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The Glory of Heaven

There are many hymns which speak of the glory of heaven. For example

- *Angels from the Realms of Glory*
- *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* “thy glorious throne.”
- *O The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*, “lifts me up to glory.”
- *When This Passing World is Done*, “we stand with Christ in glory.”

Truly, heaven is a glorious place.

- Isaiah 60:13, “...the place of [God’s] feet [is] glorious.”

- Psalm 26:8 describes heaven as "...the place where Thy glory dwells."
- Isaiah 11:10 calls the resting place of God, "Glorious."
- Psalm 29:9 says that, "...in His temple everything says, 'Glory!'"
- Isaiah 63:15 calls heaven, God's "...glorious habitation."

That is why a very common synonym today for heaven is "Glory."

God the Father Is In Heaven

Now this raises an important question: What is so glorious about Heaven? First the heaven is glorious because that which is most important to us is in heaven, God the Father is in heaven.

Matthew 6:9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name...'"

While Matthew 6 typically is used to teach of the content of biblical prayer, nevertheless we learn an important characteristic of heaven here, heaven is where the Father resides.

Yet, this raises a question. If God is Omnipresent, how is the statement, "God is in heaven" any more significant than the statement, "God is everywhere"? Because as a Spirit, God is everywhere and at certain times throughout redemptive history has condescended to the level of man and given a manifestation of Himself in the form of a Theophany (e.g., Exodus 34:6-8), nevertheless we are taught in Scripture that the physical manifestation of God as Spirit has never been seen by a man (Exodus 33:20) and will not be seen until we enter into heaven (1 John 3:2)! So herein is the answer: No man has ever seen God, and no man will ever see Him until they enter into eternity! At this moment they will gaze upon the face of God!

In Exodus 33:18, Moses requested that God manifest Himself. Moses wanted to see the Lord! What was the divine reply?

Exodus 33:20, "But [God] said, 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!'"

Yet God in His grace did accommodate Moses in that the Lord placed the patriarch in a cleft in a rock, and allowed Moses to gaze NOT upon His essence, BUT *where the Lord had been* (cf. Exodus 33:23)! (R. Laird Harris, 2003, p. 68) This gazing upon "where the Lord had been" transformed Moses' physical appearance:

Exodus 34:29, "And it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai... that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him."

If just gazing upon where God had been could so radically transform Moses, how much more will it be on the day we behold God face to face? It is because of this that we say that heaven is

a glorious place! Speaking of the process that occurs as a sinner goes from being a rebel, then saved, then sanctified in life, and then eventually brought into the presence of God, R. J. McKelvey said this:

One after another the barriers separating man from God are removed until nothing remains to hide God from his people. 'His servants... shall see his face' (Revelation 22:3f.; cf. Isaiah 25:6ff.). This is the glorious privilege of all who enter the New Jerusalem. (I. Howard Marshall, 1996, p. 1160)

And yet, that is not all. Notice the emphasis of Christ in Matthew 6:9, "...Our Father who art in heaven..." For the child of God, heaven is a glorious place not only because it is the dwelling place of God, but also because it is the dwelling place of God, "Our Father." This is incredibly significant. In the Old Testament faithful Jews had known of God as their Father in several ways:

- He was the Father of Israel (Psalm 63:16; cf. Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9),
- He also was their spiritual Father and Savior (Psalm 89:26; 103:13).

However as time went by, the people of God grew cold in their love for their Lord. Their relationship distanced such that by the time of Christ, most Jews NOT ONLY had lost sense of God's intimate fatherhood, BUT they saw God as "Father" only as a remote, distant, faded figure who had once guided their ancestors- much like we do today! But then Jesus came on the scene and radically transformed the way His people were to view the Lord. In response to the disciples' request for Jesus to "teach them to pray" (Luke 11:1), the Lord said:

Matthew 6:9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven...'"

