

The Kindness of the King

Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven

Scripture: 2 Samuel 9

And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

—2 Samuel 9:3

In the passage that we read, we see King David serving as a type of King Jesus. Let's consider these rich and glorious parallels from this history of David's interaction with Mephibosheth and Christ's interactions with needy sinners. Our theme is “The Kindness of the King”: 1) It reveals his tender heart; 2) It reveals his true subjects; 3) It reveals his lavish provision.

The King's Tender Heart

The kindness of the King *reveals his tender heart*. In 2 Samuel 7:1 we read that David had rest from all his enemies. And now as he sits upon his throne, he is able to give attention to matters other than warfare. And what is it that operates behind the tender heart of King David?

First of all, there is *commitment*. He has committed himself to show kindness to the house of Saul. As he sits upon his throne he thinks about his covenant made with

Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:14–16a, “And thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not: but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house forever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David.” It is because of this covenant that David now remembers the promise made. He has committed himself to do this and not to do it would mean that he would break his promise to Jonathan.

And how does this reveal the tender heart of God our King? Is it also not in his commitment to us? He covenanted with Christ in eternity to show kindness to His people. He remembers His covenant to eternity. This kindness is vividly displayed for us in the cross of Jesus Christ, where the Lord declares His commitment to sinners such as we are. The Lord has shown this same commitment to David in 2 Samuel 7. He negotiates with David out of sheer and sovereign grace, and He does the same in the preaching of the gospel.

Second, there is *kindness*. David asks, “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (v. 1). In verse 3, David repeats the question. He is eager to show kindness, “Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?” Notice how David describes this kindness. It is not just kindness that wells up in his heart. No, it is kindness that is rooted in God’s kindness to him. The word “kindness” actually means covenant faithfulness. David is asking whether he can demonstrate the covenant faithfulness of God to any of Saul’s house. This is an astounding question because kings in the ancient Near East would never spare the descendants of a dynasty that had fallen for fear of reprisal and rebellion. They would all be annihilated, but here David asks if he might show

covenant faithfulness to the house of Saul for Jonathan's sake! He seeks to show kindness to an enemy dynasty!

And this question comes to us as well. The Lord calls to sinners through the gospel: "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake? Is there yet any that is left of My enemy's house that I may show him kindness for the sake of Christ?" Remember the house of Saul was a house marked by disobedience, a house that in all respects should have been annihilated. Is that not true of us? We deserve to die because of our rebellion. And yet we hear this gospel question, "Is there yet any left?" Sin is unkind. People can be unkind. The devil is unkind, but the Lord offers His kindness, His covenant faithfulness for sinners for the sake of Christ. David is doing this for the sake of Jonathan. As he asked this question, no doubt the love for Jonathan continued strongly even after his death, and as David asked this question he saw only Jonathan. That is how God is favorable towards sinners. He shows kindness for the sake of Christ. He sees Christ and He shows kindness for the sake of His beloved Son! Are there yet any—even those who deserve to be annihilated—to whom I can show kindness for Christ's sake?

Thirdly, there is the *discovery*, or the answer to David's questions. In response to the first question, the servants of David discover Ziba, a man who had served Saul. Having found Ziba, David aims the question at him and Ziba responds in verse 3, "Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet." It is not Mephibosheth who discovers David and pleads for mercy and kindness, but it is David who discovers Mephibosheth. "And where is he?" asks David. Ziba answers, "Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar." And what is significant about that? Well, you probably know the history of Mephibosheth. He was forced to flee when David

ascended the throne, and so he is in exile, in hiding. His name means “scatterer of shame.” He is in Lodebar, a city whose name means “nothing.” He does not have much going for him, does he?

