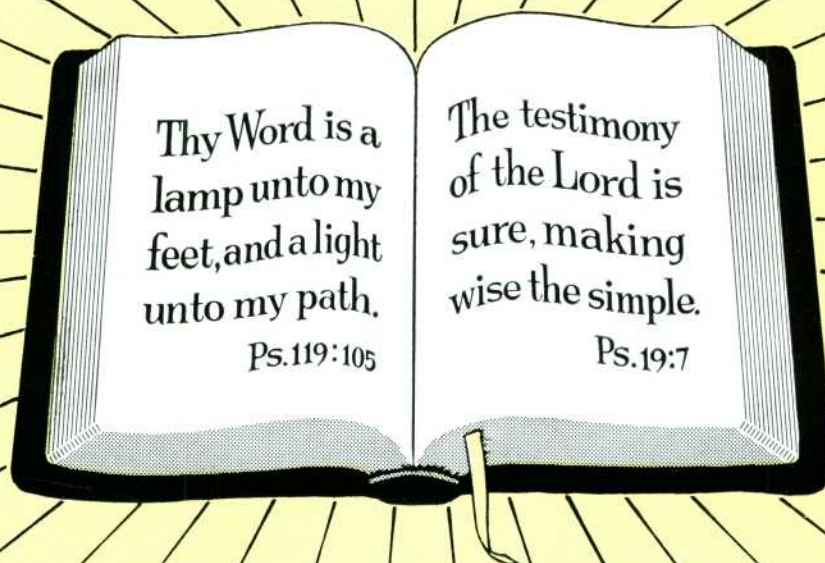


Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST



It Costs . . . But It Pays!

"The Thousand Years Are Finished"

A Second Chance?

Surpassing Pay!

The Malady of Not Wanting

SAYS a keen observer, "Most people suffer most from the malady of not wanting."

This suggests that the most serious limitation on our achieving is not a lack of opportunity or a lack of ability but lack of desire. We "have" not because we "want" not—at least, we do not want sufficiently to make the effort necessary to obtain.

In temporal matters we are likely to "want" strongly enough—we have no difficulty "wanting" to do what others can do, or have what others have; in fact, this type of "want" must be curbed lest it lead us to jealousy. But in things pertaining to God, how strongly do we "want"?

Jesus suggested that we are apt not to "want" strongly enough. "Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking," He advised. It is the persistent asker who gets the answer, the tireless seeker that finds, the insistent knocker that gets the door opened.

Perhaps this sounds a bit aggressive, but aggressiveness has its place. Far better is it to be aggressive than indifferent. We are far more surefooted when we are taking one forward step after another than when we are standing with one foot in the air while we try to decide whether or not we should step.

Sacrifice that is only ritual, service that is only perfunctory, conversation that is light and superficial—all are relatively easy and undemanding—and unproductive. Real desire means intensity, intensity in listening, in thinking, and in responding. Real desire means hungering and thirsting after righteousness (Matt. 5:6). Real desire is that of the Psalmist when his soul "pants" after God as "the hart panteth after the water brooks" (Ps. 42:1), when he can say, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1); or, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God" (Ps. 84:2). Real desire is "coveting earnestly the best gifts" (I Cor.

12:31), as Paul admonished. Real desire is the "groaning" which he felt, "earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, . . . that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (II Cor. 5:2-4). Real desire is all our heart's affection set "on things above, not on things on the earth."

The promises of God are surely sufficient. The Almighty Provider "satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness" (Ps. 107:9). Again, He "will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Ps. 145:19). Those who seek Him will find Him, always faithful and true (Prov. 8:17). "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:8-9).

With all this in store for those who truly love God, is it possible that we can suffer from the malady of not wanting? Perhaps it is more correctly the malady of not thinking, or not considering, or not seeing. We covet that which is quick, cheap and easy; "instant" fulfillments look more glamorous than the heavenly realities.

How can it be, with such wonders just ahead? God's part is sure. The question lies with us: How much do we want what God has to give? How strong is our desire? How much are we willing to invest? What risks will we take? Are we ready to go and sell all our interests in this world which stand in the way of obtaining what God offers? Are we ready to "forsake all" and "follow"? Are we willing, if need be, to leave "houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands" for His sake and the gospel's? (Mark 10:29-30). Is what He has to offer worth that much?

Or do we suffer from the malady of not wanting?

If we are satisfied with what we have now, we can be sure that is all we will ever have; the malady of not wanting will be fatal. ●●

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Megiddo Means

"a place of troops"

—Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon

"a place of God"

—Young's Analytical Concordance

Geographically, Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, located at a strategic point, demanding heavy fortification; for Palestine is the age-old gateway between East and West, and the avenue connecting North and South. Supremacy there has long been the envy of aggressive nations, and the prevailing power has guarded it with jealous eye. The famous pass at Megiddo through a solid mountain range is the one means by which this avenue between continents may be traversed.

In the spiritual parallel, it is a place of troops, where soldiers are equipped for spiritual warfare against the forces of evil without and within. "The weapons we wield are not merely human but divinely potent to demolish strongholds; we demolish sophistries and all that rears its proud head against the knowledge of God; we compel every human thought to surrender in obedience to Christ" (II Cor. 10:4-5, NEB).

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It Costs, . . .

But It Pays and *PAYS!*

A YOUNG and talented pianist was completing a brilliant performance of one of the great masterpieces. With a smooth and flowing ritard, and one last graceful flourish, he put the final touch on a few minutes of near perfection. Enthusiastic applause burst from every corner of the wide hall; it was the high moment of success.

As the crowd dispersed, a gracious-looking gentleman stepped forward to deliver his personal compliments to the pianist. "Magnificent, my son, magnificent!" he exclaimed as he patted the young man on the shoulder; and then, in an affected stage whisper he added, "I'd give *anything* to be able to play like that." "Would you?" came the abrupt and slightly tart reply. Without doubt this genteel man would like the performing and the applause, but did he think that performing began on stage? What about the price? When it came to the thousands of hours of painstaking, disciplined practice while the normal activities of life must be set aside, would this gracious well-wisher still be ready to "give *anything* to be able to play like that"? That was the question, and the young pianist thought he knew the answer.

What Would We Give?

There is a performance coming, a grand hour of triumph when the achievement of the saints will be heralded from one end of the universe to the other. Indeed, the heavens will resound with the grand applause of multitudes of the heavenly hosts, as they shout "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:6-7). It will be the supreme moment in the history of our planet.

This is no idle fancy or dream. Its arrival is decreed by the God of the universe, the God whose mercy reaches even from everlasting to everlasting

upon those who fear Him. That Day of triumph will come; the event is planned and scheduled, and most of the participants are already sealed, even 144,000 of them. Not one of earth's noblest sons and daughters will be missing. Abraham will be there, along with Isaac and Jacob. Moses will be there, and his faithful servant and successor Joshua. A grand company of prophets—Isaiah and Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel—along with their unknown faithful brethren, will join in the activities of that Day. The noble Ezra will be there, and his dynamic co-worker Nehemiah. Peter will be there, and that man who was known as "Peter's brother"; and there will be John, and James, and Philip and Nathanael. Paul will be there, with his faithful sons and brethren. The unsung heroes of the early Church will be there, along with the last faithful witness of the twilight hour. And then there will be those of our own day and time—even some from among our own company will be there to participate in the glories of that hour. Some among us may know and experience the exultant joy of that supreme hour of triumph. "Oh!" we exclaim, "I would give anything, *anything* to be one of them." So we say, and so we feel at times like these; but *would* we? When it comes to paying the price of discipline and watchfulness and self-denial and petty cross-bearing hour after hour, day after day after day, *would* we? Do we say by our actions that we will indeed give *anything*?

Consider the Cost

When Jesus came teaching and preaching the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God, people marveled at the gracious words that proceeded from His lips. Never man spake like this man. He talked of bread which, if a man eat, he could "live forever" (John 6:58); of meat that would "endure unto everlasting life" (John 6:27); of water that would spring up "into everlasting life" (John 4:14), and of fruit that could be gathered "unto life eternal" (John 4:36). What lover of life could hear this and not be enthusiastic! "I would give anything to have that life," they said in effect.

But Jesus' response to their enthusiasm was

NOTE: "It Costs, But It Pays" is available on Cassette as a church-service recording. Price: \$3.00.

weighty, considered, and heart-searching: Would you? Do you really mean it? This bread, this meat, this water, this fruit, this life that I am telling you about have their *price*, a very *high* price. Are you willing—are you sure you are willing to *pay* it, *all* of it?

Where there is value, there must be price. Where there is gain, there must be sacrifice. And where there is gain in terms of eternal value, there will most certainly be cost in terms of personal sacrifice. Who would have the gain? Rather, who is willing to *pay the price*?

To consider the price before attempting to make a purchase is only good business policy. Jesus illustrated it this way: "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:28-29).

Now it might not be possible to know the full cost at the beginning, but by counting one recognizes that there will be cost. Where there is value, there is cost. And he can decide whether he will be willing to meet that cost. Likewise, when commencing to work for God, we are not able to know the full meaning of the price; but counting the cost means being aware that there will be cost, and being persuaded that what God offers is so great as to be worth *any* price, whatever its cost in self-sacrifice or humiliation or surrender.

Jesus' Challenges

All through His ministry, Jesus was continually pointing men to the greater values of life, and at the same time reminding them of their price. Tell Him in all earnestness that you would like to be His disciple, and He would be likely to reply, "Do you mean it? I'm not conscripting, you know; it is all voluntary." If you still insisted, He might question to be sure you had thought the matter through. "How much are you willing to give up?" He might ask. "Are you ready to carry a cross, deny yourself, redirect the whole course of your life?" Jesus never hid the sharp demand, the high price. These are His words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). There will be sacrifice; there will be denial; there will be surrender, even to the shedding of the very life-blood of the old nature; for the higher life cannot grow until the lesser life is nailed down and crucified. Can you do it? Are you ready to raise the hammer and strike the blow? Will you pay the price? (Continued on page 6)

Let Us Pray . . .

O Lord our Great and Matchless God, Thou to whom all nations shall one day bow in reverence and adoration, we rejoice that we have learned of Thee, that we know Thy superior attributes, and that we possess a frame of mind to do Thy will and so to work for Thy great and boundless rewards.

