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THE PRELUDE TO THE ETERNAL STATE

W. FRASER NAISMITH

The question is often asked—'What is the Eternal State?' It is that timeless, dateless, unregistered, uncharted and unlimited sphere where God alone holds away.

The God of the universe is the God of eternity as the Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 90 verse 2 'From everlasting (eternity) to everlasting (eternity), thou are God'. There is nothing too big for Him—He measured the waters in the hollow of His hand: He set those lights in the roof of the world: He put up the doors of the great necropolis, keeping the living and the dead apart. He is also the God of microscopic minutiae, and there is nothing too small for Him—He marks the fall of the sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our head.

Time is the measured span on the great ocean of eternity. During this period God has acted towards man in different ways through different dispensations. The present economy is that in which God is visiting the Gentiles, 'to take out of them a people for His name'—Acts 15:14. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will terminate this favoured dispensation of divine grace. see 1 Thess. 4. This period is 'the fulness of the Gentiles' and it concludes with the Rapture: Romans 11:25. The 'times of the Gentiles' will end at the manifestation of Christ in glory: Luke 21:24.

In heaven there will be the Father's House with love as its very atmosphere, and the beams of Christ's glory diffused throughout that realm. The 'Bema', or Judgment Seat of Christ, shall then be set at which the redeemed shall have their lives brought into review—not to know if they are fit for heaven, but so that everything which has not been adjusted in this day of opportunity may be put right and rewards, commensurate with the fidelity of the saint, may be awarded. This shall be followed by the Marriage of the Lamb, as into His eternal embraces the Lord takes the church which He loved and for which He gave himself. See 2 Cor. 5:10 and Rev. 19:7.

On earth events will move rapidly as seal after seal is opened and finally the Great Tribulation bursts upon the godless world; especially affecting the apostate people—the Jews. At the termination of the Great Tribulation the Lord Jesus Christ shall come forth to take the reins of this world's government and to rule from shore to shore. During this period of one thousand years shall God's Christ be Sovereign Lord. The influence of that arch-enemy, Satan, will be unknown, as he shall be in the bottomless pit for that whole period—the Millennium: see Rev. 20:1-3.

Prosperity and longevity characterise the scene over which Christ shall hold sway, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords—Rev. 19:6. One cannot accurately estimate the number of those who will be born throughout this remarkable period; but millions will be born during the millennium, many of whom shall yield feigned obedience to the ruling Monarch. When Satan is loosed from his prison house—Rev. 20: 7-10—he will go out to deceive the nations and will lead a mighty army against the camp of the saints and the beloved city, which is the Millennial Jerusalem; then fire from God out of heaven shall descend and devour them, and Satan shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the Beast and the false Prophet are, and they shall endure eternal torment.

Consequent upon the subjugating of all His foes the Great White Throne shall be set up before which the dead great and small, who have had opportunity of salvation but refused, shall stand to hear their doom pronounced. One has said 'This is the closing scene in the great drama of man's eventful history on the stage of time being enacted ere the curtain falls forever'.

In Isaiah 6 the prophet had a vision of a throne and a Throne Sitter. This produced conviction of sin, for he cried 'Woe is me, I am undone (lost) I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts'. No sooner had he emitted this statement revealing the state in which he found himself for the light from the throne disclosed the darkness of his heart and demanded justice and judgment—than to this confession the altar

lent an ear and readily responded. The live coal touched the prophet's lips and the voice said 'Lo! this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged'. The Great White Throne will demand justice and judgment, but there will be no altar to hear and respond. It is now too late to appeal to the sacrifice of Calvary as the only means of having sin removed. The day of opportunity has passed and, alas! those who appear before the Great White Throne are forever lost. The throne is a *Great* throne. It takes its character from the Person who sits thereon. 'The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son' John 5:22 said Christ. His greatness cannot be fully estimated, for He stated ere He ascended on high 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth'—Matt. 28:18. It is also a *White* throne. Never has there been contrast in black and white as there is at this time: The unsullied purity and righteousness of the Throne Sitter and the dark, lost sinners who are suspended before it. Everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life shall be cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the tragedy of rejecting God's proffered mercy.

Heaven and earth have fled—it is dissolution not annihilation! God has put the heavens and the earth into the crucible and thrust them into the flame and out of the sinful scene He shall bring 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'—2 Peter 3:13. This is the summit of holy desire and hope. New Heavens will be the home of the raised and changed saints of all ages. New Earth will form the abode of the saints who have passed through the Millennial reign of Christ and have not revolted when it is over. No doubt there will be adaption to moral and physical changes by divine wisdom and power. This is God's everlasting rest. His rest in creation was disturbed by sin's entrance. His rest in Canaan was disturbed by unbelief. Now He retreats into Christ, and that rest remaineth—Heb. 4:9. Both the heavenly and earthly saints will enjoy this rest—'a keeping of the sabbath'.

