

The Joy of Eternal Life

A Thorough Description of the Glory of Eternal Life in All Its Aspects, Rightly and Intelligibly Drawn from God's Word; and Furthermore, a Well-Founded Account and Explanation of the Beautiful and Glorious Existence Already Enjoyed by the Souls of the Elect in the Heavenly Paradise Even before the Last Day; Written for the Blessed and Living Comfort of All Afflicted Christians, Who in Various Ways Are Made to Dwell As Exiles in This Vale of Tears,

By Philipp Nicolai,
Doctor of Holy Scripture
and Minister of the Word of God in Hamburg.

Translated from the German
by Matthew Carver



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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THIS TRANSLATION, presenting for the first time in English the entirety of Dr. Philipp Nicolai's important work on eternal life, is designed to be accessible to the layperson without compromising accuracy. It has been made chiefly from the second edition (1607), an edition significant in the history of the work because of its appearance after a terrible recurrence of the plague that originally occasioned the first edition. The Latin and Greek phrases here and there, which might have been intelligible to an average reader of the sixteenth century, have been silently replaced with English, except in a few places where clarifications of technical terms are provided with the nearest English equivalents. The abundant marginal notes and glosses have been converted into headings. Scriptural quotations have been translated directly from the German with some modification to agree with familiar biblical English idiom. Concerning the numerous Scripture references under those headings, it should be noted that all verse indications have been supplied by the translator, and none were given by Nicolai or the authors quoted by him, nor should any errors or doubtful readings be ascribed to Nicolai here. Often the verse intended is clear; occasionally, it is unclear whether a verse is meant, or the whole chapter, or perhaps whether the indicated chapter is a typographical error. Because the Scriptures are often quoted only in part, or rhetorically adapted, or merely alluded to, and to avoid impediments to reading, the references have been left in the headings and not inserted in their respective places in the paragraph. Hymn translations conform with those found in the most familiar hymnals. For the hymns appended by Nicolai at the end of the book, a literal translation in prose has been provided in addition to the rhymed translation.

By way of introducing the author to the unacquainted reader, it seems helpful here to include a brief biographical note on Nicolai found in *Der Lutheraner*, vol. 14, no. 25, p. 197, in a column by Rev. Eduard Koch focusing especially on the great hymnwriters of the Lutheran Church:

Philipp Nicolai was born August 10, 1556, in Mengerlinghausen, in the county of Waldeck, where his father was a pastor and the inspector of the Waldeck clergy. Philipp, then, spent time under various fateful preachers in a number of places: first in 1576 in the city of his birth, along with his father; then in 1583 in the Hardeck Cloister, from which he was expelled by the Roman Catholics that same year. He then showed very great zeal and spiritual boldness in the defense of the evangelical faith against both the Catholics and the Calvinists, and for this reason came to author a number of disputations. In 1586 he then came to the Lutheran congregation under the cross at Cologne, then in 1587 to Wildungen, and then in 1596 to Unna in Westphalia. Here in the year 1597 a plague raged across

all of Westphalia, so that in a brief time more than 1,400 people in Unna died. From his window Nicolai looked on as one after another was buried. He himself, however, was untouched by the plague, although many of his closest relatives died and his own household was struck. In these days of tragedy he spent his time in daily contemplations of death, turned his thoughts away from the world, and immersed himself in the question of eternal life. This had the effect of lifting his spirit tremendously, and so it was that the work he was then committing his contemplations to was given the title “Joyful mirror of eternal life.” In 1601 he eventually left Unna for Hamburg as pastor of St. Catherine’s church. Here on October 26, 1608, at the age of 52, he himself was inducted into the joy of eternal life. Of the four hymns he composed, the most renowned are “Wachet auf ruft uns die Stimme [Wake, Awake, the Night Is Flying]” and “Wie schön leucht uns der Morgenstern [How Lovely Shines the Morning Star].” The first is the more famous of the two hymns, based on Matthew 25:1–13, and is a precious pearl in the hymnodic wreath of the Lutheran church. It made its way into every hymnal and was even translated into Malabar, Portuguese, and Danish. The melody, rightly dubbed the king of chorales, was probably devised by Nicolai himself along with the hymn text. The second hymn, “How Lovely Shines the Morning Star,” was likewise composed by Nicolai in the year 1597, when the plague was raging so fearsomely in Unna. One morning, being in great distress, he seated himself in his quiet workroom, and from the distress and death that surrounded him he soared in spirit up to the Redeemer and Savior, and in these hours this precious hymn appeared. Here he fell so completely into a blessed reverie that he forgot to eat dinner (around midday), nor did he let anything distract him in his poetic labor until he had finished the hymn. When this finally happened around three o’clock in the afternoon, he is supposed to have come to his family uncommonly overjoyed and in utter rapture. He gave the hymn the title “A spiritual wedding hymn of the believing soul concerning Christ Jesus, its heavenly Bridegroom, based on the forty-fifth Psalm of the prophet David.” Through good times and bad, this hymn was the favorite hymn of our old evangelical congregation. They would sing it both at weddings and the Lord’s Supper, but most of all it was heard resounding by the deathbeds of those believing Christians who had a constant love for their Savior and, now being called to the wedding of the Lamb, were departing this world. This hymn even resounded in the place of executions and helped to bring a sweet comfort of dying to those condemned to death. There is hardly a more blessedly perfect hymn or hymn stanza than this one, so often mentioned in the descriptions of people’s lives and the announcements of their death.

