

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 19

REVELATION IN GLORY THE STATE OF SAINTS IN GLORY

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Transcript

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We have shown that there is a real and radical difference between the death of a believer and that of an unbeliever, and having contemplated some of the accompaniments of a Christian's departure from this world we are now ready to consider how he exists in the disembodied state. It is not to be wondered at that the unregenerate should be thoroughly befogged at this point, for they are so materialistic that they find it very difficult to form a definite concept of anything that is incorporeal and intangible. But those who, by God's grace, enjoy a real communion with Him who is "Spirit" (John 4:24), ought not to flounder on this matter, for they have proved by experience how much more important is the soul than the body, and how infinitely more real and satisfying are spiritual objects than the perishing things of time and sense. So far from regarding his soul as a mysterious, nebulous and indefinable thing, the believer looks upon it as a living, intelligent, sentient being—his real self We should view a disembodied soul as one which has cast off its earthly clothing and is now appareled in a garment of light, or, to use the language of Scripture, "clothed in white raiment" (Rev. 3:5; 4:4). At death the soul of the saint is freed from all the limitations which sin had imposed upon it, and its faculties are then not only purified, but elevated and enlarged. It will be like a chrysalis emerging from its cramped condition, or a bird liberated from a cage, now free to spread its wings and soar aloft. It is true the body is a component part of man's complex being, yet we must endeavour to view it in a due proportion. Which is the more important: the tenant or his tenement, the individual or the tent in which he resides? It must be borne in mind that the soul derives not its powers from the body. That is clear from the Divine account of man's creation: after his body had been formed, and as a separate act, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). The mind is the noblest part of our being, and therefore it must find exercise and satisfaction in the disembodied state, otherwise we should not be "blessed" or happy (Rev. 14:13) immediately after death. "It is the mind maketh the man; it is our preferment above the beasts that God

hath given us a mind to know Him" (Thomas Manton). "The soul can and does operate without the use of bodily organs in its present state, and in many things stands in no need of them. The rational soul thinks, reasons and discourses without the use of them. Its powers and faculties need them not: the will is directed and guided by the understanding; and the understanding has to do with objects in the consideration of which bodily organs are in no way assisting. As in the consideration of God, His nature and perfections; of angels and their nature; and of a man's own spirit, and the things of it—it penetrates into without the help of any of the instruments of the body. It can consider of things past long ago, and of things very remote and at a great distance; and such objects as are presented to it by the senses, it reasons about them without making use of any of the organs of the body. And if it can operate without the body, it can exist without it; for since it is independent of it in its operations, it is independent of it in its being. Since it can exist without it, it can act in that separate state of existence without it. Wherefore since it dies not with the body, it is not affected as to its operations, by the absence of it, nor at death becomes insensible as that is" (John Gill). Yet, obvious as is what has been pointed out above, the majority of Christians seem to suppose that it is impossible for us to form any definite ideas of what it is to be disembodied, or of that state into which the saint enters at death, or of what the medium is by which he will know, enjoy, and have fellowship with the Lord in that state. While they remain content with such slothful ignorance, it is not to be expected that any further light will be vouchsafed them—"According to your faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29) holds good at this point as much as it does anywhere else. Not a curious and unbridled imagination, but a Scripturally informed and regulated faith ever has to do with God and His written Word. If His Word be searched prayerfully, diligently and expectantly for Divine instruction on these things it will not be confused. From some of the accounts given in the sacred volume we may gather some real apprehensions on these subjects, yea, much more than is generally attended to. To these accounts we shall now turn. The case of those servants of God who were favored with ecstatic raptures and supernatural visions while their bodies were inactive and senseless shows most clearly that the soul can function without any assistance from the body. Micaiah said unto the king of Israel, "I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of Heaven standing by Him, on His right hand and on His left" (1 Kings 22:19). Though the Prophet was in the body, it was not with his natural eyes that he gazed upon such a scene as that. Again, a similar sight was granted Isaiah, and in addition he listened to the very words of the seraphim as they cried unto one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:1-5), and yet the eyes and ears of his body could no more have "seen the King, the LORD of hosts," nor heard those acclamations of Divine homage than could those of our bodies lying cold in death. God is Spirit, incorporeal: and His ineffable glory cannot be seen by the corporeal senses of any creature: it was therefore a visionary representation which was made to the spirit of His messenger. Ezekiel tells us while among the captives by the river of Chebar, "the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God" (1:1). At the close of the first chapter of his prophecy, he describes one of those celestial revelations. He says, "And above the firmament that was over their heads [i.e. the cherubim] was the likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone, and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a Man above it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of His loins even upward, and from the appearance of His loins even downward, and I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (vv. 26-28). From the words we have placed in italics it is obvious that the Prophet was under the supernatural influx of the Holy Spirit, and that his spiritual faculties were granted a visionary sight of the Saviour before He became incarnate. The experiences of Daniel also supply some illumination on the matter we are now considering: the

