

Melva's Corner

GOING UP!

May 16, 2005

Bible Text: II Corinthians 5:6-9, II Corinthians 5:10, I Corinthians 3:12, Revelation 4:10, 11 5:11, 12

Central Truth: On earth we burn our trash to get rid of it. How good it will be to permanently get rid of all our earthly trash!

Since our weekly message of April 25th "From Glory to Glory," I have received numerous requests for additional information on the Rapture and Eternity. Quite frankly, detailed information of this type is usually reserved for the "Learning Tree" segment of the website. Nevertheless, let's give it a shot. In the next two weekly messages we will discuss more details of the Rapture and Eternity. Let us first start with the Rapture.

RAPTURE

Really, we know very little about Heaven. But we believers "walk by faith, not by sight," as Paul put it (II Corinthians 5:7). Intimations in the Scriptures about Heaven give us at least a great appreciation of that wonderful place, if not exact details. The Christian longs to go to Heaven to be with the Lord, to be with loved ones who have gone on before.

When a believer dies, his death is different from that of unbelievers. His body is buried, but his soul goes to the presence of the Lord (II Corinthians 5:6-9). At the time of the Rapture, that soul will be reunited with its former body and resurrected. The transformation to immortality will take place then, and the believer will live on eternally.

Those alive at the moment of the Rapture will be translated directly and changed at once, without ever experiencing death.

Thus, at the time of the Rapture, both the resurrected and the translated saints will be carried away from the earth in eternal bodies to join Christ in Heaven.

It's not very easy for us earthlings to describe these marvels, other than to take the truth from the Word and write them out. But faith in the revealed truth makes a big difference in the earthly life of any believer. Paul's point is well taken that we do not have to actually see a spiritual thing to believe in it; Christians experience so many spiritual, "mystical" transactions in their daily walk that Heaven is not at all hard to believe.

In walking by faith we gain a serenity and assurance that is simply unexplainable to the rest of the world. That we count on a blessed "hereafter" has confounded many kinds of thinkers every since the gospels were written. The Christian confidence about death has caused many people to wonder.

The Marxists have called Christianity "the opiate of the masses," since masses who count on a bright future seem drugged to them! To the Marxist Heaven has become a delusion, an escapist way of thinking and an impractical Utopia. As far as the Marxist is concerned believers are regarded as folks who turn their attention from the hard realities of the here-and-now to concentrate on some theoretical better life to come. Psychologists theorize that a future Heaven makes life on earth more endurable, and so they say the naive Christians like to persuade themselves that their belief is true.

Actually, the experience of true faith in God provides reliable and intimate assurances of Heaven every day. Christians are familiar with real joy and they taste heaven-like blessings by faith daily. The abundant life given by Christ far exceeds the physical life understood by the five senses, and it speaks clearly and reasonably of a continuing blessing after death.

To the believer, the realities of Heaven are more dependable than those of the earthly life. The things which we see here on earth are temporary, we know, but the things which are now invisible will last forever. (II Corinthians 4:18). It's a reverse kind of philosophy to the materialistic, earthbound thinker, but it has only to be tried to be verified.

Thus Christians wait in faith to be taken away to Heaven. There, we know from Scripture, is the kind of life believers were meant to live! There in Heaven is complete joy, peace, love, and glory in the very presence of God Himself.

The first event of our existence in Heaven, however, is one which causes mixed emotions among believers, for all Christians will be judged at the "Judgment Seat of Christ" (II Corinthians 5:10). This will be the scene of an examination of each Christian life by the Lord Himself. On that day believers will see what they have done and not done, and how it all looks from Heaven's perspective.

This Heavenly judgment should certainly not be confused with what is popularly called "Judgment Day," which is the final judgment of all unbelievers who have ever lived. That ultimate judgment will be held at the conclusion of the Millennium, and it will involve penalties and loss of life. Jesus' Judgment Seat, on the other hand, examines only the **works** of believers, not the believers themselves:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether good or bad. (II Corinthians 5:10)

Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire. (I Corinthians 3:13-15)

The issue at this Judgment Seat is not condemnation or even punishment. No one need fear the Lord's wrath or need worry about his salvation at this event. For believers, those issues were taken care of on the cross by the Judge Himself. First Corinthians 3:15 stresses that a believer and his works are two different things in the sight of the Lord.

This judgment has to do more with rewards than with punishments. We will be "receiving the things done in our body," in other words; we will be receiving the results of our earthly lives. This refers to the way we have served our Lord on earth during the time that we knew Him.