But aren’t we so much like Mephibosheth in a spiritual way? We too, are in exile because of sin. We have been banished from Paradise, from the continual presence of God, but now God enquires of us where we are: “Where are you?” Perhaps you have never gone to the Lord Jesus before and you tremble at the thought because you fear doing it unworthily, but the Lord is seeking you out: “Where are you?” Perhaps you’ve gone before but tremble because of your sins, “Where are you?” The Lord knows where we are. We are in our own Lodebar of sin and banishment. He knows the shame and guilt you carry. And that is where God finds sinners. He knows the week that you’ve had—the struggles, the temptations, the sins—and that’s where He finds us. What a blessing it is to be found by King Jesus in such a state! He does not require more or less. He is a sovereign, gracious, wise, and loving King and He tenderly yet firmly draws sinners out of darkness, shame, and even death, into His presence.

This powerful and drawing kindness of Christ is what we see reflected in the heart of King David as he issues his summons to Mephibosheth. In verse 5 we read, “Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar.” The summons that Mephibosheth hears from the mouths of David’s servants sets him free and will restore him again because of the kindness of the king.

We too, receive the summons of our King. We are called from Lodebar, from the nothing of sin. The Lord not only finds us there, but summons us from our hiding, from our exile. What gracious words these are: “Then king David sent, and fetched him.” That is what the Lord

does for sinners. He sends His Son and He fetches us from the darkness of banishment. He summons us into His glorious presence so that we might be recipients of His kindness. This leads us to confess,

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found, was found of thee.

The King's True Subjects

The kindness of the King *reveals his true subjects*. The kindness of King David led him to search for any of the house of Saul. It did not matter that Ziba told him that Mephibosheth was lame in both his feet. “Is there yet *any?*” He is looking for subjects upon whom to bestow kindness, regardless of their condition.

The kindness of the king is lavished upon an impotent man. You say, “That’s easy. Mephibosheth was lame and hardly posed a threat to King David, so it was easy for David to show kindness to Mephibosheth.” That makes it all the more difficult. It would have been very easy for David to ignore Mephibosheth, don’t you think? Who would show kindness to a cripple? Better to leave him than love him. But that is not what David does. He shows kindness to an impotent man. This man has nothing to offer David in return. He is lame. He can’t work. He will only be presuming on the king’s kindness. A most unworthy recipient, and yet David summons this lame man.

To whom does God seek to show kindness here? I pray the spiritual parallel is obvious. We too, are much like Mephibosheth in our hearts. We are impotent. We are spiritually lame, unable to move, powerless to lift a finger for our salvation, and God comes in order to show kindness to sinners for the sake of His Son. It is easier

for God to leave us in Lodebar, in our self-imposed exile, but He does not do that. He comes and summons us and reveals His tender heart of kindness for sinners. In David's actions we see Mephibosheth's impotency come to light in its starkest reality. This man can do nothing and can only hope upon the good pleasure of the king. So too, for us, God's action and kindness bring to light our utter impotency and our utter dependence upon the mercy and kindness of God. Are we coming with such a disposition to Christ? God delights to show mercy to unworthy recipients: "Is there yet any of the house of Saul?" Come from Lodebar my friends, and see the heart of God in Christ, a heart of mercy and kindness for impotent sinners! Are there sons of Jonathan, who are lame in your feet? Even after the grace we receive, this is still our condition. When Mephibosheth dined at the king's table, our passage ends with these words in verse 13, "And was lame on both his feet." What mercy and grace are displayed here for impotent sinners! These are the true recipients of the King's kindness. He bids the helpless, the weak, the impotent to come into His presence and enjoy His fellowship!

Furthermore, David's kindness reveals a worshiping subject. We read in verse 6 that when Mephibosheth appears in the presence of David, he falls on his face and does reverence. You can almost imagine the scene. A man enters the royal court, on crutches or being carried, and he awkwardly falls before the king. There is nothing dignified in the actions of this cripple, but his posture tells us that he honors the king. In verse 8, he bows again. He fears the king and he honors him. He does not presume upon the kindness of the king. He knows he deserves to be a dead man.

