Part A: Salvation, Part B: Judgment, Part C: The Ages to Come

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B-4: What Purpose this Life on Earth?

Sharing the Good News

A passage, oft-quoted in this study, states, *"God… will render to each one according to his deeds… for there is no partiality with God."* (Romans 2:6,11) Several other Scriptures have similar themes, that Earth's inhabitants will be rewarded in the Afterlife according to their works. If these be true, and if, as brought out in previous posts, souls may be granted a "second chance" in the Afterlife, then why bother trying to reach them now in this life with the Good News?

Some analogies from modern life may help to view this question from a better perspective and to avoid jumping to conclusions on this issue: refugees from a war-torn country finding citizenship in a prosperous, peaceful country; lucrative job openings given to desperately poor, unemployed people; scholarships granted to disadvantaged student; a swimmer rescued from drowning by a lifeguard.

Those on the receiving end of such opportunities are extremely grateful, and those engaged in helping such people also derive a great deal of satisfaction from their work; both sides benefit from these efforts and are blessed.

In a sense, all of humanity, without Christ, are like these destitute and deprived individuals. They are as thirsty travelers, wandering through the spiritual desert of this world. And when we share the Good News with

others, we are giving them a priceless opportunity to find newness and abundance of life.

There is much joy and satisfaction to all parties involved, both for those who reach out and for those who are reached. And not just here on Earth, but in the Heavenly Realm also, God and those who dwell there experience great satisfaction. *"There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* (Luke 15:10, NIV) Sharing the Good News of God's Love is a win-win-win situation.

In the example of the refugees, upon entering their new country, such persons will find their lives becoming prosperous, safe, and abundant. But if they are denied entrance, then they must continue in a war-torn situation and may end up getting killed, or else continue to suffer deprivation and misery.

Many seekers are living in spiritual deprivation and misery. They are desperate for answers, and unless they get them, unless they find entrance into the Kingdom, will be left to wander in a spiritual desert for the remainder of their lives. They need urgently what Christ has to offer – not off in some distant future, but <u>now</u> in this earthly life.

And if they cannot get it now, then there is apt to be great loss and suffering. Perhaps someone on the verge of suicide will be pushed over the brink because no one went to the trouble to comfort him or her with the Good News.

There are countless testimonies of people who were desperate to know the Lord and were unspeakably grateful to have found Him – in <u>this</u> life (rather than having to wait for the next). Someone took the trouble to share the Good News in some form, and that saved someone else from having to endure a lifetime of emptiness and sorrow – or even a lifetime in some dismal region of the Nether World. Or it saved someone from having to learn things in the next life when they could have learned them in this life through faithful and concerned guides and teachers.

No one likes to fall behind, and we do a great service to others when we work to give them a headstart, to enrich and advance their lives by sharing with them the Good News. They can begin *"storing up treasure for*

themselves, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life." **(1Tiimothy 6:19, ESV) They have the power to enact God's will more energetically. As a result they have opportunity to lay a good foundation for the future and end up better prepared for life in the Heavenly Realm.**

But when we fail to advance others' lives, God's Word warns us that we are apt to feel the guilt of having neglected to be the kind of guide to others that we could have been. (Ezekiel 3:17-21) People are responsible for their own choices, but providing God's guidance is important. *"He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."* (James 5:20) And of course, there is great reward when we do try to help and guide others in the way of righteousness: *"those who turn many to righteousness* [shall shine] *like the stars forever and ever."* (Daniel 12:3)

So, even though we may understand that there is such a thing as salvation in the next life, that should not minimize the urgency of reaching others in this life with God's message for them, whatever it may be. That is, there is no need to catastrophize, worrying that some dear loved one who doesn't seems so receptive to the Good News will be forever lost in Hell. But neither should we minimize our obligation and responsibility to do whatever we can to reach out to others with the Good News of the Kingdom.

Jesus compared entrance into the Kingdom of God to that of being *"born again". "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3,7) To be born again means entering into a new world, a new life. When this happens, a wonderful transformation takes place: *"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* (2Corinthians 5:17)

When we experience this transformation known as Salvation, God answers the seeking heart and, through the working of the Holy Spirit, gives our lives a boost in the right direction. Like some kind of magical experience, Christ's presence in a life causes a person to graduate into a new reality. That touch divine frees the soul from its imprisonment in the material realm and its old ways. The Holy Spirit supplies that contact with the supernatural that kickstarts a life and sends it forward, brings

freedom from old ways, and sends it forward with new direction, purpose, and positive orientation.

