

REVELATION 21:6-8 EXCLUDED FROM THE CELESTIAL CITY

“[Christ, seated on His throne] said to [John], ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.’”¹

No more tears, no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain—this is the divine promise delivered in the first four verses of this chapter. I cannot imagine a time unmarred by tears, by death, by pain; tears, death and pain stain the path of mankind to this day.

John the Revelator has written, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’” [REVELATION 21:1-4].

It is my practise to read these words when interring the bodies of those who served the Master. I read these words because they prove greatly comforting, providing, as they do, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, the promise that God Himself shall wipe every tear from our eyes, the promise of the abolition of death and mourning and crying and pain! Throughout the long ages since John penned those words, the people of God have often found encouragement in these words that are yet to be fulfilled.

Easily missed, however, and immediately following these comforting words for saints, is a warning for those who have deceived themselves. With His warnings, our gracious God always provides an invitation, as all who name His Name should likewise do. “To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” [REVELATION 21:6b]. Even as the message is delivered, the invitation of God is extended to all who will hear—an invitation to life, an invitation to receive the adoption of a child of God, an invitation to enter into the inheritance of the just. But then comes the warning, listing those who are excluded from these precious and eternal promises.

Even the most cynical individual must surely agree that this is a dark list representing the gross sins of this unbelieving world, with perhaps one surprising category of sinners. How can the fearful, the timid, the cowardly be listed among those who are excluded from the Holy City? Explore the situation with me, discovering God’s view of sinful man that we might more effectively warn all to seek His grace and that we might ourselves seek to be delivered from that which dishonours God and insults grace.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

THE DARK SINS — A survey conducted some years past revealed that over eighty-five percent of Americans assume they will go to Heaven at death. I would imagine that similar numbers hold true for Canadians. In the popular mythology, everyone goes to Heaven. No doubt the most of those who responded to the survey are seriously self-deceived if we allow the Son of God to inform us concerning the issue of who goes to Heaven. Most of our fellow citizens anticipating Heaven think of it as a reward, something earned through their perceived good deeds. You have perhaps heard someone say, “My good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds and that will be enough to satisfy God.” Scripture has a less sanguine view of mankind’s position before God, however.

Recall Jesus’ stern warning, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” [MATTHEW 7:13-14]. This doesn’t sound like everyone goes to Heaven; the Saviour clearly cautions that we deceive ourselves if we imagine otherwise.

That narrow gate and that hard way are not attractive; therefore, people imagine they can find an easier route to the celestial city. They fulfil the warning of the Wise Man:

“There is a way that seems right to a man,
but its end is the way to death.”

[PROVERBS 14:12]

An even more worrisome statement should give pause to anyone thinking that going to Heaven is everyone’s right. The Master warned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” [MATTHEW 7:21-23].

Throughout Scripture, lists of those who shall not inherit life nor see Heaven are provided. We must imagine that the Lord has included these lists to warn those who imagine that they will go to Heaven because of their good looks, their good deeds or their good fortune! It is to our benefit to know who is excluded so that we do not inadvertently find ourselves among those who are self-deluded. Four such lists are found in this Book of Revelation. During the days when God visits His awful judgements on the earth during the Great Tribulation, John reveals that people will seek death, but that death will elude them. Demonic powers will torment mankind, but yet they will not repent of their wickedness.

The wicked deeds performed by earth-dwellers reveal their utter lack of faith in the Living God. The exclusionary deeds include murders, witchcraft, sexual immorality and thefts [see REVELATION 9:21 ISV]. Most of us recognise these deeds are indeed awful, sufficiently abhorrent that they assuredly deserve God’s righteous judgement. Perhaps some would equivocate about the sin of witchcraft because we aren’t certain that people actually practise witchcraft. Do not deceive yourself, people do practise witchcraft in an effort to gain power over others. However, the word John used likely refers to drug use or abuse.

Describing the City of God, John asserts that “Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” [REVELATION 21:27].

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Soon after writing these rather dark words, the Revelator again warned that certain groups are forever excluded from the Celestial City. “Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” [REVELATION 22:15]. The lists which John has provided are similar, and there are no great surprises to the informed Bible-reader.

