

The Glory to Come

by Horatius Bonar

The glory of God is our inheritance, and it is worth waiting for and suffering for.

Scripture: Romans 8:18, Romans 9:23, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Colossians 3:4, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Hebrews 2:10, 1 Peter 1:8, 1 Peter 4:13, 1 Peter 5:10, Revelation 21:11

Topics: "Hope in Suffering", "Transformation"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes that a person's true life and history begin at conversion, marking the transition from a life without a story to one filled with divine significance. He illustrates this transformation using the metaphor of a drop of water separating from the ocean, gaining individuality and a unique narrative that is recorded in heaven. Bonar reassures believers that while their earthly journey may be filled with suffering, it ultimately leads to a glorious future, where they will share in the glory of God. He encourages the faithful to look beyond their present trials, reminding them that their hope lies in the eternal glory that awaits them, which far surpasses any earthly affliction. The sermon concludes with a call to rejoice in the promise of glory, which is both a present reality and a future inheritance.

Transcript

Not only a man's true life, but a man's true history begins with his conversion. Up till that time, he is a being without a history. He has no story to tell. He is but part of a world lying in wickedness, having nothing about him worthy of a record.

But from the moment that he is born again, and thus taken out of the mass, he receives a personality as well as a dignity which fit him for having a history,--a history which God can own as such, and which God himself will record. From that time he has a story to tell, wondrous and divine, such as angels listen to, and over which there is joy in heaven.

In that broad ocean, there are millions of drops; yet they are one mingled mass of fluid; no one of them has a history. There may be a history of the ocean, but not of its individual drops. But, see, your drop is beginning to part from the mass. It takes hold of a sunbeam and rises into the firmament. There it gleams in the rainbow or brightens in the hues of sunset. It has now a history. From the moment that it came out of the mass and obtained a personality, it had a story to tell, a story of its own, a story of splendour and beauty.

Such is the case of a saint. From the moment that the hand of the Spirit is laid on him to begin the process of separation, from that moment his history begins. He then receives a conscious, outstanding personality, that fits him for having a history--a history entirely marvellous; a history whose pages are both written and read in heaven; a history which in its divine brightness spreads over eternity His true dignity now commences. He is fit to take a place in story. Each event in his life becomes worthy of a record. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance."

On earth this history is one of suffering and dishonour, even as was that of the Master; but hereafter, in the kingdom, it is one of glory and honour. "All the time," says Howe, "from the soul's first conversion God has been at work upon it, labouring, shaping it, polishing it, spreading his own glory on it, inlaying, enamelling it with glory; now at last the whole work is revealed, the curtain is drawn aside, and the blessed soul awakes." Then a new epoch in its history begins.

What that history is to be, we know not now. That it will be wondrous, we know; how wondrous we cannot conceive. That it will be very unlike our present one, we know; yet still not severed from it, but linked to it, nay, springing out of it as its root or seed. Our present life is the under-ground state of the plant; our future life, the shooting, and blossoming, and fruitbearing; but the plant is the same, and the future depends for all its excellency and beauty upon the present. And if life on earth, in all its various forms and unfoldings, be so very beautiful, what will it not be hereafter, when it unfolds itself to the full, transfused throughout all being, with an intensity now unknown, as if almost becoming visible by means of the new glory which it then shall spread over all creation.

"The wise shall inherit glory" (Prov 3:35). "The saints shall be joyful in glory" (Psa 149:5). They are "vessels of mercy, afore prepared unto glory" (Rom 9:23). That to which we are called is "eternal glory" (1 Peter 5:10). That which we obtain is "salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10). It is to glory that God is "bringing many sons" (Heb 2:10); so that as he, through whom we are brought to it, is "crowned with glory and honour," so shall we be (Heb 2:9). We are "to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). We are not only "witnesses of the sufferings of Christ, but partakers of the glory that shall be revealed" (1 Peter 5:1). So that the word of exhortation runs thus: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13). And the promise is not only, "if we suffer we shall also reign with him"; but, "if we suffer with him. We shall be also glorified together" (Rom 8:17).

