

THE CITY FOUR-SQUARE

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THE BAPTIST HOUR

October 24, 1954

It was nearly sundown on the muddy Pacific island when I crawled out to Sgt. Block and lifted his head to my knee. He was fatally wounded, but as I wiped the blood from his face he asked, "Chaplain, is there anything on the other side? Does death end all?" That fairhaired lad not yet twenty asked the question that is sometimes on the lips of us all: Is there anything else beyond this life?

Is the talk of heaven and hell but the wishful thinking of theologians? If not, do we have any way of knowing what to expect? Our efforts to answer honestly must cut through the sediment of mythology, sentiment, disdain for service in the here and now, and see it as Jesus saw it. Every cradle asks its whence, every casket asks its whither. The most certain fact in life is death.

No subject in religion is more filled with controversy. Man's belief about immortality takes many a divergent path. Some believe that death is the end of the way. They say man, like any other animal, when he passes from the stage of the earth becomes dust from which he was made. Others believe that immortality is but the living on of the good or evil that we do here and now, or I live on only as my children resemble me.

Why Believe?

It has become the fad in many circles today to say, "Let us live one world at a time. Why try to maintain belief in the old-fashioned idea of heaven? After all, what good is reward religion? Why believe in such in this scientific day?" Well, why?

For one thing, the nature of God assures life beyond death. If He made such rare provisions for the body—warmth, shelter, excellent food—would He not make even better accommodation for the soul? Man's dissatisfaction with any other conclusion argues strongly for something more. God did not make something as wonderful as love to have it end by the scissors of death. This magnificent obsession of love leading the way will not stumble and falter in the throes of death. As a matter of fact, life is the only thing in this world that cannot end.

But now we come to the position of Jesus in God's word. All other is but speculation and fanciful theory. This

is fact. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you." And yet, had He not so spoken, those who followed in His path could have seen heaven living within Him. Heaven struck His life like a prism of light. He did what He did because He was what He was. . . . He lived like heaven.

Friends, if we are to receive the blessing which comes from anticipating that glory land, then let us divorce our thinking from the funeral-parlor approach. The saddest chapter in my ministry is that which deals with God's people at the time of death, not because of the fact of death, but because of our attitude. There is little difference between many of God's people and the unregenerate when it comes to the attitude of death.

Did Jesus weep because Lazarus had died or because of the faithlessness of Mary and Martha? Why would Jesus have wept about Lazarus knowing that He would raise him in the next moment? Death is no time for sweet tuberoses, no time for a Christian to despair, no funeral dirge, no "moaning at the bar, no sadness of farewell." We are not like "dumb driven cattle." Jesus talked about it warmly and with the security of His convictions.

What Is Heaven Like?

Many are asking today, "But what is heaven like?" Throughout the Bible there are little seepings of light which teach us something of its likeness. It is a place, a sphere of existence for man's soul; specific, real, an abode for the righteous, not made by hands.

The reason we talk about streets of gold and gates of pearl is that these terms represent rare values on earth, and having no heavenly vocabulary, we use them to describe that place. Childish? Hardly! Just a feeble effort to give essence to that tantalizing promise, "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the mind of any man, what God hath in store for them who love Him."

Nancy sat on her dad's lap that clear night and looking up to the sky of stars she asked, "Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is this beautiful, what will the right side look like?"

Many a child of God has wondered, "Will I know my loved ones there?" I think the very tone of this question suggests how deeply the inroads of

paganism have gone. "Why, we know one another on earth, will heaven be no improvement of this?" Of course we shall know each other, in that way which is above rancor, misunderstanding, and the evils of suspicion. We shall know then even as God knows us now, that is, completely. Love, maintaining its sovereignty, lifts the relationship above the legal. That is why we shall neither marry nor give in marriage in that celestial land.

Will there be degrees of enjoyment and service in heaven? I think that the slightest understanding of the Bible, of logic, and of common sense would answer, "Yes. Yes, there will be degrees." But how could it be heaven if some sort of rank system places one above the other? Let me illustrate it this way:

Here is a man who loved, say, only string music. He had no opportunity to have ever heard a great symphony. But his son, having had the opportunity of studying music of the great masters, cultivated a love not only for the strings, but for the flutes and brasses. Now in heaven, I think the Christians who refused to grow, who just loved only the strings, walked just one mile and never more, that will be the latitude of his reward. But the Christian who digs in for God and serves night and day, who walked the second and third mile, will find himself in a capacity unknown to his one string friend. Neither would be conscious of the other's limitations or latitudes. That is fair. Heaven will know no war, no aging. The trials and droughts, the heartache, the misery, the poverty, ignorance, mysterious . . . all have no part there.

Who Goes There?

Now I come to raise the final question: Who goes there? For whom was heaven prepared? Who is invited to take up permanent residence in the house of God? Just the evangelicals? Just the Protestants? Only the Catholics? Jews or Gentiles or both? Orientals or occidentals? Is heaven for the whites only? Only the poor? The question is, Who goes there? Those who filled out a card and walked the aisle, entered their name on some book list,

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and continued on much as they were before? Who goes to heaven? Those who equate merit by the number of times they sing the doxology, or genuflect, or tithe? I want to honestly know for whom the doors will swing open. The conservative, the liberal, the fundamentalist, the modernist, the pre-millennialist, the a-millennialist? For whom?

Hear me! Heaven is made for only one group: the heavenly!!! That is right! Those who were bought by the blood of Jesus Christ and who have been made over into a heavenly nature. Anyone else would be out of place there. Someone living in his old sins, though going in the name of Christ, would be in hell in heaven, for he has no nature for the place.

All of our dogmas, our pet theories, and favorite prejudices, all of our denominational creeds, all of our childish superstitions and vain presumptions, all of our good intentions and specious conversions will fall flat as flounders if they do not give rise to the Christ-like life within us. "Tis heaven below my Redeemer to know." And "He that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of His." Heaven is for the heavenly. The list of the excluded can be read with tearful agony in the book of Revelation.

Are You Going?

So, that leaves the poignant question: Are you going there? Is this celestial land your home? That answer is up to you, and it is a present reality whether you belong there or not. Eternal life begins the moment you accept Christ as your personal Saviour; that assurance of your destiny is the one basis of a sustaining faith.

Jimmy had been blind from birth. At last the hour came when the skilled surgeon told the mother she could remove a part of the bandage to let in a little light. After seeing the world for the first time, Jimmy said, "But Mommy, why didn't you tell me it was so beautiful?" She said, "Son, I tried to." And when we first glimpse that city foursquare we will shout the question, "But, Jesus, why didn't you tell us it was so beautiful?" and He will answer, "I tried to."

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