

Discipleship and the Millennial Kingdom

(Unraveling Some of the Difficult Sayings of Jesus on Discipleship)

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A Good Run

A railroad engineer by the name of Bennie Locke recalled that one time he was 25 minutes late on a run out of Scranton, Pennsylvania. As always, he had prayed for safety. Then he asked, "Lord, help me bring her in on time." Later he said, "On this particular day I couldn't gain a second on the stiff climb up the Pocono Mountains. But once over the summit, we almost flew down the other side. I just held her steady and let her go. At last the old station at Hoboken loomed ahead. As we pulled alongside, I looked at my watch and we were right on the dot. I sat wiping the sweat off my face when I heard the tap of a cane on the outside of the cab. Looking out, I saw the president of the railroad standing there, all smiles. He said to me, 'A good run, sir! A very good run!' That meant more to me than anything in this world." The godly engineer continued, "When I make life's last run and pull into the Great Terminal, I hope I'll hear Christ say, 'A good run, sir! A very good run!'"

We too should long to hear these words from our Lord's lips when we enter the future life. I trust that this is our supreme desire. If not, we need to start focusing on the future. We should seek to follow the Lord in this life so when we appear in the next life, Jesus will be pleased with our overall performance or run in life. Are we looking ahead to the final terminal?

Revelation 14:13 says:

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

This study presents the importance of discipleship or following Christ in view of the coming earthly Millennial Kingdom. We will discover various texts in the gospel accounts where Jesus presents the credentials of discipleship to His followers in light of their entrance into the promised

earthly theocracy or Millennial Kingdom. The study will also explain the dangers of false profession and superficially following Christ, without any real attachment to Him, in light of the coming earthly kingdom.

Discipleship Living

In the various texts presented in this study, I will give some running commentary beside certain phrases and words, not to add to God's Word, but to help us see the immediate context and meaning that Jesus is giving to some of His most unusual sayings. Some words I've placed in "bold" lettering to make it easier to follow.

Matthew 16:25-27 is now placed in the context of discipleship:

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will **come after me** (*to follow Christ*), let him **deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me** (*the path of real discipleship and proof of one's salvation*). **For** (the first reason to become a true disciple = PROOF of one's salvation) whosoever will **save his life** (*from hardship by not surrendering and sacrificing one's life in discipleship and therefore giving no evidence of one's salvation*) **shall lose it** (*in the end be judged by Christ in hell at the Second Coming*): and whosoever will **lose his life** for my sake (*in surrender and sacrifice and possibly even physically death for being a disciple of Christ*) **shall find it** (*at the Second Coming when God's saints will receive great honor and recognition in the Millennial Kingdom*). For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? **For** (the second reason to become a true disciple = REWARD in the earthly kingdom) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father (*the Second Coming*) with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (*righteous conduct of the saved*).

Jesus taught that discipleship (transformation of living) was ultimately the sign and proof that a person was saved and had come into a true relationship with Himself by faith. It would also yield the eternal dividends of reward when entering the Millennium as portrayed in Matthew 16:28 (the Transfiguration of Christ) where a preview and snapshot was given of Christ's Second Coming. Jesus was teaching that a disciple of Christ will have greater or lesser opportunities of service during the Millennial

Kingdom in direct proportion to his faithfulness on earth right now (1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11).

It's interesting that Jesus spoke about the subject of discipleship in relation to Peter's misunderstanding about Christ's own hardship, suffering, and sacrifice that He was to experience in His coming death. Matthew 16:21, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." What Christ experienced would also be true of His own followers who fully embrace His teaching about discipleship. There is a high cost associated with dedicated or committed discipleship. Following Christ may cost us fame, fortune, family, and like Christ, even future death.

In short, the design of discipleship revolves around a radical way of living. It involves total commitment to Christ's cause, where a person is sold out for Christ, and is willing to serve Him faithfully, even unto their own death (Matt. 16:24). This is the kind of discipleship that will bring great reward ("then he shall reward every man according to his works" – Matt. 16:27. This means that it is perfectly legitimate to remind people of the consequences of their actions to motivate them to do what is right (1 Cor. 3:8-15; 2 Tim. 4:8; 2 John 8). That is precisely what Jesus was doing with His disciples here.

The teaching about discipleship was given to Christ's followers ("unto his disciples") in order to present the true credentials and design of discipleship. Christ begins by presenting the disciples with His design or plan regarding committed discipleship and followers of Christ. If a saved person is truly a committed follower of Christ he will take up a cross "daily" (Luke 9:23), wholeheartedly follow Jesus Christ, and make Him lord of his life. Christ's plan for discipleship has not changed. Christ's teaching on discipleship included *surrender* ("deny himself"), *sacrifice* ("take up his cross"), *submission* or obedience ("follow me"), and a *superiority* of love ("hateth and loveth") which means to love Christ more than anyone else or anything else in life (Luke 9:23; 14:27-35). This is the kind of discipleship

that will result in much reward at the Second Coming (Matt. 16:27). Again, the way a disciple invests his life determines his reward at Christ's coming. In Matthew 25:23, Jesus taught in parabolic form what He will say at His Second Coming to those who have faithfully served Him: "His lord (*a picture of the messianic King*) said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (*an expression that references the earthly theocratic kingdom*).

In the context of discipleship presented in Luke 14:16-24, which parallels to Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus opens up the message of salvation to the entire world ("and yet there is room," "compel them to come in" – Luke 14:22-23). This was an invitation for the great masses to enter the messianic kingdom, pictured as a giant banquet room, a kingdom that Jesus was promising to establish on the earth. But in Luke 14:25-35 and other related texts (Matt. 10:37-39; Luke 9:23-26; John 12:24-26), Jesus deals with the matter of discipleship, understanding that those who are compelled to enter the banquet room (the Millennial Kingdom), through expressing faith in Him, will in some measure adopt a lifestyle of discipleship that resembles surrender and sacrifice. They will follow Christ and give evidence of transformed living through following Christ and therefore give proof of their salvation and regeneration. If a person does not give evidence of transformed discipleship living, then "he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27, 33), as Jesus repeatedly taught, which obviously means that a person cannot be a genuine disciple and child of God who has embraced salvation and possesses a regenerate heart. If an individual cannot be a disciple, it's because they are not one of God's children. This is very simple to understand.

Jesus said in Luke 14:24:

"For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."

Jesus was teaching that the original band of Jews who rejected His messianic claims and salvation would not enter the earthly banquet (Millennial Kingdom) but many others (Gentiles) would enter the earthly theocracy. All are welcome to enter the earthly kingdom (the banquet

room), which is based on the offer of His grace and the new birth (John 3:5), but not every person becomes a follower of Christ which is the outward evidence that confirms a person's salvation and regeneration. This means that each individual must consider or "count" the cost (Luke 14:28) and understand what it means to be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. This is because the transformation of their lives gives confirming evidence (a clear testimony) that they have embraced Christ as Savior and are one of God's children. Jesus said to the religious people of His day, "Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). Jesus taught that people who live like the devil are the devil's children and they cannot be one of Christ's born-again disciples. This is what Jesus and His follower John taught.

1 John 3:8

"He that **committeth sin** (*habitually or as a habit and way of life showing no signs of regenerating life*) is of the devil (*a child of the devil*); for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

1 John 3:10

"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever **doeth not righteousness** (*those who do not exhibit righteous living - giving evidence of salvation*) is not of God (*he is not one of God's children*), neither he that loveth not his brother."

Jesus and John both taught that there is a marked difference between the saved and unsaved. The saved always give certain signs of regenerating life while the unsaved confirm their unregenerate state by not giving outward evidence of the new birth. This is what Jesus is teaching when it comes to discipleship. A person will give evidence of discipleship living if they are one of His children. A failure to follow Christ is the sure sign that they are not one of His children.

Jesus said in Luke 14:26-27:

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (*cannot be a true follower of Christ without being a true child*

of God). And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple (*a genuine follower of Christ since they have not come to faith in the Messiah*).

Of course, Jesus was talking about a priority of love. He does not speak of “hate” in a bad ethical sense but how followers of Christ should prioritize their love and give Him first love in their hearts and the highest priority and loyalty in their lives. Jesus spoke of this radical type of discipleship to exhort His true disciples to greater love and commitment but also to weed out the pseudo-disciples from among the masses.

Merrill F. Unger wrote:

“To jolt these would-be disciples out of any easygoing views of following Him, the Son of Man employed the figure of exaggeration, hyperbolically emphasizing that the love for Him that is to characterize real discipleship must be so intense, genuine, unadulterated, and undistracted, that love for anyone else (even the closest relatives) or themselves or life itself must in comparison be as hate.”

Jesus next talks about counting the cost of discipleship to separate the true from the false.

Luke 14:28-35:

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and **counteth the cost** (*there is a certain cost associated with being a Christian and follower of Christ – it costs us time, talents, treasures, tough times of persecution, etc.*), whether he have *sufficient* to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage (*message*), and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath (*a willingness to forsake whatever keeps us from being a committed follower of Christ*), he **cannot be my disciple** (*a true disciple, versus a counterfeit disciple, which lacks a desire to commit*

himself to Christ and His way - If an individual cannot be a disciple, it's because they are not one of God's children). Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour (its effectiveness), wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out (even as Christ will cast the unsaved into Hades at the inception of the earthly kingdom – Matt. 8:12; 13:41). He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (listen to this warning!).

Tom Constable writes:

“Obviously the Twelve had not given away everything they owned. They had adopted a lifestyle conducive to fulfilling their mission that involved relatively few possessions. Therefore we should probably understand Jesus' command as requiring a willingness to part with possessions as necessary to follow Jesus faithfully (cf. 12:33). Elsewhere Jesus taught His disciples to manage the possessions that they did have wisely (16:1–12). A person should not begin a venture without sufficient resources to finish it. Similarly one should not begin following Jesus without being willing to sacrifice anything to complete that project successfully.”

The point is this, Christ was teaching a radical form of discipleship. If a person wanted to really commit his life to Christ and become an avid follower of His, then he must embrace His claims for discipleship with the result of receiving great reward and recognition in the earthly kingdom for “then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27). Although there are varying amounts of discipleship and commitment to Christ's cause and ways, Christ's form of discipleship is the kind that results in rich reward (Matt. 5:12; 6:1-6).

Jesus taught His true disciples the kind of discipleship living that brings eternal reward and dividends at His Second Coming. So, on the one hand, Jesus used discipleship teaching to remind His genuine followers of receiving abundant future reward, when they would give Him full devotion and commitment. At the same time, the teaching of Jesus on discipleship exposed those who refuse to engage in discipleship living, as being unsaved people, who had no real intention to follow Christ. These people cannot be Christ's disciples for they have never become one of God's children (Luke 14:26-27, 33). Jesus says elsewhere, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23).

