

UPON THE ROCK

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Upon the Rock is published monthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians.

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“BEHOLD, HE COMETH”

Phil Grear

“Behold, He cometh”. (Revelation 1:7) With these words the Apostle Paul reassured the Christians in the ancient Roman province of Asia that Jesus would some day return. The return of Jesus is a wonderful promise that the hardships of this life are not penitent because this world is not permanent. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10)

However, for those who are not Christians this verse is not so much a promise as it is a warning. It will be a time when “all kindred’s of the earth shall wail because of him.” His appearing in the clouds will mark the beginning of unbearable punishment and suffering for the unprepared.

There is no doubt that Jesus will return. It is taught so plainly in the Scriptures that it cannot be denied by those who accept the Bible. Jesus told his disciples, “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) As he left this earth to return to his Father, two men in white clothing assured his disciples, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

While there is much about the future we cannot know, there are three things which we know will happen. The Bible says, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” (Hebrews 9:27-28) We know that our future contains (1) death, (2) judgment, and (3) the return of Christ.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

- 1 Hear THE WORD OF GOD - (Romans 10:17; Matthew 7:24-27).
2. Believe THE WORD OF GOD - (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16).
3. Repent OF YOUR SINS - (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3).
4. Confess THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD - (Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 8:36).
5. Be baptized FOR THE REMISSION OF YOUR SINS- (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4).
6. Live faithfully unto death - (Rev. 2:10).

My friend, if you knew the Lord would come today, what would you do? If you have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ, would you today? If as a Christian you have not been seeking **“first the kingdom of God and his righteousness”** (Matthew 6:33) would you repent of your apathy today? Peter wrote, **“Account that the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation”** (2 Peter 3:15). As long as God delays Christ’s return, it gives those outside of Christ the opportunity to repent and obey. However, each day that goes by, we are one day closer to the Second Coming of Christ. In light of this fact, Paul wrote, **“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed”** (Romans 13:11). Songwriter PP. Bliss has written, *And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll, the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend, Even so, it is well with my soul* Are YOU one of the faithful? Is it well with YOUR soul? In the Day of Judgment we will hear Jesus say, **“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,”** (Matthew 25:34) or, we will hear Him say, **“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matthew 25:41). What He will say to you and me then will be determined by what we say to Him now! As the old song asks, *Are you ready? Are you ready? Are you ready for the Judgment Day?*

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Many deny the return of Christ, believing it to be a superstition dreamed up by religious fanatics. They argue that nothing in our human experience would indicate that such is going to happen. Since nothing like it has ever happened before, they claim it cannot ever happen. Their viewpoint is not new. Some in the days of the New Testament were making this same argument. **“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of; that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”** (2 Peter 3:3-10) Noah was not believed in his day when he preached of the coming flood, but it came. Similarly, many today do not believe when they are told of the return of Jesus, but he will come nevertheless.

However, most people do not reject the idea of Christ’s return, they just never give it any thought. They slide blissfully through life, oblivious to the fact that this world will someday be destroyed. They get out of bed each morning, go through their daily routine, and return to bed each night, naively assuming that it will always be so. They will be caught by complete surprise when the sound of a trumpet blasts its way around the globe, signally the return of Jesus. It will be a day like every other day. Life will be going on as usual. **“But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”** (Matthew 24:37-39)

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3) Where will you be when the Lord descends with a shout? Will you be caught completely unaware when the trumpet sounds, and the voice of the archangel reverberates around the world? You will not miss it. Even if you are in the grave at that time, you will still respond to this call from our Lord. “The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The knowledge that Jesus is coming back is a strong incentive to live right before God. Why would we want to be caught unprepared on that great day? “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” (2 Peter 3:11-14) We dare not risk the eternal destiny of our souls by unrighteous living when we know that we could come face-to-face with Jesus at any minute. There is no excuse for being caught by surprise. We have been surely and seriously warned that it is coming. “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6)

There is no *doubt* about the eventual, perhaps imminent, return of Jesus. The articles in this issue of *Upon The Rock* will help us consider the events that will occur on that great day. May we all take this extremely seriously? We have everything to lose if we do not.

