

"A Glimpse of Glory"

A Sermon
by Jon Cardwell

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

—Revelation 21:22

Have you ever been in church and heard the preacher say, "When I get to heaven, I'd sure like to meet _____..."? You can fill in the blank with the name of someone from the Bible, or even someone whose name isn't in the Bible. King David is often used as the name that has filled the blank "because he was a man after God's own heart," they say. Is that what heaven has become to American Christianity, and its ministers in general? Has heaven become nothing more than a place where you can get to know redeemed men better? What blasphemy!

At funerals or memorial services the minister will talk about the deceased being in "a better place." Yet, these ministers also mention that Uncle Abe, Aunt Mary, Grandma Lois, or whoever it is that died, as being with the angels in heaven and looking down upon us, waiting for us to get there to be with him or her. I guess it can't be too much better if the departed have to look at this planet and look upon the faces of fallen human beings.

Most people, even professing Christians, don't have a heavenly perspective or a Biblical view of eternity because, although they may read some of the Bible, they don't care to be bothered with the entire Bible, the full counsel of God. And why wouldn't it be so? there are popular pastors and best-selling "Christian" authors telling us that we don't have to read parts of the Bible, like the book of Revelation, for instance.

God gave us, and preserved for us, all sixty-six books of Scripture. Do we neglect portions of Scripture for the incredibly sinful reason that it isn't necessary for us to read because we can't understand it? That, my friends, is the acme of stupidity and unfaithfulness. That blasphemes the character of God to suggest that He didn't know what He was doing when He gave us every jot and tittle of the Scriptures. Robert Murray McCheyne, the nineteenth century pastor of St. Peter's Church in Dundee, Scotland, made a little calendar for his congregation to encourage them to read the entire Bible through in one year, through the Old Testament once and through the New Testament and the Psalms twice. In the preface to the calendar he wrote, "If we pass over some parts of Scripture, we shall be incomplete Christians."¹

¹ Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Minister of St. Peter's Church, Dundee*; Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier; Edinburgh & London; 1894, p.562

As our minds are renewed by the reading of the whole counsel of God, we read His Word because it's not just history, but His story; that it's about Him; that "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God, the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet not withstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."²

As the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Word by the Word, because we have access to the beauty of the Word by the blood of Jesus, by His work upon the Cross, the Holy Spirit reveals the majesty, the efficacy, the heavenliness, the incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfections of the Cross of Jesus Christ in the Word. Then the glories of the Person of Christ are revealed to us because of the Cross. And when this happens, the things of earth grow dim and the excellencies of heaven become more clear; we grow in grace and get glimpses of eternity.

When the beloved disciple, John, was banished to the isle of Patmos by Caesar Domitian, he saw a great many things pertaining to the Day of the LORD. One of the events John saw was the passing away of the first heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven.³ John was carried away in the spirit to get a panoramic view of this incredible sight, describing a magnificent city with all kinds of precious gemstones as foundations, walls of pure jasper, gates of pearl, and streets made of gold so pure that it was transparent.⁴ Sadly, too often, when heaven is mentioned or when this passage is read, the focus of our attention is on the precious gems, the pure gold, and the glory of this brilliant city. That's not what heaven is all about, and although the illustration I'll give in a moment is a very weak comparison, I believe it will at least serve as an idea of the point I'm trying to make.

When I was a Navy diver, I had the opportunity to serve as a diving supervisor on a trip to a little island republic in the South Pacific called Palau. Not only was this place an historic setting for many of the battles fought during World War II, with many sunken wrecks, downed aircraft, and abandoned artillery, but it was also an incredibly beautiful, tropical paradise. The water was so clear and so pristine that diving in it you could see for hundreds of feet. The air was so fresh and clean that it smelled and tasted sweet. The flora and fauna that grew upon the little islands that just seem to float upon the glassy sea was like being in a part of the Garden of Eden. What beauty. What tranquil peace. Yet, after two weeks, the sight of every one of these things was just as common and uninteresting as an empty room.

² 1689 London Baptist Confession, Chapter 1, para.5

³ Revelation 21:1-2

⁴ Revelation 21:9-22

Someone may object and suggest, "Well, it would seem so now, but when we are glorified, with glorified bodies, we will have an appreciation for those things." My answer is that if they are still merely beautiful "things," then it will not hold our interest even when we are glorified. You see, although I am not yet glorified, as a sinner saved by the precious blood of the Lamb, I've not only tasted of the things of God, I've drunk deep of the awesome grace of God at the Cross. Only Jesus fulfills. Only Jesus satisfies, as it is written,

"And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith the LORD"
(Jeremiah 31:14).

"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Additionally, I do not contend that we will not have an interest or appreciation in the city as it is; yet, gates of pearl, streets of gold, and foundations of precious gems will not be the object of our attention. Our attention and interest will be in what these things represent and to whom these things point. Every beam, every brick, every stone represents the work of God in the Cross and points to the very Person of Christ Jesus. Let me just show you one quick example. When John saw the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, he heard God's Word, a voice declaring an awesome truth:

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).

