**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**ETERNAL GLORY**

**“When Heaven Comes To Earth”**

**December 1, 2024**

Despite the trials and traumas of this life, all genuine Christians have hope. We are confident that “*our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an* ***eternal******glory*** *that far outweighs them all*” (2 Cor. 4:17, NIV). We are confident “*that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with* ***the glory*** *that is to be revealed to us*” (Rom. 8:18). We are confident that“*when Christ appears*,”then we “*also appear with him* ***in glory***” (Col. 3:4). We know that when that day comes, we shall be in His presence, sharing in His glorified life and enjoying Him forever.

That is our hope.

But on what *basis* do we have such hope? What makes our hope any different from the religious “pipe dreams” of so many others? The answer is found in something which Paul has said in his letter to the Colossians: “*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery,* ***which is Christ in you, the hope of glory***” (Col. 1:24-27).

The glorious “mystery” refers to the way in which God’s plan of redemption has now been extended to the Gentile nations. This eternal plan was “hidden” for ages and generations but has now been revealed. At the heart of this “mystery” is that God Himself will be personally present in the lives of His people in the person of Christ. It is “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*,” which now becomes the *guarantee* that you and I will share in the glory that is to come. He is not merely “*with you*,” or beside or below you, but “*in you*.”

In the words of Sam Storms, “The glory for which we long, the glory for which we have been predestined, the glory that makes suffering and pain and disappointment in this life unworthy of comparison is the person and presence of Jesus Christ himself. *He* is our glory. *Being with him, to know him, to see him, to relish and rejoice in his beauty, is the glory for which we hope.*

Forgiveness of sins and justification and adoption and all the other blessings of the gospel are good and glorious, but only so far as they make it possible for us to experience the *permanent presence and vision and splendor* of Jesus Himself. Our hope is Christ . . . And he lives in us now. And this is the ground and assurance that we have for the glory of being with him and enjoying him forever.”**1**

When we physically die, we enter immediately into the presence of Christ in heaven. Theologians call this “the intermediate state” because it comes in between our present life on this earth and our future life on a renewed, glorified earth. This future earthly life begins at the time of Christ’s return, when “*the first heaven and the first earth*” will pass away (Rev. 21:1) and we shall live with Him on a New Earth – with a new, resurrection body – forever! That is why theologians call this the “eternal state.”

**A. Heaven – The Front Porch to Our Eternal Home**. Heaven is the place where God is enthroned (Ps. 33:13-14; Ps. 2:4; Matt. 6:9). It’s the place to which the glorified Christ has returned (Acts 1:11), and where deceased believers unite for worship and praise (Heb. 12:22-25; Rev. 4:1-11). Apart from Enoch and Elijah, all are in a “disembodied” state.

When a Christian dies, somebody will bury his or her body in the ground where it will eventually decay. Or, they will have the body cremated, and their ashes will be poured into an urn. But their souls will pass directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although we have died physically, we are very much alive spiritually. We will be emotionally conscious, and filled with joy and delight as we worship the Lamb of God around the throne in heaven (Rev. 4:1-11).

This is what Paul meant when he said, “*to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Phil. 1:21). It’s also what he meant when he wrote, “*to be away from the body*” is to be “*at home with the Lord*” (2 Cor. 5:8). There *is no* purgatory (as taught by Roman Catholicism), or “soul sleep” (the view of Seventh Day Adventists). When we die physically, we enter directly into a heavenly, spiritual, disembodied form of existence – until the time when Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. It’s a time of everlasting joy, which is why we sing so many hymns about heaven!

One of the most beautiful pictures of heaven was penned by Matthew Henry (1662-1714). He wrote it so that people could read it *after* he died:

“***Would you know where I am? I am at home in my Father’s house – in the mansion Jesus has***

***prepared for me there. I am where I want to be – where I have long and often desired to be. I am no longer on a stormy sea – but in a safe and quiet harbor. My working time is done – I am resting! My sowing time is done – I am reaping! My joy is as the joy of harvest!***

***Would you know how it is with me? I am perfect in holiness; grace is swallowed up in glory!***

***Would you know what I am doing? I see God; I see Him as He is; not as through a glass darkly, but face to face. The sight is transforming, it makes me like Him! I am in the sweet enjoyment of my blessed Redeemer, whom my soul loved, and for whose sake I was willing to part with all. I am here bathing myself at the springhead of heavenly pleasures and unutterable joys; and, therefore, weep not for me. I am here singing hallelujahs incessantly to Him who sits upon the throne, and rest not day or night from praising Him!***

***Would you know what company I have? Blessed company – better than the best on earth; here are holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am here with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the saints. And here I meet with many old acquaintances that I fasted and prayed with, who came here before me.***

***And, lastly, would you consider how long this is to continue? It is a garland that never withers; a crown of glory that never fades away; after millions of millions of ages, it will be as fresh as it is now; and, therefore, weep not for me!*”**

**B. The New Heaven and The New Earth: Our Eternal Home.** When Christ returns to this earth, He brings us with Him. At that time, our bodies are raised from the dead and reunited with our souls, and all Christians living on earth will be “raptured” (caught up among the clouds). They return to earth with Christ “as a part of His triumphant escort.”**2** (The notion that an any-moment “rapture” precedes the Second Coming before the so-called “great tribulation” is a popular one, but an unbiblical one.)

