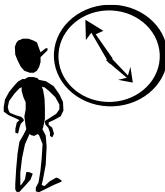


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### Time of Assembly



#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.  
Worship 10:00 a.m.  
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.  
Worship 5:00 p.m.

#### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

## Paradise Lost

By Steve A. Hamilton

Students of the bible correctly believe that faithful followers of Christ will be found in Paradise upon death. However, not all believe that some in Paradise will not make it to the final reward. This seems counterintuitive. Paradise is a place of rest in the presence of God. How could a person make it to Paradise but not to Heaven?

The mention of paradise produces visions of aesthetic gardens. The word paradise is derived from a Persian word that means “a walled garden.” The garden of Eden should come to mind (Gen. 2:8) as it was originally intended to be the place where mankind would live in the presence of God. Adam and Eve in disobedience lost access to the Garden of Eden. Consider it foreshadowing, but the same will occur on the Judgment Day where the disobedient will also lose access to Paradise.

The Judgment Day is a set occasion in which a decision or judgment will be made either in favor or against the participants. It is not a daily occasion where people are sentenced as they die. There are no passages that indicate that the judgment occurs at the moment of death. We are assured there will be a Judgment Day just as assuredly as Christ rose from the dead (Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Jn. 4:17).

Would Jesus judge anyone before they had an opportunity to speak for themselves (Jn. 7:50-51)? We know we will be afforded that opportunity (Rom. 14:12; Heb. 4:13; 1 Pet. 4:5). Not allowing the accused a real opportunity to speak for themselves was what the Jews did to Christ. Wouldn't it be wrong to punish someone before they are judged?

There is not a single passage in the bible that states only the obedient will go to Paradise upon death. The best

that can be produced are passages that teach the obedient will be found in Paradise. It is reasonable to assume all the righteous will be found in Paradise and at the Judgment Day (Rev. 20:12-15). But what happens to those who “stumble” and fail to make their “call and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10-11)? Are they excluded before they are even judged?

One of the most direct passages that teaches some disobedient people will be found in Paradise is in the explanation of the Parable of the Tares. Jesus states *“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will **gather out of His kingdom** all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (Matt. 13:41-42). One only needs to ask, where will most of the Lord’s Church be located on the Judgment Day? Those that offend and practice lawlessness are gathered out of His Church on that occasion!

Those that are gathered out of His Church are not exclusively coming out from Torment because most of those in Torment have already been removed to their eternal punishment. *“Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age”* (Matt. 13:40). Notice the wicked tares of the world are gathered and burnt before Christ sends His angels to gather the offensive and lawless out of His Church. This is consistent with the judgment scene as depicted in the Book of Revelation. The devil and all his followers are sent to Hell prior to Christ opening the books in judgment against those that remain (Rev. 20:7-15). Those that remain are those in the Lord’s Church. They are the first to be formally judged.

The Apostle Peter echoes this understanding when he wrote, *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with **us** first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God”* (1 Pet. 4:17)? Peter acknowledges that Christ’s Judgment Day will begin with those in the Church. Notice that Peter includes himself as one of the participants being judged at the judgment.

The Apostle Paul was likewise aware that he would stand in judgment. He stated, *“For **we** shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of **us** shall give account of himself to God”* (Rom. 14:10b-12). The Judgment Day is not just a sentencing but a day where the Lord will render a decision in judgment. Further, it should be noted that everyone within the Church will be present (Peter and Paul included); not just those who had not physically died when Christ returns.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast illustrates the point that sinful members of the Church will find themselves in Paradise (Matt. 22:2-14). *“Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the*

wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matt. 22:9-13). Though both good and bad people composed the wedding attendees, it was only the fellow that was unprepared (without garments) that was sent to Hell. Again, the wicked from Torment are not represented by the garmentless man because they have already been sent to Hell before the formal judgment begins (1 Pet. 4:17).

The Parable of the Talents also illustrates a servant of the Lord who was arguably unprepared. This one talent man sinned by omission. *"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'* But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matt. 25:24-30). This judgment scene parable illustrates a Lord's servant giving account of his actions. The Lord decided that his inability to use his one talent was worthy of condemnation.

The Parable of the Dragnet equates the kingdom of heaven to a dragnet. This parable serves to illustrate that the good and bad within the Church are not separated until the Judgment Day (Matt. 13:47-50). "At the end of the age" (i.e. the Judgment Day) they are separated!