The dawn of eternity—to which we look forward for the realisation of His promise: 'we according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth'—2 Peter 3:13 brings such

changes as will be appropriate to the God who introduces them. There will be no more sea. It must not be supposed that the figures used in the Book of Revelation are literal. *No more sea*—Rev. 21:1—would indicate there will be the absence of restlessness: for the sea is symbolic of unrest. It would also suggest that there shall be no more destruction—for the sea has wrought havoc to both life and property throughout the years. It postulates nearness that shall never be bedimmed by distance; living in the favour and smile of God forevermore. How blessed will this state be! At the dawn of eternity New Jerusalem is seen 'coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband'. There are three Jerusalems alluded to in the New Testament Scriptures—The Heavenly Jerusalem in Heb. 12:22; The Earthly Jerusalem in Rev. 11:8; and The Mystical Jerusalem in Rev. 21:2. This mystical city—New Jerusalem is seen in her bridal glory after a thousand years have run their course. In the love and companionship of the Lover of her soul the Bride has enjoyed the wonders of the eternal union; and now she is seen in the holy splendour of heavenly wedlock, with the dew of youth resting on her brow.

'His forever only His;
Who the Lord and her shall part?'

'The tabernacle of God is with men' intimates to us that there is a very close association between the heavenly and the earthly. A tabernacle is a moveable structure and the whole body of the heavenly saints, here indicated by the 'tabernacle of God', shall explore God's great universe which, so far, has only been faintly apprehended. There will be a close proximity between the heavenly and earthly and Eden itself shall be superseded as God shall tabernacle with men.

'He will dwell with them'—How blessed to know that He is not going to walk in the cool of the day for communion with men, but He shall dwell with them. The omnipresent God shall take residence with men when all the traces of sin have been expunged; and the words of John Baptist are truly fulfilled—'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' John 1:29.

Such can only be removed on the basis of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

'They shall be His people'—this applies not only to the 'ammi' of the house of Israel but to the saved from amongst the nations of the earth. It would seem that national distinctions shall vanish with the dawn of eternity and the saints on the new earth shall be designated 'my people'.

'God Himself shall be with them, and be their God'—such emphasises the fact of close association with God throughout eternity. There will never be a thought of faithlessness on the part of His people then. How often God had to challenge His earthly people for their unfaithfulness; but in eternity such will be unknown.

'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes'—this statement is a divine assurance that there will be no more sorrow because the cause of sorrow shall forever have been removed.

'There shall be no more death'—and we know that 'the wages of sin is death' Rom. 6:23, but with every trace of sin gone death shall be unknown throughout that eternal day. We are further assured that there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. These all are the products of sin—and we are informed that 'the former things have passed away. There are no graves on the hillsides of glory!

The One who made all things, shall make all things new. He who measured the waters in the hollow of His hand; who spake and it stood fast—who, by a divine fiat brought worlds into being, will make all things new. This splendid array of negatives forbids any thought of there being thirsty ones in this scene. The last reference to eternity in the Word of God is in Rev. 21:8 where we are permitted to learn that the ceaseless litany of the lost shall ascend from the Lake that burns with fire and brimstone: the eternal tragedy of sins unpurged. As we view this scene of eternal splendour our hearts rise in spontaneous worship to Him who is worthy to receive honour and praise everlasting. Then shall that part of the prayer which Christ taught His disciples be fulfilled to the very letter—'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven'. The Millennium shall see the greater part of the

prayer established, as the faithful remnant invoke the blessing of their God: but not till eternity breaks on our wondering visions shall the words 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven' be perfectly fulfilled.

We are but infants of a day, and time bears its sons on towards eternity. Only faintly can we apprehend the distinctive delights and glories that await the ransomed of the Lord. Our finite minds cannot take in the wonders of the things which our God has in reserve for those that love Him, but faith believes God and then the outlook beams with the galaxies of eternal glory.

What a wonderful God we have! What a wonderful portion He has prepared for our eternal enjoyment. He is worthy of our very best, though our very best is oftentimes unworthy of Him!

THE JOYS OF BIBLE STUDY

HAROLD ST. JOHN

I was once visiting a young university student and during my stay he took me into his study to show me his note books. I examined with pleasure some scores of neatly written little volumes representing months of careful research in biology, physics, chemistry, etc. After examination of these proofs of his industry I remarked, "and now show me your Bible Study books." To my surprise he looked embarrassed and replied, "I haven't any, and, indeed, I don't treat the Bible in that way, I should *not know how*."!

This incident gave me furiously to think—here was a young Christian man, with fine mental equipment, able to give hours daily to studies of *lesser* importance, and willing to register the results of such study with meticulous accuracy, and yet I found that occasionally he carelessly flung a few scraps of fag ends of time to the profoundest subject that can engage the human mind. No wonder that his spiritual life was fitful and **unsatisfactory!**