

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 20 REVELATION IN GLORY CONCLUSION

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Transcript

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Chapter 20

REVELATION IN GLORY

CONCLUSION

The glorification of the saint commences upon his departure from this world, but it is not consummated until the morning of the resurrection, when his body shall be "raised in glory" (1 Cor. 15:43). Then will he be fully "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). It is observable that in the process of conforming, the members of Christ's mystical body partake of the experiences of their Head. As He suffered on this earth before He entered into His glory, so do they, for the rule holds good here that the servant is not above his Master, who purchased all that the servant is to enjoy. As His glorification was in distinct stages, so is theirs. His glorification began in His victory over sin and death, when He came forth triumphant from the grave. It was greatly advanced when he ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Yet that did not complete it, for He is awaiting a more thorough conquest of His enemies (Heb. 10:13) and the completion of the Church which is His "fullness" or "complement" (Eph. 1:23): "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1:10). Ours begins at regeneration, when we receive "the Spirit of glory" as an earnest of our inheritance. It will be greatly augmented at death, for the soul is then purged of all defilement, and enters the Father's House. But our complete glorification will not be until our bodies are raised, reunited to our souls, and "fashioned like unto His glorious body." As Christ Himself is not in every way complete (Eph. 1:23) until the entire company of His redeemed are about Him and fully conformed to Him—for not till then will He "fully see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied"—neither is the glorification of Christians complete until their souls and bodies are united together again, for Christ redeemed the body as well as the soul (Rom. 8:23), and if the Old Testament saints were not perfect without New Testament believers (Heb. 11:40), then by the same reason the soul will be imperfect without the body. The charge God gave to Christ was not only to lose none of "them" given to Him by the Father (John 18:9), but also that He should lose "nothing" of them, but "should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39). As Goodwin pointed out, "God hath the soul of Abraham with Him above, yet still He reckons to have not Abraham, that is the whole of him, until the resurrection; from thence Christ argued that Abraham must rise because God

is called Abraham's God (Matthew 22:32)." The hope of Christ Himself, while His body lay in the grave (although His soul was in Paradise) was fixed upon the resurrection of His body. "Therefore My heart is glad, and My glory rejoiceth: My flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave My soul in Sheol [the unseen world], neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show Me the path of life" (Ps. 16:9-11). That expectation of the Saviour's was also shared by the Old Testament saints. This is evident from the language of Job: "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (19:26, 27). And again from the words of David: "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Thy likeness" (Ps. 17:15). As the death of the body is likened unto "sleep," so the figure of "awaking" is used of its resurrection. Not until then will entire satisfaction (of spirit and soul and body) be the saint's—for only then will the eternal purpose of God concerning him be fully realized. Note how comprehensive and sublime was this expectation, to "behold Thy face," which proves that Old Testament believers possessed as much light on the subject as we are now favored with, for the New Testament contains nothing higher than "they shall see His face" (Rev. 22:4). Not only so, but they turned it into practical use, and lived in the blessed power and enjoyment of the same. In Psalm 17:14 David makes mention of the "men of this world" who flourished like a green bay tree and had all their carnal hearts could desire of natural things. But far was he from envying them or being discontented with his lot because he realized they had "their portion in this life," and said, "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness"—he anticipated the joy of the life to come To behold God's face by faith is both our duty and comfort in this life, yet that can only be as we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and as we maintain practical righteousness by obedience to God's revealed will. To behold the Lord by open vision will be our occupation and enjoyment in the next life. But what is meant by, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness"? Not a few have experienced difficulty in supplying an answer. Their spiritual instincts tell them those words cannot mean that the soul will find its contentment in God's image then being perfectly stamped upon itself; yet at first glance that is what they seem to signify. Manton appears to have given the true interpretation when he said: "In Heaven we look for such a vision as makes way for assimilation, and such assimilation to God as maketh for complete satisfaction and blessedness." There will be no self-satisfaction there, but rather entire absorption with and satisfaction in Christ. "That blessedness consists of three things. 1. The open vision of God and His glory: the knowledge of God will then be perfect, and the enlarged intellect filled with it. 2. The participation of His likeness: our holiness will then be perfect: this results from the former—'we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is' (1 John 3:2). 3. A complete and full satisfaction resulting from all this. There is no satisfaction for a soul but in God: in His face and likeness, His good will toward us, and His good work in us" (Matthew Henry). It is solemnly true that the wicked will also yet behold the face of God in Christ, for it is written, "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him": yet how vastly different will be their case! They will look upon Him but briefly and not perpetually, with shame and sorrow and not with confidence and joy—upon their Judge and not their Saviour. So far from such a sight filling them with satisfaction, "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him" (Rev. 1:7), yea, they shall say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17). None will be able to stand, be he king or subject, rich or poor, save those who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." These latter are "before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple, and He that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them. They hunger no more, neither thirst any more. . . For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water" (Rev. 7:15-17), finding His joy in ministering to them, as theirs will

