

JUST BEFORE HEAVEN: The Judgment Seat Of Christ

Contained in the pages of this booklet is a truth that brought one of the wisest men who ever lived out of late-life disillusionment. Overcome by a sense of life's repetitious boredom, and profoundly disturbed by the temporary, pointless nature of existence, Israel's King Solomon finally came to the renewing truth discussed by well-known author J. Oswald Sanders in this excerpt from his book *Heaven: Better By Far*.

What makes life significant and what gives even repetitious thoughts and work lasting value is the awareness that at some time in the future our loving and merciful God will weigh the value of everything we have done (Eccl. 12:14).

J. Oswald Sanders has recently left this life to be with his Lord. It is our privilege to provide you with his words that are even more important to him now than when they were written. *Martin R. De Haan II*

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The Second Coming & The Judgment Seat Of Christ

W. Graham Scroggie, in his book *What About Heaven?* wrote, "The revelation of a judgment seat for believers is a further evidence that the fullness of heaven is not entered upon and enjoyed by any until after the advent and the resurrection. Christians who throughout these nineteen hundred years have passed on have not yet been judged as to their faithfulness or unfaithfulness. That does not take place when we die, but will do so on the eve of the consummation of redemption, of that state which will be perfect, serviceable, and eternal" (p.108).

What will the second coming and the judgment seat of Christ mean to us? The promised second coming of our Lord will mean for us the beginning of the promised joys of heaven. It will mean being with Christ, which is better by far. But that will not be the whole story. It will precipitate the greatest series of judgmental events in the history of the world. Paul foretold a resurrection of the righteous and of the wicked, when all will face the outcome of deeds done in the body (Acts 24:15).

The prospect of a coming day of judgment is one of the least popular articles of the Christian faith and is denied even by some who claim to be Christians. But it is not a concept that is peculiar to Christianity; it is common to other religions and philosophies as well. The Buddhist, for example, believes in 16 hells. The universal conscience of

humanity bears witness to a sense of guilt, a feeling of moral responsibility to a supreme being or god. People are accountable to God, and He will reward good and punish evil.

The distinctive tenet of Christianity is that God has delegated this office to His Son, Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead. "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (Jn. 5:22). "He (Jesus of Nazareth) commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42).

**“ People are accountable to God,
and He will reward good and
punish evil. ”**

No one who accepts the authority of Christ and the authenticity of His Word can doubt that there is a judgment to come. But there is a vast difference between the judgment of believers and that of nonbelievers. For the believer, there lies ahead the *bema* or judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). For the impenitent, there is the inescapable prospect of standing before the great white throne of judgment (Rev. 20:5,11-12).

It is neither possible nor necessary to compile an exact timetable for these awesome events; it is the absolute certainty of them that is important. Hebrews 9:27 says that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." We must bear in mind that when these events do take

place, the measures of time and space as we now know them will have no relevance.

But, speaking in terms with which we are familiar, would it not be reasonable to conclude that, since the "day of salvation" has extended over two millennia, we need not try to compress the day of judgment into a brief period? Conversely, does this judgment necessarily require a long time as we know it? In these days of the marvels of the computer world and television and the immeasurably greater marvel of the human brain, coupled with the omniscience of God, the slowness of our judicial processes affords no comparison. It is a well-established phenomenon that, in crisis, the whole content of a life may be flashed before the mind of a person in a moment of time.

In this booklet, we are concerned only with the judgment of believers at the *bema*. This is one of the most important events connected with the return of Christ, as far as the believer is concerned. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Does this mean that we will have to wait until that day to know whether we are saved or lost? Does Scripture not teach that upon believing in Christ we pass from death to life and will not come into condemnation?

Indeed it does. The explanation of 2 Corinthians 5:10 lies in the fact that Scripture recognizes two kinds of judgment. There is the judgment in criminal proceedings where the judge sits on the bench, hears the evidence, and decides the guilt, con-

demnation, or acquittal of the person charged. Then there is the judgment of the umpire, or referee who, as at the Olympic games, ascends his judgment seat to pronounce the winner and award the prize, because the victor has run fairly and well. Of course, the corollary is that those who have not run fairly and well “suffer loss” and win no prize. It is this second judgment seat that Paul has in view in this verse.

