



THE FOREST HILL NEWS

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Garrett Olney, Youth

Sunday:

Bible Study..... 9:30 A.M.
Morning Worship.... 10:30 A.M.
Afternoon Worship.... 1:30 P.M.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 P.M.

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“A Precious Beatitude

Wayne Jackson

A beatitude is defined as "a state of utmost bliss." The most renowned collection of beatitudes adorn Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:1-12). Lesser known, perhaps, are the beatitudes in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

Let us examine the beatitude found in Revelation 14:13.

THE SAINTS UNDER ASSAULT

In considering major enemies of the kingdom of Christ, John sketched the nature of a mighty and malevolent force that would arise against Christianity, taking as prey those yielding to its fatal doctrine. Additionally, there follows one of the most horrible depictions of eternal punishment found in scripture (Rev. 14:9-11). The Lord's anger shall be visited on the rebels without measure. His enemies shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, never resting from their anguish.

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD

By way of contrast to these spiritual villains, the faithful saints are commended for their steadfastness in the truth (v. 12). The narrative then continues.

And I heard the voice from heaven saying, "Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them" (v. 13).

A HEAVENLY MESSAGE

The apostle John, author of the book (1:1), hears a voice from heaven. The voice is not specifically identified. It might have been the angel mentioned earlier (1:1; 4:1) or maybe Christ himself (cf. 14).

It is important to note that the information about to be revealed was from heaven. This clearly reflects the fact that divine authority is behind this sacred message. Thus, one can place absolute confidence in the affirmation.

No human being on earth has personal information about the after-death experience. This also embraces all modern spiritists who claim the ability to contact the dead (see Van Baalen, 20-50). Even those who were raised from the dead (e.g., Lazarus and Eutychus) spoke not a word of their post-death experiences.

Modern-day claims are delusions, or else reflections of dishonesty. John was given a message to be written for the benefit of others. The command to write emphasizes "the importance of the message that follows" (Mounce, 275).

THE HAPPY STATE

The heavenly message is this: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." The word "blessed" is probably not the best translation for the modern reader. The Greek adjective is *makarios*, found in various forms about fifty times in the New Testament. Its basic meaning is "happy" or "blissful."

In his commentary on Matthew, R. T. France renders the beatitudes of 5:3ff as "happy are those" (158ff). In his discussion of this term and its various uses in ancient literature, Professor Spicq notes that "it is God alone who grants human happiness" (2.434).

Of special significance is the fact that these dead are happy. This cannot refer to the human body that returns to the dust to await the day of resurrection. In no way can deteriorating matter be described as happy.

Implied, therefore, is the reality that something of a person lives on after death in a state of consciousness. This disputes the materialism of atheism and likewise that of some misguided religionists.

(continued page 2)

For example, F. LaGard Smith describes the state of death as one of "darkness, inactivity, and unconsciousness" (92). This is hardly an existence that would be described as happy!

LIMITED SPHERE OF BLISS

This blissful state, however, is not promised to all humanity, as the universalist contends. The pledge of happiness in death (cf the descriptions of Lazarus' environment in his postdeath state [Lk. 16: 22, 25]) is applied only to those who die "in the Lord."

This phrase is found some fifty times in the New Testament. Generally it denotes a relationship with Christ, and the present context reveals that it is an association that begins on earth and continues for the soul beyond the death experience (Phil. 1 :23; 2 Cor. 5:8).

The in-Christ relationship commences with **the act of forgiveness** for all past sins, effected at the point of water baptism. Two passages focus upon this act.

Paul affirmed that "all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death" (Rom. 6:3). That is, through baptism we were immersed into the benefits of his atoning death. He subsequently described this act of obedience as coming "from the heart" and resulting in "being made free from sin" (v. 18; cf Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Elsewhere, the apostle declared that the in-Christ relationship was achieved on the part of those who were "baptized into Christ," thus, in a manner of speaking, "put on Christ" -metaphorically clothed with a relationship to Jesus (Gal. 3:26-27; cf. Danker et. al, 334).