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(Ephesians 4:32). Are YOU as loving, kind, understanding, and forgiving as you ought to be?

Fifth, we ought to be a people willing to sacrifice and work for the Lord. As the children of God we are “**as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ**” (1 Peter 2:5). We offer up to God the sacrifice of praise in our worship by worshipping Him “**in spirit and in truth**” (John 4:24). We have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. We belong to Him. Therefore, we must sacrifice of our time, energies, talents, finances, our entire being in service to Him! As we live each day we are to be “**zealous of good works**” (Titus 2:14), the works that God has “**before ordained that we should walk in them**” (Ephesians 2:10). Are YOU whole-heartedly serving the Lord?

Sixth, we ought to be a people willing to suffer for Christ. The apostle Paul penned, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Peter wrote, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16). If we suffer persecution for being a disciple of Jesus, we will be blessed. Our reward in heaven will be great (cf. Matthew 5:10-12). Paul was one who suffered greatly for the cause of Christ and he said, “**For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us**” (Romans 8:18). Are YOU willing to suffer for Christ?

Seventh, we ought to be a people who look and long for the Lord’s return (cf. 2 Peter 3:12-14). As faithful Christians we are “**looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ**” (Titus 2:13). We hope for Jesus’ return, that is, we desire it and expect it to take place. We have the hope of seeing Jesus and being like Him, thus, we keep ourselves pure, “**even as he is pure**” (cf. 1 John 3:2-3). The hope of Jesus’ second coming produces patience, that quality of endurance, that keeps us keeping on! Every faithful Christian possesses the same sentimentality regarding the coming of Christ as that of the beloved apostle John when he wrote, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). Do YOU long for the Lord’s return?

God, **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit. . . Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever”** (1 Peter 1:22- 23). We are born again spiritually into the family of God by obeying the Gospel of Christ. Jesus said, **“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5). This new, spiritual birth takes place in the waters of baptism. Have YOU been **“born again?”**

Second, we ought to be a holy people. We are to be **“obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation”** (1 Peter 1:14-15). We are to be different from the world in the way we think, talk, dress, act, and live on a daily basis. We are to **“live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”** (Titus 2:12). In so doing, we will **“abstain from fleshly lust which war against the soul”** (1 Peter 2:11). Are YOU living a holy life?

Third, we ought to be a growing people. We must **“as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby”** (1 Peter 2:2). The only nourishment that will sustain us and enable us to grow spiritually is the Word of God. Therefore, we must feed upon God’s Word daily in our study, meditation, and practice of it in our daily lives. We must endeavor to grow in our lives by adding to our **“faith, virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity”** (2 Peter 1:5-7). Are YOU giving **“diligence to make your calling and election sure”** (2 Peter 1:10) by growing spiritually as a child of God?

Fourth, we ought to be a people with unified, compassionate, loving hearts. **“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous”** (1 Peter 3:8). We must love one another as Jesus has loved us. By our love and unity the world will know that we are truly the Lord’s disciples (cf. John 13:34-35). Because God has forgiven us in Christ we must be **“kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another”**

WHEN WILL HE RETURN?

Charles Frampton

Did you know there are hundreds of verses in the New Testament that refer, in some manner, to the second coming of Christ Jesus? One of my favorite passages was spoken by the Lord Himself and it serves to remind me of the wonderful things that await a faithful child of God. You see, shortly before His betrayal at the hands of Judas Iscariot, Jesus tried to calm and reassure the troubled heads of His disciples by telling them that, *“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 (Emp. mine) and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also.”* (John 14:2-4). Another favorite passage is one in which the apostle John encouraged his brothers and sisters in Christ by reminding them that, *“...we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”* (1 John 3:2). I do not know exactly what the Lord will look like when He comes again, but it is enough for me to know that I will be like Him. Can you imagine how wonderful and glorious this time will be?

