



Front Cover

When the Last Curtain Falls

Life is a divine drama with two actors on the stage. One is God and the other is man. One of these days the final curtain will fall and our sojourn upon this earth shall have ended. What will our record be? Will our performance be rated genuine by the Lord who wrote the script? In 1540 Francois Rabelais penned these appropriate words:

"Ring down the curtain; the farce is over!"

Truly, when the last curtain drops we will soberly reflect over the days of our years upon this earth. "For it is appointed unto man once to die and after this cometh judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). There shall be no distinction of caste or color on that occasion. What an awesome moment it will be when our Creator opens the Book of Life and our deeds are made known! Romans 14:12 affirms:

"So that each one of us shall give account of himself unto God."

In 1725, the brilliant Alexander Pope exclaimed:

"Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall and universal darkness
covers all."

Jesus tells us that "outer darkness" awaits those who were ungodly (Matthew 25:30). In Revelation 6 we learn

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that evil men shall try desperately to escape the fierceness of the wrath of the Lord in that day. But, for those who knew not God and failed to obey the Truth only the fiery, devastating judgment of Christ awaits (II Thessalonians 1:8, 9). Shakespeare, in *As You Like It*, had a classic passage on this matter:

"All the world is a stage and all the men and women players. They
have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays
many parts."

In Ecclesiastes 12 and II Corinthians 5 we learn that everything we do upon the stage of life will be given account for when we stand before our Maker. When Jesus comes—suddenly—it will be too late to erase the evil or begin to do the

proper things! For, He shall come *quickly* (Revelation 22:12). Yes, as I Corinthians 15:52 proclaims, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

The Bible relates many foretastes of the abrupt nature of God's method with dealing with sin. Just a casual glance through the Old Testament reminds us of these stories that illustrate the necessity of *always* being prepared:

1. Tower of Babel—Genesis 11
2. Sodom and Gomorrah—Genesis 19
3. Lot's Wife—Genesis 19
4. Korah's Rebellion—Numbers 16
5. Ahab's Death—I Kings 22
6. Haman's Gallows—Esther 7:10
7. Hananiah's Death—Jeremiah 28:16
8. Belshazzar's End—Daniel 5
9. Pharaoh's Army—Exodus 14

These remind us of Revelation 18:17 ...

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"For in one hour so great riches have come to naught."

As one poet meditated on the moment when the last curtain shall fall he pondered what the result of his own judgment would be:

"Or at the last fall shall it be mine
find —
All that I worked for I left behind."

Jesus plainly taught that all earthly pride and wealth would be consumed in the final wrath of God. Read carefully Matthew 6:19-21, I John 2:15-17 and II Peter 3:8-12. And, one of the most haunting of all poems, *What Then*, has a provoking stanza that fits here perfectly.

"When the actors have played their
last drama,
And the mimic has made his last
fun;
When the film has flashed its last
picture,
And the billboard displayed its
last run.

When the crowds seeking pleasure
have vanished,
And gone out in the darkness
again;

When the trumpet of ages has been
sounded,
And we stand in His presence—
What Then?"

The loyal, faithful Christian will, with eager anticipation, long for the coming of the Lord. But, the dis-

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obedient will have an eternity to regret the golden moments wasted in the pursuit of evil. In view of the bliss of glory Peter wrote:

"Make your calling and election sure."

Have you ever seriously pondered the consequences of being lost? Have any of us truly thought of how terrible it will be to go to Hell? In Mark 9:43-48, Revelation 14:11; 20:10 and 21:8 we learn that there is a place "of sorer punishment" (Hebrews 10:29) for "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). Anyone who believes the Bible knows that there is a place of everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46) where the wicked shall "be cast into the lake of fire" (Revelations 20:15). If I go to Hell what will be the solemn thoughts that will echo down the dreary halls of torment?

IF I GO TO HELL...

(1) It Will Be Because I Neglected My Opportunities:

Surely in a time when Bibles are plentiful, gospel preaching is widespread, and freedom is predominant, I would have no excuse in the realm of spiritual ignorance. If I go to hell it will be in spite of parents who taught me the Truth, friends who showed me the way and preachers who boldly proclaimed the old Jerusalem message of redemption. Too many of us have too many spiritual advantages to ever escape the righteous wrath of God should we "neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3). The powerful entreaty of James 4:17 will ring in the ears of the disobedient forever:

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

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(2) It Will Be The Result of Poor Decisions:

Since the Bible indelibly teaches us that "we reap what we sow" (Galatians 6:7, 8) we need to be exceedingly careful concerning the decisions we make day by day. Choice of friends and mates deeply influences our destiny. The language of I Corinthians 15:33 should be embedded in our hearts:

"Evil companionships corrupt good morals."

