

Planet in Rebellion

Him!

23. Destination Earth

IN A DAY that you and I can easily remember, the moon was, to most people, only a ball of reflected light that created a pleasant evening, or, surrounded by an ominous ring, predicted a storm. Some farmers planted their crops by it. Men leisurely discussed what it might be like. But nobody thought of going to see.

The stars were an object of admiration and an aid to mariners. Some people thought their lives were in some mysterious way influenced by them-as if lumps of matter out in space could control a man's behavior. Venus and Mars were members of our solar family to be identified by schoolboys. But nobody, not even the astronomers, ever thought of going there.

Today man wants to go. He is determined to go-even if he has to go in a cumbersome space suit, take his own air with him, and take a chance on getting back. He wants to set his foot on some distant world, whatever the cost in money and research. The moon and our planet neighbors have become very, very real. Science fiction is so mixed with fact that we almost forget it is fiction at all.

But strangely enough, about all most people know about heaven is that it is up somewhere. Ask the first ten people you meet, and you will discover that the majority of men and women who have thought about it at all have no clear idea what it is like.

Heaven is up. There is no doubt about that. And heaven, where God dwells, is as real as anything the astronomer has ever viewed. But such fantastic ideas exist about what it is like that we need to open the Word of God on the sane, sensible, and thrilling prospects of the life to come-prospects that are so little understood.

You see, many think of heaven as a land where disembodied spirits float around in space. Or where we sit on wispy clouds playing on semi-material harps forever and ever. A place where St. Peter is supposed to go around clanking keys-which are quite material or they wouldn't clank-and letting in whom he chooses through some sort of gate into the so-called eternal bliss of the saints.

Heaven, to many people, is a mixture of fairy story and imagination, with a covering of puritan boredom that leaves it with little appeal. In fact, because of these popular misconceptions, many good people have rejected the whole idea of a future life, preferring to believe that life here and now is either heaven or hell, depending on what you make of it.

But in the Word of the living God we shall discover that heaven is not a ghost land or a spook country. It is not a figment of the imagination. It is not a dream. It is not a filmy fiction made of harps and clouds.

Heaven, though it hangs yet beyond the reach of our telescopes, is a world as real and tangible as our own. It is not a story land at all. The place is as real as any you have ever seen. The people will be as real as any you have ever known. People you know will be there. You may be there-if you choose.

Follow me carefully. For this thrilling possibility promises fulfillment in your day and mine-long before men with their speediest scientific achievement could be ready for anything but the most primitive space travel. The story begins with the simple, straightforward, unconditional words of the Apostle Paul: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord!" 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

No rockets. No oxygen tanks. No space suits-except the robe of Christ's righteousness. But gravity will be powerless to hold back the King of glory as He lifts His people through the skies. Nature's laws are His laws. The Creator is in control.

I like to think what that trip will be like. It seems reasonable that there might be stops at other worlds along the way-worlds that have never rebelled against their Creator. And then the glorious climax as the Savior swings wide the gates of the city and says to His people, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation 'of the world.'" I am glad we can all go together with Jesus-not one by one across a mystic river.

John, in the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of Revelation, describes the city. It is a city as literal as any we have ever known. It is a city with gates, a city with streets, a city with foundations and

Planet in Rebellion

walls. The throne of God is there. The tree of life is there. And in it there is no night, no death, no pain, and there are no tears.

But heaven, as real and wonderful and satisfying as it is, is not to be our permanent home. For Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5: 5. The meek shall inherit the earth. We shall not spend eternity on some cloud on the rim of the universe, or even in heaven, tangible as it is. God gave His Son that this world might forever be the home of the saved.

You see, this earth was meant to be our home. "For thus said the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited." Isaiah 45:18.

This world was wrested from its original owners. But God gave His Son to buy back not only a lost race but also a lost planet—a world originally intended to be man's home.

I ask you, Would our Savior, the Son of the eternal God, consent to suffer, to bleed, to die, so that you might live on some mystic cloud in a thin, vapory, immaterial existence that you wouldn't want anyway? Hardly!