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How fitting, then, that the hymn “O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright,” resounding in a church one Sunday during Epiphanytide in the year 2020, should have so moved our dear departed brother in the faith Rev. Paul T. McCain with greatest urgency to initiate the present translation! Who (but the Lord God) knew that the same year would see the translator surrounded by tidings of contagion as he committed to English Nicolai’s words of comfort, themselves first penned in the midst of a terrible plague (see Nicolai’s dedicatory epistle), or that the Lord would call Rev. McCain home on November 25 of that year? With the reader’s permission, therefore, the translator ventures to offer here the following verses in that man’s memory.

In Memoriam Paul Timothy McCain

Premature it seems that Paul should be
Asked to go before this task for me,
 Urged by his good heart, was yet complete—
 Lord, yet wise You are! It was not meet
That Your friend should go on endless days
In these plagues and peril-studded ways:
 More than mortal now his life abides,
 On the Word he feeds, in You resides!
Things here hinted—Very Love—he knows.
Here we grope in darkness, there he glows.
 Your Paul, brethren, in God’s house is found—
 My Paul too! By grace my heart is bound
Co-heir with him in our fellow Lord.
Cherish then his zeal for that pure Word
 As these lines (in number fit, though few)
 I subjoin, moved by his fervor true—
 Now God grant this book His work may do!

Matthew Carver
Nativity of St. John the Baptist
AD 2021

ABBREVIATIONS

- LSB The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2006.
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 161 vols. in 167. Petit-Montrouge: Apud J. P. Migne, 1857–66.
- PL *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. in 223. Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1844–64.
- StL Johann Georg Walch, ed. *Dr. Martin Luthers sämmtliche Schriften: Neue revidirte Stereotypausgabe*. 23 vols. in 25. St. Louis: Concordia, 1880–1910.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. 73 vols. in 85. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–.
- WA Br *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel*. 18 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–.
- WA TR *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*. 6 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–21.
- Wackernagel Philipp Wackernagel, ed. *Das deutsche Kirchenlied von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts*. 5 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1864–77.
- Walch *D. Martin Luthers sowol in Deutscher als Lateinischer Sprache verfertigte und aus der letztern in die erstere übersetzte Sämmtliche Schriften*. Edited by Johann G. Walch. 24 vols. Halle: Gebauer, 1740–53.
- Walch *D. Martin Luthers sowol in Deutscher als Lateinischer Sprache verfertigte und aus der letztern in die erstere übersetzte Sämmtliche Schriften*. Edited by Johann G. Walch. 24 vols. Halle: Gebauer, 1740–53.
- Zahn *Die Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder*. Edited by Johannes Zahn. 6 vols. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1889–1893.

DEDICATORY EPISTLE

To the Honorable, Most Estimable, Most Learned, Judicious, and Most Wise Lord Burgomaster, Councilor, and Duodecimirate of the Worthy City of Soest, My Very Favorable, Dear Lord and Friend: Grace and Comfort from God the Father of All Grace and All Comfort through Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, Together with My Prayer and Willing Service.

HONORABLE, highly esteemed, highly learned, judicious, and very wise, very favorable lords, and friends: The final article of our Christian Creed, which is to say, “I believe in the life everlasting,” is the true helmet of our salvation and the end of our hope, in which the dear martyrs and all God-loving hearts took comfort in the midst of their troubles, cross, frailty of the body, as well as in the midst of death, and valiantly passed through death into life. “No eye has seen,” says Scripture, “no ear has heard, and into no man’s heart has entered what God has prepared for those who love Him” (Isa. 64:4; 1 Cor. 2:9). “Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will ever be praising You. . . . For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather keep the door in the house of my God than dwell long in the tents of the ungodly” (Ps. 84:4, 10).

Then we will (to quote St. Augustine in his conclusion of his book *The City of God*¹) have wisdom without error, light without darkness, love without satiety, righteousness without sin, life without death, rest or refreshment without toil and labor, joy without sorrow, worthiness without fear and trembling, life without temporality, health without illness—the fullness or full abundance of all goods. Then God will be all things in all people, and we will behold Him without ceasing, love Him without weariness, worship Him without feeling of burden or toil.

Let us rightly consider and take to heart the end of all the benefits of God that He shows to His elect on earth, namely, that He has created us for eternal life, and, when we were condemned and lost because of our sins, He, in His fervent love and unfathomable mercy, through His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, redeemed us from death, devil, and hell unto eternal life and gave us His Holy Spirit and in His salvific Word calls us to eternal life. Everything—the creation, the work of redemption, sanctification, the institution of the preaching office and of the holy, most worthy Sacraments, likewise, the kindling in us of faith, hope, love, new obedience, and patience—is intended and directed by Him to the end that we may be new creatures, plants of His glory, and children of light, who live with Him forever.

But because we little and seldom consider this, and all have by nature world-seeking and earth-loving hearts which long more for the temporal than the eternal, and are more attentive to perishable goods than to the imperishable,

1 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 30.1 (PL 41:801–2).

our dear God, according to His most wise, fatherly council, has prepared and ordained the dear, holy cross (which He lays on His children) as a salutary means by which to turn them away from the world and worldly cares and incline them to Himself for their own good and eternal salvation.

“O Lord,” says Isaiah, “when there is distress, You are sought; when You discipline, they call anxiously upon You. As a pregnant woman, when she is about to give birth, has anguish, and cries in her pain, so is it with us, O Lord, before Your presence. Then we, too, are pregnant, and we are afraid so that we can scarcely breathe” (Isa. 26:16–18). Likewise, David says, “It is good to me that You have humbled me, that I might learn Your statutes. . . . My soul longs for Your salvation. I hope in Your Word. My eyes yearn for Your Word, and say, when will You comfort me?” (Ps. 119:71, 81–82). “As the hart pants for fresh water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When will I come thither, that I may see the face of God?” (Ps. 42:1–2). “Deliver my soul from the ungodly by Your sword, from the people by Your hand, O Lord, from the people of this world, which have their portion in their life, whose belly You fill with Your treasure, who have children to the full, and leave their abundance to their young. But I will behold Your face in righteousness, I will be satisfied when I awake after Your likeness” (Ps. 17:13–15).

