

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

If you are like I was, then you believe the Bible teaches certain truths even though you haven't read them in the Bible yourself. In other words, someone like your pastor or Sunday school teacher has played a major role in the formation of your religious beliefs rather than your own personal study of the Word of God.

All this changed for me when I was in high school and I wanted to know for myself what was in the Bible. Before I sat down and read the Bible from cover to cover, I thought within those sacred pages lay the truth that the world was going to come to an end and at that time God was going to judge each person according to his or her works; those individuals found worthy would spend eternity with God in heaven, but those found unworthy would be cast into hell.

By the time I had reached the Gospel of John, I saw something that totally astonished me. Jesus was speaking and He said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

I was in a state of shock! Here I had been thinking that going to heaven was determined by how I lived my life and yet I had just read where Jesus said it was based upon my belief in Him.

Could it really be that simple?

At that moment in my life I just couldn't accept it, but within the next couple of months I came to see that it was the only thing that made sense.

Why would Jesus have died in the first place if we could have worked our way to heaven? And how could Jesus be our Savior if we had to do our part? If you were drowning and someone pulled you only half way to shore, there is no way that person could be called a savior; but millions call Christ their Savior while believing He did only part of what was necessary to get them to heaven.

What people need to see is that no one is worthy of going to heaven. Maybe you have never murdered anyone or committed adultery, and you do love your neighbor as yourself, but are you as righteous as God? You may consider that a foolish question, but it isn't, considering that the Bible teaches we do have to be as righteous as God to spend eternity with Him.

And how does the Bible say one becomes as righteous as God? The obvious answer is “not by our efforts.” God’s righteousness is not something you can earn or deserve; it is something that must be given to you. And the way we receive God’s righteousness is by faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 3:22,23, explain, “Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The reason it says there is no distinction between people (in other words, what we would consider good and bad) is because according to God’s standards, none of us measure up. It says, “there is none righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10).

When God looks at us He sees people incapable of saving themselves from hell. That’s why He clothed Himself in humanity and came to this earth and suffered the punishment we deserve for our sins. Romans 6:23, says, “the wages of sin is death”, and Hebrews 2:9, says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”

It is only because the Lord Jesus Christ did everything necessary to get us to heaven that God offers us eternal life as a gift. Romans 6:23, says, “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We are counted righteous in the sight of God, not because of what we do, but because of what He did. As long as a person is trying to earn heaven by his works, he is attempting to get to heaven by his righteousness rather than God’s. It says in Romans 4:5, “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

One major objection to this truth that eternal life is received by faith alone in Christ alone is that it seemingly makes work meaningless. Why live a good life if it doesn’t make a difference?

Works do make a difference! Although our works don’t get us to heaven, they do get us rewards in heaven. And although our works can’t pay for our sins, they can merit us blessings on earth such as answered prayer and peace of mind. Clearly, the Bible teaches the way we live our lives not only affects our immediate future, but also our eternal future.

To really grasp the significance of our works it is necessary to understand certain things concerning the future. And just as my study of Scripture led me to a new way of looking at how to gain eternal life, it also led me to a new way of seeing the

end of the world.

I had thought that after God judged the human race He was going to destroy the earth and that would be the end of the earth's existence. I was wrong.

It is true that the world will someday come to an end as we now know it because the governments of this world will be destroyed and replaced by the government of God. Daniel, the prophet, foretold of this awesome event hundreds of years before the coming of Christ. He wrote, "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever" (Daniel 2:44).

When the angel announced to Mary the miraculous nature of the birth of the Child, he said concerning Jesus, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32,33).

The Jews at the time of Christ were looking for the Promised One who was going to put an end to the Roman government and establish God's kingdom on earth. There was nothing unbiblical in their desires. In fact, after Christ's resurrection, His apostles asked Him, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Jesus didn't say, "What kingdom?" Instead, He responded, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:7). So the Apostles knew the kingdom of God was coming to earth; they just didn't know when.

There are literally hundreds of verses describing conditions that will exist in this kingdom. Nations will continue to exist, but there will be no war between them. It says, "And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war" (Isaiah 2:4).

Not only will there be peace between nations, there will be peace between animals because animals that are now wild will become tame and no longer carnivorous. Children will be able to have lions as pets! It says, "And the wolf will dwell with

the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox” (Isaiah 11:6,7).

During the kingdom, man’s life span will be increased greatly. So much so that if a person dies at an hundred, he will have been considered a youth (Isaiah 65:20). Disease and sickness will be eradicated (Isaiah 33:24). All physical handicaps will be removed: “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy” (Isaiah 35:5,6).

