

Christ and the Future Life

by Barton W. Johnson

The sermon explores the problem of human life, the hope of immortality in the ancient world, and the message of hope and immortality in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:42, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Revelation 21:4, Revelation 22:1

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Resurrection Hope"

Description

Barton W. Johnson preaches about the hope of immortality and the bliss of heaven as revealed in the Bible. He discusses the ancient world's ponderings on life after death, the human longing for eternal life, and the various beliefs across different cultures hinting at immortality. Johnson emphasizes that the ultimate hope of the saints lies in the resurrection and eternal life brought to light by Jesus Christ, who abolished death and promised a glorious future. He delves into the basis of this hope, highlighting the significance of Christ's resurrection and the assurance of a heavenly home prepared by God's love.

Transcript

THE HOPE OF THE ANCIENT WORLD.

When the curtain rises in the drama of humanity, one of the first scenes revealed is the discussion of the riddle of human life. What is man? Is he a worm, or is he a god? When he dies, does he "surrender his individual being and go to mix with the elements, to be a brother to the rock and to the clod which the rude swain treads upon?" Is he dust and does he return to dust, or has he a divine and deathless spark which shall survive the dissolution of the body, the grave, and even the wreck of worlds?

Probably no one of the mysteries of which our anxious souls ask the solution has had so painful and absorbing an interest as that question of the ages: "If a man die, shall he live again?" When the first parents stood over the bruised body of their slain second born, they confronted the great problem, and it is hardly indulging the imagination to suppose that the heart of the great mother suggested to her a hope, even while her tears were falling over the sad fate, of her son. Since that first funeral and first grave of the world, there has been a battle between human hopes and fears. On the one hand, to outward appearances the grave seemed to end all. The last breath is succeeded by the death pallor, dissolution, and the disappearance from human sight, apparently forever. As far as the ken of the senses can go, they have seemed to say that man died and perished as the worm, or, as the brute. Where are the millions of the fathers of our race? Where are the storied heroes of the past? Where are the pious and the good who served the world so well that it will not let their memories die? [398]

On the other hand, there has always and everywhere been some kind of intimation, whether from without or within, from nature or from revelation, which has filled the world with a vague hope. This was shown when the old patriarchs so carefully carried their dead, even from afar, to the cave of Machpelah in the Promised Land. The afflicted sage of the Land of Uz, in the midst of his sorrows, cried out in exultation as his soul caught a glimpse of the future life. When the Egyptians brought their dead to the embalmer, spared no art to render the lifeless body imperishable, laid it away in rock hewn tombs and sealed it up from the destroying hand of time, they did it in the hope of a final reunion of the soul and body. The great sages of southern Asia attempted to solve the problem by the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. The soul which left a dying body entered into some other body, whether of man or beast, and lived again. The Greek myths and poets painted the Elysian Fields and Tartarus as the homes of disembodied spirits; the Sagas of northern Europe pictured Walhalla as the abode of departed heroes; the American Indians sent theirs to the Happy Hunting Grounds; the Chinese worship their ancestors as living and divine. Indeed, wherever men have been found, as soon as their language and life is understood, it is found that in some form, however vague and imperfect, their thought has been colored by an intimation of immortality. So general is the diffusion of this hope that Cicero in his Tusculan Disputations makes the argument that a universal belief can only be accounted for by referring it to a divine intuition, and hence, that the belief in a future life is due to God's voice in the human soul whispering to it that the grave does not end all.

Yet we always come away dissatisfied after endeavoring to silence our fears, and to give our hopes a basis of certainty, by listening to the arguments drawn from human philosophy. The death of the old year, the suspended life of the winter season, and the resurrection of the spring whisper a hope. The [399] transformations of the worm after its burial in the chrysalis to a glorious winged life seem like a corroboration. The fact that the noblest minds are often found in those "whose bodily presence is contemptible," in feeble and diseased earthly prison houses, shows that the life, is something distinct from matter. The fact that we often observe the mind in a slowly dying body as vigorous as ever until the moment of separation seems to teach the same lesson. Then, too, the personal consciousness of every man declares to him that the body is only the clay tenement in which he, the Ego, dwells. I speak of "my arm," "my head," "my body," and contemplate them all as my servants. I do not regard them as Me, but as Mine. But there is something, the Ego, that is myself, and it is impossible to think of myself apart from this. This self is one, a unit. I am therefore conscious of an existence of which the body is one of the possessions and the dwelling place. Why, if this something is not the body, may it not change its home as we change dwellings, and take another dwelling such as pleaseth Him who made both body and spirit?