capabilities of the soul abstracted from the body. First, he informs us: "I saw in the night visions. . . the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool. His throne was like the fiery flame and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him" (7:7-10). "Then I lifted up mine eyes and looked, and behold a certain Man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz. His body also was like the beryl and His face as the appearance of lightning, and His eyes as lamps of fire, and His arms and His feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of His words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision" (10:5-7). A sight of Christ was there presented to the eyes of the Prophet's mind. They were opened and raised to an extraordinary degree; and they were closed again after the vision passed. His faculties were supernaturally elevated, or he could not have seen Christ thus. He tells us, "there remained no strength in me" (v. 8), so that he was in the body. As his body did not prevent his seeing this vision, neither will the absence of ours prevent us seeing Christ by sight and vision of soul. A very similar, though perhaps not identical, case is that of Peter, of whom we read that, "he fell into a trance, and saw Heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four comers, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise. Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into Heaven" (Acts 10:10-16). The dictionary defines a trance as "a state in which the soul appears to be absent from the body, as to be rapt in vision," because at such a time, all the normal activities (save that of the heart) and sensibilities of the body are suspended. The most remarkable feature of this incident is that Peter was not only able to see and hear, but also to reason and speak, to express his religious prejudice—and his, "Not so, Lord," demonstrates that sin has defiled our inner being, and that the soul needs to be purified before it can be admitted into the immediate presence of God on high. Still more pertinent is the case of the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 12 he relates an extraordinary experience with which God had favored him. He declares, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years, ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful [or "possible"—margin] for a man to utter," and this he recites as an illustration of "visions and revelations of the Lord" (vv. 1-4). It is remarkable that twice over in those verses, the Apostle should register his inability to determine whether or not he was in the body at the time he was translated to Heaven and heard and saw such wondrous things. If the soul were incapable of recognizing objects when it is detached from the body, then most assuredly Paul had never been at any such loss as he here mentions. From the language employed it is clear that the soul is capable of attending to the most important and blessed things of all when it is out of the body, and thus that death will not deprive it of its capabilities and sensibilities. Finally, the experience which the beloved John had in the Isle of Patmos supplies us with further help on this point. He, too, was favored with a vision of Christ, an account of which he gives in the first chapter of the Revelation, and the effect which it had upon him. The glorious form of the Saviour shone forth before him beyond what it did on the mount of transfiguration. The splendor of it was more than the Apostle could bear in his embodied state—"when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (v. 17). He described how the Lord Jesus acted toward him and what He said to him: "And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not" (v. 17). He tells us that immediately prior to this supernatural experience, "I was in the spirit" (v. 10), or, more literally, "I became in spirit": that is, he