The Jews will be gathered from all the nations and brought back to their land (Isaiah 66:19,20; Ezekiel 39:27,28), and they will receive all the land area promised to them (Ezekiel 36:28).

There is a wonderful future awaiting planet earth!

HOW DO WE FIT INTO THE SCHEME OF THINGS?

The moment a person trusts Christ alone as his Savior, that person is born into the family of God. If death takes place, that person’s spirit will be in the presence of God. The Apostle Paul wrote, “We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (Second Corinthians 5:8).

But Paul also revealed that there was going to be a generation of Christians who would never die. He said, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (First Corinthians 15:51,52).

A “mystery” was a truth never before revealed. And the truth Paul was making known was that the believers living at the time of Christ’s return would never have to experience physical death (which is the meaning of the word “sleep”). Instead, their bodies would be transformed. What is now mortal (meaning “subject to death”) would become immortal.

Paul expressed it like this in Philippians 3:20,21, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory,

by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” Now on one hand I’ve shown you in the Bible that during the kingdom there will still be such a thing as death, yet I’ve just quoted where it says our glorified bodies will be like Christ’s and not subject to death.

It also says in the kingdom that children will be born, but Jesus said, “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30).

There is no contradiction. What must be understood is that there will be a multitude of people entering Christ’s kingdom who never have experienced the transformation of their physical body. They will have bodies, just as we have today. Let me explain. The Bible foretells that there will be a tremendous time of trouble befalling the earth. It is known as the tribulation. Jesus said, “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall” (Matthew 24:21).

It was revealed by the prophet Daniel and the Apostle John that this time of trouble would last seven years and the Lord would return to earth as soon as it was over. He said, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29,30).

The suffering of those on earth during the tribulation period is unimaginable. Jesus even said the days would be shortened because, if they weren’t, every human being would die (Matthew 24:22). Scary, isn’t it?

But the good news is that people who become believers before the beginning of this time of tribulation won’t have to go through it. When the Bible speaks of the generation of believers who will never experience death, it is speaking of the people who will be taken off the earth before this terrible time of tribulation begins. Biblically informed believers aren’t looking for the tribulation to come on the earth, they are “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

We are waiting for the appearance of Jesus Christ, “who delivers us from the wrath to come” (First Thessalonians 1:10).

One day millions of people will disappear off the face of the earth. This event is commonly referred to as the “rapture”. It explains in First Thessalonians 4:14-17 how Christ is going to come and take all the believers who are alive back to heaven with Him. It says in verses 16,17, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord”

I think that there is going to be a host of people who will believe the Gospel when this stupendous event occurs. These are the people who know the Gospel, but don’t accept it as true. When the day comes when millions disappear from the earth, then they will know they were in error.

Multitudes will become believers during the tribulation, including many, many Jews. And all those who believe and live through the tribulation will become subjects in the kingdom that Christ will establish on earth.

This is when voices in heaven will proclaim, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

GOD’S TIMETABLE OF EVENTS - THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

When the Lord personally returns to establish His kingdom on earth, He is going to gather all the nations before Him and separate them into two groups, those who believed in Christ and those who didn’t. It says, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31,32). Jesus is going to say to the sheep, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me” (Matthew 25:34-36).

These individuals had no idea that they had done these things to Him so they asked Him when they had done them (verse 37), to which He responded, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of

them, you did it to Me” (verse 40).

This passage must be understood in its historical context. These are people who have just come through the tribulation period. One of the things prophesied that will occur during this time period is that 144,000 Jewish men will be preaching the Gospel (Revelation 7:3-7). Because the world government at this time will be headed by someone energized by Satan (Revelation 13:4), he is going to bitterly persecute those proclaiming Christ.

This man, known as the Anti-christ, is going to require those who wish to buy or sell to receive either a mark in their forehead or their right hand (Revelation 13:16), so those who refuse the mark (such as the 144,000) will be dependant upon others to provide for their needs.

Those who accept the Gospel because of the preaching of these Jews and help them out are in reality doing it to Jesus. He said to His followers, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (Matthew 10:40). So when the believers who have lived through the tribulation ask the Lord when they did these acts of kindness to Him, He answered, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me” (verse 40). The “brothers” Jesus is talking about are the 144,000 Jewish men who will be preaching the Gospel during the tribulation.

