil.

Nat: Wow, that's fantastic.

Again joining me today is author and professor, Clay Jones. So you've just summarized very well, why God allows evil. Okay. But I've heard this so many times before, whether it's in a Sunday school class, or following maybe a sermon I gave, but people then will say, okay, well wait, so is God the author of evil? How do you answer that?

Clay: God's not the author of evil, any more than parents are the author of evil, because they had children, and their children decided to rebel, and do all kinds of stupid and sinful things. And that's just, you know, I mean, it's really that simple. And if you don't agree with that, well, don't have kids. And if you've already had kids, send them back. But I mean, everyone knows that if you have children, they're going to do evil. All of them, 100%. This is not a question. No, no, maybe mine won't. No, all of them will. All of them are going to be mean to others. You know, some of them are going to be very promiscuous. Some of them are going to divorce their spouses. Some of them actually are going to be committing crimes. I was a shoplifter before I became a Christian. You know, we blame the kids, the people that are doing it. So God gives us free will, and He creates these free beings, and we use it wrongly. So no, God's not the author of evil. He is the author of creating beings that have the power to do evil. But see, I think that's eternally valuable, because you've got to get back to the eternal. People go, yeah, but there's so much evil here. Look at the eternal perspective. We're going to live forever and ever and ever. And eternal life will dwarf our suffering to insignificance. That's what we need to remember. That's what we need to focus on; it's going to dwarf our evil that we're suffering here to insignificance. And that's just completely and utterly awesome. So if you go, well, yeah, but I'm focused on this world, well stop it. Stop being focused on this world, and start focusing on the fact, as the Scripture commands in First Peter and Colossians 3, and so on, focus on the glory that awaits you in Heaven forever, and you'll be a better servant here, and you won't be doing things here to build a legacy up for you. You'll be building up things for the Father, who will look at you and say, *well done, good and faithful servant*.

Nat: Right. When we have the right perspective, things seem to fall into place. I mean it's an imperfect analogy, but one of the things I remind people of, is something that my son has gone through. My middle son's a cancer survivor, and he's only 10 years old, and he's had I think 14 surgeries over his lifetime, and chemotherapy, and everything else, right? And there are those moments where he goes, I really don't want to have another surgery. I hate the pain and the next three days are going to be horrible. And we always remind him, and it's hard as a parent to watch him, but it's like, but buddy, you've got to remember that the pain that you're experiencing now, is producing longterm - short term in the perspective of eternity - but benefit for your future, right? And so it's hard, and it's painful, but just know your life is going to be better here. How much more so, for the suffering and the things we go through on Earth, when you compare it to the eternal weight of glory? It doesn't even compare. Just like you don't even remember those surgeries from three years ago, right? You go, it wasn't that bad. That's exactly the point. The

things we experience here on Earth today, when we look back, we're going to go, man, that was nothing and it was worth it all.

Clay: That's right Nat. And as you know, I've had bone cancer, and as you know, it's interesting, in 2 Corinthians 4, it says, *This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.* [Yes] That's either true or it's not. If it's true, then suffering is actually a good thing in our lives. It actually is training us to be godly people.

You know, by the way, my childhood was very, very hard. My parents always thought I was going to die. I wasn't allowed to play in the third grade, because of my heart valve, I have mitral valve prolapse, but they didn't know what it was then. They just thought my heart sounded weird, and so they were afraid that I was going to die, and I was sick a lot, and had rheumatic fever and blah, blah, blah. I'm thankful for that now. I'm thankful for all of that, because it shaped me into being the kind of person, frankly, that can talk to you here about this, because it made me think about mortality more as a child. And that's not a bad thing. Most parents say, "No, we want to shield this from our child as much as we can." I don't feel that way. I think that it can make your child more serious and cause him to grow up. Obviously you don't want to expose them to things unnecessarily, but it's okay if they go through some hardships, because God can use that for your good.

My wife came from a very abusive household, and she said something that I've been telling people. One day she said this, and I went, that's gold. She said, there is nothing that can happen to you in this life that will in any way hurt your eternity. I love that: nothing can happen to you in this life that will in any way hurt your eternity. In fact, many, if not all, of the hard things that happened to you in this life, if you're Christian, will be a blessing to you in eternity. My wife, you know, has understanding, and the Lord has worked in her, and done some things through her, that I think, is because frankly of the childhood that she had, that He's just reached out and blessed her, and if you abide in Him, He'll bless you too.