Then again, to pursue this line of thought a little farther, free will is a matter of consciousness. We know that we weigh motives and exercise choice. We know that we are free moral agents. But matter is subject to immutable laws. Matter can never exercise choice, and hence is not a moral agent. Mr. Darwin says that "free will is a mystery insoluble to the naturalist." If matter cannot will, and we can, it follows that there is something dwelling in our bodies, the Ego, which is not matter. The life itself, that which constitutes our personal identity, must then be immaterial and spiritual since it is not subject to the laws of matter. Hence, the dissolution of the body does not necessarily end its existence.

And there is yet another argument which has carried weight. The lesson of God's great world is that where he has created wants he has also furnished the means of supplying those wants. There are mutual correspondences. There is air for [400] the lungs; light for the eye; sounds for the ear. The body hungers and thirsts and God furnishes the harvest and the crystal stream. He has given to every species what it needs in its environment. But shall we say that the great Heavenly Father has provided the means of

supplying every sense, every lower want, and yet has utterly denied the intense longing planted in every soul for life? "All that a man hath will he give for life;" ease, property, comfort, home. The whole soul cries for life.

"It is life whereof our nerves are scant,

Thee, O life, not death for which we pant,

More life, fuller life, is what we want."

Nay, all nature declares that He who has answered every lower want of our being, would not close his ears to the universal, never ceasing, agonizing cry of his children for life. Who will say that when millions of hands are outstretched to God as they cry for life that the Heavenly Father thrusts them back and pushes all his weeping children into hopeless graves!

These arguments are noted, not in order to exhaust this source, but to indicate the kind of evidences which nature provides. Yet, in spite of all, the natural world has left man with his doubts, his hopes and his fears. If there was a Cicero who could argue immortality from an eternal hope, there was also a Cæsar who could declare in his speech in the Senate on the fate of the Cataline Conspirators that death is an eternal sleep. If there was a Socrates who could insist, as he received the hemlock, on the immortality of the soul, there was also a Cebes who could dispute the fact of future existence with the dying philosopher. If there were Platonists who declared that the soul was deathless, there were also Epicureans who claimed that in this life was our only hope, and hence that it was the part of wisdom to give full rein to pleasure, because to-morrow we die. If there were Pharisees who believed in a future world, there were also Sadducees who denied that there was angel, spirit, or the resurrection of the dead. Cato, when all hope of the Republic had been crushed out by Cæsar's legions, might [401] read in his last hours Plato's dialogue on the immortality of the soul, but its pages furnished no prospect which stayed his hand, when, in despair, he turned the dagger upon his heart.

Indeed there was little in the vision of immortality vouchsafed before Christ came that could fill men with joyous hope. The poets could touch their harps to sing of the beauties of the Elysian Fields, but the departed heroes who made them their eternal abodes were empty shades who looked back with longing on the real joys of the earthly life. Socrates, the greatest saint of the pagan world, could, in the moment of departure, speak words of consolation to his weeping friends, but in the same breath he declared that whether the change would better his condition he could not tell. Death was a departure from the known to the unknown; a leap into an unexplored abyss awful in its silence and mystery. Even when Plato and Cicero exhausted their powers, all that they wrought was to convince their countrymen of the deathless existence of the soul. They had no power to reveal a heaven that would brighten their lives with the radiance of an eternal hope. That was reserved for Him who is the Resurrection and the Life.

LIFE AND IMMORTALITY BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

We have just seen how feeble and glimmering was the light of eternal hope in the pre-Christian world; too faint and uncertain to be a strong power and consolation when the great horror of darkness came down upon the dying soul. Men might submit themselves to the inevitable decree with philosophic resignation, but there was no glorious hope in death. The sublimest height of the old-world faith was reached when the Psalmist could exclaim, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." There was no voice in all the ancient world except that of a prophet who caught a glimpse of a brighter morning

and put in words the hope of a [402] better age, which could cry in triumphant exultation, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory now?"