The other group (the goats) standing at the left hand of Jesus will be those who never trusted Him as Savior. To them He will say, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (verse 41). These people never did any kind deeds to Jesus. They will question Him as to when they were in a position to help Him out, but didn’t, to which He’ll respond, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (verse 45). Because they had rejected the message of the messengers of Christ, they hadn’t helped them out when they needed it and thus were, in reality, refusing help to Christ.

It says, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (verse 46). It is these righteous who will walk physically alive into Christ’s kingdom. They are the ones who will be having children. We, on the other hand, will return with Christ to this earth in our glorified bodies, along with the believers who died during the tribulation, to rule and reign with Him.

God is going to establish His sanctuary in Israel (Ezekiel 37:26), and David, who had once been the King of Israel will again be put in that position by God. The prophet Ezekiel, writing hundreds of years after David had died, recorded God as saying “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your father lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever” (Ezekiel 37:24,25). The reason David is going to be placed as the king over Israel is because he faithfully served God.

Although all who believe will be with Christ in His kingdom, it is only those who have faithfully served Him who will be honored by being placed in a position of authority in the kingdom. Christ taught this truth many times in the New Testament. One example is found in Luke 19:11-27. The Lord told a story about a nobleman who went to a distant country to receive authority to return and establish a kingdom. Before he left he called ten of his servants and entrusted each of them with a mina (a “mina” is unit of money equal to about 100 days’ wages). He instructed them to use the money to make money until he returned to set up his rule.

When the nobleman returned and established his kingdom, he had his servants brought to him to give an account of how they had used his money. The first servant had used his mina to make ten minas. To him was said, “Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little things, be in authority over ten cities” (verse 17). The next servant had made five minas and he was rewarded with the rulership of five cities (verse 19). But there was a servant who hadn’t used his mina, but had hidden it away. This servant was called by his lord, a “worthless slave” (verse 22), and the mina was taken away from him and given to the one who had ten minas (verse 24).

The meaning of this story is unmistakable; those who are faithful now will be rewarded accordingly in the coming kingdom and those who are unfaithful will be denied a position of authority. In fact, what would have been the reward of those who didn’t serve will be given to those who have been most faithful in their service. The Lord established this when He said, “I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away” (verse 26).

The Apostle Peter questioned the Lord concerning what rewards he and the other apostles were going to receive. Peter said, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" To which the Lord responded, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:27,28).

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

There is no such thing as a day coming when God is going to judge people to determine whether they go to heaven or not since that is determined by each person while here on earth. Jesus said, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

Another place where Jesus stated that believers will never face judgment for their sins is John 5:24, which says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

However, the Bible does teach that the unbeliever will come into judgment. This is known as the Great White Throne Judgment and it is going to take place after Christ has reigned on the earth for a thousand years. It says, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed" (Revelation 20:5).

Their judgment is described in Revelation 20:11-15. It says in verses 11 and 12, "And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."

You may wonder why it is necessary for unbelievers to be judged if it has already been determined that their fate is hell. The reason they are judged is to determine the degree of punishment they are going to receive in hell. Even though these people spoken of in this passage will be cast into the lake of fire (hell), there will be a greater degree of suffering experienced by some than others. Greater knowledge will require a greater punishment. Jesus condemned the people who saw Him and all the miracles He had performed, but yet refused to believe in Him. He said to them, "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you" (Matthew 11:24).

At the time God judges the unbelievers (after the 1,000 year reign of Christ), He is going to destroy His creation of heaven and earth. Peter said, “But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (Second Peter 3:7). After the unbelievers are judged and cast into hell, God is going to make a new heaven and earth. John wrote, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away...” (Revelation 21:1).

This is when all pain and suffering and death will pass away! It says, “And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

This is the future that every believer has to look forward to. But God has given us this glimpse into the future to stir us up to live righteously. Peter wrote, “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless” (Second Peter 3:13,14).

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Another revelation that God has given us concerning the future is of a judgment that all believers will face to determine the amount of rewards they are going to receive. This is referred to as the Judgment Seat of Christ. “For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad” (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Charles Dickens wrote a famous story called “A Christmas Carol” in which a man who was living a totally selfish life was allowed to see into the future for the purpose of having him change his ways before it was too late.

One of the things that was revealed to Mr. Scrooge was how people were going to respond to his death. He discovered that no one was going to miss him because he had been such a miserable old man. It was also revealed to him that his employee’s little boy was going to die because Scrooge wasn’t paying the boy’s father enough to be able to afford the medical attention needed for his son.

Because of this revelation that he was given, Scrooge changed his ways so that he was able to change what might have been.

If something like this happened to you, do you think it would have a major effect upon your life?

