

no victory without battle, and there is no resurrection without a cross. Today, many people with "charismatic" experiences have been led into the "upper room" without first going to the cross!

The Rapture—The Great Escape?

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."
—1 Thess. 4:17 NASB

Many believers (especially in America) are hoping this event—called the "rapture" by Bible teachers—will deliver them from the sufferings that the Bible says will torment the



"MAYBE IT'LL BE MID-TRIB..."

whole earth. In fact, there are many who are more excited about this "rapture" than they are about Jesus Himself. Do these same people believe that they are more worthy to escape tribulation than Paul, or James, who both were beheaded? Or Peter who was crucified upside down (because he thought himself not worthy to be crucified as his Lord had been)? Or Bartholomew who was actually skinned alive in Rome? What about the millions of saints through the ages who have suffered unspeakable fates as their reward on

earth for their faithfulness, or those in prison even now in Communist lands—why has there been no rapture for them? And what makes us congratulate ourselves here in the West, to think that we deserve to go scot-free from suffering when "men of whom the world was not worthy... did not accept their release, in order that they might obtain to a better resurrection"? (see Heb. 11:35-38)

A Great Falling Away (Matt. 24:10)

I think that one of the saddest stories I've ever heard was how the believers in China fared when the Communists took over their country in 1949. The Evangelical churches had been teaching that the Church would definitely be raptured before any "great tribulation" or suffering would befall the faithful. It had become such a central doctrine that all worry (and preparation) were abandoned, and praise for their absolute safety from harm and persecution was offered at every meeting. Then the Communist government took over and a vicious attack was made upon the Church, including confiscation of property, beatings, imprisonment, and even the taking of children from parents. The unprepared Church was caught so off-guard that millions fell away and denied Christ, thinking they had been abandoned by a God who did not keep His promise. Ah, but that's just it! **God has promised tribulation—God has promised persecution!** "In the world you shall have tribulation... he who desires to save his life shall lose it... all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (see John 16:33; Matt. 16:25; II Tim. 3:12) But these promises from God (no less precious than His others) were neglected in the teachings of the Chinese Church... just as they are being neglected today in the West. How sad to think that so many have become mesmerized into believing that no physical harm or suffering can befall them because they are Christians. But Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body!" (Matt. 10:28 NASB)

I'm not saying there won't be a rapture. I'm just not too sure about the timing. Yes, I believe that God **could** deliver all true

believers from the great tribulation, but since He hasn't always gotten even faithful Christians off the hook from suffering (in the Bible or in Church history), there's no guarantee that He'll protect the many lazy, apathetic believers of today from something that might not only wake them up, but would certainly divide the true sheep from the "religious" goats.

When it comes to believing in either a pre-tribulation or post-tribulation rapture, my motto has always been: **pray for "pre" but prepare for "post."** That way we'll be ready for truly anything—which is exactly the way God wants us to be!

The thing that matters most to God is that His people will be found ready to rule as the Bride of Jesus when He returns. There are so many warnings about being unprepared (Matt. 24:42-51; Luke 21:34-36; I Thess. 5:2-3), parables that tell the fate of those who are not faithful or do not keep watch (Matt. 25:1-13; Luke 12:35-40, 19:11-27), and pleadings of a loving God who "does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked." (Ezek. 33:11) We should take heed the godly advice of the great apostle...

"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"

—II Cor. 13:5 NASB

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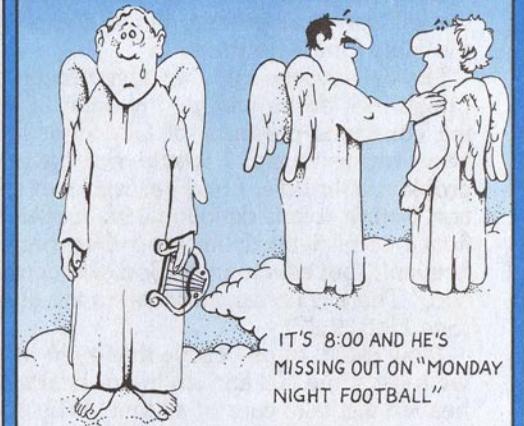
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Will You Be Bored in Heaven?



—by Keith Green

"But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My Word."

—Isaiah 66:2 NASB

Who today trembles at the Word of God? It seems to me that there are but few who really live with a passion for God—especially a passion just to be with Him. Today there is such a noise coming up before the throne of the Most High—the clamor of so-called praise, singing, and joyful shouting. But I wonder if the same people who love to sing and shout, loudly exclaiming the praises of God, really have such an intense glory in their secret life

with the Lord. When the meeting's over and there's no one there to listen except the only One who matters, do you still have that same passionate joy in your spirit, **just to be alone with the Living God?**

How Are You Ever Going To Enjoy Heaven?

The Lord made me realize recently that if I do not absolutely relish His company now, desiring to be with Him more than anyone in the whole world, then I would not really be comfortable in heaven at all—for it is there that we will spend all eternity in the company of the Holy One who made us.