It was a new era which dawned upon the world's hopes when the Man of Calvary entered upon his work. A new key-note is at once discovered in history, when we open the pages of the New Testament. "He hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." From some cause, the old fears have passed away, and the world is stepping to the music inspired by a new hope. The first martyr of the church, in the crisis of his fate, has a vision of the opened heavens and the Risen Lord, and dies with prayers upon his lips for his murderers. The mightiest apostle of the new religion, in the midst of a life of "weariness and painfulness," of want, suffering and ceaseless persecution and peril of death, could exclaim: "Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. * * * For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And when his weary course was run to the end, out of the depths of his Roman prison he could look serenely at the scaffold and the headman's axe prepared for him, and speak with radiant hope of the "crown of righteousness" which would soon, rest upon his immortal brow. If I had to choose a single sentence which would compress within its limits the attitude of the new dispensation with reference to death and a future life, it would be that of the voice from heaven, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." From that time onward saints could be found who cheerfully accepted the crown of martyrdom, and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer somewhat for a Savior who had filled their souls with glorious hope.

Nor is it difficult to account for this blessed hope which had been begotten in human hearts. The one all-sufficient [403] explanation is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The world had other great religious teachers before the Man of Nazareth, such as Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster and Confucius, but never had a teacher, Jew or Gentile, inspired or uninspired, appeared upon the earth who had dared to take upon his lips other than the timid, hesitating, lisping words of mortal man. It was a new era when one in the flesh, as the Son of Man, could declare in language only fitting for Divine lips, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE." Never before had there been One walking among mortals who could claim the high prerogative of holding the keys of death and Hades, and the power to deliver man from their dominion. Never before had prophet or sage spoken such mighty words as, "The hour is coming in which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation;" "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die;" "I am the Bread of Life;" "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life;" "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Such Godlike words might possibly have been held to be the wild ravings of a crazy enthusiast had they not been spoken by one who was Godlike in every feature, in life, in teachings, in death, and in the mighty transforming power he has wrought in the history of our race. "Never did man speak like this man." "He speaks as one who has authority, not as the scribes." Never has the earth seen a teacher of such equipoise, seemingly such a master of every subject; never at a loss, never confused, never mistaken, apparently in possession of the keys of all knowledge, and familiar with every mystery. "In him was no darkness at all," and to him all, whether past, present or future, in this world or the world to come, was clear as the sunlight of heaven. It would be utterly impossible that a character so peerless in the judgment of all the world, unbelieving [404] as well as believing, should speak wild and foolish words on the subject

of death and future existence. It is contrary to all the probabilities that one who had analyzed the human heart and life as had never been done before by mortal man, one who has been demonstrated by the wisdom and experience of eighteen centuries, to have spoken calm, deliberate, unerring truth on ninety-nine subjects out of the hundred, should have indulged in idle, vain, blasphemous and false boastings on the hundredth theme. Is it conceivable that the lips, which the universal judgment of man declares to be the lips of embodied truth, were defiled by falsehood when they declared to man the words of Eternal Hope!

There is another aspect in which Christ and the Gospel differ from all other teachers and their systems. There has been no founder of any other religion who, while still a living teacher, staked his religion upon his triumph over death, and from whose tomb a church sprang into existence, and into power, buoyant with the hope of immortality demonstrated by his own resurrection from the dead. Judaism left Moses sleeping in the lonely sepulcher of Mount Nebo. No Chinese or Buddhist Bible tells how the stone was rolled away from the sepulcher of Confucius or Gautama, and how they rose again to cheer their despairing disciples by their presence and by the promise of a like victory over the grave. As far as the dim legends of Zoroaster tell us, when he died he went to the same "towers of silence" as all his followers. The Mohammedan, borrowing a hope from Christianity, believes that his Prophet is in Paradise, but has never dared to affirm that he has been seen by mortal vision since his body was placed in the tomb at Mecca. And in more recent times, though Mormonism adores the murdered Joseph Smith as a saint, a prophet and a martyr, as well as the founder of their faith, they have never risked the proclamation of his resurrection from the dead.

