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AN APPOINTMENT YOU WILL KEEP

Joel Beeke

Dear Reader,

You and I may not know each other; possibly we shall never see one another. Yet, I desire to write a personal letter to you.

I write to you because you and I have more in common than you may realize. Though we may never meet each other in this world, we shall one day be in each other's presence because *we both possess a never-dying soul*. With this soul both of us must appear before God, your and my Creator, in the great judgment day. "*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*" (Heb 9:27).

You may do all in your power to put the *thought* of death away from you. Yet you cannot escape the *fact* that you must die. You *know* that you *must* die and face God. Perhaps you are reluctant to think about death because you also know judgment follows death as surely as night follows day. In all seriousness, therefore, could I possibly press upon you a more significant question than this: *What is going to happen to you when you die?*

The Bible, conscience, and common sense, all declare to you that there is an eternity you must face. Therefore, don't avoid this question for your own sake: *Am I prepared to die and face God as Judge?*

I am sorry to have to tell you that millions today think they are prepared to meet God who shall end in hell following the great day of judgment. This is what God tells us in His Holy Word: "*Many* will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:22-23).

Did you ever consider what a terrible awakening it will be for those who are traveling on in this life, thinking all is well with them, to hear in that day as they stand before the Most High God, "I never knew you"? Words cannot describe the anguish of soul as this sentence will be passed upon them: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Shall you and I also be among these disappointed "many" that Christ speaks of in Matthew 7?

Dear reader, please give me five minutes of your time to try to show you who will end in hell and who will end in heaven.

The Broad Road to Eternal Destruction

First, I must honestly tell you the Bible informs us in Matthew 7 that the vast majority of people will be going to hell. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Perhaps this sounds cruel to you, but this sad fact is true not because God is cruel; rather, we are cruel to ourselves. We willfully defy our Creator and despise His love, while trampling upon His commandments, given for our true well-being. Due to such rebellion and wickedness, *we have all earned death and hell*. These are the only two things we have deserved, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), and the "wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

What kinds of people are included in this vast multitude which is hellbound?

1. **All *ungodly people*** shall end in hell. This includes those who openly live wicked lives, doing such things as:

- spending their time in taverns and their money on drink and drugs,
- engaging in unlawful sexual relationships,

- treating Sunday as but another day of the week,
- daily watching the graphic display of sin on a TV screen,
- openly swearing against God by using His Holy Name in vain,
- living a life of rebellion against parents and authority given by God.

Such ungodly people shall end in hell unless they are brought to true repentance and conversion by the almighty power of God's grace. Are you one of this group? If so, I urge you to seek repenting, confessing, and turning grace, before it is forever too late to seek the Lord!

2. All *worldly people* shall end in hell. Those shall end in hell who abstain from gross sins, but whose lives are intertwined with the world, who live unburdened when they continually do such things as:

- place self above and before God,
- esteem the possessions of worldly riches above the riches of God's grace,
- promote the desires of other people above God's will as revealed in His Word,
- value the needs of daily life above the need of a Savior for their immortal souls,
- consider the results of sin to be more tragic than offending and sinning against their holy Creator who showers them with blessings,
- believe it is more important what their neighbors and friends think of them than what God thinks of them.

These shall end in hell unless they are brought to true repentance and conversion by the almighty power of God's grace. Are you one of this group?

If so, I must say to you: Heaven itself would be no happiness to you if you arrived there, for the Lord of heaven is not your friend—what pleases Him does not please you; what He dislikes gives you no pain. His Word is not your counselor; His day [of sabbath rest] is not your delight; His law is not your guide. You care little for hearing of Him; you know even less of speaking with Him. To be forever in His company would be a thing you could not endure; the society of saints and angels would weary you. As far as your practical life is concerned, the Bible means little, Christ means less, and salvation is a needless thing. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."...You cannot serve God and mammon" (Eph 5:14; Mat 6:24).

3. Many *religious people* shall end in hell. It is possible to be hell-bound though we are faithful church attendees, Sunday school teachers, and even ministers. Religion can be our favorite subject, our conversation can be about God and Christ, and our outward walk of life can be blameless—all without our soul being saved from destruction.

We can be as religious as the five false virgins in Matthew 25, possessing the same confession, the same expectation, the same lamps, and the same outward appearance as the five wise virgins—and still perish. We can be as religious as Ahab of whom Scripture says, "...he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly" (1Ki 21:27)—and still be unconverted.

It is possible to experience common convictions of sin and impressions of God and His holy attributes—even to acknowledge sin and be somewhat humbled under it, to weep and pray over it, to be afraid to sin again—and still not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. Think of Cain, Saul, and Judas.

We need more than half-hearted religion and church attendance. We need the irresistible, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in order to be born again and converted. Only then will we love God with our entire being—the key ingredient missing in the foregoing examples—and pant after God as a thirsty man pants for cold water. Only then shall we be enabled by God's grace to be prepared to meet the Lord. "Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness" (Luk 11:35).