In one letter of the New Testament, written early in Paul’s service to the churches, the Apostle has provided a list of acts that are associated with the sinful nature. Paul writes, “The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” [GALATIANS 5:19-21]. Clearly, the Apostle was convinced that some people shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. We should be aware of this truth, as well. We should understand that this is the case so that we do not presume against the grace of God and so that we will urgently encourage those outside the grace of God to receive the Saviour.

Writing in the First Corinthian Letter, the Apostle confronted these wayward saints with their penchant for tolerating numerous wicked practises. You will recall that Paul warned them, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10]. The wicked include those who are guilty of “the works of the flesh,” including, but not restricted to “the sexually immoral,” “idolaters,” “adulterers” and “men who practise homosexuality.” The remainder of those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God are “thieves,” “the greedy,” “drunkards,” “revilers” and “swindlers.” It is a dark list, but we must recognise the peril of those who play fast-and-loose with truth.

I have noted several passages of Scripture that serve to warn that there is a standard revealing the reality of our profession. Those who are saved reveal God’s salvation through transformed lives. It is not without reason that God speaks of the New Birth when He wishes to describe His great salvation. The redeemed are transformed and they reveal their relationship to God through lives reflecting His Nature. Redeemed people live holy lives not in order to be redeemed, but because they are redeemed. Saved people reflect the holy parentage that marks the redeemed. But what of the list provided in the text before us at this time? What does it say about lives that have never been changed?

I wish to consider John’s list in the reverse order from that which he provided. The first group of individuals said to be excluded from the Celestial City is composed of those John referred to as “liars.” This designation speaks not only of those who actually distort the truth, but it refers as well to those who stand in opposition to the truth. If we appeal to the biblical lists referred to previously, it is equally obvious that lying, of necessity, includes such practises as slander, fomenting dissention, envy and discord. Lying in the sense that John employs is opposition to the order of the world that God established.

The Word of God informs Christians that, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” [1 JOHN 1:5]. Individuals who lie or who live a lie act as the devil acts. Jesus said of the devil, “He is a liar and the father of lies.” [JOHN 8:44]. Therefore, whenever one lies or whenever one denies her confession [1 JOHN 2:21-23], she is acting like the devil and not as a child of the Risen Saviour would be expected to act. It is no doubt significant that the last characteristic listed as being excluded from the Celestial City is lying [cf. REVELATION 21:27; 22: 15]. Christians must be known for “speaking the truth in love” [see EPHESIANS 4:15].

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In the Gospel that bears his name, John addresses the gravest sin anyone can commit, which is the sin of lying to oneself. The Apostle of Love has written, “This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” [JOHN 3:19-21]. Believers are to live openly and honestly, walking in the light and refusing to live in the shadows so that God will be glorified through their conduct, through the manner in which they conduct their daily lives.

May I say plainly that if you are given to lying, refusing to live openly and honestly by walking in the light, or if you are prone to slander others, engaging in calumny, your actions deny your confession of Christ. Those who belong to Him must live honestly and openly and speak the truth in love as they learned from Him. We are taught, “Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” [EPHESIANS 4:25].

Yet another class of sinners who are excluded from the Holy City is identified as “idolaters.” The word at its basic meaning referred to those who used pictures or images to represent the gods. Few people in our world worship images or pictures, though the use of ikons in Orthodox worship or the use of statuary in the Roman Catholic tradition clearly approximates such action; as such, it seems contrary to God’s warning against idolatry. Of greater concern to contemporary mankind is the subtle idolatry of our world. “Put to death ... what is earthly,” admonishes the Apostle, and at the end of that list of characteristics associated with the earthly nature is “covetousness, which is idolatry” [COLOSSIANS 3:5]. In EPHESIANS 5:5, covetous people are identified as idolaters.

To any who compartmentalise their lives into secular and spiritual spheres, I caution you that you are moving dangerously close to idolatry. There is no segregation of life into such artificial spheres. Either Jesus is Lord of all, or He is not lord at all. If you esteem anything of greater worth than knowledge of Him as very God, you are an idolater. Whether **pleasure, position, possessions** or **power**, all alike stand in opposition to God if we are not fully submitted to Him as Lord.

How subtle is the deception that our pleasures make us better suited to serve Him! God gives us the capacity to enjoy life and we distort His goodness to spend it on our own desires. How destructive the thought that we will obtain our position to serve Him more effectively. If we will not serve in the small place, we will not serve in the great place. The lure of possessions and power has destroyed far more saints and sinners alike than has wealth or influence. No wonder that John closes his first letter with these words, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” [1 JOHN 5:21].