This glory, then, is our portion. It is the "better thing" that God has provided for us, and because of which he is not ashamed to be called our God. This is the glory that throws all present suffering into the shade, making it to be eternally forgotten.

Glory is the concentrated essence of all that is holy, excellent, and beautiful. For all being has its more and its less perfect parts. And its glory is that which is most perfect about it, to which of course that which is less perfect has, according to its measure, contributed. Light is the glory of the sun. Transparency is the glory of the stream. The flower is the glory of the plant. The soul is the glory of the man. The face is the glory of the body. And this glory is strangely manifold: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star differeth from star in glory."

What is really glorious is so hidden, so blighted, so intermixed with deformity and corruption here, that Scripture always speaks as if the whole glory were yet in reserve,--none of it yet revealed. So that when He came to earth who was "the brightness of Jehovah's glory," he was not recognized as the possessor of

such glory; it was hidden; it shone not. Few eyes saw any glory at all in him; none saw the extent or greatness of it. Even in his case it did not appear what he was and what he shall be, when he comes "to be glorified in his saints."

All that is glorious, whether visible or invisible, material or immaterial, natural or spiritual, must have its birth-place in God. "Of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be GLORY for ever" (Rom 11:36). All glorious things come forth out of him, and have their seeds, or gems, or patterns in himself. We say of that flower, "how beautiful"; but the type of its beauty,--the beauty of which it is the faint expression, is in God. We say of the star, "how bright"; "but the brightness which it represents or declares, is in God. So of every object above and beneath. And so especially shall it be seen in the objects of glory which shall surround us in the kingdom of God. Of each thing there, as of the city itself, it shall be said, "it has the glory of God" (Rev 21:11).

Glory, then, is our inheritance. The best, the richest, the brightest, the most beautiful of all that is in God, of good, and rich, and bright, and beautiful, shall be ours. The glory that fills heaven above, the glory that spreads over the earth beneath, shall be ours. But while "the glory of the terrestrial" shall be ours, yet in a truer sense "the glory of the celestial shall be ours." Already by faith we have taken our place amid things celestial, "being quickened together with Christ, and raised up with him, and made to sit with him in heavenly places" (Eph 2:6). Thus we have already claimed the celestial as our own; and having risen with Christ, we "set our affection upon things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:2). Far-ranging dominion shall be ours; with all varying shades and kinds of glory shall we be encompassed, circle beyond circle stretching over the universe; but it is the celestial glory that is so truly ours, as the redeemed and the risen; and in the midst of that celestial glory shall be the family mansion, the church's dwelling-place and palace,--our true home for eternity.

All that awaits us is glorious. There is an inheritance in reversion; and it is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 1:4). There is a rest, a sabbath-keeping in store for us (Heb 4:9); and this "rest shall be glorious" (Isa 11:10). The kingdom which we claim is a glorious kingdom. The crown which we are to wear is a glorious crown. The city of our habitation is a glorious city. The garments which shall clothe us are garments "for glory and for beauty." Our bodies shall be glorious bodies, fashioned after the likeness of Christ's "glorious body" (Phil 3:21). Our society shall be that of the glorified. Our songs shall be songs of glory. And of the region which we are to inhabit it is said, that "the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev 21:23).

The hope of this glory cheers us. From under a canopy of night we look out upon these promised scenes of blessedness, and we are comforted. Our dark thoughts are softened down, even when they are not wholly brightened. For day is near, and joy is near, and the warfare is ending, and the tear shall be dried up, and the shame be lost in the glory, and "we shall be presented faultless before the presence of his GLORY with exceeding joy."

Then the fruit of patience and of faith shall appear, and the hope we have so long been clinging to shall not put us to shame. Then shall we triumph and praise. Then shall we be avenged on death, and pain, and sickness. Then shall every wound be more than healed. Egypt enslaves us no more. Babylon leads us captive no more. The Red Sea is crossed, the wilderness is passed, Jordan lies behind us, and we are in Jerusalem! There is no more curse--there is no more night. The tabernacle of God is with us; in that tabernacle he dwells, and we dwell with him.

