

IS HEAVEN FOR ALL THE FAITHFUL?

THE teaching that all good Christians go to heaven when they die is one of the greatest errors of Christendom. From the Bible we know this. How many millions of people with all sincerity of heart had laboured assiduously to support their church organisations and died in the hope of going to heaven, which unfortunately is false, no one can know. It will turn to their great surprise when, on Resurrection Day, these godly-minded but misled folks will find themselves not in heaven but here on earth! In any case, the fact that a few Christians – the “Little Flock” – will inherit heaven cannot be ruled out.

There was an occasion when a Minister of the God’s Kingdom Society (GKS) had a discussion with a certain gentleman on various issues of doctrine. When the Minister said that he knew he would not go to heaven and so it was his prayer that God might grant him the grace to be on earth in His Kingdom, the friend was enraged. Before the Minister finished the sentence, he exclaimed: “Good gracious! Are you not going to heaven? Why then do you go to church and what are you preaching for?” The gentleman added: “If you are not going to heaven, I am going!” He repeated it with greater emphasis: “I AM GOING!”

The Minister, who was cool and collected, chuckled. For the outburst of the friend had struck him as a manifestation of his ignorance. Yes, ignorance is the root of bitterness.

There is a saying that if wishes were horses beggars would ride. It is very easy to say, “I am going to heaven”. But how can you go when God does not call you or take you there? The aeroplane is not a means of transport to heaven and a space-ship, which before God is like a toy with which children play, means nothing. So better it is that people stop deceiving themselves or, in their own vanity, hoping against hope.

Fables

Among the church organisations, and even in some other non-Christian religious bodies, the belief that heaven is their home is rife. In absolute disregard of scriptural facts, fables have been told from the pulpits to boost the faith of adherents so that they might do the works that would qualify them for heaven. Lessons in Bible correspondence courses and in the Sunday schools have tended to confirm the hope of believers that they will all go to heaven. And many of the hymns or songs are composed in such a melodramatic language with tender tunes to match as to stir the emotions of “churchgoers” – old and young – in anticipation of and aspiration after heaven.

There is the story of a “woman who saw heaven” published by Prairie Bible Institute, Alberta, Canada, in their monthly magazine, *THE PRAIRIE OVERCOMER*, of January, 1953. The woman who was reported to have “died at three o’clock”, woke in the death chamber at about sunset, and was quoted as saying: “I remember seeing all the family around me crying. Then the Lord

Jesus came into the room and took me by the hand and said, 'Come with Me.' In a short time we were before a gate of pearl. It was the gate of Heaven. Angels opened it and we went in. I saw many beautiful houses all of pretty colours..."

As we stated in *The Weekly Sermon* of October 13, 1968, No. 6, the woman must have been a victim of evil spirits because her story is irreconcilable with the teachings of Jesus in the Scriptures.

Taking a look at one of the popular hymns we cannot but sympathise with those who are rather feverish over their desire to go to heaven. Here are the wordings of some of the stanzas in Hymn No. 509 in the *Hymnal Companion*:

Here we suffer grief and pain,
Here we meet to part again;
In heaven we part no more.
Oh, that will be joyful!...
All who love the Lord below,
When they die to heaven will go,
And join with saints above.
Oh, that will be joyful, &c.
Little children will be there,
Who have sought the Lord by prayer
From every Sunday school.
Oh, that will be joyful, &c.
Teachers, too, will meet above,
Pastors, parents, whom we love,
Shall meet to part no more.
Oh, that will be joyful, &c.

There are several other songs of a similar tenor, especially, among those under "The Order for the Burial of the Dead".

Burial Ceremonies

A number of texts in the Bible are often misconstrued or misapplied by priests to mislead the people. One of such texts is at Job 3: 17, and it reads: "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest." They cite this verse in their sermons and songs to show that heaven is a place of bliss and comfort.

Thus Hymn No. 542 of the *Hymnal Companion* which is usually sung during burial ceremonies, runs in part in this wise:

BROTHER, thou art gone before us,
And thy saintly soul is flown
Where tears are wiped from every eye,
And sorrow is unknown.
Thou art sleeping now like Lazarus
Upon his Father's breast,
Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest.

If the place "where the wicked cease from troubling" is heaven, does it not therefore show that there are wicked people too in heaven? And that they are made impotent and so cannot trouble? But have the priests any authority of the Scriptures to support this assumption?

The truth of this point is that Job was not referring to heaven but to the grave. Because of his tribulations he said that it were better if he had died in the womb without seeing the light of day *for* then he would have been silent in the grave with dead kings, counsellors and princes of the earth. He added: "There (in the grave) the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest..." – Read Job. 3: 11-19.

The funny side of the whole show is that while during a burial ceremony the "church-goers" are singing hymns and chants to show that their dead brother is gone to rest on the Father's breast in heaven where sorrow is unknown and where he lives in the glories and joys of eternity, they are at the same time wailing and lamenting for the dead. Some even continue in their mourning for a period of three months, some a year, after the burial. If the faith that the dead are enjoying bliss in heaven were genuine it would be foolish to weep and lament for the dead. In fact, if that were the case, everybody would want to die so as to go there quickly.

Reward

Let us put away sentiments as well as prejudice and bitterness, and let us face the facts of the Scriptures objectively. That God Almighty promised to reward the faithful in His perfect Kingdom of endless peace, glory and happiness, is an incontrovertible fact, and that the place where, the faithful, with a few exceptions, will be rewarded is the earth, is also the revealed truth.

None of the holy men and women of old before Christ – from Abel to John the Baptist – indicated that he or she would go to heaven. They had the hope that they would be resurrected in God's due time for their reward here on earth. Job under divine inspiration declared: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that, he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God..." – Job 19: 25-27.