Luke 18:18-24 illustrates how unsaved people cannot be a disciple since they are not willing to become God's children: "And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? (*the Jewish concept of eternal life which was looking ahead to life in the Millennial Kingdom – "in the world to come eternal life" – Mark 10:30*) And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, *that is*, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"

We see in this encounter that the rich man, who thought that he was good enough to enter the earthly kingdom, and that God must accept Him for His good deeds, was exposed as being covetous and lost. Jesus got to the heart of the matter! With His invitation to discipleship, Jesus proved that this man was covetous and an unrepentant sinner, since he possessed no desire to sell all that he had and follow Christ. Of course, Jesus was not implying that a person must sell everything that they have and actually become a disciple in order to be saved.

Jesus was not presenting discipleship credentials as the *way* of salvation but as the *proof* that this man was not saved and unwilling to express repentance and faith in Him. In an earlier encounter, Jesus said to a woman, "Thy sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:38). Jesus said this to her because of her simple faith in Him ("*Thy faith has saved thee*" – Luke 7:50). Her faith resulted in her forgiveness and made her right before God. It was not discipleship living, promising to make Jesus Lord over her life forever, or cooperating with a discipleship program. It was her faith that resulted from a broken and repentance heart over her many sins.

Here is the point. Jesus does not present discipleship credentials and parables about fruitful living and transformation to the masses of unsaved people (Luke 14:25-35; Matt. 13:1-34) in order to get them to promise

something, follow something, or do something in order to be saved. This would be legalism which is opposed to grace and free justification (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:24). When speaking about discipleship to the unsaved masses, Jesus was demonstrating the difference between the true and the false, the tares among the wheat, or those who were saved versus the counterfeit. He was presenting the truth that “life begets life” or that people who are born again will live like saints who have been born again. Discipleship living is the *fruit* of salvation and *proof* that a person is rightly related to Him in a saving way.

The would-be followers who do not express the fruit of discipleship and transformation living, those who choose to utterly abandon Christ and turn away from Him (like Judas and the rich man Jesus encountered), it’s these people who eventually confirm that they were not genuinely converted and followers of Christ. They are the kind of people who manifest a way of living that “is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out” (Luke 14:35). They are the type of person who “having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is (not) fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). It’s these type of people that fail to give any lasting testimony of discipleship or commitment to Christ and who will not enter the earthly kingdom when it is established.

Galatians 5:19-21 confirms this as well:

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which **do** (*continually practice these sins habitually, as a way of life, and without any signs of regenerating life*) such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (the earthly kingdom or Millennium).

In Matthew 8:12, and the following verses, Jesus speaks to His Jewish audience and those who will not enter the earthly kingdom: “But the **children of the kingdom** (*the unsaved, self-righteous Jews who were the natural people chosen to inherit the kingdom and believed they were destined for the kingdom*) **shall be cast out** (*removed from the kingdom at its inception*) into outer darkness: there shall be **weeping and gnashing of**

teeth" (*expressions of judgment as well as anger and resentment when unsaved people are banished to hades at the Second Coming – Matt. 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28*).

Matthew 25:30 -31 envisions the same prophetic scenario:

"And cast ye the **unprofitable servant** (*a person who manifests no change of life and conduct*) into outer darkness (*the expression of judgment – 2 Pet. 2:17*): there shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**" (*a solemn warning of suffering God's wrath and a sad commentary on human nature*). When the Son of man shall come in his glory (*the Second Coming is a scene of judgment*), and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (*in the city of Jerusalem*). And before him shall be **gathered all nations** (*saved and unsaved*): and he shall separate them one from another (*the saved and unsaved*), as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats."

The division is based on the matter of fruitfulness or transformation of living which confirms and proves whether or not a person is born again and saved. In Matthew 25:41-43, Jesus condemns the unsaved people for being fruitless and therefore unregenerate when He states: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand (*the unsaved who are pictured as goats*), **Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels** (*the place of condemnation and suffering for unsaved people as similarly presented in the contexts of the Second Coming in Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:41, 46*): For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not."

Jesus is clearly presenting that unsaved people will be rooted out and exposed as being unregenerate (lacking the new birth) due to their utter rejection of helping God's people (the Jews) and showing no signs of regenerating life.

Matthew 25:46 concludes:

"And **these** (*the unsaved who do not manifest transformation of living – those who do not follow Christ*) shall go away into **everlasting punishment**

*(hades – the place of judgment – 2 Thess. 1:9, “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord”): but **the righteous** (those who manifest righteous living and transformation) into **life eternal**” (they will enter the earthly kingdom and begin to experience the glories related to eternal life).*

Matthew 13:43 adds:

*“Then shall the **righteous** (those who have manifested righteous living, transformed conduct, and who have not abandoned Christ, the truth, and His ways) shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (the Millennium). Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (heed these warnings).*

Discipleship Salvation?

This leads us to an important question. Does a person need to become a disciple at the time of salvation and continue to manifest all the credentials of being a committed follower of Christ in order to be saved and remain saved? Was Jesus requiring that unsaved people submit to His discipleship/mastery/lordship teaching in order to be saved as Lordship Salvation teachers assume by these verses?

We must understand that taking up a cross daily and the other credentials of discipleship have nothing to do with a person’s actual salvation and acceptance before God (2 Cor. 5:21). As I have been saying, they are only the outward evidence or proof of one’s salvation (Heb. 12:14; 2 Pet. 1:10). This is the way Jesus repeatedly presents discipleship in the gospel accounts. If a person is required to follow Christ and all the radical credentials of discipleship as a daily prerequisite, or requirement for salvation, then nobody could be saved or even know they were saved. In fact, salvation would be nothing more than a legalistic quest to make oneself acceptable before God on the basis of human effort. It would become a game of percentages. The Bible clearly condemns legalism (Rom. 3:21-22; Gal. 5:1-4). The leaven of legalism, even in a small amount, will sour the Biblical teaching of grace (“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” - Gal. 5:9).

Salvation is by grace – not by discipleship (Eph. 2:8-9). A commitment to discipleship is the *ratification* of one’s salvation but it does not become a *requirement* for salvation (Rom. 3:28). This is because no person has ever been a perfect disciple, or follower of Christ, nor can one merit God’s approval by any degree of commitment (Titus 3:5; Isa. 64:6). Salvation from the penalty of sin is a finished transaction (Acts 16:31) but discipleship is a daily routine (Luke 9:23 – “daily”). Deliverance from the penalty of sin is accomplished the moment a person believes in Christ (John 1:12; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:13; Eph. 1:13; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:39) whereas discipleship and sanctification is a lifelong process (1 Thess. 4:3-4; Phil. 2:12-13). Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) while discipleship is by following Christ through commitment (Mark 8:34). Never mix discipleship with the expression of faith in Christ at the time of salvation (the Lordship Salvation position). We don’t become a follower of Christ in order to be saved but will give evidence of discipleship and transformed living after we are saved.

Professors and Possessors

Jesus talked about discipleship living to stir the hearts of His followers and get the most out of their lives, while at the same time, He also presented the claims of discipleship to warn against the dangers of illegitimate or spurious followers of Christ. When presenting the truth about discipleship, Jesus also warned about the danger of false profession, since Luke 14:25 reveals that “there went great multitudes with him.” Great throngs of people, saved and unsaved, followed Christ. Therefore, Jesus presented the credentials of discipleship to confirm those who were truly saved and part of His true flock. Jesus is not teaching that every disciple will be exactly the same in their commitment to His cause, but He is teaching that those who truly follow Him will demonstrate a transformed state of discipleship that will give evidence of their regeneration. Those who give no evidence or fruit that relates to following Christ and His cause, confirm that they are not part of His true company of followers. In short, they were never regenerated and are mere professors of salvation. Discipleship is not the *way* of salvation but it is the *confirmation* of one’s salvation.

Matthew 16:25-26 records Jesus’ familiar words: “**For whosoever will save his life** (by living the self-life – saving one’s life from hardships by not

becoming a disciple or follower of Christ, and refusing to live a transformed life, giving evidence that one is not saved) shall lose it (receive of Christ's judgment at the Second Coming): and whosoever will lose his life for my sake (the spiritual life - surrendering and sacrificing one's life in discipleship and possibly die as a martyr for Christ's cause) shall find it (discover recognition and reward in the next life within the kingdom). For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Along with the teaching of discipleship Jesus spoke about those who *profess* salvation but do not actually *possess* salvation. Jesus taught that a person enters the kingdom by new birth (John 3:3); however, a person's commitment to following Christ or change of conduct becomes the evidence of his salvation. Discipleship is not *part* of one's salvation but the *proof* of their salvation. The teachings of Christ repeatedly bring out this truth. Therefore, when a person totally repudiates discipleship and Christ's authority over his life he is an imposter who does not possess genuine salvation.

The old saying is still true:

"There are many professors but few possessors."

When speaking about discipleship Christ presents truths that relate to both believers (possessors of salvation) and unbelievers (professors of salvation). This is a helpful way to summarize Jesus' teaching on discipleship. Christ also addressed the larger crowds, when speaking about the matter of discipleship or following Christ (Mark 8:34; Luke 6:17), in order to warn people about the danger of false profession and losing one's soul because of a wrong relationship with Him (Matt 16:26; Mark 8:36-37). Of the original 12 apostles, only one, Judas Iscariot, fell into the latter category (John 6:64). Judas betrayed Christ for money and lost his own soul! Jesus was speaking about superficially following Him without any real attachment to Him (John 15:1-6). A person who does not make any *genuine* initiative to follow Christ, and who does not manifest any *true* or *lasting* godly fruit in their lives, demonstrates that he is not saved (Matt. 3:10; 6:15-18 13:22; 24:45-49; 25:24-25) and in the end will be judged by Christ at His Second Coming (Matt. 3:12; 7:19-23; 24:50-51; 25:26-30, 41, 46).

Jesus often taught the difference between the saved and unsaved, the true and the false, the wicked and the righteous, and the danger of a false profession of salvation, which is never accompanied by a change of lifestyle (Matt. 3:1-12; 7:13-23; 13:24-30; 23:1-33; 24:32-52; 25:1-46). In the kingdom parables that Jesus gave, as elsewhere in Scripture, works are always an *evidence* of salvation, they are never the *ground* of salvation (Eph. 2:8-10). The kingdom parables do not talk about the *way* of salvation but the *fruit* that comes from salvation. The evidence of a person's salvation is alluded to by the manner in which they display righteous living, wise living, faithful service, loving actions, and committed discipleship, which in the end are commended by the King and they are granted entrance into the earthly theocracy. So, in the gospel accounts and parables Jesus used discipleship, fruitfulness, and commitment to His cause as a confirmation sign of a person's salvation.

In Matthew 16:25-26 and Mark 8:35-37 Jesus is giving a warning to those who claim to be a followers of Christ but never demonstrate any change in their conduct, behavior, or manner of living. When a person desires to repeatedly "save his life" (vs. 25a) from the hardship or suffering that is associated with discipleship, when he fails to follow Christ and repudiates Christ's authority over his life, this becomes an indicator that one will "lose his life" or end up being judged for his sins as an unbeliever. Scriptures repeatedly teach that person who is born again will bear some fruit that is related to regeneration. Where there is no fruit there can be no life and the end result will mean judgment.