Many other passages of scripture describe in vivid detail some aspect of our Lord’s return. Luke the physician tells us that Jesus will descend from heaven in a similar manner to the way He ascended up to heaven after His resurrection and appearing to many witnesses (Acts 1:9-11). When Paul wrote his first letter to the saints at Thessalonica, one concern he addressed was their ignorance regarding the state of those who die before the Lord returns. Paul assured them that the faithful followers of Christ who die before the Lord returns would be raised first when He comes again. Not only would they be raised, but they also would be taken up together with the faithful saints who are alive to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Paul also wrote that, *“...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16). It sounds like the return of the Lord will be very noisy. Do you think when He comes again those who are alive

will know He is returning? In addition, Paul noted that Jesus' return will mark the beginning of eternal rest in the presence of God for those who are found faithful. But for those who do not know God and who have not obeyed the gospel of Christ it will mark the beginning of eternal sorrow and painful knowledge that they will never be in the presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Yes, we know many details about the Lord's return, but there is one detail that remains a mystery. And try as we might to find a passage of scripture that will prove our calculations and guesses, the one detail we can't know is the time of the Lord's return. There simply is no passage of scripture in God's immutable word that specifies exactly when—day, month and/or year—Christ will return to gather the faithful to Himself. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

In addition to encouraging and teaching the Thessalonian brethren about the Lord's return and the state of the dead, Paul also taught them concerning the time of the Lord's return saying, *"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night."* (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). Here Paul compares the return of the Lord to a thief who comes in the night. A thief never announces when he is going to break into one's home to steal valuables does he? A thief doesn't call you or mail you a letter saying, "Just wanted you to know that I'll be by on such and such a date and time, please don't be home, I intend to rob you," does he? The obvious answer to both questions would be, "No!" A thief comes when he is least expected and never makes his intentions known. The point Paul makes is that the Lord's return will not be made known in advance but will come at a most unexpected time.

Paul, however, is not alone in his belief that the time of the Lord's return is unknown to man. Peter also used the same *"thief"* analogy as Paul when speaking of the day of the Lord's return (Peter 2:10). In addition, words and phrases like *"...the coming of the Lord is at hand"* (James 5:8) and *"...Surely, I am coming quickly"* (Revelation 22:20) represent the idea of "certainty" or "unexpectedly" more than that of "immediately." Thus, these two passages of scripture tell us that the coming of Christ could happen at anytime.

grandfather then asked again, *"What then?"* The young man thought for a moment and then said, *"I guess I will die."* The grandfather then asked, for one last time, perhaps the most important question of all, *"What then?"* Certainly, what faces each of us upon death is the most sobering thought indeed.

In a letter to M. Leroy in 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote, *"Our constitution is in actual operation; everything appears to promise that it will last; but in this world nothing is certain but death and taxes."* To this list we can add two more certainties: the Second Coming of Christ and the Judgment! The reality of death, the promise of Christ's Coming, and the Day of Judgment are the most serious events each of us will ever face. The author of Hebrews reminds us, **"and as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment"** (Hebrews 9:27). In speaking of the His second coming and the Day of Judgment Jesus said, **"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father"** (Mark 13:32), **"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come, . . . Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh"** (Matthew 24:42-44). It is essential that we make proper preparation for death and the Judgment because our eternal soul is at stake. Jesus said of the value of the soul, **"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"** (Mark 8:36-37). We must prepare for death and the Judgment!

In Isaiah 38:1 we read of God telling the prophet Isaiah to go to Hezekiah King of Judah and tell him **"Set thine house in order for thou shalt die, and not live."** How can we set our house in order? How can we make ready for death and the Judgment? In speaking of the Second Coming of Christ, the destruction of a material world, and the Judgment of mankind, the apostle Peter asked the question, **"What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness...?"** In his writings Peter answers this question. In following Peter's inspired instructions we will make ready for the Judgment.

First, we ought to be an obedient people. The only way a person can make ready for the Judgment is by becoming a child of God. Peter reminded his Christian readers how they had become the children of

have chosen to live in sin. A holy God cannot tolerate sin! A just God cannot allow sin to go unpunished! No, “the Lord is *not* willing (does not desire) that any should perish,” (II Peter 3:9) but he cannot save us in our sin.

