

# The Doctrine of the Last Things

from *Great Doctrines of the Bible* by William Evans

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## **THE FINAL REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS.**

If, says the Apostle Paul, in this present life we have a hope resting on Christ, and nothing more, we are more to be pitied than all the rest of the world (1 Cor. 15:19). The idea is that if this hope in Christ which the believer has is a delusive hope, with no prospect of fulfillment in the future, the Christian is indeed in a sad state. He has chosen a life of self-denial; he will not indulge in the pleasures of the world, and if there are no pleasures in the darkness into which he is about to enter, then he has miscalculated, he has chosen a life that shall end in self-obliteration. If he has no home to go to, no God to welcome him, no King to say, "Well done, exchange mortality for life," then he is indeed in a pitiable plight. But such is not the case. The hope of the Christian enters beyond the veil, into the very presence of God Himself, and endures throughout all the eternities.

## **I. THE CHRISTIAN NEVER DIES.**

1 John 8:51—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." 11:25, 26—"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

What Jesus means here is not that the believer shall not pass through the experience that we call death, but that in reality it is not death, at least, not in the sense in which it is death to the unbeliever. Jesus has taken the sting out of death. How sharply the contrast between death and the experience through which the believer passes is presented in 1 Thess. 4:13, 14—"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Jesus "died"—He tasted the awfulness of death; the believer in Him "falls asleep." Cf. John 11:11—"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." We have no ground in these words for the modern doctrine of soul-sleeping. Christ did not mean to say that the soul is unconscious between the time of death and the resurrection. For, when the disciples did not understand His *figurative* language, He told them *plainly*, "Lazarus is dead" (11:11-15). What Jesus meant was that death is something like that

which takes place when we go to sleep. What takes place when we go to sleep? Surely the current of life does not cease, but flows on, and when we awake we feel better and stronger than before. There is a shutting out of all the scenes of the world and time. Just so it is in the case of the believer's death. Three ideas are contained in the word "sleep": continued existence,—for the mind is active even though the body is still; repose—we lose our hold on and forget the things of the world; wakening—we always think of sleep as followed by awakening.

The word "see" in John 8:51 means that the believer shall not gaze at death protractedly, steadily, exhaustively. Death is not the objective of his gaze. The believer's outlook is that of life not death. The death of the body is to be reckoned no more as death than the life of the body is life (1 Tim. 5:6). The believer's back is turned upon death; he faces and gazes upon life. The temporary separation of the soul and body does not even interrupt, much less impair, the eternal life given by Jesus.

## **II. THE BELIEVER GOES TO BE WITH CHRIST.**

2 Cor. 5:6, R.V.—"Being therefore always of good courage, and knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." Phil. 1:23, R.V.—"But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better."

The experience (death-sleep) through which the believer passes ushers him at once into the presence of Christ. It takes him instantly to be "at home" with the Lord. Surely there can be no hint of unconsciousness or the sleeping of the soul in these words. It would seem from Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 that some kind of spiritual body is given to the believer during the period of his waiting for the resurrection body. What Paul longs for is not to be in a bodiless state, but to put on another body which shall not be subject to death. "At home with the Lord"—that is what "death" (?) means to the believer.

## **III. THE BODY OF THE BELIEVER IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD.**

See under the [Resurrection of the Dead](#) for the full discussion of the believer's resurrection body, its characteristics, etc.

## **IV. THE BELIEVER SHALL RECEIVE HIS FINAL REWARD IN THE FUTURE.**

1 Matt. 25:20-23—"And so he that had received five talents came and

brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

Luke 19:12-19.—"He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities."

Matthew 24 exhorts us to watch and wait for Christ's coming; chapter 25 shows us how we may obey this exhortation. Chapter 25 illustrates to us, in the parable of the Virgins (v. 1-13) the necessity of caring for the inward spiritual life; while the parable of the Talents (v. 14-30), emphasizes the necessity of activity for Christ while awaiting His return.