It is "the God of all grace" who "has called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus." It is "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, that we shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4, 10). And this "after we have suffered a while," and by suffering have been "made perfect, stablished, strengthened, settled." So that suffering is not lost upon us. It prepares us for the glory. And the hope of that glory, as well as the knowledge of the discipline through which we are passing, and of the process of preparation going on in us, sustains us, nay, teaches us to "glory in tribulation." This comfort, nay, it is happiness. Strange in the world's eye, but not strange in ours! All that the world has is but a poor imitation of happiness and consolation; ours is real, even now; how much more hereafter! Nor will a brief delay and a sore conflict lessen the weight of coming glory. Nay, they will add to it; and it is worth waiting for, it is worth suffering for, it is worth fighting for. It is so sure of coming, and so blessed when it comes.

"The mass of glory," says Howe, "is yet in reserve; we are not yet so high as the highest heavens." All this is hanging over us, inviting us on, stirring us up, loosening us from things present, so that the pain of loss, or sickness, or bereavement, falls more gently on us, and tends but to make us less vain and light,--more thoroughly in earnest.

"That they may behold my glory," the Lord pleaded for his own. This is the sum of all. Other glories there will be, as we have seen; but this is the sum of all. It is the very utmost that even "the Lord of glory" could ask for them. Having sought this he could seek no more; he could go no further. And our response to this is, "Let me see thy glory"; yes, and the glad confidence in which we rest is this, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." This is our ambition. Divine and blessed ambition, in which there is no pride, no presumption, and no excess! Nothing less can satisfy than the directest, fullest vision of incarnate glory. Self-emptied before the Infinite Majesty, and conscious of being wholly unworthy even of a servant's place, we yet feel as if drawn irresistibly into the innermost circle and centre, satisfied with nothing less than the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

"The glory that thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22). No less than this, both in kind and amount, is the glory in reserve, according to the promise of the Lord. The glory given to him he makes over to them! They "are made partakers of Christ," and all that he has is theirs. Nay, and he says, "I have given"; as if it were already theirs by his gift, just as truly as it was his by the Father's gift. He receives it from the Father only for the purpose of immediately handing it over to them! So that even here they can say. "This glory is already mine, and I must live as one to whom such infinite glory belongs." "Beholding, as in a glass, this glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). To fret or despond is sad inconsistency in one who can say, even under sorest pressures, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Look at them by themselves, and they do seem at times most overwhelming; place them side by side with the eternal glory, and they disappear.

"The riches of his glory," says the apostle in one place (Rom 9:23); "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," writes he in another (Eph 1:18). Strange expressions these! They carry us up to a height of such infinite glory and joy, that we feel bewildered and overwhelmed. Just as there are "riches of grace," and "riches of mercy," and "riches of love," and "riches of wisdom," so there are "riches of glory"; glory in abundance,--such as shall make us rich indeed; glory spreads over our whole inheritance, so that we shall "have all and abound." Nay, this glory is that which God counts his riches, that which he reckons the perfection of his inheritance,--the very essence of its beauty and its blessedness.

"The liberty of the glory of the children of God," writes the apostle (Rom 8:21)--thereby telling us that there is a glory which is the peculiar property of the saints,--a glory of which they can say, it is our own, thereby marking it out from the glory of all other creatures. This glory contains liberty. It sets free those who possess it. Corruption had brought with it chains and bondage; glory brings with it divine liberty! It is not the liberty that brings the glory; it is the glory that brings the liberty. Blessed liberty! Freedom from every bondage! Not only the bondage of corruption and sin and death, but the bondage of sorrow! For is not sorrow a bondage? Are not its chains sharp and heavy? From this bondage of tribulation the glory sets us eternally free. It is the last fetter, save that of the grave, that is struck from our bruised limbs, but when it is broken, it is broken for ever!

And this liberty which the glory brings to us is one which shall extend to the unconscious creation around us. We brought that creation into bondage, covering it with dishonour, and making it the prey of corruption. It now groans and travails under this sore bondage. But as it has shared our bondage, it is also to share our liberty; and that same glory which brings liberty to us shall introduce the oppressed and dishonoured creation into the same blessed freedom! O longed-for consummation! O joyful hope! O welcome day, when the Bringer of this glory shall arrive, and the voice be heard from heaven, "Behold, I make all things new."