God’s love is what motivated Him to send His only begotten Son to die on the cross and pay the penalty for our sin. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) In doing so, God was able to maintain His holiness and demand His justice. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God sent forth to be a propitiation... that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:21ff) That is the “good news” that will draw men to Jesus! Jesus died for my sins! Jesus died to save me! What did Jesus save us from? An unspeakable eternity in hell.

God’s love is the heart of the gospel. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:15-46)

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ARE YOU READY?

Bob Vincent

A young man in his senior year of High School was asked by his grandfather, *What are you going to do with your life?* The young man replied, *“I am going to graduate from High School”* The grandfather then asked, *“What then?”* The young man replied, *“I will go away to college and get a degree.”* The grandfather then asked, *“What then?”* The young man said, *“I will then get a job and earn my keep.”* The grandfather then asked, *“What then?”* The young man replied, *“I will find the love of my life, marry her, and raise a family,”* The grandfather then asked, *“What then?”* The young man replied, *“I will work for thirty five or forty years, raise my family, and then retire.”* The

Jesus Himself used several illustrations to teach that the time of His return is a mystery. In one such illustration our Lord used the example of Noah and the great flood (Genesis 6-9) saying, *“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man be”* (Matthew 24:37-39). From Jesus’ illustration we learn that the people did not heed Noah’s words as a preacher (2 Peter 2:5), but continued to do the same things they normally did. And just as the flood came without any advanced warning, to a people unprepared to meet God, so also will be the return of the Lord.

In another illustration, Jesus described His return as being, *“... like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And I say to you, I say to all; Watch!”* (Mark 13:34-37).

In addition to using illustrations Jesus also spoke plainly to the disciples, and so to us today, about His pending return even expressing His lack of knowledge as to the exact time saying, *“But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is”* (Mark 13:32-33; cf. Matthew 24:36, 42). Jesus would also go on to admonish and warn His disciples to *“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming”* (Matthew 24:42) and encourage them to, *“be ready, for the son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.”* (Matthew 24:44). If Jesus said He did not know the time of His return, and his disciples could not know the time of His return, how can anyone attempt to pick a time for His return?

Any attempt to pinpoint the exact day, month and/or year of the Lord’s return is, as one preacher put it, “mere speculation.” The simple Bible fact is that we don’t know when the Lord will return.

Even Christ Himself, while He walked this earth did not know when He would come again. The Bible does not say, but perhaps now that Jesus is sitting at His Father's right hand in heaven He may know the time of His return. But, one sure thing we know is that God knows when He will send His Son back to gather the faithful to a glorious home in heaven. Why try to calculate or predict what cannot be known?

Jesus will come again! Are you prepared to meet Him?

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IMMANUEL: JUDGE AMONG US

Trevor Major

In a wonderfully uplifting passage, Matthew heralds the good news of Jesus' birth (1:18-25). He is the Son of God, born of a virgin, and conceived by the Holy Spirit.

This was an important teaching to stress in the early church. Many religious people in those days believed that God would anoint a special leader—a messiah—who would save the Jews from Roman oppression, but they missed two vital points. First, God had always intended that this leader would free them, not from political bondage to some earthly power, but from spiritual bondage to sin (Luke 24:21-27). And second, this Person would be greater than any military or political leader. He would, in fact, be fully God and fully man (John 1:14; Philippians 2:7-8).