Most of you know that Aramaic was the primary language that the Jews spoke in the first century and so also Christ. As such the word Jesus would have used here to refer to God was "Abba." And as you know "Abba" is equivalent to the English "Daddy." It was one of the first words spoken by the Jewish child. It denoted the warm, intimate, love-relationship between a dad and his son. This now is how we are to address the Lord! He is our "daddy" who resides in heaven! This reminds me of Job's words:

Job 19:25-27, "And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me."

Heaven is so glorious because it is where our "daddy" is! After a long day of suffering bumps and bruises, where does the child want to go? To the arms of his daddy!

Jesus is in Heaven

Acts 1:9-11, “And after He [Christ] had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’”

According to this text, Christ presently resides in heaven! And, after our Lord returns a second time to judge the living and the dead (Matthew 24-25), conquer Satan (Matthew 20), and renew the earth (2 Peter 3), notice what then will happen in the final state:

Revelation 22:3-4, “And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.”

The conclusion to be drawn from these passages is clear, “...to be absent from the body [is] to be at home with the Lord [Jesus]” (2 Corinthians 5:8). This is an incredible truth! There are certain people in Scripture who held a position of great privilege when Christ walked the earth. For example:

- Lazarus was called the “friend of Jesus,” John 11:11.
- Mary and Martha obviously had a special and unique relationship with Christ. Christ specially stayed at their house (Luke 10:38-42) and Mary sat at Christ’s feet and listened to His teaching (Luke 10:39).
- John the apostle is described as “lying on the breast of Christ” during the evening meal, John 13:25; 19:26.
- And in John 15:13-15, Christ called His eleven disciples, “His friends.”

Oh, to know Christ like this! Not only to accept by faith that Christ loves me, but to see Him, recline on His breast, hear His voice, feel His touch, and walk in the garden with Him *like Adam and Eve!* Is not this the desire and passion of every one of us?¹ And yet, Heaven is none other than the time and place in which we shall with all our senses be united to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Why is heaven a glorious place? Because it is where our Savior is!

Our Brothers and Sisters in Christ are in Heaven

Speaking of our salvation, the Hebrew writer said this:

Hebrews 12:23, “[But you have come] to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of

righteous men made perfect.”- what an incredible truth: Heaven consists of the “spirits of righteous men made perfect.”

Another way of saying it, heaven consists of every child of God that has ever lived, is living, and will live! That means when Christ returns, He will reunite all of His people together in paradise (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17). And thus as the body and bride of Christ, together we shall always be with the Lord! And so for the believer, heaven is nothing less than a glorious reunion! Our departed loved-ones in the faith are there. Every Old and New Testament believer who has died will be there. And someday, we who are in Christ also will be there!

Now family of God, let this truth soak in a bit. I have known of people who on account of the loss of a loved one- a spouse, a child, a parent- become embittered toward Christ. Amazing! The one they love and adore has been taken by Christ from this state of sin and misery to stand in the presence of God and fellowship with Jesus! Do you think they are happy? What felicity and joy they must know! And yet, we in our selfishness would hold this against Christ as though the Lord has done something wrong?

There is not a loved-one lost that you will not see again in glory! In fact, if our loved one returned to console us in our bitterness for one minute, what do you think he/she would say? *What are you doing?! In a blink you too will be with me in glory?! Why are you angry at our Lord?! His ultimate plan involves reuniting us in Glory!* John G. Whyte put it this way:

Would you call them back to earth again? Would you wish them back, back from the presence of the Lamb? Back from the sweets of glory to the bitterness of time? Back from those rivers of pure pleasure which flow at God’s right hand to the muddied streams in this valley of sorrow? After they have reached the haven of rest, would you recall them to struggle again with the storms of life? Could you be so selfish and so cruel?

No! Instead we plan on joining them at the end of our race! And join them we will, for Heaven is where all the departed in Christ go when the Lord summons them! Truly this is another reason heaven is a glorious place!