Friends, do we know our place before the Lord? Do we do reverence before the LORD? Do we recognize that what we rightfully deserve is death because of rebellion and

sin, but that the Lord summons us into His glorious presence and we are in that presence even now, that heaven is opened as it were as we worship God? What is the posture of crippled sinners to be before our gracious and merciful King? Let us fall on our faces and reverence the Lord, who is worthy of all our praises. The Lord is concerned about our hearts. Even if we hobble into the presence of the King, does the kindness of the King reveal in us a heart of reverence and worship?

The king's kindness also reveals an obedient subject. In verse 6b, David calls out, "Mephibosheth." The king has intimate knowledge of this man lying in a heap before him. What fear must have struck Mephibosheth as David called out his name! The king is seated on his majestic throne and the name of this impotent man echoes through the royal chambers with authority. And how does Mephibosheth answer? "Behold, thy servant!" He takes a posture of obedience. He is ready to do what the king requires. He is at the mercy of the king.

Is that how you approach the Lord? The Lord calls out personally through the gospel, "Mephibosheth." Perhaps you fear and tremble at the sound of the Lord's voice as He summons you from His throne and into His presence. This is not a trifling matter. It is the voice of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Will you show an obedient heart like Mephibosheth? Will you be obedient to the command of our King when He calls you personally? Will you say, "Behold, thy servant"?

The king's kindness also reveals a humble subject. The kindness of King David does not just leave Mephibosheth quivering and quaking in fear. No, David speaks words of unbelievable kindness in verse 7: "Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." Imagine the

impact of these words! These words are almost unbelievable. They are overwhelming. Here is a man expecting to die, expecting to be hauled away to the executioner, and he hears this: “Fear not.” He hears this: “Surely you will receive kindness, restoration, fellowship.” This is too much for Mephibosheth, and in verse 8, he bows himself and says, “What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?” Mephibosheth bows in abject humility. He feels his utter unworthiness in these moments. Literally he says, “What is your servant that you should turn towards a dead dog like me?” David was supposed to turn away his favor from Mephibosheth, but he turns it towards this lame man, who by all customs and traditions should have been annihilated. He sees himself as a dead dog, despised and unfit for the kindness of the king.

This displays for us the wonder of grace and our response to it. When God speaks to us in this way in His Son, when He desires to have dealings with you, and when He finds you in your impotency and shame, it is so overwhelming, it is so contrary to our expectations. We deserve to die, and yet King Jesus removes the obstacle of fear. We have nothing to bring, but Jesus says, “I will restore what sin has destroyed and ruptured.” We have nothing to plead, but God says, “I will show kindness for the sake of my Son.” We now have something to plead, the Name of Christ. We are lonely, weak, and malnourished without God, and God says, “You will eat at my table continually.” Lord, what is Thy servant that Thou shouldest turn towards a dead dog like me? We feel despised and unworthy, much like Peter in Luke 5:8, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man O Lord.” Do we display this abject humility in the face of such grace and kindness? This too, is the kindness of God! It is the sheer goodness of God that leads sinners to repentance and humility.

The King's Lavish Provision

The kindness of the King *reveals his lavish provision.* But the king's kindness did not change upon the feelings of Mephibosheth. These feelings only demonstrated all the more his need of the kindness of the king. That is true of us as well. Our feelings and our unworthiness do not change the lavish provision of King Jesus for our souls. And that is what we see reflected in David's actions towards Mephibosheth. King David in his kindness lavishes all kinds of provision upon Mephibosheth.

First of all, Mephibosheth receives the restoration of his inheritance. In verse 7 David says, "I will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father." In verse 9, he tells Ziba what he has done for Mephibosheth, "I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. In verse 10, part of that inheritance includes Ziba and his household as servants to Mephibosheth: "Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits.... Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants." This was a sizable inheritance, to be managed by so many! And then in verse 12 this aspect of servants is reinforced: "And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth." David withholds nothing. He gives the inheritance, but he also gives those to minister to Mephibosheth so that he might enjoy this inheritance.