We thank Thee that Thou hast set eternity in our hearts, that we have been imbued with a desire for that which is unending. We pray that this desire in us may not be a fruitless thing, but that it may grow and expand and develop until we have attained the moral likeness of our Master and stand ready to receive the final change to immortality.

We thank Thee for all the disciplines of life which help us toward that end, and for all the experiences that draw us closer to Thee. We thank Thee for those things which seem to hinder, harm, or hurt us; may we look upon them as evidence of Thy interest in us, as minor inconveniences, the slight trouble of the passing hour that will result in solid glory past all comparison. May the hope of all that Thou hast promised dwell constantly in our hearts by faith and be the compelling power in our lives.

Grant us, we pray, to know and realize that Thy rich and incomparable blessings have a price; we cannot expect something for nothing. Help us then, O Father, to look beyond, to be such far-sighted followers of Thy Son that we will eagerly tread the path of humble obedience, of self-denial and self-sacrifice He trod, and by a wholehearted devotion to Thy every command pay the price in full. We know Thy recompense will be beyond anything we can imagine.

Grant us to so desire that life to come that we will forget every selfish desire within us, that self will be no longer the center of our lives but that Thy will shall wholly displace our own and all our ways be lost in Thee. With our hearts fixed upon Thee, may we glory in the cross that crucifies us to the world and to ourselves, gladly enduring any hardness that may confront us, our whole concern being not what is safe or what is comfortable or what is easy, but only what is right in Thy sight, that in the end we may merit Thy eternal favor.

Teach us the mind of Christ in all our dealings with one another, and when we have completed our work, save us eternally in the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose Name we pray. Amen.

... A Loss

Or, when you ask to be Jesus' disciple, He might ask you if you want to suffer. "Are you ready to suffer the loss of anything and everything—even to your own life—if need be? Do I really mean that much to you?" He might ask. "For if any man come to me, and hate not [be not willing to suffer the loss of] his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). No escaping it, there will be something to surrender, something to give up, a price to pay; even the nearest and dearest of human affections

must be secondary. "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (v. 27). Here again is the cross—are you willing? Are you strong enough to pick it up and carry it?

Tell Jesus that you would love to have that eternal life He had been talking about, and to share a home in His beautiful Kingdom, and again you would hear the searching question: Would you? What kind of value do you place on it? What are you willing to give up to secure it? "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25). Must we really lose to gain? Yes, says

Surpassing Pay!

It is difficult to imagine how anyone could be fonder of envisioning the "PAY" than was our founder, Rev. L. T. Nichols. Never did he address his people without thrilling anew at some aspect of it. He thought of it, he spoke of it, he dreamed of it; and doing all this, he was constantly impelled to *live* for it.

Occasionally he prepared a bit of verse to capture the vision.

As you read this rhyme, join him in his flight of fantasy—and realize that someday it shall be glorious reality!

*O what great joy and peace divine
Can all be yours, can all be mine
If we'll but walk in narrow way
With Christ our Lord each day by day!*

*O what a happy blissful lay
Can grace our lips in that glad day
If we will now forsake the world
And hold aloft God's truth unfurled!*

*O what a power our God will give
To all who now will godly live
And do His bidding, great or small,
As did our dear, beloved Paul!*

*O what a mansion bright and fair
We each one then will have and share,
If we'll but to all sin now die
And keep our mind on things on high.*

*O my! what grand beatitudes!
We'll sure enjoy the interludes
If we will crucify the flesh
And ne'er be caught in sin's dark mesh.*

*O what a joyful, happy band
We'll join within God's summerland;
We'll bask with them for evermore
In joys each day increasing more!*

*O what great joy we then will take
In passing through the pearly gate
With all the joyous happy band
Who'll enter that glad summerland!*

*O what a joy to then behold
This happy band all pure as gold
All sparkling with God's love divine
Because they stayed in Christ the vine.*

*O wondrous summerland of joy
Without a thing that can annoy!
Among the ones that reach this land
O may we be, this little band!*

*O how we long to meet you there,
And in these glories gladly share,
Where all the tugs and toils of life
Will all be gone, with every strife.*

*O what a joy we all will take
In hearing Daniel, Paul relate
The trials they in life passed through
While they were being made o'er new.*

*Great Gabriel will be there in white
Who long ago passed weary night;
He has been learning, living more,
He'll have great things for us in store!*

*O what a pleasure, lasting, grand,
To have him mongst our little band!
We'll listen to his stories great
Which he to us will then relate.*

Jesus, if you will let go the things you cannot keep (and which have only fleeting value at best), I will give you that which will be yours forever!

Could we ask for anything better than that? And yet, when it comes to "losing" this present life, totally submerging ourselves in pure, selfless service, do we wonder? Yes, there is a price.

... A Sacrifice

One day a rich young ruler came along, inquiring about the price of what Jesus called "eternal life." "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" he asked, confident that he had the price pretty well paid already. And when

Jesus answered, "Keep the commandments," the young man was sure of it—why, hadn't he kept the Ten Commandments since he could remember? He had never stolen (he didn't need to, he had plenty of money); he had never thought of committing murder; and he held his parents in highest respect (much of his wealth was due to their generosity).

But this wasn't all the price that Jesus had in mind; there was still a large balance due. "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast"—forget your social standing and all the honors of this world, and "come, take up the cross, and follow me." Here

(Continued on page 23)

*'Twill make our hearts with joy expand
As Gabriel tells of his dear band,
Of all the wondrous things they've done
Throughout ten thousand ages long.*

*O what a privilege greater still—
'Twill give our hearts the grandest thrill
When he invites our little band
To go and see his blessed land.*

*May you be there to shout "Amen!"
So let it be, Amen! Amen!
We'll gladly visit your own band
Within your own dear summerland!"*

*O what a visit that will be
To go and Gabriel's brethren see;
We'll pass ten thousand worlds so bright
With all their inmates filled with light.*

*And we'll hear music, oh! so grand,
That sounds afar from Gabriel's band;
They've spied dear Gabriel! oh, the joy,
That nothing ever can destroy.*

*And then the welcomes! oh, how sweet
As they come forth to Gabriel greet!
Yes, what grand joy, as loves entwine,
Surpassing loves of humankind.*

*So upright, good and grand and bright
Are all his brethren dressed in white;
All clean and spotless, pure within,
All cleansed from every form of sin.*

*This trip alone will pay us great
To bear our cross and evil hate;
To do with all our mind and might
The things our God hath said are right.*

*Long time we'll stay at Gabriel's home
And with his happy, loved ones roam.
Our minds will grow, each day expand
As stay we do with Gabriel's band.*

*The time will pass so quick, so fast,
Ten thousand years will soon be past,
And then we hear a trumpet sound
In accents sweet, "Be homeward bound."*

*We bid Adieu to Gabriel's band,
And swiftly fly to our own land,
Where our own brethren, loving, dear,
Are anxious to our story hear.*

*Ten billion visits we'll repeat;
Each time 'twill be a greater treat;
Time ne'er will wane nor shorter grow
As to ten billion worlds we go.*

*Our minds they will expand and grow
As with the noble ones we go.
How happy will the dwellers be,
Enjoying all they hear and see!*

*O praise the Lord! can it be true,
These wonders are for me and you?
Yes, yes! they are for each one here
Who will perform what they do hear.*

*O brethren, will you each one go
Where there will come no kind of woe?
All will be joy supremely great
Within the Golden City gate.*

*Yes, we can join that faithful band
Who'll enter God's fair summerland,
Those who will clothe in garments white
By doing what they know is right.*



*This is the eleventh in a series
of articles on the coming
MILLENNIUM.*

*"And I saw an angel
come down from heaven,
having the key of the bottomless
pit, and a great chain
in his hand.*

*"And he laid hold on the dragon,
that old serpent,
which is the Devil,
and Satan, and bound
him a thousand years, and cast
him into the bottomless pit,
and shut him up,
and set a seal upon him,
that he should deceive
the nations no more,
till the thousand years should
be fulfilled"
—Revelation 20:1-3*

"The Thousand Years Are Finished"

A THOUSAND years is a long time, but it is not forever. Like every preceding era of earth's history, the thousand years will have an end.

The Bible describes a number of events which will happen at the end of the Millennium; for almost all of our information about these events we are indebted to the work of John the Revelator.

To learn about events that shall occur when the thousand years are finished, we go to Revelation 20. We cannot know exactly how God's program of events will be carried out; we can only project the sequence of events as given in the Bible, and know that God will perform according to His plan. How accurate or complete our present understanding will prove to be, we cannot know now, but Revelation 20 provides a guideline to follow.

The chapter starts at the beginning of the thousand years when "an angel" comes down from heaven, "having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand," with which he binds "the Devil, and Satan . . . a thousand years . . . that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled" (vs. 1-3). This presents in symbolic language the unbreakable law which will keep "the Devil," that is, all sin and sinners, completely restrained; no open manifestation will be tolerated.*

Revelation 20:4 and 6 are talking of the victorious overcomers of the first six thousand years of God's plan on earth. Those who have part in the "first resurrection" are from this group, and are "blessed and holy"; they are also said to live and reign "with Christ a thousand years." This first resurrection is "first" in "dignity, in importance," not only in time (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*). Thus these persons who are judged at this time, the time of Christ's return, are raised to immortality, rewarded with glory and honor, and given positions of authority with Christ.

The last part of verse 5 belongs with the thought of verse 4: "This is the first resurrection." The first part of verse 5, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years

*The Bible frequently refers to sin and sinners as "the devil" or "satan." See John 6:70, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Also James 1:13-14: "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." Every man's "own lust" is the source of "the devil," and during the Millennium it will be restrained by sternly enforced law.

were finished" seems to be added explanation belonging to a later time. These words are set in parentheses in *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*, also in the *Concordant Version*, also in the *New International Version*. The thought of the words shows their meaning; it is an explanatory clause to inform us that the populace of the Kingdom who die during the Millennium are not resurrected and rewarded until the judgment at the close of the Millennium.

If we omit this added clause, the passage reads: "And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. . . . This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection" (from verse 4, part of 5, and into 6).

From the bits and pieces of information given it seems that the first sign of the end of the Millennium will be the Resurrection. At the blast of the trumpet of the archangel, the graves are opened (of those who have lived and died during the Millennium and are amenable to Judgment), and the innumerable multitude of those who have died during the Millennium come forth. It is the second and last Resurrection.