But included among the many fatherly blows of the cross by which our dear God gives His children in this world cause to die each day to the temporal and perishable world and to seek without pause the eternal good which produces steadfast boldness is the heavy epidemic and plague of the raging pestilence of recent time. The Hebrews call it in their language “*deber*,” which is as much as “word” or “sermon,” since by it God openly preaches to us concerning His righteous wrath and His ignited and burning anger and zeal at the world’s wickedness, and admonishes us to repentance, that we may depart from sin, believe in Christ, and acquire a thirsty longing for the everlasting goods of heaven.

Such a *deber* He also preached zealously to this city of Unna last year in 1597, when He attacked her with “the pestilence that walks in darkness and with the sickness that destroys at noonday” [Ps. 91:6], so that in a short time more than 1,400 went on their bed to the Last Day. And thus it was really His intention to begin by disciplining this city in Westphalia, since death followed in the other neighboring districts and is still demonstrating its fierce slaughter in cities, towns, and villages here and there.

In this tragedy and misery (it was said here in Unna in all the streets, and often for several days in a row, more than twenty—twenty-four, twenty-seven, -eight, or -nine, and up to thirty—dead bodies were laid to rest in the cemetery not far from my dwelling), I have always had to strike myself with thoughts of death, and more than once I felt as King Hezekiah, when he said, “Now I shall no longer see

the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living. . . . My age is departed and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent, and I have torn off my life like a weaver" (Isa. 38:11–12).

The plague with its fury and rage fell upon the city like an unforeseen thunderstorm and tempest, and soon left no house unharmed, and lastly broke into my own dwelling, and the people for the most part went about with shattered spirit and terrified heart as if they were blind and half-dead, so that someone could have applied to our situation what Moses writes in Deuteronomy 28[:65–67] with the following words. "The Lord will give you a trembling heart and failing eyes and a parched soul so that your life will hang before you. Night and day will you be afraid and unsure of your life. In the morning you will say, 'Oh, that I might live until the evening!' In the evening you will say, 'Oh, that I might live until the morning!'—for the fear of your heart, which shall terrify you, and for that which you will see with your eyes."

Neither is it absent from Lübeck, Hamburg, Lunenburg, Hildesheim, Göttingen, etc., nor from Lower Hesse and the County of Waldeck, my dear homeland, Corbach, Wildungen, and Mengershausen. Neither does a man hear at all concerning those familiar friends which he had in such places here and there except that they fall sick and depart from this life. So also for myself, nothing but sad news and sad messages came to my ears concerning some of my sisters, kinsmen, and in-laws killed and taken away by the plague, which increased my grief and gave me all the more cause to turn all my confidence and heart and thoughts away from the world.

During that time, nothing was sweeter, fonder, or more pleasant to me than contemplating the precious lofty article of eternal life procured by Christ's blood. I let this fill my heart day and night, and I searched the Scriptures to see what they testified concerning it, and also read the ancient doctor St. Augustine's sweet treatise on that subject, where he bites into this high mystery like a nut and pulls out its wondrously sweet kernel. Following this, I recorded my meditations day by day with pen and ink and found that I (God be praised) had success in the enterprise, being well cheered at heart, joyful in spirit, and completely at peace. I gave my manuscript the name and title *Joyful Mirror of Eternal Life* and undertook to leave behind this *Joyful Mirror*, which I composed as a testimony of my peaceful, joyful, and blessed Christian departure, whenever God should summon me from this world; or, if He should spare my health, then out of due Christian love to use it to serve other troubled Christians to whose homes also He sent the plague, and in this way to visit them with tangible comfort.

But our gracious, faithful God, in the midst of the dying, most graciously preserved me from the terrible plague and wondrously delivered my life beyond all my hope and imagining so that I am able to say to Him with the prophet David:

“How great is Your goodness which You have concealed from those who fear You! O Lord, You have brought my soul out of hell, You have kept me alive, when they went into hell. O saints, sing praise to the Lord, thank and bless His glory. For His wrath endures for a moment, and He delights in life. For the evening the weeping lasts, but in the morning is joy. You have turned my lamentation into rejoicing, You have taken off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness” (Ps. 31:19; 30:3–5, 11).

Further, I say, “How shall I repay the Lord for all His benefits which He does for me? I will take the cup of salvation and preach the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people. O Lord, I am Your servant. I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant. You have broken my bonds asunder. I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to You and preach the name of the Lord. I will preach Your name to My brethren. I will extol You in the congregation. Extol the Lord, you who fear Him. Let all the seed of Jacob honor Him, and all the seed of Israel draw back before Him. For He has not despised nor contemned the misery of the poor, nor concealed His countenance from Him. And when He cries to Him, He hears it. I will glorify You in the great congregation” (Ps. 116:12–19; 22:22–25).

Therefore, that I may pay this vow to the Lord, I now direct and address this, my preface, to your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, and very favorable lordships, that the consolations of eternal life from God’s Word may sound in your ears, and the sorrowful heart may even find joy amid this epidemic. For because the almighty Lord of Sabaoth, who kills and makes alive, brings into hell and out again, has sent the poisonous, contagious pestilence also to the same, your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, and very favorable lordships, and thereby caused great loss by the death of many important leaders of the council and other prestigious persons—therefore, I, as one of the least, feel sincere Christian sympathy at these things on account of the dear Gospel and because of our spiritual condemnation, and I beseech the Father of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that, even as He has graciously had mercy on Unna at last and turned away the fierce plague, so He will also have pity at the evil sent upon your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, and very favorable lordships and over the whole congregation, and say to the destroyer as in the time of David, “It is enough” (1 Chron. 21:15), that he may sheathe the sword of execution and desist.