What are the spiritual parallels? Does the Lord not lavish upon His adopted children a glorious inheritance? Mephibosheth had no right to this inheritance that David gave him, neither do we have a right to the inheritance that is stored up in Christ, but we receive it out of grace alone! What was lost because of the fall of Adam in Paradise is restored to us in Christ. These are the words of God to us in the gospel, "I will restore thee *all* the land of Saul thy father." He gave His Son to execute His will. He

gives His Spirit as a down payment for what is to come. He gives His servants to bring in the fruit so that we might enjoy the inheritance we have in Christ. We are restored to holiness, righteousness, and our eternal reward of grace stored up in heaven for us. We now have the right to this inheritance, not because of who we are, but because Christ has secured this inheritance for us, and He has the power and the willingness and authority to confer that inheritance. This is the kindness of the King.

Second, David treats Mephibosheth as one of his own sons. Imagine Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom, and later Solomon, all the rest of the sons and daughters of David, all accomplished princes and princesses enjoying the privileges of being the king's sons and daughters, all sitting around the table. In hobbles Mephibosheth on his crutches, perhaps a servant assisting him, and he sits down at the king's table. Not the servants' table, but at the king's table as a son! In verse 11, we read these words, "As for Mephibosheth, *said the king*, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons." We are inclined to focus on the fact that Mephibosheth ate at the king's table, but he did so as one of the king's sons. What a turn of events for Mephibosheth! It is such a contrast from where he had been so recently. The king could well have killed him and now he is treated as one of the king's sons, adopted into the family of the king! This scatterer of shame from the city of nothing is exalted to the position of the king's son! Orphaned from the family of Saul, Mephibosheth is now treated as David's son! What grace and kindness are displayed here! What lavish provision!

What a picture of the lavish provision that you have in Christ your King, if you are indeed one of His true subjects! He exalts transformed sinners to the position of sons of the King. We are adopted into the King's family. We are called from time to time to the table of King

Jesus and he bids us come not as servants but as sons. We enjoy all the privileges of adoption. We who are like Mephibosheth, lame and impotent, full of shame and from the city of nothing, of vanity, are bidden to come as sons to the King's table. By nature, we who are sons of Adam and orphaned from the family of God, are by grace again adopted into the family of God for the sake of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ! Mephibosheth dined with sons and daughters who were born into the royal family. None of us is born into the royal family by nature, but we are adopted into the family of God by grace. And that is how we are invited to come now. Not as servants, but as sons. "How deep the Father's love for us...to make a wretch His treasure!" This is the kindness of the King.

Finally, Mephibosheth is lavished with strength and fellowship at the king's table. It is after all the king's table. In verse 10 we read, "But Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread always at my table." In verse 13, "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table." This was not simply a one-time meal, a passing dream for Mephibosheth. He was guaranteed a perpetual place at the table of the king so long as he lived. He would receive strength, sustenance and fellowship at the king's table with the king himself. He receives royal bounty and royal fellowship. Who could ask for more?

And what a spiritual parallel with the Lord's Supper! We can call it the King's table, where He delights to sit down with His guests and feed them with royal bounty, with Himself, and strengthens them and fellowships and communes with them and assures them that this is no passing dream, no illusion, but they are guaranteed a perpetual place at His Table, both now and into eternity: "We will eat at the king's table continually." For now, we enjoy the spiritual presence of Christ at the table, but there will

be a day where we shall see him face to face and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Meditate on this the next time that communion is celebrated. This is the kindness of the King.

And how does Mephibosheth respond? We do not read a direct response to the kindness of King David, but we do read that Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem and dined at the King's table. He fellowshiped with King David as a son. But there is another marker in the text that indicates where Mephibosheth's heart was in regard to God's provision for him. In verse 12 we read this: "And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha." Presumably, Mephibosheth had this son after he was welcomed into the king's family. The name of his young son stands as a testimony for the kindness of God received by Mephibosheth because Micha means, "Who is like unto our God?" Indeed, who is like our God that lavishes this kindness upon impotent and needy sinners, transforming them into sons. Mephibosheth's life was full of the fear of God. Is yours, dear believer?

