

Baptist hour messages



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HEAVEN'S TRIO OF SURPRISES

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There is a lot of guesswork about who is going to heaven! Hours of speculation reams of paper, and endless debate in sermon and conversation prove the dimensions of this guesswork. Some believe that all will go to heaven while others believe that none will, since theirs is the conviction that there is no heaven. Human judgments, one of the other, leave so much to be desired that we must begin this sermon with some authority far more trustworthy than human opinion.

SOME I DIDN'T EXPECT

I believe among my biggest surprises in heaven will be the people whom I didn't expect to get there. There are some people in our world whom I have come to know personally who are seemingly devoid of natural piety. Try as hard as they will, to wear the garb of external righteousness to them is out of the question. There is no display of self-righteousness among them. Herein is a grave danger for many religious folks: that we should pass sentence on the impious, indiscrete man who rough of appearance, and uncouth of speech as being outside the fold of salvation. It is true that oftentimes he is, but externals are not the index of whether one is saved or not. One should think of the crude people who came to Jesus—people who seemed the farthest removed from temple niceties. Yet, Jesus made it undoubtedly clear that they would go into the kingdom ahead of the Pharisees who had perfected religious niceties, but who were not perfected within their hearts.

Yes, up there I shall be surprised to find some folks who down on earth never gave the impression that this was their future destiny. Not that it is a guessing game as to who and how one goes there, but that God, not man, is the judge in the final disposition of the soul. What we call human evidence may be little more than the feverish efforts by which we impress one another rather than God. My, what soul assurance there comes by knowing that God looks upon the heart and that deep down in some people who know a minimum about righteousness is a lot of solid good. In his system of values, Jesus rated a good man far above that of a righteous man. The two can be one and the same; but they are not necessarily the same. One's real character may be a far cry from his reputation.

What is often overlooked is that the best of people still are in human flesh. These mortal gifts are in earthen vessels anyway you care to reason it and such being the case, we shall always have that inner civil war waging between flesh and spirit, life and death, God and Satan. So to play the role of puritanical judge is to play the role of the fool. Sometimes a truly good person commits an unquestionably evil deed. Perhaps not in some premeditated way, but did it nonetheless.

For instance, I have always contended that a person who commits suicide could hardly be in his rational mind: Do not misunderstand me: no person ever has the right to take his own life for the poignant

reason that it is not his to take. Many a good person becomes victimized by the morass of circumstances—circumstances often not of his own design nor control. Under these harrowing necessities life is squeezed into a death-dealing corner and suicide becomes the lot. Now. Will God judge the person on the basis of his thought and conduct while he was rational or for the one act committed, though fatal, during his mental fiasco? I think a sense of fairness and understanding of what Jesus would do would have to argue in favor of the former question. Some people will wind up in heaven because they couldn't quite make themselves known or understood on earth.

CRITICAL OF OTHERS

Wouldn't it be an interesting pastime to wonder how much of the wickedness that we see in people is little more than a projection of the wickedness in ourselves? Are we able to recognize all these wrong things in other people's lives because we have known and seen them so long in our own lives? Few things are better indices of one's own nature than those that he deems ridiculous in others. Let us beware of our preachments, our holy outlooks, lest we indict someone less innocent than we or worst still, parade our shortcomings on the public clothes line of hyper-criticism.

A friend of mine was a volunteer for foreign mission service when I was just a young boy. While attending graduate school her hearing became impaired to the point where she had to give up her cherished plans to serve God as a foreign missionary. Next came impairment of eyesight and the necessity of leaving school. She returned home to the little countryside and went through her years of silent embitterment and then came back to rededicate her all there on the home field. After having married and over the years many children were born, debts piled up, and her presence in church became a bit irregular. Then a new pastor came to town and not knowing her background, used her one day as a sermon illustration on how not to be a Christian. His words were cutting and accusing—little knowing that she had offered her all to God on the altar of selflessness. The point is: we can never know all the facts and should with-

hold our hurting cant even if it marks us as being dumb. There will be people in heaven whom I didn't expect to be there.