be in such ministry. "At the resurrection there will be a glory upon the body as well as upon the soul: a glory equal to that of the sun, moon and stars. The body which is sown in the earth in corruption, a vile body, corrupted by sin, and now by death, shall be raised in incorruption, no more to be corrupted by sin, disease or death. What is sown in dishonor, and has lost all its beauty and glory, and become nauseous and fit only to be the companion of worms, shall be raised in glory—in the utmost perfection and comeliness, fashioned like to the glorious body of Christ—and shine like the sun in the firmament of Heaven. What is sown in weakness, having lost all its strength, and carried by others to the grave, shall be raised in power—strong and hale, able to move itself from place to place—and will attend the service of God and the Lamb without weakness and weariness—there will be no more complaint of this kind: 'the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' What is sown a natural body, or an animal one, which while it lived was supported with animal food, shall be raised a spiritual body: not turned into a spirit, for then it would not have flesh and bones, as it will have; but it will subsist as spirits do, without food, and no more die; then it will be no encumbrance to the soul, as now, in spiritual services, but assisting to it, and befitted for spiritual employments and to converse with spiritual objects." (J. Gill). When the glorified soul and the glorified body are united, there will then be a full accession of glory to the whole man, and his enjoyments will then be entered into in a larger and more sensible manner. Let us now consider the various features of a saint's glorification, or those things which constitute his eternal bliss. First, a perfection of knowledge. This is clear from "now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." This does not mean we shall become omniscient, or possessed of infinite knowledge, but that our knowledge will be free from all doubt and error, and as full as our finite faculties will permit. We shall not only enjoy a greater means of knowledge, but our capacity to take in will be immeasurably increased. That sight of God in Christ which will be ours will not only irradiate our minds but enlarge our understandings. We shall perceive the glory of God with the eyes of our mind fully enlightened. The rays of that glory will shine into our souls so that they will be filled with the knowledge of God, and with the whole good pleasure of His will, in all His vast designs of grace unto us. That which is revealed in Scripture, and upon which we now exercise faith and hope, shall then be fully experienced by us. Second, a perfection of union and communion, both with Christ and fellow believers. Henceforth, there will be no more differences of opinion, cooling of affections, or breaches between Christians. Then will be fully realized that prayer, "that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:22, 23). The very reading of those words should fill our hearts with holy amazement, and the actualization of them will fill us with adoration. The oneness between the Father and the Son is such that they partake of the same ineffable blessedness, each enjoying it equally with the other. And that is the likeness, by way of similitude, of the final union between the Redeemer and the redeemed—ours will be like Theirs! As the union between the Father and the Son is a real, spiritual, holy, indestructible, and inexpressibly glorious one, such will be that between Christ and His Church in Heaven. There is a grace union between them here, but it is the glory union which is referred to in the above verses. "He will be theirs, and will bless them forever. He will be all around them and within them, the light of their understandings, the joy of their hearts, the object of their perpetual praise" (John Dick). Christ will remain the everlasting bond of union between God and the saints. Third, a perfection of love. Even now Christ has the first place in their hearts (otherwise they would not be real Christians), yet how often their affection toward Him wanes. Real need has each of us to pray, "O may no earth-born cloud arise, to hide You from Your servant's eyes." But, blessed be God, such a thing will be unknown there. It will be impossible to constantly contemplate the excellence of God without continually loving Him. "In this world the saints prefer Him to their chief joy, and there are seasons when their hearts go out to Him with an ardor which no created object can excite, with desire for the closest union and the most intimate fellowship. But this flame will glow more ardently in the