When, in the text, John speaks of sorcerers as being excluded from the Holy City, you might imagine that warlocks, witches, wizards and practitioners of the occult arts were in view. You would not be wrong, since such individuals seek to enter into realms which God has forbidden man to enter. There is no question but that those individuals who delve in the dark arts, playing with Ouija boards and seeking to speak with the dead are under an awful curse from God. Long years past, Isaiah wrote: “When they say to you, ‘Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living” [ISAIAH 8:19]?

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In writing this, Isaiah was but iterating the warning issued long years before by Moses. “There shall not be found among you anyone ... who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God” [DEUTERONOMY 18:10-13]. The reason Moses gave for avoiding these practises was that “You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.”

I have spoken at other times of my personal experiences when encountering people who worshipped demonic beings, individuals who had sought out the dark powers of the occult world. There was no question but that these individuals encountered powerful beings, and that these dark powers could intimidate and frighten people who were unaware of the occult. I’ve also told you that God has demonstrated that He is truly all-powerful in protecting His servant and in silencing those who had surrendered themselves to do evil.

I’ve also spoken of people who employed drugs to achieve an out-of-body experience. Perhaps you have known such people, and you could speak of the dangers associated with surrendering control over your life to chase a phantasm, to pursue a phantasmagorical illusion, to seek a will-o’-the-wisp. Society is experiencing an opioid crisis today as people seek a higher high, only to find death instead.

Why mention this in the context of speaking of those who are identified as sorcerers who are excluded from the Celestial City? There is an aspect to this word which is translated “sorcerers” which is not readily apparent to us. The word *phármakos* is the root of our word “pharmacy” or “pharmaceutical.” Those who practised magic arts in the day in which John wrote employed drugs and potions to accomplish their dark arts. Thus, the word could easily refer to illicit drug users. Let the hearer take warning.

Whenever we read of the “sexually immoral,” realise that we are speaking of a broad category. The term “sexually immoral” encompasses any sexual activity outside of marriage. Homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, addiction to pornography, harlotry and incest would all be included by this term. I solemnly warn you that if you enjoy the titillating show on late night television, it may be indicative of a serious problem in your relationship to your spouse. Be cautious if you enjoy reading the salacious novel for the momentary thrill it affords. That may reveal more about your heart than you could imagine. When you pause to view pornographic magazines, arguing that there are some good articles, you open yourself to destruction and eternal condemnation. Don’t try to tell me that viewing pornography will make you a better lover—your spouse will never live up to the air-brushed fantasy. Be honest enough to admit that you aren’t watching the pornographic videos on television because they have a strong story line.

Likewise, we should have no difficulty understanding John’s reference to “murderers.” Those who so despise human relationship that they count the death of a fellow human no great loss, need to recall Jesus’ words warning us that to hate another or to despise another in your heart is a precursor to murder. Those who so despise their fellow humans will be held accountable to God.

The “detestable” are those who are loathsome in God’s sight. Paul describes to Titus rebellious people who willingly ruin entire households for the sake of dishonest gain. Of such people the Apostle states that they claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. Such people are “detestable, disobedient and unfit for any good work” [see TITUS 1:10-16]. The reference is to those who are loathsome to God because they dishonour Him because their actions fail to match their profession.

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No doubt Paul had such people in mind and could easily have referred to such people as “abominable” or “detestable” or “loathsome” or “vile” when he penned **ROMANS 2:17-24**. There, Paul wrote, “If you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”

You should be aware that God finds some actions and some things abhorrent. God declares idolatry to be abhorrent to Him [**EZEKIEL 5:9, 11; 6:9**]. This must surely include the modern idols we erect in our hearts, idols such as position, possessions, power and pleasure. Again, the Lord declares wickedness to be an abomination in His sight [**PROVERBS 8:7; 11:1**]. The people of God are repeatedly called to separate themselves from everything associated with pagan practises since their actions are loathsome to God.

Lest you think such matters have no reference to us as a professed people of God, listen to the warning provided by Jesus’ words recorded in Luke’s Gospel. To the Pharisees, sneering at Him, the Master said, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” [**LUKE 16:14-15**]. Think about that! What man esteems is an abomination to God! The things that we count as important in this life are an abomination in the sight of God! We should be careful to review what we value to ensure that we are not falling under divine condemnation.