Nor is it liberty only which this glory contains in it, but power also, as it is written, "strengthened with all might according to the power of his glory" (Col 1:11). This glory has, even now, a power giving energy, whereby we are strengthened "to all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." Thus "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:2), we are fitted for all manner of tribulation and endurance. Though still among the things "not seen," it not only flings forward a radiance which brightens our path, but sheds down a strength which enables us to "run with patience the race that is set before us." And so, in an unholy world, we "walk worthy of Him who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12), having that prayer fulfilled in us, "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

"Christ in you the hope of glory." An indwelling Christ is our earnest, our pledge, our hope of glory. Having Him, we have all that is his, whether present or to come. He is the link that binds together the here and the hereafter. We died with him, we went down into the tomb with him, we rose with him, and our life is now hid with him in God; but "when he who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4).

The joy with which we rejoice is a joy "unspeakable and full of glory," or more literally, a "glorified joy"; a joy such as Paul had when caught up into paradise; a joy such as John's when placed in vision within sight of the celestial city; a joy into whose very essence the thoughts of glory enter; a joy which makes the soul which possesses it feel as if it were already compassed about with glory, as if it had "come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven" (Heb 12:22).

"The glorious gospel of Christ," says the apostle (2 Cor 4:4); and again, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim 1:11); or, more literally, "the gospel of the glory of Christ," that is, "the good news about the glory of Christ," and "the good news about the glory of the blessed God." As it is "the gospel of the kingdom," or good news about "the kingdom," that is preached, so it is good news about "the glory." These good news God has sent, and is still sending to this world. In believing them, and receiving God's record concerning the glory, we become partakers of it, and continue to be so, "if we hold the beginning of our

confidence stedfast unto the end." These good news most fully meet our case, however sad or sinful, and shed light into our souls even in their darkest and most desponding hours.

Our present "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of GLORY." So that glory is not merely the issue of tribulation, but in some sense its product. Tribulation is the soil, and glory is the blossom and the fruit. The soil is rough and unseemly, but the produce is altogether perfect. It may seem strange that out of such a field there should spring verdure so fresh and fruit so divine. Yet we know that such is the case. How much we owe to that unlikely soil! Not only do all things work together for good to us, but they as truly work together for glory.

Faith lays hold of this and prizes tribulation, nay, glories in it; so realizing the joy as to lose sight of the sorrow, save as contributing to the joy; so absorbed in the glory as to forget the shame, excepting in so far as it is the parent and precursor of the glory.

Most needful is it that we should realize these prospects, these glimpses which God has given us of what we are yet to be. It is not merely lawful to do so for the relief of the laden spirit, but it is most vitally important to do so for the health of our soul, for our growth in grace, and for enabling us to press on with cheerful energy in the path of service towards God and usefulness to our brother saints or fellow men.

The man of sorrows had joy set before him. And it was for this that he endured the cross, despising the shame (Heb 12:2). He needed it, and so do we; for He who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one. He found in it strength for the bearing of the cross and the endurance of the shame. So may we, for as the path he trod is the same that is given us to tread in, so the strength is to be found where our forerunner found it. There is joy in store for us, even as for him; joy not only like his own, but his own very joy (John 11). This makes us willing to bear the cross in all its weight and sharpness; nay, it lightens it so that oftentimes we do not feel its pressure. We can glory both in the cross and the shame. We have less of these than he had, and we have all his consolation, all his joy to the full.

When this is lost sight of, selfish melancholy often fastens on us. We brood over our griefs till they engross us entirely, to the shutting out of all else. We magnify them; we spread them out and turn them over on every side in order to find out the gloomiest. We take credit to ourselves for endurance, and thus feed our pride and self-importance. We fret under them, and at the same time grow vain at being the objects of so much sympathy--at having so many eyes upon us, and so many words of comfort addressed to us.

Nothing can be more unhealthy than this state of soul, not more unlike that in which God expects a saint to be. It shuts us into the narrow circle of self. It contracts as well as distorts our vision. It vitiates our spiritual tastes, it lowers our spiritual tone, it withers and shrivels up our spiritual being, unfitting us for all offices of calm and gentle love, nay, hindering the right discharge of plain and common duty. It is in itself a sore disease, and is the source of other diseases without number.