This is how Paul presents the picture of Christ’s return, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17: “*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And, so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

Christians who are alive at His coming will undergo “a marvelous transformation (1 Cor. 15:50-54), while Christians who had died will experience a glorious re-embodiment (2 Cor. 5:1-5).”**3** Our resurrection bodies, like Christ’s, will be eternal, imperishable, immortal, never again subjected to the weakness and decay of our mortal bodies. This is the final link in the unbreakable, golden chain of our eternal salvation; the Scriptural name for this grand finale is our “glorification.”

**1Q.** Will we recognize each other? **A.** Yes, we will. Just as the risen Christ was recognized by His disciples, and as the re-embodied Moses and Elijah were recognized at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17: 3-4) and as the resurrected Jewish saints were recognized at the time of Jesus’ resurrection (Matt. 27:52-53), so will risen Christians be recognized by each other. That is *implicit* in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, for Paul is writing about Christ’s return to comfort his readers with the hope that they would certainly see their Christian loved ones again! We can rest assured that there *is* a continuity between our mortal body and our resurrection body.

**2Q.** Where will we spend eternity? **A.** Not in heaven, but right here on earth, which will become the “new earth” (Re. 21:1-5). When Christ returns, this earth will be redeemed. All evil will be eradicated. The curse from creation will be lifted (Gen. 3:17-19). There will be no tornadoes, earthquakes, hailstorms, tsunamis; there will be no weeds or thorns that infest the ground. The earth will be reconstructed and changed into an entirely new earth (Rom 8:19-21; 2 Peter 3:10-13). It will be the perfect home in which the Lamb will forever live with the people He has redeemed through His atoning death.

God has always purposed to redeem and glorify this earth as much as He purposed to redeem and glorify our bodies. We see this, for example, in His prophetic word through Isaiah: “*Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind*” (65:17). This promise becomes the basis for the blessing pronounced in one of the beatitudes of Jesus: “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matt. 5:5).

This becomes even clearer in the book of Revelation: “*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth*” (Rev. 5:9-10).

The final revelation given to John says it all: “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away*” (Rev. 21:1-5).

What these texts are teaching us is that when Christ returns to establish His eternal kingdom, He will bring heaven to earth. We will live forever and ever *in the presence of Christ* on this glorified and restored earth, which is the New Earth. This is the hope of eternal glory!

**Q.** So, in the midst of our trials and sufferings, how do we keep our focus on Him and not ourselves? **A.** *First*, by immersing ourselves in the Scriptures. They were written for our instruction, so that as we patiently endure our earthly trials, we might be encouraged to hold fast our hope in Christ: “*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope*” (Romans 15:4, NIV). When Paul wrote those words, he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. In God’s providence, they were written and preserved for our benefit, which is a basic New Testament conviction (1 Cor. 10:11-13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12). They record one example after another of faithful men and women who *lived in light of the certainty* of entering eternal glory. The well-known 11th chapter of Hebrews highlights numerous examples of this (11:1-40).

*Second*, we maintain our focus by taking “the long view” of life’s sufferings, hardships, and disappointments. That’s one of the many exhortations the author of Hebrews gives to his wearied readers: “*And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come*” (Heb. 13:12-14).

What is that city? It’s the city already mentioned as “*the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*” (Heb. 12:22). It’s the city for which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob longed as they endured the many ordeals they faced in the land of promise. They looked beyond Canaan to a lasting, heavenly country and city, designed and built by God Himself (Heb. 11:10, 14-16). It’s the city that will come down to the new earth when Christ returns in glory (Rev. 21:1-3). The best news *ever* is that *we* will share in His glory – with our glorified bodies – and enjoy His presence forever and ever. That is the hope of eternal glory!

*What is our hope in life and death?*

*Christ alone, Christ alone!*

*What is our only confidence?*

*That our souls to Him belong.*

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The Hope of Glory, Sam Storms, Crossway Books, 2007.

Concise Theology, J. I. Packer, Tyndale House Publishers, 1993.

Ibid.