

Knowing the Truth 04

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:32

What and Where is Hell?

SATAN'S CRUEL LIE AGAINST OUR LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER

We have learned that the Bible teaching on “death” is quite different to the ideas of many mainline churches - that when we die, we either go to Heaven if we have lived a good life or to Hell if we have been bad in this life. Some even teach of a “halfway place”, called Purgatory, where some stay for a while until enough prayers have been said, and enough money has changed hands here on earth, and then the people can move up to Heaven. It is teachings such as these that have turned many people away from Christianity.

Today we want to answer from the Bible, such questions as: “Is Hell the hot place we have traditionally been brought up to believe”? “Could God be a loving God, and yet have people suffering in a burning Hell for all Eternity”? “Can the good people look over the walls of Heaven and see their loved ones suffering in Hell”? These are questions that beg to be answered, don’t you agree?

In religious instruction for children written years ago is found this word picture of hell: "Look into this little prison. In the middle of it there is a boy, a young man. He is silent; despair is on him. He stands straight up. His eyes are burning like two burning coals. Two long flames come out of his ears. His breathing is difficult. Sometimes he opens his mouth and a breath of blazing fire rolls out of it. But listen! There is a sound just like that of a kettle boiling. Is it really a kettle which is boiling? No; then what is it?

Hear what it is. The blood is boiling in the scalded veins of that boy. The brain is boiling and bubbling in his head. The marrow is boiling in his bones! Ask him, put the question to him, why is he thus tormented? His answer is, that when he was alive, his blood boiled to do very wicked things, and he did them, and it was for that he went to dancing-houses, public-houses, and theatres. Ask him, does he think the punishment greater than he deserves? 'No,' he says, 'my punishment is not greater than I deserve, it is just. I knew it not so well on earth, but I know now that it is just. There is a just and terrible God. He is terrible to sinners in hell—but He is just!' -J. FURNISS, "The Sight of Hell," Tracts for Spiritual Reading, sec. 27, p. 20.

How could God be ‘just’ or fair to punish someone forever for a few short years of sin on earth? It is indeed astonishing what people may be led to believe in the name of religion. It is yet more unbelievable how responsible high churchmen feel free to pass favorable judgment upon such teaching as the above. One leader wrote, "I have carefully read over this Little Volume for Children and have found nothing whatever in it contrary to the doctrines of Holy Faith; but, on the contrary, a great deal to charm, instruct and edify our youthful classes, for whose benefit it has been written." WILLIAM MEAGHER, Vicar General, Dublin, December 14, 1855.

What far-reaching responsibility does man take upon himself! How could such word pictures help a child to know of a loving God?

THE TRUTH ABOUT THREE WORDS FOR HELL

In the Bible our English word hell has three meanings:

1. Hell sometimes means the "grave." The Hebrew word widely used for "grave" is sheol. In Psalm 16:10 we have it rendered "hell," referring to the grave. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou subtler thine Holy One to see corruption." In Acts 2:27 this scripture is quoted by Peter. In this verse the Greek word for "hen" is hades. Its meaning is "grave," the same as sheol in the Hebrew. As you know, the New Testament was originally written in Greek. In Acts 2:31, Peter definitely says that Psalm 16:10, the verse we speak of, refers to Christ's resurrection. Christ was not left in "hell," that is, not in the grave, but was raised from the

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dead. The word hades is used eleven times in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 15:55 it is translated "grave." Otherwise it is translated "hell," signifying the grave or state in the grave.

2. Hell also signifies a "place of burning." In the New Testament the word is "Gehenna," or the "Valley of Hinnom," described as "a deep, narrow glen south of Jerusalem, where, after the introduction of the fire gods of Ahaz, the idolatrous Jews offered their children to Molech." In this Valley of Hinnom, the bodies of dead animals and the refuse of the city were cast. Fires burned continuously, and worms infested the carcasses of animals. What the fire did not destroy the worms consumed. It thus was a type of complete annihilation. Gehenna, the place of burning, is used twelve times, being translated "hell"

3. The third meaning of the word hell is found in 2 Peter 2:4. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." The Greek word here is tartaros, not Gehenna or hades. The text above pictures it as a place of darkness, a fit representation of the darkness that enshrouded Satan and his angels when they were separated from God and heaven.

