

THE TRUTH SERIES

We Believe...

In

LIFE

ETERNAL

By Dr. Lester Sumrall

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in
Life Eternal**

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

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We Believe in Life Eternal

A week ago I heard a rather well known preacher on the radio, and the things he taught were not true. I said to myself, "Isn't it a pity that he is spending so much money to teach ideas that are not true?" He had the book of Revelation all mixed up; it was just simply pitiful. Listen to me. If we don't have our own footings and foundations deep in God, we can be led astray by some pleasant looking person who has a good voice. So, it is necessary for us to study the Christian foundations that we might know the truth!

In Revelation 20:10 it says, "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day

and night for ever and ever." Now we know the destiny for the devil, the antichrist (here he is called the beast), and the main religious leader during the Great Tribulation (here he is called the false prophet). It says that they will all be sent into the lake of fire for ever and ever!

Verse 11 of that same chapter says, "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." Later in the book of Revelation it says this: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they

shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes [the redeemed]; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).

We see here that the righteous are destined to eternal life and to live in the presence of the Creator of the universe — they shall live there with Him forever. And this is made possible because of what we call Calvary. Here the Lord Jesus Christ gave His life so you and I might have eternal life.

On the other hand, the destiny of the wicked will be an eternal separation from God. This is known as the second death. At that moment, the God of love will become the God of justice! I’d underscore that if I were you. A lot of people can’t see how a God of love can also be a God of justice. That’s

because they don't understand what love is. Love is not sentimentality, like some people think. Love is based upon truth and integrity and honesty; it is more than sentimentalism.

The Promise of Christ

We have the promise of heavenly citizenship from Christ in John 14:1-4. He says, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." And so He said in His Father's house are many places to live — places for the redeemed in Christ.

Jesus promised, "I'm going to prepare a place for you." That means after death Christians will live with God forever. They should

have no fear in this matter because Jesus promised we shall live with God forever.

In Philippians 3:20 it says, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Our citizenship is in heaven. We're just passing through the earth for a very short length of time; our real citizenship is in heaven. Verse 21 says, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things under himself." The believer has entered into a heavenly citizenship where he shall live forever with God after he leaves this world.

Revelation 20:15 says, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Your name, I suppose, is in the book of death when you serve the devil. But God takes it out of there when you become a follower of Christ, and He places

it in the book of life. Someday, when we stand before Him, He will open the books and read to us all that we have done. We wouldn't have understood that a few years ago, but computers today can do a million things at one time; so God can do the same thing as He records all of the details about our life.

Revelation 20:15 says, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." So we see there are two destinies in the world that is to come. One eternal destiny is living with God forever because you believe in Him and you live by His commands. The other eternal destiny is eternal desolation if you refuse to love and serve God.

Revelation 21:8 says, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Here

the Bible tells us that there will be a second death and explains who will enter into the second death. We should know this and make the effort to tell people that their souls are in danger, that their future is such that if they do not come to Christ they will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.

You don't have to be fearful, you don't have to be unbelieving, you don't have to be an abomination to God, you don't have to be a murderer, you don't have to live immorally, you don't have to be a spiritist and give yourself over to all kinds of spiritism, you don't have to be an idolater and kneel down to idols, you don't have to be a liar. You can be born again and go to heaven! You don't have to go to hell. Nobody, not even the devil, can make you go there. It's your own will that takes you there.

Two Resurrections

Now, because there's such a divergence of

the two destinies of the human family, there will also be two resurrections — one for the righteous, and another for the wicked. John 5:28-29 says, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” Do you see it? There are two resurrections. They are not the same, and they do not take place at the same time. One will occur at the beginning of the great tribulation, when there is the resurrection of all those people who have died in Christ. But the people who are evil will not be resurrected until a thousand years later.

Revelation 20:4-5 says, “And I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and

which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection." The first resurrection is when God brings forth those people who have died in Christ or died in God or died in righteousness or died in truth anytime from Adam until the time of the rapture of the Church.

