

Rev. 2:7. Paradise and the Tree of Life

by Horatius Bonar

The promise of paradise and the tree of life is given to the Ephesian conqueror, representing Christ Himself as the food of our immortal life, and the fullness of a dying, risen, and glorified Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 3:22, Revelation 2:7

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Overcoming"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the promise made to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:7, highlighting the significance of overcoming to gain access to the tree of life in God's paradise. He reflects on Christ as the central figure of this promise, who offers not just rewards but Himself as the ultimate possession. Bonar urges the backsliding Ephesians to awaken and return to their first love, reminding them that despite their decline, the invitation to partake in the heavenly paradise and the tree of life remains open. He contrasts the glory of the heavenly paradise with the earthly, emphasizing that through Christ, believers can regain what was lost and enjoy eternal fellowship with Him. The sermon calls for vigilance and perseverance in faith, assuring that the tree of life is accessible to all who overcome.

Transcript

"To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."--Revelation 2:7.

The promise here is to the Ephesian conqueror. It is the first of the seven promises, and, like the rest, very glorious--carrying us on to the return of the second Adam, and to paradise regained. It comes from Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. Here, as in several other places, Christ is at once the promiser, the promise, and the thing promised.

Of the promise He is the center and its circumference, its body and its soul, its first and its last, the yes and the amen, the eternal yes and the eternal amen. It is out of His varied fullness that the promise is composed, and in each we are presented with some portion of His exceeding riches, His boundless excellency. Christ Himself--in closest intimacy, in most endearing fellowship, in fullest love, and in brightest glory--is presented to us. The rewards connected with the kingdom and the throne are glorious, and in these there are vast and various differences and degrees; but the rewards which hold out Christ Himself to us as our possession are more glorious still, and in these there are equally varying degrees--to some being given more, to others less, of Him and His riches--some being brought nearer Him than others--brought into the very bosom of Him who is in the bosom of the Father!

Ephesus was once a noble Church, and the Epistle to the Ephesians shows us how high in spirituality she stood at first. But she had left her first love, and come down very low. She did run well, but had been hindered. Her lamp was low and dim. Her Lord was troubled about her declension, and gently upbraids her because of it. Yet He is far from throwing her off. He speaks lovingly, and holds up the reward before her eyes, to incite her to rouse herself and return to her early love. He woos her still--that He may win back her wavering love.

One balancing feature in her character is her 'hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which, the Lord adds, 'I also hate' (verse 6). Hatred of evil--hatred of false doctrine (verse 15)--these are things which the Lord looks for in His Churches. Indifference to error, tolerance of evil, smoothing down the ridge between true and false teaching, whether by the press or the pulpit--these are things very common in our day, as proofs of liberality and large-mindedness. But the Lord says, 'these things I hate.' To be 'broad' and 'wide' is the universal boast; to be 'narrow' and 'strait' the worst of reproaches--as if 'broad' and 'wide' were not the words of the Mater's condemnation--as if He had not been said, 'Enter in at the strait gate--for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to death; and strait is the gate, and narrow the way, leads to life.'

Awake, you who sleep! Oh, Ephesian backslider, arise and shine, for your light has come! You are not yet a castaway. See from whence you have fallen, what is your present low estate; see especially the bright recompense which may yet be yours, and let these things quicken you. Up, shake yourself from the dust; gird on your sword; put on the whole armor of God; fight the good fight--it is not too late, even yet you may overcome! The tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God, may still be yours! For such a blessedness and brightness, who would not fight and suffer--and deny self--and toil to the end?

1. Entrance into the paradise of God. The 'heavenly' is the pattern of the 'earthly' in all things. The model of earth, and all that is good on earth--is to be found in heaven. Adam's paradise below was but the image and shadow of the paradise above, as the tabernacle in the wilderness was but the 'example' or image of the better tabernacle above, showed to Moses on the mount. From the lower paradise (or garden) man was cast out, and it is into the upper paradise that he is brought. He gets the earthly back again, or the new earth--but he gets far more; he gets the heavenly as well as the earthly. 'Paradise regained' is his; and in addition to it the paradise of God. From both was man shut out. Both were barred against the sinner. The flaming sword confronted each child of Adam, and forbade his entrance. Sin made him an outcast, an exile, a condemned man--with no home but the waste howling wilderness, the land of darkness.