They come forth to mortal life. But many of these were cut off in rebellion. Many of these refused to cooperate with the new government and died because of the enforcement of unbreakable law. Others are people who transformed their natures and made themselves worthy of the crown of life.

The Final Rebellion

Before the time of final separation and judgment, there is a period of what is called "silence in heaven."

All during the thousand years, Satan, representing the evil in the hearts of men and women, was controlled by stern and inviolable law, the guiding voice being ever present to say, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21).

But there comes a time when this voice is no longer heard. It is the end of another epoch in the plan of God, and like the calm before the storm, an ominous silence reigns in the political heavens. No inflexible law restrains the rebellious element; and many of the rebellious are quick to discover it and to mutter their disaffection.

This is the period described in Revelation as the time when Satan is "loosed a little season" (Rev. 20:3), a time when there is "silence in heaven" (Rev. 8:1). Mortals are allowed to manifest their evil natures, and there is no penalty. The rulers overlook it in silence.

This lasts for a "little season."

Some of the definitions of "season" are "a certain definite time, a short time." Though definite, its length is not revealed. Whatever time is set aside for this suspension of law, it will not be long.

The purpose of the strange silence is to let the evil in men's hearts vent itself, so that they can prove themselves the wicked servants they really are, to show to themselves and to all that they are not worthy of the age that is then just ahead. Other mortals will be able to see them in their true light and know that the punishment reserved for them is just.

It is a time of sifting, a time for the "scum" to come to the top.

Someone has commented that God allows these rebellious people to let their whole power loose that their total defeat may be more decisive.

*"Blessed and holy is he
that hath part in the
first resurrection:
on such the second death
hath no power,
but they shall be priests of God
and of Christ,
and shall reign with him
a thousand years"*
—Revelation 20:6

*"And I saw a great white throne,
and him that sat on it, . . .*

*"And I saw the dead,
small and great,
stand before God;
and the books were opened:
and another book was opened,
which is the book of life:
and the dead were judged
out of those things
which were written in the books,
according to their works. . . .*

*"And whosoever was not found
written in the book of life
was cast into the lake of fire"*
—Rev. 20:11-12, 15

What do the rebels do? They go out "to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle" (20:8).

The word "nations" does not imply foreign empires at this time. The word may mean people, lands, or races, or simply inhabitants.

Who are Gog and Magog? A footnote in Berkeley's New Testament reads: "All forces that oppose God." Another Bible student describes them as "all enemies of God's truth." Another says, "Gog and Magog represent all the faithless upon the earth." If we are faithless and oppose God, we too are His enemies and may be counted as part of Gog and Magog.

What, then, is the picture at the end of the Millennium? There are two classes of mortals: those who are faithful, and those who are unfaithful and rebellious in heart. At this point, everyone who lives is either on the Lord's side, or with the forces of evil.

Revelation 20:9 pictures the rebels in action: "And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city." And what happened when they did this? Did they succeed in their evil design? No, "Fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." There is no more opportunity for repentance; the day of grace has ended. These people rebel against God and at the hand of God meet their fate: swift and final destruction.

The Final Destruction

At this point, the devil, symbolic of all evil, comes to an end. We read: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone" (v. 10). The "lake of fire" is a symbolic term, defined in verse 14 as "the second death," a death that is penalty for sin and final. Satan has been bound a thousand years at this time, then loosed for a "little season"; now he is flung into the lake of fire; this is the end of evil.

Already in the lake of fire is the beast, and the false prophet (v. 10). This indicates that all powers of darkness and false creeds and false religious systems are also at an end. The final hour has come.

How long will their fate continue? They "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (v. 10).

Does this mean they will writhe in agony and pain and misery through all eternity? Is such the end God has promised those who disobey Him? Never! Jesus said long ago that the "broad way,"

the way of sin and self-indulgence, leads to "destruction," not torment. And Paul says the "wages of sin is death," not eternal suffering and misery.

But there will be torment, as Jesus revealed at the close of one of His parables. It will be torment enough to "see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God" and they themselves eternally outside (Luke 13:28). It will be mental torment as long as their life extends, but not beyond.

How is this, when "they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever"? However long this verse sounds, it speaks only of the finality of their doom. The torment lasts only as long as "day and night," and day and night does not last forever, for with the dawn of the eternal Day shall come the end of night: "There shall be no night there." With the dawn of the Eternal Day, the punishment and consciousness of the wicked shall end, and night shall end, and all shall be bliss and glory and life forever!

The Final Judgment

In Revelation 20, after describing the end of all evil, John gives another description of the last Resurrection and Judgment. "And I saw a great white throne [a symbol of purity and equity], and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." The old political heavens of Gentile times fled away at the close of the first six thousand years of God's plan. Now both the heavens and the earth are new—the earth has a whole new populace. There is no place left for the old. The King is reigning in justice and holiness, and everything is being done in a new way; all things are become new.

"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (v. 12). It is another scene of Judgment. The "small and great" of the Millennial probation time are judged. All ranks and degrees and conditions of men are judged. None can escape. They are judged by God's standard, they are judged according to their works. Some names are in the book of life, and some are in the book of death.

Books are kept. It is a reminder that men cannot escape the results of their deeds. The consequences are adhesive. They cannot be torn away from the man who performs them. They are all recorded in God's book. The books are photo-

*Surely those who feared the Lord with all their heart are
 experiencing His salvation.
 Prosperity is everywhere.
 Glory is dwelling in the land.
 Mercy and truth have met together,
 Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
 Faithfulness is rising from the populace,
 God is smiling down upon us.
 His blessings are poured out lavishly,
 The land is yielding her fruit.
 All our paths are justice and peace from henceforth and forever.*

--Psalm 85:9-13, a paraphrase

graphs of human souls. Each man comes to Judgment trailing the record which will determine his destiny. It is the age-old principle: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

People are judged by their deeds, which express the very inner meaning of their lives. This has always been God's principle. Those who have bad records would like to hide the record from all eyes human and divine. But God does not keep things hidden; at Judgment the records are brought forth, the record that shows how thoughts became purposes, purposes became deeds, and deeds became destiny.

John continues with his vision: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (v. 13). John emphasizes how completely earth's population will be represented, and again he declares the fact that every man is judged according to his works. This is the unvarying principle.

Then he describes again how extensive is the final destruction: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (vs. 14-15).

The Final Triumph

One great day at the end of the Millennium the summons to final Judgment goes forth. At a single swift blow the whole army of rebels (a mighty host, see Rev. 9:16)—a mere handful amid the countless hosts of faithful—are swept

from the earth, while upon the remainder of the people, the happy populace of the Kingdom, rests the benison of the Father, with the boon of eternal life. At last is brought to pass the saying written so long ago in prophecy: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

And victory it will be! From pole to pole is heard the song of triumph, the anthem of deliverance, the shout of liberty full and complete, "liberty throughout all the land to all the inhabitants thereof." John saw this grand time in vision, when the victorious multitudes are before the throne rejoicing.

"After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from all nations and provinces and languages, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white, with palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a mighty shout, 'Salvation comes from our God upon the throne, and from the Lamb'" (Rev. 7:9-10, TLB).

The white robes denote honor, acceptance, and triumph. What a sight it must have been! What a sight it *will be!*

Then follows the great celebration, the greatest this earth has ever seen. It is the celebration of the triumph of the great multitude. The whole host of happy newly crowned mortals, now receiving immortality, are there. The thousand-year-old immortals, who sit with Christ upon the throne of His supreme glory, are there. Also attending are myriads of angels. It is the climax of all earth's ages. It is the celebration which marks the end of time and the beginning of Eternity. Another planet has arrived at the end of its long

period of development and is being welcomed into the heavenly family of perfect worlds, among whom it will shine forever and ever. How fitting that the angels should attend!

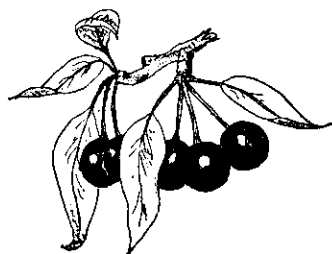
Then the angels, the saints, and the new immortals all join their voices in one grand chorus that goes ringing through the heavens, as they shout: "Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Then follows one final ceremony of acceptance for the new immortals whose victory is lauded: "These are they which . . . have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood [word, or life] of

the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple"—what glorious service! "And he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters"—fountains that issue the waters of immortal life! And then there is the most tender and loving expression of eternal happiness: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (vs. 16-17).

Oh, what will it be to be there! ●●

Fruitful Fragments



The cheering-up business is a good sideline, and it does not interfere with your main line.

You cannot run away from a weakness; you must fight it out or perish. So why not begin now, and where you stand!

Success comes in "cans." Failure comes in "can'ts."

The real test of character is not how we do when the going is good but how much rough road we can take.

The wise man endeavors to shine in himself; the fool to outshine others.

The man who is self-centered is off-center.

If we choose a life of sin, we sacrifice and lose what we could have had.

If we choose a life of self-denial and sacrifice, we lose a little now. But we gain later.

Either choice involves sacrifice. The difference is in how much of it, and when.

*I would think it's safe to say
That if you snarl and bark all day
Your energy is soon expired
And when night comes, you'll feel dog-tired.*

Zeal is not enough; popularity is not enough; education is not enough; success in this world is not enough. We must have faith, and that faith must work—by love.

Encouragement is oxygen to the soul.

Self-Denial Week

This year the Megiddo Church will observe its annual week of Self-Denial during the week beginning February 5.

During this week we will limit ourselves to three articles of food at each meal. We shall make our selection from simple, plain, common foods, the selection being varied at each meal as desired. We shall refrain from all specialties, all cakes, cookies, pastries, and fancy foods. We shall think first of our need, not of our taste.

Eating to satisfaction of three articles of staple food can scarcely be termed a hardship. Yet it is a restriction and requires exercise in self-discipline, which is so vital to the life of the God-controlled man. It has been said that the first requirement of the Christian life is control, the second is control and the third is control.