We ministers of the Gospel of Christ in the church of Unna have one unanimous mind and opinion with the worthy ministerium in your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, very favorable lordships’ widely renowned city—in every parish church of which (God be praised and thanked) His salvific Word is taught and preached purely, clearly, and unadulterated by any Calvinist or sectarian corruptions, and the pastors perform their office faithfully with Christian attentiveness,

with chastisement and warning, where the necessity of case demands, no less than with comforting instruction and strengthening of the spiritually downcast and humbled hearts, in the time of the predominant pestilence, as is attested by the three profitable and learned sermons of the worthy, estimable, and highly learned lord John Schwartz, pastor of St. Thomas's church, my dear, favorable brother in Christ—in which sermons he has thoroughly shown from God's Word where the plague originates, what means may be used against it, and how a Christian should comfort himself against fear, fright, and terror, and, if he should be assailed, how he should prepare and ready himself for a blessed departure.

Likewise, I am not unmindful of the honor and friendship shown me by your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, and very favorable lordships, when, upon my first visit from the County of Waldeck two years ago, at the neighborly pleasure of an honorable councilman of this city of Unna, the same your lordships gave me favorable advancement by having my little council conducted and brought over into their own city, or Brilon, that your lordships might cause your sincere inclination toward my humble person to be detected and discerned.

Therefore, second to my prayer to God Almighty, I would again at the present time be greatly pleased and comforted to repay your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, very favorable lordships in these present troubles with my own service, nor can I do so in any more fitting or better way than by setting forth the wondrously sweet and pleasant article of eternal life—namely, how, after the toilsome pilgrimage of this fleeting life, our dear God revives His people above in heaven, wipes away the tears from the eyes of His elect who have wept here on earth, lets neither heat nor frost disturb them, leads them to the spring of living waters, feeds them with the hidden, heavenly manna of eternal life, is Himself their shield, their great reward, and their highest good, and gives them to drink of the rich bounties of His house so that in perfect love, consummate joy, and glorious honor they agree together with one accord, shout for joy, rejoice, and know no more of any anguish, sorrows, sickness, or care.

It is with this precious article that we must comfort, strengthen, and revive ourselves in every necessity that befalls us and, in the tribulations of body and soul, cling to the certain assurance and infallible hope that our heavenly Father will, after a little while, summon and take us (who believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God) from this wretched valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

Thus with this mirror of comfort and joy I would be honored to dedicate and devote these meditations of mine to your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, and very favorable lordships and to the whole worthy congregation, that you and they and all godly townspeople who in this world have been robbed of their close relatives during the epidemic by temporal death may be refreshed therein, discover from it the blessed and happy condition of all elect persons with our dear

God in His kingdom of sight, take comfort in it, and turn all their thoughts from the world to God in heaven and to the eternal fatherland.

Moreover, I am of good hope and confidence in doing so, seeing as your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, and very favorable lordships and the Christian congregation have for many years now publicly and unhesitatingly confessed your adherence to the pure and holy teaching of God's Word compassed in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and are also well aware (and in this time of mortality have learned by experience) that, when the heart is sad and all temporal joy, glory, and hope dissolves in the face of mortal anguish, fear, and terror, the Word of God alone is the best rod and staff broken from the tree of life to comfort us. As David says, "Let Your Word quicken me, let Your grace be my comfort. If Your Law were not my comfort, I would have perished in my misery. Sustain me, O Lord, by Your Word, and let me not be ashamed because of my hope" (Ps. 23:4; 119:92, 116). Wherefore, in contemplation of these reasons, may you be pleased to accept with good will this my labor drawn from God's Word and composed with diligent consideration.

The eternal, almighty God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with all fatherly tenderness preserve your honorable, highly esteemed, very wise, and very favorable lordships and the whole Christian congregation from the noxious plague, as many of you as are still left, and after your great sorrow give you joy again, graciously open the eyes of His fathomless goodness and mercy upon the churches, political government, schools, and domestic estates, visit you with rich blessings for the hallowing of His name and the propagation of His kingdom, graciously preserve you from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and grant us all that we may cultivate Christian behavior in this temporal life, grow and increase in repentance, in faith, in the knowledge of God, in the blessed hope, in love, in new obedience, patience, and good works, and, finally, when the hour of death comes, fall blessedly asleep in Christ, pass through death to life, and on the Last Day arise at the final heavenly trumpet to eternal joy and the glad communion of the entire Holy Trinity and the heavenly fellowship of the dear angels and all the elect, and be and remain eternal citizens of the new heavenly city of Jerusalem. Amen.

The city of Unna, August 10, AD 1598.

Your honorable, highly esteemed,
 very wise, and very favorable lordships'
 willing servant,

Philipp Nicolai, D. Eccl. in that city.

INTRODUCTION TO THE JOY OF ETERNAL LIFE

The article of eternal life produces comfort and joy in believing Christians.

John 16:20–24; Ps. 17:15; 1 John 3:2; Matt. 8:11; 2 Sam. 12:23; 1 Sam. 25:29; Jer. 31:16–17; Rev. 14:12–13; 7:17; Ps. 30:11; Isa. 65:13–14, 19; John 16:22

I EXULT heartily in the Lord, and my soul rejoices in God my Savior, whenever I recall the comforting article of eternal life and the glorious fatherland, where we believing Christians will see with joyful eyes the almighty King of glory and invincible Serpent-crusher, our only Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ, and be gathered to the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles and with great rejoicing will again behold our dear kinsmen, such as father, mother, brothers, sisters, husband, wife, children, and all acquaintances who fell blessedly asleep in the Lord and in true faith departed before us. And God will wipe away all tears from our eyes and turn our complaint into a song of joy. He will gird us with gladness so that our heart will rejoice forever, and this joy no man shall take from us.