Two Judgments

Just as there are two times of resurrection, there will also be two times of judgment. The judgment of the righteous will be according to their works. That's found in Second Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be

good or bad." Every one of us will be judged before God for how he or she has lived! I want you to know it'll be a fearsome time. You say, "But this judgment doesn't have to do with the destiny of my soul." That's correct, it does not have to do with your destiny. Every one at this first judgment are believers, every one of them. The only thing it will do in eternity is give you your place there, and some in eternity will wish they had been a greater servant of the Lord Jesus while living here on earth.

Jesus said it this way: "Some shall be over one city, two cities, or three cities, or five cities, or ten cities." In other words, you will be given a place in eternity that corresponds to your faithfulness now. You might say, "Well, that little widow over there, she is ignorant and doesn't know much and can't do much." But if she is completely faithful in what God tells her to do, in the next life she won't be ignorant. And she won't be little, either. When

she gets over there, she'll be as great as everybody else. The Lord will look at her and say, "You did your best, didn't you?" "Yes, I did," she'll say.

The Lord may speak to some famous pastor and say, "You never did half as much as you could have done, did you?" And he'll say, "No." Well, Jesus will tell him, "Then, you only get a half reward over here, too."

And to some evangelist, Jesus will say, "You took off more time than you were on, didn't you?" And he'll have to admit, "Yes, that's true." The Lord will say to him, "Then, you only get this much for a reward."

If God's called you to do something, you'd better do it. If you're called to give, give with all your heart. And if you're called to pray, pray with all your heart. And if you're called to go, go with all your heart. Whatever God's designed for you to do, do it. Do it!

Let me say something right here, and don't

you ever forget it: If God wants you to do something, He will make the way for it and you don't have to keep screaming at Him. You don't have to say, "Oh, God called me to Korea and I haven't gotten there yet." Honey, if God wants you in Korea, He's got a lot of ways to get you there. You say, "What does it mean when I feel led to go but I don't go because the doors are not opened?" You know what it means: It means God wants to know if you're *willing* to go. And if you're willing to go, it's finalized with God. You say, "Can you prove it?" Very easily. God told Abraham to offer up his son, but that son never died. When God looked into the purity of his heart, He said, "You've already finished it; it's already completed!" When God tells you to go to Africa, and you say, "Yes, Lord, I'll go!" He might say, "Don't go any further; you're close enough. Everyday you should say, "Lord, I will do what you want me to do; I will be what you

want me to be.” That’s what He’s looking for — a willingness.

As I said, there will be two judgments. The first one will be the judgment seat of Christ. This is where all believers will stand before Him. It does not have to do with your eternal destiny; it has to do with your relationship to your eternal rewards.

First Corinthians 3:10-15 says, “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide

which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Every man's work shall be made manifest. That's what the judgment seat of Christ is for. Whatever we've done in pride, and whatever we have done in self aggrandizement to build ourselves up, that, the Bible says, will be burned. It'll be the wood, hay and stubble. The fire shall try every man's work to reveal what sort it is. Whatever I do, I must do it because I love you. I must do it because I care. I must do it because Jesus commanded it. And if I don't have the right motive in doing it, the Bible says that will be wood, hay and stubble, and it will be burned. It could be the same with the giving of your tithes. If you don't give it in the right way, that's burned, you see. If you're witnessing with the wrong spirit, it's burned. Everything that is not done the way that God

wants it to be done is wood, hay and stubble.

The judgment of the wicked shall not be there; instead, it will take place at the great white throne judgment. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

Are you seeing it? This is the great white

throne judgment. Jesus Christ will be the judge seated upon this throne. And then the dead, small and great, shall all stand before him – not the believers, not the Christians. This is the wicked dead. And the dead will be judged out of those things that God has written down in His books. Then, death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire.