Hell will be full of people who made the wrong decision concerning *emphasis in life*. A desire for fame and wealth above devotion to God instilled a wrong set of values within the framework of their daily budget of time. As II Timothy 3:4 sadly relates, they "were lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Instead of marrying *only in the Lord* such folk seek glamour, position and physical attraction when they take one of the giant steps in life. Many a person will be forever lost because they chose a job that was dishonest but high-paying. What a high price to pay for low living!

I Will Miss A Lot of Joy On Earth and In Heaven

If I go to Hell it will mean that I have been a failure in this life God granted me in which to prepare for eternity. The sincere Christian is truly the happiest person on earth as he possesses "the peace passing understanding" (Phillipians 4:7). He can associate with those of "like precious faith" (II Peter 1:1) even though "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (I John 5:19). But, if a man fails to be a devoted follower of the Lamb of God he will have all his life and then Hell forever with those in darkness! No one, thinking properly, should want to be a failure. However, anyone who dies in sin automatically admits that the best of two worlds

passed him by. In John 8:21 we read the following epitaph from Jesus:

"You shall die in your sins and where I go, you cannot come."

Should we hear such an exclamation on Judgment Day we will be forever ruined and spiritually barren indeed! Think of the joys of Heaven we will miss. As children we heard of the golden street, gates of pearls, no darkness, no sickness, no separation—and the tree of life in the midst of the garden of God. Oh, how we longed for the beautiful home of the soul! As we mature we think more, perhaps, of the sublime presence of Christ, our dearest friend, and the redeemed of all ages plus deliverance from the vile pattern of earthly existence as the grandest treasures of heaven. The powerful hymns of praise to be sung around Jehovah's majestic throne, reunion with loved ones who "died in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13) and meeting spiritual giants of yesteryear—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 8:11) will be our delight. Hearing Jesus, Jeremiah and Paul preach—these will be some of the resplendent moments on that golden shore. But, they will belong only to those who miss Hell because they "washed their robes and

made them white in the blood of the Lamb ... therefore ... God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 7:14-17). May we so live that this can be our portion in the world that is to come! Johnson Oatman, Jr. shared with us one of the most vibrant of all spiritual songs:

"If I walk in the pathway of duty,
If I work till the close of the day,
I shall see the great King in His beauty

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When I've gone the last mile of the
way
And I know there are joys that
await me
When I have gone the last mile of
the way."

One of the supreme tragedies in the spiritual realm the failure of many who *know* the way of righteousness to *obey* it! Someday it will be *too late* for millions who definitely *intended* to become Christians. The Bible is replete with warnings concerning delay and indifference. Indeed, we need to take time to be holy while the world rushes on to ruin! In Hebrews 3:15 the urgency of *now* is vividly chronicled:

"Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

The real dilemma of delay is that we might become hardened in sin or as Paul strikingly wrote in I Timothy 4:2 and Ephesians 4:17-19 ...

"their conscience seared as with an hot iron"
and
"they are past feeling."

Zechariah, the discerning prophet, said that some in his day had *hearts like an adamant stone*. Judgment Day will be too late to get ready, death will come too soon for many and the river of life will be too turbulent to cross for many who postponed their obedience. The Thessalonians were tersely reminded that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Let us not miss Heaven because of procrastination. *When the Last Curtain Falls It Will Be Too Late To Get Back On The Stage Of Life!*

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Some unknown poet has wisely captured the sentiment of our lesson in the following words:

NO TIME FOR GOD

"You have time to build houses,
and in them dwell,
And time to do business, to buy
and to sell;
But none for repentance or deep
earnest prayer
To seek your salvation you have no
time to spar

But time will not linger when help-
less you lie;
Staring death in the face, you will
take time to die!
Then, what of the Judgment? *Pause,*
think I implore
For time will be lost on Eternity's
shore."

When the last curtain falls we shall rejoice in every moment we spent in the service of the Master. Every soul we helped to save (I Timothy 4:16) will be a source of extreme satisfaction. We shall be thrilled with the *divine, sublime* presence of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9) and in our deliverance from this sin-cursed earth. I John 3:3 says it tenderly:

"And every man that hath this hope in him
purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

When the final moment peals forth we shall understand even more fully the grace and mercy of God and the abundant life His Son fashioned for us (John 10:10). Does not John 3:17 fit this point perfectly?

