

A Heavenly Inheritance

***“Blessed be the God
and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ,
which according to
his abundant
mercy hath
begotten us again
unto a lively
hope . . . , To an
inheritance
incorruptible, and
undefiled, and that
fadeth not away,
reserved in heaven
for you.”
—I Peter 1:3,4***

THE THOUGHT OF LEAV-

ing this earth and going to heaven to spend eternity is inseparably associated with the beliefs of nearly all professed Christians. Among these, there have always been a few sincere and ardent believers to whom this has been a bright prospect, and which they have anticipated with a considerable measure of joy. To the vast majority, however, the idea of going to heaven has appealed only as

an alternative to going to a place of torment at death. Many professed believers would prefer to remain alive on the earth, but since they believe this is not possible, they would rather go to heaven than to eternal torture.

This is understandable, for according to common reasoning, the picture of heaven has not been drawn

in an especially inviting manner. Centuries of tradition have portrayed heaven largely as a place of idleness or, at best, of harp-playing and singing. The Bible clearly teaches that a heavenly hope is held out to the faithful followers of Jesus. (Phil. 3:14,20; Heb. 3:1; I Pet. 1:3,4) In addition, while it is impossible for our finite minds to understand heavenly conditions, the Bible assures us that there is a real purpose in exalting some to this high position. In God's divine arrangement, heaven is not designed as an escape from a fiery hell.

Jesus said to 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) Here we can properly think of the "Father's house" as the entire universe, and the "many mansions" as the numerous places of abode, or spheres of life, which had already been created at the time Jesus made this promise to his disciples. When Jesus said that he was going to "prepare a place" for them, he meant that it was a new place, one which did not yet exist. It did not mean, however, that other previously created "mansions" in his Father's house were to be unoccupied.

A PRIESTHOOD TO BLESS

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (Heb. 3:1) In Peter's epistle, we read, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood." (I Pet. 2:9) These two texts reveal that those who receive

the heavenly calling are shown symbolically as being inducted into a priesthood. This terminology is based upon God's dealings with ancient Israel. There were twelve tribes of Israel, and one of them, the tribe of Levi, was set apart from the others to minister to the nation in holy things. One of the families within the tribe of Levi was chosen to be priests. The priests of Israel offered sacrifices and, upon the basis of their sacrifices, extended blessings to the people.

Thus, Paul and Peter explain that in the present age, beginning with Jesus' First Advent, God is calling a people to be a "priesthood" with Christ as Head, or High Priest. These also offer sacrifice, not of animals as did the priests of Israel, but of themselves—their lives to God's service. Jesus gave his human life for the sins of the world. As his consecrated followers, we are invited to be sacrificers with him. Based upon this work of sacrifice, Jesus and his faithful body members will extend blessings to the people. However, before that can take place, this antitypical priesthood is to be exalted to heavenly glory. Their calling is not only to a priesthood, but to heaven as well.

God's plan to bless the world of mankind through Jesus and his church is shown in his promise to Abraham, that through his "seed" all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) The Apostle Paul identifies Christ as being the chief one of this "seed" class. (Gal. 3:16) Then in the closing verses of the same chapter he says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor

female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—vss. 27-29

The great objective of God's plan of salvation through Christ is the blessing of all the families of the earth—upon the earth! Hence, we see that the purpose of the heavenly calling is not to afford, for merely a few of God's favorites, an escape from unending torture. Rather, it is to select and prepare representatives from among mankind to be associated with Jesus in extending blessings of life to the remainder of the human race.

THE "BRIDE"

To help us understand more clearly all that is involved in the heavenly calling of a few, in order that they may be used as channels of blessing for the remainder of mankind, the Scriptures refer to these using various symbols. As we have seen, they are a "priesthood" to offer sacrifice, and later to extend blessings to the people. They are also spoken of as the "bride" of Christ. In the Book of Revelation, we read, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb [Christ Jesus] is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." "There came unto me one of the seven angels . . . , and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God."—Rev. 19:7; 21:9,10

The "great city, the holy Jerusalem," is not a place to which Christians go to escape hellfire, but

is another descriptive name for the “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” composed of the true followers of Jesus. This symbolic “holy city” is shown as descending from God out of heaven after the saints are united with Jesus. The “gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.” (Rev. 21:25,26) The open gates of this city suggest that Jesus and his bride will welcome the peoples of earth to come in, and to receive the blessings of life provided for them through his death as the “Lamb that was slain.” (chap. 5:12) The faithful followers of Christ will not be sitting endlessly on clouds, playing harps. Instead, they will be engaged with Jesus, as his bride, in the great work of blessing all the families of the earth, restoring them to perfection and to oneness with God.