Nat: Right. Well, and even part of that, part of the reason why we do experience suffering, obviously as we know from James, that actually produces maturity, right? But the other part of that is, the sufferings we go through can actually be of comfort to other people. We can come alongside people and encourage them. Right. So good perspective.

So let me ask you this, going back to this issue of evil, you've cleared it up. God is not the author of evil, but isn't the reality of evil, evidence against God? Because I mean, you've heard it. I've heard it. Okay. If God exists, he surely wouldn't allow evil. Okay. But maybe, He does exist, but He must not be all powerful or He must not be all good. So how do we as Christians respond to that charge, that either God doesn't exist because of evil, or He's not the God that we think He is?

Clay: You know, my answer to that is just simply, again, it's about eternity. For instance, I mean, if you really have the opportunity to live forever and ever and ever and ever, and you go, well, yeah, but I had to suffer on Earth. Well, I use this analogy. I say, suppose a child was inoculated

against, I don't know, measles and whatnot, when she was five, and she cried for 10 minutes. Well, and I go through the math in my book. You know, if she lives to a hundred, that's 0.0. It's five zeros, and then like four or five or six, or something like that. It's 0. five zeros of her 100 year life. If she came to me and said, wow, but you made me suffer for 10 minutes, we would think I've raised a very stupid child. I mean, she would complain, you got 10 minutes of suffering, and you're coming to me to complain about that. Similarly, if we live a hundred years out of eternity, if you think about how long eternity really is, most people don't. But, if we had a timeline that went from where you're seated, and it went out past the Milky Way galaxy, you know, and that timeline represented eternity, a centillion years on a timeline that represented eternity, even if it went out to the Milky Way, a centillion is a one with 303 zeros after it, it would only appear as a point, on a timeline of eternity. We just are troubled so often, is we just really do have a hard time wrapping our minds around the fact that what forever really means. And so I think to tell the atheists - and I have told atheists this, and honestly I've thought it's been pretty effective - you know, I mean, if eternity is true, then cry about the fact that, yeah, but I had to spend maybe even a hundred years going through hardships here. That's nothing compared to eternity. Come to Jesus and get saved and you can live forever.

Nat: Right. Bingo. So what should our response as Christians be to evil and suffering?

Clay: Well, our first response to evil and suffering is to weep with those who weep. I do not, by the way, and I really encourage all of us, don't give people these bromides, these little band-aids of going, Well, God's going to work it out for your good. I hear that people do that all the time. God's going to work it out for your good, or God has a reason. Well, yeah, sure He does, but that's not the answer. If somebody has just gone through a major loss, lost a child, they've lost a spouse, if whatever. I was just, as a matter of fact, doing a Zoom meeting with some people, and this one woman had had a stroke, and even though her mind was fine, it has drastically hurt her body. She's like, you know, I mean, how do you deal with this kind of stuff? And I told her, I said, you know, start off by saying, I'm really sorry for this, because we need to love people and bring them meals. Most people when a loss first occurs, they're not looking for answers. In fact, by the way, I've got a blog entitled, "What to do if someone cries", because I think there's a lot of things you can do. If you Google *What to do if someone cries* by Clay Jones, we need to weep with them and be there for them. Then once they're kind of like going, okay, I've gotten over the initial shock, I'm no longer going to chemo. What's God doing in the universe? Then and only then, say, well, let's talk about, you know, the things that we've talked about today: God is preparing you to be a vessel of glory.

And I've got news for everyone here. The only way you grow up in Jesus is through suffering. I mean instruction too, of course, and that's hopefully not suffering if it's done well, but the way you really grow up is through suffering. God, and I like to say God's Plan A for your life, is to bring you through regular periods of suffering, and there is no Plan B; you're going to suffer. The Scriptures in Hebrews say, *endure hardship as discipline for God is treating you as sons*. You know, read from the beginning of First Peter, talks about suffering and Paul says, *and we rejoice in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope*. In other words, if you suffer, you have to

toughen up. And as you toughen up, it gives you character, and as you get character, you know what that did for me, over in my life?

Now, I've been a Christian for 50 years. What it did for me, is this caused me to go, when I come out of it and I go, wow, I'm a stronger, more Christlike person than I was before I went into that suffering. I go, this whole Christian thing is true, and God really is working His character into me, and I really am going to live forever. It makes me believe all of this stuff that the Bible is telling about, that He's preparing us to be vessels of glory for all eternity.

Nat: Bingo. Wow. Wow. That is pure gold, Clay. That is pure gold.