The location and glory of eternal life.

Heb. 12:22–23; Isa. 65:14; 1 Cor. 3:21; Gen. 15:1; Rev. 21:22; Ps. 27:1; 1 Cor. 15:28; Luke 15:7, 10

We will enter into the heavenly Jerusalem, into the city of the living God, to the multitude of many thousand angels and to the congregation of the firstborn who are written in heaven. And there we will shout for joy with a glad heart at the noble, precious treasure: that heaven and all imperishable heavenly goods which Christ has are to be ours. God Himself will be our very great reward, our temple, our light, and all in all, which we will not trade for all the pomp, glory, gladness, and majesty of the perishing world. The holy angels will look at us kindly and smile upon us, and the whole heavenly host will call us blessed to have believed in Jesus Christ and trusted in His truthful Word even till death.

Admonition to spiritual joy in all godly Christians who pass through the valley of sorrow in this world.

Heb. 11:33–40; Matt. 5:10–12; Luke 6:20–23; Ps. 84:4–5; Matt. 10:16–32; Luke 21:12–19; John 15:18–21; Lam. 3:29; Hab. 1:13–14; 1 Cor. 4:10, 13, 9

“My heart and mind are comforted, calm and quiet,”² whenever I remember this, and I am not disturbed by the fact that we wretched worms and the sheep of Christ’s pasture in this world, “in the midst of life, are by death surrounded”³ and that, because of our faith and our hope, we must always pass through the fires of the devil and his accursed horde. The children of God are not to despair but to wait for eternal life in the sure hope that, although they pass through the valley of sorrow with tribulation, want, mockery, scorn, and inequality, and live in exile, and are comfortless widows and orphans, reviled preachers, afflicted creatures, a poor, sick, captive, and grief-ridden band which everyone wishes to destroy, who put their mouth in the dust and let themselves be smitten on the cheek, accept perverse judgment, cry out over evildoing and receive no help, are made out to be fools for Christ’s sake, the purge offering of all men, and a spectacle to angels and men.

Our redemption draws near, and eternal life will soon begin.

Luke 18:7–8; Jer. 31:13; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; Isa. 64:4; 2 Cor. 2:9

The Lord will come soon and has already mercifully heard the sighing and crying of His elect (who call upon Him night and day). He will deliver us shortly, and His Church will rejoice after her sorrow. And what we now suffer a little while in this world is not worthy to be compared with the unspeakable, magnificent glory that will be revealed in us. For our tribulation, which is temporal and easy, produces an eternal and immeasurably weighty glory, the likes of which no eye has seen and no ear has heard, neither has it ever entered into the heart of any man.

Great glory, joy, and bliss of the heavenly paradise.

Rev. 12:11; Luke 23:43; Heb. 12:22–24; Exod. 3:8; Ps. 68:5; 1 Cor. 15:28; Acts 7; Ps. 36:8; 16:6; 17:15; 1 John 5:20; Matt. 18:10; Isa. 6:2–3; John 16:13–15; 17:5; 1 Cor. 13:12; Ps. 103:21; Matt. 8:11; 22:31–32; Gen. 25:8, 17; Wisdom 3:1–9; Isa. 56:7; Rev. 14:13; 2 Sam. 12:23

Oh, the unspeakable glory, the great joy, the blessed good, and the eternal majesty that we will live to see there and that causes every part of the heavenly hall of gladness to shine as a blessed comfort and blessed refreshment of all children of light, who have overcome the devil, the world, and all tribulation by the blood of Christ! Oh, the precious, wondrously beautiful paradise, the glorious city of God, and the heavenly land of Canaan, where there is nothing but hills of gladness and mountains of comfort flowing with sheer milk of consolation and honey of joy, and where God is all in all! What a wondrously beautiful world it must be—a delightful place, a pleasant habitation, a splendid garden of gladness,

2 From the hymn “Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin” (Luther, 1524), st. 1; see *LSB* 938.

3 From the hymn “Mitten wir im Leben sind” (Luther, 1524), st. 1; see *LSB* 755.

and a kingdom full of all comfort, where God the Father reveals His sweetest and kindest face to His elect children, angels, and men with all clarity and wondrous comfort and where Jesus Christ shows His glory, which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. Likewise, also, with wondrous sweetness and kindness the Holy Spirit will be seen in the Father and in the Son. Oh, the beautiful, noble life, where the holy angels praise God with joy, where the dear patriarchs, prophets, and apostles dwell, where all godly Christians are gathered out of this vile and treacherous world to their people, where our godly parents, father, mother, husband, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and other familiar friends, in faith trusting in Christ's blood, have been taken before us and await our arrival with great joy and delight!

Augustine, Meditations, ch. 22;⁴ likewise, Manual, chs. 7–8⁵

“O blessed life,” says Augustine, “that God has prepared for those who love Him! What a truly lively life you are! You are a blessed life, you are a constant, secure life, you are a quiet, peaceful life, you are a pure, chaste life, you are a holy life, you are an eternal, joyful life, where no death or sorrow or sadness is heard of. You are a life without blot, without anguish or trouble, without corruption or change, without fear, fright, or terror. You are a life in which all things are exceedingly lovely, beautiful, graceful, and delightful, where there is no adversary who assails us, where there is no incitement to sin, where there is perfect love, one heart, mind, and sense, and a constant unity, where there is an eternal, bright, shining day, where God is seen face-to-face, and where with this food of life man is so satisfied that he hungers no more!