Finally, one more practical gospel application that flows from this beautiful and profound narrative. Someone once called this history, "Kingdom Policy for the Disabled." If this is how David dealt with Mephibosheth and how Christ has dealt with you, then this is a kingdom policy for His people to follow too. Is there yet someone to whom you can show God's kindness, whether spiritually or physically disabled, and yet in the city of nothing, waiting to be restored through God's kindness? Will you carry out this kingdom policy? David was doing this because of what God had done for him. Will we do the same for the sake of our Savior? May we ever live out of the kindness of our King and show that kindness to others. Amen.

The Satisfying and Nourishing Word of God

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Scripture: Psalm 19

Hunger is an all-consuming passion. When a baby is hungry, you can give him toys, play with him, change his diaper, rock him, lay him down to sleep, and sing to him, but he will be restless and unhappy—and likely let you know it in the loudest of ways—until you satisfy his hunger. Babies grow up into men and women with more self-control, but when people are hungry, they are not happy and have trouble concentrating on anything except food. When people are desperately hungry and their bodies are starving, they will do almost anything to get food.

Therefore, it is hard to imagine the experience of our Lord Jesus Christ when He went for forty days and forty nights without food. He was not fasting in a comfortable place surrounded by friends, but alone in the wilderness of Judea, an area known for its hot, dry climate. If He had continued to fast much longer, it seems likely that He would have begun to die of starvation.¹ Yet Christ chose to

1. Although the effects of fasting vary depending on health and hydration, severe starvation generally sets in after 35 to 40 days, during which the body cannibalizes the protein of its own muscles and organs to survive, leading to death after anywhere from 45 to 60 days of no nutrition, occasionally longer. Peter

do this. Why? It was not because Jesus was an ascetic who thought the pleasures of this life are inherently sinful. Christ chose to endure the hunger of the body for a time because He had a far greater hunger. As He Himself said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Christ hungered for the truth, life, and power of God’s Word.

God’s Word reveals that Christ must be the last or second Adam and defeat the devil’s temptations through the power of faith and the suffering of obedience. Christ must succeed where the first Adam failed in trusting and obeying the Word of God. And Christ did succeed, because He hungered and thirsted for God’s revelation of saving, sustaining truth more than for life itself. He told His disciples in John 4:34, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” In order that “the scripture might be fulfilled,” Christ endured wracking, unquenched thirst upon the cross as He suffered for hell-worthy sinners like us and completed the work of redemption (John 19:28–30).

Although Christ’s calling to obey and suffer for the salvation of His people was a unique calling, His hunger for the Word is a model for us all. In the wilderness of Judea, Christ quoted Moses’s words concerning how God had led Israel through the wilderness of Sinai. Moses said that the Lord had humbled them and trained them to live in absolute dependence and obedience to God’s Word: “that he might make thee know that man doth not live

Janiszewski, “The Science of Starvation: How Long Can Humans Survive without Food or Water,” *Plos Blogs*, May 13, 2011, <http://blogs.plos.org/obesitypanacea/2011/05/13/the-science-of-starvation-how-long-can-humans-survive-without-food-or-water/>; Thomas C. Weiss, “The Phases of Starvation—What Happens When We Starve,” *Disabled World*, February 1, 2016, rev. January 18, 2018, <https://www.disabled-world.com/fitness/starving.php>.

by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Deut. 8:3). This is a lesson that God the Father is teaching His children in all times through their many trials. The Word of God, as the great object of our dependence and obedience, must be our greatest hunger, our persistent appetite, and our most savory delight. It is our blessed duty (and privilege!) to feed upon the Word all our lives.

With God’s help, I wish to consider with you in this sermon, based on Psalm 19:7–14, the theme, “The Satisfying and Nourishing Word of God” in two thoughts: our delight in God’s nourishing Word and our duty toward God’s nourishing Word.