To show his Jewish readers that this was what God had planned all along, Matthew quotes an ancient prophecy: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). This name, Immanuel, means "God with us."

them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Man. 13:49-50) (The Parable of the Dragnet) "And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30) (The Parable of the Talents) "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:46) (The Parable of Judgment)

What is the nature of hell as it is described in scripture? Hell is a place. Some contend that eternal punishment is simply the annihilation of the evil person. But the scriptures speak of a place where the lost will exist forever. What is hell like? It is called a "lake of fire burning with brimstone." (Rev. 19:20) Jesus referred to hell as "an everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41) The agony of a torment in fire will certainly be intensified by the fact that hell is also described as a place of darkness. "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. "For whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." (Jude 13)

The greatest despair suffered by the soul in hell will be the helplessness and hopelessness of their situation. To be in hell is to be forever separated from God or any thing good. The residents of hell will include the vilest sinners this life has ever produced — the murderer, the deviate, the vile, and perverted — all will suffer together. "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." (Rev. 21:8) This suffering will be endured by those whose conscience and memory will remind them forever of the choices they made in life that determined their fate. "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented." (Luke 16:25) "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out!" (Luke 13:28)

How can a God of love condemn anyone to such a fate? The truth is that God never intended for man to be in hell. But man, all men, have chosen to reject God and live in violation of His will. Man, all men,

the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” (Romans 1:18ff)

Why would anyone choose not to believe in God? Why would they suppress the truth and exchange it for a lie? “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” (Romans 1:18) The reason that the people of Paul’s day didn’t want to believe in God or in hell was the same as it is today – they were living unrighteous lives and did not wish to think of a righteous God who would be their Judge!

So, it may appear to some that God’s judgment of man and punishment of sinners is no longer a part of the Christian message. Some preachers who once faithfully proclaimed the truth have exchanged it for lies that are more readily accepted by those who arrogantly believe that God cannot be God and punish sinners eternally. Some simply choose to remain silent believing that preaching the truth on the subject will be regarded as “negative” and will turn people away. But ignoring the truth or choosing not to believe it does not change it or make it go away!

Why should we believe in and preach the biblical doctrine of eternal punishment in hell? First of all because it was an integral part of the preaching of Jesus. Jesus admitted that some people were offended by His preaching, but He could not be our Lord if He had spoken anything other than the truth. Jesus spoke of hell more often than He spoke of heaven. He plainly stated the warning “and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28) He spoke of an end-time when “all who are in the waves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28-29)

Many of Jesus’ parables were “judgment scenarios” that speak of God’s ultimate judgment of man and separation of those who are lost from those who are saved. “So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from the just and cast

How does this apply to our lives today? We might think of intimacy and closeness. There, in the land of Palestine, God walked and talked with us for the first time since He had walked and talked with Adam and Eve back in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). We might also be comforted by the knowledge that God has lived among us and suffered with us and for us (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). Because Jesus experienced the physical pain of earthly life, and the spiritual pain of temptation, He is eminently suited to be our Intercessor—to represent us before His father in heaven (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

There is another image that is not so comforting: this Immanuel came to judge. This Immanuel is more like the master of the house in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). As Jesus explains in this story, the master entrusts his servants with certain duties. When he returns, some have done what they were supposed to, some have not. It is the same for the Son of God. When He comes to earth in the form of man and lives among a people chosen by God, He finds that some have abandoned or corrupted the duties that God had set before them. Just as the master comes among his servants, finding some worthy and some unworthy, so Immanuel comes among his people and finds some worthy and some unworthy.

We see this theme of judgment come up time and again in the Gospel of Matthew. First, we see that God is Judge among the Jews. When the Jewish leaders came to where John was immersing people for the remission of their sins, he gave them the following warning: “And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10). Jesus uses the same imagery in His famous Sermon on the Mount and in addressing the Pharisees directly (Matthew 7:15-20, 12:33). To drive His point home, Jesus demonstrates this judgment on a real fig tree (21:18-19). Immanuel had arrived to judge those people who counted themselves as upstanding members of the Jewish religion, but who had corrupted God’s teaching and opposed His Son.

Second, God is judge among the church. Jesus is not Immanuel in flesh alone. He continues to be with us. “For where two or three are gathered together in My name,” Jesus taught, “I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). At the close of the Great Commission, in

the very last verse of Matthew, Jesus promises His disciples that He would be with them “always, even to the end of the age” (28:20). If Jesus continues to be Immanuel—continues to be “God with us”—then He stands ready to judge the church. The church, as the new fig tree, has yet to face judgment, but it *will* be judged.