Christians should desire nothing higher nor ponder anything more than eternal life.

“O eternal, blessed life! It is my heart's desire and joy that I may think on you. How splendid life is in you! I am heartily delighted by your excellent bounties, for which I have a deep longing. And the more I think of you and embrace your loveliness and sweetness, the more love, desire, and longing for you grows and increases within me. And whenever I think of you, my heart smiles for joy within my body. Therefore, I take pleasure in turning my heart, mind, and sense toward you and considering and contemplating your loveliness.

We should always desire to speak and sing of eternal life during our toilsome pilgrimage.

“It is my delight daily to speak of you, to hear of you, to write of you, to talk of you, and to read of your eternal blessedness and heavenly glory, and to close in my heart what I have read and to ponder it constantly that I may thus tear and turn myself away from the present care, danger, toil, and labor of this mortal and transitory life and take refreshment like a pilgrim and wanderer with the sweet,

4 Author uncertain, *Meditationes* 22 (PL 40:917).

5 Author uncertain, *Manuale* 7–8 (PL 40:955). The theme and language bear marked similarities to *Meditationes* 22.

cool air of your lively goodness, that whenever I go to sleep, I may lay my weary head in your bosom and find my rest in you, O eternal life!

Eternal life cannot be sought or found on this earth except in Scripture.

“Therefore, I find my delight and refreshment in the pleasant, beautiful pasture of Holy Scripture, and there by diligent gathering I pluck many green, comforting herbs of passages, and I read these gathered passages as if I were eating and tasting plucked herbs, and just as a man digests things inwardly, so I ponder them diligently, and when I have contemplated, weighed, and compared them well, I put them down and close them in my heart, that by such savor of your sweetness I may feel all the less the bitterness of this most miserable life.

Joy and glory of an elect Christian in eternal life.

“O most blessed life! You are indeed a blessed kingdom and know of no death and have no end. In you there is eternity and no change of time. In you there is one day and it permits no night to come, but endures and abides eternally. There a Christian soldier who has overcome the world, the devil, death, and all calamity is a fellow, brother, and companion of the angelic thrones and dominions that continually praise God with a jubilant voice, and he sings to our God without pause the joyful hymn of joy of the glory of Zion and wears on his brow the crown of life everlasting.”

Christians desire that the doctrine of eternal life might be expounded fruitfully.

Luke 24:32; John 5:39; 2 Pet. 1:3; Deut. 32:2; Isa. 64:1–4

Oh, if only there were a man somewhere on earth who could speak, sing, preach, and write of this so sweetly, splendidly, comfortingly, and encouragingly that among the afflicted, troubled children of God many hearts might thereby be roused to blessed gladness and richly comforted! How is it, O dear God, that we are so lazy to believe Your Holy Word, which testifies of eternal life and has been made known to us in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures? Oh, that it might, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, burn like a light in our hearts and flow like a fruitful rain which drips upon the grass and falls like the dew that moistens the tender herb! Oh, that it might cut to our heart like piercing spears and nails and bear utterly rich comfort and living joy for the alleviation and dispelling of the great sadness, heaviness, and tribulations with which Your poor Christians are ceaselessly troubled, tormented, and afflicted in this valley of sorrow!

The joy of eternal life can never be grasped or described in this world.

1 Cor. 2:7, 9; 13:11–12; Isa. 64:4

It is true, dear Lord God, and we must confess it: This sweet, precious mystery is far too deeply hidden, the joy too great, and the glory too weighty for our reason; while our heart is too narrow, our eyes too sleepy, and our mind far too weak and far too inept to fathom the precious mystery, the great and lofty joy, and the

weighty glory. And even if Your enlightened children in this world get a part of it right and understand it somewhat, so that they speak, sing, and write of it, yet all their knowledge and prophecy is in part, incomplete, and a child's beginning. Therefore, I am cast down within me and think: How shall I speak and write perfectly of the gladness of eternal life when I cannot understand it perfectly nor attain to it perfectly in my thoughts? And whatever does not enter into my heart, how shall I bring it to my tongue or give the pen free course? Surely Pericles, Demosthenes, Cicero, Isocrates, and similar widely famed orators, even if they understood this subject rightly, would be far too weak and lowly in eloquence and rhetorical skill to reflect it rightly and to give it sufficient description.

We should and must begin in this world like young children, to lisp and babble about eternal life, until we arrive in the perfection of yonder world.

Ps. 89:15-16; 36:8-9; 16:11; 108:1; 57:8; 96:11-12

And yet, dear God, in Your Word You will and command us to make a beginning in this world where we know in part and to speak, preach, sing, and talk of eternal life as much as Holy Scripture reveals of it. "Oh, blessed is the people," says David, "that can shout for joy! O Lord, they will walk in the light of Your countenance. They will rejoice at Your name daily and be glorious in Your righteousness. They will be drunk with the rich bounties of Your house, and You give them to drink of pleasure as with a flood. For with You is the fountain of life, and in Your light do we see light. In Your presence there is fullness of joy, and at Your right hand is pleasure forevermore. Therefore, O God, it is my earnest desire: I will sing and rejoice, even with my glory. Arise, psaltery and harp, I will rise in the morning. Let heaven rejoice and the earth be glad, the sea rumble, and what is therein. Let the field rejoice, and all that is upon it, and let all the trees of the forest exult."

Prayer to God.

