

The Heaven That is to Be

by W. E. Vine

SCRIPTURE makes a distinction between the Heaven which forms the subject of our consideration, and the physical heavens. The distinction lies especially in relation to the Person of Christ. The created Heaven consist of two regions, the lower, which surrounds the earth, in which rain, for instance, falls, (Deut. 11.11), and birds fly (Matt. 6.26, R.V., "the birds of the Heaven"), and the higher, where the stars are (Matt. 24.29). Beyond these is the place where Christ has ascended. He has been "made higher than the Heavens" (Heb. 7.26). At His ascension He passed "through the Heavens" (Heb. 4.14, R.V.) through the created regions and beyond them into Heaven itself. He ascended, "far above all the Heavens." Again, "Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us" (Heb. 9.24, R.V.). Here God ever dwelt, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in all the effulgence of self-existent glory. From that glory, which the Son had with the Father before the world was, the Father sent Him.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this region as

"The Third Heaven."

Thither he was caught up, and there he heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12.4).

It was evidently the Divine intention that we should be

Occupied More with God Himself

than with the wonders and glories of Heaven. God is more important than the locality in which He dwells. Meditation about the blissful region must hold a very secondary place to that of communion with the Lord Himself. And, after all, the loveliness of Heaven consists less in its circumstantial grandeur and glory than in the beauty of holiness and moral conformity to Christ. Hence the purposive economy of detail about the locality.

Heaven not Merely a Condition.

The passages quoted above make clear that Heaven is a place. Christ's own words were, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14.2).

Paul speaks of the place where he was caught up as Paradise. The word

signifies an enclosure the circumstances of which are those of happiness. It is a place where the Lord promised the penitent malefactor that he would be with Him that very day (Luke 23.43).

He also calls it "the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2.7). While Heaven is a place, the idea of a state or condition is constantly associated with it.

Best of all, Christ Himself makes Heaven what it is. To be absent from the body, at the death of the believer, is to be "at Home with the Lord." "AT HOME!" A sweetly suggestive word! What joyous associations are connected with it! Towards home the mariner on the deep, the soldier in his campaign, the traveller in his wanderings, turn their wistful thoughts. Home, the scene of parental and filial affection, family life and friendships! "At Home with the Lord!" Yes, Christ makes Heaven a home. Paul, to whom Christ was everything here, says that to depart this life is to be with Him, and for that reason is "far better" (Phil. 1.23). And when the Lord returns, He says, I will "receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14.3).

No Purgatory.

There is nothing between our being absent from the body and being "present with the Lord." The idea of purgatory is pure imagination, a deception profitable for those who impose it on their dupes, but without endorsement in the pages of Holy Scripture. Nor is there anything therein to support the notion that believers in their spirit state pass from a lower stage to a higher, or from one degree of blessedness to another. The spirits of the redeemed are the spirits of the just "made perfect" (Heb. 12.23). There is doubtless an increase in their knowledge and understanding of God and His ways and His glories as revealed in Christ, and of the exquisite and infinite diversities of omniscient skill; but there is no such thing as an increase in fitness for His presence. Those who are here are "in Christ" [and] are made meet to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1.12).

That to be with Christ is "far better" is no doubt what the apostle had in his mind when he said "to die is gain." The "gain" would be in enjoying more of Christ than had been possible in this life. Moreover, Paul had himself already been in Paradise. What he had seen and heard there intensified His longings to be with his Lord.

No Sleep of the Soul!

How preposterous such testimony makes the doctrine of the sleep of the soul! In the first place, the word "sleep" is never used in Scripture of the spirit; it is said of the *body*. Suggestive of this is the description, "Them that sleep in the dust of the earth" (Dan. 12.2). The very word

"cemetery" signifies the "sleeping place."

That saints are said to fall asleep is indicative of the cessation of bodily activity. Not so with the spirit! The spirit enters into the untrammelled enjoyment of its activities in Paradise. This liberation from the restrictive conditions of the natural body Peter describes as the putting off of my tabernacle (2 Peter 1.14), a vivid description of the release of the spirit! There is nothing in Heaven to hinder or disturb the spirit in its communion with the Lord, and in all the other activities which are there enjoyed. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy" (Psa. 16.11).

"To depart, and to be with Christ" could not be "far better" if this means to lapse into unconsciousness, and so to become oblivious of one's surroundings. That would be to enjoy Christ less even than in this life. It could not be "fulness of joy." To Stephen it was granted to see "the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7.56). Stephen's prayer at his martyrdom was, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7.59). Then with a prayer for the forgiveness of his enemies "he fell asleep." What folly to conceive of this as passing into a state of unconsciousness! No longer even the Heavenly vision! What an outrageous notion! All around in Paradise an utter blank! A cessation of the conscious enjoyment of the Lord and His love till the resurrection day! What a perversion of the truth! Not in that state did the Lord answer His martyr's prayer and receive his spirit. To press a figure of speech beyond the Divine intention of its application is to prepare the way for erroneous doctrine.

Personal Recognition.

The Scriptures already referred to show that personal recognition is the experience of the departed. This is further confirmed by the Lord's testimony concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In reply to the question of the Sadducees, He says, "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22.31,32). The conscious relationship between God and the patriarchs in their lifetime has continued ever since. He is still their God. They "*live* unto Him" (Luke 20.38) and ever will.