Self-denial is for the purpose of strengthening our powers of control. It is a long-established Bible principle, of which the denial of food variety is the very least. But each of us has a will to conquer, a mind that inclines to cherish many a wandering thought, a tongue that so easily lets slip the idle word, and hands that work so quickly for selfish purposes. These are the real, daily self-denials, which we should be able to keep in mind continually as we engage in our week of self-denial. ●●

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God."

The Pre-Existence of Christ

"**W**HO of us can ever comprehend Jesus Christ?" says a contemporary writer. "His person so magnificent, his purpose so amazing, his character so complex! The angels sang at his birth—but he had fathered the angels! At twelve, he questioned the rabbis about the Scriptures—yet he was the fountainhead of the Scriptures' inspiration! Jesus began at the Nativity—but God the Son participated in Creation! He was susceptible to pain and even death—yet he was magnificently victorious over the grave!"

If the statements made in this quotation from a current publication were true, Jesus Christ could not be comprehended. Truly His person is magnificent and His purpose (the greater part yet unfulfilled) is amazing; but His character is no more complex than that of any other human being. He was a man, born as any other human, of a human mother, only His was a miraculous conception.

The angels did herald His birth—but to say that He "fathered the angels" is pure conjecture. He did possess superior knowledge at the age of twelve—but He had nothing to do with the inspiration of the Scriptures. Peter testified as to the inspiration of the Scriptures: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:21).

His life began at the Nativity—how could He have had part in the creation? God is the sole Creator by His own testimony. It was "God himself that formed the earth and made it"; "for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isa. 45:18; 46:9). "God the Son" is but a fictitious title attached to Christ by theology. It is not found in Scripture.

Such false beliefs as those contained in this quotation have come into being through the reasonings of men and not from the Scriptures. They are incorporated in the pre-existence doctrine and as such have been examined in previous lessons on this subject. All have been shown to have no

Bible foundation whatever, hence they form no part of the Truth of God's Word.

III. THE PRE-EXISTENCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

"Jesus was continually expressing the fact of his pre-existence," says one writer. "The Jews were astonished at his doctrine, saying, 'This is an hard saying; who can hear it?' (John 6:60)."

Have we any proof that Jesus taught His disciples that He had a prior existence? Was it His pre-existence that constituted an "hard saying"?

To have had an existence thousands of years prior to His birth Jesus must have been immortal, and He must have been deity. Both assumptions pose problems: They are not supported in Scripture. If Christ were immortal, or if He were God, He could not have died—and He did die. Also, we are told that Christ was "in all things . . . made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2:17). His brethren were mortal men, men who lived and died as other men. No one has suggested a prior existence for any save Jesus Christ. How then could Jesus be in all points like His brethren if He had a prior existence?

A. Jesus and Pre-Existence

Was Jesus "continually expressing the fact of his pre-existence"? A casual reading of the Gospels might lead to this conclusion. But is it true? Must we disregard the plain statements concerning His birth, life and death, and grant Him the status of deity in order to give Him a prior existence in heaven? Let us examine some of the texts which suggest a pre-existence.

1. John 3:13. "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Casual reading of this text might lead one to believe that Jesus had indeed been in heaven with the Father. But to accept this idea would force us to deny other plain teachings of the Bible; hence let us consider well.

The main difficulty in understanding this verse—and others—lies with the use of the term "Son of man" or "Christ." The Bible uses the term Christ

in three distinct ways with three distinct meanings. There is *a*) the man Christ; *b*) the knowledge or wisdom of God, which the literal Christ personified in His exemplary life; *c*) Christ's spiritual body, the Church, often called Christ.

a. Christ the man was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem. He grew to manhood and at thirty years of age went out to "every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1).

b. Christ the knowledge of God is the spiritual Christ, the Word of God personified. Christ lived the law of God so perfectly that He was in a sense the living Word. In Him men saw the life God required. And it is this spiritual Christ that can be in someone, as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

c. Christ the Church consists of Christ the Head and the Church His body, as in I Corinthians 12:27: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

When Jesus said, "No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven," we are confident He was not teaching that He had a prior existence in heaven. The Son of man, as used in these verses, is the wisdom of God, the knowledge that the man Christ personified. This "Son of man" came from God in heaven. Jesus Himself testified to this fact when He said He spoke only what He had received of the Father: "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28).

The latter part of John 3:13 indicates that Jesus did not mean His statement literally, for Christ was speaking on earth and was not "in heaven" at that time. It was the knowledge of God which Christ personified which was in Him and in heaven.

2. John 6:50-63. Here again casual reading of Jesus' words might lead us to think Jesus was saying He had come from heaven. But let us consider the depth of the passage and see.

First, what brought about the discussion? The Jews had been seeking Jesus; and when they found Him, He accused them of looking for another free meal; or as worded in the Living Bible, "The truth of the matter is that you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you believe in me." Jesus was more concerned with the spiritual food and He attempted to turn their minds in that direction.

"My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: . . . the bread that I will give is my flesh, . . . Except ye eat the flesh of the Son

of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. . . . For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:32, 51, 53, 55, 56).

Let us analyze Jesus' words.

The Jews could see only the literal, and so concluded that Jesus' words were unreasonable: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" and "How is it . . . that he saith, I came down from heaven?"

But Jesus' words show that He was not telling them about literal flesh and literal blood which they were to eat and drink. The flesh and blood must be spiritual, representatives of something far deeper.

How can we know what Jesus meant? Jesus said He was the living bread which came down from heaven, which if a man should eat "he shall live for ever." Again He said it was His flesh and blood which men must eat to live.

If Jesus meant either statement literally, we could never have future life, for we have no access to Jesus' literal flesh and blood. But Jesus explained this statement by another statement which follows: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me" (v. 57). Jesus lived by eating of His Father, His divine wisdom, His principles, His promises; and in the same manner we can live by eating of Jesus, that is, the principles and divine knowledge which He personified. Jesus lived by the Father; we live by partaking of Jesus, His flesh and blood, the vital knowledge which kept Him spiritually alive. Jesus confirms this thought in verse 63: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." The literal "flesh profiteth nothing." It is "the words that I speak," says Jesus, which "are life."

Now if His "flesh and blood" which give life are His words, His teaching, divine wisdom, must not the living bread which came down from heaven be the same? for it, too, is said to give life; and we know that there is only **one** way to life. The living bread which came down from heaven was the wisdom Christ personified in His life, the divine knowledge by which He so completely directed His life. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." The whole passage refers to this life-giving knowledge of God. What meaning there is, then, in these words: "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" He was saying, What if you should lose all that I have given you—if the divine wisdom which can show you the way to life should suddenly return to heaven, what would you have left?

You would starve, spiritually; you would have no hope.

This is just what Peter said when replying to Jesus' words "Will ye also go away?" He answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (vs. 67-68). The words of divine knowledge were the bread of life which had come from heaven, the bread which was being made available to them by Christ.

3. John 17: 5. To the person believing in the pre-existence doctrine, this verse is conclusive evidence because it seems to claim a prior "glory" for Jesus with the Father in heaven: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

But was this Jesus' meaning? Did He intend to say that He shared a glory with the Father in heaven before the beginning of His life on earth?

To draw such a conclusion is to contradict many definite statements in the Scriptures, hence we must look deeper into His words.

The Greek word **para**, translated "with" in the text, is used with the dative case, and is defined as, "A being by the side of any person or thing; . . . before; in the presence of; often of being heard before judges." Jesus asked to be glorified in His Father's presence or before Him.

The Greek word used for "world" in this text is **kosmos**, meaning a particular arrangement of things upon this planet. Had it referred to the physical earth upon which we live the Greek **ge** would have been used.

In the context of this chapter Christ is speaking of the future world, the time when this earth shall come under the dominion of Christ, a promise not yet fulfilled. The fulfillment of this promise will be accompanied by glory for Christ for He will be King over the whole earth (Zech. 14:9). The word "was" at the end of the verse is the infinitive form "to be," hence it is the "world to come" (Heb. 2:5).

It was for this "world to come" that Christ spent His whole life on earth. He had already qualified Himself for the Kingship and was so certain of receiving it that He could speak of it as though it were an accomplished fact. His heavenly Father, knowing all things from the beginning, knew that Jesus would live His life so perfectly that He gave Him the promise of future glory. Were we to say that Jesus had experienced glory with the Father in heaven, we would be accusing Jesus of contradicting the record of John 7:39 which states that "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." No, Jesus, at that time, had never been with His Father in heaven. After His resurrection He

told Mary that He had **not yet** ascended to His Father. He was glorified after He ascended to heaven and was at "the right hand of God exalted" (Acts 2:33).

B. John and Pre-Existence

The first fourteen verses of the Gospel of John, commonly known as the prologue to the book, are cited by those who espouse the doctrine as definite proof that Christ pre-existed with the Father in heaven as long ago as the creation of the earth. Basic to this belief is the term **logos**, a Greek word translated "Word" and understood by nearly all Christendom as referring to Christ.

Is there any basis for equating Christ and the **logos**? Was John here teaching a pre-existence for Christ? What is there in Scripture to support the claim that Christ was the **logos**? Let us study these verses to ascertain John's teaching.

1. Verses 1-3. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

With the idea firmly fixed in their mind that Christ is the **logos**, theologians see in these verses the pre-existent Christ assisting His Father in the creation of all things. In the first verse, it was the **logos** that was with God, hence the "him" of verse 3 is the **logos**. But have we any reason for assuming that the **logos** and the "him" are Christ?

What is the **logos**? Theologians are sure that it is Jesus Christ, but we can find no proof in the Scripture for this claim. Some Bible scholars believe that the term should have been left untranslated because there is no one-word equivalent for it in the English language. According to Berry's **Greek-English New Testament Lexicon**, **logos** means "a speaking, a saying, a word, as the expression of thought. . . , the thing spoken." There is nothing to indicate that a person is meant; theology has added that meaning.

The idea that the **logos** was a person and that that person was Christ is one of many that came from the Greek philosophers. The belief was developed over a period of time during the centuries immediately following the Apostolic Age. It was the Church fathers, under the influence of the Greeks, who were responsible. Irenaeus put the doctrine into written form and it persists today in much the same words as those he wrote.

What is the **logos** that was "in the beginning" with God? It is the wisdom of God. This **logos** or wisdom existed "with God" and through this **logos** or wisdom God created all things. "The Lord

by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens," wrote the Wise Man (Prov. 3:19), echoing the words of the Psalmist, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all" (Ps. 104:24).