Matthew 3:10

"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit (*the fruit of righteous living – embracing Christ, truth, and His ways*) is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (*an illustration of coming judgment upon the unsaved at the Second Coming – Matt. 8:12; 13:30, 42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:41, 46*).

Matthew 7:19

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (*an expression of future judgment for the unsaved at Second Coming*).

Matthew 12:33

“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his fruit*” (*the fruit of transformed living versus corrupt living, obedience versus disobedience, truth versus error – “by their fruits ye shall know them” - Matt. 7:16, 20*).

When a person only manifests rotten fruit they prove that they do not have the life of God flowing through them (1 John 3:6-9). The end result of those who bear no fruit is judgment. Jesus repeatedly warns about this.

John 15:6

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.”

Here is yet another illustration of eschatological judgment for those who reject Christ as Savior and therefore manifest no genuine signs of regenerating life. It's similar to what Jesus taught about the unsaved Pharisees and Sadducees, when He said, “Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12). These are explanations that can only be understood in the framework of severe punishment and judgment, as it relates to God's wrath being meted out on unbelievers at the Second Coming.

Matthew 25:41, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” All of the fiery expressions of judgment and punishment in the context of the offer of Christ's kingdom, the context of His Second Coming (Matt. 3:10-12; 8:12; 13:30, 42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:41, 46), and in the context of discipleship (transformed living versus rejection of Christ's ways and unrighteous living), all speak of judgment upon the wicked and lost in the realm of hades. There is no other contextual, Biblical, and even logical conclusion but to view these texts as expressions of God's wrath upon unbelievers and Christ-rejecters who live without God in their lives and manifest this by their beliefs and conduct.

In John 12:24-26, Jesus gave an illustration of the law of harvest (vast spiritual fruitfulness and increase) to authenticate that a person was truly saved and one of His true followers and children. Once again, we see the repeated language of Christ when He states: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and **die**, it abideth alone (*a disciple must die to his selfish ambitions and interests as illustrated by Christ’s death on the cross*): but if it die, it bringeth forth much **fruit** (*fruitfulness related to following Christ and righteous living as illustrated by the fruit of saved souls through Christ’s death*). He that **loveth** his life (*living for self and carnal pleasure, having no interest in Christ and righteous living*) shall **lose** it (*this person will be judged at the Second Coming and lose his own soul in hades – Matt. 25:41*); and he that **hateth** his life in this world (*by not following his own selfish interests and ways, by setting different priorities, putting Jesus Christ first*) shall **keep it unto life eternal** (*will experience a new life in the earthly kingdom that is established on earth - “in the world to come eternal life” – Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Matt. 25:46*). If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (*in the earthly messianic kingdom – Matt. 6:4; 10:33*).

Seed never produces grain until first it falls into the ground and dies. On the one hand, Jesus was referencing Himself and approaching death, but he uses the illustration of His coming death to also teach the true nature of discipleship. If Jesus did not die, He would abide alone. He would enjoy the glories of heaven by Himself; there would be no saved sinners (fruit) to share His glory. But if He died, He would provide a way of salvation by which many could be saved. In a similar way, a true disciple will die to his own selfish ambitions and ways in order to follow Christ wholeheartedly and faithfully. The result of this death would be fruitful living, transformed living, discipleship living, a new way of life. This is what Jesus is teaching. His genuine followers will manifest a new way of life that reflects the credentials of discipleship which is surrender and sacrifice for Christ and His cause.

A Lost Soul

“Somebody’s never heard of You,
Somebody’s searching for the Truth,

Not too far from here.
Somebody wants to hear you speak,
And somebody's ready to believe,
Not too far from here."

Yes, there are poor lost souls everywhere. We must reach out to them today with the Gospel message. Let's go on and give some more explanation on the thought of losing one's life at the Second Coming of Christ, at the time He returns to planet earth to establish His messianic kingdom (Matthew 10:39; 16:25-26, Mark 8:35-36; Luke 9:24; 17:33, and John 12:24-26). Losing one's life involves a terrible end in relation to the unbeliever's eternal soul. It means to experience judgment and great spiritual loss under the hand of God's righteous judgment (Rom. 2:5). The phrase in Matthew 16:25 ("shall lose it") can best be explained by Matthew 16:26 when Jesus said: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (see also Mark 8:35-36). In other words, a person can possess great material gain or fame in this world but what value is this in comparison to losing one's soul in hell? What can a person actually give in exchange for the value of his soul? Money, material things, and marked fame which men receive in this life for their worldly pursuits may seem to be something wonderful but they are certainly no trade-off for a lost soul in hell (Luke 16:23-24).

Charlemagne gave instructions that when he died he should be buried seated in the royal posture of a ruling monarch on a throne. Then he directed that the gospels should be laid on his knees, his sword beside him, the imperial crown on his head, and the royal mantle on his shoulders. And thus his body remained for 180 years. About 1,000 AD, the tomb was opened by the Emperor Otho. They found the skeleton of Charlemagne, dissolved and dismembered into various hideous postures. The skull was still wearing the crown. And the bony finger of the skeleton was pointing to the verse of Scripture, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

In other similar kingdom texts a person is said to "save it" (Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24) and "preserve it" (Luke 17:33), meaning their life, when they choose

to lose their life by following Christ in discipleship, hardship, and even death. The context is talking about saving one's life from God's judgment in contrast to losing one's life in judgment. A man can refuse to follow Christ, gain the fortunes of the world, and lose his own soul. However, a person who follows Christ and lives for Him demonstrates his salvation before God and will be saved from future judgment. He will preserve it for entrance into the Millennial Kingdom (Matt. 13:43). Once again, the *way* of salvation is not being taught by Christ but the *fruit* that comes from salvation. Christ argues from the perspective of fruit (discipleship living) to prove a person's salvation. He is not speaking of the way of salvation which is by faith and through grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The point is this. Although one does not need to become a disciple of Christ in order to be saved (Luke 14:17, 23), a truly saved person will not completely reject Christ's authority over his life. There will be a connection and commitment to Christ in some way, even though the individual may not become the kind of radical disciples that Jesus taught about in the gospel accounts which received great reward (Matt. 16:27). Those who make no attempt to follow Christ, completely ignore Christ's plan for discipleship, and refuse His authority over their lives, while claiming to be saved (Matt. 16:25a), are nothing more than tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:25). In the end, they will be judged as an unbeliever for not doing God's will and true service (Matt. 7:21-23; 24:45-51; 25:24-30, 46). They will lose their lives by experiencing God's wrath and judgment in the next life.

Matthew 3:12 is worth repeating:

"Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his **wheat** (*Christ's true disciples and children*) into the **garner** (*a picture of the safety of the Millennial Kingdom*); but he will burn up **the chaff** (*spurious disciples and followers of Christ – unregenerate people*) with **unquenchable fire**" (*the fire of hades, the same expression of God's wrath and judgment as depicted in Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:41, 46*).

The contexts of all the discipleship verses in the gospel accounts share one general theme. They present the danger of false profession which leads to ultimate judgment when Jesus returns as the King. In one sense, people can save their necks in this life but lose their souls in the next life! When a

person is counterfeit, when they exhibit no marked pattern of discipleship, when they show no commitment to Christ's cause, or manifest no change in their unrighteous patterns of living and outward conduct, they demonstrate they are not genuinely saved.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:37-38:

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is **not worthy of me** (*not worthy of being a true or genuine follower of Christ because they have never become one of God's children*): and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is **not worthy of me** (*cannot be worthy of being a disciple and by extension a child of the heavenly Father*). And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is **not worthy of me**" (*worthy to be called a disciple of Christ and therefore His child*).

Again, Jesus is talking about unsaved people, who do not express the fruit of discipleship and transformation. The thrice repeated phrase "not worthy of me" suggests that these people are not part of the true band of discipleship believers who have embraced Christ as Savior and who give evidence of this by their obedience to Christ. Jesus is teaching that a person's misplaced loves and loyalties will eventually confirm them as unsaved and spurious followers of Christ. No love for Christ, no cross (sacrifice) for Christ, no transformation of living means no spiritual life – no regeneration ("whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God" – 1 John 3:10). The danger of false profession is everywhere! Even Jesus had a Judas! There are those who claim to be following Christ and doing the works of Christ but are actually ignoring Him and His will for their lives (Matt. 7:21). As a result, their fruits or overall manner of living and conduct repeatedly witness against them. 1 John 5:

Matthew 7:20

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Titus 1:16 puts it this way:

"They profess that they know God; but in works (*their sinful and degrading ways of living*) they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

In the context of false profession, Christ says He would one day return to establish His kingdom and be ashamed of those who are imposters, which have lived a shameful life in the midst of a wicked generation.

Mark 8:38

“Whosoever therefore shall **be ashamed of me and of my words** (*those who reject Christ’s claims, words, and give no evidence of salvation and identification with Christ*) in this adulterous and sinful generation (*a description of unregenerate people*); **of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed** (*express disfavor toward the unsaved for rejecting His claims and truth by bringing swift judgment on them*), when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (*at the Second Coming and the establishment of His earthly kingdom*).

The Role Call

Christ will also refuse to confess before the Father those who are not His true and genuine children. Their names will be absent when the role call takes place. When the roll is called up yonder – not everyone will be on the list!

Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33:

“Whosoever therefore shall **confess me before men** (*outward testimony that one is a Christian = PROOF of salvation*), him will I **confess also before my Father** which is in heaven (*acknowledge them as God’s children = PROMISE*). But whosoever shall **deny me before men** (*refuse to recognize Christ’s claims over one’s life = PERMANENT rejection of Christ*), him will I also **deny before my Father** which is in heaven” (*will not be acknowledged as one of God’s children = like Judas*).

In the context of the Second Coming, we discover that Christ will refuse to confess before the Father those who are imposters, who are not His children, and who have demonstrated this by their wayward living and failure to place themselves under His authority and acknowledge Him as their Savior.

Matthew 7:23 records in more vivid detail Christ's refusal to confess false professors before the Father: "**And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**" There are many people who live for themselves and yet claim to live and follow Christ at the same time. Jesus says this is an impossibility. Many are too busy living for themselves and doing their will instead of the Father's will (Matt. 7:21). These people are not true redeemed followers of Christ in spite of what they might say or do. In fact, Christ says that He never knew these kinds of people as His own children.

Luke 13:27 teaches the same truth:

"But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:12:

"If we **suffer** (*in varying degrees and different ways = PROOF of salvation*), we shall **also reign with him** (*PROMISE of the Millennium*): if we **deny him** (disown Christ, the Christian faith and its truth = *PROOF of apostasy and lacking regeneration*), he also will **deny us**" (Christ will PRESENT us as the devil's children – not God's children and a genuine follower of Christ).

If we (an alleged follower of Christ) totally deny or disown Christ, expressing total disloyalty to Him, He will in the end also deny that we are one of His true followers and also deny us entrance into the earthly kingdom ("I never knew you" - Matt. 7:21-23). This speaks of apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 10:38-39; 2 John 9) and the Lord's ultimate rejection of those who professed Christ only temporarily (Matt. 10:33, 13:20-21). Instead of continuing to identify with Christ, like Judas, the apostate finally dissociates himself from Christ by the way he lives and acts (Titus 1:16). Christ denial is very strong language. It reveals that Paul believes that faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

Pay Day

While presenting discipleship, Jesus also spoke about future reward and the recognition of those who do follow Him and give life-transforming evidence that they are one of His disciples.