The meek shall inherit the earth. True, the meek are not in possession of much of it now. Much of it is in the hands of finance companies. But God promised Abraham, "Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou sees, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." Genesis 13:14, 15. And Paul said, If you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29.

If you belong to Christ, then you are an heir to the original promise—an heir to this world. Now this world at present might not be a very desirable gift. But God will give it to His people as a perfect gift, renovated and changed and new. Remember the words of Peter: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." 2 Peter 3: 10.

And now notice what follows, in verse 13: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness." The world is imperfect now. But in the great day of the Lord, the day toward which all creation is moving, the earth will be cleansed, it will be changed, it will be made completely new.

A thousand happy years will have passed quickly—years spent with the Savior, spent in companionship with the angels and sinless beings from other worlds, spent in becoming acquainted with the wonders of God's universe. What a day for the scientist, the astronomer, the traveler!

And then the hour will come for the space trip of the ages. There will be no frantic last-minute preparations for take-off, no hurried repairing of spaceship doors that might leak precious oxygen out into space, no fear of radiation belts. The entire city, with the tree of life, will move safely out into space and begin its long journey. I like to think it will move down through the star-lined corridors of Orion, that giant canyon in the skies. Its destination—earth!

Says John, "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Revelation 21:1

What a landing strip it will need! But the Savior Himself will prepare it. "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south." Zechariah 14:4.

Then will follow those final events in the awful history of rebellion. And when it is all over, the universe will be clean. One writer describes it this way:

"There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God's people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home. .

"All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe, and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator's name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One

Planet in Rebellion

pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their un-shadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”-The Great Controversy, pp. 675-678.

All this is in God’s plan. Let me illustrate. In America’s very early days a family lived in their wilderness home on the bleak New England shore. It was a home of their own making, with furniture carved out by their own hands. There were two adult children. One of them was a young doctor who was almost constantly away from home, visiting the little towns and isolated settlements along the coast. The other was a lovely girl about twenty years of age.

Each evening she would steal away in the quiet of the nearby wooded sections without the family knowing just where she went, and would have her quiet devotions alone in nature’s retreat. Always she would sing:

“When softly falls the twilight hour,
Over moor and mountain, field and flower,
How sweet to leave a world of care,
And lift to heaven the voice of prayer.”

One evening as she enjoyed her meditation, and just as she had completed the first two lines of her little song,

“When softly falls the twilight hour,
Over moor and mountain, field and flower,”

an Indian crept up behind her, struck her on the head with a tomahawk, and fled. She dropped to the ground, unconscious. Naturally, when the evening meal was served, the girl was missing. A party went out to search for her. She was found, but remained unconscious for several days. The doctor brother was called, and an operation was planned to remove the pressure on the brain.

When it was completed and she had regained consciousness, what do you suppose she did? Her lips began to move, and she finished the song so abruptly interrupted a few days before:

“How sweet to leave a world of care,
And lift to heaven the voice of prayer.”

Her brain began to function just where it had left off. Just so, God’s plan was interrupted-rudely interrupted. It was delayed, but not changed. The song begun in Eden will again be taken up and finished when the earth is restored to its original beauty and man to his original happiness.

The first three chapters of the Bible describe God’s original plan and sin’s rude interruption. The last three chapters of the Bible describe God’s plan restored, the music continued. And all the rest of the Bible in between unfolds His program to bring man back to the happiness intended for him. Remember, “The meek shall inherit the earth.” And, If you be Christ’s, then are you heirs.” It is just as simple as that!

And it will all be real. I hope if you get anything out of these words, it will be the conviction that the home of the saved, the future life, will be real. God is real. Christ is real. You will be real.

Our friends will be real. We will recognize each other. How could it be otherwise? The lovable little personality traits which make for happiness here will certainly not be lost.