“ The greatest thought that has ever entered my mind is that one day I will have to stand before a holy God and give an account of my life. ” —Daniel Webster

A person’s eternal destiny is already determined in this life, according to whether or not he or she has trusted Christ for salvation. “So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). Few verses of Scripture are more soul-searching than this. Daniel Webster, the noted American statesman, on being asked what was the greatest thought he had ever entertained, replied, “The greatest thought that has ever entered my mind is that one day I will have to stand before a holy God and give an account of my life.”

The judgment seat of Christ, then, is His “umpire” seat. The primary purpose of His judgment is to assess and reward believers for the manner in which they have used their opportunities and discharged their responsibilities. The basis on which we will be judged is stated in clear terms:

“that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

But motives as well as deeds will be taken into account. “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5).

In a very penetrating paragraph Paul told us how this process is carried out:

No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Whatever else this paragraph teaches, it makes clear that there can be a saved soul but a lost life because of unfaithfulness in the stewardship of life.

What do gold, silver, and costly stones symbolize? It is well to examine this subject in view of the serious possibilities implicit in the passage. What will be taken into account in the assessment?

1. Our testimony for Christ (Phil. 2:16).
2. Our suffering for Christ (1 Pet. 4:13).
3. Our faithfulness to Christ (Lk. 12:42-43; Rev. 2:10).
4. Our service for Christ (1 Cor. 3:8; Heb. 6:10).

5. Our generosity for Christ (2 Cor. 9:6; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).
6. Our use of time for Christ (Eph. 5:15-16; Col. 4:5).
7. Our exercise of spiritual gifts (Mt. 25:14-28; 1 Pet. 4:10).
8. Our self-discipline for Christ (1 Cor. 9:24-25).
9. Our leading of souls to Christ (1 Th. 2:19).

The awards conferred by our Lord from His umpire seat are symbolized by using the figure of crowns. (These will be dealt with in the section on rewards, beginning on page 14.)

But the *bema* is not all joy and the winning of prizes for all believers. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that just as the stars differ in glory, so also will the saints (1 Cor. 15:41-42).

Some will be ashamed when He comes because of unfaithfulness to Him, of persistence in known sin, or of having been ashamed of Him before people. The apostle John wrote, "Dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming" (1 Jn. 2:28).

Some will suffer loss because they have used wood, hay, and straw in building on the foundation, and these materials cannot withstand fire (1 Cor. 3:12). As F. E. Marsh has said:

They have built the material of earth's products upon the foundation of Christ's being and work. The gold of Christ's deity, the silver of His vicarious sacrifice, and the precious stones of His peerless worth and coming glory, are truths that will stand the tests of God's fire; but the wood of self-esteem, the hay of man's

frailty, and the straw of human eloquence will all be burned up, although the worker himself will be saved.

Paul wrote, "If (any man's work) is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Cor. 3:15).

Will we be among those who receive the full reward and have an abundant entrance into Christ's kingdom, or will we be among those who are ashamed and suffer loss?

**“ Continue in Him, so that when
He appears we may be confident
and unashamed before Him at
His coming. ”** —1 John 2:28

What will the second coming mean to Christ?

Jesus said, "Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world" (Jn. 17:24).

The inherent selfishness of even the regenerate human heart is disclosed by our tendency to think of the Lord's return more in terms of what it will mean to us—how the accompanying events will affect us—than of what it will mean to Him. A very popular hymn of a generation ago epitomizes that sentiment. Charles Gabriel wrote:

O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me!
We are rightly thrilled at the thought of our mag-

nificent inheritance in Christ, but are we equally thrilled at the thought of His inheritance in us? Here is Paul's prayer: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19).