In contrast with all other religions of humanity, Christianity bounded into existence big with the hope of immortality, and [405] pointed to the empty tomb and to the Risen Lord as the demonstration of its hope. Peter, a craven while his Lord was in the hands of his enemies, has now been transformed by some new element into a hero, and fifty days after the tragedy of the cross, declares to the men who had crucified his Master, "Him * * whom ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain, God hath raised up. * * * Whereof we all are witnesses;" and the Twelve who fled in terror when their leader was seized, "all witness with great power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." The burden of every sermon was the resurrection of the Savior, and eternal life. So it was in the first sermon; so it was again in the discourse at the Beautiful Gate. The one thing that turned upon the church the rage of the Sadducean rulers was that "they were grieved that the apostles taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Indeed, the gospel, which in its mighty workings wrought out a church whose progress could not be stayed by sword or fagot, or by all the might of Sanhedrim or Cæsar, was the gospel of a Risen Lord. That was the "old Jerusalem gospel," and it was no less the gospel which wrought out the transformation of the Gentile world. "I delivered unto you," writes the greatest of the apostles to a Gentile church which he had founded, "first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

The faith of Christianity that "Christ is the Resurrection and the Life, and that he rose from the tomb as the first fruits of them that slept," is a full explanation of the new hope, joy and inspiration which came into human life from the tomb of our Lord.

THE BASIS OF OUR HOPE.

Future existence is not future life in the full and blessed sense in which the phrase is used by our Savior. Even the [406] wicked may exist "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Nor is existence here on earth recognized by him as life. In him was life, and in him The Life walked and moved in a world that was lying dead in trespasses and sins, which he invited to him in order that he might have life. Those who received him were born to a new life received from him, and henceforth were moved by the power of an eternal hope. For them eternal life had begun, and what we call death was only a transit to a higher stage of its existence in which all the ills of "this present evil world" were left behind.

Hence the intimations of nature that the spirit of man survives the passage of death fall short, when we seek proof from these sources of the blissful immortality which is the promised inheritance of the Christian. If I were asked for the basis on which our hope of a happy state in the eternal world rests, and was required to give the answer in a single word, that word would be CHRIST. Upon him hang all our hopes. In him all proofs center. He is the Light that illumines not only this world, but which casts its rays through the gloom that gathers around the mysteries of death, and reveals a Better Land. To me the future is not hopeless death, nor even a shadowy and uncertain existence, but a joyous and inspiring hope, because I believe with all my heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It is he "who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light." When the stone was rolled from the door of the sepulcher in which the body was lain it was rolled from the hopes of humanity, and when he came forth living it was not only a triumph over death, but the beginning of a new era, the birth of a new world.

I shall not take space to discuss the proofs of the resurrection of the crucified Lord. They have been ably considered in other portions of the series to which I am only contributing a part. It is sufficient now to quote the testimony of Dr. Thomas Arnold, of Rugby, Regius Professor of History in the University of Oxford, and himself the author of a number of valuable [407] historical works, who declares: "I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them; and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the mind of a fair inquirer, than that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

"Why should it be thought incredible that one should rise from the dead?" Indeed, this is far less incredible than to believe that the church which rose out of the tomb of Christ, based upon faith in his resurrection, was based upon a delusion; that the suffering martyrs, who gave up all that the world values, and endured every trial and sorrow that causes the world to shrink and shudder, were either deceived by the conviction that they had seen the Risen Lord, or were deceivers; and that Saul of Tarsus, the bitterest of persecutors, was transformed into the saintly Paul, the apostle, the apostle of prisons, stripes, weariness, painfulness, hunger, cold and nakedness, by an optical illusion! The resurrection of Jesus Christ must be accepted as a historical fact, unless we plant ourselves upon the dictum of Hume, accepted by Huxley, that "no testimony can prove a miracle."

Yet, if the resurrection of Jesus stood alone it would not furnish an impregnable basis for our hope. If the voice of Jesus had remained silent concerning the wonders of the divine love, and there had no promise of eternal life for man fallen from his lips, we would still be left in doubt concerning our future. Indeed, the resurrection did not take place, primarily, in order to demonstrate that we should live beyond the tomb. It was the primary purpose of the resurrection to demonstrate that the crucified Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The Sanhedrim condemned him to death for blasphemy because, in reply to their own question, he had affirmed his high claims. When they had nailed him to the cross, Sanhedrists, populace, and Roman soldiers, all taunted him with his inability to prove that he was the Christ by coming down. And when the lifeless [408] body was sealed in the tomb, they felt that the demonstration was complete, that

he was either a deluded fanatic or an impostor. So it would have been had the tomb held him. Had he seen corruption, the lot of mortality, his very name would have been forgotten. But he had affirmed, "On this rock," the rock of the fundamental truth that he is the Christ, the Son of God, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (the great unseen world of death) shall not prevail against it." The Jewish nation declared that these gates should prevail, and that question between the words of Christ and the Sanhedrim was at issue during the three days that the stone closed the door of the sepulcher, and of human hopes.

