

THE

HARVESTER

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." [Luke 10:2]

JULY 1995

No. 115

FREE TICKET TO HEAVEN?

Often I have seen signs at religious buildings that read: "Free Ticket to Heaven, Details Inside." Another sign I saw recently said, "Read the Bible, Free Gift Inside." When you think about it, these are clever eye-catchers. I suppose it is one way to get outside people interested in that particular denomination's religion, especially when one sees the word "Free" flashed up there. But at the same time I have wondered how misleading that message on the sign could be. How many people actually stopped and, upon finding out further instructions, they went away sorrowful like the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:22)? Did they misunderstand the word, "free"?

THE HARVESTER
1120 Sun Hill Road
Birmingham, AL 35215-4106

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Birmingham, AL
PERMIT No. 4624

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CORRECTION

I wonder what thoughts about the road to heaven and eternal salvation were being conjured up in the minds of the passerbys? Was the message implying to many of its readers that the act of being saved was "free", that it is easy and there is no price to pay? Is eternal life really "free"?

Of course, most people realize that the "free" is not in the least bit associated with a physical monetary system. True salvation cannot be purchased with today's currency anymore than true love can. No one can buy his way to heaven, though some live as if they will make the attempt. *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ."* (Matt. 6:19-20). Unfortunately, some have forgotten that *"a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* (Luke 12:15). When it comes to salvation, the poor man has an equal spiritual chance with the rich man for achieving success, though Jesus certainly warns that the covetous mind-frame of the typical rich person will definitely be a burden (Matt. 19:23,24).

In today's age of materialism when we say something is a "free gift", we usually mean that it has little value or that its cost is next-to-nothing. It must be a cheap item or else how can the producer afford to give it away for "free"? Certainly this is not the case with gospel salvation!

Perhaps the term "gift" itself is misleading some about the true concept of "free". When someone gives you a gift on a special occasion, usually you do not have to reach into your pockets and pay for it. It is "free", from the standpoint of receiving the gift. But what

about from the standpoint of the giver? Does he consider its worth as "free"? Did he not go to the store and pay money for your present or did he not spend his own time making it with his own hands? The giver would not say the gift was "free" after all, though to you it would appear so.

Likewise we learn from Romans 6:23 that *"the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"*. Those to whom this "gift" is given would think it is "free" and on the surface it seems that way. But is it really "free"? Didn't the gift cost the Giver something valuable, like His only Son? *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). Didn't Jesus shed His blood to make this gift possible and accessible to mankind (Eph. 2:13; Heb. 9:14; 1 Jn. 1:7)? Well, when we look at it that way, it might be misleading to advertise salvation as a "free" gift.

We should never forget the price paid to redeem our souls, *"with the precious blood of Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:19). Our "ticket to heaven" was paid with the stiffest penalty ever imposed. I am afraid that sometimes when we label it "free", we actually cheapen it! The salvation of our souls should be our most valuable endeavor. *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt. 16:26)

Other times people associate the word "free" with the meaning of 'being easy'. Again I am afraid that the phrase "free ticket to heaven" gives the impression to some people that the way to heaven is a 'bed of roses', free from troubles, trials, and temptations. They think

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Lk. 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, and all correspondence to:

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all you have to do is 'believe in Jesus' and you are automatically bound for heaven! Some teach that once you have 'faith' in Jesus, then you are 'saved' and you will always be 'saved', no matter what you do afterwards! That is what they consider a "free ticket" with a money-back guarantee and full refunds!

But upon becoming a child of God, the road to heaven is anything but easy or "free". *"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"* (Matt. 7:14). Even the disciple of Christ *"and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (2 Tim. 3:12). This is exactly what happened to the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 11:23-28), to the early Christians (Acts), and will continue until Christ comes again.

To get a "ticket to heaven" requires special efforts. One must obey the complete Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ if he seeks eternal salvation (2 Thes. 1:7-9). He must believe (Mark 16:16), repent (Acts 2:38), confess (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized (1 Pet. 3:21) to become a Christian (Acts 11:26). Then he must live righteously and faithful to the end (Rev. 2:10). Only through these great sacrifices will we agree that salvation certainly was not "free" but it definitely was worth it!