Our Citizenship is in Heaven

Philippians 3:20, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

To the recipients of this letter, the message of this text would have been huge! See Roman citizenship was a prized and coveted privilege in the ancient world. To be a Roman Citizen meant that you were protected by Roman law, you were treated with Roman respect, and you had a right to all the tangible privileges granted any and all who dwelt in the capital itself. In fact, Roman citizenship was so coveted that Roman magistrates used this privilege as a

means to control their province.

- In 31 BC the Roman battle of Actium was fought in which Octavian (or Augustus Caesar) defeated the forces of Antony and Cleopatra.
- Not wanting to kill the Roman followers of Antony, Augustus Caesar did the next best thing: He banished those who supported Antony to certain regions of the empire- one of which was Philippi!
- To keep these banished soldiers happy and at bay, Philippi was granted the title of *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis* which made the city literally Roman soil (the title was so important at the time it appeared on their coins)- this was known as the 'Italic right' (*ius Italicum*).
- What did this mean? It meant that the citizens of Philippi enjoyed the same rights and privileges as if they lived in the capital city itself! This made the city of Philippi the envy of Greece! Thus to say that you were from Philippi meant something! Everywhere you went in that day, Roman law and privilege followed you! You were a Roman and thus the envy of all whom you met!

It is against this backdrop that we see the significance of Paul's statement in Philippians 3! To a church whose members no doubt boasted in their Roman citizenship, Paul exhorted them that in Christ their "prized" citizenship was not that of Rome, but Heaven, "...our citizenship is in heaven..."! And so it is with us! The nation in which we live is not our true citizenship. Our nationality, our true citizenship, lies in heaven! This is why I have such a hard time getting upset by the decisions and actions of our President and Congress! THE kingdom and nation which only will last for eternity is the kingdom of heaven, of which we are citizens this very day!

Our Inheritance is in Heaven

Peter says that we are begotten in Christ:

1 Peter 1:4, "To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."

Now I dare say that if you were the only child of Bill Gates, you would keep your whereabouts known so that in the event of your father's demise, you could receive your inheritance. And there are few among us who would fault you for doing so. Don't you suppose that a similar concern ought to be a part of our thinking when it comes to heaven? In Christ we have been promised so much. Is it wrong for us then to desire to receive it? Certainly not! In fact, far from being wrong it actually is prescribed by God in Scripture.

John 6:27, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life..."

What is this food? Eternal life which would include our inheritance!

Colossians 3:1-2, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above [things which would include our inheritance], not on the things that are on earth."

Christ also commanded us:

Matthew 6:19-20a, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."

Heaven provides for the Christian all that God has promised to us in Christ: life, fellowship, the service of God, the full enjoyment of Christ, the glory of God, perfection, and much, much more! Thomas Boston put it this way:

This then is the peculiar treasure of the kings who inherit the kingdom of heaven [that is, us!]. They shall want nothing that may contribute to their full satisfaction. Now they are rich in hope; but then they will have their riches in hand. Now all things are theirs in respect of right; then all shall be theirs in possession. They may go for ever through Immanuel's land, and behold the glory and riches thereof, with the satisfying thought that all they see is their own. (Boston, 2000, p. 445)

What an incredible truth and what a delight to our souls! Heaven is a glorious place because it will be the time and place that we shall enjoy fully our divine inheritance!

And so we see the Glory of Heaven- for that which is Most Important to us is there:

- God the Father is in Heaven (Matthew 6:9).
- Jesus Himself is in Heaven (Acts 1:9-11; Revelation 22:3-4).
- Our brothers and sisters in Christ are in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
- Our Citizenship is there (Philippians 3:20).
- Our Inheritance is in Heaven (1 Peter 1:4)!

The Clothes of Heaven

Now building on this theme, notice another characteristic that makes heaven so glorious, the clothes of heaven.

Revelation 7:9-10, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God

who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

One thing which stands out in scripture as a major emphasis when it comes to our appearance in heaven is our “white robes.”

Revelation 3:5, “He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments...”