But on that glad Sunday morning the stone was rolled away! The sepulcher was empty! The Lord is risen indeed! The accounts of the women were not idle tales. Simon hath seen him! Nay, all have seen him but the skeptical Thomas. Nay, one week later, Thomas, convinced, exclaims, "My Lord and my God!" Five hundred disciples see him at once, and last of all, as one born out of due time, the raging persecutor sees him on the way to Damascus. Then on Pentecost, a mighty power descends on the little band of saints, and as Israel gathered in wonder, Peter declared to the men of Judea and Jerusalem that "Him whom ye have taken, and with wicked hands crucified and slain, God hath raised, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible that he be holden of it. * * * This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. * * * God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The gates of Hades did not prevail against this grand truth, the foundation of the church. The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus, the condemned, the crucified, is both Lord and Christ.

But if Lord and Christ, the seal of the living God is placed upon every word that has fallen from his tongue. When he, in the flesh, uttered those words in which Omnipotence seemed to [409] speak with human lips, "I am the Resurrection and the Life;" "I am come that ye may have life, and have it more abundantly;" "Because I live, ye shall live also;" "He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die;" "They that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they that hear shall live;" and when he declared that in the last day he should say to his followers, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you;" when he uttered these and many other words equally gracious, it was the voice of him who holds the Keys of Life, of Death and Hades, which spoke. When he, whom the resurrection demonstrates to be the "Brightness of the Father's glory," speaks, we who have heard him have heard the voice of the Father, whose offspring we are. And we know that if we have fellowship with his life and death that we shall have the fellowship of his resurrection also. He is Life; he is Immortality. Because he lives we shall live also.

Yet one more sweet thought full of hope comes from the demonstration that Jesus came into the world to show us, not only the Father's will, but the Father Himself. In him we behold how the Father loves us. We hear it in his words. He tells us that if we want a definition of God, it is comprehended in the one word LOVE. Yet love will never let what is loved die if it can have its will. He who loves a flower or a singing bird, is saddened if it dies. A mother's love would hold back her child as it is drawn towards the gates of death, and would even give her own life that it might live. Love would always dower the loved one with life. Hence, when we look up to the great God, and know as we see his face that we are gazing upon the depths of an utterable love, then there comes to us the unfaltering conviction that the Omnipotent Father is not deaf to his children's cry, will not thrust back the hands extended in supplication, and that even of his own will, because love is not death, but life, he will dower them with immortality and eternal peace. [410]

THE HOPE OF THE SAINTS.

When the risen Lord finally bade adieu to his disciples on the eastern, slope of the Mount of Olives and disappeared behind the curtain of the clouds, he left behind him a great and inspiring hope. That hope not only changed the lives of the disciples who had followed him on the earth, but has changed the current of human history. It was that which made the saints of the apostolic age disdain threats, trials, hardships, poverty, prisons, scourgings, sword and fagot, and move steadily onward in the work of imparting to the world their own blessed hope. It was the assurance of a glorious immortality bestowed by Christ, and in fellowship with Christ, that led those who turned away from Judaism or Paganism to the gospel to seek to purify themselves even as he is pure. When the philosophical historian seeks to account for the wonderful change that gradually shows itself in the moral condition of the world, he cannot fail to recognize the new hope as one of the most powerful factors. Pliny, in the closing years of the first century, takes note of the fact that this hope had disarmed the persecuting power of imperial Rome of all its terrors. What cared the saint for the flames of martyrdom when he felt a firm assurance that they were only another chariot of fire which would carry him, like the Tishbite, up to heaven and to God?