This is a sobering thought. Just as mere descent from Abraham was not enough to save a Jew, so mere birth into the Lord’s body through baptism is not enough. Each one of us must continue to bear fruit. Jesus issues the following warning to those who might count themselves as His disciples: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

In other parables taught by Jesus and recorded by Matthew we see that the Kingdom of God, which is the church, will be a mixed bag. Its citizens will consist both of...

- useful wheat and worthless weeds (13:24-30, 36-43)
- good fish and bad fish (13:47-50)
- obedient servants and wicked servants (24:45-51)
- wise, well-prepared wedding attendants and unwise, unprepared wedding attendants (25:1-13)
- productive stewards and lazy servants (25:14-30)

Where are we in all this? Are we wheat or weeds? Are we a good catch for God, or not? Are we obedient or disobedient? Are we well-prepared for Christ, or not? Are we doing what God has instructed us to do as His servants, or not?

Finally, Jesus as Immanuel will stand as judge of all humanity. When the disciples saw Him ascend to heaven, they thought that everything had come to an end, that Jesus would be among them no more, but they were mistaken. An angel had to assure them with these words:

may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” If we want to know how we can have eternal life then we must begin with God’s Word, the Bible. It is the soul’s only guide in our journey to our eternal reward. We just cannot be good enough to go to Heaven; we must be in Christ and obey Him.

³ [His Hand and Heart](#) The Wit and Wisdom of Marshall Keeble by Willie Cato. 1999. p. 13

What Ever Happened to Hell?

Dana Slingluff

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. posed this question in a recent two-part article printed in *Pulpit Helps*. He went on to define many of the shifts in the philosophies and attitudes of people in today’s society that make them unwilling to hear or believe the Biblical doctrine of hell. It has been evident for many years that liberal theology has rejected the concept of sinners being condemned by God to eternal punishment. What did surprise the author, however, was that the pulpits of most conservative, bible-based churches remain silent on the subject! The reason? Well, *essentially*, to talk about hell is viewed as intolerant and is certainly not “politically correct!” As one preacher told me recently, “I cannot believe that a God of love could condemn anyone to eternal punishment. That’s certainly not the “good news” that will draw men to Jesus!”

Why would anyone deny what the Bible teaches about hell? In the thinking of so many in our world today, truth is what you choose to believe. This philosophy may be called “modern”, but it is certainly nothing new. Paul spoke of the Gentiles of his day. They rejected any belief in God, not because they couldn’t see the evidence of His existence, but simply because they chose not to acknowledge Him. “Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God... but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools... Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness..., who exchanged

God abides on Him.”² 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 declares that if individuals want to avoid the flaming fire and vengeance of the Lord they must obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ lived, died, was buried, and resurrected on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). When mankind obeys Christ’s Gospel by confessing Christ before men, Romans 10:9-10, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Upon this confession of faith the sinner who truly believes in Christ as the Son of God must repent of their sins, Luke 13:3 “. . . but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” One’s repentance will lead them to be buried with Christ by immersion in water, as commanded in Acts 2:38, “. . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” In Romans 6:4 it reads, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” This teaches that at our baptism we begin a new life in Christ, which is the beginning of our journey to Heaven.

In order to get to Heaven people must prepare to go there. In John 14:2 Jesus tells His Disciple that Heaven will be prepared for many people. Scripture even tells us that God desires all to repent and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9). Yet Jesus also reminds us that not all that desire to go to Heaven will be there, only those who hear and do His will (Matthew 7:21-24). Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.