Matthew 16:25

“For whosoever will **save his life** (*from hardship and discipleship – giving no evidence of salvation*) **shall lose it** (*be judged at the Second Advent*): and whosoever will **lose his life** for my sake (*in self-denial, spiritual living, and even experiencing death for Christ’s cause*) **shall find it**” (*in the next life within the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus rewards them*).

The old cliché is true: “Finders keepers and losers weepers!” Finding one’s life has eternal implications in the earthly kingdom while losing one’s life has the overtones of Christ’s wrath and judgment at His Second Coming for at this time “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

Dr. Thomas Figart has rightly observed:

“How a person relates to Christ in the present will determine whether he saves or loses his life in the future.”

On the end of the spectrum, finding one’s life once again speaks of future reward and recognition in the life to come within the messianic kingdom. Jesus taught that payday is eventually going to come for His Jewish followers.

Matthew 16:27

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels (*a reference to the Second Coming and arrival of His earthly kingdom – Matt. 24:31; 25:31*); and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”

“Only one life,
Twilt soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Roy L. Laurin said:

“Measure your life by the broad sweep of eternity.”

Christ explained in Matthew 16:25 that when a person “will lose his life for my sake” or follow Christ’s plan for discipleship, surrender his life to the Lord, commit himself to good works and living, experience hardship,

suffering, and even death, it's only then that he will "find his life." This means that when one becomes a dedicated disciple or follower of Christ, he will find a better way of life, discover the true reason for their existence, and in the end receive eternal reward and blessing in the life to come (the earthly kingdom). Jesus is referring to those believers and genuine disciples who exhibit character of their salvation through discipleship and commitment to His cause and who "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 13:8).

The expression in Matthew 16:25b ("find his life") can best be explained by what Jesus said in Matthew 16:27: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." A person may lose his life today in hardship and even death for Christ, as Christ would (Matt. 16:21), but in the end find his life being showered with great blessing, honor, recognition, and reward in the life to come, within the promised Millennial Kingdom. Instead of losing one's life a person will find his life filled with reward and blessing associated with life in the earthly kingdom.

Luke 18:28-30

"Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (*the world to come for the Jews was their blessed hope to enter the earthly kingdom – Mark 10:30*)

Peter reminds us that the Jews looked ahead to "the world to come" (Millennial Kingdom) to receive reward and recognition in the earthly theocracy (*"for the kingdom of God's sake"*). Eternal life was often associated with the next life to come (*"the world to come" - Heb. 2:5; 6:5*) which for Jews was their entrance and reward in the earthly Millennial Kingdom (*"thy kingdom come" - Matt. 6:10*).

Mark 10:30

"But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."

Since the Jews viewed eternal life and reward within the earthly theocracy or Millennial Kingdom (“the world to come”), the expression *finding one’s life* is often associated with recognition and reward in the next life, within the discipleship contexts that are related to the earthly Kingdom (Matt. 10:37-41; 16:27; 19:27-30; Mark 10:29-31) and other related texts (John 12:26; 2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:4-5).

In Luke 17:26-27 Jesus gives this prophetic picture:

“And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man (the days prior to the Second Coming). They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”

Jesus then says in Luke 17:33-36:

“Whosoever shall seek to **save his life** (*from the hardship related to discipleship living and giving no evidence of one’s salvation*) **shall lose it** (*experience Christ’s judgment at His Second Coming*); and whosoever shall **lose his life** (*in living as a true follower of Christ, even dying for Christ’s cause, and therefore giving evidence of his regeneration*) **shall preserve it** (*preserve themselves from experiencing Christ’s judgment at the Second Coming*). I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the **one shall be taken** (*into judgment at the Second Coming, as the unsaved were in the days of Noah*), and the **other shall be left** (*to enter the earthly theocracy*). Two women shall be grinding together; the **one shall be taken** (*to judgment as the unsaved were judged by the Flood*), and **the other left** (*to enter the Millennial Kingdom*). Two men shall be in the field; the **one shall be taken** (*to judgment at Christ’s Second Coming*), and **the other left** (*to enter the messianic kingdom*).”

This is not the Rapture. Those who were taken away in Noah’s day were taken away in the judgment of the great flood. Similarly, those who will be taken away when Jesus returns to earth in His Second Coming will be those who are unsaved. Those who are taken out of the bedroom, field, or mill will be judged by the King, whereas those who are left will enter the glorious kingdom reign and be allotted their reward and portion in the future reign of Christ over the earth (Matt. 24:38-42; Matt. 25:21).

This is actually a promise given to the Jews in Jesus' day to indicate that there will be future blessing associated with the kingdom for all the saved who enter this glorious Golden Age. Jesus reminds them of this eschatological event to encourage their hearts in the time of persecution, even when they are faced with losing their own physical life for Him. He reminds them about His Second Coming and the time they will enter the Millennial Kingdom. Jesus wants His disciples to remember there will be plenty of future reward and honor connected with His kingdom reign (Matt. 25:23).

In losing one's life, there would naturally be surrender, selflessness, and sacrifice. In other words, a true disciple would lose his life in the sense of abandoning his own interests, goals, ideas, and in practicing obedience to Jesus. But Jesus may also be giving a literal emphasis connected with the idea of losing one's life. He may ultimately be teaching that there was the ever-present reality of losing one's physical life in interest for the King and His Kingdom program (Matt. 10:17-21; 24:9; 10:33; Mark 13:9-11; Luke 12:4). Many disciples would meet their death at the hands of the enemy. The same will be true in the future Tribulation Period as these Scriptures and others prophetically anticipate (Matt. 24:9).

If this is the case, how will these martyred people enter the earthly kingdom reign or Millennium and be rewarded? The answer is simple. The King's arrival to earth will mean their resurrection and entrance into the earthly theocracy. It's at this time when the Jewish disciples, who were living under the Old Testament economy, will receive rich reward and recognition for their dedication to Christ (Daniel 12:1-3; Isaiah 26:19; Job 19:25). In one sense, Jesus is saying in Luke 17:33 that if you "lose" your physical life for my sake in the ministry of discipleship (surrender and sacrifice), then you will "preserve" your life for eternity and for entrance and reward in the Millennial Kingdom. In essence, those who give evidence of their salvation by discipleship will experience their physical or bodily resurrection and subsequent arrival in the kingdom, and also receive rich reward and honor in the earthly theocracy.

Once again, the concept of salvation for the Jew living in Christ's day, who was still under the Old Testament economy, dealt with the earthly rule,

reward, and entrance into the coming messianic kingdom (Luke 18:30). Therefore, if a Jewish disciple would die physically or lose his life for the cause of Christ, then his life would be preserved for a glorious future in the earthly theocracy or kingdom. This was associated with a life of rich reward and increased inheritance. Those Jews who die for the King and the kingdom's sake, along with the surviving Jewish believers on earth at the time of Christ's Second Coming, will be taken into the kingdom and richly rewarded.

The Old Testament saints who have died for the sake of the kingdom message will be resurrected and rewarded (Rev. 11:15) along with all the other earthly disciples who were spared from death and service the Tribulation Period (Matt. 24:13). Their labor and love for Christ will not go unnoticed and together they will be rewarded and live in the millennial age. Thus, Jesus talks about entrance into the Millennial Kingdom (the 1,000 years) to encourage the hearts of those Jews who survive persecution and those who might lose their lives in connection with the kingdom program of Jesus. Both survivors and martyrs will enter this wonderful kingdom age and be richly rewarded for their discipleship living (Rev. 20:4).

Robert Harkness wrote these lovely words in an old hymn:

“Are you keeping close to Jesus
In the old-time way?
Daily walking in His presence
In the old-time way?
Have you made a full surrender
In the old-time way?
Given all to follow Jesus
In the old-time way?
Are you working for His kingdom
In the old-time way?
Are you leading others to Him
In the old-time way?”

In the old-time way, In the old-time way,
We must claim the old-time blessing,
In the old-time way.

Kingdom vs. Church Truth

These same truths about following Christ in light of the kingdom, find their way into the epistles, and are applicable to church-age saints.

2 Peter 1:11

“For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

In summary, if a person wants to experience an *abundant* entrance into the Millennial Kingdom (1,000 years), which prepares the earth for the eternal kingdom (1 Cor. 15:23-28; Rev. 11:15), he should become serious about dedicated discipleship and follow Christ in his present life, so when he enters the earthly theocracy, he will find his life filled with recognition, reward, and regal authority (Matt. 5:19; 18:4; 19:29-30; 24:44-47; 25:14-23; 25:31-40; Luke 13:28-30; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21).

Even God’s New Testament saints must be surrendering their time, treasure, and talents for the purpose of finding a wonderful life filled with reward, recognition, and rulership privileges in the coming earthly Millennial Kingdom. The Church Age saints who receive their rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) will be transferred, along with their rewards, into Christ’s glorious Kingdom reign over the earth.

Revelation 22:12 says:

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

This is the promise of the Rapture for church age saints who are in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Christ is going to appear in the air before the seven-year (Dan. 9:27) Tribulation Period begins (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9-10) in order to receive His Bride (Church) unto Himself (the taking of the bride) and then escort this New Testament Bride home to be with Him in Heaven (John 14:1-3). But make no mistake about it. We must follow Christ in view of the kingdom as well. Although the Millennial Kingdom is not God’s next plan on the prophetic calendar, we must follow Christ by working and serving in light of the kingdom’s future establishment. We must work and

live in such a way to receive reward at the Bema Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), which will in some measure be reflected in our honor and recognition in the coming kingdom. Our reward after the Rapture will in some measure be transferred to our honor, recognition and reigning privileges with Christ during the kingdom.

2 Timothy 4:1

“I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing (Rapture) and his kingdom” (Revelation).

Some expositors suggest that “his appearing and his kingdom” are one reference to the Second Coming. This is possible but it seems better to take “his appearing” as a distinct reference to the Rapture of Church Age saints. The word “appearing” is linked to the Church and the Rapture within this same context (2 Tim. 4:8) and is also mentioned as an “appearing” throughout the church epistles (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:7). It’s interesting that Paul may be linking the appearing of Jesus Christ in the Rapture for the Church (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13) with the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. This is not done to confirm the time reference for the Rapture since Christ’s appearing in the air (the Rapture) occurs seven years before His appearing in His revelation to earth (Rev. 3:10).

Paul’s charge to Timothy was made before God and in view of Christ’s “appearing” for His Church and in relation to the time He rules planet earth (“the kingdom”). Timothy was apparently charged in light of the Rapture and Revelation of Christ to earth (Second Coming). Perhaps Paul links the Rapture and Second Coming of Christ together in order to remind Timothy, as well as you and me, that we must serve the great and Almighty God in light of the kingdom recognition and glory we too will receive someday on earth. This is the future glory and honor that we will have which is directly related or connected to our reward received at the Rapture which Paul mentions in 2 Timothy 4:8.