What thought have we given to His glorious inheritance in us? Do we pay sufficient attention to His eager expectation and anticipation of His wedding day? Is His coronation day prominent in our minds? A. J. Janvrin wrote:

He is waiting with long patience
For His crowning day,
For that Kingdom which shall never
Pass away,
Watching till His royal banner
Floateth far and wide,
Till He seeth of His travail,
Satisfied!

Consider the startling contrast between His first coming and His second. Then He came in poverty and humiliation; soon He will come with incredible riches and glory. Then He came in weakness; soon He will come in great power. Then He came in loneliness; soon He will come accompanied by His hosts of angels and the company of the redeemed. Then He came as a man of sorrows; soon He will come with radiant and unalloyed joy. Then in mockery men placed a reed in His hand; soon He will wield the scepter of universal dominion. Then men pressed a crown of acanthus thorns upon His brow; soon He will come adorned with the many

diadems He has won. Then He was blasphemed, denied, betrayed; soon every knee will bow to Him, acknowledging Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

“ At the first coming, Christ was blasphemed, denied, and betrayed; at His second coming every knee will bow, acknowledging Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. ”

In His prayer to His Father, Christ made only one personal request: “I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory” (Jn. 17:24). This prayer reveals the deep yearning of His heart. These failing men meant a great deal to Him—and so do we. When He comes again, this yearning will have its fulfillment: “And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Th. 4:17). But in the light of His greatness and majesty and holiness, do we not cry out with the psalmist in amazed wonder, “What is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him?” (Ps. 8:4).

When He comes again, He will be fully satisfied with the outcome of His so costly sacrifice: “After the suffering of His soul, He will . . . be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). He will then experience the consummation of “the joy set before Him” (Heb. 12:2).

The noted Rabbi Duncan of Edinburgh once preached on the text “He will see His offspring” (Isa. 53:10). He divided the text as follows:

- He shall see them born and brought in.

- He shall see them educated and brought up.
- He shall see them supported and brought through.
- He shall see them glorified and brought home.

This is part of the joy set before Him.

Christ's return will result in His eternal union with His bride, the church, which He purchased with His own blood. For Him, as for us, that will mean the ecstatic joy of the wedding supper of the Lamb and eternal fellowship and communion.

When He returns, it will be to receive the kingdom of which He spoke so much on earth. When He first came to His own people and offered Himself as their king, their response was, "We don't want this man to be our king" (Lk. 19:14). But at last His kingship will be universally acknowledged and confessed. Frances Ridley Havergal wrote:

O the joy to see Thee reigning,
 Thee, my own beloved Lord!
 Every tongue Thy name confessing,
 Worship, honor, glory, blessing,
 Brought to Thee with one accord;
 Thee my Master and my Friend,
 Vindicated and enthroned,
 Unto earth's remotest end
 Glorified, adored, and owned.

What will the second coming mean to Satan?

The apostle John wrote, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down" (Rev. 12:10).

For no one will the return of Christ have greater

and more far-reaching significance than for Satan, the evil prince of this world. Scripture presents a consistent picture of two rival kingdoms confronting each other on the world scene—the kingdoms of Satan and darkness and the kingdom of God and light. Satan and his minions are allied with evil people in their plan to smash the kingdom of God and bring about the ruin of the human race.

“ [Christ] shared in [our] humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ” —Hebrews 2:14-15

At the end of the age, Satan is seen in alliance with the beast and the false prophet. These three, united in a common purpose to defeat Christ and secure domination of the whole world, form a sinister trinity of evil. While on earth, Jesus inflicted a stunning defeat on Satan—first in the temptation in the desert, but preeminently in His death on the cross. Christ “shared in [our] humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb. 2:14-15).

It was for this very purpose that Christ the Son of God came to earth the first time: “He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has

been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn. 3:8).