WHERE DO ALL MEN GO AT DEATH?

All men go to the grave at death, that is, to hades or sheol. Said Job, "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Job 30:23. This house of death is the grave. "If I wait, the grave is mine house." Job 17:13.

This hell is an impartial one. "There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." Ecclesiastes 9:2. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave [sheol]?" Psalm 89:48. The rich and poor, the high and low, the righteous and the wicked-all meet in that abode.

Into the grave have gone the vilest characters who have ever lived, and its portals have opened to receive the loveliest and sweetest mortals who ever graced the earth. Of these latter Isaac Watts sang:

"Unveil thy bosom, faithful tomb;
Take this new treasure to thy trust
And give these sacred relics room,
To slumber in thy silent dust."

Yes, death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26), and the grave is not a comforting consolation, but we thank God that "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." Revelation 14:13. And we may also rejoice that the wicked slumber in silence rather than scream in torture and agony. There is no pain in the grave.

WHEN WILL THE RIGHTEOUS DEAD COME OUT OF HADES?

The righteous dead will come out of their graves at the sound of the "last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible." 1 Corinthians 15:52. This is at the second coming of Christ when "the Lord himself shall descend. . . with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Christ's promise of His glorious return to gather His chosen ones unto Himself (John 14:1-3) will someday be fulfilled. At the sound of the "trump of God" the saints who have slept in silence, unconscious of the passing of time, will suddenly be awakened. Some have slumbered for thousands of years; others have had only a brief rest in the grave. To all, the time will seem the same-just as a moment, or as the "twinkling of an eye." They will come forth, their faces glowing with joy, health, and immortality, and go to their heavenly home.

WHEN WILL THE WICKED DEAD COME OUT OF HADES?

There is to be, as Paul states, "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Acts 24:15.1.

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The wicked, or unjust, do not rise from their graves until one thousand years after the resurrection of the righteous. "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." Revelation 20:5.

WHERE WILL THE WICKED BE CAST?

When the wicked are resurrected, they, together with the devil, death, and the grave, will be cast into the lake of fire (verses 10-15). This is the "Gehenna," the burning hell.

Peter declares that the Lord knows how to "reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." 2 Peter 2:9. Also that the earth itself is "reserved unto fire against the day of judgment" (2 Peter 3:7), and that "the elements shall melt with fervent heat" 2 Peter 3:10.

According to John the revelator fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours the wicked (including the devil, death, and the grave) in a "lake of fire." This is called the "second death." Revelation 20:9,14.

Since the wicked perish in this burning Gehenna, and the earth itself becomes a molten lake of fire, we understand more clearly the Bible statement that the wicked will be recompensed in the earth (Proverbs 11:31), and also that "they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath." Job 21:30. Jesus Himself said that "the tares are the children of the wicked one," and "as therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world" Matthew 13:38, 40.

This gives us ample evidence to believe that the fiery hell is yet future, and at this present moment not a single, solitary sinner is burning in hell. Thank God for that.

ALL OF MAN CAST INTO THIS FIRE

Nine times Jesus warns of the "burning" hell, the "Gehenna" hell.

In Matthew 10:28 He said, "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Again He counseled, "It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire," or "having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." Matthew 18:8, 9.

This makes it clear that the whole man, soul and body, is cast into hell fire. Since the body goes into the grave at death, and since there is no fire in the grave, again we see that the burning hell is yet future; If God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11), and has reserved them unto the day of judgment to be punished, why should we wish to rush them off to hell as soon as they die? Why are some so bent on believing that God has literally billions of wicked souls roasting in a fiery coffin of hell?