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"For God sent not His Son into the world
to condemn the world but that the world
through Him might be saved."

But, when the curtain falls there shall be some regrets also. We will be ashamed of all the time we wasted "here and there" (I Kings 20:40) when we could have been working in the vineyard of the Lord (II Corinthians 6:1). We will deeply regret any compromise of Truth for nothing else can *make us free* (John 8:32). One of the leading contributions to Hell will be those "who received not the love of the truth

that they might be saved...because they had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2:10-12). As we stand before Jehovah on that final Day of accounting we shall be filled with remorse over those we failed to teach because we were *debtors* to them (Romans 1:14; Ezekiel 3:17ff). Thousands will be sorry they failed to study and learn the Bible. Psalm 119:11 reminds us all:

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee."

Parents will regret improper training for their children that could cause the loss of all. When we fail to build our home on the Lord we labor in vain (Psalm 127:1) because our offspring are not raised in the cultured environment of Christianity (Ephesians 6:4). Hell will be even sadder if we take our children with us due to parental weakness, neglect and example! *To sum it all up*: If I go to Hell it will certainly be due to the fact that I just did not want to go to Heaven strong enough!

We will not make it to "the land of fadeless day" if we allow inherited religion, prejudice or emotionalism to overwhelm us. Materialism on the one hand and immorality on the other are twin deterrents to glory.

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Those who attempt to guide themselves, instead of following the mandates of the Bible, will also miss the road that leads to mansions in the sky (John 14:1-6). Those who allow any mundane concern to hide the spiritual directives of Holy Scripture pose as the greatest enemy of their own eternal security. An absence of total commitment to the gospel of Christ is a sure reflection of one's disenchantment with the cause of the Lord. Men should be willing to pay the very highest premium for Truth!

"Buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23).

Whatever sacrifice such a demand requires out to be speedily attended to. Heaven will be too sweet to miss. And, when the last curtain falls, we will be amazed at the vanity of many things we once deemed important, necessary and urgent. Only those matters performed *in the name of Christ* shall endure the shifting sands of time. *Do we really want to go to Heaven?* The way we live now is an honest mirror of our attitude toward and energy expended in the divine realm Hell will be full of folk who were not sincerely concerned with their conduct upon the earth. Sadly, such concern came to late! *Death Has no Favorites* was the gripping headline recently in a report of the fiery crash of a jetliner that claimed 137 lives. How very pertinent is that reminder! No one knows how many days there are remaining nor how many nights in which to sleep. But, one thing is very sure as stated in Acts 17:31 ...

"But God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world."

In view of that monumental appointment—which no one shall cancel—should we not each one soberly ask:

Am I Ready For That Day To Come?

Notice carefully the following conclusions. *When The Last Curtain Falls:*

1. Time Shall Be No More
2. Opportunity For Salvation Shall Have Passed
3. Judgment Awaits Us All
4. The Gates Of Hell Shall Open Wide
5. We Will Stand Face To Face With Christ
6. The Gospel Shall Be The Standard Of Judgment
7. Every Tongue Shall Confess The Lord
8. The Devil Will Have Lots Of Company
9. Heaven's Portals Shall Shine Gloriously
10. We Shall Reap The Fruit Of Our Influence

Jesus invites us, this side of judgment, to open the door and let Him into our lives (Revelation 3:20). Our service in the Lord's vineyard will not be in vain (I Corinthians 15:58). Since we are to be judged according to His blessed word (John 12:48) let us be wise enough to choose the way of the Cross and not the broad way of leisure.

"Two ways lay before me,
From them I must choose,
One way I must take
That I cannot refuse."

When the last curtain falls let us pray that the rejoicing we hear is not from the demons in Hell but the angels in Heaven (Luke 15:10). For, when God rings down the curtain on the final act we cannot replay our part. The greatest drama the stage of life has ever known is now being enacted. It is called SALVATION and it demands our best.

In the piercing language of Joshua 24:15 we come to the final scene in this lesson:

"Choose ye this day whom you will serve."

Friend, do not let the curtain fall on you indecision, rebellion or shame. Obey Christ today and live for Him until the drama has ended. You will never regret a performance like that!

* Read Acts 8:26-39 for a clear Bible example of how to become a Christian and then II Peter 1:4-11 on how to maintain this relationship.

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