At Calvary that victory was achieved gloriously, and the sentence of doom was passed. The blessed result was that "having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

Ever since Calvary, the vaunted power of the adversary has been shattered. His power is not inherent, it is derived. He is not invincible but vulnerable. He is not triumphant but doomed. He and his accomplices are reserved for a final and future judgment, which is described in Revelation 20:7-10:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. . . . They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

So one of the blessed absences from heaven will be Satan the tempter, the accuser, the deceiver. There will be no more temptations. We will have no weak spots of our nature. No more raking up of old sins and unfounded accusations. No more deceptions playing on our ignorance and credulity. Nothing unclean or defiling will ever enter heaven through those pearly gates. Hallelujah!

Rewards & Resurrection Bodies

In his book *The Future Life*, Rene Pache writes, "Here is a searching word—the motive of our work is what counts. In that day God will test everything by His standard of truth, and if it meets with His approval, a reward will be given. The reward is not salvation, for salvation is of grace, altogether apart from works (Eph. 2:8-9). But this reward is for faithful service, because of salvation.

"We will have bodies fit for the full life of God to indwell and express itself forever. We will be able to eat but will not need to. We will be able to move rapidly through space and matter. We will be ageless and not know pain, tears, sorrow, sickness, or death. We will have bodies of splendor. In a promise to the Old Testament saints, the Lord compared our glorious bodies to the shining of the moon and stars (Dan. 12:3). Christ's glorified body is described as shining like the sun in its strength."

Who will receive rewards? Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven" (Lk. 6:22-23).

"The whole subject of rewards for the believer in heaven is one that seems to be thought of only seldom by the ordinary Christian, or even by the average student of the Scriptures. It is at once both a joyous and a solemn theme, and should serve as a potent incentive for holiness of life." So wrote

Wilbur M. Smith many years ago, and circumstances have changed little since then with regard to this topic.

There are spiritual teachers who regard the whole concept of rewards for service as a very second-rate motivation. They liken it to offering candy to a child if he will be good. But Jesus in no way offered support to this viewpoint. In fact, He taught the reverse. The apostle Paul also taught about rewards in several of his letters.

No meritorious acts of ours can win salvation, for that is a result of God's incredible and unmerited love. But the very fact that Jesus spoke of rewards for service on a number of occasions would indicate that He considered their granting an important article of faith. But in no way did He suggest or imply that service was a method of accumulating merit and thus receiving salvation. Eternal life is a gift, not a reward.

The language in which the biblical concept of rewards is expressed is highly symbolic and metaphorical and should be interpreted accordingly. Of course, faithful service will bring rewards in this life as well as in the life to come. Both are mentioned in the following verse: " 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus said to them, 'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life' " (Lk. 18:29-30).

The New Testament opens with the Lord's promise of reward in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of

Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven" (Mt. 5:11-12). This reward is for the person who endures slander and persecution for the sake of the Lord.

The New Testament closes with the Lord's assurance, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12).

Since Jesus said that the reward for affliction suffered for His sake is great and is a cause for rejoicing, we should take His words seriously and not dismiss them carelessly as some do.

“ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. ” —2 Corinthians 5:10

Paul is equally definite on this point: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). From this passage we learn that our past deeds will confront us at the judgment seat, but it is equally clear that there the salvation of the believer is not at issue. That important matter was settled forever at the cross, when our substitute graciously bore the judgment that was justly due to us for our sins. As a result of that blessed event, Paul assured believers, "Through Him (Christ) everyone who believes is justified from

everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). The blessed consequence is, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

So the believer doesn't need to fear that he will lose eternal life at the judgment seat. But it might be objected, "Didn't Paul have a fear of being a castaway?" When Paul wrote of that possibility, it was not because he was in fear of losing his salvation. The word *castaway*, as it is rendered in the King James Version of 1 Corinthians 9:27, is better rendered "disqualified." Paul was speaking in the context of competing in the Isthmian games. The fear he entertained was that, after having exhorted others how to run so as to win the coveted prize, he himself might be disqualified for the victor's crown. After all, eternal life is not a reward but a gift.