pure atmosphere of Heaven. The fervour of his affection will never abate, nor will anything occur to suspend it or turn it into a different channel. God will always maintain the pre-eminence and appear infinitely greater and better than all other beings" (John Dick). There will be a perpetual cleaving of heart to Him without change or weariness, a love that never ceases working communion with God. Fourth, a perfection of holiness. "Now they are in part made 'partakers of the Divine nature,' but then they shall perfectly partake of it. That is to say, God will communicate to them His own image, making all His goodness not only pass before them, but pass into them, and stamp the image of all His own perfections upon them, so far as the creature is capable of receiving the same; from whence shall result a perfect likeness to Him, in all things in and about them" (Thomas Boston). "If our view of the glory of Christ by faith is assimilating now, and 'changes into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18), what will a full view, a clear sight, of Him do? Then will the great end of predestination—to be conformed to the image of the Son of God—be completely answered. The soul, with all its powers and faculties, will bear a resemblance to Christ. Its understanding will have a clear discernment of Him, the bias of the mind will be wholly toward Him, the will will be entirely subject to Him, the affections will be in the strongest manner set upon Him, and the memory will be fully stored with spiritual and heavenly things" (John Gill). Fifth, a perfection of glory. Of old it was promised, "The Lord will give grace and glory" (Ps. 84:11): as surely as He has given us the one, will He the other. "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13, 14). That was what God had in mind for His people in eternity past: nothing less would satisfy His heart. Observe well that it is "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Our glory cannot be independent of Him, but the glory which the Father has given Him, He gives us (John 17:22), so that we share His very throne (Rev. 3:21)! As He is the Head of grace, ministering to our every need, so He is the Head of glory and will communicate the same to us in Heaven. He will shine forth in all His glory so that His bride will reflect the splendor of it. Angels will be spectators of it, but not the sharers. It will be a glory revealed in the saints which is beyond all comparison (Rom. 8:18; 2 Thess. 1:10), and a glory put upon them which is inconceivable (Ps. 45:13; Rev. 21:11), so that, "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4), in shining robes of ineffable purity and beauty. Sixth, a perfection of joy. "Joy sometimes enters into us now, but it has much to do to get access while we are encompassed with sorrows; but then, joy shall not only enter into us, but we shall enter into it, and swim forever in an ocean of joy; where we shall see nothing but joy wherever we turn our eyes" (Boston). Our joy will be pure and unmixed, without any dregs of sorrow. "In Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). The object of our happiness will not be a creature, but God Himself. The presence and communion of the Lamb will afford us everlasting delight. All that the spouse is represented in the Song as longing for, she will then have, and a thousand times more. Christ will then say, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21), sharing with us His own joy. Perfect serenity of mind, complete satisfaction of heart, will be ours, without interruption forever. As we are told that in that day the Lord God, "will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. 3:17), so will it be with His people. Seventh, a perfection of praise. In Revelation 15:2, the heavenly saints are seen "having the harps of God"—the emblem of praise. At present our best worship is faulty, for both our knowledge of God and our love to Him are sadly defective—but when we come into His presence and are filled with all His fullness (Eph. 3:19), we shall render to Him that which is His due. Then shall we fully realize our infinite indebtedness to His grace, and our hearts will overflow with gratitude. A glorified soul will be far better capacitated to estimate and appreciate the wondrous riches of His grace than it can be in its present state, and therefore our adoring homage will be immeasurably more

