

The Future Of The Church: Prospect Of Eternity

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Christianity is its own reward! Even if envy of all who dwell on earth. there were no heaven, no eternity, no house of many mansions, it would still be worthwhile to live the Christian life. The benefits and blessings which accrue to the Christian (i.e., joy, peace, and good conscience) make him the envy of all who dwell on Earth.

There is, however, a sense in which the after-a-while is what makes church-life now worthwhile. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable (pitiably, ASV)." (I Cor. 15:19) At the time Paul wrote these words the church was experiencing severe hardship -- persecution, ostracism, death "While Paul never minimizes the compensations the Christian has in this life in the way of peace within and the like, yet it is only common sense to see that, if this world is all there is anybody is better off than the Christian!" (Leon Morris, I Cor., Tyndale N.T. Commentaries.

Aside from times of persecution the church really has the best of both worlds. It serves on earth with a "foretaste of glory divine." And it looks forward to eternity in the presence of God.

This was what Paul had in mind in Phil. 3:20 where he described the church as "a colony of heaven." (Moffat) The city of Philippi was one of a large number of Roman colonies scattered throughout the empire. "The great characteristic of these colonies was that, wherever they were, they remained fragments of Rome. Roman dress was worn; Roman magistrates governed, the Latin tongue was spoken; Roman justice was administered., Roman morals were observed. Even in the ends of the earth they remained unshakeably Roman." (William Barclay)

"The point with Paul here is that we are now citizens of heaven even while living on earth." (A.T. Robertson) It is our responsibility to see that our conduct here corresponds with our citizenship there. But it is not just a matter of responsibility. It is a matter of blessing, too. Of this Paul speaks in Eph. 5 when he says, "That he (Christ) might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." The purification process has already begun, but the ultimate fulfillment of this promise awaits our Lord's return and the presentation of the church unto himself "as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:2) Mortals on earth can never fathom all that God has in store for the church in heaven. Some hints are given in the symbolic language of the closing chapters of the book of Revelation. There the Lord portrays the future of the church in the figures of a tabernacle, a city, and a garden.

A Tabernacle-- "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." (Rev. 21:) In the days of the wilderness wanderings the tabernacle was the place where God met with Jewish people. The symbol here points to a future time when God will meet His church in unbroken and unending fellowship in the "tabernacle of God."

A City-- "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. 21:10) There are 12 gates (v. 12), confirming the apostle's promise "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom ..." (2 Pet. 1:11) The fact that the "twelve gates were twelve pearls" (v. 21) is indicative "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)-- the pearl being the only jewel produced by suffering. The height of the walls and the strength of the foundation suggest security. Ancient walled cities were often breached with battering rams, but the church in heaven will be safe from all dangers.

A Garden- "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations!" (Rev. 22:2) All that is needed to sustain life -- food, water, healing -- will be found in heaven.

These promises, couched in terms of our material existence on earth, are but pale representations of the realities in heaven. But they are enough to give some clue of the resplendent future prospects of the church.

"Sorrow is to be forgotten; sin is to be vanquished; darkness is to be at an end; the temporariness of time is to turn into the everlastingness of eternity." (William Barclay)

Perfect fellowship with God, eternal security, abundant resources to meet every need -- these are some of the things God has in store for the church. But one suspects that "the half has never yet been told."-- **1713 Savannah, Fort Smith, AR 72901 A**