William MacDonald recognizes this:

“The believer’s service will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but these rewards will be manifested at Christ’s appearing and His kingdom. It appears that rewards have to do with rule or administration during the Millennium. For instance, those who have been faithful will rule over ten cities (Luke 19:17).”

Hebrews 12:28 also speaks about the Church and Kingdom:

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

Yes, even Church Age saints must serve God in light of the future kingdom. When the Bible speaks about “receiving a kingdom” it is not referring to a present spiritual kingdom of people living in the world today. It is emphasizing a literal kingdom which is yet to be established upon planet earth (Luke 1:32-33). The kingdom concept is future. The kingdom is not the Church nor is the kingdom in some manner “already” present and still waiting a future fulfillment as progressive dispensational writers are teaching today. The kingdom is future and it is earthly!

In view of this, we must live and serve God in an acceptable manner, which consists of reverent fear and godliness (Heb. 12:28). Why? It’s because it pays to serve God! It pays to become a disciple in light of the promised earthly kingdom. Future honor and rulership privileges will be given within the Millennial Kingdom in direct proportion to how church saints have served today. The writer of Hebrews says that the kingdom is coming and we can wait for its arrival with confidence (even though it’s not the next prophetic event on God’s calendar) knowing that we will take part in this future time of glory over the earth. Therefore, we should seek to live and walk in light of this promised kingdom realizing that recognition and honor will be allotted to us in direct proportion to our discipleship and dedication to Him today.

Looking Ahead - The Kingdom of His Dear Son

Colossians 1:13 says this:

“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness (*past* – our unregenerate state under Satan’s power and world system), and hath

translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son” (*proleptic* – something that actually happens in the future but is seen to already be accomplished in past).

Some dispensationalists are convinced that this kingdom should not be interpreted eschatologically. Instead, they view this is as a spiritual kingdom which is set in contrast to the spiritual kingdom of darkness over which Satan rules and keeps unsaved people bound to sin. In other words, even though there is a future kingdom coming to earth, there is also a spiritual kingdom, which includes all of God’s saints, over which Christ is King (the sovereign rule of the Lord over human hearts). It is reasoned that although Christ does not yet rule on earth, He is no less our King.

Of course, if we view this as a universal spiritual kingdom over which Christ in some sense rules today, it must be understood that nowhere in Scripture is Christ called the “King of the Church” and Jesus is not on David’s throne ruling some kind of spiritualized form of the kingdom in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (Luke 1:33). Nor does the sovereign rule of God’s kingdom cancel out the literal fulfillment of Christ’s earthly kingdom on earth.

Some dispensationalists conclude that the “kingdom of his dear son” is similar to the phrase “kingdom of God” which is believed to be a spiritual form of the kingdom (the sovereign rule of God over the lives of His children). However, these same dispensationalists then make a distinction between the phrases “the kingdom of heaven” and “the kingdom of God” while the gospel records use them interchangeably (Matt. 19:14; 18:16) and repeatedly link them to the future earthly kingdom. In other words, both of these descriptive kingdom phrases should be understood in the context of Christ’s offer of the kingdom to Israel. Even the new birth was necessary for entrance into the earthly theocracy (John 3:3, 7). This is the manner in which the Jewish people would understand these kingdom phrases. They did not view them as some kind of spiritualized form of the kingdom.

After considering all the Biblical data, there seems to be a better option in understanding “the kingdom of his dear son” (Col. 1:13) in that it refers to

the future Millennial Kingdom over which Christ will rule with His saints (1 Cor. 15:24-25). Heinrich Meyer points out in his "Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament" that "The aorist is to be explained by the matter being conceived proleptically (Romans 8:24), as something already consummated (compare Romans 8:30). Thus the kingdom which is nigh is, by means of their fellowship of life with their Lord (Ephesians 2:6), as certain to the redeemed as if they were already translated into it."

Yes, the "transfer" is tied to the rescue operation of verse 13 which is spiritual in nature. But this does not necessitate that the transfer must be into some spiritualized form of the kingdom. When one happened so did the other by virtue of the believer's position in Christ. Part of our "inheritance" is the future earthly theocracy or Millennial Kingdom. So, Paul is inferring that at a decisive moment in the past, when we believed on Christ as our Savior, we were immediately transferred out of the spiritually kingdom of darkness (positionally and provisionally now have victory!) and by virtue of our position and inheritance in Christ we were transferred proleptically into the future kingdom or the Millennium over which His Son will some reign. In other words, God views His Church Age saints as already been made "meet" (fit or qualified – Col. 1:12) to be participants and occupants of the future kingdom in view of their positional inheritance in Christ.

It seems much better and in sync with Pauline teaching to understand this kingdom reference as referring to Christ's Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-6) rather than a general sphere of God's sovereign rule or a spiritual rule over God's saints today. God's kingdom ruling over all (Ps. 103:19), or His universal sovereignty over all things, is not the same as a spiritual kingdom over which He rules.

Now think of this. Paul doesn't say that one day, in the sweet by and by, we may find ourselves in God's earthly kingdom. He says we were "rescued" (past tense) from the dark domain of Satan's rule in which we were born and "transferred" (past tense with future implications - proleptic) into the kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ (1:13). This transference of citizenship in the future earthly kingdom is a done deal. The transfer happened in the past but it will be fully actualized and realized in the future. Yes, Paul is

looking ahead to the future earthly manifestation of the kingdom coming, but there is already a foretaste of this glorious future which we can and should anticipate right now and experience in our daily lives (Romans 14:17).

One again we must understand that God has already guaranteed us an entrance into the kingdom. We already have the passport! In fact, in God's settled mind we are already in the kingdom. No regenerate believer in Christ will miss out on the joy of entering the kingdom (John 3:3, 7; Rev. 5:10). This is because we have already been officially transferred into this future Millennial Kingdom. In God's mind, all church age saints in view of their position in Christ, are already kingdom citizens translated into this future kingdom of royalty and blessing.

The Bible teaches that we are positionally seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3; 2:6) before we get to Heaven. It also teaches that we have already been glorified in God's sight and mind even before it occurs (Rom. 8:30). In a similar way, we have already been transferred into the future kingdom era even before it has been officially inaugurated. How can this be? It's because God "calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). Therefore, we must learn to keep our eyes focused on the future glory and reward associated with this coming kingdom.

Romans 14:17 gives us a good reminder:

"For the kingdom of God (the future messianic kingdom) is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Paul gives the reason why we should express brotherly love and seek for unity and peace among the brethren on the local church level. The reason is an earthly kingdom reason. We must remember that the future Millennium does not consist only of earthly physical things like meat and drink (Isa. 25:6) but spiritual things such as righteousness, love, peace and joy. And it's these very things, which are to be practiced by believers living in this present age. Righteousness, peace, and joy characterize the coming earthly kingdom (Isa. 11:4-5; 55:12). Therefore, living a righteous life which is manifested by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24), such as a Spirit-produced

peace, love, and joy, are the very things that we should be practicing in our present day lives, in light of the kingdom's future arrival.

Paul is getting us to reflect on the future and what lies ahead in the Golden Age of the Millennium, so it might impact the way we live today. We are to think about the future and live in light of it. In one sense, we should live like a kingdom citizen right now even though the kingdom has not yet arrived in any sense whatsoever. We must look past the sunset of our lives and live for what lies beyond our horizon – the coming kingdom glory. We must remember that only the spiritual fruit in our lives and the Spirit directed works in our lives will last in reward, future privilege, and blessing in the kingdom. Alas, the world is passing away even as we speak.

1 John 2:17 says:

“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

This simply means that there is no future reward and value attached to the things related to the world system. They are passing away in the sense that there is no meaning, significance, or coming reward attached to them. They are absolutely worthless. Living for the things of this world which are passing away and which have no future significance is like rearranging the deck chairs on a sinking ship! This is why we must become a disciple in light of the future reign of Christ and all that is connected with this glorious reign (Rev. 2:26-27). The best is yet to come!

Jesus taught in Matthew 18:4:

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus told His disciples they must humble themselves and become as a child in order to have greater reward and honor in the glorious kingdom reign over the earth. In this statement Jesus declared that a person must become as a little child, or a humble servant in this life, if he is going to receive great recognition and reward in the future Millennial Kingdom. Dearly beloved, we must start to focus on eternity instead of being lost in the present hustle and bustle of our own lives. We cannot afford to be so busy that we

fail to look ahead and live in light of the future kingdom reign. We must humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord and as a result He will lift us up (James 4:10). Let us not forget the importance of humbly sowing and serving for Christ in view of our eternal reward and blessing (Gal. 6:9).

“Just a tiny little minute
Only sixty seconds in it.
Forced upon me
Can’t refuse it
Didn’t seek it
Didn’t choose it.
But it’s up to me to use it
Give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute
But eternity is in it!”

Looking Back – Missing the Kingdom

Luke 9:62

“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus spoke these words in the context of His previous statement, “Let the dead (spiritually dead) bury their dead” (physically dead). He was clearly referencing unsaved people who claim to follow Christ but express no transformation of living and commitment to Christ. In the same kingdom context, while discussing entrance into the messianic kingdom at His Second Coming, Jesus said, “Remember Lot’s wife.” She looked back, loving and embracing the riches of the cities, and became a pillar of salt (Luke 17:32). Her love and lifestyle proved her unregenerate state and therefore she would not enter the kingdom, just like the person who looks back and fails to follow Christ.

Luke 17:32-34 give us the full picture:

“Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever (*like Lost's wife*) shall seek to **save his life** (*by living the self-life – saving one's life from hardships by not becoming a disciple or follower of Christ, and refusing to live a transformed life, giving*

evidence that one is not saved) shall lose it (receive of Christ's judgment at the Second Coming); and whosoever shall lose his life (in surrender and sacrifice and even physical death for being a disciple of Christ) shall preserve it (for kingdom entrance at the Second Coming and discover great honor and recognition in the Millennial Kingdom). I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken (taken to judgment as the unbelievers in the days of Noah - Matt. 24:37-41), and the other shall be left" (to enter the Millennium – even as Noah and his family escaped the world that perished and entered the new world).

Many people look back and abandon Jesus Christ proving they are unsaved and not a true follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus is speaking about "would-be" disciples, unsaved people in these discipleship passages, who are not willing to follow Christ and who never manifest the change from being a follower of the world to becoming a follower of Christ. Jesus said that if we do not become a disciple of Christ in our daily practice, by failing to place genuine faith in Him for salvation, and therefore manifest no change in our hearts and lives toward spiritual things and living, we give proof of our unregenerate state and will not be "fit" or prepared to enter God's kingdom (Luke 9:62). Remember Lot's wife! Unsaved people who fail to enter the earthly theocracy will not become part of the reward and recognition program associated with the kingdom, which Jesus was seeking to establish while He was living upon earth.

