

The Players

By

Curtis Dickinson

“Was the play a success?” asked the interviewer.

“Oh yes’,” the young actress replied. “We received terrific reviews.”

Then he asked why the play ran only two months if it was such a raving success.

“Well, you see, it was only a trial run,” she told him. “We’re making some changes, and will open on Broadway in 30 days!”

A trial run!

Time-wise, this life is very brief, like a “vapor,” James says. When it “closes,” some changes will be made, in the clay of resurrection, and when we open again it will be the real thing! This is just a “trial run.”

We are accustomed to thinking of ourselves as spectators of the world scene. We watch our TV, our newspaper, our neighbor and then discuss it as if we were placed here to watch it all, to be entertained by the antics of others and pass judgment on whether or not they act well.

Some are professional people-watchers, seeking ways to regulate men, making fearful proposals as to how the rest of us should be made to act.

Instead of merely looking at the stars, and the moon, we prepare men to GO there. We want to SEE for ourselves just what is out there. There are some who think we had better learn how to conquer space, for there may be other creatures out there watching us!

There is the fear that we are NOT the spectators after all; that instead of being the watchers, we are the watched.

This is the true case, although the Watcher is not a man from Mars or from some other planet. “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

We are NOT the spectators after all. We are the actors. And that “we” means all the people, not just the preacher. It is common practice for the congregation to consider the preacher’s sermon as a kind of performance, and, indeed much preaching is just that and no more. The people watch and listen, then go home to comment on how well he delivered the sermon, how cleverly he turned a phrase, or how poorly he illustrated the talk. He is seen as an actor with the pulpit his stage, and the congregation as the audience.

But, as Soren Kierkegaard pointed out, they have it all wrong. The people are not the audience, but the actors themselves. The preacher is only the prompter, the one who stands behind the stage props to whisper the correct lines, so that the actors may perform well. (What a pity that so few prompters know the lines, or even read the script!)

Then where is the audience? The audience is God. He is the critic. He wrote the script. The entire play is done for His benefit. Nothing matters, whether prompter in the pulpit, or actor in the pew, but how we please the audience: God (Hebrews 12:28).

This is not fiction! God is real. He is not dead, nor asleep. The script is the Bible. In it is the only revelation ever given to men of the ultimate purpose of God. You may reject it or choose to remain ignorant of it, but it remains. If the actors decide to adlib their lines and ignore the script, this doesn't change the fact that the script exists. If the prompter gives the wrong lines, then this makes both he and the actor wrong, and they will have to account to the author.

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" and "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

God has not left us without a script! He has told us how we got here, how we are to live, and where we are going.

And He has also told us the consequences of rejecting Him. "He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). For THIS IS ONLY A TRIAL RUN. The real play is yet to open in a new theater, opening date yet to be announced!

As Paul put it, "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19). Seventy or eighty years may seem like a long time, but hospitals abound with people of this age trying to preserve their lives for a few more years, even a few more months. No matter how much joy we find in this life — and few people find much of it — it is still all too short.

Of course there's a reason for this. When Adam and Eve became sinners, rebelling against God, not following the script, disbelieving God, their lives were cut short. God will have no sinners living eternally in sin. His plan is for perfect people, those who reflect His image, who act like HIM. So He said, "Thou shall surely die." Remember, this was said with relation to the possibility of man's sinning. If you sin, then you will die! The implication is that if man had NOT sinned, he could have gone on living indefinitely. But there's no use saying "if," for man did sin, and all men sin. The "wages of sin is death," so whatever be one's lot in this world, his days are numbered.

Then the curtain! "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes judgment." (Hebrews 9:27). So we have this "trial run" in which we read the script, and try to follow

it, so that we may be “well pleasing unto Him,” who wrote it. The “prompters” are there; the preachers, elders and teachers. But we all have access to the script, the Word of God. There is no excuse for anyone to be misguided or deceived, for we can each read it for ourselves, and find out if the “prompter” is correct. Then the play closes.

Before the play opens again, before the curtain rises on that eternal and immortal stage of a new creation, some changes will take place. First of all, there is a resurrection. All who have left the stage must be brought back upon it for judgment. Those who have rejected the script and rebelled against the Author will be removed from the stage forever. It will not be a mere matter of refusing them admittance to the Actors Guild; their judgment is severe: destruction.

You see, the script doesn't change. The wages of sin always was and always will be death! All will die the first death (except those alive when Jesus comes) and then be resurrected for judgment. But the second death for the rebellious becomes final. It is eternal.

It is a different story for all who have believed the Author, who have accepted the Script. This doesn't mean that they have been able to act it out perfectly, but they have studied it, desired to follow it, and have believed the, Author.

For these there is a shocking change before the new play begins. They are all resurrected with new immortal bodies “We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed ... for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible ... and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Such a change is wrought in them by the Author Himself that they no longer have to “act” like the Author, they ARE like the Author. “And if He shall be manifested, we shall be LIKE HIM ...” (1 John 3:2).

In fact, there will be no more acting, as such, at all. For these faithful ones will be transformed into the likeness of the Creator, and placed in a perfect stage, where there are no props, for everything is real. Compared to the new heavens and the new earth, this present world will appear a poor and flimsy stage, after all.

Spectatorship is a major characteristic of modern man, He watches. He watches the political scene while scoundrels actually make the policies and destroy the republic. He watches the religious scene while false prophets, false teachers, wolves in sheep's clothing deceive and take over the church. He buys five dollar seats to observe the ball game or theatre, but cannot buy a good Bible nor a handful of tracts to publish the eternal Word. He watches the TV, too “tired” to search for truth and too cowardly to advocate it when he knows it. He has become a spectator of life.

But whether he realizes it or not, he is the chief actor on life's stage. He was not put here merely to observe. Christ did not die merely that we might read about it or sing about it. We must enter into that death in faith: “all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death” (Romans 6:3). He did not reveal His eternal purpose merely that we might memorize a few choice bits and argue over the rest. “Be you doers of the word,

and not hearers only.” Jesus said that one who hears his words and refuses to act upon them is like the fool who built a house on the sand. He did not found a church merely in order for men to have their names on a roll, nor merely for “services” where the preacher and choir might perform and the people watch. If there is any performance to be judged, it is the performance of each member being judged by the Judge of all!

Christian faith is not for spectators. “Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Before whom? Before God the Father. All we do is under the Father’s careful observation.

Contrary to some critics of Biblical faith, the Christian is not merely abiding his time, waiting for the next life. We look with eager anticipation to the coming of Christ and the unveiling of the new Creation, our immortal bodies, and our ultimate glorious home.

But the knowledge of this ultimate victory and glory with God is the very thing that motivates our present action under His direction. “Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11). We know that this life will soon be over: Not only for the individual, but for the entire world, even for the animal world, and for the universe itself. The play will end, the trumpet shall sound, and “there shall be time no longer” (Revelation 10:6). In fact, the heavens and earth shall be no more; the present age and present world will have fulfilled their part in the eternal plan of the great Playwright.

**OUR RIGHT TO A PART IN THE NEXT WORLD, THE ETERNAL ONE, WILL
DEPEND ON OUR ATTENTION TO THE AUTHOR’S DESIRE IN THIS PRESENT
ONE.**

“Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God...” (2 Peter 3:11-12).

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