HOW LONG WILL THE GEHENNA HELL BURN?

The Gehenna hell will burn until "both soul and body" are destroyed. "Fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body." Matthew 10:28.

'The day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . . . For they shall be ashes." Malachi 4:1-3.

This hell will burn until the wicked are devoured [Revelation 20:9]. This is the "second death"-not everlasting, burning life (verse 14).

It is perfectly plain that the wicked are going to be completely destroyed. This will be the second death. At the first death the wicked go into the grave. The second death marks the end of the sinner, the end of death, and the end of the grave. God is forever through with sin, sinners, death, and the grave.

When the work of burning and complete destruction is over, the fire does not necessarily keep burning for all time. The expression "for ever and ever" in Revelation 14:11 and Revelation 20:10 means "continuous, with no cessation," and may signify a long time or a shorter time. These are two texts that must be understood in the light of the abundant testimony of the Bible, to mean that the wicked will be annihilated. Eternal life endures forever. Eternal death (the second death) lasts forever. Those who suffer the second death will be destroyed

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by eternal fire. Jesus declared, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." Matthew 25:46. Notice, it does not say "punishing," but "punishment," and has reference to the result rather than to the method.

If you will read Exodus 21:2.6, you will find that "for ever" may mean only as long as man lives. Jonah said that he was shut , If in the great fish and "the earth with her bars was about me forever." Jonah 2:6. Yet he was in this strange abode only three days.

WHAT IS THIS KIND OF FIRE CALLED?

The fire of this future hell is called "everlasting," or eternal. These shall go away into everlasting punishment" Matthew 25:46,

Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of how this kind of fire works. We read Jude 7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah ...are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire,"

How did this eternal, or everlasting, fire affect these cities? Please note, "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, . . . making them an ensample unto those that after mould live ungodly." 2 Peter 2:6,

What more could be said! Both Jude and Peter set forth the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of destruction by "eternal" fire. The result was "ashes." Are the fires of these cities still burning? No.

The fire of hell is also spoken of as being unquenchable. "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," Mark 9:44.

Because of continued Sabbath desecration by the Jews, God threatened the destruction of Jerusalem by a fire that "shall not be quenched" Jeremiah 17:27, The record of the destruction is found in Jeremiah 52:12, 13.

Jerusalem is not still burning today. "Unquenchable" fire is fire that cannot be put out until it has consumed everything. It burns everything up and then burns out. In the same way shall the wicked be destroyed.

The "worm [that] dieth not," is a figure taken from the refuse dump in the Valley of Hinnom before mentioned. What the fire did not destroy the worms devoured, It is a symbol of complete destruction.

The wicked "shall be as though they had not been." Obadiah 16. "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be," Psalm 37:10. When hell has burned out there will be less left of sinners than there is of Sodom and Gomorrah today. Their ashes will become a part of the very ground upon which the righteous tread (Malachi 4:3),

GOD'S BETTER WAY

God never intended that any man should ever suffer in hell. It was "prepared for the devil and his angels," Matthew 25:41. If we are ever cast into that place of final destruction, it will be because we did not cast ourselves upon the mercy and grace of God or because we held back the full surrender of our hearts to Him.

God never purposed for men to believe that He operates brimstone concentration camp, under the direction of the devil The dead, good and bad, rest in silent slumber. There is no Consciousness, no pain. Resurrection day is coming. Those who sleep in Christ will be raised to reign with Him. The wicked will be raised for the execution of final penalty. Then sin and sinners will be no more.

"No eternally burning hell will keep before the ransomed the fearful consequences of sin. One reminder alone remains: our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion. Upon His wounded head, upon His side, His hands and feet, are the only traces of the cruel work that sin has wrought. Says the prophet, 'He had bright beams coming out of His side: and there was the hiding of His power.' Through the eternal ages the wounds of Calvary will show forth His praise, and declare His power." The Great Controversy, p. 674.