What was the nature of this hope which has been such an inspiration to mankind? When the Lord was about to go away from the earth he assured his disciples that he was going in order to prepare a place for them in his Father's house, and that he would return to take them to himself that they might dwell there with him. There seems good reason for believing, notwithstanding the positive statements of the Savior, that the time of his second personal coming was known only to the Father, that the early church was in expectation of his speedy appearance once more upon the earth. Yet they soon realized [411] the fulfillment of the promise in their own experiences. He came to Stephen when he was suffering a martyr's death, and the dying saint was permitted to look up and see the heavens opened and the Lord standing ready to receive him. So he came to James, the brother of John, when he was killed by the sword of Herod. So he came to apostles, saints and martyrs, and they obeyed the summons in the joyful expectation that what men call death is a deliverance, a great gain, a release from bondage, the passage to eternal honors.

The first fact that I wish to lay emphasis upon is, that they regarded death as an immediate deliverance. There was no thought of a sleep of ages upon ages before the eternal awakening. There is no hint of a long period of unconsciousness which lasts until the final trumpet of the archangel. There was no cloud across the heaven of their hope which suggested years or centuries of purgatorial suffering. On the other hand, the saints closed their eyes on the scenes of earth with the belief that they would at once open them in the brightness of that country which needs no sun.

To the penitent sufferer by his side the dying Savior said, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." As the martyred Stephen was suffering his death wounds, he saw the heavens already opened to receive him. The apostle Paul declares that if the earthly body is dissolved, there is ready another body, "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," and declares that "we groan" while clothed in the flesh for the heavenly clothing which our spirits shall wear when the earthly garments of the flesh shall be laid aside.

In the same connection (2 Cor. chap. 5) he says that to dwell in the body is to be absent from the Lord, and he declares that he would "rather be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." And again, in writing to the Philippians, he declares that for him to die would be gain; yet for him to continue to live in the flesh is of advantage to the churches; hence he "is in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is better." In the Pauline [412] theology death is simply the departure of the spirit from the body.

In the case of the Christian, the earthly tabernacle is dissolved, he departs from it; he then receives a new body fitted to his new sphere of existence; a spiritual body, a "building of God;" to depart from the body is to "be with Christ," or to listen to his call and go to dwell with him, and such a departure is "gain," "better" than to remain "in the flesh." This theology harmonizes fully with the facts stated in three of the gospels and alluded to by both Peter and John, that two of the Old Testament saints came back from their immortal homes to stand with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration and to converse with him over his approaching suffering.

It is in full harmony with the picture drawn of the future life by the Savior himself, in which he portrays all of the earthly actors in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as existing consciously in the future world, and Abraham and Lazarus as enjoying the bliss of Paradise. The New Testament hope of immortality, inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ, is a hope of an immediate passage through the darkness of death to the light of eternal day; of a deliverance from the pangs of the dying body to eternal bliss; of ending the journey of life by passing through the gates of that eternal city which has been sought by the saintly pilgrims of all the ages.

"But some will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" Surely not, as Mohammedans believe, with the bones, flesh and blood of the earthly body, even to the point that where limbs are amputated here, they are lost to the body forever. Certainly not, as Talmage has so vividly described, with the old body formed again by its scattered members being drawn together, from wherever they have been dissolved, back again, into the original earthly form. Rather, in the vigorous language of the great apostle: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. * * Thou sowest not that body which shall be. * * God giveth it a body as hath pleased him." Observe closely [413] the apostle's statements. The seed is planted and dissolved but lives again, not as a seed but as a stalk, or plant. It lives again in an entirely new form. To every kind of life is given the kind of body needed; to the bird a body suited to the air; to the fish a body suited to the water; to the beasts bodies suited to their sphere; to the stars a glory that is their own; to everything, everywhere, a glory and a form suited to its state.

"So also in the resurrection of the dead." On earth there was a body adapted to earthly condition. At death that earthly body was "sown" or planted in the earth. "It is sown in corruption," or subject, to corruption. "It is raised in incorruption. * * It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." Our earthly bodies, like that of the earthly Adam, are of earth; the new body, "the house not made with hands," is in the image of the heavenly man, the glorified body of Jesus Christ, for "as we have borne the image of the earthly, so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly." Then, to silence forever those who expect a sensual heaven in which they shall abide in the flesh eternally, he exclaims, "Now, this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." This, in its connection, can only have one meaning. Flesh and blood bodies, bodies made of corruptible earthly materials, are not compatible with a home in the world of redeemed and glorified spirits. The soul's tenement, if it have one, must be adapted to the new conditions of being.

