

How Long is Eternity?

By Dr. John Ankerberg

As we enter the new millennium, many people are talking about the future. According to the Bible there is one future event all Christians will attend. It is called The Judgment Seat of Christ. What does the Bible say is the purpose of this judgment? What will happen when each Christian stands before God? Are real rewards going to be given to those who have faithfully served Christ on earth? What are the rewards that will be given? Will some Christians be honored more than others? Will some experience a great loss of rewards that will affect their status in heaven for all eternity? How can you live today in order to do well at the Judgment Seat of Christ? These are the questions we will attempt to answer in this series of articles.

I'd like to begin with a question to help introduce the importance of our topic. Which of these two options would you choose if you had the chance? The first option is this: Let's say that for 24 hours you could be a billionaire. You would be famous. But after 24 hours, you would be thrown into jail and have to stay there for the rest of your life. That's option number one. Or you could choose option number two, which is: For 24 hours, you will be in jail, and you will be penniless. But after 24 hours, you will be freed from jail and know that for the rest of your life, you will be a billionaire and live in a beautiful palace. Now, which of these two options do you think you would choose?

Well, obviously, we would all take option number 2. It would be foolish to take the first option as no one would want to be a billionaire for only one day and then spend the rest of their life in jail. But, you know, that's exactly what many of you are doing right now. Some of you haven't put your faith in Christ; you are living life the way you want to, you've left God out, and you're forgetting that eternity is coming. In terms of time, our life is far less than a day compared to eternity. Yet you have foolishly chosen to ignore Christ and are living only for this life. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

On the other hand, some of you are Christians. You have put your faith in Christ and you are going to Heaven. But most of the time you are living for yourself and not for Christ. Now, you will not lose Heaven, but according to the Bible, those times you did not live for Christ will result in your losing eternal rewards. Where does the Bible teach this? The Bible says: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Now let's stop and ask the question, "How long is eternity?" How long will I exist either with or without the eternal rewards God wants me to have? If you're a non-Christian, how long will you exist in hell? Let me see if I can illustrate this for you. Many of you have a parakeet or you've seen one in the stores. Picture a parakeet in your backyard next to a sandbox. You take a pail, fill it full of sand, and then let some of the grains of sand fall through your hands. One bucket of sand has thousands of grains of sand. Let's imagine that you could instruct that parakeet to pick up one of the grains of sand in its beak, fly to the moon and drop it off. Let's say it takes one million years for the parakeet to get to the moon. He puts the grain of sand down and flies back to earth. It takes a million years for him to get back. He then picks up the next grain of sand and flies back to the moon. He drops off that grain and flies back to earth—a million years there, a million years back. One

by one the parakeet takes each grain of sand in your sandbox to the moon. When he is finished, you take him down to Key West, Florida and there you show him the Atlantic Ocean and the beach which runs along the coast. You tell him, "I want you to start clearing off the sand on this beach one grain at a time." He starts there, then works his way up to Miami, then to Jacksonville, Hilton Head, Charleston, New York City, Boston, and up toward Maine. He takes each grain of sand to the moon one at a time, a million years there, a million years back. When he's done with all of that, you take him out to the West Coast and from Mexico all the way up to California and Oregon, you tell him to take one grain of sand at a time and fly it to the moon. When the parakeet finishes with all of that, you say, I've got this other little spot called the Sahara Desert. I want you to clear the sand off of that place one at a time." When he finishes that, you say, "Three-fourths of the surface of the earth is water. Let me drain the oceans dry. At the bottom of the oceans you have a lot of sand. Take all of that sand to the moon, one grain of sand at a time, a million years there, and a million years back." When he finishes, if you could add up all of the millions of years it had taken to remove all of the sand from all of those places, eternity would just be beginning.

Can you understand now why it would be foolish to live just for this life and ignore where we will be and how we will fare for all eternity? Before you die, if you haven't placed your faith in Christ, the Bible says you won't be in Heaven for eternity: You'll exist in a terrible place God calls hell, separated from Him and all that is good.

Have you asked Christ to be your Savior and Lord? If not, why not ask Him to come into your life and to forgive you of your sins right now? He graciously offers to do so and to give you the gift of eternal life.

On the other hand, if you have already believed in Christ, yet you're a Christian who is living life the way you want and not following the Lord, you need to know that you, too, are living very foolishly. Each day you live for yourself you are forfeiting eternal rewards, honors and privileges God wants you to have for all eternity.