'So He drove out the man' was the doom not of one--but of all. Expulsion from the presence and the paradise of God and from the tree of life was the sentence. We all went out of paradise with the first Adam, and became, like him, banished men. The second Adam entered in for us, and took possession of it in our name. He quenched the flaming sword; He sprinkled these heavenly places and heavenly things with His own blood (Hebrews 9:23), so that now the entrance lies open for the sinner. In believing, we get the title to all this just now; and as those who have believed and overcome, we shall enter in hereafter. Entrance into the paradise of God, through Him who is the gate, is the reward of the overcomer.

No slumber, then, no ease, no sheathed swords at present! Forward is our battle-word. Forward to the celestial city, to the paradise of God, 'that so an entrance may be opened to us abundantly' (2 Peter 1:2) into this everlasting glory. 'Today shall you be with me in paradise' may not be the promise; but it will not be long, for He who shall come will come, and will not delay.

2. Access to the tree of life. In that paradise is the tree of life; and the promise is of free access to it, the reverse of that refusal to man of access to the earthly tree (Genesis 3:22-23). Free entrance, free access, and free liberty to eat of the tree of life.

Everything connected with life is comprised in Jesus Christ--'In Him was life; and the life was the light of men' (John 1:4). He is the bread of life; the water of life; He is life itself; He is 'eternal life' (1 John 5:20). The tree of life may or may not be an actual tree; but whether figurative or real, it represents Christ Himself, or something connected with Him, as the food of our immortal life, of our risen and glorified life.

Just as He says, 'I will give him the morning star' (that is, I will give him myself in the character of the morning star), so here He means, I will give him myself as the nourishment of his glorified being, and this in such a near and full way as he cannot have on earth. Christ, as the tree of life, the food of the new life, the glorified life, is to be given to the conqueror in a special way, such as even faith cannot conceive of here. There will be different degrees of glory, and knowledge, and love--different degrees of intimacy and fellowship with the Lord Jesus. He shall bring us into His banqueting house in a new way then--under His shadow we shall sit down with great delight, and His fruit shall be sweet to our taste.

Ezekiel's tree of life, and gushing stream, represent the earthly blessedness restored (more than restored), as in Adam's paradise. John's tree of life and crystal river represent the heavenly splendor and gladness; for the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another--both of them together making up the heritage of the redeemed. 'Blessed are those who keep His commandments' (or 'have washed their robe') 'that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city' (Revelation 22:14).

The prospect of such things is greatly influential upon us here. It tells on our daily life. It quickens us, it nerves us, it purifies us, it comforts us, it makes us brave and resolute.

Nor is that prospect separate from the cross of Christ in which we glory here. That tree of life represents the fullness of a dying, risen, and glorified Christ. It is what it is for life and nourishment, by reason of its connection with the great atonement; so that even in the kingdom we shall eat of that of which atonement has been made--priestly or sacrificial bread--bread which is connected with blood, and has passed through the fire--that flesh which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed (Exodus 29:33).

The garden of Gethsemane and eternal Paradise can never be far asunder. They are inseparably linked to each other. The tree of death and the tree of life are after all but one; the glory of the latter can never be disjoined from the shame of the former.

As we fell in the first Adam--we rose in the second. No more. Not only shall we have restoration of all that the first Adam lost, but partnership in all that the second Adam has won; in all that He has and is. As one with Him, as represented by Him, we enter into the second paradise, and eat of the tree of life; not only unbarred--but welcomed; as the very tree to which we are entitled as conquerors--Ephesian conquerors--in a Church of Ephesian backsliders. For beauty, for food, for shade, for health, is that tree renowned! And all these we shall share with Him in whom, and by whom we are introduced into the garden, and made welcome to the heavenly fruit.

And does not this tree send out its invitation to all the sons of the first Adam? Does it not bid welcome to all? 'Whoever will' is the invitation to the water of life; 'whoever' is the equally wide invitation to the tree of life.

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