Are we then denied a body in the future state? By no means. I may not be able to understand the nature of that body, because I have never seen such an existence, but I can accept the statements of the word of God and believe that it is exactly fitted to the happy sphere of glorified existence. It "is a building of God," it is made "as it hath pleased him," it is "a spiritual body," it is "incorruptible," it is "immortal," it is after the image of the heavenly man, and "our vile bodies are changed into the likeness of his glorified body." In order [414] to comprehend what this means do not look at the Lord when he was here in the form of a servant, but look at him as seen in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, and as revealed to John on

Patmos, shining with eternal splendors. What material of the old tabernacle may be used by the Lord in building the new form is unknown, but it is known that he does not use its flesh and blood. Hence, because these immortal bodies are freed from their earthly dross and from all the ills to which the present dwelling places of our souls are incident, there can never be in our eternal home "any more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

HEAVEN.

The existence of sinless man began in Paradise; the existence of man, after life's journey is over, if he has chosen his lot with the children of God, is in Paradise. "To him that overcometh," says Christ, "I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Paul, caught up into the third heaven, whether in the body or out of it he could not tell, calls it Paradise. The paradise of the infancy of our race is described as a garden, which is, indeed, the meaning of the term itself; the future home of the redeemed is pictured forth by the symbol of a city; the city for which the ancient saints were seeking; a city which hath eternal foundations; a city of which God is the builder. The earthly Jerusalem was for a thousand years the center of the worship of God's people on the earth, and in contrast with it the blessed home above is styled the Heavenly, and the New Jerusalem.

The teachers of the various religions which have been accepted by men have been wont to describe in detail the future home of those who are so happy as to gain their heaven. The Greeks portrayed the Elysian Fields in their richest strains; the savage Germans and Scandinavians painted eternal banquets in the halls of Odin, where mighty warriors quaffed [415] liquors from drinking cups made of, the skulls of slaughtered enemies. The Mohammedan heaven is a gigantic harem where the followers of the Prophet are surrounded by groups of beautiful Houris, and dwell forever among green trees, shady groves and sparkling fountains. The American Indian expected to go with his favorite dog and gun to the Happy Hunting grounds, where he would find abundance of game, and chase it forever. So each race has been wont to paint its heaven in the colors of earth, tinting it with those things which it loved best in the present life. On the other hand, the Scriptures are content to assure us of a heavenly home, a home prepared by the Savior, a blessed abode which trouble and pain can never enter, a home provided by the love of a Heavenly Father, and for some reason have failed to give us detailed descriptions. It is true that our poets have transferred into their songs the things that enter into their conceptions of a beautiful home, and we sing in our songs of "the green fields of Eden," "the fields that are eternally fair," "the glittering strand," "its gardens and pleasant greens," etc., but these pretty thoughts have been drawn from the imagination of the poets rather than from the word of God.

The paucity of details is due, I suppose, not to the unwillingness of our Heavenly Father to inform us, but to the limitations of our understanding. We can only understand what we have not seen by comparison. When we read or hear of a country we have not seen, a picture is impressed upon our minds by the words, and that picture is made of ideas drawn from things we have seen. Its mountains, lakes, rivers, animals, vegetation are all represented by images drawn from things within the bounds of our experience. The more enlarged our experience is, the better we can understand. Some things the child cannot understand, which will be clear to it when it becomes a man. Some things the savage cannot comprehend which are clear to the enlightened. Our state in heaven, heaven itself, our life, employments and enjoyments there, differ entirely from life and enjoyments in the flesh, and since there is nothing [416] within our present knowledge that we can make a standard of comparison, it is impossible for us to have clear and correct conceptions. If we now picture heaven, that picture is made up of earthly scenery, tinted in earthly colors.

Yet there are certain general features we can understand. Some persons have turned to the Book of Revelation and hung over its sublime imagery, as if these were literal descriptions of our eternal home; but we must remember that this is a book of symbols, and that this fact will not permit a strict adherence to the letter in seeking the meaning of its glowing visions. Revelation does not aim to teach us, as some have thought, that the ceaseless employment of heaven is eternal singing or praising, but that it is an abode of rapturous joy of which song and praise are the natural expressions. Nor are we to conclude that the heavenly city is literally paved with gold and fenced in with jasper walls and pearly gates, but that it is a splendid and glorious home beyond anything that mortal eye has ever seen. The seer of Patmos sees sweeping before the eyes of his soul visions of unearthly beauty though drawn in earthly colors, and blessed is he that reads and understands their real signification. In addition to these apparent descriptions, we rejoice in the thought that our own Lord and Savior arose from earth, ascended to heaven, and assured us that he was going in order to prepare a place for us in the Father's House. That place will be prepared by the hands of Love, and those hands are Omnipotent. We are therefore assured that it will lack no beauty, no comfort, no blessing, no good thing that God's great universe can supply.

