

# Eternal Salvation

## *The Blessed Hope of the Saved “in Christ”*

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**I**t is a grand thing to be saved!

The book of Ecclesiastes declares that ***“The misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be”*** (Ecc. 8:6-7). This, of course, in common with the rest of the book, is only the conclusion of human wisdom, looking at things from the earthly standpoint. It is quite apart from divine revelation, especially the gospel of Christ, who has ***“brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”*** (2Timothy 1:10). To regard the Old Testament in general, and the book of Ecclesiastes in particular, as God’s last word on last things, is to leave ourselves open to some very peculiar conclusions.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the believer still does not know ***“what a day may bring forth”***, his condition is far removed from one of “great misery”. Rather is it one of rejoicing ever-more, for

what prospects Christ has opened up for him! There are three alternatives lying before him, and the choice lies between the good, the better and the best!

Says Peter in 1Peter 3:10-12; ***“For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue (pursue) it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers”***. For the Christian, life is ***“good”***. Only the born-again soul can live the life of practical righteousness described in these verses, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, but the result is a continuous experience of happy communion with God. So real is this, that the possibility of suffering for righteousness’ sake cannot detract from the blessedness. Indeed trials are the opportunities for a closer walk with the Lord and a richer sense of His presence and help (2Cor. 12:9-10), so that even the peculiar difficulties which must attend the pathway of a child of God in an ungodly world cannot obscure the fact that the Christian life is the only life worth living. To love any other life is to lose it eternally (John 12:25). Days of fellowship with God are the only truly ***“good days”*** to be enjoyed on earth, and are a sweet foretaste of heaven below.

How then should we look at death, which brings this ***“good”*** life to an end? Paul says, ***“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better”*** (Philippians 1:21,23). So that if, for the believer, to live is ***“good”***, to die is ***“gain”***, ***“far better”***! How is that? It is not because there is rest in the grave from the trials of life. As we have already seen Paul enjoyed life and gloried in its trials, because for him to live

was Christ. The blessedness of death for Paul lay in this, that it meant to depart and to be with Christ – the happy communion of life was not to be lost in the oblivion of soul-sleep, but was to be infinitely expanded by translation into the Lord’s very presence.

Divine comfort (Luke 16:25) in the enjoyment of the Lord’s presence in Paradise (Luke 23:43) is the portion of the believer when death removes him from this scene. So greatly superior is this to anything of the Lord’s presence known on earth, that to be ***“at home in the body”*** is to be, in contrast, ***“absent from the Lord”***. Paul’s words in this passage give the true perspective, and show the Christian’s proper attitude to death; ***“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present (at home) with the Lord”*** (2Cor. 5:6,8). At the same time Paul was conscious that the Lord might yet have work for him to do on earth, that his presence here might be more needful for others (Phil. 1:24), so he was happy to leave the time of his departure from this scene in God’s hands, and to say, ***“Wherefore we labour (make it our aim), that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of (well-pleasing to) Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”*** (2Cor. 5:9-10).

It is quite conclusive from these clear Scriptures that when the word ***“sleep”*** is used figuratively of death, it does not connote unconsciousness or passivity of soul in the intermediate state between death and resurrection. That would be pressing the figure beyond the obvious scriptural limitations. The word ***“sleep”*** is appropriate in this connection for a number of reasons.

Firstly, when a person dies the body is no longer active, but is relaxed and normally appears peaceful, as in sleep. Secondly, persons that die do

not cease to exist, anymore than those who sleep. Thirdly, it is only a temporary condition (until the resurrection); as in the case of one who sleeps there will be an ***“awakening”***. Fourthly, as the Greek word commonly used for ***“sleep”*** in the New Testament literally signifies ***“to lie down”***, so it affords a proper contrast to the word frequently employed for resurrection, which signifies ***“to stand up”***. These are quite sufficient reasons for the use of the word ***“sleep”*** in a figurative way as a synonym for ***“death”***, without pressing it to the point of contradicting the Scriptures we have already considered, as well as those which teach the state of the unbeliever after death.