Let me help you understand that. If someone were to kill another person tonight, he wouldn't be taken to the penitentiary tonight. He'd be taken to a local jail instead. He might stay there for several months, and then they would bring him before the judge. At that time the judge would tell him, "You are guilty; you killed that person. I'll have to put you in the penitentiary for the rest of your life."

When a righteous person dies, he goes to be with God. The Bible says that to be absent from the body is to be in the presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). So,

when the righteous die, they go immediately to be wherever Christ is; they're not sleeping down in the earth somewhere. You mustn't believe that. The dead in Christ go to be with Christ, and those that are wicked go to a place of torment — not later, but as soon as they die. Then, later, comes the judgment. At that time unbelievers will know where they belong; they will realize that they are there for the simple reason that they did not serve Christ.

Heaven—The Reward of the Righteous

Christ has promised a heavenly reward. In John 14:2 He promised you a house to live in. In John 14:3 He promised to have fellowship with you. And in Revelation 21:4, it says that when you get with Him, God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes. There shall be no death, no sorrow, no crying, neither shall there be any pain, all the former things are passed away. That means all sorrow and

affliction will be banished. It will be gone forever. It even says in this verse that there shall be no more death. The greatest enemy man has ever confronted is death, and it shall be banished by the mighty power of God!

Hell—The Reward of the Wicked

While the righteous will enjoy heaven, the wicked will know torment. Revelation 20:14-15 says, “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

In Revelation 21:8 it says that the fearful, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, and so forth, will be the sinner’s companions for eternity.

In Luke 16:19-31 we see that the sinner will be haunted by memory and remorse:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and finelinen, and fared

sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence

to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

False Views

We have a lot of things that we ought to give attention to regarding false ideas about the hereafter. One of them is universalism. It's taught in our world today, even in the town in which I live. This is the view that everybody will be saved eventually — no one ends up in hell.

There are many people who say that God is too loving to exclude anyone from heaven, but that is not true. John 3:18 says, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

There is also a doctrine called restorationism. According to this view, you may go to hell for a time, for a temporary period, then you will get out. But this view is not true either. Hell is permanent!

Second probationism is another false doctrine. This position says that you will have a second chance to be saved. Somewhere in eternity, between death and the resurrection, you will have a second chance to repent and be saved. But Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." You should put some little circles around the key words there.

Conclusion

Man is given the privilege of choosing his own destiny, and you can be sure that his present decisions will forever seal his destiny. Every human being will make the decision whether to live with God or live without God for all eternity!

Prayer of Salvation

Lord Jesus I confess I am a sinner and I repent of my sins (stop sinning and turn away from my sins). Please forgive me. I accept you as my Lord, Master and Savior. I thank you for taking my judgment of death for my sin debt, by being nailed to the cross and shedding your blood for the forgiveness of my sins. I thank you for giving me your righteousness.

With your help I will obey you all the days of my life. I will confess you before mankind and will not be ashamed of you. Please change me by the power of the Holy Spirit and give me your grace and love for all people. Show me the plan you have for my life and help me to fulfill it. Amen.

Sign your name

Be sure to (1) read your Bible daily, (2) Pray daily, and (3) Attend a Bible-believing church consistently.

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Dr. Lester Sumrall

1913~1996

The voice of Dr. Lester Sumrall remains prominent in the Christian world today. More than 65 years of ministry in over 100 nations made Dr. Sumrall a respected source of wisdom and understanding. He was an author, teacher, missionary, evangelist, and the pastor and founder of Christian Center Church in South Bend, Indiana.

Throughout his lifetime, Dr. Sumrall worked tirelessly to fulfill the Great Commission by carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In 1957 he founded LeSEA, a multi-faceted global outreach. Today, with the help of our faithful partners and friends, the ministry continues to blanket the world through television, satellite, FM and shortwave radio, LeSEA Publications, and LeSEA Global Feed the Hungry®.

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