The teaching of eternal torment has done more to turn people away from God than any other teaching of the Church. Thank God! That it is not one of God's teachings, nor is it a teaching of the Bible, but is a perpetuation of ancient Egyptian and Pagan mythology.

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Before leaving this topic, it would be best to examine a Parable that Jesus told in Luke 16:19-31. There are many Bible teachers who often quote this story to convince people that when we die, we go to Heaven or Hell immediately.

This is the well-known story of “Lazarus and the rich man”. The rich man was well dressed, and well fed. Lazarus, the poor beggar, on the other hand was “fortunate” to eat the crumbs from the rich man's table. Dogs licked his sores, - what a pitiful word picture is painted here. The beggar died, and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom; which was a colloquial name given to Heaven by the Jews. Let me ask a question here, “How many people could fit in the literal bosom of Abraham”? None! So we see that this story is not to be understood literally.

In this story Jesus was contrasting the Jews with all their spiritual blessings and the Gentiles who had only the crumbs, as it were. Remember when Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman, she said she was willing to be considered a dog if she could but have the crumbs even a dog is entitled to. The Jewish leaders prided themselves they were children of Abraham and they despised the gentiles, they did not even wish to share the crumbs with them. Jesus was showing that those who have spiritual blessings or even literal blessings of life are under obligation to share with those who have not these things. So to our story:

The rich man died also and was buried, and went to Hell. Luke 16:23, 24. The rich man was in Hell, and he could see into Heaven and even converse with Abraham. He asked that Abraham would send Lazarus down to Hell with a drop of water on his finger, to cool him down. With all the heat that is supposed to be in this burning Hell, how much relief would you get from one drop of water? That is, assuming that the drop of water wouldn't evaporate before getting to the man. I hope that you can see that this story is not to be understood literally?

Verse 26. God told the rich man that no one could travel between Heaven and Hell, “there was a great gulf fixed”; neither are we expected to believe that anyone could have a conversation between Heaven and Hell.

Verses 27, 28, The rich man had still not got the point, so he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them, that if they didn't change their lifestyle they would finish up in Hell also.

Verse 29, Abraham told the rich man that his brothers had Moses and the prophets, who taught that we have to read the Scriptures, and live in harmony with their teachings by caring for our fellow man, if we want to be saved.

Verse 30, this man is not giving up easily, is he? Now he reasons with Abraham that if one went unto them from the dead, they would repent, and change their lifestyles. In our other lessons we learnt that once a person dies, they know nothing. They have nothing to do with anything on this earth. Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6.

Verse 31, Abraham spoke very plainly to the man and told him that if we don't learn the truth from the Scriptures, or the Bible, Old Testament, or New Testament, then we won't believe anyone even if they rose from the dead.

This was proven shortly after Jesus gave this parable—He did raise a man from the dead and that man's name was Lazarus! And did the priests and Pharisees then believe in Jesus? No they did not! They went about to kill Jesus and Lazarus too!

God is the only who can raise someone from the dead; Abraham, even if he were alive could not raise people from the dead; and people do not just rise from the dead on their own. This verse is certainly not saying a dead person can speak to anyone; otherwise, the Bible would be contradicting itself. And that would mean that God is contradicting Himself.

Examine this story for yourself; those things spoken of between verses 19 & 25 are not in harmony with the teaching of the rest of the Bible; the Bible does not teach, that if you are rich while you live on earth, then you

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will go to Hell when you die. Nor does it teach that if you are poor while on earth you will go to Heaven when you die.

You cannot build a doctrine such as “Everlasting burning in Hell”, or that “the people in hell can communicate with those in heaven”, from a parable, a story given to teach an entirely different lesson. The Bible teaches the exact opposite to the first part of this story.

Let me ask you another question; Could you love a God who expected the righteous, loving saints to look over the walls of Heaven, and see their loved ones who were not saved, writhing in anguish in an eternally burning Hell of torment? I could not!

