

# ***Teaching Sound Doctrine***

## **Heaven**

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus depicts those who have used what God has given them as receiving a reward. The master told both of the men who had doubled their talents, "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" (Matthew 25:21, 23). When Jesus returns, He will require us to give an account of how we have handled our divine duties. We will either be "good and faithful" servants, or "wicked and slothful" servants. To the good and faithful servant there is a reward. A reward is given because of what somebody has done or accomplished. Heaven will be a reward for those who have done God's commandments. Those who think they can do nothing and stumble into Heaven need to look again at the Bible's teaching on faith and works. And they can start right here with the Parable of the Talents. The Lord told the good and faithful servants to whom the great reward would be given, "Well done." He didn't say, "Well thought," as if mere intellectual acknowledgment, or faith only, would suffice. No, He said, "Well done." The servants did something that resulted in the Lord's approval and secured for them a joyous reward. While people will enter Heaven by the grace and mercy of God, and by the blood of His Son Jesus Christ, they also will enter because they have done what God told them to do to get there! And they will not enter if they will not obey God!

Jesus further brings to mind the idea of the rewards of Heaven when He refers to Heaven as a place of treasure. A rich, young ruler once came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. He had already done many things that Jesus approved of, but he wanted to know what he lacked. Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:21-22, NKJ).

Although this story has a sad ending, we do learn that Heaven will be a place of treasure, or reward, for those who are willing to sacrifice here in this life. Jesus personally invited that young man to great riches. But he, like many

today, turned his back on the Lord and walked away to a heap of rusting, decaying, corruptible treasure. He may have had great possessions, but the greatest possessions are in Heaven! Jesus said during His Sermon on the Mount:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Thus, Heaven is the place for the safest investments. The returns will be bountiful. Notice with me some of the rewards, or treasures, of Heaven. We are told several wonderful things about Heaven in Revelation 21:4. In describing the blessedness of that place, the text says, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

The former things that pass away in Heaven are the present things of the earth that we wrestle with constantly. Here we shed an innumerable amount of tears brought on by many sources of grief and anguish: the death of a loved one, disappointment, betrayal, regret. We meet with sorrows upon sorrows in our brief earthly sojourn. But we are told in Heaven God will with His own divine hand of compassion reach out and wipe away the tears of His children. We are told there will never be another funeral service, another grave side farewell, another cold casket closing, for death will be no more. We are told we will not be subjected to the pains of a diseased, injured, or feeble body, "for the former things are passed away." How beautiful Heaven must be!

Realizing that such great reward and treasure await in Heaven will spur us onward. We will have a goal in mind, something to look forward to in the "better country" (Hebrews 11:16). This is the Christian's great, sustaining hope, and we are saved by hope (Romans 8:24).

Both John the Immerser and Jesus, during their ministry, proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). This phrase, "kingdom of heaven," is frequently found in Matthew's gospel account. Jesus describes

the citizens of the Kingdom in Matthew 5:3-10. He often used parables to describe what the Kingdom of Heaven would be like when it came (Matthew 13). In Matthew 16:19, Jesus told the Apostle Peter he would be given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter used these keys in Acts 2, when the Kingdom of God came, and he told men to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). We then find that the Lord added those who were being saved to His Church, or Kingdom (Acts 2:47).

Paul speaks of the "whole family in heaven and earth," named after Christ (Ephesians 3:14-15). He's talking about the Kingdom. In Colossians 1:13, he tells Christians they had been transferred into the Kingdom of Christ. So the Kingdom of Heaven is visible on earth through the Church of Christ established in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost. Many today are waiting for Christ to establish a Kingdom on earth, but He already has! The Kingdom on earth, or the Church, is a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul in fact tells Christians, members of the Church, that their citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Remember as Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). Now remember Jesus prayed this prayer at a time when the Kingdom was "at hand," or soon-coming. It had not arrived yet though, and so He prayed, "Thy Kingdom come." However, today we can say that the Kingdom, or Church, has already come with power (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:4). And so, when we use Kingdom in that sense, this prayer has already been answered.

However, of particular note in that model prayer Christ gave His disciples is the fact that He said in addressing God, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." The will of God is performed in Heaven, and Christ wanted His disciples to pray that it would be on earth. Not only are disciples to pray for this, but they are to live their lives in such a way that the prayer is answered. We receive authority for our practices today from Heaven (Matthew 21:25). Unfortunately, though, men often substitute their own will for the will of God in their practices. God's precepts are ignored or shunned in many, many places today as man lives in ignorant or willful rebellion. But not so in Heaven! You can rest assured that God's will is done there, because Jesus said it was! Nobody rejects His commandments, and nobody procrastinates in

their obedience. When God speaks, it is done! Those who find it so unpleasant and bothersome to comply with the will of God here on earth would be dreadfully miserable in Heaven! Those who don't enjoy praising, glorifying, and worshiping God here wouldn't be too happy in Heaven! Indeed, they won't be there, because Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people, and if we have not fitted ourselves to obey God here, we won't be prepared to do it in Heaven.

And let me include this great thought -- If God's will is done in Heaven at all times, it surely must be a happy place, for the will of God is designed for our own good and benefit. That's true here on earth, and then eternally in Heaven!

That singular fact impresses me. It motivates me to make Heaven my abode. Read with me the words of John 14:1-3, where Jesus attempts to comfort His disciples as His death approaches. He says: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Jesus says He's coming back to take His disciples to be where He is in Heaven. You know the Apostle John describes some marvelous things about Heaven in the book of Revelation, and these descriptions impress upon our minds how beautiful and precious Heaven must be. He mentions the street of gold, the jasper walls, the pearly gates, and the crystal sea (Revelation 21; 4:6). But none of these things make Heaven so beautiful and precious as the fact that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, will walk there, and be the light of that city (Rev. 21:23). One day, if I'm faithful, I will get to meet and dwell with my greatest Friend, my Savior and Redeemer. I will bow down before Him, kiss His nail-scarred feet and hands, and say, "Thank you. Thank you for dying for even me."

## FEW WILL MAKE IT

Many people believe that one must simply have some good morals and be a decent person in order to make it to Heaven. There are even some people who believe that everybody will eventually wind up in Heaven, no matter what they have done in this life. Certainly the devil has deceived many by

lowering the standard for citizenship in Heaven. Satan has been so successful in this campaign that it would come as an absolute shock for many if you told them only a few will make it to Heaven. Yet the truth remains unchanged.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Again the Lord says in Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Thus, everybody's not going to Heaven. Not even most will be there. "Few," says Jesus. How sobering!

May the words of Jesus Christ regarding Heaven encourage, uplift, and challenge us. Every child of God should remember that Heaven is our home, not this earth. As we sometimes sing, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." Christians need to avoid getting too comfortable here; we need to always have that homesick feeling for Heaven. Truly, as the Bible speaks of in Hebrews 11:13 and 1 Peter 2:11, we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and we desire a "better country" (Hebrews 11:16).