To meet this unhealthy tendency God seeks to draw us out of ourselves. He does so in holding up the cross for us to look upon and be healed: but he also does this by exhibiting the crown and throne. The cross does not annihilate man's natural concern for self, but it loosens our thoughts from this, by showing us, upon the cross, One to whose care we may safely intrust self with all its interests, and in whose pierced hands it will be far better provided for than in our own. So the vision of the glory does not make away with self, but it absorbs it, and elevates it, by revealing the kingdom in which God has made such blessed and enduring provision for us, as to make it appear worse than folly in us to brood over our case, and make self the object of our sad and anxious care. If we are to have glory as surely and as cheaply as

the lilies have their clothing, or the ravens their food, why be so solicitous about self? Or why think about self at all, save to remember and to rejoice that God has taken all our concerns into his own keeping for eternity.

Thus God beguiles us away from our griefs by giving us something else to muse over,--something more worthy of our thoughts. He allures us from the present, where all is dark and uncomely, into the future, where all is bright and fair. He takes us by the hand and leads us, as a father his child, out from the gloomy region which we are sadly pacing, with our eye upon the ground, bent only upon nourishing our sorrows, into fields where all is fresh and Eden-like; so that, ere we are aware, joy, or at least the faint reflection of it, has stolen into our hearts, and lifted up our heavy eyes. He would not have us abiding always in the church-yard, or sitting upon the turf beneath which love is buried, as if the tomb to which we are clinging were our hope, not resurrection beyond it;--he would have us to come forth; and having allured us away from that scene of death, he bids us look upwards, upbraiding us with our unbelief and folly, and saying to us,--"They whom you love are yonder; ere long He who is their life and yours shall appear, and you shall rejoin each other, each of you embracing, not a weeping, sickly fellow mortal, but a glorified saint, set free from pain and sin."

There is nothing more healthy and genial for the soul than these anticipations of the morning, and of morning-glory. They are not visionary, save in the sense in which faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." They transfuse the life of heaven through our frame, either, on the one hand, making our languid pulse to beat more swiftly, or, on the other, our feverish pulse to throb more calmly and evenly. They act as regulators of the soul in its wild and inconstant movements, neither allowing us to sink too low nor to soar too high. They tend to steady our extreme impulses by acting as a counterpoise to the weight of grief which so crushes us with its pressure.

They withdraw us from self and self-broodings, they widen the circle of our sympathies, and throw back into the distance the fence of exclusiveness, which, in times of suffering, we are apt to throw up around ourselves. They check mere sentimentality, and forbid us to indulge the flow of grief for its own luxury. They prohibit morbid gloom, which loves to shun out society, and chooses loneliness. They fill us with energy for facing the toils, and with ready courage for braving the dangers of the night. They animate us with the calm but indomitable confidence of hope,--a hope which expands and brightens as its object approaches.

The morning! That is our watchword. Our matin and even song are full of it. It gives the hue to life,--imparting colour to that which is colourless, and freshening that which is faded. It is the sum and term of our hopes. Nothing else will do for us or for our world,--a world over which the darkness gathers thicker as the years run out. Stars may help to make the sky less gloomy; but they are not the sun. And besides, clouds have now wrapped them so that they are no longer visible. The firmament is almost without a star. Torches and beacon-lights avail not. They make no impression upon the darkness; it is so deep, so real, so palpable. We might give up all for lost, were we not assured that there is a sun, and that it is hastening to rise. The church's pilgrimage is nearly done. Yet she is not less a pilgrim as its end draws nigh. Nay, more so. The last stage of the journey is the dreariest for her. Her path lies through the thickest darkness that the world has yet felt. It seems as if it were only by the fitful blaze of conflagrations that we can now shape our way. It is the sound of falling kingdoms that is guiding us onward. It is the fragments of broken thrones lying across our path that assures us that our route is the true one, and that its end is near,--that end, the morning with its songs; and in that morning, a kingdom; and in that kingdom, glory, and in that glory, the everlasting rest, the sabbath of eternity.

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