The late gospel preacher Marshall Keeble once said in a gospel meeting, “The Bible is right! You can leave this meeting and go home mad, but the Bible is still right. You can fuss at Keeble all night, but the Bible is right! All men can die and go to Hell, but the Bible is still right!”³ The Bible is right, it is where one must begin if they want to go to Heaven. The Apostle John said in 1 John 5: 13, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye

² Best translate in ASV.

the same Jesus “will so come in like *manner* as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). When He comes again, for one last time, it will be to judge us all. Listen to the words of Jesus, again as recorded by Matthew:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matthew 25:31-33,41)

The idea of Jesus as Immanuel can be comforting. Christ lived among us, eating our food, sleeping in whatever bed He could find, talking with us, playing with our children, healing our sick, saying “No!” to temptation. Ultimately He went to the cross for us, but even then, He came back from the grave to be with us. This is the Jesus we find so easy to love. This is the Jesus we can praise in song. This is the Jesus through Whom we pray. But the Son of God also is among us as Judge. If we are Christians loving God and doing His will (1 John 5:2), then we have every right to focus on the comforting picture of Immanuel. But whether we believe we are saved or not, if we fail to love God and keep His commandments then we must be prepared to face the terrifying specter of Jesus as Judge among us. — Trevor Major, Alkire Road Church of Christ, 2779 Alkire Road, Grove City, OH 43123

“HE IS NOT HERE; FOR HE IS RISEN”

Steve Snider

The resurrection of Jesus is the very foundation of the Christian religion. Paul would write, “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” (1 Cor. 15:17) Go through the early chapters

of the book of Acts and notice how important the topic of the resurrection was to the early preaching and teaching of the apostles:

“...Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands and have crucified, and put to death; who God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it...This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.” (Acts 2:23, 24, 32)

“But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, *whom* God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.” (Acts 3:14, 15)

“let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God has raised from the dead, by *Him* this man stands before you whole.” (Acts 4:10)

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 5:30, 31)

It becomes evident that the apostles wanted everyone who would listen to know that Jesus was alive, He had conquered death, and He had risen from the dead. They stressed that this was all according to the scriptures and all a part of God’s eternal plan for our redemption. (1 Cor.15:1-4; Acts 2:23)

Because the resurrection is so essential to Christianity it has been attacked from the very beginning by Christ’s enemies. Read Matt.28:11-15 and you will find the beginnings of the efforts to deny the truth that **“He is not here, for He is risen.”** (Matt.28:6) While these efforts began in the first century they have continued until this very day. Some of the arguments made in an attempt to deny the resurrection of Christ are (1) He didn’t die, He merely swooned (2) The disciples stole the body to make it look like He had raised from the dead (3) The enemies of Jesus stole the body to make “fools” out

of sin, just look at the daily newspaper. Heaven is a better country, far better than the United States. Heaven is a better place because there will be no more sin, no more death, no more sorrow, no more evil, and no more of the things that break our heart. Hebrews 11:16 states that the faithful long for a better country. The idea, which *is* stated in Hebrew 11:16, is that Heaven is far better than anything we can ever hope for or imagine for upon this earth.

Heaven will also be a place of fellowship. First of all, Heaven will be a place of fellowship with God. One day the Bride of Christ will dwell with her Groom according to Revelation 21:3. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 states, “... shall we ever be with the Lord.” What joy it will be to dwell with God. Second, Heaven will be a place of fellowship with others who have been found faithful in Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-18 tells us that Heaven is where the dead and those who are alive in Christ will go and be together. The Bible teaches that the Saint’s identity will be know to one another such as the case with Moses and Elijah on the Mt. Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-13 and the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31.

The wonder and beauty of Heaven as it is described in the Bible is also a place of unending joy as seen in Isaiah 35:10 and Revelation 21:4. Revelation 2:7 states, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” In 2 Corinthians 12:4 it also affirms that Heaven is a place of paradise.