Even though we are all born into God's family by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we, as God's children, have been left here on earth to accomplish certain things for God. Those who obey God will be rewarded for the work they did, but those who refuse to obey will be denied those rewards.

How many times I have wished that all believers could have a preview of what the Judgment Seat of Christ will hold for them so that the believers who aren't serving the Lord would change their ways before it is too late.

Although it is an impossibility to see this with your physical eyes, I ask that you look with me with your eyes of faith at some things God has revealed in the Bible concerning your future. And I hope that by looking at this revelation of what the future holds, you will be impelled to act upon the knowledge you gain, and to change what might have been. Although this journey into the future is imaginary, I will show you that it is based on God's revelation of what is sure to come to pass.

Imagine, if you will, that you have been transported to heaven and looming before your eyes is a building which is in the process of being constructed. As you gaze at it you see that this is no ordinary building. In fact, you have never seen anything like it before.

Portions of the building radiate with opulent beauty, but only a very small percentage of it, and these portions are scattered throughout the building. But most of this uncompleted building is constructed of what appears to be crude materials which seem all the more base when compared to what radiates.

As you walk closer, you see that the portions of the building which are so overwhelmingly beautiful, are materials you are familiar with. The gleaming yellow substance is gold. And as you inspect another portion that shines, you see that it is silver. And all those glistening colors are different precious stones. You immediately recognize a diamond and then you spot a ruby. The dazzling green that caught your eye is an emerald. To see these materials doesn't surprise you, considering that you are in heaven. But what does surprise you is that most of this unfinished building is made of comparatively worthless materials. Much of it is made of wood. And the other two worthless materials are hay and straw. You are both fascinated and intrigued by this strange structure.

Then your eyes look beyond it and in the distance you see other buildings all constructed from the same materials, but all of them in varying amounts. Some are absolutely breathtaking. These buildings consist mostly of gold, silver and precious stones. In stark contrast are the ones which consist only of wood, hay and straw. Many of the edifices are similar to the one you are closest to, consisting primarily of wood, hay and straw, with small portions of gold, silver, and precious stones. What is this building, you wonder, which is being built with materials that are so different in value? And who is building this strange and unusual thing?

Before you even have a chance to ponder these questions in your mind, you hear the answer and you really aren't prepared for what you hear.

"This building that you see being erected," you hear in a booming voice, "is your life, and you, in fact are the one who is building it."

"How can this be?" you ask.

"What you are looking at is the work that you have done since you became a believer. Remember the time you talked to your best friend about how to go to heaven? That is the ruby you see in that building.

"All the gold, silver, and precious gems are the works that you have done for Christ. It is only works done for Him that have any worth. And as you can see you have done very little for Him. Because you have lived to please yourself rather than God, most of your life has amounted to wood, hay and straw."

When he says that and you gaze upon your building, the regret you feel is almost unbearable. Suddenly all that seemed so important to you on earth appears no longer to be of any significance. You realize to your dismay that you have invested your precious time in things that have no lasting value. How you wish you would have spent that time serving the Lord.

Then you ask, mostly out of a desire to stop thinking about it, but also out of curiosity, "What is going to happen to this building?"

"When it is complete, God is going to set fire to it. Of course, the wood, hay and straw will be consumed, but the gold, silver, and precious gems will remain, and you will be rewarded accordingly."

As you consider how little you have done for Christ and how few your rewards will be, you question whether it is too late to do anything about it.

And just as you do, you again hear that booming voice saying, “Although it is too late to change what you’ve already built here, the building is not yet complete. You still have the rest of your life ahead of you and if you spend it doing what God has commanded you to do in His Word then the rest of your building will be constructed of gold, silver, and precious stones. The choice is yours.”

If this imaginary journey were to really happen to you, do you think that it would change your life? Would having a glimpse into the future cause you to rethink your objectives?

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU BUILD

Although this journey into the future was imaginary, what was envisioned was not. The Bible teaches that when a person trusts Christ as his Savior, he has laid the foundation of a building in heaven which he will be in the process of constructing for his entire life. The building materials used in this construction are the believer’s works. If a believer does works for Christ, then those works are of value and they amount to gold, silver and precious stones. But if a believer lives for self then his works are of no value so they amount to wood, hay, and straw.

Someday, when a believer goes to heaven and stands before Christ, he will stand before what is called the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is where every believer is going to be rewarded for the work that he did for the Lord. It says in Second Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.”