All true believers who stand before the judgment seat will qualify for heaven, but not all will receive the same reward. Someone once said, "Rewards will be calculated more on the basis of fidelity and suffering rather than on successful ventures." We are strongly exhorted, however, to "watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2 Jn. 8).

In the parables of the minas (Lk. 19:11-27) and the talents (Mt. 25:14-30), Jesus taught that each believer has differing abilities and capacities. That is something over which we have no control and for which we are not responsible. The parable of the minas teaches that where there is equal ability but unequal faithfulness, there will be a smaller reward. On the other hand, the parable of the talents tells us that where there is unequal ability but

equal faithfulness, the rewards will be the same. Christ's judgment and the reward bestowed will be according to the use we made of the opportunities given to us.

These parables, and indeed the whole subject of rewards for service, underline the importance of how we act here and now. It is now that we are determining our future status and reward in heaven. Charles Wesley wrote the following:

In hope of that immortal crown,
I now the cross sustain
And gladly wander up and down,
And smile at toil and pain;
I suffer out my threescore years,
Till my Deliverer come,
And wipe away His servant's tears,
And take His exile home.

What do the promised crowns signify? The apostle Paul wrote, "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8). The rewards promised in heaven are sometimes represented by the symbol of a crown. In the Greek culture a crown might be either an ornamental headdress worn by a king or queen or a wreath worn as a symbol of victory.

Before considering the significance of the crown awarded to victors, we should have a clear conception of the nature of heaven's rewards, for we are apt to equate them with our earthly reward system—equal pay for equal work. The idea of merit is thus involved. But a heavenly crown is not a matter of *quid pro quo*. In the heavenly rewards, merit is expressly excluded. Our Lord's word to His disciples makes this clear:

Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "Come along now and sit down to eat"? Would he not rather say, "Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink"? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty" (Lk. 17:7-10).

Heaven's rewards are all a matter of God's grace. They are God's generous recognition of selfless and sacrificial service. G. Campbell Morgan goes so far as to assert that service for reward is not Christian, but un-Christian! "He emptied Himself. He served 'for the joy set before Him.' Yes, but what was that joy? The joy of lifting other people and blessing them" (*The Gospel Of Luke*, p.197).

The fact that the laborer who was hired to work only at the eleventh hour received the same wage as the one who had worked all day underlines the fact that most of the wage he received was not earned, but was a generous gift from the master. When one of the fulltime laborers charged his master with unfairness, he replied:

Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous? (Mt. 20:13-15).

We are not told precisely what form the crowns in heaven will take, but John MacArthur Jr.'s view has much to commend it: "Believers' rewards aren't something you wear on your head like a crown. . . . Your reward in heaven will be your capacity for service in heaven. . . . Heaven's crowns are what we will experience, eternal life, eternal joy, eternal service, and eternal blessedness" (*Heaven*, pp.114-115).

In the New Testament, there are two Greek words translated "crown." One is *diadema*, a royal turban worn by Persian kings. It is always the symbol of kingly or imperial dignity. It refers to the kind of crown Jesus receives. The other word is *stephanos*, the victor's crown, "a symbol of triumph in the Olympic games or some such contest—hence by metonymy, a reward or prize" (Vine). It was a crown of leaves or vines, beautifully woven. This is the word that is used to denote the rewards of heaven.

Here are the crowns mentioned in Scripture:

1. Crown Of Life. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (Jas. 1:12). "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

This crown is bestowed in recognition of enduring and triumphing over trial and persecution even to the point of martyrdom. The motivation must be love for Christ.

2. Crown Of Righteousness. "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on

that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

This crown is awarded to those who have completed the Christian race with integrity, with eyes fixed on the coming Lord. It is the reward for fulfilling the ministry entrusted to one.

3. Incorruptible Crown. “They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Cor. 9:25).

This crown is won by those who strive for mastery, for excellence. Here Paul was using the figure of the pentathlon with its tremendous demand of physical stamina. The crown is awarded to the disciplined.