How may I know if I am included among those who are heaven-bound?

The Narrow Road to Eternal Life

All those who shall arrive in heaven will confess their salvation to be a great miracle of God's free grace. They shall all be souls that have been truly born again by the Holy Spirit (see John 3). They are people who have been converted by God. In their conversion they experience three things: (1) heartfelt sorrow over their own *sinfulness*, (2) heartfelt joy over *salvation* in Jesus Christ, and (3) heartfelt *gratitude* to God for His great salvation (see Romans 7:24-25; Psa 50:15).

1. Heartfelt sorrow over their own sinfulness

When the Holy Spirit begins to work salvation in a sinner, He does not begin with revealing Christ to him. There is no room in our hearts by nature for Christ. Rather, He brings such a sinner face to face with his tragic misery and dangerous state of sinnership before God. The sinner is brought to experience:

- heartfelt sorrow over his innumerable actual sins in thoughts, words, and actions against an all-knowing God;
- heartfelt sorrow over being without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world;
- heartfelt sorrow over his dreadful original sin through his deep fall in Adam, being taught his entire heart is nothing but a fountain of pollution and corruption;
- heartfelt sorrow not only because the burden of sin becomes too heavy to bear, but also because he finds it impossible to free himself of this burden;
- heartfelt sorrow when he is brought to the point where he realizes that he cannot save himself and yet that he must be saved so that he cries out, “Lord, Thou art righteous and just to cast me away forever, but is it possible that there is a way in Thee to escape Thy divine punishment and be restored into Thy favor?”

Have you also become such a concerned, miserable, unworthy, guilty, and lost sinner—a sinner who knows by experience that there is no hope of salvation from your side?

2. Heartfelt joy over salvation in Jesus Christ

When the sinner experiences he has no future but condemnation from his side, and the Holy Spirit enables him to cast himself upon God as the only place of refuge, that same blessed Spirit shall unveil the triune God’s unspeakably rich way of salvation and deliverance through the blood and satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner is brought to experience:

- a need for Christ;
- a view of some aspect of Christ’s atoning work in its beauty, fullness, and suitability;
- a revelation of Christ in his soul by means of Word and Spirit through which he learns how Christ has fully obeyed the law and fully borne the punishment of sin on behalf of fallen, unworthy sinners;
- an application of Christ by which he may embrace Christ with unspeakable joy as his Savior and his salvation.

Have you also experienced something of Christ as the great way of deliverance through the power of the Holy Spirit applying God’s Word to your soul? Has it caused you to desire to know Christ more and more as your All-in-all—to know Him *experientially* as the exclusive, willing Savior who saves to the uttermost?

3. Heartfelt gratitude to God for His salvation

Finally, those who truly experience God’s way of salvation in Jesus Christ will also express a wholehearted gratitude for such a great deliverance: “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?” (Psa 116:12). They desire to surrender everything, soul and body, for time and eternity, into the hands of the Lord, lie at His feet in true submission, and confess, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Despite many shortcomings on our part, we then desire to live to the glory of God above all, and to lovingly serve our neighbor to his spiritual and temporal welfare.

Dear reader, examine yourself.

Which Road Are You Traveling?

Are you traveling the broad road to eternal destruction or the narrow road to eternal life? In this world there are many different roads, but in the spiritual world there are only two, and these two never intersect. They are as opposite from one another as darkness from light, Satan from God, nature from grace, and hell from heaven. Only God, in His free grace, can take us off the broad road to destruction and place us on the narrow road to everlasting life.

Sinner, we beseech you, turn from your sinful and evil ways. Cry for true conversion from Him who not only said, “Ye *must* be born again,” but who also testified of Himself, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.” Your soul is lost and your condition miserable; therefore, beg the Lord to show you this, so that room may be made within you for the gospel message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Allow me to leave you with a final warning. In the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, hell is mentioned 234 times. If life’s road were twenty-seven miles long, and there were 234 billboards along this route which all read, “This road leads to hell,” would you stay on that road? As long as you are an unrepenting, unbelieving, Christless, self-satisfied sinner, you are on this road to hell. Hell is the end of a worldly or religious life which remains Christless.

This short message is still another billboard sent by God to you on your pathway of life to warn you that all the ways of man end in death. “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (Isa 55:6).

How many more billboards will the Lord send your way before His patience comes to an end, and He fulfills His own Word: “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”?

Make haste, sinner, for your life’s sake. The thread of your life is not yet cut, but it is growing increasingly thin and brittle. The Lord still calls to you, “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?” (Eze 33:11).

The door of grace is still open. The throne of Christ is not yet shut. Will you hear His voice before it is too late? “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Psa 2:12).

All those who have lived without God on earth shall be without God in hell. How terrible it shall be to experience with the rich man in Luke 16, “In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments...And he cried...I am tormented in this flame.”

Dear friend, I desire to warn you with love. You and I cannot escape death. It is an appointment we will keep—regardless.

Are you prepared to die? ☞