

A Heavenly Reward

"Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven."
Matthew 5:12

Spring has come and life is bursting from the earth. The somber tones of winter pass as vividly colored leaves, grasses and flowers paint the earth. This picture of life after death forcibly reminds us of the resurrection. Where will we find ourselves in the resurrection? In heaven? What is heaven like? What will we do there?

Time (March 24, 1997) dedicated its cover story to this question. It is significant that this question is addressed in a public forum like Time. The modern concept of heaven differs from that held by our ancestors. Sermons today on the nature of heaven are met with skepticism. A literal description of it seems beyond the reach of popular theology. Apparently the fast pace and materialistic crush of our world has diminished longing for the "here-after." How true our Lord's rhetorical question, "Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, will he find the faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8

David Wells, a theology professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary notes, "We would expect to hear of [heaven] in the Evangelical churches, but I don't hear it at all. I don't think heaven is even a blip on the Christian screen from one end of the denominational spectrum to the other. The more perplexing question is, What explains this?"

We, as a society, have gotten caught up in the things of this life. We all know that this is so easy to do. We are constantly bombarded by media reminding us to "go for the gusto." "Be all you can be." "You deserve the very best." Our lifestyle today puts the lifestyles of past kings to shame. However, if our Christian focus shifts to the benefits of this life, it will be to the detriment of the life which is to come.

Others today have invented alternative visions of heaven and the means to get there. The poor deluded ones of Heaven's Gate, the Branch Davidians and Jonestown met with tragic results. These painfully remind us of the error in following men and "doctrines of men."

Our Christian hope rests on our Lord Jesus and the promise made before his crucifixion. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2-3

We have complete confidence in our Lord's words. He did go away to prepare a *place* for us. What will heaven be like? What will we be like in heaven? Will we have these same bodies that we possess now? What will we do there?

It Doth Not Yet Appear

The answer to the question, What will we be like?, is not given in detail by the scriptures. But the suggestions given are astounding. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, *and it doth not yet appear* what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*; for we shall see him as he is." 1 John 3:2 We will not be as we are now—we shall be like him! "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? . . . , that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, . . . God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." 1 Corinthians 15:35-44

Jesus "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Philippians 3:21 Then we will fully realize our relationship as the Body of Christ. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many." 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

The Christ, The Messiah, The Anointed, The Deliverer has many members. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29 The promise is that in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The nations of earth will be blessed by The Christ. Jesus is the head over the body—which is his church. Colossians 1:18 This clearly indicates what we as Christians will be doing when we reach our heavenly condition.

We will share with Jesus in reigning over the world, to bless, teach and correct in righteousness all the families of earth. God has called us with a purpose in mind—initially to be His active agents with Jesus in restoring the human race. We may rightly speculate that in the ages to come we will participate with Him in spreading His dominion throughout the billions of worlds not yet inhabited.

All this is in addition to the joy and awe that will be ours in coming to know God personally. For eternity He will reveal to us His infinite Wisdom, Justice, Power and Love. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gifts to us.

The Saints Shall Judge The World

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 The trial time for God's people is now. Judgment must begin with the house of God. 1 Peter 4:17 We are in the school of Christ to learn of

his ways, his standards, his love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity. The world will be educated and have its trial in Christ's millennial kingdom.

Our lessons prepare us for a future role—the great work with Jesus of restoring the human race to the image of God—of returning mankind to the purity that father Adam possessed. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Revelation 20:6

The reign of Jesus and his mystical body, the Bride of Christ, will lead whosoever *will* (not whosoever is *called*) to partake of the water of life freely. This is part of the mystery hid from ages and generations but now made manifest to the saints, Christ in you—the hope of glory. In other words, the world's Deliverer is composed of Jesus and his saints.

The Manifestation of the Sons of God

This is the purpose for which God calls Christians. They are not called to an idle life of eternal harp playing while floating on a cloud. Nor is their eternal existence a copy of the present life—only on a grander scale. The life eternal of the Divine family, the children of God, will be one of dynamic involvement in God's eternal plans for creation. "If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.' (NRSV) Romans 8:17-21

The groaning creation waits for the sons of God to manifest themselves. They do so from the instinctive hope that a great Deliverer will come and save them from sin and death. Thank God such a one will soon be manifested.

The Earth Shall Be Full of the Knowledge of the Lord

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah of His Kingdom on earth. "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." (NRSV) Isaiah 11:6-9

At no time in history,—not at Christ's first coming or during the days of his Apostles, not during the Dark Ages and certainly not at the present—has the knowledge of the Lord covered the earth as the waters cover the sea. The world has a cacophony of contradicting religions and philosophies. But this will not always be the case. To those who attain the heavenly calling and overcome all things a great reward awaits. "To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (NRSV) Revelation 3:21 May the prospect of such heavenly joys encourage us daily.

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