passed out of the condition of normal human consciousness into the supernormal. The same expression occurs again in Revelation 4:2, "I became in spirit and, behold, a throne was set in Heaven": he was elevated to a new mode of consciousness and sphere of existence—in which mortal imperfections had no place—in which all bodily activities and sensations were completely suspended, and in which the soul was wholly under a Divine influence, entirely abstracted from all corporeal things, being fully controlled by the spirit. It appears to the writer that from the accounts cited above, from both the Old and New Testaments, we may form some real, definite, and spiritual conceptions concerning the saints in their disembodied state. The soul will be detached from all occupation with natural things and entirely fixed upon Divine objects. The mind or spirit will be lifted above the natural or mortal state and be illumined and engaged with supernatural things. As those saints were favored with visions of Christ while in their bodies, yet their bodies were of no use to them at the time, so all of the redeemed when dismissed from their bodies are granted a view of Christ for which their physical senses are not needed—such a complete and immediate view of Him as fills them with admiration and adoration. If it be asked what will be the medium by which disembodied believers will know, enjoy and have fellowship with the Lord, the answer is furnished by, "Now we see in a mirror [American R.V.] obscurely, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). The "mirror" is the Word (Jam. 1:23-25) and the medium of perception is faith; but in Heaven the soul will have an unobscured sight of Christ and the whole invisible world will be opened, so that we shall see as we are seen or "know as we are known," by means of intuitional light and knowledge, crystal-clear intellectual and spiritual views of Christ and the Father in Him, by the indwelling Holy Spirit. At the separation of the soul from the body it, or better he or she, enters into a state of which he has had no previous experience, yet the anticipation of the same should not occasion the slightest uneasiness—for Christ Himself passed out of the world and entered that state the same way. It is no untrodden path, for thousands of God's people have already gone over it. Immediately upon its dismissal from the body, such a change passes upon the soul that regeneration is then completed by being instantaneously and forever delivered from the whole being of sin and death. As we cannot enter Christ's spiritual kingdom of grace except by the new birth and a translation out of darkness into His marvelous light, neither can any of His redeemed (prior to His second coming) enter the kingdom of Christ's glory save by death. At that moment mortality is swallowed up of life. While death will bring a great difference in me, it will make none in my Saviour to me. "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom. 14:8, 9). While I am in the body Christ ministers to me and supplies my every need, and when He summons me to leave the body, that will afford Him opportunity to express His love to me in a new way, introducing me into Heaven, there to behold His glory. Luke 16:9 represents another aspect of the experience of saints upon their leaving of this scene. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting." As Goodwin remarked, "Those everlasting habitations there mentioned are in Heaven, where there are many mansions." This verse is part of the parable of "the unjust steward," and here the Lord made a practical application of the same. He bids His disciples emulate the wisdom (though not the wickedness) of him who has an eye to the future. The "mammon of unrighteousness" is the coinage of this world, in contrast with the "true riches" of the Spirit. The saints are to expend their earthly means, however small, in works of piety and charity, and thereby "make to themselves friends." "Our Lord here exhorts us to provide for ourselves a comfortable reception to the happiness of another world, by making good use of our possessions and enjoyments in this world" (Manton). The soul's passage out of this life is termed a "failing"—of the body—and its entrance on high as a being welcomed home by those to whom he had ministered upon earth. "The poor saints that are gone before to glory receive them that in this world