The translator's application of the personal pronoun "him" to the *logos* is no proof that it refers to Christ. The Greek pronoun used could be translated "it" with equal authority. It is so rendered in Wilson's **Emphatic Diaglott** as well as in the Concordant Version of the Bible: "All came into being through it, and apart from it not even one thing came into being which has come into being."

The phrase "the Word [*logos*] was God" is a poor translation. It is better translated "... the Word was divine," as it is rendered in the Moffatt Bible and the Goodspeed Translation.

Understanding the *logos* to be the word or wisdom of God, we can better understand John's words. The *logos* is to God what thought or idea is to man. In the beginning, when God formulated His plans for the earth, the *logos*, or wisdom was already in existence and it is through this wisdom that God does all things.

2. Verse 4. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Here we have the same "him" as in verse 3, but must it be Christ? No, the "him" is again the *logos* or wisdom of God which was in the beginning with God. Only through this wisdom or knowledge of God is eternal life possible. "For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it" (Eccl. 7:12).

Christ personified this wisdom of God by living it out in His daily life in order that men might gain eternal life by following His example (1 Pet. 2:21). He lived it out so completely that His life became the "light" or pattern for those who came afterward to follow.

3. Verse 5. "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." The "light" that God sent into a dark world in the beginning was His *logos*, His wisdom, not Christ in a pre-existent state. The man Christ did personify this wisdom by living it so perfectly hence was called "the light." The phrase "the darkness comprehended it not," is better rendered "the darkness overcame it not," as in the **Scofield Reference Bible**. Throughout the centuries there were those who tried to put out the light of God's Word, but always without success because God willed it so. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," said King David in Psalm 119:105.

4. Verses 6-8. These verses are a clear reference to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, who was sent to "bear witness of the Light." The Light to which he bore witness was Christ, but He had no existence prior to his birth. Because John was "sent from God" as this verse states, no one assumes that he pre-existed. Why must we assume a pre-existence for Christ because He testifies that His Father sent Him?

5. Verse 9. "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Theology applies a literal interpretation to this verse, but such is not possible because everyone that has come into this world has not heard of Jesus Christ. Uncounted numbers have been born, lived and died without ever hearing the name. But everyone that comes into the new world, the new order of things after Christ comes and sets up His Kingdom, will be enlightened by Christ, the true Light. The "world" of this verse is "the world to come" of Hebrews 2:5. In the original the Greek word *kosmos* refers to a particular arrangement of things, not the earth on which we stand.

John was not teaching that Jesus Christ had been enlightening every one that existed throughout the ages in a pre-existent state, but was showing God's plan for this earth when all who would live will come to the light of God's knowledge, when "all shall know [the Lord], from the least of them unto the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:34). When this prophecy is fulfilled, Christ will be lighting every man that comes into the world, that comes into the new order.

6. Verses 10 and 11. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The word translated "made" in this verse occurs over five hundred times in the New Testament and is nowhere translated "create." It means "to come to pass," "to be born," "to arise," "occur," "be appointed," "be done," "be changed." There is no idea of "creating" among them, and John is not telling us of a pre-existence of Christ; it is the "world to come" which is under Christ's authority, or the "world of believers" who were "changed" by Him.

7. Verse 14. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Jesus Christ in His ministry was "the Word made flesh" because He personified the Word of God by living it out in His life. ●●

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10 cents per copy*

A Second Chance?

"If God blinds people to the truth, as in Matthew 13, verses 11-15, then they have to have a chance later on. Otherwise God wouldn't be very just, would He?

"And you say that all the people who ever lived, who had no knowledge of God or His laws, will never be judged, and will never be resurrected to be given their first chance. Then the very same thing applies to innocent, perfectly harmless babies. They surely don't have the ability to think and reason about God's laws. Does that sound like a loving God to you? And what about the poor, unfortunate person who is born mentally retarded and grows up with a vegetable-like mind and then dies? Are we to assume that God will just 'overlook' all these? Won't they ever be given a chance for salvation? Certainly they will!" —J. F.

PERHAPS our friend should read Matthew 13: 15 again: "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed." Who closed their eyes? Did God? "Their eyes they have closed." They are like the people who are willingly ignorant—they are not ignorant because God withholds the knowledge from them but because they choose not to learn (II Pet. 3:5).

But what about the theory of a "second chance"—sometimes called a "first chance" because extended to people who seem to have had no chance at all during their lifetimes? The idea of a "second chance" is appealing to many people, but it is not even once hinted at in the Bible.

A number of factors must be considered before we can discuss this subject directly. First we need to understand God's attitude toward the human family.

From the Scriptural point of view, **all mankind are not God's children.** He is not responsible for their presence only insofar as He set in motion the laws whereby the human race is able to reproduce itself. Hence, all mankind are not His special concern. This statement may strike some persons as hardhearted, a frigid indifference not becoming to a loving God. But before we allow our emotions to lead us to some premature conclusion, let us look at the facts as they are, and

consider the declarations of the Word of God.

We read: "That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God" (Rom. 9:8). All mankind are not God's children as a result of their natural birth into the world. The statement is straight-forward and comprehensive: "They which are the children of the flesh, these are *not* the children of God." Only by complying with the law of adoption do we become sons of God. Paul pictures sonship through this process in Galatians 4:3-6.

Outside this special relationship, all mankind are creatures of chance. The following are the words of King Solomon: "I returned, and I saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all" (Eccl. 9:11). A wise Creator allows events to take their course.

Job 21 describes the man who doesn't need God, who goes his own way, getting whatever he can out of life: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. One dieth in his full strength, . . . His breasts are full of milk and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust . . ." (Job 21:13, 23-26).

Again in Ecclesiastes 3, the Preacher speaks dispassionately of the unimportance of the man who is not the child of God: "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; . . . as the one dieth, so dieth the other; . . . so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; and all turn to dust again" (vs. 18-20).

And this factor of unimportance applies not only to the weak, the poor, the obscure, but also to the mighty, the wise and honorable: "Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish. . . . He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light" (Ps. 49:12-19). *(Continued next page)*

In God's scale of values, human beings do not rank very high. In fact, "All nations [when they do not recognize His authority] before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity" (Isa. 40:17). And again: "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity" (Ps. 62:9).

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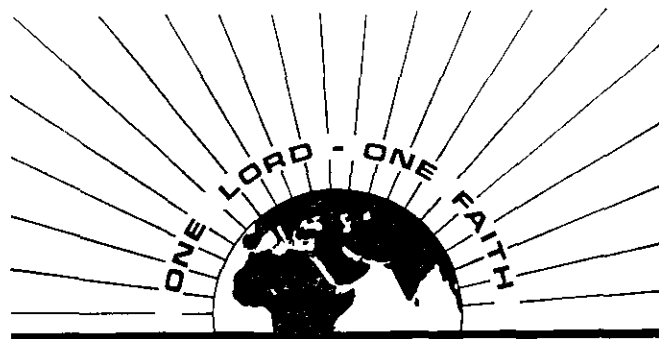
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There is a broad segment of dead humankind who will not be resurrected at all: Those who wander, being outside the way of understanding, shall "remain in the congregation of the dead"; they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake"; they shall "be as though they had not been" (Prov. 21:16; Jer. 51:57; Obadiah 16).

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he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:10-11). The resurrection is for a calling to account, for judgment, not for further opportunity. •



Is There A Hell?

Part 2

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The belief in hell was a direct result of another perversion of true Bible teaching—the idea that every man has an immortal soul or spirit that survives the death of the body. This idea was adopted from the pagans, and has no place in Scripture. "The dead know not anything" (Eccl. 9:5). And, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). This takes away any possibility of a man or his soul suffering in hellfire after death, because "There is no work, nor device, nor knowl-

edge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10).

The doctrine that man has an immortal soul led directly to the belief in hellfire; for, it was assumed that "good" souls go to heaven. But all "souls," unfortunately, are not "good." What, then, could happen to the immortal souls of crooks and scoundrels? Didn't they deserve misery rather than bliss? And so the idea of "hell" evolved (it was borrowed largely from a thirteenth century Italian poet named Dante, who designed a horrible "inferno" for the punishment of those he disapproved of; Dante was writing fiction, not fact, but his "hellfire" formed the basis of many of the ideas of "hell"). It was the right place for the really "bad" immortal souls, and filled with demons and devils—all as "real" as the imaginary place itself.

When we understand what the Bible teaches about man and his nature, that he is mortal and corruptible, having nothing immortal or undying about him, we have no need to imagine a place for the punishment of his soul after death. As the Bible uses the term "soul," it applies to the whole living person. "Seventy souls" went down into Egypt with the patriarch Jacob (Ex. 1:5). When a "soul" dies, the whole man dies, goes to the grave and remains there, until the power of God releases him by resurrecting him. All life beyond death depends on a resurrection, and all states of misery or bliss beyond death must wait until that time of resurrection; there can be no feeling prior to that time, for when a man dies, "that very day his thoughts perish" (Ps. 146:3-4).

The idea of "hell," like many another doctrine of the average so-called Christian Church, developed gradually through the centuries. Hell as a place of torment or punishment was unknown and unthought of among the Jews in Old Testament times. To them, *sheol* was simply the abode of the dead, the grave, as its usage in Scripture indicates. Neither is there any indication that the apostles believed or taught such a doctrine.

The Meaning of Fire

One of the prime reasons many people think they find support for their belief in hell in the Bible is due to a misunderstanding of the term "fire" as used in Scripture. Fundamentalists see nothing but a literal burning "fire" when Jesus speaks of burning up "the chaff with unquenchable fire," or of fire which comes down from heaven and destroys. But the definition of "fire," as given in the Hebrew Lexicon, is: "A symbol of destruction, whether of men or things, so that to be de-

stroyed by war is said to be destroyed by fire: figuratively used of the judgments of God." We ourselves use "fire" in this symbolic manner today; shouldn't we allow the same right to the authors of Scripture? Fire consumes, destroys, burns up; it does not preserve in eternal torture. We should keep this in mind when we read the Word of God.

John the Baptist, speaking of Christ, said "he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12). Notice first that this fire will "burn up" the chaff, not smolder through all eternity. Just as "wheat" and "tares" are symbolic (no one assumes Jesus will be harvesting literal grain), so the fire is symbolic of God's judgments upon evil-doers.