The Narrow and Wide Gates

"Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" (Luke 13:23). This question about salvation and entrance into the earthly kingdom allowed Jesus to talk about this specific matter in the verses that followed. In response to this question, Jesus taught that many unsaved people would not enter the Kingdom, people who look back, like Lot's wife. Great multitudes of unsaved people will experience judgment at the hand of the King when He returns. He says, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24). Jesus continues this same narrative of the saved entering the kingdom (those who have given proof of their salvation in discipleship

living) but the unsaved missing out on the earthly kingdom (those who have no evidence of genuine discipleship living).

We see this repeated in the Gospel narratives.

In Matthew 7:13, Jesus spoke of the wide gate and the majority:

“Enter ye in at the strait (narrow) gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:”

In light of the whole sermon, it is obvious that Jesus is comparing the wide gate and broad road to the outward righteousness (legalism) of the Pharisees which results in a person going to hell. It also would reference the type of person who does not manifest any genuine fruit and transformation in his life (discipleship) which serves as proof that one is not saved. There are many traveling this road today! Jesus is speaking specifically to people who are devoted to religion, but who are deluded in thinking they are on the road to Heaven, when they are really on the broad road to hell (2 Tim. 3:5). Jesus warns about self-deception.

In Matthew 7:14, Jesus speaks of the narrow gate and the minority:

“Because strait (narrow) is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

In giving a reason for not entering the wide gate that leads to destruction, Jesus now gives a second description of a narrow gate. In contrast to the first analogy, this second illustration of a narrow gate and road refers to a person who will enter the earthly Kingdom someday by embracing Christ as Savior. It is referring to the person who is a true disciple and follower of the teachings of Jesus in the sermon that emphasizes the internal transformation of heart and living a righteous life, which serves as the CONFIRMATION and PROOF of his salvation.

Below is a summary of the two crossroads of decision:

- a. wide gate and road = the person who does not repent and who is trusting in his legalistic works as the WAY of salvation, it is the easy

path of least resistance which makes no demands of discipleship on a person, and therefore speaks of a person who possesses no fruit or transformation of living (the PROOF that one is NOT saved)

- b. narrow gate and road = those who repent and possess genuine faith in Christ, those who experience the cost of true discipleship and obedience, which is often hard, and which also serves as the PROOF of one's salvation.

Jesus taught elsewhere that righteous living is the clarifying mark that a person is one of His children and on the narrow road that leads to eternal life in the messianic kingdom.

Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit (those who express humility of repentance and living): for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (they will enter the earthly kingdom).

Matthew 5:10

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (they will enter the Millennium when it is established over the earth.

Matthew 13:43

“Then shall the righteous (who practice righteous living as the proof of their salvation) shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (the earthly kingdom or millennium). Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

The Last Shall Be First

Luke 13:28-30 says:

“There shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth** (*the punishment and anger of the unsaved who do not enter the earthly kingdom but who are banished into “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” at the Second Coming – Matt. 25:41*), when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the **kingdom of God** (*enjoying the Millennium*), and

you **yourselves thrust out** (*the unsaved, like the Pharisees, will not be allowed to enter the Millennium – Matt. 13:41; 25:10*). And **they** (*the great Gentile masses who are saved and traveling in the light and blessings of the earthly kingdom*) 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. And, behold, there are **last** (*a reference to the Gentiles who are saved, but by Pharisaic Jewish standards, they are despised and last on God’s list of prominence and favor*) which shall be **first** (*first on God’s list of favor and received by Him, allowing them to enter the earthly kingdom and enjoy its blessings*), and there are **first** (*the unsaved Jewish people like the Pharisees who think they are first and most prominent in God’s eyes*) which shall be **last**” (*a derogatory term of disfavor, meaning that Jesus does not accept them and allow them to enter the earthly kingdom*).

Matthew 13:41 also confirms this:

“The Son of man shall send forth his angels (*in His Second Coming to planet earth – Matt. 25:31*), and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (the unbelievers or unsaved).

Matthew 25:10

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (the unsaved are barred from entering the earthly kingdom).

Ezekiel 20:38

“And I will purge out from among you the rebels (*the unsaved or unregenerate people living on earth at the time of the Second Coming*), and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they (saved Jews) shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.”

Jesus and the prophet Ezekiel made something very clear. When you are not in God’s favor or grace, you won’t enter the earthly kingdom. The unsaved Jewish people (like the Pharisees) considered themselves to be “first” in every way (first in God’s favor, blessing, and privileges), but they would be “last” which is a derogatory and defaming word, indicating God’s disfavor, displeasure, and rejection of these people (Luke 13:30). It’s like

saying, “You are on the bottom of my crumb list!” This derogatory term obviously means in this salvation context that they (the self-righteous Pharisees and others like them) would be left out of the earthly kingdom for not being saved and subsequently failing to demonstrate true discipleship and a new way of life. There are no “in-between” ranks of people in the teachings of Jesus (half-saved and almost saved). Or half-baked and almost baked! There are only the saved (those accepted by Christ) and the unsaved (those not accepted). The concept of the “first” and the “last” brings this out very clearly.

There is a very clear dividing line. The unsaved which manifest no signs of regenerating life and discipleship will not be able to enter the Millennium. In contrast, some Gentiles, who were considered to be “last” in relation to their significance and privilege in God’s eyes, would actually be “first,” which means God fully accepts them on the basis of their faith and they would enter the kingdom. This same “first and last” and “last and first” analogy is repeated in other gospel records (Matthew 19:29-30; Mark 10:29-31). Those who seem to be on the low end of the totem pole in this life may surprisingly enter eternity with great honor and recognition!

There is a lesson for us to learn as we contemplate these solemn words of Jesus. We can fool ourselves, thinking that God must accept us on the basis of our race, inheritance, and merits. However, the Bible teaches that we cannot experience the new birth by heritage or relational ties of any kind, when it states: “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). Furthermore, it’s only the new birth that gives us the promise of entering the earthly kingdom.

John 3:3

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see (*enter*) the kingdom of God.”

Not seeing the kingdom of God (the earthly Millennium) means that a person will not enter into the kingdom. They will be banished from it. Jesus clearly illustrates this in the parables of the wise and unwise virgins. Those who were not spiritually prepared (saved or regenerated) discovered that “the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10) into the earthly kingdom that Jesus was

going to establish over the earth. The same would be true regarding the wicked servant (Matt. 25:26-30) and the figure of the “goats” who by their outward actions and conduct prove that they are not saved and genuine disciples of Christ (Matt. 25:31-46).

The new birth not only gets us into Heaven – it also gets us into the earthly kingdom (Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 6:10). The entrance into the earthly theocracy (God’s rule over the earth) is based solely upon grace and one’s salvation is then confirmed by one’s transformation of living. This question brings us to another point in our study where we can talk about the blessings and rewards of those who are born again and enter the future Millennium.

Shining Stars

Daniel somehow compared reward in the future kingdom with the ability of his saved Jewish brethren (Old Testament saints) to both reflect and then radiate the glory of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, after they are resurrected and enter the Millennium.

Daniel 12:3 prophetically records:

“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

Like these saved Jewish saints who enter the earthly kingdom, all of God’s saints will be able to in some measure reflect and radiate the glory of Jesus Christ from their own lives and bodies in direct proportion to how they have served the Lord upon earth. If we have expressed wisdom in our living (“they that be wise”) by witnessing to the lost and were busy investing our time in the God’s service, then we will be able to reflect God’s glory in some noticeable measure, in proportion to the way we have served.

“When he cometh, He will gather,
The gems for His kingdom, All the pure ones,
All the bright ones, He loved and His own.
Like the stars of the morning,
His bright crown adorning,
They shall shine in their beauty,
Bright gems for His crown.”

Matthew also envisions this radiant glory or shining that rewarded believers will manifest in the coming kingdom day.

Matthew 13:43 says:

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Yes, we will all shine in some degree as we reflect the glory of Jesus Christ. But how much we reflect and radiate God’s glory depends on our commitment to God and service while living on earth. Our eternal reward will evidently be manifested in the way we are able to reflect God’s eternal glory. We will receive reward that will in some measure be able to reflect God’s glory and it will never fade away (1 Peter 5:4). This will be the greatest reward that we could ever receive which is to ultimately glorify Christ through the reflection and radiating of His own glory. We will shine, hallelujah, we shall shine! But Jesus will outshine them all in this glorious kingdom day (Isa. 60:19-20).

For many years Sir Walter Scott was the leading literary figure in the British Empire. No one could write as well as Scott. Then the works of Lord Byron began to appear, and their greatness was immediately evident. Soon an anonymous critic praised his poems in a London paper. He declared that in the presence of these brilliant works of poetic genius, Scott could no longer be considered the leading poet of England. It was later discovered that the unnamed reviewer had been none other than Sir Walter Scott himself!

That Day!

We now move to the church epistles and we see similar promises given to the church regarding her reigning, ruling, and recognition privileges in the earthly kingdom. Yes, from a dispensational standpoint the church is a heavenly people with a heavenly hope (Phil. 3:20-21), but Paul does not allow us to forget the kingdom or millennial hope, how we too will reign with Christ over the earth.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the

Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at **that day** (*the Rapture and our subsequently rewards*): and not to me only, but unto **all them also that love his appearing**" (*Christians who will love Christ's return in the Rapture because they are ready for His return, anticipating it, living in light of it, following Christ*).

Paul lived in light of "that day," which was the day of the Rapture and his time of reward, when he stands before the Bema or Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Pay day is coming on that day! As Church Age saints, our reward and reckoning day will occur at the Rapture of the Church. This is when we will receive or lose reward in direct proportion to how we have lived and served Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-14; 2 John 8). However, the reward we receive on this day or "that day" will continue to be reflected in our reign with Jesus Christ during the Millennium.

A little first-grader beamed with satisfaction about a spelling test on which his teacher had written a large "100--Good work!" The boy said, "I showed this to Dad and Mother because I knew it would please them." We can just see him riding home on the bus, hardly able to wait for the moment when his parents would express their excitement with how well he had done. His desire to make Dad and Mom happy was obviously a very important motivating factor in his life. In a similar way, rewards should be a motivating factor in our lives. We are going to meet Jesus someday and be rewarded for how much we loved, served, and sacrificed our lives for Him.

Yes, the promises about reward and position in the earthly kingdom are given to the Jews in the context of Christ's kingdom offer to His covenant people Israel. This is evident in the gospel records and Old Testament writings. But let us not be so fast to write off all kingdom truth for the Church Age saints! New Testament saints will be rewarded at the Bema Seat of Christ which is a judgment that occurs in conjunction with the Rapture. The reward for the church is linked to the Rapture and His return in the air to receive us unto Himself and our heavenly home (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-16; John 14:1-3). But the Jews and Old Testament saints will be rewarded at the Second Coming of Christ which is the time when He returns to establish the long awaited kingdom (Matt. 25:29).

Jesus gave this word to His Jewish audience in Matthew 16:27:

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels (the Second Coming and arrival of His earthly kingdom – Matt. 24:31; 25:31); and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”

A day of rewards is coming for all of God’s saints. For the church it is “that day” (2 Tim. 4:18) and for the Jews it is the kingdom day. Nevertheless, even Church Age saints will be able to carry over their reward into the time of the kingdom reign. All New Testament saints (the overcomers) will be able to rule and reign with Christ in direct proportion to how they have lived and served God while dwelling on earth.