distributed to their necessities" (Matthew Henry). The above verse is one of several which makes it clear that there will be the personal recognition of the saints in the next life. The question was asked Luther a little while before his death whether we should know one another in the other world, to which he answered by observing the case of Adam, who knew Eve to be flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone whom he had never seen before. "How did he know this," asked Luther, "but by the Spirit of God, by revelation?" And then he said, "so shall we know parents, wives and children in the other world, and that more perfectly." To which we may add, How otherwise can those of whose conversion and edification Gospel-ministers have been the instruments be their "joy and crown of rejoicing" in the day to come (1 Thess. 2:19) unless the one is able to identify the other? A further hint on the subject is supplied by the Apostles knowing Moses and Elijah on the mount, for they had never beheld them previously nor seen any statue or picture of them, for such was not allowed among the Jews. It has long been our conviction that the glorious scene which the three Apostles witnessed on the holy mount was designed (among other ends) to furnish us with a glimpse of the blessed condition and delight of the glorified. So ravished was Peter by the sight that he exclaimed: "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matthew 17:4), and would fain have remained there. As Manton said: "So was he affected with joy in the presence and company of Christ, and Moses and Elijah appearing with Him, that all his natural comforts and relations were forgotten." They were granted a foretaste of the life to come, for those who enter that blessed state will never desire to come out of it. The account of the transfiguration is prefaced by the statement: "And after six days" (Matthew 17:1) and, "It came to pass about an eight days after" (Luke 9:28): thus it was a seventh day (the perfect number!) event—a foreshadowing of the eternal Sabbath. The central figure was Christ Himself in resplendent glory. Talking with Him were Moses and Elijah: the one who had survived death, the other who had never expired—types of those saints alive on earth at Christ's second coming. Not only does the above incident teach us that the departed saints preserve their individual identities and are recognizable, but the fact that the Apostles were permitted to see them, and to hear their discourse with Christ intimates that the society of saints is a part of Heaven's blessedness, and that the Old Testament saints (represented by Moses and Elijah) and those of the New (the Apostles) are all together with Christ. Is not the same fact indicated by our Lord's words, "I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 8:11)? Still another passage which witnesses to the truth that the company of the redeemed and our fellowship with them is an adjunct of Heaven's blessedness is Hebrews 12:22, 23, where among other privileges we are said to have come to "the spirits of just men made perfect." That same passage also makes mention of "an innumerable company of angels." If the Bethlehem shepherds were filled with joy as they heard the heavenly hosts praising God, what delight will it give us to mingle our voices with the angelic choirs! Yet these things are but secondary, for as Rutherford well said: "The Lamb is all the glory in Immanuel's land," or, as Matthew 17 shows us, Moses and Elijah soon faded from the Apostles' view, and they "saw no man save Jesus only" (v. 8)! Though God has not given us the Scriptures in order to gratify an idle carnal curiosity, it has pleased Him graciously to reveal sufficient in them to satisfy the spiritual aspirations and expectations of His people concerning the life to come. Nevertheless, it is neither the prayerless nor the indolent who apprehend and enjoy much therein. We have shown from the Word of Truth that the saint dies in union and communion with the Lord, that an angelic guard of protection and honour conducts him to the Father's House on high, that he is there greeted by those believers whom he had befriended upon earth and who have entered before him into their inheritance, and that Christ Himself receives him and presents him faultless before the throne of His glory with exceeding joy. We have seen that the company of the redeemed and our fellowship with them, yes, and with the holy angels also, constitutes a part of Heaven's blessedness, yet that such privileges are entirely subordinate to the blissful communion we shall have with

Christ Himself. The supreme and climacteric joy will be found in that One who occupies both the central and supreme throne in Heaven. Nor would any saint have it otherwise. Christ is the One who loved him and gave Himself for him, and therefore He is not only his Saviour, his Beloved, but his "All" (Col. 3:11). Well might the Psalmist, under the Spirit of inspiration, exclaim: "O how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee" (Ps. 31:19). A part of that which God, in His eternal purpose, designed for His people is entered into and enjoyed by them during their earthly pilgrimage; but far more is "laid up for them" for their eternal felicity. The good or best wine is reserved for the end—for the marriage feast (John 2:10)—and its inexpressible excellence is indicated by the, "O how great!" Then it is that we shall participate in the consummation of God's "so great salvation": we shall be as happy and as blessed as it is possible for creatures to be. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:8, 9). It is blessed to note that in the Hebrew word for "pleasures," there is the plural of "Eden." As Home said: "In Heaven alone the thirst of an immortal soul after happiness can be satisfied. There the streams of Eden will flow again." To drink of that "river" (cf. Rev. 22:1) we understand to signify to be favored with an unclouded knowledge of God and a pure affection to Him. There are two of the Divine titles which ought to appeal particularly unto believers: "the God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10) and "the God of glory" (Ps. 29:3). The former is much the better known one, yet it is the latter which receives the most prominence in Scripture. There we read of "the Father of glory" (Eph. 1:17), while the Son is styled "the King of glory" (Ps. 24:7), and "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8), and the Comforter is termed "the Spirit of glory" (1 Pet. 4:14). Those appellations speak not only of what God is in Himself essentially, but also of what He is in His relations and acts unto His dear people. As S. E. Pierce pointed out, "the God of glory expresses what He hath prepared for us, what He will bestow upon us, and what He will be to us in the house eternal in the heavens." "Glory" imports an excellency (Matthew 4:8), yea, a height of excellency (2 Pet. 1:17), and therefore that place and state of blessedness into which believers enter immediately after death, and into which their Forerunner was "received," is designated "Glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). It is striking to note that the Hebrew word (*tabod*) means both "weight" and "glory," as though to tell us that what seems so nebulous unto men is that which alone possesses substance and solidity—explaining the Apostle's expression, "an exceeding weight of glory," in 2 Corinthians 4:17. "Glory" is connected with that which is exceedingly lovely to look upon, for when we read of "the glory of his countenance" (2 Cor. 3:7), we know it was no ordinary beauty and radiance which illumined the face of Moses when he came down from the mount, but one that was too dazzling for the beholders to gaze upon, so that he had to cover it with a veil (Ex. 34:35). So, too, Paul tells us that when the Saviour appeared to him on the way to Damascus, "there shone from Heaven a great light upon me." No ordinary light was it, for he added: "I could not see for the glory of that light" (Acts 22:6, 11). Thus it is in Heaven itself: the celestial city "had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). What then must be "the riches of His glory" (Eph. 3:16)! During their sojourn here believers are made partakers of "the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7), but in the life to come God will "make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:23) and they are "His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). That a revelation of God in Christ unto His saints in glory will satisfy every longing of the renewed heart is implied in the request of Philip, "show us the Father, and it sufficeth" (John 14:8), for that is an indirect acknowledgment that there is such a sufficiency in viewing Him as will be enough to completely content all the insatiable desires of the soul. Three tenses are used in connection with the saint's absorption with Christ's excellence. First, "we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), which is realized at our conversion, when a