One cannot but raise the question: what is the fate of those who refuse to enter the in-Christ relationship by means of this divinely prescribed method? Does the term "obedience" have any relevance (Heb. 5:8-9)? Reflect also upon the Savior's testimony:

He who believes on the Son has eternal life; but he who obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (Jn 3:36; cf. ASV, ESV).

The implication concerning those sinners who die outside of the Lord is clear-and is horrible to contemplate.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PLEDGE

There is now a dramatic pledge from the Holy Spirit.

First we must note that this is clear testimony that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, a sacred entity, just as the Father and Son are (cf. Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). This declaration stands in stark contrast to the Watchtower Witness heresy that the Holy Spirit is "not a person" (ABU, 1542).

The Christian life is depicted as one of numerous labors. In the Greek Testament the word "labors" represents far more than a 9-to-5 job! Professor Spicq has an extensive discussion of the Greek term, particularly as such pertained to Paul's ministry. The concept involves such things as: constant, exhausting labor; fatigue from periods of toil; wounds, suffering, slander, insults, imprisonment (2:329; cf. 2 Cor. 11:24ff).

How very comforting it is to know, therefore, that at the end of this weary trail, when death comes, there will be rest.

A couple of important points must be made here. First, there is no mention (here or elsewhere) of that mythical religion, touted by our Roman Catholic friends, called purgatory, where one must be purged of his remaining sins before entering his reward.

Second, our after-death lives will not be like a vacation theme park. Rather, it will be the thrilling existence of "serving" God (Rev.22:3). Deadhead church members who disdain the service of God cannot begin to appreciate this glory.

THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW

Finally, the faithful will be glorified because of their "works," i.e., their level of service upon the earth. How did the idea ever evolve that the term "works" is theological profanity?

The answer is to be found in the annals of church history. Martin Luther became so incensed at the Roman Catholic dogma of justification by "works of supererogation," i.e., good works done beyond that required for salvation, that he promoted the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. So convinced was he of his theory, he doctored the text of Romans 3:28 by adding the word "only" after "faith."

No informed Bible student believes one can earn his salvation by doing good works. Paul thoroughly negates this philosophy (Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5). Yet James, writing by inspiration (Jas. 2: 14ff), declared that faith, if not joined to works, is dead in itself. He further argues that a faith unaccompanied by works is both demonic (v. 19) and barren, and that those who contend for the faith-alone theory do so in vain (v. 20).

James introduces Abraham as an example. He was justified in that, as Jehovah commanded, he offered up his son, Isaac. His obedience perfected his faith (vv. 21-22). James affirmed that one is justified by his obedience, and "not by faith alone" (v. 24).

Should anyone be surprised that Luther repudiated the book of James as an inspired document?

The truth is, actions implemented in response to commands of God are also called "works" (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 3:8; Rev. 2:26). Faith is a work (Jn. 6:27-29; 1 Thes. 1:3; 2 Thes. 1:11; Jas. 2:14ff), and so is repentance (Mt. 12:41; Jn. 3:10). Baptism is a work only in the sense that it expresses obedience to a divine command (Acts 2:38; 10:48). Baptism is called the "washing of regeneration," yet is distinguished from "works" of human "righteousness" (Tit. 3:5).

At the day of judgment, men will be judged by their earthly works (2 Cor. 11:15; Rev. 20:12-13; 22:12). Let us faithfully follow our Savior's will with rejoicing and comfort in his everlasting promises.

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COMING THIS FALL AT FOREST HILL



PARENTING SEMINAR

Saturday, September 30

8:30-11:30

Classes for Moms and Dads

Training Boys-Jerry and Lynn Manning

Training Girls-Greg and Christa Mangrum

LADIES DAY AND GOSPEL MEETING

Ladies Day

Saturday, November 11

Speaker: Kathy Pollard

Gospel Meeting

November 12-15

Speaker: Neal Pollard

Brother and Sister Pollard live in Denver, Colorado where they work with the Bear Valley Church of Christ and the Bear Valley Bible Institute.

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