Jesus was teaching the point that if people harden their hearts and will not be persuaded of His truth by the evidences of Scripture, like the Jewish Leaders were doing, they will not believe even if one rose from the dead—and as we said, a few days later Jesus proved it by raising Lazarus!

We must study our Bibles now; we must make our decisions for God now! That is what decides where we will spend eternity. I hope your decision is to follow Jesus in all that you say and do.

Now let's talk about Heaven:

What will the future be like for those who are ready to go home when Jesus comes?

There are a lot of wrong and silly ideas about Heaven that we hear of or sometimes see in pictures. Some people have the idea that in Heaven people just float around on clouds and play a harp and eat pie all the time. One little boy I read about, thought Heaven was a big room full of hard chairs where you had to sit all the time with a bunch of old people, and be quiet and look very serious.

Many people try and tell us that our future life will be kind of misty and cloud-like, just floating around somewhere as part of something else. Well, I am here to give you the good news—Heaven is a Real Place! In Heaven and later in the New Earth, we will be real people and do real things, the kinds of good things you enjoy here and Lots More!

When Jesus comes, all the good people who have died, will be resurrected—waked up—and go home together with the good people who are still alive at that time.

The Bible tells us that Heaven is so wonderful there are just no words to tell about it. One of the things we can do is think about some of the sad-bad things of this earth that will never be in Heaven or in the Earth when it is made all new again.

What won't be There: Have you ever been sick or in pain? Or have you had an accident and got badly hurt? Well, in heaven no one will ever get sick or hurt. Not even your pets! Never again will you feel the terrible sadness and loneliness that comes when a person or animal that we loved so much, dies. No one will ever die any more.

Have you ever had someone be really mean to you? Perhaps a bully has beaten you up. Or maybe someone has told untrue tales about you and got you in trouble. Maybe others have called you names or made fun of you. That will never happen in God's kingdom, because all who go there will have learned to be kind and courteous.

Many folk the world today have a very hard time. Some have no family to look after them, and have to work hard or even beg, to try and get food. Some are often hungry and may not have hardly any clothes to wear. Others may have family members who drink alcohol and then are very cruel to them. In Heaven there will always be plenty of good food, and it will all be free. No cruel or bad people will ever go there. All cruel or bad people will either have gone to Jesus and asked Him to forgive them and make them good and kind, or if they refuse to do that, they will not be taken to heaven.

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Have you had people yell at you and tell you to go away, or get out? Can you imagine how nice it would be to live where everybody is your friend? And not just friends, but really good friends! You could go anywhere you wanted and always know you'd be welcome there. Even small children will play freely and happily in the fields, forests, or streets and never be in any danger. There will be no borders or fences or 'No Trespassing' signs, and you will be free to go anywhere and everywhere you chose.

Have you ever been made sad because someone you trusted lied to you? Perhaps they tricked you with a mean and nasty joke. Well in Heaven, you will always be able to depend on what anyone tells you for no one will ever tell lies and everything spoken will be true.

Have you ever had something you really liked, stolen from you and you felt so bad? Or maybe someone took something and smashed it on you? Well, in Heaven you could leave your possessions anywhere and they'd never be stolen or damaged by anyone else.

Have you perhaps had a break-up in your family? Or have you been made sad and afraid by fighting and quarrelling or even violence and war? Well that kind of thing will never be any more, all will be in agreement on the important things of life, and because no one will be selfish, there will be no fighting there. No one will ever be unkind or cruel to anyone or anything. No one will ever kick or hurt a pet and even the animals will all get along happily together.

More Things that won't be There:

- No harmful or hurtful things that bite or sting, lurking to spoil anyone's fun;
- No disease or decay, all is beautiful;
- Satan and his nasty angels will not be there to tempt you to disobey God any more or to try and hurt and spoil the lovely things God has made. No selfish, greedy or mean people will be there either;
- No fear of death and accident that spoils even the happiest occasions here;
- No harsh or oppressive laws; the only law is the Law of Love based on the character of our loving God, and no other limits exist to perfect freedom and joy;
- No-one will be unwanted, homeless, unhappy, or sick- not ever;
- No taxes, oppression, fear, poverty, sickness or death, and all things are free; no money worries or bills to pay!