supernatural revelation of Christ is made to the heart. Second, "But we all, with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18), which is a progressive experience in the Christian's life, as by the exercise of faith upon the personal and official perfections of Christ, as they are set forth in the written Word and under the gracious agency of the Spirit, we are transformed being assimilated to His holy image. Third, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am: that they may behold My glory" (John 17:24), which is realized when they are removed from earth to Heaven. We are, from our regeneration to our glorification, taking in Christ into our renewed understanding. It is but little that we now apprehend of Him, yet the least degree of spiritual apprehension of Him received into our hearts from the Word of Truth renders Him more precious to us than the gold of Ophir. Imperfect though it be, yet even in this life the genuine Christian has a real and solid, convincing and affecting knowledge of Christ. By the gracious operations of the Spirit, his faith is called into exercise in such a manner that it obtains both evidence and subsistence of the things of God in the soul (Heb. 11:1). As the eye of the body conveys to the mind an image of the object beheld, so faith (which is the eye of the soul) takes in a true knowledge of Christ, so that He is "formed within" him (Gal. 4:19). Thereby he procures as accurate a knowledge of His Person as he ever will in Heaven. When the believer shall see Christ "face to face," it will be identically the same Person he formerly beheld by faith, through a mirror obscurely. It will be no stranger to whom he needs an introduction that the believer will meet with on high, but One whom he savingly knew here below, and with whom he enjoyed an all-too-brief, yet real and precious, fellowship. Let there be no mistake upon this point: in this life every born again Christian experiences the truth of those words: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). That does not mean he will not desire a more complete knowledge of Christ, deeper draughts of His love, sensible enjoyments of Him—but that a satisfying portion is now his. He "thirsts" indeed, yet not for any other portion, but for larger measures of it. He will never more be without that which will abundantly meet his every longing. The saints in Heaven know more of Christ, but they do not know Him more truly than they did on earth. By the Spirit the mind is enlightened to receive the true and saving knowledge of Christ, and we are brought to believe on Him with all our hearts. By Him we are "given an understanding that we may know Him that is true" (1 John 5:20). The Spirit is graciously pleased to reveal Christ to us as He is set forth in the Word—nevertheless, each of us yearns with Paul "that I may know Him"—more perfectly (Phil. 3:10). Further and grander manifestations of God will be enjoyed by saints in Heaven than on earth, yet this will be different only in degree, and not in kind, from that which is vouchsafed His people in this life. It will indeed immeasurably exceed in fullness and clarity anything which they are now capable of enjoying, but for substance it will be the same. Grace is glory in the bud; glory is grace in full fruition. The good wine of the kingdom is sampled by them now, but their cup of bliss will then be full to overflowing. Even here the Spirit shows us "things to come" (John 16:13), but there we shall enter into the full possession of them. That communion with Christ in glory which the redeemed enjoy at present, those refreshings in which they participate from the fountain of His love—are termed "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23)—samples of the harvest of blessedness awaiting them as a cluster of the luscious grapes of Canaan was brought to Israel before they entered the Land (Num. 13:23). Such experiences are also termed "the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22). An "earnest" is a small token of the whole yet to come, a partial payment of the thing itself; what we now enjoy is a foretaste of the coming feast. "The fullness of the felicity of Heaven may appear if we compare with it the present joys and comforts of the Holy Spirit. Such they are as that the Scripture styles them strong consolation (Heb. 6:18), full joy (John 15:11), joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8), abounding consolation (2 Cor. 1:5). And yet all the joy and peace that believers are partakers of in this life