4. Crown Of Rejoicing. “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes?” (1 Th. 2:19).

This is the crown of the soul-winner. It will be cause for rejoicing when, in heaven, we meet those who have been won to Christ through our ministry. This crown is open to every believer.

5. Crown Of Glory. “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be. . . . And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

This promised award for spiritual leaders in the church should provide strong motivation for sacrificial pastoral ministry.

None of these crowns, however, is awarded automatically. There are qualifying conditions attached to each, and it is possible to forfeit a crown through unwatchfulness. In the letter to the church at

Philadelphia, the risen Lord warned the believers, "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Rev. 3:11). This is a contemporary warning to us as well, who are often surrounded by competing claims for our love and loyalty.

Philip Doddridge wrote:

'Tis God's all-animating voice
That calls thee from on high,
'Tis His own hand presents the prize
To thine aspiring eye.
That prize with peerless glories bright,
Which shall new luster boast,
When victor's wreaths and monarch's gems
Shall blend in common dust.
Blest Savior, introduced by Thee
Have I my race begun;
And crowned with victory at Thy feet
I'll lay my honors down.

What will our resurrection bodies be like?

The apostle Paul wrote, "But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?' How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed. . . . But God gives it a body as He has determined" (1 Cor. 15:35-38).

Paul did not go into detail about the exact nature of the resurrection body of the believer, probably because of the small number of revealed facts. Yet he did make several very definite statements. About such subjects the philosopher and the scientist can make only educated guesses.

With the inspired Word in our hands, however, we have certainty.

1. It will be a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44), perfectly adapted to our heavenly environment.

2. It will be a real body, not a phantom, but will be like that of the risen Christ, who challenged His disciples, "Touch Me and see" (Lk. 24:39).

3. It will be a recognizable body, having identity with the physical body that has been laid to rest. After the resurrection, Jesus spoke of having "flesh and bones" (Lk. 24:39). The apostles recognized Jesus.

To clarify the issue, Paul then proceeded in 1 Corinthians 15 to draw comparisons and contrasts between the physical and the spiritual bodies.

4. It will be an imperishable body (v.42). It will be deathless, not subject to decay.

5. It will be a glorious body (v.43), no longer the body that is "sown in dishonor," subject to the tyranny of sin and the attacks of Satan.

6. It will be a powerful body (v.43), having thrown off the frailty of its mortality.

While now the body is only an imperfect vehicle of the spirit and often frustrates it, in heaven the new body will be perfectly suited to conditions in its new sphere. "Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49).

It should be noted that the term *spiritual body* does not imply that it is ethereal and ghostly, but rather that it will be subject to the human spirit, not to our fleshly desires. In addition, the spiritual body will be able to express better the believer's aspirations than can the earthly body.

There are two current misconceptions about the spiritual body that need correction: (a) That it will be identical with the body that was buried. (b) That there is no organic connection between the body that was buried and that which is raised. If these conceptions were so, there would need to be a new creation, not a resurrection. We must acknowledge that there is mystery here, mystery that will be revealed only in heaven.

In answering the question, "With what kind of body will they come?" Paul enunciated four truths, which are illustrated in the growth of a seed and in the diversity of animals and of the sun, moon, and stars.

1. What grows from the seed we sow is not altogether identical with what is sown (1 Cor. 15:37). An acorn produces not an acorn but an oak, yet both enjoy the same life force.

2. Each kind of seed has a distinctive, God-given body (Gen. 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:38).

3. The fruit of the seed sown has an organic connection with the seed from which it sprang. It is not a new creation but is the product of something already in existence.

4. As there is great diversity in the bodies in the animal kingdom, so it will be in the heavenly kingdom (1 Cor. 15:39-41).

If the resurrection body is not organically related to the body that is sown as it dies, there can be no resurrection. That we are unable to explain this does not alter its truth. We should keep in mind that there are other mysteries, perhaps connected, that we have to live with. Medical people tell us that in a lifetime our total body substance has been

changed about 10 times, and yet our personal identities have continued; we remain the same people. Our memory of past events remains unimpaired. This is a mystery too, but it does shed some light on our problem.