Ps. 89:16; 100:4; 43:3; 31:19; 36:10

Oh, let us likewise rejoice and be glad in Your name daily, dear God, and be glorious in Your righteousness, according to this exhortation from Your prophet David. Oh, let us sing of Your heavenly grace, as much of it as has been revealed to us, and extol Your truth with our mouth forever and ever! Oh, let us enter Your gates with thanksgiving and Your courts with praise, glory, and the honor of Your name! Bring us to Your holy hill and to Your habitation, O Lord, our joy and rejoicing, that we may see and acknowledge Your great goodness which You have laid up for those who fear You and which You spread upon all who know You.

DIVISION OF *THE JOY OF ETERNAL LIFE* IN TWO PARTS

Part I: What Eternal Life Is. Part II: How God Readies Us for It.

WITH heartfelt joy I eagerly desire to help to make such a beginning and to indicate pleasantly and sweetly from the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, first, what kind of precious and joy-filled life the eternal life of the elect children of God is above in heavenly paradise; and, second, from whom this salutary good comes and how the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, out of sweet, unspeakable love and kindness, prepares us poor children of Adam for eternal life and causes us to reach it.

Invocation of God for His help and grace for the explanation of this article.

Ps. 25:14; 71:15–17; 8:2; 51:15

O great King of glory and Captain of eternal life, my dearest Savior and Redeemer, Lord Jesus Christ, who out of great, sincere love for men has earned and obtained eternal life for us poor sinners with Your precious crimson blood; who reveals this secret wisdom to those who fear You and causes them to know Your covenant; who also prepares Your own praise from the mouths of children and babes so that they gloriously honor, proclaim, and spread abroad Your wonders and benefits: I beseech You to make me also one of those babes! Open my lips, that by the power and working of Your Holy Spirit I may expound fruitfully the precious article of eternal life to the glory of Your great majesty and as a blessed consolation to all sorely aggrieved and despondent hearts who weep and wail here on earth while the world rejoices and for the sake of Your name must be subjected to all manner of threats, distress, mockery, and danger. Grant to them, O God of all comfort, that this article may be their cup of consolation, from which they may draw the true living water and salutary draft of refreshment, a comfort to gladden and revive their thirsty, weary soul.

PART ONE

WHAT ETERNAL LIFE IS

The first article concerning eternal life provides all godly Christians with instruction for gladness and rejoicing.

Matt. 25:21, 23; Rom. 8:18; John 16:20–22; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 3; John 5:24

CAREFUL contemplation of this precious and lofty article of eternal life in our Christian Creed produces and works in us a living comfort, constant joy, and sincere delight. Rejoice and celebrate, all you Christians who heartily long for eternal life! Let us sing, leap, shout for joy, and be glad at heart in the Lord our God and Savior because of the blessed good of heavenly glory, gladness, and majesty, which out of sweet, unspeakable love He has prepared for us, His sorrowful children, from the beginning of the world and will bring to a glorious revelation so that we will see it in front of us with our very own eyes as soon as we have faithfully finished the contest and fight of our faith on earth and by the power of the Holy Spirit have passed from this toilsome valley of sorrow through the final throes of death into the heavenly fatherland.

CHAPTER I

IS THERE AN ETERNAL LIFE?

Proof from our Lord Christ's testimony that there is assuredly an eternal life.

John 14:27; 10:28; 5:24; 12:26; 17:24; Luke 23:43

THIS IS my heart's highest comfort, my joy, and my delight, and a lovely refreshment in all cross and adversity. Here say to your soul: Why are you cast down, O my soul, and so disquieted within me? You will not abide forever in this afflicted valley of sorrow. An eternal life has been prepared for you after this misery. And why do you doubt this? "Let not your heart be troubled," says the Son of God. "You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would tell you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will also come again and receive you to Myself, that you may be where I am. I give My sheep eternal life. He who believes in Me has eternal life and shall not enter into judgment, but has passed from death into life. For where I am, there shall My servants also be, and he who shall serve Me, him will My Father honor. O Father, I will that they whom You have given Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me." And what kind of glory may this be? "Truly, truly," He says to the dying thief on the cross, "I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise."

From God's Word we are given full assurance of the doctrine of eternal life so that we need not doubt that God's Word is the pure truth.

Rev. 3:14; 2 Cor. 1:20; John 14:6; [1 Pet. 2:22]; Isa. 53:9; 14:27; Ps. 33:4; Ezek. 12:24–25

Here we hear not a mere man's utterance but God's Word, God's promise, and God's testimony concerning eternal life. Who would not trust this divine testimony? Meanwhile, the pagans also write about it and make fables—especially the poets—about the Elysian Fields, that is, a new world and beautiful, pleasant place where the souls of upright and virtuous men are supposed to go after they

die in this world. But who would trust their fables? They are the dreams of men and poetic works in which no one can trust. To us, however, this precious, lofty mystery is proclaimed and made known by the great Amen of God, Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life and in whose mouth no deceit was found. “The Lord has decided,” says Scripture, “and who will change it?” “The Word of the Lord is true, and what He promises, that He keeps with certainty.” “You shall remember,” God Himself says, “that no prophecy shall lie. For I am the Lord; what I speak shall be performed.”

All the works of God—creation, redemption, rebirth, as well as God’s Word, the Gospel, Baptism, the Supper, and our whole Divine Service—testify that there is an eternal life.

Indeed, what do all the works of the great love and kindness of God do but preach to us of eternal life? For to what end were we created? To what end did Christ redeem us from death, the devil, and hell? To what end are we born again by the Holy Spirit through the Word and Holy Sacraments? Surely the Holy Trinity did not intend it chiefly for this brief period of our perishable life in this world. Neither are we baptized for this temporal life, nor do we go to church and the Supper and hear God’s Word to learn how to farm, sow, build, plant, raise animals, sell merchandise, and make use of this world. For non-Christians, Jews, Turks, and pagans also do these things, and they require no Baptism, no Sacrament, no Gospel, and no Absolution. Rather, our dear God intended it all for our heavenly salvation and eternal life. We were created for eternal life, we were redeemed for eternal life, we are born again for eternal life, we are baptized for eternal life, we are called by the Gospel for eternal life. And what is the end of our faith and of our blessed hope other than eternal life? And for what does a Christian die in the Lord but that he may rest and go from this world into eternal life?