I had always thought that even though now I might not desire with all my heart to be in the conscious presence of God, that somehow, mysteriously, I would not have that problem after I die. I had believed that salvation from a rotten devotional life would only finally come with death (and then naturally heaven!), but as a man of God said centuries ago, "There is no sanctification in the grave!" (See Heb. 9:27)

How many of us believe that even though we have some evil and sin in our hearts now, heaven will take care of all that? Why do we put our hope in some future redemption when God says, "*Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation!*" (II Cor. 6:2 NASB) Do you think that even though you allow yourself pride and selfishness here, once you get to heaven everything will be all set because "it's impossible to sin in heaven"? Aren't you forgetting that Satan let pride, selfishness, and deceit rule his life, even though he had lived in heaven **since the day he was first made!** It must be seen that heaven can't take away our sins, only **Jesus** can take away our sins **and the power of sin over our life!**

The Gates Of Holiness

Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to say that God will allow sin in heaven. On the con-

trary, He has prepared hell as the final dumping site for the devil—and **all** the sin in the universe! God will only allow what is holy to enter through the gates. (Rev. 21:27) That is why I implore you to see that it's not heaven that will finally purify us . . . only the blood of Jesus can cleanse and purify us, and that **must** take place here and now. For without holiness, "*no one shall see the Lord.*" (Heb. 12:14 KJV)

If your heart takes more pleasure in reading novels, or watching TV, or going to the movies, or talking to friends, rather than just sitting alone with God and embracing Him, sharing His cares and His burdens, weeping and rejoicing with Him, then how are you going to handle forever and ever in His presence with no TV, movies, or singles' retreats? You'd be bored to tears in heaven, if you're not ecstatic about God now!

How could God invite you to heaven, where the most exciting thing to do all day is gaze upon His glorious face, if you're not in heaven right here on earth when you're alone with Him? Do you think that after you die, suddenly you'll be in heaven and "presto!" all at once you're not going to like worldly things anymore? All of a sudden you'll love more than anything else just to hang out with God, when you couldn't stand being alone with Him even 20 minutes a day?

The Excitement Of Death

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . I do not know which to choose, but I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith . . ."
—Phil. 1:21-25 NASB

What an amazing passage this is. But then again, what an amazing man Paul was! He speaks here as if he could snap his fingers and be in heaven any time he chose to leave the planet. He says that he'd really rather depart this life and be with Christ in heaven, but he was willing to stay **if** he really had to!

How different his attitude toward death is than ours. When we think of dying, many times it still holds the same dread for us as it does for unbelievers. Even worse, there are many believers who do not wish to "depart and be with Christ" any time too soon. When they think of going to be with the Lord, they hope it will be a long, long time in the future—in fact, going to heaven now would

Three Who Loved Not Their Own Lives

There was a converted Hindu Christian martyr whose skin was slashed and filled with salt and chili powder. He said to his tormentors, "Formerly Satan wounded me with his fiery darts. The blood of Jesus healed those wounds. The suffering caused by your wounds is not much." Enraged by these words, they started to skin him alive. "I thank you for this," he said, "tear off the old garment. I shall soon put on Christ's garment of righteousness." He was finally burned praying for his persecutors.

(A Book Of Protestant Saints by Ernest Gordon)

Then there was Alan Cameron, one of the "covenanters" of the great Scottish persecutions, who was shown the head and the hands of another covenanter, his own son Richard. They asked him the cruel question, "Do you know them?" He kissed them saying, "I know them . . . I know them. They are my son's, my own dear son's. It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me nor mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days."

(Fair Sunshine by Jock Purvis)

Thomas Haukes, after refusing to have his son baptized into the Roman Church, was ordered to a fiery death by the Bishop of London. During his agony, he stretched forth his burning hands and clapped them together three times, signifying to his friends that God was giving him grace in the fire. June 10, 1555.

(Foxe's Book Of Martyrs by John Foxe)



interrupt many of our plans (even "Christian" ones), cutting short a "long, productive life."

Be honest, would you be thrilled for the Lord to come back right before you get that college degree, or if you had your choice, would you prefer He wait until right after graduation day? Maybe you're engaged to be married. How would you like to go to heaven the day before your scheduled wedding? See what I mean? Paul really desired more than anything else to go to be with the Lord. We desire long, fulfilling "Christian" lives on earth—but we're willing to die and go to heaven . . . **when we really have to!**

Living Martyrs

What God seeks for today is a Church full of dead men and women. Dead to themselves, that is—and alive to their Beloved! Have you ever read *Foxe's Book Of Martyrs*? Such stories! Men and women tortured for a faith that seemed to the world (and the organized church of that day) to be in vain—because they chose to die for what they believed rather than accept the false, temporary peace of the so-called "religion" of the times.

The Bible still prophesies terrifying times ahead for the world, a time of horror and tribulation "*such as the world has never seen*" (Matt. 24:21 LB) "*men's hearts failing them for fear.*" (Luke 21:26 KJV) According to Jesus, these times will try believers' hearts and faith more than any other in all the history of civilization. We must prepare for these times in the same way the apostle Paul did. He openly shared his secret of enduring suffering, torments, and persecution with joy—"I die daily!" Paul was a living martyr. He had been to the cross and had been "crucified with Christ." He had laid down upon the altar and counted all his strengths, talents, and benefits from this life as garbage so that he might "gain Christ." (I Cor. 15:31; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:7) Paul shares experiences in II Corinthians 11 that would make most of today's faint-hearted believers shrink away from the faith—because the crucified life is not taught, only the "victory of the believer." **But there is**