

# THE SPRINGFIELDER

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Address communications to the Editor, Erich H. Heintzen, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois 62702.

## Living In The Light Of Eternity

HOWARD W. TEPKER

THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST chapters of the book of Revelation answer one of the most significant questions confronting us today: "What is the ultimate goal and purpose of your life and mine?" If I were to ask you why you are here at the seminary, you would probably answer: "to prepare for the public ministry, to become a pastor." But if I were to inquire farther and ask why you want to be a pastor, then you might reply: "I want to devote my life to leading men to Christ, helping them to come into a personal relationship with their Lord and Savior." But if I were then to continue pressing with other questions, searching your heart for reasons why you have made the choice that you have, you would finally arrive at an answer that would be closely related to Revelation 21 or a similar passage. Our life must ultimately add up to one basic task, namely, preparing ourselves and others for the day when this world will come to an end with all of its sins and weaknesses and every individual will henceforth spend eternity in the presence of God or as an outcast from Him.

We hear much today about the urgency of problems that face us here and now, problems having to do with food, with housing, with equal opportunities for education, and the like. All of these are indeed important, and I do not wish to say anything that might give the impression that these problems should not concern us deeply, but when all is said and done there still remains that one question which transcends all others: "Am I getting ready for heaven?" Are we ready for that final day when everything that constitutes this earthly life will fade into the past and only our relation to God will matter?

How do we make such preparations? The last chapters of the book of Revelation suggest two specific questions in this regard. First of all, are we ready for that final onslaught of satan against the faith which will occur just before the end comes? We are given some insights into what conditions will be in the church during those final days when we read verse seven of chapter twenty: "Satan shall be loosed out of his prison and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle." Satan himself, the father of deception, will assume leadership; he will spearhead new attempts to deceive the nations of the world in order to recruit them for the final battle. This is not to say that great masses of people here on earth have not already been deceived by satan. In chapters 13 and 19 the lamb-beast is pictured as carrying on an active program of deception even

prior to this. But the deception spoken of here is the climax of all that has gone on before; it is the last and most effective kind of deception, the final effort that will endeavor to persuade even those who have previously been hesitant.

What is more, the deception that will be planned and led by satan himself will succeed, at least in part. This is implied by the aorist infinitives in this verse.

And what will be the purpose of the deception? The holy writer, in a vision, sees nations in all parts of the earth being deceived into opposing and antagonizing the Lamb and His church. Under the leadership of satan nations will be deceived into gathering together in satanic unanimity for the battle that will have as its sole purpose to wipe off the earth forever the last saint and the last sound of the Gospel. This is the picture painted for us in Revelation 20. It is a picture familiar to us also from the writings of Ezekiel and Daniel. It is a theme that occurs in both testaments. It is prominent in Paul's letters as well as in John's. St. Paul warns young Timothy in his second letter to his coworker that "the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables."

I am not going to decide for you whether we are now living in these times; I will only ask you, "Are you ready for such times if they are here now, or if they should come in the near future?" When St. Paul warns young Timothy to be prepared for just such conditions, he urges him: "Watch in all things, endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." Again he advises: "Be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Finally he adds these pertinent words which should ring in our ears: "Study to show thyself approved unto God as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, cutting the furrow straight," i.e., holding a straight course, presenting the truth rightly and fully.

Just a few words of advice from an aging apostle. Perhaps we can find them relevant also for our lives. They can make us ready for the day of which the apostle John here speaks.

But the holy writer suggests also a second question that appears pertinent for our day. Are we living our lives with heaven in mind? With what kind of an attitude are we looking at things around us, the evils, the problems, the perplexities, the social ills, the lovelessness, the lust, the hatred, the challenges to the Christian faith? What is your reaction when you read the newspapers or come face to face with the sordid side of life? Does the fact that a heaven lies beyond have any relevance at all in this situation? Yes, says John, for it changes our whole outlook on life. It puts things in a proper perspective. It reminds me in a most dramatic fashion that I have a purpose in life; I have a goal to which I am traveling. Many others may see no meaning in their lives, but that cannot be true

of you and me when we consider our destiny, when we recognize by faith that we are children of God on the way to heaven.

And what a heaven it is. Listen again to the words of the apostle as he describes the events of that last day, as far as the Christian is concerned: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." Note the emphasis on the word "new". Today the youth of our land are clamoring for a new approach to things; they are tired of old mistakes, of old weaknesses, of old cures and remedies. Brethren, my generation thought along similar lines. We had lived through the depression and through the second world war. We too wanted peace and prosperity. I suppose that this is an ever-present wish in the hearts of men. We tried to do something about it; and it must be said that the forties and fifties were not without some progress; we enjoyed blessings which those before us had not known. But my generation did not produce anything like a utopia. Nor will the present generation. It is our fervent hope and prayer that life will improve for all people. But never will perfection be reached in this world where satan is at work. At least, not until God Himself will intervene and produce a new heaven and a new earth in which dwelleth righteousness. And that day will most certainly come. John saw it and he describes it for us in these words: "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Only God can produce what men and women in the depth of their souls are longing for—a world without sin and its consequences, a world without injustices and frustrations, without inequities, without privations, without wars and strife. We should thank God that He has indeed promised just that. The apostle writes: "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 new heaven and the new earth which shall come into existence on that day will represent a totally new and different order of things. The world of sin, of lovelessness, of temptation, of tears will have passed away. We shall then live in the dimension of God. The Lord Himself will dwell with us. We shall be His people and He will be our God.

This prospect must change our outlook on life. It must affect our attitudes. Let it never be said that life is without meaning for those who live with such a bright prospect for the future. Life indeed does have a goal; it does have a purpose.

What is more, if this is our philosophy of life, then we have the strongest incentive and the most compelling motivation prompting and moving us to concern ourselves also with the hopelessness, the hunger, the privations and frustrations of our fellowmen who are toiling on their way through life. We have reason to sense the depths of their need. We have learned what love for our neighbor means. We are fully aware also of our Savior's promise that on the

last day He will remember the concerns that we now have for the needy, the hungry, the ill-clothed and underprivileged. We shall then hear Him say: "I was hungry and ye fed me . . . naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me," for whatsoever you have done unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Do we need a greater inducement than that to look with compassion on our fellowman in his misery and come to his aid?