Recounting the experience of the rich man and Lazarus [Luke 16], the Lord makes clear the matter of recognition in the intermediate state. Lazarus was in the place which the Lord figuratively calls "Abraham's bosom"; it was a place of bliss, separated by an impassable gulf from that region of Hades to which the rich man had gone; his recognition of Abraham continued.

All the theories which have been advanced, such as that Christ was merely accommodating Himself to the tradition of the Pharisees, or that He was adopting some of the prevalent fictitious conceptions of the time, or exposing the conceits of mere human theology, are outrageous, not to say blasphemous.

Lazarus was evidently in happy intercourse with Abraham. The Douay Version of verse 23, which is based upon the Vulgate, makes out the experience of the rich man to be at the "last day," but the original Greek, faithfully rendered in the A.V. and R.V., makes such an idea impossible. Moreover, it is entirely disproved by the statement, "*Now* he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (v. 25).

Mutual recognition in the spirit state is confirmed also by John's testimony as to the vision given to him at the opening of the fifth seal. He saw "the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, Holy and True, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" [Rev. 6.9,10] White robes were given to them, and they were told to rest for a little time till the rest of their brethren were killed. Firstly, they are seen to be in the spirit state; secondly, their pleadings are with one consent; thirdly, that which is ministered to them is ministered to their comfort in association one with another. The conclusion as to their mutual recognition is obvious.

We may observe, too, what David says about his dead child: "Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" [2 Samuel 12.23]. The idea in his mind was not simply that he would go to the place where his child was, nor was it that he would lapse into unconsciousness when he went there; plainly, his departure to him would involve his recognition of him.

The Happiness of Departed Saints.

What comfort then, the Scriptures give us as to the present experience of our loved ones who are at Home with the Lord! How ineffably blessed is their state! Released from the body of weariness, sickness, and pain, freed from this present life with its perplexities, its uncertainties, its sins and its sighings, they enjoy a state of rest and peace, of unbroken fellowship with the Lord and with one another, and all in an activity unconceivable to the natural mind, and impossible to the natural state.

Let it not be imagined that the saints in Heaven are merely engaged in intercourse. That is not their sole occupation any more than it is our single business here. As the angels who are spirits, are engaged in service for their Master, so with departed believers. Theirs is the

blessedness, not only of worship and praise, but of *service* to the Lord. The mode of this service is not disclosed to us.

No Intermediate Body.

A deduction has been drawn from the opening passage of 2 Cor. 5, that a temporary body is given to the believer upon departing this life. That the statement, "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens, " refers, not to the intermediate state, but to what takes place at the resurrection, is clear from the context. The apostle speaks of the spirit state as that of being unclothed (verse 4). That we may be clothed upon with our habitation which is from Heaven, is the object of our earnest hope, for then "what is mortal will be swallowed up of life" (verse 4). The phrase "that mortality" refers to this natural body, and that will be swallowed up of life when the Lord comes to the air to receive us to Himself. Then we shall be supplied with our building from God, the house "not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens."

Heaven, now experienced by the spirits of the just made perfect, will then be enjoyed in full measure in their glorified state. Then, having received their rewards at His judgment-Seat, according to the measure of their adherence to the Word of God and their faithfulness in His service in this life, they will come forth to reign with Him.

That Heaven that is to Be.

What blessedness will be ours in the new Heaven and earth, which are to supersede the old creation! What glories are depicted in the symbolism of the City-Bride!—perfection both of harmoniously regulated organisation, and of holy intimacy and affection.

That is true already in Heaven which is said of the eternal state: "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" [Rev. 21.4]. But the glory of the Heaven that is to be, is the glory of the City "which hath the foundations, whose Builder (Architect) and Maker is God" [Heb. 11.10]. And the glory of the city is the glory "of God and of the Lamb" [Rev. 22.1]. It will have no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine upon it, for "the glory of God will lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof" [Rev. 21.23]. There will be no temple therein; for "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Rev. 21.22). That there is no temple is indicative of full and free access to be enjoyed by all the saints alike. Moreover, as God and the Lamb will be the Temple, to worship God and Christ will be to be "in God" and "in Christ," and to enjoy the full realisation of the Divine attributes and excellencies.

The association of God and the Lamb indicates that all that is said in connection therewith is established on a basis of redemption. In this respect there will be perfect recognition of, and submission to, the sovereign authority of God: "there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him" (Rev. 22.3). Not only will the Father and the Son be manifested in all their combined glory, but the service that will be rendered will be carried out in loving and undeviating subjection to Their rule, the rule of "Our Lord, and of His Christ" (Rev. 11.15), and in unbounded and unending gratitude for what infinite wisdom and love and the wonders of redeeming grace have wrought. "They shall see His face; and His Name shall be in their foreheads" [Rev. 22.4]. The vision of His face will involve complete conformity to Him, and the uninterrupted reflection of His character. His saints will perfectly represent Him and bear untarnished testimony to all that He is.

What a contrast to present conditions of earth! A city without griefs, without graves, without sins, without sorrows, a city resplendent with the glory of Him whose highest handiwork will be the very masterpiece of God, the means of the reflection of His glory, the seat and centre of Divine communications! "'Tis Heaven where Jesus is," and the highest bliss that we shall enjoy the moment we come there, and through the ages of eternity, will be that our eyes shall see "the King in His beauty," and the vision will mean our transformation into His image. "We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3.2). GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION.

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