While both parables deal with the matter of the rewarding of the saints, they nevertheless present the subject from different viewpoints. The parable of the Pounds was delivered before the entry into Jerusalem; that of the Talents, three days after; the Pounds, to the multitudes; the Talents, to the disciples. The Pounds was given because the people thought that the kingdom would immediately appear, hence the idea of a long journey. In the Pounds there is opposition to Christ; in the Talents, none. In the Talents unequal sums are multiplied in the same proportion; in the Pounds, equal sums in differed proportions. The parable of the Pounds was uttered to repress impatience; that of the Talents, to stimulate activity until Christ should return.

The talents are distributed not capriciously but according to each man's ability to handle them. He who had five talents was able to use five, and was therefore held responsible for the use of this number; so with the two, and the one. The question is not so much "How many talents have I received," but "To what use am I putting them?" The rewards for faithfulness are the same in each case—"Be thou ruler over many cities." In the parable of the Pounds it is different. All start out with the same number of pounds. As men differ in their use of them, in their fidelity, zeal and labor, so they differ in spiritual gains and rewards (ten cities, five cities). The reward of the believer will be in proportion to the faithfulness of his service for God with the use of the talents with which God has endowed him. The rewards therefore will differ according to the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of our service and life.

Faith in Jesus Christ saves the believer, but his position in the future life together with the measure of his reward will depend upon his faithfulness in the use of the gifts with which he has been endowed by God. Thus it comes to pass that a man may be saved "yet so as by fire," i.e., saved because of his faith in Christ, but minus his reward. See 1 Cor. 3:10-15—"In discharge of the task which God graciously entrusted to me, I—like a competent master-builder—have laid a foundation, and others are building upon it. But let every one be careful how and what he builds. For no one can lay any other foundation in addition to that which is already laid, namely, Jesus Christ. And whether the building which anyone is erecting on that foundation be of gold or silver or costly stones, of timber or hay or straw—the true character of each individual's work will become manifest. For the day of Christ will disclose it, because that day is soon to come upon us clothed in fire, and as for the quality of every one's work—the fire is the thing which will test it. If any one's work—the building which he has erected—stands the test, he will be rewarded. If any one's work is burned up, he will suffer the loss of it; yet he will himself be rescued, but only, as it were, by passing through the fire." (Translation from *Weymouth's New Testament*.) While this passage has its primary reference, probably, to Christian teachers and preachers, and touches the matter of doctrines that are taught, it nevertheless has a fitting and true application to the life and work of every believer.

## **V. THE NATURE OF THE BELIEVER'S REWARD.**

### **1. HE SHALL RECEIVE A CROWN.**

The Scriptures speak of a number of crowns: The Crown of *Life* (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10, compare context which speaks of

death); of *Glory* (1 Pet. 5:4; cf. John 17:22; Heb. 2:9); of *Righteousness* (2 Tim. 4:8), the full realization of the imputed and inwrought righteousness of Christ; of *Rejoicing* (1 Thess. 2:19), at the sight of converts that have been won by one's ministry for Christ; of *Gold* (Rev. 4:4); *Incorruptible* (1 Cor. 9:25), as compared with the perishable crowns of the Greek games; *Thy* crown (Rev. 3:11), that which is laid up for you, and which should not be lost by unfaithfulness; the summing up of all the previous expressions—all are characteristic of "thy" crown.

## **2. THE SEVEN "OVERCOMES" IN REVELATION (cc. 2, 3).**

### **a) 2:7—"Eat of the Tree of Life, Which is in the Midst of the Paradise of God."**

The tree of life, which has been practically unmentioned since Genesis 3, where it was lost through sin, is here restored in accordance with the restitution of all things in Christ. This figure expresses participation in life eternal—the believer shall die no more.

### **b) 2:11—"Shall Not be Hurt of the Second Death."**

He who is born but once—"of the flesh"—dies twice: physically, and eternally. He (the believer) who is born twice—"of the flesh" and "of the spirit"—dies but once; that is, he passes through only that physical dissolution of soul and body which is called death. The "second death" means, to say the least, utter exclusion from the presence of God. To say that the believer shall not be hurt of the second death is equivalent to saying that he shall eternally behold the face of the Father which is in heaven.