- Revelation 4:4, the elders are clothed in “white garments.”
- Revelation 6:11, the persecuted in Christ were given “white robes.”
- Revelation 19:14, the armies of heaven are clothed in “...fine linen, white and clean...”

What is the significance of these “white garments”- the clothing of heaven? To answer this, we begin with Genesis 3.

Genesis 3:21, “And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.”

On account of the sinfulness of mankind, God clothed Adam and Eve to cover their shame! And thus, from this we learned that the clothing that you and I have on this very moment is nothing less than a symbol of our sin and shame (it is ironic that we should make so much out of a symbol of shame)! However, in heaven the clothing of shame is replaced with the WHITE garments of glory! Once again Thomas Boston wrote this:

All garments, properly so called, being badges of sin and shame, shall be laid aside by the saints when they come to their state of glory. (Boston, 2000, p. 436)

What then is the significance of the “White Garments” we someday shall wear in glory? Notice from the book of Revelation that white garments represent at least two things, the first is triumph.

Revelation 7:9, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands.”

The image of this verse is that of a triumphant celebration! In the Bible, the “palm” is the symbol of triumph because the Palm Tree, though oppressed by weight, typically does not yield but rather shoots upward (after the weight is removed)! And thus as a symbol of triumphal endurance, “palm trees” were carved on the doors of the most holy place (1 Kings. 6:32)! As you went to the temple you were reminded that in Christ we are “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37)! Thomas Boston further observed:

The more difficulties the saints have passed through in their way to heaven, the place will be sweeter to them when they come to it. Every happy stroke, struck in the

spiritual warfare, will be a jewel in their crown of glory. Each victory obtained against sin, Satan, and the world will raise their triumphant joy the higher. The remembrance of the cross will sweeten the crown; and the remembrance of their travel through the wilderness will put an additional verdure on the fields of glory... (Boston, 2000, p. 440)

White garments also represent freedom. It is important to note that “white garments” had great significance in Rome. When a slave was granted freedom, he went through a ceremony in which he would be given white garments as a badge of their freedom. In essence, the “white garments” told the world, “No longer am I a slave!” Accordingly to tell a first century Jew or Gentile that “*The day would come when Christ would dress you in white*” would evoke the thought of Freedom! That is exactly what is pictured in:

Revelation 6:9-11, “And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.”

As these martyred saints stand in heaven, they wear “white garments” and “they rest!” The association here couldn’t be clearer: Their newly dawned garments of white are their badge of freedom and thus their REST! And such will be the case when it comes to you and me. When we enter into Glory and their find ourselves clothed in white, what a celebration we shall have as we are FREED to REST from:

- The temptations of sin.
- Satan and his deceptive army.
- The snares of the evil one.
- The miseries of this life.
- The lion’s den.
- Persecution.
- Sin.
- Death.

When we stand in Heaven robed in garments of white, truly we shall know of the glory of heaven!

I want to direct your attention to the words of Robert Murray McCheyne:²

When this passing world is done, when has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ in glory, looking o'er life's finished story,

Then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe.

When I hear the wicked call on the rocks and hills to fall,
When I see them start and shrink on the fiery deluge brink,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe.

When I stand before the throne, dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see thee as thou art, love thee with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe.

When the praise of heav'n I hear, loud as thunders to the ear,
Loud as many waters' noise, sweet as harp's melodious voice,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe.

Chosen not for good in me, wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side, by the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show, by my love, how much I owe.

Bibliography

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End Notes

¹ Christ in John 16:7 told His disciples that it would be better if He went away. And so while we would never want to reverse Redemptive History and go back to the time when Christ walked the earth, the glory of Heaven is seen in that as NT believers indwelt by the Spirit of God, we nevertheless will fellowship with Christ in a realized and fulfilled way unknown and unseen in this present age. Truly, Heaven is not a regression, but a progression.

² *Red Trinity Hymnal* #545.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 22, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.