is but as a drop in the ocean, as a single cluster to the whole vintage, as the thyme or honey upon the thigh of a bee to the whole hive fully fraught with it, or as the break and peep of day to the bright noontide. And yet these tastes of the water, wine, and honey of this celestial Canaan, with which the Holy Spirit makes glad the hearts of believers, are far more desirable and satisfactory than the overflowing streams of all earthly felicities. And there are none who have once tasted of them, but say as the Samaritan woman did: 'Lord, give me that water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw' (John 4:15). So also the first and early dawns of the heavenly light fill the soul with more serenity, and ravish it with more pure joy, than the brightest sunshine of all worldly splendour can ever do" (W. Spurstow, 1656). To see God in His Word and works is the happiness of saints on earth; but to see Him in Christ face to face will be the fullness of their blessedness in Heaven. None can doubt that the Apostle Paul was favored with the most intimate, exalted and frequent communion with Christ down here; yet he declared that to depart and be with Him is "far better" (Phil. 1:23). He did not say, "to depart and be in Paradise," but "to be with Christ"! So again—"absent from the body, present with the Lord"—not, "safe at home in Heaven." From earliest times it was announced, "unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). That receives a threefold fulfillment at least: at conversion, when they are drawn to Him by the power of the Father (John 6:44); in the assembly to worship Him by the power of the Spirit (Matthew 18:20); at death or His return, when He brings them to Himself on high. "My Beloved is gone down into His garden to gather lilies" (Song. 6:2). Christ comes into His "garden" (the local church) sometimes to plant new lilies, and at others to crop and gather old ones, to remove them into His paradise ("garden") above. "Gather My saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:5). "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me" (John 17:24). Too many of our moderns would postpone the realization of that request until the "Eternal State," but there is nothing in Scripture which intimates that the saints will have to await the resurrection morning ere they shall gaze upon their glorified Lord. It should be quite clear to the reader from all that we have set before him that the obscure, partial and transient enjoyment of Christ which is his in this life is turned into a clear, full, perfect and permanent enjoyment of Him immediately after death. The beatific vision will then be his—designated such because, having been freed from all the darkness and limitation which indwelling sin places upon the soul, he will then be able to take in his full measure of bliss. At first his vision of Christ will be wholly spiritual and intellectual: after the resurrection it will be corporeal also. In Heaven the Son will be seen in all the surpassing dignity and splendor of His Person, His perfections shining forth in cloudless luster. "Then how should believers long to be with Him! Most men need patience to die; a believer should need patience to live!" (John Flavel). On high the Christian will have an immediate, uninterrupted and satisfying view of the Lord of glory. In Him the Incomprehensible Three will be manifested in the uttermost display of Their excellencies, before all the holy angels and saints. It is that which will be the supreme blessedness of Heaven, and which each believer shall forever behold, filling him with such concepts of the Divine glory as he can never express. He will be eternally admiring the same, rejoicing in it, having communion with God over it, praising Him for it. The heart will then be everlastingly fixed upon Christ as its Center. The glory of Christ is very dear unto the saints. They have a spiritual perception of it now, but a far greater apprehension of it will be theirs when they are removed from this vale of tears and are "present with the Lord." Then shall they behold the King in His beauty, and that supernatural sight shall be theirs forever. Paul could go no higher than, "so shall we ever be with the Lord." Not merely beholding His glory as spectators, but taken into intimate fellowship with the same. How overwhelming must be the first open sight of Christ! What will our feelings be when, without any intervening medium, we shall behold the Son of God? Who can fitly visualize our first meeting with the eternal Lover of our souls? What stretch of imagination can comprehend the experience of soul as we