BEGOTTEN AGAIN

In our opening text, Peter speaks of Christ’s disciples as being “begotten . . . again.” When Nicodemus went to Jesus by night to learn more about him and the message he was presenting to the people, Jesus told him that to enter the kingdom of heaven he would have to be “born again.” (John 3:3,7) Nicodemus did not understand this, so Jesus explained that those who are born again can come and go as the wind, meaning that they are invisible and very powerful. This was Jesus’ way of describing some of the characteristics of those who enter into the heavenly inheritance. This was literally true of Jesus after his resurrection. With the exception of a few brief times he appeared to his disciples, he was invisible to human eyes. When he appeared in

their midst, they knew not from whence he came. When he disappeared, they did not know where he went. “So is every one that is born of the Spirit,” Jesus explained to Nicodemus.—vs. 8

It is this that is involved in our hope of being “born again” into the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom. In our text, Peter said that we are now “begotten” to this hope. This new life has begun in our minds. However, it will not come to birth until, in the resurrection, we shall be made like Jesus as invisible and powerful spirit beings. The Apostle John wrote concerning this glorious hope of the true Christian, saying, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, . . . we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) As John explains, it is only those who are, in the resurrection, made like him, that will be able to see the Heavenly Father and the glorified Jesus.

THE “LAST TIME”

In the verse immediately following our theme text, Peter speaks of a revelation of the heavenly class in the “last time.” (I Pet. 1:5) In the plan of God for man’s salvation and restoration of the willing and obedient to perfection of human life on the earth, this present age is for the purpose of calling from the world a class who will receive a heavenly inheritance to live and reign with Christ. They have been unknown to the world, and often persecuted by those who have been blinded to the truth of the Gospel by the “god of this world,” who is Satan.—II Cor. 4:4

However, in the beginning of Christ’s kingdom—the final age or “last time” in the accomplishment

of the restoration of Adam's race in the plan of God—the true position of these faithful ones will be revealed. Then it will be recognized by all mankind that this “little flock” of misunderstood and sometimes persecuted followers of the Master were really God's true people, and that now they have been raised from the dead, exalted to heavenly glory, and together with Jesus, are the new spiritual rulers of the world.

It is fitting that these should receive a heavenly inheritance, for they gave up all earthly honor and advantage in order that they might devote their lives wholly to following in the footsteps of their Master, our Lord Jesus. The Apostle Paul was a good example of the full devotion of this class. He wrote, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of

the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:8-14

Paul’s use of the expression “high calling” is revealing. It indicates that those to whom the promise of a heavenly reward has been offered are invited to a very special place in the divine arrangement. It is not, as many would have us believe, an alternative to being tortured forever, as an emergency escape from an eternity of doom. It is not a matter merely of being “saved,” but a calling, an invitation, to participate in God’s plan for the blessing of all mankind.

CHILDREN AND HEIRS

In a passage already quoted, the Apostle John refers to this class to whom the high calling is extended, as being sons, or children, of God. Paul also wrote concerning these: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 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. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.”—Rom. 8:16-19

The expression, “earnest expectation of the creature,” is translated more properly “earnest expectation of the creation.” (*Revised Version*) Here the reference is to God’s human creation—the entire world of mankind. Paul says that creation is waiting for the “manifestation”—that is, revealing—“of the sons of God.” He then adds that “the whole

creation” groans and travails “in pain together” until this manifestation comes to pass.—Rom. 8:22

The world of mankind, blinded by the great Adversary, Satan, does not understand the plan of God. The people are blind to the glorious provision of life through Christ which has been made for them by divine love. Nevertheless, in their groaning and travailing they are ever hopeful that conditions will change, and that happiness will in some way replace their misery. Pain and death shall indeed be destroyed in God’s due time. (Rev. 21:1-7) This will be done through the power of the Christ class, made up of Jesus the Head, and his body members, the house of sons, who have been made partakers of the heavenly calling.—Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18

When these children of God are revealed together with Christ, in power and glory, the promised kingdom of blessing all the families of the earth will begin. The sons of God themselves will occupy a heavenly position, being exalted to “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) In this position of authority and power, they will be the instruments of God in extending blessings of health and life to all of mankind who, when they are enlightened, accept the gift of life through Christ, and obey the righteous and just laws of the kingdom which will then be in force. What a joyous prospect is thus laid before those who seek this heavenly inheritance! ■

*Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
who only doeth wondrous things.
Blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let
the whole earth be filled with his glory;
Amen, and Amen.”—Psalm 72:18,19*