Jesus made a similar statement when speaking of the condemnation of those who will be turned to the left at the Day of Judgment: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Those believing in hellfire seize this statement to prove their doctrine, but there is no such thought in the text. Fire again is a symbol of destruction, not of torment. Everlasting fire is simply everlasting destruction, everlasting punishment, punishment from which there is no release. Many of Jesus' parables speak of "fire," but parables are representative stories and filled with symbols not intended to be taken literally. The same fact that is true of Jesus' words in Matthew 13: 40-42 is true of the words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3. We do not imagine the wheat to be literal, or the tares; so why should the "fire" be literal? We must be consistent; this rule is the rule of Scripture: "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:13).

Sodom and Gomorrah were said to have suffered "the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). Does anyone think that fire is still burning in those cities? Has it been burning for nearly three thousand years? No; again it is a symbol of destruction. They met the fate of pursuing evil; they pursued it to their own destruction (Prov. 11:19). The use of "eternal fire" could not possibly mean that the fire would never burn out, or that it is still burning in some subterranean place. The "vengeance of eternal fire" was God's immediate and immutable judgment upon them; there could be no return to life.

Peter speaks of the heavens and earth being "reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (II Pet. 3:7). Here he associates the "fire" with the "day of judgment."

(Continued on page 21)

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SCRIPTURAL SPOTLIGHT

"He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" —Daniel 3:25

TODAY we find ourselves surrounded on every hand by evil. We have to begin early and work continuously to avoid contamination.

We can take a lesson from the experience of the three Hebrew children. The world of today could well be likened to a burning, fiery furnace, for it is all too eager to consume virtue and bring those striving to live on a higher plane down to low levels of conduct and conversation.

It is recorded of Daniel's three companions that they walked in the midst of the fire and were not consumed. They *walked* in it—they did not crawl or creep downhearted, or run frantically about without purpose; they walked manfully through it. They maintained genuine godly poise through a severe trial. The reason for this? They had a "fourth person" with them, one "like the Son of God"; they lived an open life before God; they walked with God's angel, and the angel was there to strengthen them in their trial, to deliver and save them from harm.

We also have the promise of "ministering spirits," heaven-sent helpers, angels of God, to be near and strengthen us today to do His will if we are walking with God through our fiery trials.

We are living in a furnace of evil, perhaps by comparison seven times hotter than in times past. It has been stated that Elijah, the most celebrated of the Hebrew prophets, would return at a time of "surpassing wickedness" and impiety. We see this condition in the world today; iniquity flourishes on every side, while goodness and virtue are often frowned upon. The Lord is allowing it to prove us, whether or not we will walk nobly in the midst of the fire, keeping ourselves above reproach as Christians should, walking uprightly as the early Christians did. He is allowing it to prove whether we will walk in the fire, or be consumed by it. He is allowing it to prove whether we will forget His promises, or remember that "surely there is an end ["reward," margin], and thine expecta-

tion shall not be cut off" (Prov. 23:18).

It is written of those faithful three, "The fire had no power" on them, nor did "the smell of fire" pass on them (Dan. 3:27). They kept themselves entirely free from its contamination; no one could afterward have told that they had been in the fire. They did not let it affect them, but lived above it. The promises of God kept them steady, upright, and gave them the faith and courage to keep walking in the fire till God's appointed time of release should come. They not only kept faith with God when the fire burned low, and when it was hot, but when it was "seven times" hotter than usual.

We can take a great lesson from this expression, and hold fast to the right however evil the surrounding conditions. True Christians are not good only when it is comparatively easy to be good, or when the environment is naturally conducive to virtue. The fiery test is when the circumstances are adverse to goodness, when goodness is berated and ridiculed, or when those who once maintained higher standards have allowed the fire to consume them. Then it is that we prove whether we will exalt God's ways or whether the fire will have power to consume us. It is then that we prove whether we will be contaminated, or whether we will come out without even the "smell of smoke" on us.

There are many little fires of temptation in daily life through which we must pass until we get to the point where we are so pure that they leave not even the smell of smoke upon us. Perhaps the secret lies in *walking* in the fire, not standing still or sitting down in it.

There are few days in life when we do not pass through some kind of fire, some heat that tries our patience; but are we letting the fire perfect patience or does it leave at least a taint of smoke on our garments? Sometimes the fire can be pretty hot when it comes to a test of being

easily entreated. If it does not entirely consume us, we will do very well if others do not get even a whiff of the smoke upon us.

We are not likely to think of pride as a fire, but it is, and an evil that takes but a very minute breeze to fan its flame into a raging fire that will certainly consume every vain soul who lingers in it. There are fires of dishonesty all around us burning in a hundred different forms. We cannot allow even the smell of their smoke to touch our garments.

There are many fires of jealousy, hatred, bitterness, malice that are within our powers to bypass, but strangely these fires do not cause the pain and discomfort that they should. Is it because of the deadening power of sin? If we find ourselves in such conflagration, we should certainly walk out of it in a hurry.

Every child of God has had his or her fires to walk in. Joseph had his, among his jealous brothers and in Egypt. Moses had his, leading a band of unthankful ex-slaves; Elijah, his; Obadiah, Jeremiah, Paul, all had theirs; in fact, all of God's people sooner or later have found themselves in some kind of hot fire. Many have been consumed in these fires. Thousands have come through them but with the "smell of smoke" on their garments.

"One of the most unfortunate things and greatest dangers is that having passed through the fire, one carries forever after some unmistakable evidence of the evil day." So says a commentator on human nature. If we carry evidence of our fires, let it be of a different kind entirely—let it be evidence of a stronger, purer character than smoke. As we pass through the fire, we have not derived the benefit we should have if we have not become stronger, better able to withstand some evil tendency than before. If our lives have been blackened by the experience, our spiritual radiance dimmed, our enthusiasm and hope of eternal life diminished, then we have nothing in common with Daniel's faithful companions. In fact, we can never claim companionship with any of God's faithful heroes.

If in our contact with the world, we allow their conduct and conversation to taint or influence ours, "the smell of smoke" will be on our garments. If in an exasperating situation we are moved to lose control of our tongue, we are being harmed by the fire. God allows no fire we cannot walk in.

Saul suddenly found himself in a fire of jealousy when the people honored David's victories above his; and most unfortunately, this fire had "power" over him and consumed him.

Diotrephes fell victim to the fire of loving preeminence and thereby rejected the beloved John.

David was engulfed in many fires which, for a time, had power over him; but by his zeal for God, he finally extinguished these fires and his garments became white and pure.

We should take heart from the loving examples of faithfulness left us in the Word of God, and not let even the smell of the flesh, our own lower nature, touch our garments. If the smoke has smudged us, there is no reason for us to continue with its odor, for our scent can be changed till our garments are fragrant like the clothing of the King's daughter whose righteousness caused her to smell "of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad." ●●

One Lord-One Faith

(Continued from page 19)

ment," two terms for the same event. The term is symbolic, as are the "heavens" and "earth" which will be destroyed (see v. 7). The "heavens" represent the ruling powers of earth, and the "earth" represents the people ruled over. The fire that shall destroy them must likewise be representative. It is prophecy, and it shall be fulfilled when the devouring fire of God's judgments sweeps over the land, removing all who will not embrace the new regime of Christ and the saints, the new "heavens." There is no suggestion that anyone will be tormented forever.

In Revelation 20, the destruction of the evildoers is said to be by "fire," but again the language is symbolic. In Revelation 20:9, it is said that "fire came down from God out of heaven." Again it is the judgments of God descending, whatever form those judgments might take. Paul explains that the burning "fire" is "destruction." He says Jesus will come, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, . . . who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (II Thess. 1:7-9). The "flaming fire" will result in "everlasting destruction," not eternal torment.

Revelation 21:8 says of the "fire and brimstone," "*which is the second death.*" This again shows that the "fire" is not burning in a literal sense but only a symbol of destruction. And when "death and hell" are cast into "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14), it is the end of all death. This is the promise, for when the Kingdom is fully come, "there shall be no more death" (Rev. 21:4). Death will have been "swallowed up in victory"; and when death is no more, hell—the grave—shall be no more. This is the hell of the Bible. ●●

Kathy
Kandor's
Korner

A Way Through

THE word "through" struck me as these words were running in my mind.

*He'll take you through,
however you're tried
His tender care
is never denied.
Then always trust
His promise so true;
He'll take you through,
all through.*

It was one of those times when I had knelt beside my bed to talk with my heavenly Father. A number of things I had prayed about for some time were not resolved, nor did I understand what God's answer was to be. But as I opened my heart before Him, the words of this familiar old hymn seemed like an anthem to my soul: "He'll take you through"—not out of. . . .

Suddenly there flashed across my mind many more things I needed to look at: Neal's recent severe illness, so unexpected and so costly in doctor bills and suffering; then our sorrow in the death of his mother when we were unable to be there to help or comfort. Then there was our anxious concern in rearing our children in this increasingly evil world; the constant struggle to keep God's precious promises more real and compelling than the tinsel allurements of the world—and the ever-haunting question: Were we fulfilling that sacred duty as we ought? Then there were heartaches caused by misunderstandings; the wounds from sharp words which should never have been said; plus the daily wear and tear of personality friction and a few hard-hitting criticisms when I felt I had done my best. Altogether, it seemed like too much.

But the Lord had promised, "I'll take you through." Isn't that what is written? "You can

rely on Me, for I will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear, but I will send with the trial an escape route as well, so that you may be able to bear it" (see I Cor. 10:13).

I felt comforted; the heavenly Father knows the trials and testings I need. They do not come to make me fall, but that I may emerge stronger than ever. My trials are not unique; others have endured all this—and much more—and have come through victoriously. My thoughts went to Jesus, sitting now at the right hand of God. Wasn't it written that He was in all points "tempted . . . as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). "Yet without sin" . . . I pondered the thought, wondering how He did it.

All at once, it seemed, I began to see so many things that were cluttering my life. I suppose that was part of my problem—too much clutter!

Paul's words came alive, pregnant with new meaning: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us. . . ." If affliction works for us, then it is a helper; it is a helper sent to teach me trust and patience, to show me how all things are working together for good if I am sincerely striving to serve God.

