

## PREPARATION FOR HEAVEN

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*Lesson: John 14:2,3*

We know that when people wake up in the world of spirits and learn that they are spirits, they go through two stages there. At first everything is the same as in this world. They look, sound and feel the same. But in the second stage the real person is revealed. What we are really like underneath, what we secretly think and love, comes to view. If we have been evil in our minds; if we had hateful thoughts and feelings about people most of the time; if we were always acting selfishly but hid this while in the world, then in the second stage we will not be able to hide this any longer. Our real character is shown. It will no longer be possible for us to pretend. We will begin to speak and act what is in our mind. And it will become clear to the good spirits that we really belong in hell.

For an evil spirit like that there is no third stage in the world of spirits. There is no way of preparing for heaven, nor to belong there.

The Writings tell what happens if such a spirit tries to get into heaven. If people try to get into heaven and really do not belong there, they find that they can hardly breathe. They begin to feel sad, and to writhe and squirm. From other passages in the Writings we learn that spirits who are not really fit for heaven feel like fish out of water. They gasp for breath. They feel most uncomfortable. They have not lived according to the laws of heaven, set forth in the Lord's Word.

We know this also from a parable in the New Testament. The earthly story was about a man who went to a wedding for the king's son. But to his surprise, he was not allowed to stay at the wedding feast because he was not wearing the right clothes. He was not wearing a wedding-garment. He was bound hand and foot by the servants on order of the king, and he was cast into outer darkness.

You may be surprised at that. We know how important it is to be nicely dressed when we go to church or to a wedding. But it may seem that no king would have someone thrown into outer darkness because he was not wearing the right clothes. But this story, being a parable, has deeper meaning. The wedding feast means heaven. Being allowed into the feast is like being allowed into heaven. The king is like the Lord. But what about the man who did not have a wedding-garment? What is he like?

He is like someone who knows how he should live, from the Lord's Word. But he has not lived right. There are two things that must be done. The first is to learn from the Word how we ought to live. The second is to do it. We must do these two things. They must be joined together—just like a wedding. Our learning and our living must be joined together, must be married together. If we do that, then it is like having a wedding-garment. We are prepared for heaven. If we don't have the wedding-garment, we cannot be allowed into heaven. We are not ready for it. We would be most unhappy if we were allowed in. We would soon know we didn't belong there. And we would flee away.

People who find that they don't belong in heaven soon begin to forget all they ever learned about heaven. They forget all the things they had learned but not lived. Then they are completely "in the dark" about heaven and the Lord. This is what is meant by the man without a wedding-garment being cast into outer darkness. He really did that himself. It isn't that the *Lord* casts anyone into hell. We choose hell after we find we are not happy in heaven.

There is no third stage in the world of spirits for the evil. The third stage—which is preparation for heaven—is only for the good. "Preparation" means being taught about heaven. Some good spirits are well instructed about heaven when they arrive in the world of spirits. They learned about it on earth, so they do not stay there long. But most good spirits have some mistaken ideas. They need to be corrected. This is done in the third stage.

There are also spirits who are basically good. Yet they still have some bad habits. They are not fully ready for heaven until they have given up these bad habits. This, too, is done in the third stage of the world of spirits.

When the good spirits have been fully prepared, they are clothed in white garments. They are led out of their place of instruction and correction. Then a wonderful thing happens. They see a pathway that leads to heaven. They do not know at the time that the path leads to their own society in heaven. But the wonderful thing is that no one else sees that pathway—only the person who is supposed to walk along it. The good spirit walks along the path that leads upward to heaven and is greeted by the angel guard. He or she is led to his or her own society—his or her own group of people. They recognize the good spirit as if they had always been friends. And the newcomer also feels at home with them. This is the way the Lord prepares people for a home in heaven.

While on earth the Lord made this promise: "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."