It is at this Judgment that the believer will be able to see with his own eyes exactly what his life amounted to. Some believers, unfortunately, are going to be looking at a building constructed only of wood, hay, and straw because they did absolutely nothing for the Lord. And because they did nothing for Him, they will receive nothing from Him. It is only those who have done works for Christ who will receive rewards. It says in First Corinthians 3:8, “...each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”

This Judgment is described in detail in First Corinthians 3:11-15. It says, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious

stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Lord is going to have a fire come upon the building the believer has constructed. Of course, all the worthless works will be consumed by that fire and only that which was of value will remain. And what remains after this fire will be rewarded accordingly.

However, according to verse 15, there will be some believers whose buildings are constructed only of wood, hay, and straw so that when fire comes upon their structure, it will be totally consumed, leaving nothing but ashes.

The verse says, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire." This verse is comparing the fate of the believer who has his building completely burn up to that of a person who safely comes through a fire.

And how does getting safely out of a fire compare with a believer who has all his works burned up?

To understand this, please join me on another imaginary journey. For this one, though, you don't have to leave earth. This journey is to your dream house. This is the house that you have been building for the last ten years. The reason it took so long to build is because you could work on it only on weekends.

Oh, how you looked forward to getting off work on Fridays so that you could work on your house. This house is so important to you that you don't mind that so much effort and money is going into it. After all, this is your dream house.

Finally your work is complete and you now get to move in. It's your first night in your new dream house! You have just fallen asleep when you awaken to the smell of smoke. You rush out of bed to get outside and as soon as you do your house goes up in flames.

As you watch, you cannot help but feel thankful and relieved that you have escaped unharmed, but at the same time you feel a great sense of loss as you see what you poured your heart into going up in smoke. As you gaze upon the

smoldering ashes you realize that all your work has been in vain and there is nothing you can do about it.

This, I think, to a certain extent describes how the believer who has built a house of wood, hay, and straw will feel when he stands before the Judgment Seat of Christ and watches his building burn to the ground. He will be thankful to be in heaven, but at the same time he will grieve over his loss as he sees that what he lived for has amounted to a pile of ashes.

I think that the regret and grief he will feel will be immense knowing that all his work has been in vain and there is nothing he can do about it.

Is this what you want to face when you go to heaven? I'm sure that you don't, but unless you do some work for Christ, I'm afraid that this will be your fate.

You, as a believer, have a choice. You can choose to live for the things of this world, and thereby forfeit having rewards in heaven. Or you can live for the Lord and by so doing, lay up treasures in heaven.

Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal; For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19 21). So if you have been headed to an eternity with little or no rewards, now is the time to change what might have been.

HOW DO WE LAY UP TREASURES?

You may be questioning exactly what you have to do to lay up these treasures in heaven.

Let me begin by explaining that God has left His children here on earth as His representatives. In Second Corinthians 5:20 it says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

God has a message He wants the world to hear and He wants those who know it to share it. That is why he has commissioned all believers to do the work of spreading His Word. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

When the Lord Jesus came to this earth to die for the sins of the world, He did so to save all people from going to hell. Although it is common knowledge, especially among those who call themselves Christians, that Christ died for sins, it is generally not known that when He died, He accomplished all the work that needed to be done to get a person to heaven.

Most people are under the misconception that they must do something to earn their way to heaven. So instead of trusting Christ to be their Savior, they are in reality trusting Him as a Helper.

But salvation is a result of God's grace, not man's feeble efforts to make himself worthy of heaven. The word "grace" means "undeserved kindness." It says in Ephesians 2:8,9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

When a person believes that it is possible to earn his salvation or to lose his salvation then that person has not yet understood the message of grace. The Bible teaches that the only reason people will be in heaven is because of the work that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished upon the cross. It has nothing to do with our works, either the ones we have done in the past or the ones we are going to do in the future.

Because Christ suffered the penalty for our sins, thereby paying our way to heaven, He now offers everyone the free gift of everlasting life. Romans 6:23, says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The only condition to receive this gift is to have faith in Him, meaning that you are depending upon Him rather than yourself to get to heaven. He said, "...he who believes on Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

This is the message that God wants us to take to the world. The Bible clearly teaches that unless people hear this message and believe it, they will spend an eternity separated from God in physical and mental torment. It says in Revelation 14:11, "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever: and they have no rest day and night..."

Will you obey the command of Jesus Christ to reach people with the Gospel so they can escape this horrible future that awaits them? Or do you think that you aren't really that needed because there are already multitudes of people spreading the Gospel by word of mouth and by radio and television?

Oh, how I wish that were true!