fervent and raised to a higher pitch. The infinite perfections of the Triune Jehovah, His love unto the Church collectively and to each of its members individually—the revelation and manifestation of His glory in Christ, the salvation which He provided for them at such fearful cost to Himself, contain an all-sufficiency for perpetual praise and thanksgiving throughout the endless ages. His praises can never be exhausted: for all eternity we shall find fresh matter in Him for thanksgiving. "And 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. And they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:3, 4). That is not only the final but the ultimate word on this glorious subject. In the beatific vision it is not upon His "back parts" we shall look, as did Moses upon the mount (Ex. 33:23), but we shall "see His face"! We shall not be limited to touching the hem of His garment, nor to embracing His feet, but shall actually and personally feast our eyes upon His peerless countenance. That sacred head which once was crowned with thorns is now adorned with diadem resplendent; and that blessed face which was covered with the vile spittle of men will forever beam with love upon His own. Oh, what an ineffable sight! No longer will our eyes be clouded by sin or dimmed by old age. Nor will such bliss be ours for a brief season only, but forevermore. There will be a perfect and perpetual influx of delight as we view Him in the inconceivable radiance of His manifested glory. "They shall see His face." There will be many other objects to behold, but nothing in comparison with Him! Those mansions which Christ has gone to prepare for His beloved must be indescribably lovely. The holy angels, the cherubim and seraphim, will be present to our sight. The Patriarchs and Prophets, the Apostles and martyrs, some of our own dear kindred who were washed in the blood of the Lamb. But chief and foremost, claiming our notice and absorbing our attention, will be our best Beloved. Then it is we shall receive the fullest and grandest answer to our oft-repeated prayer, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us" (Ps. 67:1). To see the King's face is to enjoy His favour (2 Sam. 14:24, 32). But it also signifies to have the most intimate and immediate communion with Him, that we shall then be the recipients of the fullest and most lavish discoveries of His love—beholding Him with both the eyes of our understandings and of our glorified bodies. All distance will then be removed. Every veil will then be done away with. All we longed for perfectly realized. Nothing will then be lacking to the absolute completeness of our happiness; and, what is far better, nothing will be lacking to complete the happiness of Christ. That "joy" which He "set before Him" or held in view, as He "endured the Cross" (Heb. 11:2), will then be fully His, for we shall not only be with Him, but like Him, conformed to His image. "His name shall be in their foreheads." Then will it openly appear to all beholders that they belong to Him and bear His holy image, since they shall perfectly reflect Him. As the "name" represents the person, so we shall bear His likeness, giving expression to those who see us who and what He is. We shall be publicly acknowledged as His (cf. Rev. 14:1). Christ will everlastingly delight in the Church, and the Church will everlastingly delight in Him. There will be mutual intercourse, an unrestrained opening of the heart one to another. In communion communications are made by both parties. One party bestows favour upon another, and the recipient reciprocates by giving back to the donor, according to the benefit received, grateful acknowledgment—those communications, from both sides, flowing from love and union. Thus we read, "Now ye Philippians know that. . . no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only" (4:15). Paul and the Philippian saints were united in heart and had spiritual fellowship together in the Gospel (1:5). Out of love to him, they communicated in a temporal way, they being, the active givers, he the passive receiver. Then, in return for their kindness, the Apostle communicated by acknowledging their beneficence, thanking them for it. This may help us a little to form some idea of what our communion with Christ in Heaven will be like. As the vine conveys sap to the branch, so the branch responds by bearing leaves and fruit. Christ will continue to be the Giver, and we the receivers. This will issue in the overflowing of our love, and in return, we shall pour out praise and

thanksgiving, adoration and worship. "He and I in one bright glory Endless bliss shall share; Mine, to be forever with Him; His, that I am there."

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