Things We will be Given There:

White Robes of Light: In the Beginning, when God made Adam and Eve, the very first people on earth, they did not have to worry about clothes. They had a special Robe of Light that covered their bodies and looked like a lovely, shiny white coat. This was really the Glory of God around them and it was all the clothes they would ever need.

When Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God, that lovely Robe of Light just faded away and they found themselves bare. It was not at all God's will for them to be bare; it is not 'natural' for humans to be bare, like some people try to tell us. Adam and Eve first tried to make clothes out of fig leaves but God showed them that this was not enough.

God made the first coats for them of animal skins; probably sheepskins. God was showing them that their sin brought death and pain to the earth, and only through death and suffering of their Creator, could they ever hope to return to the family of Heaven. Now in Heaven, the pure Robe of Light will be ours to wear again forever.

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A Harp and Ability to play it: The angels all have special musical instruments to play. The Bible calls it a harp, but just what a wonderful harp it really is, we can't even imagine! When we all reach that wonderful Sea of Glass, a Heavenly Harp is one of the things we will be given by Jesus Himself!

Now on this earth, if I go and buy a musical instrument, even if I buy a very good one and pay a lot of money for it, I still have to spend years learning how to play it. I have to have a music teacher and take lessons, and practice long, hard hours to learn. Now when we are given this Heavenly Musical instrument, we will right away be able to play it beautifully and join in with the Angel Choir and orchestra to sing happy songs of Praise to God and Jesus. What a treat that will be!

A Special Crown: Jesus Himself will place on each one of our heads a special crown, made just for us personally. It will have a bright jewel star in it for each person that we have helped to be ready for Heaven. Some crowns will have many stars and others just a few, but each person will be fully happy with his or her crown and will never be jealous.

A Lovely Home to Live in: Each of us will have a lovely home of our own to keep forever. Never again will anyone be thrown out because he can't afford the rent. Never again will people sleep in the streets because they have no home.

These homes will be in the wonderful city, the New Jerusalem. Later when this Earth is all made new again, we will build our own country homes wherever we want to, just the way we like them. We will each have our own gardens and fruit trees also.

A Special Job to do for God: In this world, having a job is hard sometimes. People who have jobs are often unhappy with them, and people who are out of work have to try so hard to find a job so they can earn enough money to live on. But in Heaven, God will have a special job for each person that is saved from this earth. What will those jobs be like?

We don't know too much about it, but the Bible says we will be a kind of special servants for God, something like the angels. You see, when Satan and 1/3 of God's angels rebelled and left their jobs in heaven to fight against God, there were many job openings left vacant. The redeemed will fill those empty places.

Whatever job we are given, we can be sure it will be one that will make us very happy. We will work with the lovely angels also. Even on this earth, there is nothing that is more enjoyable than working for God!

A woman who was sharply denouncing the Bible said, "I'm going to heaven whether God wants me there or not." The simple truth is that God will not close the door of heaven to any soul who could be happy there. All who reach hell would be dissatisfied in heaven. That is why we must prepare for heaven now.

In a foxhole, by a hidden light, a soldier wrote, "The shells are exploding so near they shake my paper as I write. . . . Sometimes I wonder if my world will ever again be filled with peace and quiet, with laughter and love. If only for a little while, I want to go home."

In the human breast God has planted a deep desire for the heavenly home. The warfare of earth will one day be past, and Christ will come again. When darkness overshadowed the cruel cross, and the outlook was black, the suffering Saviour took time to say to a repentant thief, "Thou shalt be with me in paradise."

"Through the gates to the city, in a robe of spotless white,
He will lead me where no tears shall ever fall;
In the glad song of ages I shall mingle with delight;
But I long to meet my Saviour first of all."
Fanny J. Crosby