But the facts of the matter are that the vast majority of those who talk to others about God are telling them a message other than the Gospel. Instead of telling people that they need only to believe in Christ to go to heaven, they are telling them that it isn't enough just to believe but that they must do more.

There are a multitude of different messages that are being presented as the Gospel, but which are actually counterfeits. Messages such as "ask Jesus into your heart", "turn from your sins", "commit your life to Christ", "confess Christ publicly", and "endure to the end" and "invite Christ into your life," are examples of what is being preached in the name of Christianity but which constitute false gospels. As long as a person is being told that he must do anything more than believe in Jesus Christ to get to heaven then he is being told a lie.

You may be thinking, "Wouldn't it be a good idea for a person to turn from his sins and commit his life to Christ anyway?" Certainly it would, but not to go to heaven!

A condition to go to heaven is that a person doesn't work for it. As it says in Romans 4:5, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness."

But once a person has trusted Christ to get him to heaven, then God wants that person to do good works so that God can bless his life and reward him in heaven. But as we have seen from the Bible concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ, there will be believers in heaven who never did anything for Christ. This person will suffer loss of rewards, but he will not suffer loss of salvation. It says, "...he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved..." (First Corinthians 3:15).

Believers cannot lose what was never earned in the first place, namely, their home in heaven. Jesus made all those who have trusted Him as Savior a promise. He said, "...the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). Salvation is based totally upon the work of God, while rewards in heaven are earned by the believer's works.

So if someone claiming to represent Christ is saying you must do more than believe in Christ for salvation, he is preaching a message that is powerless to save a person from hell.

Now I'm not questioning the sincerity of those who are preaching such messages, but I am saying that they themselves need to hear the Gospel and believe it because they are as lost as the people to whom they are preaching these messages.

So if your desire is to lay up treasures in heaven, then you must obey the command of Christ to preach the Gospel.

Another command that God has given His children is to diligently study His Word. Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of Truth."

If you want to live a life that is pleasing to God then every single day you should set apart time for the purpose of reading the Bible. If you apply what you learn from the Bible to your life, you will soon discover that God will reward you by giving you the ability to understand more things from His Word.

You will also find that God not only wrote the Bible to impart knowledge but that He also intended His Word to be a source of spiritual nourishment and strength. Jesus said, "...Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

And a person doesn't have to spend much time reading the Bible to find out that he doesn't have to wait until heaven to start getting rewarded by God. There are literally hundreds of promises that God wants to fulfill right here and now for those who serve Him.

King David wrote concerning the words of God, "Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:11).

There are warnings of punishment to those who disobey His Word, but the believer who obeys His Word will find the pages of the Bible filled with promises of blessings that cover every aspect of his life.

One of the things that those in this world long for is peace of mind. For the child of God this longing can become a reality since God has given us the prescription for peace in His Word. (See Philippians 4:6-9). The key to claiming the promises of God is obedience. Answered prayer, joy, and help with problems, are just a few of the things that can be yours if you obey the Lord.

What a shame that those who could be living like spiritual millionaires are living like spiritual paupers!

God has given us principles in the Bible to govern our lives not for the purpose of keeping us from having a good time, but for our benefit. If we ignore His counsel we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Wisdom is being aware that your actions will produce consequences. The Lord, when grieving over the Jewish people who were disregarding His laws said, "For they are a nation lacking in counsel and there is no understanding in them. Would that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern their future!" (Deuteronomy 32:28,29).

The Lord said that a wise person considers his future. In other words, he considers the consequences of his actions. Those who give heed to the words of God will be rewarded, but those who ignore or disregard His words will suffer for it. Whether you like it or not, you are in the process of determining your future by how you are living now. Galatians 6:7, says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this will he also reap."

It is an unchanging law that whatever you plant, you will harvest. If you plant apple seeds, you won't harvest potatoes. Apple seeds planted result in apples harvested, just as seeds of sin result in misery and chastening harvested. But those who plant seeds of obedience will harvest a life full of blessings and as we've seen, rewards when they stand before the Lord.

It is your life and you are free to live it as you choose, but please don't lose sight of the fact that you are going to have to live with the consequences of those choices here on earth and in the future.

The day of reckoning cannot be avoided. It says in Romans 14:10, "...for we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of God." And at this Judgment it says that. "...each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

Every believer will see with his own eyes what his life amounted to when he looks upon the building that he has constructed with his works, whether good or bad. All the excuses a believer may have had for not serving the Lord will seem very pitiful on that Day as he sees what he lived for go up in flames.

But all believers who serve the Lord will be rewarded according to what they have done. The fire will come upon their building and after it has burned up what was worthless, they will be rewarded according to what remains.