### **c) 2:17—He shall Receive a "Stone with a New Name Written" Thereon; To the Believer also will be Given to Eat of the "Hidden Manna."**

This figure may mean that to the believer is given the white stone of acquittal. In courts of justice in those days a black stone was given to the condemned. Reference may here be made to the white stone (diamond?) which was not among the stones in the high priest's ephod, and thought by some to be the Urim and Thummim. The partaking of the hidden manna may refer to the fact that they who had resisted the eating of meat offered in sacrifice to idols would, as a reward, be allowed to feast on the bread of God, the divine food. The new name mentioned may stand for a new nature and character which the believer will possess in that new country.

**d) 2:26, 27—Authority Over the Nations.**

There is doubtless a reference here to the reign of the saints with the Lord Jesus Christ on the millennial earth. Those that have suffered with Him shall also reign with Him.

**e) 3:4, 5—He Shall Be "Arrayed in White Garments," and His Name Shall in No Wise be Blotted Out of the Book of Life.**

"White garments" undoubtedly refers to the righteousness of the saints. In the Old Testament days to be blotted out of the book of life meant to forfeit the privileges of the Theocracy—to be shut out forever from God's favor. Here the certainty of the believer's eternal security is assured. Christ will rejoice over him and gladly confess that He knows him as one who belonged to Him and served and confessed Him on the earth.

**f) 3:12—The Believer Will Be a Pillar in the Temple of God; He Shall Go Out No More; God Will Write Upon Him His Own New Name.**

Philadelphia, the place in which was situated the church to whom these words were written, was subject to earthquakes, and quite frequently the massive pillars of the temple were shattered. It shall not be so with the believer—he shall never be moved. He will go in and out no more—no possibility of falling then. He will have the name of God written upon him—no danger of anyone else making claim to him. Then the believer's period of probation will have passed away; he shall have a permanent and eternal place in the kingdom of the Father.

**g) 3:21, R.V.—"I Will Give to Him to Sit Down With Me in My Throne."**

Not "on" or "upon" but "in" my throne. Christ will exalt us with Himself. James and John wanted to sit by Christ's side in the coming kingdom. Here is something infinitely better—to sit with Him in His throne.

**VI. THE BELIEVER WILL ENTER INTO A NEW CONDITION AND ABODE OF LIFE.**

**1. A NEW SPHERE OF LIFE FOR THE SAINTS.**

New Heavens and a new Earth: Paradise regained; new spiritual environment; new physical conditions. Not surrounded by the temptations and defects of this mortal life. "No more sea"—to the Jew a symbol of unmingled peril, trouble, and restlessness.

## 2. A NEW HOME FOR THE SAINTS.

Rev. 21-22:5—A picture of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which is to be the final and eternal abode of the people of God.

Within the New Heavens and on the New Earth is the Holy City. Note some characteristics of the Holy City: Its *Name*: New Jerusalem—what music to the ear of the Jew, who for so long had been without a city of his own! Its *Walls* (21:17): high, secure, safe against all assaults. Its *Gates* (21:15, 21): guarded by angels; names on gates; only saints enter. Its *Foundations* (v.14): the Apostles of the Lamb; lustrous (18). Its *Citizens*: of the nations that are saved (citizens' characteristics 21:6, 7; 22:14, R.V.; contrast with 21:8, 27). Its *Magnitude*: 4800 stadia (the earthly Jerusalem being but 33 stadia). Its *Glory* (11-23): what costliness!

## 3. NEW CONDITIONS OF LIFE FOR THE REDEEMED.

God's home is there (21:3); thus the believer has uninterrupted communion with God. Some things that used to be have all passed away: death, mourning, curse, tears, sorrow, night—all have gone. New created things appear: the river of life, the tree of life, new service, new relationships, new light (22:4).

"And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:"

"And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia."

"And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great."

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Rev. 19:1, 4-7.