While Paul in 2Corinthians Ch. 5 indicates his willingness to die, he makes clear, however, that this is not his whole desire. Death for him is like the leaving of an earthly tabernacle, or like the laying aside of a garment. But this means that after death the soul, bereft of a body, is in an ***“unclothed”*** state, a state which will not be remedied until the resurrection, when the resurrection body of glory will be assumed. And this intermediate state, though far better than being confined in this mortal body, is not the apostle’s hope. ***“Not”***, he says, ***“for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life”*** (v4).

This brings us back to the truth of 1Corinthians 15:51-57, the glorious prospect of those who ***“are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord”*** (1Thess. 4:15). These will ***“never die”*** (John 11:25-26), but will ***“be changed”***. ***“Mortality”***, the present condition of liability to death, will be ***“swallowed up of life”*** without knowing either death or corruption. Instead of the old garment being laid aside to wait a while for the new one, the new one will, as it were, be immediately

adopted over the old one, so that the believer is “clothed upon” or “over-clothed”, never being found naked. This is surely the best of all! Truly we can say, **“Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (v57)!

If the future, then, means continuance in life, whatever trials may await us, as long as we walk in fellowship with God, it must be **“good”**. Should we be called to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, through the great triumph of the cross this can only be **“gain,”** the introduction into what is **“far better”**. But if the Lord should come, we will never know the partings of death again, but will all go home **“together”**: and we will not need to wait for our full blessing, but will be changed **“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”**. Then will our deepest longings all be satisfied at once (Psalm 17:15); and this is our best prospect and the true hope of our souls.

But we may ask, what then? We have noted already that inseparably connected with the Lord’s coming is His judgement seat. Some Scriptures which refer to this occasion are Romans 14:10-12; 1Cor. 3:12-15; 4:5; 2Cor. 5:10; 2Timothy 4:8; 1Peter 5:4; Revelation 22:12. The believer, in one sense, will never come into condemnation (or judgement) (John 5:24). The judgement which his sins deserve was borne by Christ upon the cross, so that for him the judgement of sin is past. His presence at the judgement seat of Christ will not be with a view to penal judgement, to determine his guilt, but rather to assess the quality of his Christian life and service. For all failure he will suffer eternal loss, for all that meets the Lord’s approval he will receive an eternal reward. These rewards, which are sometimes regarded as crowns, sometimes as positions of authority, will be manifested in the coming kingdom, i.e. they will

be received at the judgement seat, but manifested in the kingdom.

The holy city, the new Jerusalem, the bride, the Lamb’s wife, will come down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2); but it is never said to come to earth, though access to it will be granted to those on earth. The city cannot be a figure of the whole body of the redeemed of all ages, for we read of **“the nations”** and **“the kings of the earth”** who shall walk in the light of it, and have access to it, while not being part of it. The contrast shows that the city represents a heavenly people, which is to be distinguished from those whose names are also written in the Lamb’s book of life, but whose place is upon earth.

Today the gospel of Christ calls men to a **“heavenly calling”** (Hebrews 3:1). Although the bride of Christ, the church, will return with Him when He comes to earth and will share His Kingdom, her true place and her true inheritance is, where His true place is, in heaven (John 14:1-3; 2Cor. 5:1; Col. 1:5; 1Peter 1:3-4). The Believers present spiritual position of having being raised up together with Christ and seated together with Him in heavenly places where He now is, will then become realised in literal experience (Ephesians 2:4-7).

This is the believer’s full prospect, to be **“with Christ”** (1Thess. 4:17), to be **“like Christ”** (1John 3:2), to **“reign with Christ”** (2Timothy 2:10-12) and to **“serve Christ”** (Revelation 22:3) eternally.

### **Is it not indeed a Grand Thing to be Saved?**

Let us make sure with certainty that we are truly possessors of Eternal Life and **“in Christ”**. Let us recall His words: **“Verily, Verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting Life”; “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me”** (John 6:47; 14:6).