Our works of service for the Lord vary a great deal and we're going to know just how much they vary on that unique day in Heaven when the Lord looks all of them over. Some works will be

extremely pleasing to Him and others not at all. And even within these two groups of good works and bad works there will be gradations: good works will be graded as **"gold, silver, and precious stones,"** while bad works will be graded as **"wood, hay, and stubble"** (I Corinthians 3:12).

Paul's image of the testing of our works (" . . . it shall be revealed by fire and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is") is very logical. The precious metals and jewels will survive the fire while the wood, hay, and stubble will be totally consumed. It is as if the entire works of our lifetimes in Christ will be piled up and put to the torch. What comes out of that fire will last for eternity; what is burned will be gone forever.

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The things that last—the good works—are pictured as beautiful rather than merely durable; they are precious and beautiful things rather than durable but drab iron and stone. In Paul's metaphor is the intimation that we will be adorned with our good works for all eternity. We are to **"wear"** them in glory!

The Lord made each one of us, and He knows how we tick. Our salvation does not depend on these good works; it is a free gift. But the opportunity is open for us to earn rewards for good service. By God's grace we can work to receive that finest of commendations from the very lips of the Lord Himself, **"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."**

We are not expected to be able to perform works pleasing to Almighty God by our own strength. It is by the grace of God that we produce these durable works—by our yielding to His direction, just as a good servant yields to his master's will. As we yield to God, He produces good works in us that we send on to Heaven and these become our **"treasures in heaven."** Jesus recommended that our personal fortunes be stored above, where they are safe, rather than on the earth, where thieves break in and steal.

God is practical; He even operates a sound retirement program! We contribute now and reap the full benefits later on. Our pension fund is safe and sound under God's own care in Heaven!

No one can be sure how long the Judgment Seat will last, or even on how we determine time in Heaven, but in earthly terms. all Heavenly business must be cleared up in seven years. That is, the Tribulation will be wracking the earth for a seven-year period, and the Heavenly events scheduled to occur before Christ's second coming must be accomplished during this seven-year period. What a difference between Heaven and earth! There will be joy above but woe below, and such extremes between the two!

The wedding of Christ and His bride, the church, plus the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb," will take place after the Judgment Seat events. An actual wedding ceremony will be held in Heaven, and it will surely be something to behold!

The bride will wish to present the bridegroom with a "dowry," and so the members of the church will give to Christ their only possessions—their crowns. While the crowns are made to last for eternity, it appears that the church does not keep them, but rather presents them to the Bridegroom with the proclamation that He alone is worthy of praise (Revelation 4:10, 11 5:11, 12).

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." This is how Revelation 19:7, 8 describes this unique, joyful moment of Heavenly matrimony.

It is admittedly difficult to imagine this idea of a corporate wedding of the church to the Lord. The church is composed of millions of individuals, but apparently in Heaven it becomes one personality clothed in beauty, chastity, purity, and loveliness, with her entire yearning and aspiration to be presented in this fashion to her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. An actual ceremony is envisioned, with the Father conducting the marriage, the Son standing as a literal Bridegroom, the Holy Spirit escorting the redeemed church as the Bride, and the wedding guests being the innumerable spirits of the Old Testament saints.

This is the ceremony toward which Christ has been looking for almost 2000 years now and really from eternity past. It was at least partly for this unique, mystic event that He endured the Cross. He

surely anticipates this wedding at least as much as does His stumbling, erring, unchaste church today.

The wedding ceremony, though not given a great deal of space in Scripture, is certainly one of the preeminent events of God's program for His own. We don't completely understand what a Heavenly wedding is, especially between the Savior and the millions, but we all know what marriage is. It is as if the Lord wishes to create a relationship with His own people which is more intimate, more complete, more loving, and more adoring than any He has participated in previously. Marriage, the ultimate union, the final joining together, will be accomplished in Heaven as it never was on earth—God's relations with men, even with Israel, were never so close as this.

In Revelation 19:9 a "Marriage Supper" is spoken of, and this is generally thought to be just that—a kind of reception meal following the wedding. It has also been suggested that this supper will be delayed until after Christ descends to the earth and establishes His Kingdom. In the latter case the Marriage Supper would correspond with the Millennial Banquet described by Isaiah (25:6-8).

Whether or not the two suppers are the same or are held successively, the church and the rest of the redeemed of all ages are in for some joyful feasting. The Lord enjoyed a good meal, as do we and He has made many plans along these lines.

So the Bride of Christ will be completed in Heaven, attired graciously and presented to her Bridegroom. She will be formally wed and will return triumphantly to the earth with her Lord and Husband to establish and reign over the Millennial Kingdom of God.

Memory Text:

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(Revelation 19:7, 8)**