Revelation 2:26

“And he that overcometh (*POSITIONAL* victory through believing in Christ as introduced and revealed in 1 John 5:4-5 and Rev. 2:7, 11, 17), **and keepeth my works unto the end** (*PRACTICE* of the overcoming position – *PERSEVERANCE* in Christian truth and living in varying degrees and ways which is separate from the actual position – an added *PROOF* of one’s salvation), **to him will I give power over the nations”** (*PERSONAL* reigning privileges in the Millennium which all saints will have – Rev. 5:10; 3:21 - howbeit in varying degrees, according to their service and living for Christ – 2 Pet. 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 12:28; Matt. 5:19; 18:4; 25:21, 23).

The overcomers enter the earthly kingdom or Millennium in view of their position in Christ (1 John 5:5) and Christ’s promise (Rev. 5:10; 2:26; 3:21) but their practice, or living out of the position they have in Christ, not only becomes the proof of their salvation but will also determine how much reigning privilege and recognition they will receive in the Millennium. This seems to be what John is stressing in this verse.

Phillip Paul Bliss wrote these lovely words:

“More purity give me,
More strength to o’ercome,
More freedom from earth-stains,
More longings for home;
More fit for the kingdom,

More useful I'd be,
More blessed and holy,
More, Savior, like Thee."

Revelation 3:21 also says:

"To him that overcometh (*POSITIONAL* victory through faith in Christ as introduced and stated by John in 1 John 5:4-5) **will I grant to sit with me in my throne** (*PROMISE* of reigning with Christ over the earth), **even as I also overcame** (*PROVIDING* our salvation through His victorious death and resurrection – Rev. 1:18), **and am set down with my Father in his throne"** (*PROVING* our salvation is complete as He sits upon the throne of Heaven – Heb. 1:3: 12:2).

This is a promise designed to encourage the saints to stay on the right path and keep on keeping on! It's always too soon to quit. Living victoriously, triumphantly, and boldly for Christ will result in greater privileges to reign with Christ over the earth. Our sanctified and separated living will result in great future privilege and honor. All the saints will reign with Christ (Rev. 5:10) but not all of them will reign equally. In a similar way, all saints will be rewarded by Christ (1 Cor. 4:5) but not equally (Rev. 22:12). John is giving these saints who have already overcome in Christ (1 John 5:4-5) a word of confirmation or reassurance regarding their future *reward, recognition, and rulership* privileges in the Millennium.

So the promises given to the overcomers are designed to *confirm* (reassure) the Christians that they are saved and provide *comfort* or encouragement (exhortation) to face life's difficulties and persecutions ("be thou faithful unto death" – Rev. 2:10). They are designed to encourage the saints to stand up in spite of great persecution and pressure.

"Stand up, stand up for Jesus!
The strife will not be long;
The day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song;
To him that overcometh
A crown of life shall be;
He with the King of Glory
Shall reign eternally."

The Bible teaches that the Church Age saints are coming back with Christ on white horses to rule with Him over the earth (Revelation 19:11-16) and all the saints who have overcome in Christ (1 John 5:4-5) can claim the promise of ruling with Him (James 2:5; Rev. 5:10; 2:26-28; 3:21). However, when reviewing all the verses, it also appears that the saint's rulership privileges will be given in direct proportion to how they have lived out their lives on earth (2 Tim. 2:12) and the rewards they have received (Rev. 22:12) at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Again, since all Christians are not rewarded equally; therefore, it is also true we will not reign equally.

Of course, all Christians will enter the Millennial Kingdom by the New Birth (John 3:5) and rule with Christ in view of being joint-heirs with Christ but our ruling privileges will be based on our varying faithfulness and commitment to Christ in this life.

Romans 8:17 declares:

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (*POSITION – our identification with Christ*); if so be that we suffer with *him (in varying degrees and different ways = PRACTICE and PROOF of salvation)*, that we may be also glorified together” (*PERFECTION*).

James 2:5

“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and **heirs of the kingdom** (*POSITIONAL identification with Christ*) **which he hath promised** (*a PROMISE based upon our grace-relationship with Christ*) **to them that love him?**” (*PROOF of one's salvation which is true of all Christians in varying degrees – as in Rom. 8:28 and 1 John 4:7-8*).

All Christians are “joint-heirs” with Christ and “heirs of the kingdom” based upon their union and identification with Christ. Therefore, it would seem that the privilege to rule with Christ is part of the future “joint heir” grace-relationship that we have with Christ. This is something we all have and it's based upon the expression of His free grace. However, we will not all share in the kingdom glory equally. Our positional guarantee of kingdom entrance does not mean we cannot have different ruling privileges and honor in the earthly kingdom based upon our faithfulness, commitment and obedience

to the Lord, and service to Him. Jesus illustrated this when teaching about the kingdom during His earthly ministry.

Matthew 25:21

“His lord (*picturing the returning Messiah*) said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will **make thee ruler over many things** (*ruling during the kingdom - the world to come - in relation to the way God’s saints have served and lived while on earth*): enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (*the Millennial Kingdom*)

Matthew 25:23

“His lord said unto him (*picturing the returning Messiah*), Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will **make thee ruler over many things** (*ruling privileges during the Millennium*): enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (*the messianic kingdom*).

Of course, even when it comes to suffering, there are some who suffer more than others in the cause of Christ, and this will result in differing degrees of reward and glory. The future is ours by virtue of our position in Christ. However, in another sense, the way we live today will enhance our future reign with Christ in reward and honor in the coming kingdom.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 says:

“That ye would walk worthy of God (a COMMAND to follow related to *our daily living today*), who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (*a MOTIVATION for Christian living based on the future*).

Believers should walk and live in such a way that they represent a kingdom citizen right now since they are bound for the Millennial Kingdom and their destiny for the Millennium is sealed (Col. 1:13). Generally speaking, we should manifest the kingdom way of life or kingdom credentials in our lives even today (Matthew 5-7) in light of Christ’s coming kingdom.

“Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His shame?”

“Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage Lord;
I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.”

Suffering for the Kingdom

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5:

“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: *Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God (against those who are persecuting the saints), that ye may be counted worthy (by the demonstration and proof of their salvation through persecutions and tribulations) of the kingdom of God (as consistently portrayed through the gospel records and Scripture – the earthly kingdom – when God rules the earth in a theocracy), for which ye also suffer:*”

The heroic endurance of these Christians proved them “worthy” of entering the earthly kingdom in the future. Of course, this does not suggest that any personal merit (legalism) entitled them to enter the kingdom, since it is only through the merits of Christ that anyone will be there (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:5). Let us always remember that transformation of living, including our suffering for Christ, is the *sign* that we are saved (Eph. 2:10); it is not the *way* that we are saved (Eph. 2:8). Works do not tell us how we are accepted before God; they give us the proof that we are already saved (2 Cor. 13:5; James 2).

What Paul is teaching here is that those who suffer on behalf of the future kingdom show or demonstrate by their transformed life that they are born again, and that they will be among those who will reign with Christ in this coming day, which is promised because of the saint’s grace-relationship with Christ (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26). Suffering in various ways and degrees is something that all Christians experience, as they seek to live a different way of life that aligns with their position (2 Cor. 5:17), and as they remain faithful to Christ. Suffering is another aspect of their regenerate life and proof that they have been born again.

Paul taught the saints to remember that they were suffering in view of the coming earthy kingdom. Yes, there is some overlapping of kingdom truth even in the epistles, which are given strictly to the church. These church saints knew that their suffering would pay off in their privileged to rule with Christ in the future. Apparently our reward and honor in the kingdom will reflect the way that we have served and suffered for Jesus in this short span of life.

I recall witnessing an event that left a lasting impression upon me. In a large football stadium, which seated no less than one hundred thousand people, a moment of silent meditation was given in the honor and memory of a great football legend. He had just passed away the week before. The moment of silence turned into three minutes. But in all of this time there was an absolute silence or hush that filled the stadium. It was a silence that I never thought could be maintained in a sports stadium filled with one hundred thousand people.

This event reminds me of what should occur in our own lives when we listen to what Jesus, Peter, and Paul spoke about in connection with following Christ and suffering for Him, in view of our future reigning privileges with Him, and our abundant entrance into the earthly theocracy (2 Pet. 1:11). These solemn announcements should cause us to stand still, stop in our tracks, and bow our heads. We should pause and honestly investigate our lives to see what kind of follower of Christ we have been. How much have we been surrendering and sacrificing our lives for Him? How much have we entered into His suffering through our dedication to His causes? How disciplined and dedicated are we in our discipleship living and ministry for Christ? Remember, how we live and suffer for Christ today will determine how much we will rule with Christ in the future.

1 Peter 4:13 says:

“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed (*at the Second Coming*), ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (*filled with gladness for participating in Christ's suffering since we will share in Christ's glory during His kingdom reign*).

All of God's people pass through various amounts of suffering for Christ and will reign with Christ based upon their overcoming position in Him (1 John 5:4-5). But apparently those believers who suffer greatly for Christ are promised a special place in the future glory of Christ's reign, which is the time when Christ Himself reveals His own splendor and great glory at His return to planet earth (Matt. 24:27). God's saints will be glad for how they have suffered while living on earth because their suffering will evidently pay off in great dividends in the blessed kingdom reign. We are to possess a future hope regarding our kingdom reign with Christ and rejoice in the future prospects of ruling with Christ in the earthly theocracy that He will establish over the earth.

One day while walking with some children, Queen Mary was caught in a sudden shower. Quickly taking shelter on the porch of a home, she knocked at the door and asked to borrow an umbrella. "I'll send it back tomorrow," she said. The queen had deliberately disguised her appearance by putting on a hat that partly covered her face and by wearing some very plain clothes. The householder, reluctant to give a stranger her best umbrella, offered her a castoff she found in the attic. One rib was broken and there were several holes in it. Apologizing, she turned it over to the monarch, whom she did not recognize.

The next day she had another visitor -- a man with gold braid on his uniform and an envelope in his hand. "The queen sent me with this letter," he said, "and also asked me to thank you personally for the loan of your umbrella." Stunned, the woman burst into tears. "Oh, what an opportunity I missed that I did not give her my very best," she cried. Many, I fear, will have to make the same confession when they face the Lord at the end of life's road. Have we been seeking to give Him our best? This is rather soul-searching.