The Bible portrays Heaven as such a wonderful place that its joy is beyond imagine. It is no wonder that many people want to go there. Yet Heaven is only for the Saved. 2 Corinthians 5:1 tells us that Heaven is where the Saints will dwell with God for eternity. If mankind wants to dwell with God in Heaven then they must be found in Christ to do so (Philippians 3:9). People cannot pray, wish or just desire their way into Heaven. The Bible proclaims that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John goes on to point out in John 3:36 that this is an obedient faith, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of

Heaven

Mark T. Tonkery

Are you going to Heaven? There is a growing tendency to believe that all good people, whether or not they consider Jesus Christ to be their Savior, will live in Heaven after they die on earth. In 2005 a Barna survey found that 54% agree, 39% disagree that if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their life; they will earn a place in Heaven.¹

Heaven, as described by the Bible, is certainly a wonderful place. No wonder people want to go there. The Bible defines Heaven as the eternal dwelling place of God in Isaiah 66:1, "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne..." When Jesus taught His disciples to pray He taught them to pray by addressing God the Father, "which art in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9) which also illustrates that God dwells in Heaven. Not only is Heaven the dwelling place of God but also the Bible describes many wonderful characteristics of this Paradise.

The Bible describes Heaven as a place of eternal rest. Revelation 21:3-4 tells us "...Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Hebrews 4:9-11 and Revelation 14:13 also teach that Heaven is a place of eternal rest. This is a major contrast from Hell. Jesus points out that Hell is a constant place of unrest where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30), torment (Luke 16:23), and eternal fire (Matthew 25:41). Unlike Hell, Heaven is a place of eternal peace and rest for the Christian's weary souls.

The Bible also states that Heaven is a better dwelling place or a better country. We who live in the United States of America live in a great country, yet it is not Heaven, many problems exist here because

¹George Barna survey found

of His followers. Upon careful examination all of these (and any other argument skeptics make) fall by the wayside.

I want to suggest that the burden of proof lies with the unbeliever. The unbeliever is obligated to explain (with a reasonable explanation) the empty tomb. Charles Colson, the former counsel of President Nixon, stated that "Watergate" helped convince him that Jesus was raised from the dead. He writes, **"There were only 8 or 10 of us in the inner circle around the president who really knew what was going on. All we had to do was stonewall for a couple of months and the Watergate scandal would be over. We had all the power and prestige of the Presidency at our fingertips. And if the truth broke there would be embarrassment and perhaps a prison sentence. There was no grave danger. Our lives were not threatened, but we could not hold the conspiracy together for more than two weeks. We could not contain the lie. Once prosecution was possible the natural instincts of self-preservation was so overwhelming that the conspirators one by one deserted their leader."** In view of that, how do you explain the faith of the apostles and the early Christians? It was not just their reputations that were at stake, it was their very lives! They were not going to gain power or money or position by lying, yet they continued to claim that Christ is risen! All but one of them died a martyr's death, yet not one of them ever changed their story about Jesus Christ.

"He is not here, for He is risen." The only reasonable explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus is alive! The fact that the church exists today, the truth that He appeared to over 500 witnesses at once (I Cor. 15:6), the inability of anyone in the 1st century to produce the body, and the testimony of even non-Christian writers around that time all prove that our Lord did indeed rise from the dead.

The importance of the resurrection is seen in a powerful way as Paul endeavors to reason with the church at Corinth. There were some among them who were denying that there was going to be a resurrection of the dead. (I Cor. 15:12) Paul argues that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Jesus was not raised from the dead; and then sets out for all readers for all times the terrible consequences if that is true. (I Cor.15:12-19) Consider some of the things that are true if Christ is not risen from the dead:

(1) The apostles preaching was in vain (15:14)

(2) The apostles are false witnesses (15:15)

(3) Our faith then would be vain or empty (15:17)

(4) We are still in our sins (15:17)

(5) Those who have already died have simply perished (15:18)

(6) We are to be pitied (15:19)

Paul continues, though, *“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* (15:20) Because of Jesus' resurrection we have the promise of forgiveness, the promise that physical death is not the end and that there is indeed something to look forward to beyond the grave.

One of Jesus' own disciples refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he could see the evidence. Thomas, after being told that Jesus was alive, said he would not believe until he saw the nail prints in His hands and the wound in His side. When Jesus appeared to him and showed him the evidence, Thomas proclaimed, **“My Lord and my God.”** (John 20:28) May each of us consider carefully the evidence of the empty tomb. May we come to believe the truth, **“He is not here, for He is risen”** and then like Thomas accept Jesus as our Lord and our God.

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