David was a great man. Not only was he one of the faithful patriarchs but was also an anointed king in Israel and a prophet of God. He said: "For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait

upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” -Psalm 37: 9-11. He did not say the meek shall inherit heaven.

What is more, King Solomon – the son of David – who too was a prophet and the wisest of his days, stated: “Behold the righteous shall be recompensed IN THE EARTH: much more the wicked and the sinner.” – Proverbs. 11:31.

Before we go further, we wish to emphasise this salient fact that none of the holy men and women of old before Christ went to heaven or will ever go to heaven. This is a serious statement and we take responsibility for it. The promise of heaven affects only a limited few among the Christians or followers of Jesus Christ.

Some people cite the case of Elijah the prophet who was said to have gone “up by a whirlwind into heaven”. (2 Kings 2:11). They conclude that Elijah as well as other righteous people is in heaven. This assertion is wrong. The Bible speaks of heaven, apart from being the dwelling place of God, as also referring to the cloudy region of the air above the earth where the birds fly. (Genesis 1: 20; Job 35: 11) So the correct understanding and interpretation of the reference to Elijah, is that he was carried by a whirlwind into the air out of sight and was turned to nothing. Like Enoch, God made him not to die the ordinary death. (See Hebrews 11: 5) In the day of resurrection, Elijah, Enoch and all other ancient worthies shall come back to life on this earth made glorious. If Elijah and Enoch were in heaven, Jesus would have told us when he came to the earth. But he said: “No man hath ascended up to heaven...” – John 3: 13.

Lazarus

Another instance some priests often cite to support their teaching about going to heaven is that of Lazarus, the beggar, as related in Luke 16: 19-31. In the first place, the account is a parable put by Christ, and should not be taken to be the story of a real literal event. The rich man in hell was said to have “lifted up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom”. It is also stated that he begged Abraham to send Lazarus “that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool” his tongue for he was tormented in the fire.

How is the distance between heaven and hell that the rich man in the midst of fire in hell could see Abraham and Lazarus in heaven? How can a tip of finger dipped in water in heaven be taken to a man in an “unquenchable fire” in hell without the finger drying up? By the way, is it literally possible that the water on a tip of finger can cool a man in such a big flame? However, where people interpret parables as literal things they are bound to err. We shall treat this in details in due course, by the grace of God.

In fact, the account does not state that Lazarus went to heaven; rather it says that he “was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom”. (Luke 16: 22) Who can prove from the Bible that “Abraham’s bosom” means heaven? How can it be heaven when- Abraham himself did not and will never go to heaven?

If Abraham, Enoch, Elijah, David and other faithful of old were in heaven Jesus Christ, we repeat, would have told his disciples during his Ministry on earth. Rather he stated categorically that none of them was there as already quoted from John 3: 13.

Jesus did show that Abraham and others, would receive their reward in God’s :Kingdom on earth and then all opposers of truth and righteousness would gnash their teeth in punishment. He said: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God.” – Luke 13: 28,29.

Some professed Christians believe that David is in heaven hence they often say: “David pray for us”. But the Bible says quite the contrary. St. Peter, the apostle of Christ, under inspiration declared: “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day...For David is not ascended into the heavens...” – Acts 2: 29-34.

Little Flock

When Jesus Christ came to this world he gathered followers or disciples and divided them into two distinct classes. In Luke 6: 12, 13, it is written: “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he called apostles.” See also Mark 3: 13-19.

Not all the disciples were called apostles. The apostles were the first class of Christ’s disciples and they were vested with greater authority and more privileges than others. (Matthew 10: 1-16; John 5: 7-10) It is the apostles and others of their class chosen afterwards that constitute the “Little Flock”. Addressing them, Jesus said: “Fear not little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” – Luke 12: 32.

With regard to those disciples who are not in the class of the apostles, Christ said: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold (of the Little Flock): them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” (John 10: 16) From this we can see the clear distinction between the two classes of Christians. But the trouble with many preachers is that, because of lack of vision, they generalise everything and apply texts relating only to the “Little Flock” to all God’s people without any mark of difference.

It is only those of the class of the Little Flock that Jesus promised to take to heaven to reign with him as, kings and priest in Mount Zion, the capital of his kingdom. They are chosen and anointed with the Holy Spirit to be teachers and leaders through whom those of the "other sheep" are gathered to Christ. – John 15: 15,16; 17: 18-21; 1 John 2: 27; Hebrews 12: 22-24.

The anointed Christians are predestinated and called to be Christ's servants. As soon as they receive the ordination through the Holy Spirit, they give up all secular work and devote their lives fully and wholly to the preaching of the gospel. And one of the marks by which they can be identified is the preaching of the truth as contained in the Bible without adulteration. -Romans 8: 29, 30; 10: 13-15; 1 Corinthians 7: 20-24; Galatians 1: 11-17; 1 John 2: 27.

Jesus said to the apostles: "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you." (John 13: 33) Herbert Armstrong of the Ambassador College of America with a branch in England, often cites this text to show that even the apostles are not going to heaven. Christ did not say that they could not follow him to heaven at all but that they would follow afterwards, This is explicitly stated in verse 36, which Armstrong always loses sight of: "Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, whither go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards,"

Jesus Christ confirmed his promise to the apostles when he said: "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." – John 14: 1-3.

Before Christ was arrested, he again gave this firm promise to his apostles: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22: 28-30) It is wrong to apply this text to all God's people because all – both men and women – are not ordained to be kings to sit on thrones.

It is the anointed Christians whom St. Paul described as "Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Hebrews 12: 22, 23) that are ordained to be kings. John the apostle who is one of them said: "And (Jesus) hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. " – Revelation 1: 6.