Blessed God-sent helpers! Yet how I had resented them, resisted them, snubbed them. Small wonder that I had recognized none of their gracious assistance—when I had refused to accept them!

If I could step aside and observe for a season, things might look different in my life. I might see what all these little problems of mine were doing in my behalf, and might learn to appreciate their presence.

The words of James came with fresh encouragement. "When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends"—helpers in gaining that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I arose from my knees strengthened, and the melody still running in my mind. "He'll take you through, however you are tried, He'll take you through, all through."

Just then the door opened and Neal entered the room. He came around to my side of the bed and sat down beside me, clasping my hand warmly in his. "Kathy"—he spoke in a low, questioning voice—"what's happened?"

I couldn't imagine what he meant.

"What's happened? You look so relaxed, more than I've seen you for days! You've been so tense, so very tense, it has concerned me. What has happened?"

"I did it, Neal," I said, almost under my breath.

"You did what?"

"I took it all to the Lord in prayer. And I feel so refreshed. It's like a whole shower of blessing. I want to remember this. I've been wrestling so long between me and myself. I needed God to straighten it out. I'm so thankful for the power of prayer. Remind me, Neal, when it happens again. How I thank God for the healing balm of prayer!" ●●

It Costs, . . . But It Pays!

(Continued from page 7)

again was the cross, the price. And it was high, higher than the young man had ever dreamed it could be. It was too high; he went away sorrowing (Mark 10:17-22).

One day this mighty Master of men approached a would-be follower, bidding him "Follow me." The man consented, saying that he would gladly follow, but that first he had to go and bury his father. Did Jesus say, "That is fine; come when you can"? No! His answer spoke the price in totally unsympathetic terms: "Let the dead bury their dead," He said, "but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-60). Or in other words, if you are going to start out fettered with secondary loyalties, you had better not start at all. If the Kingdom cannot be *first*, forget it, because you will never get it.

Another man heard Jesus' invitation and answered, saying, "Lord, I will follow thee." But this man also felt a prior obligation: "Let me first go bid them farewell which are at home." Did Jesus say, "That's all right, there will be plenty of time to pay the price later"? No, priorities had to be set straight right at the first if there was to be eternal gain. What man could plough a straight furrow in the field if he was continually looking back over his shoulder? And what man could plough a straight furrow toward the Kingdom if he could not give the task his undivided attention? "No man," said Jesus—not even you—"who sets his hand to the plough and then keeps looking back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:61-62, NEB). These were the facts; the price was fixed, and there could be no reductions to accommodate any man's special situation.

... A Price

One time Jesus fed a multitude, and they thanked Him graciously—they even offered Him a crown. That night Jesus fled across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. When the people gathered along the

shore the next day to see Him, and realized Jesus was not there, they boarded boats and went across to Capernaum to look for Him. One might have expected Jesus to commend them for their zeal in seeking Him. But no, He could read their hearts. "The truth of the matter," He told them starkly, "is that you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you believe in me" (John 6:24-26, TLB).

Then Jesus proceeded to tell them of the cost of following Him. He gave them a sermon so meaty and so powerful—about spiritual meat, and bread, and blood, and sacrifice—that they were offended. "This is more than we can take," they cried out. "Why listen to such talk?" And Jesus watched while they walked away, scores of them. The crowd thinned to a handful. The price was too high.

At last Jesus was left alone with His disciples, and what did He say? Did He turn to them and pour out His grief for the terrible loss He had suffered and beg of them to hold on? No, He put before them an even sterner challenge: "Do you also want to leave me?" It was a fierce question. What would they say? The apostle Peter responded heroically: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God" (John 6:67-69). The Master was testing, sifting to find the highest quality.

We wonder: Would *we* have stood His test?

Who Is Able?

Two of Jesus' chosen disciples, even James and John, came to Jesus one day with a very singular request. "What would ye that I should do for you?" Jesus asked them. Did they want the price discounted? No, they wanted the pay certified. "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory." Such honorary pay! Perhaps they felt that the sacrifice they had made merited such honor. Or perhaps their all-too-human love of pre-eminence was pre-eminent just then. What did Jesus say? Did He tell them, "I would be only too happy to give such places of honor to such devoted young men"? No, His answer was an unrelenting restatement of the price of all honor: "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able . . .?" and He proceeded to inform them of the disciplines which lay between them and the securing of *any* position in His Kingdom. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:36-38; Matt. 20:22). No easy answer was this! There was a

price to be paid, a *great* price.

What if one might wish to represent Christ to the world but felt a sort of withdrawing shame for the lowliness of the Nazarene and His unpopular teachings? Should he not be given credit for his good intentions, even though he be not ready to pay the full price? Listen to Jesus' words: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). The cost is set, and he who is not willing to pay it shall be ashamed; and he who is ashamed—whether it be you or me or whoever—will receive shame, not honor in the presence of Christ.

More Cost

Heavenly honor has its price, even the dedicating of all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength. Is not the Kingdom of heaven "like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it"? (Matt. 13:45-46).

Following Christ costs; it costs us our human desire for popularity now—which means more to some of us than to others; but no one likes to be *unpopular*. To be well thought of among one's friends and associates is instinctive. But it is an instinct that must be surrendered in exchange for the greater honor of God. Said Jesus, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" (Luke 6:26). "Woe," because "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). The Lord sees not as man sees; if man is pleased, God is not. If God is pleased, man is not. This is part of the cost.

Following Christ also costs us our right to our own opinion and all the individuality that goes with it. Every way of every man being right in his own eyes, our own private opinion is a valuable possession. But how foolish we are to hold to it when God has offered us *His* thoughts—which are as much above ours as the heavens are above the earth! Should we not be glad, even anxious, to exchange?

Strange creatures we are even to *want* to hold to something so inferior and worthless; but we do it.

Then we must relinquish our natural right to choose our own course in life and to please ourselves. Of course there is nothing in the world so important as pleasing ourselves!—such is our natural thought. To gratify one's particular notions and wishes is the life goal of many a man. But

the follower of Christ must be different. His goals must be *Christ's* goals.

Let us beware when we feel pleased with ourselves or what we have done or acquired, lest *our* notions become our goal; for, says the law, "even Christ pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3). Can *we* expect privileges *He* was denied? If *He* needed to feel the keen edge of discipline, can we think *we* should escape it?

Oh, the price! It has so many forms and designs. It is anything that would hinder us, anything that would lessen our chances of obtaining the favor of God in the great Day that is coming. The price is any love or affection or desire or interest or wish or advantage in this world which might distract us, or hinder us in rendering the complete service we have pledged. It is anything that could possibly prevent us from receiving the full pay. Whatever it be, it is too much risk.

This is why Jesus said what He did in the Sermon on the Mount. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out"; or "if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off" (Matt. 5:29). This sounds severe, and indeed it is, though we can be sure Jesus did not mean it in a literal sense. "Right hand" and "right eye," the most valuable of our physical members, represent those propensities and habits which are most pleasing and profitable to us naturally. When they prove to be inlets to temptation or the instruments of sin, though innocent in themselves, we should voluntarily deprive ourselves of them. Better to get into the Kingdom maimed, than to spare ourselves the sacrifice—and perish!

Someone has commented that men will part with members of the physical body to save the physical life, which will end later anyway. But how slow they are to deprive themselves of the look, the touch, the small pleasure which endangers their eternal welfare. Let us look well to ourselves.

Oh, the cost; it affects every aspect and angle of our lives. It obligates us to keep ourselves on vigil through every waking moment of every day, to see that we are at all times under control—physically, mentally, emotionally.

But what does all this cost add up to? How does it compare with the pay? How much pain for how much gain? Is the life of denial and sacrifice worth it?

This is what the apostle Peter asked Jesus one day when he was feeling the pinch of sacrifice. "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive"—was Peter hearing right? It isn't

all sacrifice! "He shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:28-30). Just look at what happens when we begin to give! It is like a man said once about His dealing with the Lord, "I shovel into His bin, and the Lord, He shovels into my bin; only He has the bigger shovel." For all that we give up, even in this world, we gain—yes, we gain a hundred times the value of what we surrender. There is just no possibility of losing on this venture; for when we have received the hundredfold in this life, we still will have "in the world to come eternal life." In prospect of such gain, what is the cost!

The hundredfold of blessing in this life might be considered in one sense a reward, for we receive joy and satisfaction here and now in direct proportion to the spirit we bring to the task and the effort we put into it. But this is not the full pay. After the hundredfold is over and the work is done, the full pay is still ahead. And when we try comparing that everlasting and ever-multiplying pay with the cost—well, there just isn't any comparison. What are sixty, seventy or eighty years of the most gruelling sacrifice compared with hundreds and thousands and millions and billions of ages of pleasure and happiness and glory and fulfillment? The greatest sacrifice we could make in our little lifetime cannot pay for the *enth* part of a reward which is "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think"! (Eph. 3:20).

Great Pay

In each of His letters to the seven churches, Christ compared the cost and the pay. The reward in every case was promised "to him that overcometh"—there is the cost. And what about the pay? Jesus' promises overflow with symbols of everlasting life, adorned with all the rich and heavenly extras He had already tasted during His first few years of immortal life. How He must have been yearning to share His abounding blessings with His faithful brethren on earth. He writes to them of glory, acceptance, favor, joy, power, authority, happiness, strength.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7). In the midst of the paradise of God—when all the earth is paradise—will be a tree whose fruit makes life perpetual; it is a symbol of immortality. Who would not love to partake of such fruit! Isn't this tremendous pay?

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna" (Rev. 2:17), He wrote to the

next church. The Hebrews in the wilderness were supported by manna; it was called "angel's food" (Ps. 78:25); and will not the "hidden manna" be food that sustains the angels in the vigor of immortal life?

But there is more to this promise: "And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written." A "stone" was given as a token of favor, and the "white" was a symbol of approval. It is the pledge of divine favor, prosperity and success, a pledge that one is accepted of God and that all the rewards and honors of the higher life shall be his. Isn't this tremendous pay?

In another letter is this promise: "He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (2:26, 27). Here is promise of dominion and authority that shall transform the world into a paradise of delight for everyone who lives!

