

# Our Future Glory\*

I once visited an isolated eastern city in the former Soviet Union, where I met with 1,500 impoverished Christians. They were the descendants of exiles, and they and their ancestors had suffered terribly under Soviet oppression for three quarters of a century. Their poverty was so severe that they had to work hard every day just to put food on the table.

The subject that was most on their heart was their future glory in heaven. I had the privilege of teaching them about that from Scripture for several hours, and many were so overcome that they wept with joy. Their response was strikingly different from many others Christians in the West, who have things so good that they do not long for heaven. As a result, they live as if heaven would be an unwelcome intrusion into their busy schedules---an interruption of career goals, or family plans. They do not want to see heaven until they have enjoyed all the pleasures the world has to offer.

When they have seen it all or done it all, or when age or sickness hinders their ability to enjoy those pleasures, then they will be ready for heaven. While it is true that, as the old spiritual put it, "Everybody talkin' bout heaven ain't goin' there," it is also true that everybody going to heaven is not talking about it.

When believers lose their focus on heaven, they become self-indulgent and self-centered, materialistic and worldly, spiritually weak and lethargic. The pleasures and comforts of this present world can consume too much of our time and energy. Believing women can forget that this world is not their true home, that they are "aliens and strangers" here (1 Peter 2:11), that their "citizenship" is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The church is increasingly in danger not of being so heavenly minded that it is no earthly good, but rather of being so earthly minded that it is no heavenly good.

All Christians should long for heaven, since everything precious to us is there. Our Father is there. Fellow believers who have died are there. Our names are recorded there. Our inheritance is there. Our eternal reward is there.

Most important of all, our Savior is there: He is there and is preparing a place for us so that we can be with Him forever, sharing rich fellowship with Him and worshiping Him. Jesus Himself is the glory of heaven. The reality that believers will be reunited in heaven with Christ and each other is the subject of the last part of the Lord's High Priestly Prayer in John 17:24-26. Here is a description of the fellowship of future glory, the focus of future glory, and the foretaste of future glory.

## The Fellowship of Future Glory

Jesus' passionate plea that those whom the Father has given Him might be with Him in His eternal glory is the final petition of Christ's prayer in John 17. Humanly speaking, there is nothing to warrant such an overwhelming privilege. But the marvelous truth of redemption is that not only does God forgive us when we repent of our sin, but He also adopts us as His children. Thus, the glorification of believers in heaven is the ultimate goal of the plan of salvation.

Our wanting to be with Christ is not difficult to understand; but, it is staggering to realize that *He* wants *us* to be with *Him*. Christ's specific request for those given Him by the Father, that "they might be with Me where I am", further expressed His desire for eternal fellowship with us. He wants all of those chosen for Him in eternity past to be with Him where He now is--- heaven. In John 14:3 and John 12:26, Jesus gives us a promise.

What will make heaven so glorious for us is not its gates of pearl, or streets of gold but the presence of the Lamb. Our supreme joy will be to "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6), experiencing perfect, intimate, holy fellowship with Him and all the saints forever.

## The Focus of Future Glory

Jesus also asked the Father that His followers might see His glory which the Father had given Him. It is true that in Christ's incarnation "we saw His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). But that glory was veiled in His flesh (Phil. 2:5-8). Only in heaven will Christ's glory be fully manifested to His children when they "see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:12).

In God's gracious plan, we will not only see Christ's glory, but also share it: "For our citizenship is in heaven," Paul wrote to the Philippians, "from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

John's vision of heaven as recorded in Revelation gives him (and us) a glimpse of the throne room of God. Throughout all eternity, we will be singing the song of the redeemed as we behold the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This request complements the statement the Lord made back in verse 22: "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them." In the incarnation, Christ had manifested "His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (Jn 1:14; cf. 2:11). We also receive Christ's glory through His indwelling of us through the Holy Spirit (Jn 17: 23,26; Jn 14:20,23). In this sense, we have His glory---His attributes and essence---within us.

But the glory of which Christ speaks here is the visible manifestation of the fullness of His glory that believers will one day see in heaven. In the incarnation, Christ's glory was partially veiled (cf. Phil. 2:7). But when Jesus returned to heaven, the Father restored that fullness of glory to Him, as He had requested in verse 5: "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." We enter the fullness of Christ's glorious presence when we die (or at the rapture, if we are alive at that time). To see God after death has always been the hope of the saints. In Psalm 11:7, David expressed his confidence that "the upright will behold His face." He reiterated his thoughts in Psalm 17:15 where he wrote, "as for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake." Jesus pronounced the pure in heart "blessed...for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

John wrote one day we will "see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). Revelation 22:3-4 reveals that in heaven, "There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on

their foreheads.” So overwhelming will the manifestation of Christ's glory be that the only possible response will be praise. All of the blessings believers will one day experience in heaven flow from the reality that the Father loved the Son before the foundation of the World.

From all eternity the Father and Son enjoyed perfect fellowship (Jn 1:1), love, and shared glory (17:5). As indicated throughout this prayer, based on mutual love, the Father chose a people (Eph. 1:4), gave them to the Son, and prepared an eternal kingdom for them (Matt. 25:34) where they will behold His glory forever. We will behold His glory forever.

## The Foretaste of Future Glory

The closing verses of this magnificent prayer exude Christ's confidence that the righteous Father will grant His requests. God is righteous in everything He does; His judgments, deeds, ordinances, and Word are righteous. Jesus reiterated the point He had made earlier in verse 9. His requests were not for the world, which has not known the Father and hence has no right to receive His special care or the Son's intercession. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, sinners face eternal judgement.

In John 3:18 Jesus warned, “He who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God,” while in 3:36 John the Baptist added, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Not only had Jesus perfectly known the Father from all eternity, but He had also made His name known to His followers, who had known that the Father had sent Him. The Lord's mission was to lead lost sinners into a personal relationship with God (Luke 19:10), which comes only through the knowledge of Him (John 17:3, cf. 14:6). Jesus initially makes the Father known at the moment of salvation, continues to make Him known to believers through the process of sanctification, and finally ushers them into the Father's heavenly presence at their glorification.

His goal is that even now we might experience the love with which the Father loved Christ, and by knowing “the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that [they might] be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). God's love is poured out on believers at salvation (Rom. 5:5), continues in them as Christ indwells them, and is fulfilled perfectly in them in heaven.

Christ's requests in this greatest prayer ever prayed may be summed up in seven words. The Lord prayed for our:

preservation (*Holy Father, keep them in Your name*, v.11);

jubilation (*that they may have My joy made full in themselves*, v.13);

liberation (*keep them free from the evil one*, v.15);

sanctification (*sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth*, v.17);

unification (*that they may all be one*, v.21);

association (*Father, I desire that they also whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am*, v.24);

glorification (*that they may see My glory*, v.24).