In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Paul contrasted the old body with the new in four respects:

1. It is sown perishable but will be raised imperishable (v.42). There has been only one body not subject to corruption (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27). Sooner or later our physical bodies waste away. We all are victims of disease and, ultimately, death. Although the hearse is now ubiquitous, our spiritual bodies will be imperishable.

2. It is sown in dishonor but will be raised in glory (v.43). There is nothing beautiful or glorious about a decaying corpse. We dispose of it with respect in a grave or by cremation. But the resurrection body will be a glorious body, inconceivably more beautiful and wonderful. This is assured because "the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21).

3. It is sown in weakness but will be raised in power (v.43). Bible commentator Leon Morris wrote that inevitably the "strength of youth yields to the frailty of age. A dead body is a symbol of weakness, but our new body, like our Lord's, will be characterized by power. Sleep will not be necessary to relieve weariness or recoup spent energy. Our abilities will be enlarged and we will throw off the limitations of which we are so conscious in life on earth" (*First Corinthians*, p.28).

4. It is sown a natural body; it will be raised a spiritual body (v.44). The natural body is adapted to life in this world but is not fitted for life in the next. The spiritual body is the organ that is intimately related to the spirit of man, just as his present body is intimately related to his earthly life. No longer will our bodies be subject to the laws that limit our physical life.

“ Our bodies are now subject to limitation and deterioration. But when our Lord returns, a glorious transformation will occur. ”

Our Lord's resurrection body is the pattern for ours (Phil. 3:20-21). He ate with His disciples (Jn. 21:9,12-13). He passed through closed doors (Jn. 20:19). He appeared and disappeared from sight. He claimed to have flesh and bones (Lk. 24:39). In other words, there was a real connection and identity with His former body, minus some of the limitations of that body.

Our bodies are now subject to limitation and deterioration, they confine and cramp us, and they are destined to return to their constituent elements. But "we shall be changed." When our Lord returns, a glorious transformation will occur. Our lowly bodies will become like His glorious body and will be bodies in which our longings and aspirations will find perfect expression.

What was our Lord's resurrection body like? It was certainly different from that same body before death.

1. There were three occasions when He was not recognized at first by His closest friends:

“Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus” (Jn. 21:4).

“At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus” (Jn. 20:14).

“Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him” (Lk. 24:15-16).

2. While the Lord’s resurrection body was indeed different, it bore similarities to His physical body. He said He had “flesh and bones” (Lk. 24:39). He denied that He was a ghost (Lk. 24:37-39). He prepared breakfast for His men and ate with them (Jn. 21:9-14; Lk. 24:42-43).

3. However, He was able to pass through closed doors (Jn. 20:19). He was no longer confined by our limitations of time and space.

4. His was a real body. In answer to Thomas’ disbelief, He extended the invitation, “Put your finger here; see My hands” (Jn. 20:27). And to Mary, “Do not hold on to Me” (v.17).

Jesus gave satisfying evidence that He was just the same person as before the cross. He was recognized by His intimates who were now prepared to die for Him—as most of them did.

It is intriguing to note that our Lord’s body retained its scars in the new body. Exactly what this signifies is difficult to say. One interesting suggestion is that scars received as suffering for Christ’s sake will persist in some way, not as blemishes but as eternal badges of honor.

How To Gain Entrance To Heaven

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:3).

The Scriptures definitely support the belief in life after death and the existence of such a place as heaven. There is no doubt that our Lord and His apostles taught these truths, and they also taught with equal clarity that there is such a place as hell, where the impenitent receive the reward of their deeds.

The popular idea, according to recent polls, is that good people go to heaven, and a majority of those polled rated their own chances of going there to be good. There are few who don't want to go to heaven. Most base their expectation on their performance in this life, irrespective of their relationship to Christ. Is this a valid hope?

Here again we are driven to the Scriptures for an authoritative answer. All else is speculation, but in a matter of such far-reaching importance, we need more than that—we want certainty.