Then when these believers return to earth with Jesus at His coming, they will be placed in governing positions over the inhabitants of the earth who have lived through the tribulation period. Some will be placed over many cities, others few, but unfaithful believers will be placed over none at all.

A CROWN FOR THE VICTOR

The Lord also talked about a different type of reward which He will be awarding those who are deserving. He said, “I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).

You may be wondering what the difference is between the rewards you receive because of the treasures you laid up in heaven and the reward of a crown. Actually, there is a lot of difference. Although all who have done works for Christ will receive rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, it is only those believers who remained faithful who will receive crowns. And because the reward of crowns is conditioned on the continued faithfulness of the believer, they can be lost. John warned in his second epistle, “Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward” (Second John 1:8).

To further understand how crowns are acquired, it is helpful to have some knowledge of the Olympics because the Bible draws an analogy between the contestants in the Olympics and the believers who are striving to gain a crown. In biblical times the contestants who engaged in the Olympics were required to undergo a period beforehand where great demands were placed upon them. Before they were even qualified to compete in the Olympics they would have to go through nine months of rigorous training and live on a restricted diet. They had to exercise a great amount of self-control.

Keeping these rules was so essential to the winning of the crown that even if a person were to come in first in the competition and it was later determined that he had broken any of the training rules then he was disqualified from being crowned. But if a person did keep the rules and did come in first then he would be crowned with a wreath of fig leaves.

With that in mind, let's look at what the Apostle Paul had to say. He wrote in First Corinthians 9:24 and 25, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run,

but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath; but we an imperishable.” All believers who are serving the Lord are likened to contestants in the Olympics running on a race course. And although all believers who are now serving the Lord are runners in this race for a crown, it is only those who finish the race that will be awarded. A person could at the start of the race be running far ahead of his competitors, but if he were to stop running or slow down for some reason, then obviously he wouldn’t win a crown. It wouldn’t matter how well he was doing when he started the race, it’s finishing that counts.

And the same holds true for those who are striving to be awarded with a crown when they stand before the Lord. A person could be diligently serving the Lord, but if for one reason or another he stopped serving Him or grew sluggish in his service for Him, then that believer would lose out on being awarded. Quitters don’t get crowned.

IS IT EVER TOO LATE?

If you have been a believer for some time and have never served the Lord or if you have served Him and then stopped, you may be wondering if there is any hope of your gaining a crown if you were to start serving Him today.

It may interest you to know that the exhortation in First Corinthians to strive to gain a crown was written to just such a group of people. The Corinthians had been believers for about five years and for the most part they had been rebellious, disobedient believers. But they were told that it was still possible for them to gain a crown. That’s why Paul wrote to them, “...run, in such a way that you may win” (First Corinthians 9:24).

How encouraging to know that even if you have wasted your life up to this moment, you’re still eligible to receive these special rewards. But you must give heed to the words of Paul to “run, that you may win.”

And it should be remembered that there is a big difference between the trophies won by the athlete in the Olympics and those that will be won by the servant of the Lord. Those who competed in the Olympics did so to obtain a wreath of fig leaves, or as Paul put it, “a perishable wreath,” whereas believers who are worthy will obtain an imperishable crown.

But Paul knew that there were certain rules that the believer was required to keep in order to qualify for this crown. Just as the contestants in the Olympics were required to exercise self control in all things to qualify for a crown, the same is true for those who are striving to receive an imperishable crown from the Lord.

The particular crown Paul referred to in First Corinthians, chapter nine will be the reward of all those who have lived their lives with a view to having people believe the Gospel. For instance, believers since the time of Christ have been free to eat any kind of meat they want, whereas believers living under the laws of the Old Testament were prohibited in partaking of in certain foods, such as pork. Even though Paul had a perfect right to eat pork, he wouldn't when he was reaching out to Jews with the Gospel. He voluntarily restricted the things he had a right to do so as to not offend an unbeliever. He said, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more" (verse 19).

Another example is the right that believers have to drink alcoholic beverages. Of course drinking too much, which is drunkenness, is a sin, but nowhere in the Bible is drinking alcohol condemned. Even though we believers have the right to drink in moderation, there are many unbelievers who consider any amount of drinking a sin. If your goal is to reach people with the Gospel, then you would give up your right to drink, along with anything else in your life, which would hinder the unbeliever from trusting Christ. That's what Paul meant when he wrote, "...I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (First Corinthians 9:22).

And it should be pointed out that the same man who told the believers at Corinth that they had the opportunity of gaining this crown if they started running, also said that the possibility existed of his losing out on this crown if he were to fall away from the Lord.