In contemplation of eternal life Christians are to rejoice, not to grieve like the heathen.

1 Thess. 4:13

O my soul, why are you afflicted and cast down with such heaviness and anxious thoughts? If it is true that all the chief works of God, such as creation, redemption, and sanctification, and also God’s Word, Baptism, Absolution, the Supper, as well as our faith, hope, and Christians’ final departure from this valley of sorrow, all bear strong witness to the article of eternal life and are all properly intended and directed toward eternal life—why, then, should we not heartily rejoice and be glad? Why should we Christians, for anguish and impatience, pluck out our hair, fret and worry ourselves to death, and grieve like the heathen, who have no hope?

Holy Scripture gives eternal life many glorious names.

Luke 23:43; Rev. 19:9; Luke 12:31; Matt. 25:34; John 14:2; Rev. 21:3; Ps. 16:6; 17:15; 36:8-9; Luke 19; 1 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:23; Col. 1:12; 2 Cor. 4:17; Ps. 16:11; Heb. 11:16; 12:22

And what is the purpose of the splendid and comforting names with which eternal life is crowned here and there in Scripture? Why is it called a paradise? Why does the Lord Christ call it a wedding feast? For what cause does it receive so lovely a name as to be called the kingdom of God, the eternal Father's house, an everlasting tabernacle, and the holy hill of the Lord, the river of pleasures, the fountain of life, the holy temple, fullness of joy, an eternal marriage bond with God, the joy of the Lord, the imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, the inheritance of the saints in light, the great and immeasurably weighty glory, pleasant existence, the heavenly country, the land of the living, the holy city of the living God, the new Jerusalem?

The reason why the Holy Spirit gives so many precious, lovely, and comforting names to eternal life.

To what end do these words serve us, and why does the Holy Spirit exalt eternal life with so many comforting names, except that in our faith and in our hope we might be encouraged and exhorted to heartfelt joy and gladness? For what is more delightful than a beautiful paradise and garden of pleasure? What is more pleasing to young people, to young men and women, than nuptial joy, nuptial love, and marital union? What is more splendid than the assembly of great lords and their majestic glory, joy, and delight? What enriches children more than their great inheritance and large estates? What is more prestigious than a powerful and beautiful city? What is more renowned in the whole world than Jerusalem? What sounds statelier than a great kingdom? What lifts the spirit more than one's own country? Who is not eager to see pleasant tabernacles of wildflowers and fruitful, beautiful hills? What is lovelier than pleasures? What revives and refreshes thirsty souls on earth better than a sweet and pleasant drink? What has a more glorious appearance than heartfelt gladness, weighty glory, and pleasant existence.

The world is corrupt and inclined toward nothing but perishable good, pleasure, honor, splendor, and prosperity.

Eccles. 1-2

I see great vanity under the sun in the way the world strives and seeks after perishable good, splendor, honor, glory, and pleasure. Kings, princes, and great lords build stately palaces, delight in beautiful parks and pleasure gardens, and plant all manner of fruitful trees in them. Young men and women occupy themselves with love, and their desire is for marital life. Others delight in seeing the world, that they may know of the widely renowned and distant kingdoms and to write and tell of India, America, Tartary, China, of Prester John's lands,⁶ etc. I see how,

6 A legendary Christian territory variously placed in Ethiopia, the Middle East, or the Orient.

when there is a great estate and riches to be inherited, the closest kinsmen strive and quarrel passionately for it. I see how earthly kings and potentates and great lords with hostility snap up cities, villages, lands, and peoples and wage great wars. Likewise, we also see that, among the common man, there is to be found no end or limit of seeking and striving for temporal happiness, riches, and pleasure, lofty rank and reputation.

Majestic names of temporal goods and glories are lent to eternal life that Christians may thereby be drawn to heavenly joy.

Here awake, my soul, and consider with joy the reason why Scripture borrows so many words and names from the goods, splendor, glory, and pleasures of this world and applies them to eternal life. O dear soul, Holy Scripture does this to attract and turn our heart and mind to the eternal, heavenly, and imperishable good. Indeed, by this it teaches us that no wedding feast, no marital love, no nuptial bond in this world can be so pleasant, so glorious, so desirable as eternal life in heaven. It teaches that no princely or royal pleasure garden is to be compared to the most delightful paradise of God. It also teaches that eternal life is such a treasure, such a kingdom, such a city, such a country, such a joy, such a glory, such a pleasure, and such a good that it spreads its wings on high and soars far above all the perishing treasures, above all the kingdoms, above all the lands, above all the fair cities, and above all the splendor, riches, pleasure, joy, and glory of this world.

The contemplation of eternal life is to awaken heartfelt joy in us.

Ps. 89:15; 103:1–2

Blessed, therefore, are the people who can shout for joy! Blessed are the children of light who with heartfelt rejoicing consider this wondrously cheering mystery! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. For who would not rejoice in this precious, lofty good and with all diligence eagerly strive and seek after it? We ought to cry from our heart with St. Augustine's mother, Monica:⁷ What are we doing still in the world, and why do we not fly up to heaven? Why do we not forsake all that we have and follow after Christ, that we may possess this salutary good here in faith and hereafter in sight? We who believe in Christ should always be leaping for pure joy and walking in heaven with our thoughts.

7 St. Monica is described in legends as having cried, "Let us fly to heaven!"