In a world where there is so much injustice and inequality, where the righteous suffer and the evil prosper, where the weak are exploited and the powerful flourish, it is easy to conclude as Israel did, "The way of the Lord is not just" (Ezek. 18:25). In our contemporary society the administration of the judicial system often gives the breaks to the criminal rather than to the victim. The greater number of crimes go unpunished,

while meritorious action is often unrewarded. It is the two nations who instigated World War II who have prospered most since then. This creates a puzzling moral problem.

The psalmist Asaph, faced with a similar problem, had no answer and almost lost his faith. Hear him:

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills (Ps. 73:2-5).

Because of human sin, life on earth is manifestly unjust. If God is as good and just as the Scriptures state and as we have maintained, how can He retain His character while permitting such a state of affairs to continue? If He remains inactive in this situation, it would appear that He is either uncaring or is powerless to redress the obvious injustices of this life.

But both Scripture and history are replete with affirmations that He is neither uncaring nor inactive. This life is not the end of all. Such inequalities will be redressed.

Where did Asaph discover the solution to his problem? He wrote, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. . . . When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny" (vv.13,16-17). Like him, we should take our perplexing problems into the presence of God and try to see things from His perspective. It is the end-view that is important.

Scripture abounds with intimations that a day is coming when injustices will be made right and inequalities straightened out, when evil will be punished and virtue appropriately rewarded. This will take place at the day of judgment. Those who in this life have not availed themselves of the only way of salvation through the grace of God and the atoning death of Christ will not enter the gates of heaven. The Word is unequivocal: "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).

“ Nothing impure will ever enter (heaven), nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. ” —Revelation 21:27

What does it mean to have one's name written in the Lamb's Book of Life? The metaphor of books of record occurs throughout Scripture, beginning with Moses' plea to God to be "blotted out" of God's book as an atonement for the sins of the people of Israel (Ex. 32:32). This figure of speech is drawn from the registers of the tribes of Israel. Its final appearance is in the text we are considering.

Concerning the judgment in front of the great white throne, we read, "Then I saw a great white throne. . . . And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were

opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Rev. 20:11-12).

One set of books, then, contains the record of each person's life-history. The other book is the Lamb's Book of Life. The first record can bring only condemnation, for all have fallen short of God's standards. In the Book of Life are recorded the names of those who have repented of their sins and exercised saving faith in Christ as Redeemer and Savior.

Remember that it's our decision whether or not our names are written there. John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress* describes the armed man who came up to the table where the man with the book and the inkhorn was seated, and said, "Set down my name." It is open to anyone to do just that. A living faith in Christ, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29), is the sole condition for having our names written in that book, and that constitutes our passport through the pearly gates. "They that trust in Jesus Christ," writes Alexander Maclaren, "shall have their names written in the Book of Life; graven on the High Priest's breastplate, and inscribed on His mighty hand and His faithful heart."

Why not make absolutely certain of heaven by opening your heart to Christ the Savior and Lord right now, inviting Him to enter, to cleanse it from sin, and to make it His permanent dwellingplace? He gives this assurance: "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20).

Note to the reader:

This booklet, *Just Before Heaven: The Judgment Seat Of Christ*, is based on a portion of the book *Heaven: Better By Far*, written by the late J. Oswald Sanders. He was putting the finishing touches on the manuscript of this book about heaven when he went home to be with the Lord. He went quietly in his sleep a week after his 90th birthday. Dr. Sanders was one of the last of a great generation of Bible teachers, and we are the richer for having been the heirs of his ministry for 70 years. He wrote more than 40 books and preached thousands of times. His ministry spanned the world, and he was loved by all who knew him.

Dr. Sanders' book *Heaven: Better By Far* is published by Discovery House Publishers, a nonprofit affiliate of RBC Ministries. We are pleased to be able to incorporate an excerpt of a full-length Discovery House book into our Discovery Series once or twice each year. We feel that this is a good way to introduce our members to other sources of solid, biblical teaching.

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