behold Him who is "altogether lovely"? No doubt the Christian reader has, like this scribe, attempted to anticipate those moments when he will first gaze upon that Blessed One whose visage was (through pain and suffering) more marred than any other's, but which now shines with a splendour exceeding that of the mid-day sun, and which will beam with love as He welcomes to Himself another of His redeemed. Doubtless, when we behold His glorified humanity, which is personally united to the Divine nature, and is exalted far above all principalities and powers, we shall be lost in wonder, love and praise. If the wise men fell down and worshipped Him when they saw Him as "a young child with Mary, His mother, in the house," what will be our feelings when we see Him seated upon the Father's throne? Such views shall we then have of His excellence as will satiate our souls with holy admiration and joy inexpressible. Our efforts to anticipate that blissful experience will be aided somewhat if we bear in mind that we shall then be completely rid of sin and that selfishness of character which mars even the regenerate in this life. "Everything we now enjoy, though even of a spiritual nature, is tinged with self. If we contemplate the glories of God in His trinity of Persons, as revealed in Christ: if we feel our souls going forth under the Divine leading of the Holy Spirit in sweet communion with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ—if the soul be led to bless God, when at any time receiving love-tokens of pardon, consolation, strength, or any of the 10,000, times 10,000 marks of grace, like the dew from Heaven, coming to us from the Lord—in all these, self and self interest is mingled. But there is an infinitely higher source of pure unmixed felicity, which the disembodied spirit will immediately enter upon when all selfishness is lost in the love of God" (Robert Hawker). There the soul will be lifted up above itself, absorbed entirely with God in Christ, independent of what He is to us and all that He has done for us. Christ, the God-man Mediator, is the grand Center of Heaven's blessedness and the all-engrossing Object of its inhabitants. "In the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). And the hosts surrounding Him sing: "Thou art worthy to receive honour, and glory, and blessing" (vv. 11, 12). It is the contemplation of this most glorious Christ which will constitute the holiness and happiness of the saints for all eternity. To behold His beauty will be infinitely more than all the benefits we derive from Him. Our refined and enlarged intellectual and spiritual faculties will be so engaged with and exercised upon Him that it will be impossible for us to fall again into sin. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead personally. In and through Him the Triune God is displayed before elect angels and saints, reflecting on them the full blaze of the Divine perfections. It is a Christ who is "The brightness [effulgence] of God's glory" (Heb. 1:3) that we shall forever enjoy. Christ is the Medium and Mirror in which the redeemed shall see God. "In Him we shall behold the manifestation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as far as the invisibility of the Divine essence can admit of revelation" (Robert Hawker), and so far as finite creatures will be capable of apprehending it. As all the glory of the sun is inherent in itself and is only apparent in the object it shines upon, so all the glory of Heaven centers in Christ and is treasured up in Him for them—as all grace is (2 Tim. 2: 1)—and He imparts it unto them. Our blessedness in Heaven will not be independent of the Lord, but conveyed to us out of His fullness. "Christ's glory, as the God-man, is that of the Godhead dwelling personally in Him. That glory is founded upon the union of the human nature with the nature of God. This glory breaks forth and shines through His human nature, as if the sun were encompassed with a case of clear crystal—how glorious would that crystal be!" (Goodwin). Christ's glory is so inherently and essentially in Himself that He is designated "the Lord of glory," and His ineffable beauty will be so beheld by us as to be reflected upon us, as the countenance of Moses shone with a more-than-natural light after his communion with Jehovah. Christ has indeed an incommunicable glory, yet according to our capacity we shall be partakers of the glory which the Father has "given" Him (John 17:22).

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