And then, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment." "White raiment" is said to be expressive of purity, holiness and joy; it is another mark of acceptance before the throne of God. "And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." Among the ancient Israelites, to be blotted out of the book of life meant to forfeit the privileges of one's sacred covenant. So he who is never blotted out of God's book of life never loses his heavenly citizenship or his right to the privileges that come with it. The names that are found in the book of life on the great Day of final account will be there forever, for this is the book of life, immortal life! And along with this assurance comes a public acknowledgment of one's victory: "And I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

There is yet another promise: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out" (3:12). A pillar is a permanent part of the finished structure. The pillars of the ancient temple signified strength and permanence. Wouldn't we like to be such pillars in the eternal temple of God? The cost is temporary; the gain will be permanent.

"And he shall go no more out." He shall be forever free from any possibility of falling away. It is the blessing of eternal security. Furthermore, he shall be inscribed with God's own name: "and I will write upon him the name of my God"—here is a divine endorsement upon his holy and supreme attainment. Also written upon him will be "the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem"; this is a mark of perpetual citizenship in that new world. And third, he shall bear the name of Christ Himself: "And I will write

upon him my new name." When Christ bestows His own name upon His faithful servant, He is bestowing His full glory and eternal favor. Isn't that tremendous pay?

Then there is one final promise: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (3:21). Christ has a place of honor reserved for every faithful servant of this six-thousand-year day.

And so we have it: a right to the tree of life, a new name, hidden manna, a white stone, a pillar in the temple of God, a place of honor on Christ's throne—isn't it enough? It will be pay magnificent beyond our finest powers to imagine.

Cost vs. Pay

With all this before us, is it possible that the cost ever troubles us? Yet it does. Why?

One reason is that it is so very *present*; it is so much easier to see the cost than the pay. We face it continually day after day, whether we work or walk or rise or rest. We confront it head-on when we must face the shame of our sins and failures; we confront it yet the more when we rise to try again. Oh, the cost! If we could only get it paid in full! If we could only make one big sacrifice and be done with it forever! But such is not the plan that God saw fit to set up. And in the constant vigil, we grow weary. What is the matter? Why do we hesitate to give up our way when there is so much to gain?

There is but one answer: We lack faith. We lack conviction. We believe, yes, but not with the gripping conviction that had seized the apostle Paul when he wrote, "This one thing I do. . . . If by any means I might attain"—if by any means, at any price whatever!

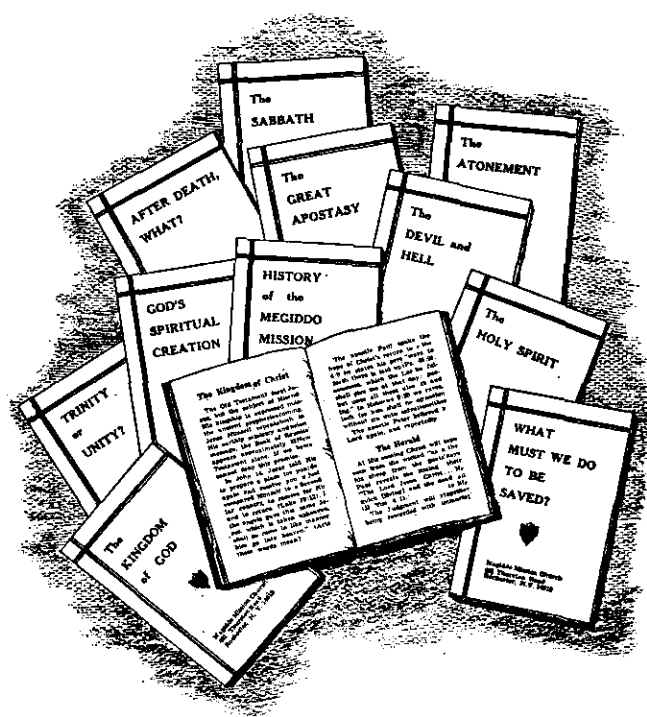
Brethren, where is our faith? What does it take to convince us and keep us convinced? True, we have not been blinded by the light from heaven; but can we question the promises of the God of the universe? We *know* whereof we affirm; we have His Word, and we know that Word is true. We have evidence a thousandfold. A man of religious conviction once said, "Time was, whenever I heard a skeptical remark, I felt wounded and somewhat shaken. I am no longer shaken by these wandering winds. There are certain things I am as sure of as of my own existence; I have seen, tasted, and handled them, and I am past being argued out of them by those who know nothing about them." Is it not time we said the same?

We need to set our hearts on the great things ahead of us and go after them full force. What if the vigil is long or the pain severe or the sacrifice supreme? What else is there that is worth *anything at all*?

Oh, the pay that is coming! How we should keep ourselves continually stirred by the joy and glory that can be ours. Soon God will be doing great things, and right here among us. We will see it. We *can* be part of it. And what will it matter then, the size or description of the price, if only we paid it in full? When we feel that new immortal life pulsing in our veins, shall we think even for one second that the sacrifice was too great, or the price too high?

Truly, the Christ-life costs, and costs; but it pays, and *pays* and *PAYS!* ●●

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Our Readers Write...

Deceased

We have been informed that our brother, Ernest Simmons, who lived in St. Louis, Missouri, died in the Missouri Pacific Hospital on Tuesday, December 13. I will be writing more at a later time.

Charleston, Mississippi

Miss Rubye Simmons

NOTE: Brother Ernest Simmons was a regular correspondent of the Megiddo Church, and was glad to receive any brethren who chanced to come his way. He was acquainted with the Church during most of his life.

Brother Simmons is survived by five sisters—Iola, Lillian, Marlene, Elvira, and Rubye—all of whom are still actively enjoying life on or near the family homestead in Charleston. All of them are still grateful to their father, Brother James Simmons (deceased in 1927), who became acquainted with the Megiddo Church over fifty years ago and who instilled in his young children a deep and lasting appreciation for spiritual values. Sister Rubye Simmons has spent considerable time among our congregation in Rochester and now corresponds regularly. She now lives with her older sister Lillian, and together they share a zealous faith and hope.—Editor.

With All Our Heart

I have read and reread the latest Message and I was deeply impressed with the article by our founder, the Rev. L. T. Nichols, in which we are to love our God with all our heart, soul, and strength if we are to ever enter into the Kingdom and live through all eternity. It is so very, very easy to lose sight of this fact and let the worries and concerns of this world slip in and steal this wonderful truth away.

Earlier in the week, while reading this article for about the 4th or 5th time, I resolved to truly devote my life and all that I have to loving the Father, that all else shall come second and remain secondary. I truly wish to possess eternal life and to receive the commendation from Christ, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

There is no turning back now. I know the way will be difficult and the days of trial and testing are not over by any means, but the minute-to-minute living will be done in total love and commitment to the Father. Regardless of the pain, I will develop that self-discipline that will make me fit for the Kingdom of God.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

D. K.

Studying

I have been studying the Bible Lesson on "Maintain the Spiritual Glow." There is so much cleaning up for us to do in our everyday life. The verse in II Corinthians 10:5 is a good one to remember: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." To replace evil thoughts with good is sometimes hard to keep in mind at all times.

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

L. S.

February, 1978

How Favored!

How highly favored we are to have been called out of the darkness into the marvelous light of God! God's plan for this earth is revealed to us, and also how we can be a part of His plan. Of all earth's millions, we are among the handful of favored ones whom God has chosen to discipline and train.

The world seems to be rushing madly to destruction. Mankind is running into problems which are too big for them to solve. While the wise of the world blindly grope for the answers to the ills of our civilization, we Christians know what the outcome is going to be. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again with power and knowledge to transform this planet into a paradise. The second coming of Jesus is our only hope. Without this hope before us, the future would be thick darkness.

If we really believe "all things work together for good to them that love God," we will be at peace at all times. We have no need to worry and fret, because God is directing our future.

We will not let other people upset us or annoy us, either. I have to associate with unbelievers every day where I work, as many others do. If we do not keep up a strong guard we will soon be conforming to their standards and joining in with them. How can we maintain our guard? By fortifying ourselves with the Word of God. We can be meditating on the good things of God, so that when we must be out in the world, we are not one of them.

Athens, Tennessee

S. K.

Thankful

Great is the mercy of our God. I am so thankful for His extended goodness to us; a little more time to grow more meek, more humble, more willingly submissive under His shaping hand. To walk more closely in the footsteps of my Master is my heart's desire.

What wonderful things are awaiting those who will continue faithful unto the end! Oh, let us never grow weary in well doing, for soon the Lord will be here. I am resolved to press on more vigorously against all obstacles, to gain that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

South Amboy, New Jersey

L. M. K.

ABIB Is Coming!

The onward march of time is bringing us steadily nearer to the beginning of another sacred New Year, which the Megiddo Church will observe this year beginning with the evening of April 8, Bible days being measured from "evening to evening" (Lev. 23:32). This is in accord with the lunar pattern, which repeats itself every 19 years.

The ancient Hebrew calendar being based on the lunar cycle, the New Year commences with the first new moon after the spring equinox.

The arrival of Abib means a double celebration at the Megiddo Church—the recognition of another New Year, and the anniversary of the birth of our coming King, Jesus Christ.

Distant members and friends, plan now to come and join us at this sacred season! ●●

What Can We Know?

*Lord of all majesty and might,
Whose presence fills the unfathomed deep,
Wherein uncounted worlds of light
Through countless ages vigil keep:
Eternal God, can such as we,
Frail mortal men, know aught of Thee?*

*Beyond all knowledge Thou art wise,
With wisdom that transcends all thought:
Yet still we seek with straining eyes,
Yes, seek Thee as our fathers sought;
Nor will we from the quest depart
Till we shall know Thee as Thou art.*

*Frail is our form and brief our day,
Our mind has not the power of years;
What puny balances can weigh
The magnitude of starry spheres?
Before us is eternity;
Whence comes it, Father, but from Thee?*

*For, when Thy wondrous works we scan,
And Mind gives answer back to mind,
We learn of Thy eternal plan
And, seeking, we shall surely find.
Thy sons their heritage shall claim,
And as Thy children bear Thy Name!*

*We know in part: enough we know
To walk with Thee, and walk aright;
And Thou shalt guide us as we go,
And lead us into fuller light
Till, when we stand before Thy throne,
We know at last as we are known.*

—Selected.