The words "tabernacle" and "dwell" in the verse above come from the same Greek root, σκην (skeen). "Tabernacle" is translated from the Greek word, σκηνη (skeenee). "He will dwell" is translated from the Greek word, σκηνοσει (skeenoosei). Now, you may recall that I've mentioned something like this before, in Chapter 5, "The Mystery of God," as it pertains to the incarnation of Christ. Σκηνοσει (Skeenoosei) is the third person future tense equivalent of this third person past tense Greek word for "dwelt": εσκηνοσεν (eskeenoosen). "Dwell" (Skeeno) is found five times in the Bible,⁵ only used by John, and found for the first time in his gospel here:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, this Greek word is very closely related to the Aramaic word שכך (Shekan) and the Hebrew word שכך

⁵ John 1:14; Revelation 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3

(*Shakan*), which means dwell or habitation. Additionally, one of the Hebrew words used as a name for the Tabernacle that God had Moses build is מִשְׁכָּן (*Mishkan*), which means "tent" or "place to dwell." It is written,

"And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it" (Exodus 25:8-9).

Why is this significant? Everything about the Tabernacle of Moses speaks of Christ, and the points to the Redemption in particular. Here is just an example of how it does:

In Exodus 26, God gave Moses instructions on how to make the curtains that cover the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The first covering, was made of fine linen of blue, purple, and scarlet. Cherubim were embroidered in the fabric with gold and the curtains were attached with gold loops and taches.⁶ This curtain could be seen from within the sanctuary. The blue, purple, and scarlet colors represent royalty in the Scriptures, as gold has the Scriptural symbolism of deity. This is a prophetic picture of heaven.

The second curtain Moses was instructed to have made for the Tabernacle went over the first curtain and was to be made of goats' hair and the curtains were attached with brass loops and taches.⁷ Just before God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He made for them "coats of skin" (Genesis 3:21) and brass is typically depicted in Scripture as symbolic of judgment. This is a prophetic picture of fallen man.

The third curtain that Moses was instructed to make for the Tabernacle covered the second curtain and was made of rams' skins dyed red.⁸ Interestingly, there are no dimensions recorded for this curtain as there were for the first two. As Jesus Christ is the sacrificial ram, whose horns were caught in the thicket on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:13), the rams' skins dyed red are a prophetic picture of the atoning blood sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Christ.

The fourth and final curtain that God commanded Moses to place over the Tabernacle was not given any dimensions in the Scriptural command. It was to entirely cover the first three curtains and was made of "badgers' skins" according to the King James translators, "hides of sea cows" by the translators of the New International Version of the Bible, and "porpoise skins" by the translators of the New American Standard Bible. The reason for the disparity between translations is because the Hebrew word תַּחֲשִׁימִים (*Tachashiym*) is used in the Scripture and it is not known what that word is today.⁹ Although Moses, Aholiab, Bezaleel, and the children of Israel knew what the animal was,¹⁰ the animal is certainly unknown today, and I believe that

⁶ Exodus 26:1-6

⁷ Exodus 26:7-13

⁸ Exodus 26:14

⁹ Exodus 26:14

¹⁰ Exodus 25:1-5; 31:1-6

was by God's design as well. You see, this final curtain was a prophetic picture of the future restoration of all things and the fullness of its glory would be beyond description.

Both the rams' skins and the *Tachashiym* skins would be as a "covering" over the other curtains. This word "covering" is translated from the Hebrew word מִכְשֶׁה (*Mik'seh*), which was used of the "covering" that Noah removed from the ark after the flood:

"And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry" (Genesis 8:13).

Mik'seh comes from the Hebrew root word כָּסָה (*Kasah*), which means "to overwhelm." In the Psalms, David writes of the hatred of his enemies and the oppression of the wicked being so severely upon him that the horror brought upon him by their evil had caused him to tremble in such fear, that he had almost a thought for nothing else. *Kasah* is used here to describe such:

"Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me" (Psalm 55:5).

I suggest that the glories of the new heaven and earth will be so overwhelming to us as we inhabit the New Jerusalem in glorified bodies, that we will be overwhelmed with thoughts of Christ and His Redemption, that a thought or emotion apart from Him and the Cross will be, literally, unthinkable. As it was prophesied in Genesis after the flood as Noah removes the covering from the ark, as it was prophesied in the last two coverings of the Tabernacle, and as it was prophesied by David in the Psalm, glory will be overwhelming, just as it is written,

"...for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

In that day, the omnipresent Christ will so overwhelm our glorified souls, that every glimpse of glory in the new earth, the new heaven, and in the New Jerusalem, in every thing and every one we see, touch, smell, and taste, will not just remind us of the Lamb and His Redemption, nor will it merely be a testament of who He is and what He has done, it will be a flood of exceeding joy, unsurpassed peace, and unutterable love, because the real abiding and indwelling Lord Jesus Christ shouts to us in every fiber of our glorified beings the truth of His ever-present reality. That's the true meaning of the Scripture,

"...in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11).

Furthermore, we can know glimpses of the reality of that truth,

before we get to heaven, because in the Cross, He makes all things new. The absent-present Christ is not merely prayed to, but also dwells in our prayers; He is not merely worshiped but inhabits our praises; Jesus is not merely the Word we read, He is the living embodiment of the Word and is present with us and in us because the reading of the Word truly fills us with His Word as the Word becomes a part of us and we become a part of the Word.

This is what really bothers me about skits, plays, and dramas within the local congregations. In the Dark Ages, plays, icons, and the lighting of votive candles were used to placate the masses because the Word of God was not available to everyone, as the Scriptures were handwritten at that time. Why have we relapsed into such a sinister time? We have lost the glimpse of heaven because we have removed the Word from its place of importance and replaced it with visual stimulation in skits, plays, dramas, and cinematic entertainment.

As in the days of Jeremiah, God is calling us back to "stand in the ways, and see." He desires that we "*ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein*" because it is in them, the way of the Cross of Jesus Christ, taking the Lord's yoke upon us, that we "*shall find rest*" for our souls (Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:28; 16:24).