Jesus taught that Salvation means one *"has passed from death into life"*. (John 5:24, 1John 3:14) A person gains that wonderful assurance that he or she is a citizen of the Kingdom of God – no more uncertainty of "what will happen to me when I die?" And in addition to Heaven hereafter, in the present also, we have a touch of that heavenly life to come in our hearts.

Another point to keep in mind: The very fact that a person recognizes who Christ is, is pleasing to God. When Peter declared, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,"* Jesus answered, *"Blessed are you… for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 16:16-17)

And this is a big part of what pleases God – when one of His creations honors Christ and seeks to connect with Him through His Son, who is the Mediator between God and humankind. To the Father this is a grand step of faith from His creations in the earthly realm, showing both courage and submission, and in itself worthy of the reward of acceptance into the Kingdom.

We may wonder, of course, why would anyone not want to engage with the Most High? But whoever is *"practicing evil"* and *"hates the light"* and doesn't want that *"his deeds should be exposed"*, they have their reasons. (John 3:20)

Many in the world, however, have not come to Christ, not because of *"practicing evil"*, but simply because of not having the opportunity to find out about Him. Yet in a veiled sort of way, they have engaged with the Almighty – by following the *"true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world"* (John 3:9), or by following their conscience (often described as God's presence in man).

We might consider the example of Nathanael of whom Jesus said, *"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"* (John 1:47) Nathanael was already a lover of the Light and a doer of truth, and even if he had never met Jesus, he likely would have continued in that path. But his

encounter and association with Christ quickened the process; he grew much faster and his life became a much greater influence by his having met the Savior. Christ is referred to as a life-giving or *"quickening spirit".* (1Corinthians 15:45, KJV)

Thus, it is to anyone's advantage to have the life-giving spirit of Christ dwelling in him or her. God wants people to *"have life… more abundantly"* – in this life, not just the next. (John 10:10) And the fullest expression of God's presence in a life comes from receiving Christ who also bestows the Holy Spirit to empower that life with guidance and overflowing love.

The Holy Spirit *"dwells with you and will be in you,"* Christ told His disciples. The Holy Spirit, sent by Christ and the Father, is that aspect of the "lofty" Godhead that has been made available to us "lowly" human beings. Through Christ the human-divine relationship is transformed so that human beings are no longer estranged. We are reconciled to God; we can become true *"sons and daughters"* of God and *"joint heirs with Christ"*. (2Corinthians 6:18, Romans 8:17)

Although God is the Almighty – transcendent, lofty, and beyond our finite understanding – yet He is also indwelling and personal. *"Thus says the High and Lofty One… 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit.'"* (Isaiah 57:15) And that special aspect of the Godhead (His dwelling with humankind) was expressed in the First Coming of Jesus Christ and will be expressed in ever greater fullness in His Second Coming. To have the honor of engaging in a personal relationship with such a Being is surely the greatest blessing and privilege imaginable.

How can we then not want to share this precious information with others? And by doing so, we not only bless them and society in general, but find that we ourselves also are blessed. These are the payoffs for making the effort to share the Good News. Why would we want to deprive anyone, and ourselves, of such a great blessing?

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Citizens of the Kingdom

Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not

> **to snatch people away from earth to heaven, but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about. (N. T. Wright*, Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*)**

Life is a journey. When someone is *"born again"*, that simply marks the end of stage one in the journey. The search for God, His Incarnation, Ultimate Truth, Creator of the Universe, etc. has ended. And our souls can rest in that reassurance and knowledge. But the journey continues. God is ever moving and always has something new up His sleeve. And to stay vibrant and alive, we cannot afford to abandon that searching mindset of the seeker.

> **Our salvation is… just the beginning, the entry point. It's what brings us into the kingdom of God, into relationship with Him—a relationship which encompasses our earthly life and then continues on throughout eternity…**
>
> **That entrance into the kingdom means our eternal life starts now. We are becoming who we will be in eternity…**
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> **Life in the kingdom is not limited to our after-death future; it's also relevant to today. Living in the kingdom of God means pursuing God's reign in our lives, aligning our will with His, and endeavoring to trust Him for every aspect of our lives. Living the kingdom of God is being in deep, personal, and interactive relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—now and forever.**
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> **(from "The Kingdom of God," *Jesus His Life and Message Directors' Corner,* 21 July 2015)**

Jesus once said, *"I am come that they might have life… more abundantly"*. (John 10:10) Not a life of misery followed by an abundant life in Heaven, but abundant life in the here and now. His intention is for mankind to prosper during this life.

