

A PROMISE TO THE FAITHFUL

Does the Bible teach that all believers will get to reign with Christ? Does it matter whether we train for heavenly rule? Will everyone inherit the kingdom equally? Will all the saints share an equal honor at the marriage supper of the Lamb?

God has always reserved special rewards for those who are most faithful. When Israel left Egypt, the nation had been redeemed by God. At least a remnant of those who died in the desert, as far as we know will be in heaven. They were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; they experienced redemption from Egypt. And, yet they died without entering into the fullness of God's promise; they missed Canaan. The land was a promise of additional blessing for those who were faithful. Of the older generation, only Joshua and Caleb qualified!

Even Moses was excluded from the land of Canaan because of his disobedience. He will be in heaven, but he forfeited his earthly inheritance. In the Old Testament it was possible to be regenerate, belong to God, and still miss out on the extra blessing of inheritance. Salvation was a gift through faith, but the added blessing was dependent on obedience.

Today, we are not concerned about entering into the land of Canaan, but the same principle applies. Just as some did not enter into the land - and yet made it to heaven, even so some will be in heaven - but without experiencing the fullness of reward. Rewards are always dependent on faithfulness.

Paul made it clear that slaves were to serve their masters as they would serve Christ. If they were devoted, - the Lord would give them *the reward of the inheritance*. Some would accept his challenge; possible others did not.

Colossians 3:23-25, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism (without partiality)."

Slaves could accept unjust wages with the assurance that Christ would personally reward them for their faithfulness. Of course, if they could better their position, that would be acceptable, but they lived in a culture where there was no opportunity to redress the wrongs. But if slaves served their masters as if they were Christ, Christ would reward them. Their reward was dependent on their works!

All believers have God as their inheritance, - but there is another inheritance, an additional one given to those who are faithful. All believers will get to be heirs, but they will not inherit the same things. Christ made the same point to His disciples.

Matthew 19:28-29, "Jesus said to them, `I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."

Imagine the payback! To leave father and mother - for the sake of Christ is to receive "*many times as much*" and "*to inherit eternal life.*" Eternal life is a gift given to those who believe on Christ, but the expression "*inherit eternal life*" refers to an additional acquisition, something more than simply arriving in heaven. It refers to a richer experience of being appointed by Christ to be in charge of the affairs of the cosmos as a ruler or judge. Salvation is guaranteed to those who accept Christ by faith; rewards are not. Entering heaven is one thing, having a possession there is quite another. One is the result of faith; the other, the reward for faith **plus obedience.**

The Bible is a realistic book. It does not assume that all believers will be faithful. Indeed, there are many examples of unfaithfulness of believers. Many true Christians have buckled under persecution given in to laziness, doing what only what is convenient in life circum to fleshly desires, or seduced by temptations of one kind or another.

God's Word promises those believers who are obedient and faithful to Christ, living an overcoming life, will reign with Him As Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:12, "*If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us.*" In the Revelation it says, "*To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations* (Revelation 2:26).

Some Christians will not get to rule with Christ and some will rule over a lesser territory. Remember the parable of the talents? The servant who was unfaithful servant had his talent taken away from him and given to another. While others reigned over cities, he did not. All that he could ever hope for was to be admitted into the kingdom; he could never inherit its most prized positions.

WEDDING PREPARATIONS

We are presently, in this Christian life, *engaged* to Christ, however, someday we will be *married* to Him. The Bible gives a rather detailed description of the "*marriage supper of the Lamb*" (Revelation 19:9) - for which we must be properly dressed. At any wedding, those attending are always interested in what the bride is wearing. The style of the dress and the choice of flowers and veil are all the focus of attention. We read in Revelation 19:7-9, "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)*"

Notice the phrase, "*The righteous acts of the saints.*" What are these righteous acts? Certainly these "*righteous acts*" act are not the same as the acts that declared us justified before God; I cannot stress too often that we did not work for the garments of righteousness that Christ gave us. These are different garments.

In order to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb, we need two different suits of clothes. The first is the righteousness of Christ, the gift which admits us into heaven. This is a free set of clothes, the garments by which we are ushered into heaven's courts. "*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

But the second suit of clothes is a wedding garment for the marriage supper. This suit is

not the righteous of Christ, but, rather, it is the deeds we have done for Christ while living on earth. Christ has made us ready for heaven; we must make ourselves ready for the wedding feast. We must distinguish between what only God can do and that which we can have a part in doing.

What are we doing today? We are sewing the garments that we will wear at the marriage supper of the Lamb. We are making sure that we will not be so scantily clad that we shall be ashamed. John warns, "*And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.*" (1 John 2:28).

If you ask how do these garments became so "*while and clean?*" The answer is that our imperfect works are made perfect in the sight of God through Christ Jesus. God takes what we do, and if it is done for Him, these deeds are made white and clean. A woman died who was faithful to Christ throughout her long life. Her pastor tells how that one day - when he had stopped by to see her, her face was flush with tears. She apologized for crying, explaining, "*You caught me in the middle of my prayer time for my family.*" I believe she was sewing a garment for the wedding; my suspicion is that she will be well clothed at the marriage supper.

The purpose of our trials and temptations - is to train us for ruling with Christ. We are learning the laws of the kingdom, responding in faithful obedience. We are given the opportunity of becoming overcomers so that we might inherit the promises. "*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*" (2 Corinthians 4:17). If you placed all of your trials on one end of a scale and the eternal weight of glory on the other, The scale would simply go "*plunk*" . . . the glory side would go all the way down. Your trials, all together, are the weight of a feather - versus a cubic foot of gold!

I heard of a family who lost both of their children to prolonged and severe battles with cancer. And now, the father himself is down to 125 pounds, expected to die at any time of the same disease. What is God's purpose in all of this? It is to increase the eternal joy of the saints. Not the present joy, to be sure, for the moment seems to be utterly divesting, but *we can only become overcomers when there is something that must be overcome!*

We want life to be smooth, secure, uninterrupted. God has a different agenda. He is purifying us, - testing us, training us so that we might be presented to Him as a pure church, ready to take our place sitting next to Christ on His throne. The English preacher Spurgeon wrote: "*O Blessed axe of sorrow that cuts a pathway to my God by chopping down the tall trees of human comfort.*"

Our desire to pass our test and receive Christ's approval is not prideful but, rather, it motivates us to worship a God who would be so generous with His undeserving children. We can only wonder at Christ's gracious words: "*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*" (Luke 12:32). The idea that we should reign with God's Son is not ours, it is His. God's desire is to display His wonder and grace throughout all of eternity, "*In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*" (Ephesians 2:7)

In the next lessons we will study in more detail what it means to "*suffer lose.*" I will attempt to answer the question of what it might be like to enter into heaven minus the rewards reserved for the faithful.

We will learn that if we are unwilling to suffer loss for Christ in this life, we will surely suffer loss in the live to come. Let us examine our hearts lest we be among those who do not hear Christ's "*Well done.*"