You remember how Mary stood in the garden, blinded by tears, on the morning of the resurrection. Through her tears she could not recognize her Savior. She did not expect to see Him alive. She thought Him to be the gardener. But Jesus quietly spoke one word -”Mary!” And the characteristic way in which He said it was unmistakable. Instantly she responded, “Master!”

The resurrection will bring changes, to be sure, but they will be changes for the better. God will take our poor, worn-out, imperfect bodies and make them perfect, immortal. Tired, broken, aging bodies - all will be changed. Wonderful news!

Let me read the description that God gives of the new earth. See how real and practical and satisfying it will be. “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” “And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant

Planet in Rebellion

vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another cat.” Isaiah 65:17, 21, 22.

Evidently it is going to be an own-your-own-home proposition. And think how satisfying it all will be. Today we build a lovely home for our comfort and the happiness of our family. We landscape the grounds, and it is not long until the home has the touch of our personality and love. Yet all too soon we die, and the home is left to others. How wonderfully different it will be in the new earth, for there we shall never die. In that perfect world we shall not build and another inhabit.

And did you know that there is to be health insurance as well? “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.” Isaiah 33:24.

Often the heart leaps with sadness, and even fear, when a little child says to his parent, I am sick,” or when a husband or a wife says, I am sick.” But here will be the finest health insurance of all perfect bodies with youthful vigor that will never diminish. “They shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Isaiah 40:31.

Sound appealing? No hospitals, for there will be no sick. No psychiatrists, for none will suffer with a tired mind. All their sins will be forgiven. And there will be no fatigue.

Friend, I can hardly wait. Can you? Imagination ever so wild could not begin to picture the joys and the wonders of God’s glorious new world. Listen! “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9.

Best of all, Jesus will be there! Just think of taking hold of a hand and finding it God’s hand—the Savior’s hand! What would you give for a privilege like that?

Do I hear you say, “How can I be there?” Your question—and your answer—are found in Psalm 24:3, 4: ‘Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?’ And back comes the answer: “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.”

There is only one way to have clean hands and a pure heart. That is the way of forgiveness through a dying Christ—and the way of a new heart and power to live through a living Christ.

But now will you picture for a moment the day when this inheritance becomes yours? We might find an illustration in the inspiring day when twenty thousand Frenchmen approached the Arc de Triomphe as the armistice of World War I was celebrated.

A great choir sat on a special platform erected above the archway. They sang out the challenge, “By what right do you come to the arch of victory?” Can you imagine the inspiration and emotion as from the lips of twenty thousand Frenchmen came the chorus, ‘We come by the blood-red banner of Verdun!’

Psalm 24 pictures a comparable scene, but one infinitely more glorious. When the Lord of heaven sweeps through the gates of the New Jerusalem with the redeemed of the ages, the question is asked, “By what right do you enter here?” And the answer returns in hold refrain, ‘We come by the blood-red banner of Calvary!’

There is no other way to come. No other door. No other gate. Every man who enters the city will come by way of the cross. Will you lift its banner now—by an act of deliberate choice? There is no compulsion. Just an appeal. But it means life—eternal life. Will you accept it?

24. Does Liberty Wear Chains?

IT WAS July of 1776. The Continental Congress had met at Philadelphia to ponder a mighty issue—Independence. A long, lanky Virginian—Thomas Jefferson by name—had been appointed, with others, to write the declaration—words that even today excite the patriotism of free men everywhere.

The carriages with their trim footmen had delivered many notables for that historic gathering. John Hancock was there, and at the crucial moment led off with his signature, writing it so boldly that George III might be able to read it without “putting on his specs.”

Among the many legends of that day is one that tells of an old bell ringer who had been assigned to start ringing as soon as the word was out. Pessimistic, he waited with one hand on the rope in the old belfry and muttered, “They’ll never sign it! They’ll never sign it!”

But sign it they did! The story has it that a little boy was stationed outside the great colonial door. Watching through the huge keyhole, he saw the movement of chairs and heard the shuffle of excited feet. Running to the bell tower, he shouted, Ming, Grandpa, ring for liberty!”