Nor was this abundant life confined to spiritual life, but it was to extend to physical life as well. We often think of that in terms of personal prosperity. But it is more comprehensive; Jesus expected His followers to work to bring prosperity to others – both spiritually and physically.

And so it is no surprise that, in most of the world's trouble spots, dedicated Christian workers and organizations are in the majority, leading the way to alleviate the sufferings of war, disease, poverty, and natural disasters. Godly men and women all over the world are working to establish better health and safety habits, to fight against environmental pollution, to bring peace to societies instead of war, to strive for the uplift of the poor and downtrodden, and the list could go on and on.

In other words, they are doing what the Lord's prayer exhorts, *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* (Matthew 6:10) We are supposed to be preparing now for what's coming – when Heaven and Earth will merge, when *"the dwelling place of God is with man"*, and *"He will dwell with them."* (Revelation 21:3, ESV) God needs those who can labor to advance the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Those who know Christ intimately have resolved the burdensome issue of life-after-death anxieties; and with the help of the Holy Spirit, they are better equipped to wage war against the powers of Darkness that rule the Earth.

And furthermore, just because salvation can happen in the Afterlife, does not mean we can neglect the business of guiding people towards salvation in this life now. There is so much misery and emptiness that people are suffering from now that God would like to undo… but He needs us to reach out to them.

So, even though we understand that humankind's future will see a great new Age of Peace established on Earth, that doesn't mean we can ignore the task of bringing that future Age into the present. It is already here in our hearts. *"The kingdom of God is within you… The kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Luke 17:21, Matthew 3:2, 4:17) And God's people should be laboring diligently, in whatever way they can, to establish God's Kingdom on Earth.

Regrettably however, there are some misguided elements in the Christian world who are doing just the opposite – fomenting wars, promoting intolerance, persecuting less established religious groups. Jesus foresaw the rise of these distorted practices and teachings that would arise among those claiming, falsely, to be operating under His name:

> ***"The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service… because they have not known the Father nor Me… But all these things*** **[persecution]** ***they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me."*** **(John 16:2-3, 15:21)**

Some of these evildoers may have come to the Lord at some point in their lives but turned away, abusing the name of Christ to further their own agendas; they have their reward. And we will look more into that subject later – the "hell in heaven" feature mentioned in the title of this study.

Although Christ's coming has brought salvation with its wonderful present joys and glorious hopes for the future, it is helpful to keep in mind the sober warnings that He gave on the need to maintain an active conscience toward God – rather than a lethargic, take-it-for-granted attitude. Familiarity with God's goodness can breed contempt and hardening of the conscience.

In Christian culture there exists a common pitfall of getting familiar with God's goodness. We understand so much about the grace of God and forgiveness of sins. All well and good, of course, as long as that knowledge does not cause us to become self-satisfied or lethargic, failing to maintain vigilance of spirit.

Christ exhorted His followers to *"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness… to labor for the food which endures to everlasting life."* (Matthew 11:29, 6:33, John 6:27) God wants to use us as His instruments to provide guidance and leadership to the needy world around us, to *"become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."* (Philippians 2:15)

But if we head off in the wrong direction, the Lord offers His word of warning: *"take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life… Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy… to stand before the Son of Man… watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* (Luke 21:34-36, Matthew 26:41) Whether

it's the final, tumultuous days prior to Christ's return, or any period of history, the same wise counsel applies – to prepare during one's lifetime and so be found worthy to stand before the Son of Man.

Now we should not equate such vigilance to a perpetual wet blanket stifling our enjoyment of life. *"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."* (John 15:11) Nor with frantic busy-ness. The Lord said, *"My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* and promised, *"You will find rest for your souls,"* which is not lethargy. (Matthew 11:29-30) Elsewhere, we read, *"Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest."* (Hebrews 4:11) The word *"rest"* is defined by Joseph Thayer in these terms:

> **The heavenly blessedness in which God dwells, and of which he has promised to make persevering believers in Christ partakers after the toils and trials of life on earth are ended. [*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testment*, pg 335]**

As "persevering believers", we are to *"rest in the Lord"* in the context of an active pursuit of godly living and God's plan for our lives. (Psalm 37:7)

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Continue to B-5: "I will Give Thee a Crown of Life!"