If only obedient Christians are in Paradise, then where do disobedient Christians go upon death? If we understand that those in Torment have judged themselves unworthy for salvation (Rom. 2:12; Eph. 2:12; 2 Pet. 2:4-12ff), then those in Paradise are the ones who do not know their end (Matt. 7:21-23, 13:40-43; 1 Pet. 4:17-18; Rev. 20:12-15). Christ does not need to judge those who have judged themselves (Jn. 12:47-48; Heb. 6:4-8, 10:26-31).

Jesus theoretically illustrated the Judgment Day by using lawless Christians from His era. Christ said, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me **in that day**, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I*

*never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*” (Matt. 7:20-23)! We know these were Christians because they were able to perform miracles. The only people that were able to perform miracles were first century Christians. They are long gone yet they appear before Christ on the Judgment Day without a hint that they were lost. Jesus says many “in that day” pose that dilemma. Where would such Christians await the Lord’s return?

Another way to approach this issue is to ask, “Does God remove sinners from the Church upon sin?” We know that a separation occurs with sin (Isa. 59:2; Jas. 1:15). Does that mean the Lord treats Christians as alien sinners when they sin? Does God remove a Christian from the Church upon sin requiring baptism when repentance is obtained to be added back to the Church? If not, then when is a disobedient Christian removed from the Lord’s Church? If not directly by sin it must be when Christ formally removes him on the Judgment Day.

It seems logical and comforting to assume those in Paradise are guaranteed a heavenly home. However, the balance of scripture does not support that view. We need to allow scripture to inform us of the truth. We cannot afford to dictate a view where scriptures disagree.

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## The Lunch Lady

By Matthew W. Bassford

One of the best-attended funerals I’ve ever preached was for a school lunch lady. Her name was Marlene Norris. She was a faithful member of the church in Joliet, with which I was working at the time, along with her husband and three of her children. As is the custom in those parts, they asked me to offer the eulogy.

I arrived at the funeral home early and noticed when I went into the parlor that half the chairs had been removed. Only 40 or 50 remained. Nobody was expecting a big turnout.

This didn’t surprise me. I’d known and been friendly with Marlene ever since my arrival in the area, but she wasn’t a standout in the congregation. She attended regularly, but she didn’t speak up in Bible class, teach children’s classes, or sing so that I could hear her voice. If I remembered her for anything, it was for faithfully updating me on her various ailments every time I greeted her. To the extent that there is such a



thing as an ordinary saint, she was it.

The family was already there, both those who were members in good standing and those who weren't. I knew them all. I also knew the funeral-attenders from the congregation who were beginning to arrive. You know the type: those staunch older Christians who can be relied upon to show up for absolutely everything, including the funerals of members of the congregation, their relatives, and even notable brethren from surrounding congregations. They offer one of the little-recognized fringe benefits of being a child of God — the knowledge that no matter who dies, you won't have to grieve alone.

However, a third group also began to trickle in, a group of people I did not know. They weren't family. Frequently, they had the wrong skin color to be family. They weren't funeral-attenders either. They weren't nicely dressed, utterly respectable, utterly at ease. They didn't look like they belonged. They sure thought they belonged, though.

There were a lot of them, too. They filled the available seating, so the funeral-home staff brought back a row of chairs. Soon it was filled with people, then another row, then another row.

The process continued even after the funeral service began. These weren't people who had ever known the stern duty of appearing punctually at "the next appointed time." Being 10 or 15 minutes late was nothing to them, but Marlene Norris was something.

By the time the last amen was said, the room was full of chairs, and the chairs were full of people. If I remember rightly, there were even folks standing because there were no more seats to be found. I've never seen anything like it.

The only explanation I can offer is the one in Marlene's obituary. It reads, "No one could ever walk in her home and not eat. She will be remembered for her giving and caring spirit, always putting everyone else's needs before her own." That sounds like an obituary commonplace, right up there with "She loved her family," and "She loved to travel." All the dead are generous and compassionate in their obituaries.

In Marlene's case, though, I think the obituary spoke the truth. I think there were students at Gompers Junior High School for whom Marlene the lunch lady was the only kind voice in their lives. I think there were people who came to her kitchen at home because it was the only place on the planet where they could find warmth and food and love.

I'm guessing about all this because Marlene never mentioned any of it to me, even while she was giving me every detail about her ingrown eyelashes. I don't think she thought about it much. Compassion was simply the water in which she swam. However, at the end of her days, the recipients of her kindness rose up and bore witness.

Such is greatness in the kingdom of heaven.