SOME I THOUGHT WOULD GO

While some have no gift for righteousness or its display, many folks have a very pronounced gift. With great facility they speak the language of Zion. Praying . . . often in public . . . comes easily to them. Quoting the Bible in easy rote, they impress you as having the ring of the real. Theirs is a respectability beyond repute, standing without question, affiliation with the finest. Yes, Jesus had to admit that these things, while being of value, will never save us. His question keeps coming up, "Have you been born again?"

Think of the millions who on this Lord's Day are standing in the vestibule, without ever going down to the altar where the real drama of time and eternity is being reenacted by surrendering souls and penitent hearts. "By this shall all men know them. . ." This what? This fruit of spirit, this Christlikeness in purpose, this unyielding to the claims of Satan, this walking beyond the required distance.

Remember what He said about those who would come up to the portals of heaven and recite their old catechism of accomplishments on earth. The money they had given, the time spent in church, the sacrifices made in the cause of community betterment . . . all these? And the answer given by the Doorkeeper was a soul-chilling, finality: "Depart from me, ye who work iniquity, I never knew you." Wouldn't most people in the day of Jesus have voted for Judas Iscariot? Why, of course they would have! He was one of the inner twelve, the treasurer, the only Judean and for all respectable purposes, apparently a righteous man. Now from our hindsight of history, we know that his external show and mask merely covered an inner character which had no sympathies with what Christ was trying to do. Oh, what frightful consideration that it is possible for us to be in the inner circle. . . yea, in God's own house, and yet be lost!

What about the times when we gave our friends the benefits of the doubts about their own soul . . . just because we liked them and they were our friends? Those times when we had a way of overlooking

the earmarks of a degenerate life; but will God? Hardly! The big surprise in heaven will be an aching absence of many folks who on earth certainly gave the impression that they would be in heaven without fail.

BIGGEST SURPRISE

Briefly, I will tell you the third and biggest surprise that I shall find in heaven: that I got there! This confession is no mock humility . . . but a statement of honest facts . . . by which I mean simply, that whether or not I get there isn't the point. I settled that point a long time ago . . . in fact when I was twelve years old . . . but the simple fact that it is so incredible. No, the final judgment is not to determine whether or not we shall be saved, but the degree of reward or punishment . . . The fact of eternal life begins here and now and those who have been twice born are now indisputable candidates for that eternal city. Let there be no doubt about it! Jesus made this point as clear as a morning sky after a rainfall.

But just to think: that mankind—this strange makeup of atoms, protons and neutrons . . . this chemical equation of flesh and blood could somehow by God's fashioning be made into an image for eternal life with God. That seems incredible doesn't it. Of one thing I am quite sure, that there is nothing in the nature of God that requires human association to complete it. Yet, God being a creator of creative love has made this provision for man, not for Himself. No, I am not depreciating human nature I am just trying to understand it and put it in its rightful place. Wondering why God

worked this miracle for human salvation is as futile as trying to understand how the dew appears. But just as I can feel the dew's presence, I can accept this profound truth of God's provision. To think that anyone person could live eternally with God is a fact to confound us yet to encourage our anticipation since it is doubtless true.

I close the message with another man's words:

"My life is a wearisome journey;
I am tired of the dust and the heat;
The rays of the sun beat upon me,
And the briars are all around my feet.
But the city to which I am going
Will amply the trials repay,
And the toils of the road will seem nothing
When I get to the end of the way.

There are so many hills to climb upward,
That often I am weary for rest;
But he who appoints me my pathway
Knows just what is needful and best.
I know in His word He has promised
That my strength shall be as my day;
And the toils of the road will seem nothing
When I come to the end of the way.
He loves me too much to forget me,
Or give me one trial too much;
All of his children have been dearly
purchased.
But Satan can never say as much.
By and by I shall see and praise Him
In the land of unending day,
And the toils of the road shall seem nothing
When I get to the end of the way."

And that is no surprise.

FEET ONLY

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Scripture: John 13: 2-9

As He walked into the room He knew something was wrong. The air was strained with emotion; feelings were worn on their sleeves inasmuch that the men sitting there had dispensed with the common niceties akin to good manners. Jesus looked about Him in that upper room to see a

group of Apostles arguing among themselves as to order of rank, privilege and precedence. On this last night together Christ had counted to cement the bond of true affection 'twixt him and them into one indissoluble tie.

Their last night together: my, what a time for the right atmosphere, for under-