2 Timothy 2:11-13 reveals the same truth about reigning with Christ and creates a dichotomy between true Christianity and apostasy: "It is a faithful saying: For if **we** (*the elect* – 2 Tim. 2:10) **be dead with him**, (*POSITION = our union and identification with Christ's death* – Rom. 6:5a, 6-7) **we shall also live with him** (*POSITION = our union and identification with Christ's resurrection* – Rom. 6:5b, 8): **If we suffer** (*PRESENT suffering and hardship*

*for Christ that all Christians experience in various ways and degrees – 2 Tim. 3:12), **we shall also reign with him** (PRIVILEGE in our future life – Millennial Kingdom – Rev. 3:21): **if we deny him** (PATTERN of apostasy – fully and finally disowning Christ – Heb. 10:39-39; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 John 9), **he also will deny us** (PERMANENT rejection of an unsaved person - Matt. 10:33 - deny that we are His children - Matt. 7:23): **If we believe not** (PERMANENT choice to reject Christ – John 5:40 – a lack of saving faith and not merely a weak or temporary lapse in faith), **yet he abideth faithful** (PROMISING to judge the apostate who rejects Him – 2 Pet. 2:17 – and therefore maintain His integrity and justice by bringing judgment against both sin and sinners – Rev. 16:7; 19:11): **he cannot deny himself**” (PERJER Himself – speak untruthfully about His true nature and be inconsistent with His character – Malachi 3:6; Heb. 13:8 - by failing to bring righteous judgment against the unsaved – John 3:18; Rev. 20:12).*

Edmond Hiebert summarizes these difficult verses:

“The central truth of these pithy statements is that faith in Christ identifies the believer with Him in everything while unbelief just as surely separates men from Him.”

Second Timothy has been interpreted in various ways, but no person can miss the promise given to Christians regarding reigning and suffering, as in 2 Thessalonians 1:5. This is a statement of fact. As Christians suffer for Christ, in varying degrees and different ways (the PROOF of their salvation), they can be sure that they will not only reign with Christ (their PROMISE), but have a special place of honor and rulership privileges giving to them in the future (their PRIVILEGE). This statement is not made to confirm that some Christians will not enter the glorious kingdom reign, if they fail to suffer for Christ, since this defies the clear teaching of Scripture (Rev. 5:10).

Sometimes we read more into a verse than God intends to convey. The statement simply means that all Christians do suffer for Christ to some degree or extent and they can be reassured that they will reign with Christ. This promise was given to provide the saints with hope for the future since these saints have stood the test and served Christ faithfully. In a similar way, the promise of rulership with Christ was given to the overcomers of Thyatira (Rev. 2:26) in order to provide them with hope and

encouragement for the future since they weathered the storms against Christianity and served Christ faithfully.

Someone said:

“It’s training time for reigning time.”

We need to remember this. The manner in which we live for Christ and serve Him will come back to us when we rule with Christ over the earth.

Connecting the Dots

Let’s set some things straight before ending this study. In order to do this, we must connect all the dots associated with kingdom and church teaching. It’s very clear that all Christians have free entrance into the coming earthly theocracy or Millennial Kingdom by virtue of the new birth (John 3:5). Jesus clearly taught this while He was here on earth offering the kingdom. The clear statements from Scripture inform us that every Christian will participate in the Millennial Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 12:28; James 2:5 – “heirs of the kingdom”).

All Christians will enter the kingdom as heirs of this glorious destiny on earth (“the world to come” – Heb. 2:5) but the unbelievers or unregenerate will not enter the kingdom as heirs (Gal. 5:19-21 – “shall not inherit the kingdom of God”). Likewise, all Christians will also rule and reign with Christ in some measure (Rev. 5:10 – “and we shall reign on the earth”). However, I’m personally convinced the epistles teach (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Peter 1:10-12; Rev. 2:26; 3:21) and Jesus taught (Matthew 5:19; 18:4; 19:28-29; 25:21, 23; 19:17-19) that *we will not all reign in an equal fashion* within the Millennial Kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven (Dan. 2:37, 44; Matt. 4:17; 5:3, 10; 6:10) is not heaven but the time when the heavens rule over planet earth in the earthly theocracy. Jesus taught that when heaven rules the earth during the coming Millennial Kingdom, when God’s kingdom comes to earth there would be those who are “**least in the kingdom of heaven**” (Matt. 5:19) and others who will be considered “**greatest in the kingdom of heaven**” (Matt. 18:4). This definitely speaks of different privileges and honor. I think there

will be some surprises in the future theocracy which will one day come to planet earth. Those Christian people who might be viewed as being great in this life may not have a significant rule and role in the future kingdom and those Christians who are seen to be small or insignificant in this life will become great in their rulership responsibilities and privileges during the Millennial Kingdom. It all boils down to faithfulness and doing God's will. Greatness in this life does not mean greatness in the next life.

As already mentioned, when Christians live a fruitful life (2 Pet. 1:5-8), instead of a barren life (2 Pet. 1:9-10), we are promised that "an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom" (2 Peter 1:11). It's one thing to enter the Millennial Kingdom by faith (John 3:5), which will eventually merge into the eternal kingdom, but it's quite another thing to enter the kingdom with *abundance* (with much reward, recognition, and ruling privileges). There seems to be a promise that greater suffering, service, and sacrifice for the Lord means greater honor and privileges given to the believer in the future kingdom reign.

William Kelly was an outstanding student of the Bible whose scholarship and spirituality made him a real power for God in Great Britain at the close of the last century. Mr. Kelly helped a young relative prepare for Trinity College in Dublin, and in this way came to the attention of the professors there. They urged him to take up work at the college and thus distinguish himself. When Mr. Kelly showed a complete lack of enthusiasm, they were somewhat surprised. One of them asked in exasperation, "But Mr. Kelly, aren't you interested in making a name for yourself in the world?" To which Mr. Kelly humbly replied, "Which world, gentlemen?"

Born Again!

Dear friend, are you prepared to enter the Millennial Kingdom someday?

Jesus taught in John 3:3-5:

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again (from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto

thee, Except a man be born of water (speaking of the cleansing and forgiveness of one's sins – Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 36:25) and of the Spirit (new life the Holy Spirit gives), he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

Jesus is saying that you can only enter the future earthly kingdom by new birth. To be born again means that you are born a second time. You receive a spiritual rebirth on the inside when God's life is implanted within your spirit (Eph. 2:1-2).

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 promises:

“Know ye not that **the unrighteous** (*those who practice unrighteous living and do not manifest righteous living give proof they have not received positional forgiveness and justification before God, as explained in this verse*) **shall not inherit** (*receive no lot, obtain no inheritance or entrance, possess no portion, to be no partaker in the earthly kingdom*) the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, **shall inherit the kingdom of God** (*those who are characterized by wickedness, as a pattern of life, are not related to Christ in a saving way, and will not enter the earthly kingdom – the Millennium*). **And such were some of you** (*indicating a change in our pattern of living has occurred because God changed who we were before His presence, as stated next*): **but ye are washed** (*a positional cleansing before God of all your sins – past, present, and future – Titus 3:5 – we are no longer seen as a sinner who has transgressed His laws*), but ye are **sanctified** (*a positional holiness – we are no longer viewed as a sinner but a saint before God's throne – 1 Cor. 1:2*), but ye are **justified** (*a positional and legal declaration of righteousness before God – Rom. 8:33*) **in the name of the Lord Jesus** (*in view of Christ's redemptive work on the cross*), and **by the Spirit of our God**” (*because of the Spirit's regenerating work in our hearts at the time of salvation*).

The practical change in the lives of all God's saints occurs because of their positional change before God's throne. In other words, the blessing of our salvation results in the blessing of a new way of life. The new life is the result of the new position (2 Cor. 5:17). The blessings stated above actually occur at the time of conversion, or when a person is saved, but Paul

indicates that this salvation extends to our everyday deliverance and becomes the ultimate proof of our positional salvation in Christ before God's throne.

Those who engage in sinful living and want nothing to do with salvation and righteousness give no evidence of a saved position before God's throne. As a result, they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" when it is established over the earth because they have not received of this positional salvation which in return results in practical righteousness. But how wonderful it is to rest in the wonderful truth that when we are positionally saved and our sinful records are cleared in Heaven, God also begins to change the sinful patterns of our lives and we bear the spiritual fruit of righteous living (Phil. 1:11; John 15:1-8), as a new way and pattern of life for "ever one that doeth righteousness is born of God" (1 John 2:29). If those who practice wickedness as a pattern of life do not inherit the earthly kingdom, then those who have been saved and practice righteous living will enter the Millennium, not on the basis of their transformed living, but as *proof* of their salvation and regeneration. And this is exactly what the Bible teaches over and over again.

In describing our salvation experience, which started us on a new spiritual journey of transformation, we must remember that we have been forgiven of all our sins, saved, and spiritually prepared to enter the earthly kingdom someday. Though our expression of faith in Christ, God has washed away all of our sins (past, present and future) in His sight. Through the sacrificial shedding of Christ's blood and death upon the cross (Rev. 1:5; Rom. 3:24), He has provided us with legal or judicial forgiveness in God's presence ("ye are washed") and a holy (sanctified) and legally righteous standing (justification) in His presence forever.

The Bible is teaching that God saves the poor lost sinner from hell so he can enter the glorious Millennial Kingdom in the future. It is also teaching that those who have been declared holy and righteous in His presence at the time of their conversion will also live holy and righteous lives after their conversion. They will bear some fruit, others more fruit, and still others much fruit (Matt. 13:8). In the end, they will enter the Millennium and experience great joy.

Isaiah 55:12 prophetically declares:

“For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.”

There is great joy and blessing associated with salvation and entrance into the earthly kingdom. This will be true for the saved Jews but also of all God’s redeemed in this coming day of jubilee on the earth. When a person is saved everything comes alive and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17). How wonderful it will be when we enter this future reign with Christ and enjoy the blessings of Christ’s rule for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1-5)!

Let’s not pass over Christ’s words too quickly. “Except a man be born again (from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). I trust that you have been born again and are ready to enter the earthly Millennial Kingdom some day. If you have not been born again by receiving God’s life from above, then you will not enter the future kingdom and take part in this wonderful future reign of Christ upon planet earth.

Let’s revisit one more time, what Jesus taught in Matthew 25:31-32:

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory (*Christ’s Second Coming to earth to establish His kingdom*), and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory (*in Jerusalem – David’s city*): And before him shall be gathered all nations (*a gathering of the living nations that survive the seven-year Tribulation Period*): and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.”

Matthew 25:41 adds these solemn words:

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Jesus used the vivid imagery of “sheep” (*representing believers – those who have placed faith in Christ for personal salvation and eternal life*) and “goats” (*representing unbelievers*) being gathered for a time of inspection at the inauguration of His earthly kingdom. The goats or unsaved people will be judged by Christ at His Second Coming, prior to the establishment of the earthly kingdom. They will be cast into hell or hades, the place of

suffering, since they refused to place faith in Christ, who paid the penalty of judgment for their sins and who died to give them the promise of eternal life. Now, they are seen suffering the penalty for their sins in the place of fire and the righteous expression of God's wrath.

Since this is true, I need to ask you something. Are you a sheep or goat? If you are still a goat (an unsaved person rejecting Christ to be your Savior), I beg of you to change your mind about your sinfulness before God and by faith trust in Jesus Christ to be your only Savior (John 3:16). Only then will God cleanse you from all your sins and give you an eternally accepted position in His holy presence (Rom. 5:9). Only when you are born again can you have the confidence of being part of this future reign of the coming King. Are you prepared to enter the kingdom? You must be born again!

“Jesus shall reign wher-e'er the sun,
Does his successive journeys run,
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.”