Also listed are “the faithless.” This refers not simply those who do not believe, though it certainly includes such. It includes all who are mistrustful or even disobedient. Ultimately, however, the hesitant, the incredulous and the mistrustful are faithless. All alike fall under the condemnation of **MARK 16:16**, “Whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Faith always results in deeds, though deeds can never secure faith. The Puritans of old were wont to say, “*Faith alone saves; but the faith which saves is never alone.*” Paul challenged the Corinthian saints, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test” [**2 CORINTHIANS 13:5**]! If your disobedience denies your profession, you need to examine yourself to see whether you are in the Faith. You need to test yourself. When you do examine who you are and your relationship to the Master, I trust that you will discover Christ is in you and that you are in the Master.

A final group excluded from the Holy City is “the cowardly.” Perhaps we are surprised by the exclusion of the cowardly from the celestial city. Each of us at one time or another have equivocated, we’ve known what it is to fear. I’ve certainly been accused of being a coward, and I admit that I have not always been as bold as I should be. However, it is essential to recognise that many Christian confuse brashness with boldness, confuse caution with cowardice.

Jesus used this same Greek term when He rebuked His disciples in the storm. Jesus asked the disciples, “Why are you so afraid” [**MARK 4:40**]? The question begs an answer. We need to remember that God does not want us to live in fear. Paul wrote, “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” [**2 TIMOTHY 1:7**]. The latter portion of that verse would lead us to suspect that cowardice excludes power and love and self-discipline, qualities that are highly esteemed in the realm of spiritual warfare and for spiritual work.

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Perhaps we need to define what is meant when God speaks of “the cowardly.” The presence of fear does not mean that one is cowardly. Soldiers in battle are fearful, but their training permits them to set aside their fear in order to do the hard tasks. Fire fighters and police are sometimes fearful in the conduct of their duties, but we know they are not cowardly; their training allows them to stand firm, refusing to give in to fear as they perform hard tasks even when threatened. Parents sometimes are fearful, but their fear is not cowardice. A father will fight for his children, standing up against unimaginable odds because he will defend his child. Mothers will sacrifice themselves if they may save a child. Oh, no, parents are not cowardly.

I assure you that each time I stand behind the sacred desk to address the people of God, I am fearful—I fear God. I tremble at the thought that I may dishonour Him by being unprepared. I fear failure to speak clearly when presenting the call to life in the Son of God. I fear that I may somehow misspeak and fail to honour God who appointed me. However, I pray God will always give me courage to speak the truth, proclaiming the message of life that is meant to build strong Christians and to honour the Name of the Living God.

Remind yourself that the evidence of the fullness of the Spirit is boldness before the wicked of this world, and boldness says nothing of whether or not one experiences fear. Boldness is the outward manifestation of one disciplined to do hard things despite feelings. Let me show you that by pointing to the Word of God. The disciples, on the Day of Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke boldly of Christ as the fulfilment of prophecy, and this in the very city where He had been crucified [ACTS 2:4 ff.].

Peter and John, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly addressed the Sanhedrin, rebuking them for killing the Messiah [ACTS 4:8 ff.].

Released by their enemies, these fearless men returned to the other disciples who together prayed for holy boldness, and at the conclusion of their prayer, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness” [ACTS 4:31].

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit dared look upward while his tormentors and those who would murder him howled out their rage. He was rewarded with the vision of the Lord standing to receive him [ACTS 7:55-56].

In Pisidian Antioch, the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, rejoiced despite persecution and extreme opposition [ACTS 13:52].

If the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence is holy boldness, the evidence of His absence is cowardice before the enemies of the Lord. Those who never speak to the lost because they fear the reaction they may experience need to ask whether they have the Spirit of God. Those who prefer momentary peace rather than the truth are cowardly and know nothing of the Spirit’s presence. Those who would sacrifice truth for the sake of approval from this world must question whether the Spirit of God resides with them. Cowardice is evidence that the Spirit of God has been turned away. I do not say that those who are Spirit-filled will never experience doubt as they serve God; I do say that in His power the child of God will stand firm against the host of hell. If you are silent in the face of spiritual opposition, if you tolerate wickedness in order to have a transient calm, if you compromise truth for the sake of momentary peace, you are cowardly and craven. Thus, you have positioned yourself with the enemies of God.