With a few condensed thoughts which might be expanded into a volume, I must bring this article to a close. The first is, that no place can be heaven to any being who does not take heaven to it in his soul. Heaven is a state, as well as a place. No man can be happy unless he has the elements of happiness within. Some carry hell with them wherever they go. Heaven was a hell to Milton's Satan; heaven would be hell to the sinner [417] steeped in sin, hating God and righteousness. In order to have an eternal heaven, we must have the love of heaven, of God and heavenly things, planted in our souls while below.

In the second place, we gain some idea of the bliss of heaven by the eternal absence of the things that distress us here. These frail bodies of ours are often bundles of pain so severe that we sigh for release. There are those who are upon the rack day and night, and life is a long-drawn agony. How sweet the thought to these tired and weary ones; to all whose bodies are aching, whether it be from the burdens of toil or disease, to think of a home near at hand, where there is no pain any more, where strong crying and tears are unheard and unseen forever! These aching bodies of flesh and blood and nerve shall be exchanged for spiritual, incorruptible, undying bodies which will never get out of repair, and hence will never suffer pain. And this fact also excludes another of the dark shadows which clouds our earthly life. With such bodies there will be no death in the eternal home, no funerals, no broken circles, no bereaved hearts, no mourners, none of that great sorrow that cometh sooner or later to every earthly household, and the dread of whose coming always casts a gloom.

Then, again, the curse of this present world is sin. Sin unsheathes the sword, devastates a country with war, burns cities, turns brutal soldiery upon wives and daughters, opens the saloon, the gambling den, and the brothel, beggars millions of our race, poisons with slander, cheats, robs, murders, and indeed perpetuates every wrong that fills the world with wretchedness. Who hath not felt its bitter sting! Who hath not known the sorrow of unmerited wrong! Who hath not traced his greatest misery to the presence of sin in this world! In view of this sad experience of our race there is no statement concerning the heavenly city which contains sweeter comfort than the assurance that "there shall no sin enter there." "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they which are [418] written in the Lamb's book of life." Not in the holy city, but "without, are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Never in that blessed abode shall the righteous soul be grieved by the sight of impurity or wrong; never shall the saint endure the sting of an angry, spiteful or slanderous tongue. There shall no shadow fall upon

the spirit, no penalty for broken law, nor shall there "be any more curse," because the defiling touch of sin shall never stain that pure and holy home of the redeemed. There will be no discord in heaven, but union and peace forevermore.

I shall not draw upon my imagination for the employments of the happy dwellers. They will not be idle, nor will their employments be useless. They have on earth worked the work of God, and they will work it still; their earthly life has been a continual growth in divine knowledge, and heaven will not bring that growth to its end. If there be work forever for the angels, surely there will be work for God's redeemed children. But one of the most delightful prospects of heaven is the blessed company that shall gather in the holy, happy land. Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, is made to speak of the worthies beyond, whom he expects to see when he passes through the gates of which the hemlock was to be the key. And what a holy and happy reunion will be ours on the celestial shores! Not only will we be greeted by our own sainted dead, the loved ones whom regretful memory still keeps near us, but also by the grand heroes of whom the world was not worthy, who have laid themselves upon the altar of humanity. In that heavenly society we will meet Judson, and Luther, and Savonarola, and the mighty host of sufferers, male and female, who loved not their own lives; the ever glorious Paul, and the other members of that immortal band of apostles, evangelists and martyrs who put in motion the new forces that changed the world; the sweet and blessed women who told the first news of the Risen Lord; and there, too, will "gather many from the east and the west [419] who will sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob," and the rest of the men of God of the infant world.

"There the saints of all ages in harmony meet,
Their Savior and brethren transported to greet;
While the anthems of rapture unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul."

When the day comes for the parting of the nations of men, will it be found that your name, dear reader, is recorded in the Book of Life? [420]

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