He wrote, "But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (First Corinthians 9:27). Paul had a fear that after instructing others about these rules that he himself would break them and thereby be disapproved, meaning he would be disqualified from receiving a crown. Paul wrote in another place, "And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules" (Second Timothy 2:5).

With that possibility existing, Paul strove to make sure he had control of his passions so that he was the master of his body and it was his slave. His aim was to

have nothing in his life that would hinder a person from believing the Gospel. He knew that to do anything less would mean that he would miss out on this crown.

There are three other crowns that the believer can obtain. One is the crown of life, which is going to be awarded to those who were faithful in the midst of trials. It says, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). In other words, when hard times come into the believer’s life, he doesn’t murmur and complain and say, “Why me?” Instead he recognizes the fact that God has a purpose for this trial and submits himself to God.

There is a crown of righteousness which will be given to those who are uncompromising in their stand for the Gospel and who look forward to the Lord’s Coming. Paul wrote, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on the day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (Second Timothy 4:7,8). If you are affiliated with a church or Bible study which teaches that going to heaven is based upon what Jesus did and what you do, then a requirement to serve the Lord is to separate yourself from such (Second Corinthians 6:14-18). Not to do so is to disqualify yourself from the crown of righteousness.

And lastly, there is a crown of glory for those who are pastors or shepherds of the Lord’s flock. If they faithfully fulfill their obligations with pure motives, they will be given this crown (First Peter 5:1 4).

IT WILL BE WORTH IT ALL

God intended the promise of receiving crowns and rewards to be an incentive for us to make sacrifices for Him now so that we can profit in the future.

There is no question about it, serving the Lord means denying self. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34).

When it comes to what we consider most important, by nature we put ourselves and our wants and desires first. But anyone who wants to become a follower of Jesus Christ must put himself last and God first. This is the person who realizes that people are going to hell unless they hear and believe the Gospel and therefore will obey the command of Jesus Christ to reach them with the message. Instead of living to satisfy his own selfish desires, this person lives to meet the needs of

others.

Each believer has his own choice to make. He can hang on to his own life and live for self or he can lose it in the sense that he gives it to God. Jesus said, “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s, shall save it” (Mark 8:35).

If a person chooses to live his life to satisfy his own desires then he is losing it in the sense that his life has no value. Each moment he lives is lost as far as rewards go. But the person who gives his life to God, so in that sense loses it, is really saving his life because the value of his life is being extended into the future. Just think what the future holds for him! In the book of Daniel it says, “And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

What a shame to think of believers squandering their precious time on things that are of no eternal value or consequence. A person could live for the things of this world and obtain great wealth, but when he dies he can’t take it with him. His life will have been a total loss.

Jesus expressed this when He said, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his own soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36,37).

In view of His words, doesn’t it make sense to live our lives for what is eternal? If you are familiar with the story of Moses, you know that when he was born, the law of the land of Egypt was that all male Hebrew babies were to be put to death. Moses’ parents disobeyed the king’s edict and hid him for three months and then placed him in a basket on the Nile River to see what would happen to him.

Pharaoh’s daughter just “happened” to come down to the Nile to bathe and spotted the basket; after seeing Moses she adopted him as her son. Because Moses was the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, he had it made as far as the world goes; wealth, fame, and power were all his.

But Moses wasn’t content to have those things if it meant missing out on future rewards. So he made a decision. It says in Hebrews 12:24-26, “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the

passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking for the reward.”

Moses exchanged a life of luxury for a life of hardship. Do you think he made a wise decision?

The Apostle Paul gave up a lot and went through a lot to serve Christ, but from his perspective the sacrifice wasn't even worthy to be compared to what God had in store for him. Paul wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18).

He also wrote, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (Second Corinthians 4:17).

Don't you want to hear the Lord say to you someday, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21), and have Him reward you with a position of authority in His kingdom? It is only those who serve Christ who have this promise. Paul said, “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (Second Timothy 2:12).

The rest, I'm afraid, are going to meet with His displeasure. The Lord said, “For whoever is ashamed of Me, and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

My prayer is that you will not have to face the Lord ashamed, but that you will settle for nothing less than being a follower of Jesus Christ.

IN CONCLUSION

So, my friend, you have been given a glimpse of what the future holds. You can act upon that knowledge as Scrooge did and change what might have been or you can choose to be a scrooge with God. The choice is yours. But please remember, not only is the choice yours, so are the consequences.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”
Ecclesiastes 12:13,14