THE DREADFUL SENTENCE — “Their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” [REVELATION 21:8]. There should be no surprise at who has been banished from the Celestial City and condemned to eternal punishment. Many of these will no doubt be greatly surprised, however, since so many people have deceived themselves.

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The cowardly may imagine that they can somehow be God's secret agents, but they are attempting to treat God's salvation as nothing more than a celestial fire insurance policy. The faithless may think they will never be exposed, but even now they are under condemnation. The detestable know nothing of God; because of their wilful ignorance, He will deny them a place at His table. Murderers, the sexually immoral and all who appeal to the dark side of human existence may imagine their sins are hidden; however, all alike shall receive their awful sentence from the Great Judge of the Universe. Idolaters will be exposed as having trusted in nothing more than a gossamer web; when they lean on their god, it shall give way. Those who have lived a lie, destroying others with their tongues, shall themselves be destroyed in that awesome day. This is the second death.

Some argue that this reference to the "the lake that burns with fire and sulphur" is simply dramatic language indicative of an earlier, simpler time. I am well aware that preachers of another era were prone to employ exaggerated vivid descriptions of hell, of Hades, of Gehenna. I cannot provide such descriptions; I have no way of knowing what hell is like except through the descriptions God has provided in His Word. If the Word of God is figurative, as some claim, then I am certain that the reality must be terrifying in the extreme. God does not rejoice in providing such descriptions; He provides these descriptions to warn against going to that place. Take heed, then. If the description of those consigned to hell should fit you in any instance provided, take these words as a warning of love and not as exulting over your certain destruction and eternal ruin.

I remind you that Jesus related the account of a rich man who lived without thought of God and expressing no particular concern for his fellow man. Since it was a story that could have been told of many Canadians, it is important to recognise that Jesus was not delivering a parable in this instance; rather, this was an account from Him Who is the Judge of all mankind. The rich man died, but death did not end it all! Jesus spoke of him as "in Hades, being in torment" [LUKE 16:23]. This rich man spoke of "anguish in this flame" [LUKE 16:24]. Did Jesus tell this story to gloat over the condemnation of sinners? Such thinking is folly-wide-the-mark! Jesus related this frightful account to warn those listening to heed the words of Scripture. Christ the Lord was not condemning mankind; rather, He was lovingly warning mankind.

Hell was not designed for man; hell was "prepared for the devil and his angels" [MATTHEW 25:41]. Indeed, Satan shall at last be eternally incarcerated in that awful place. The great tragedy is that so many of our fellow man will likewise be condemned to spend eternity in that awful place. What a dreadful scene John paints in REVELATION 20:11-15. "I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

You may have heard cultists solemnly pronounce, "I wouldn't throw a dog into a fire!" Neither would I! But when all existence is reduced to either eternal joy in the presence of God or eternal ruin excluded from His presence, the choice lies within one's own heart. Through their unbelief, through their refusal to believe the message of life, through their inaction and failure to acknowledge Christ as Lord, people condemn themselves and seal their eternal fate.

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It is sometimes said that hell is the insane asylum of the universe. The description is apt since one would need to be spiritually insane to go there. It is not so much that God throws men into hell, but it is rather that people choose to go there through their refusal to receive His grace and His pardon and His mercy. What is left but that God must separate the wheat from the chaff, or the sheep from the goats? The choice before us is either the second birth or the second death.

THE DIVINE SUMMONS — “To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment” [REVELATION 21:6]. Though the text we have been examining began with an invitation, I have reserved exploring that invitation to this moment. I want God’s dramatic and gracious invitation to linger in your minds as you leave the service this day. If you will not immediately act on His invitation, perhaps it will remain in your memory, haunting you until you receive the grace of God in Christ the Lord. I pray that you have no peace until you have surrendered to the Spirit of God as He draws you to faith in the Son of God and to the life that is found in Him.

The Saviour does not say that you must thoroughly understand every theological nuance presented in the Book in order to receive His gracious gift. Are you thirsty? He provides water which will quench the thirsting of your spirit, satisfying the most discriminating palate. Are you willing to stand with the Son of God? If you only have the will to believe Him, He promises that you will move toward life in Him. Accepting His call will assuredly result in life for you.