The ticket to heaven cannot really be considered "free" when it cost the blood of Christ. The only thing "free" about salvation is its availability to man. *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men"* (Titus 2:11). Everything else about it is far from "free". The gift of eternal salvation is priceless!

RAY McMANUS

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. How many days did the people aboard ship, along with Paul, go without food during the storm off Crete?
2. How many Levites returned from captivity according to Nehemiah?
3. How does Peter describe God's promises in 2 Peter?
4. What kind of sleep does the working man experience according to Ecclesiastes?
5. What chapters in the Bible record the story of the flood?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. What did Jesus say the Pharisees swallow while straining at a gnat? A CAMEL (Matt. 23:13)
2. On whom did Paul and Silas tell the jailer in Philippi to believe, in order to be saved? THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (Acts 16:31)
3. What did Solomon say his lover's teeth were like? A FLOCK OF NEWLY SHORN SHEEP (Song of Sol. 4:2)

4. Which prophetic book is found between Hosea and Amos? JOEL

5. What type of food was always present in the tabernacle? SHEWBREAD (Exo. 25:30)

R. I. P.

Many years ago when I was employed by a Birmingham (Alabama) bank, there was situated on a certain desk a small, rectangular piece of marble upon which was printed the letters R. I. P. This interesting piece of stone was actually used as a paper weight to hold down in a certain basket paperwork which had been completed. The initials apparently expressed the hope that the completed files would "rest in peace" and not require further attention.

The printing of these initials was no doubt influenced by the hopeful thought often expressed regarding those deceased and placed on their tombstones, "Rest in Peace" Death presents a dark, dismal prospect, for it brings us face to face with uncertainty -- an uncertainty from which there is no return to the present.

When death draws together the curtain of life for someone we love:

Our friends come to comfort us,

A memorial service is arranged,

The preacher speaks appropriate words, and

A grave marker is placed.

The dead has passed beyond our reach. We have done for him all we can do.

But regardless of:

What is done for the deceased's body,

The kind words which are spoken,

The faults which are overlooked,

The peace and beauty of the burial place,
 A carefully selected epitath on the marker,
 we cannot alter the dead one's situation
 regarding eternity. Jesus' story of Lazarus
 and the rich man (Luke 16:25-26) vividly
 expresses this stark reality. The voice from
 heaven in Revelation 14:13 stated with
 assurance, "*Blessed are the dead which die IN
 the Lord*", but it offered no hope for those
 who die OUTSIDE.

Only a genuine Christian has the assurance
 that his rest will be in peace. Through God's
 grace and his own obedient response,
 preparation for his life in the hereafter was
 made here before death.

HARRY COBB
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ALL THIS AND MORE

*God made the sunlight,
 but it cannot laugh,
 God made the moonbeams,
 but they cannot smile;
 God made the stars,
 but they cannot play;
 God made the endearing fawn,
 but it cannot sing;
 God made the birds,
 but they cannot hold the heart;
 God made music,
 but it cannot love.
 So, God made you, my child.*

-- Selected --

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Place & Time</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
July 7 - 9 (F - Su)	West Gadsden Church Gadsden, AL 7:30 evenings	Joe Young (Valley, AL)
July 9 - 14	Temple Hill Church Auburn, MS	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
July 9 - 14	Valley, AL	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
July 16 - 21	Oak Grove Church Woodland, AL	Ricky Murphy (Woodland, AL)
July 23 - 28	Napolean Church Woodland, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
July 28 - 30	Barnes' Ridge Church Livingston, TN	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
July 30- Aug. 4	Rainsville, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
July 31- Aug. 6	Leitchfield, KY	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)

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EDITOR'S NOTE OF THANKS

THANKS to all those who have sent in articles and given financial donations. You have been a tremendous assistance in publishing this paper. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. Special thanks are always extended to the Sun Hill Road church (Birmingham, AL) and to the Hokes Bluff church (Gadsden, AL) for their generous support. May God continue to bless all of you.