Perhaps you have heard that the Master said, “If anyone wants to do God’s will, he will know about my teaching, whether it is from God or whether I speak from my own authority” [JOHN 7:17]. To even have the desire to know the will of God is to position yourself to discover His will. Is this your will? Is this what you want? I pray this is the case for you. However, if you are determined to resist Him and His Spirit, you will not be convinced regardless of how persuasive the presentation you may hear. To have the desire is to be moving toward life.

There is something else that must be stated. When you have come to faith in the Risen Son of God, He will graciously work in your life to touch the lives of those you love. When Paul and Silas were asked what was necessary to be saved, they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” [ACTS 16:31]. It is faith in the Son of God that saves, but when one has believed Him, that one will have influence over those who are close. A husband does have influence with his wife to point the way to life in the Son of God. A father has influence with his children to point them to the Saviour. A mother has influence over her children if she will live consistently as a follower of the Master. Who knows but that a child can have influence in the life of that child’s parents. The salvation God offers will have an impact in the life of the one who believes Him.

Resisting the evil of this world, standing against the lure of the wicked one and in opposition to the downward pull of your own desires as befitting those who are redeemed, will result in glory. To overcome is to enter into the inheritance of the Lord. That inheritance includes eternal life, joy and peace as promised in the preceding verses. Here is a fascinating piece of trivia. The word which is translated “conquers” in our text is drawn from the little Greek word *nikáō*. You would be more familiar with the noun form, which is *níke*. We associate the word with a line of running shoes and sports clothing; however, in the Greek language, the word speaks of “victory.” The word is employed in our New Testament twenty-seven times, of which the great majority are in John’s writings, primarily in either his first epistle or in the Apocalypse. These books frequently speak of victory, of overcoming, just as is true in the case of our text for this message. We are to be victorious ... against what? Against whom? What is the realm of conflict? How shall we overcome?

REVELATION 21:6-8
EXCLUDED FROM THE CELESTIAL CITY

Each of us has undoubtedly heard of the unholy trio—the world, the flesh and the devil; and we know these three are very real opponents to grace, even if we don't fear them as we should. If we will honour the Master, we must resist surrendering to any of these three enemies of God; we must overcome their appeal. "The world" refers to the fallen order of things, the distorted view that exchanges eternal truth for temporal possessions. The allure of a young woman for a man is less the attraction of godly companionship and complementary strength than it is a matter of attraction to form and features which must fade away with time. Women are nineteen years of age for only one year!

The temptation to depend upon physical aspects instead of God's Spirit is an appeal to the world. If we will please God, we must overcome our natural attraction to that which is seen and felt and heard with our physical senses. As I've said on other occasions, if you can see it, smell it, hear it, taste it or touch it, it has "Temporary" written all over it! Train yourself to look for the eternal aspect, to seek out the spiritual, for that is permanent.

Closely allied to "the world" is "the flesh," the pleasures that attract us because we so readily relate to the flesh. The world attracts; the flesh desires. I'm urging you to focus on the spirit as that which is eternal and thus possessing beauty, real beauty that can never fade away. It will require discipline to refocus our attention on the permanent rather than the transient. We have been so long conditioned to think only of what we can see, touch, smell, hear or taste that we fail to remember that these senses are means by which we experience this world only. The world for which we are saved is spiritual, and we must cultivate the Spirit to recognise that which is permanent.

Is it actually necessary to identify what is meant when we speak of "the devil?" We are identifying that enemy of the soul who seeks to destroy and to kill. We are speaking of that fallen angel who despises God and seeks to usurp the worship that rightfully belongs to God. The devil is seen as the entity motivating all that would supplant knowledge of the Living God. Beware of the evil one, the deceiver who tripped up our first mother and now slanders the people of God even to the face of the Living God.

How shall we resist these powerful adversaries? Earlier in the Apocalypse, John wrote, "I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them'" [REVELATION 12:10-12a]! Did you note that the wicked one is conquered by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of the testimony of those who are redeemed? We gain victory over the world, the flesh and the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by the testimony of grace.

Have you received the life that is offered in Jesus? This life is promised to all who receive the Risen Saviour as Master over life. We urge you to believe this message even today. Amen.