Our Delight in God’s Nourishing Word

The Holy Scriptures abound with testimony that God’s Word is the satisfying and nourishing food of our souls. Psalm 119:103 says, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” In Proverbs 8–9, God’s Wisdom invites all people to come and enjoy the bread of understanding and the wine of knowledge (Prov. 8:1–11; 9:1–5). Jeremiah had a very difficult ministry, but he declares in Jeremiah 15:16, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.” God said to Ezekiel, “Open thy mouth, and eat [what] I give thee,” and the prophet ate God’s Word and said, “It was in my mouth as honey for sweetness” (Ezek. 2:8; 3:3).

Why is God’s Word such savory and nutritious food for our souls? David explains in Psalm 19 that it is because of the Bible’s attributes and operations as the inspired Word of God:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul:
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart:

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever:

The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. (Ps. 19:7–9)

Mark these attributes of God’s Word: it is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and righteous. Although the very heavens above us declare the glory of God, as David said earlier in this psalm, only God’s Word brings the knowledge of God and His will into such sharp focus and fullness of detail so that we can know Him personally as our Rock and Redeemer. Mark as well the effects and operations of God’s Word: it is the Holy Spirit’s effectual means of salvation and sanctification. John Calvin said, “Since God in vain calls all peoples to himself by the contemplation of heaven and earth, this [God’s Word] is the very school of God’s children.”²

The Bible is divinely designed for effective application (2 Tim. 3:16). It is not a textbook for mere intellectual theology, but doctrine for life, “truth in order to goodness,” as the Old Princeton divines saw it. This is one reason for the great variety of ways or forms in which its books are written. William Ames said that the Holy Scripture reveals God and His will “by stories, examples, precepts, exhortations, admonitions, and promises. This style best fits the common usage of all sorts of men and also greatly

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.6.4.

affects the will by stirring up pious motives, which is the chief end of theology.”³

At every point, Psalm 19 tells us that God’s Word is the answer to our fallen condition in Adam, for the Word reveals Jesus Christ, “the bread of life” (John 6:35).⁴

- First, the Word nourishes us by “converting the soul” (Ps. 19:7), which may be translated “restoring the soul” (KJV mg.). The phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible for reviving or restoring someone’s life by giving food to the hungry (Lam. 1:11, 19). Adam and Eve fell into disobedience to God’s Word by lustng after forbidden food (Gen. 3:1–6), but God’s Word is the spiritual food that gives life to sinners.
- Second, the Word nourishes us by “making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7). Satan enticed Adam and Eve with the lie that disobedience would make them “as gods, knowing good and evil,” so that they would be “wise” (Gen. 3:5–6). But, “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22). God’s Word is “able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).
- Third, the Word nourishes us by “rejoicing the heart” (Ps. 19:8). Eve coveted the forbidden fruit because Satan deceived her into thinking it was “good,” “pleasant,” and “to be desired” (Gen. 3:6). Instead of joy, our first parents tasted death. God’s Word brings us back into fellowship with the triune God and with each other, so that our joy may be full (1 John 1:3–4).

3. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.34.19 (187–88).

4. For what follows, see D. J. A. Clines, “The Tree of Knowledge and the Law of Yahweh (Psalm XIX),” *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 1 (1974): 9–13; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalm 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 19, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 182–83.

- Fourth, the Word nourishes us by “enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:8). When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, “the eyes of them both were opened,” but only to a new experience of shame and fear as God’s enemies (Gen. 3:7–8). Man’s heart became darkened by sin and idolatry (Rom. 1:21–23). God’s Word illuminates us so that we walk in knowledge, hope, life, and power as God’s forgiven and adopted children (Eph. 1:17–19).
- Fifth, the Word nourishes us by “enduring for ever” (Ps. 19:9). Because Adam dishonored God by not listening to His Word, God gave mankind over to death (Gen. 2:17; 3:19). We have become shadows on the earth (Job 8:9), and our lives are but a vapor that quickly passes away (James 4:14). But the Word of the Lord “abideth for ever,” and by it God’s Spirit causes us to be “born again” into eternal life (1 Pet. 1:22–23). This living and abiding Word is the incorruptible seed of eternal life in Christ (1 Pet. 1:23–25).
- Sixth, the Word nourishes us by being “true and righteous altogether” (Ps. 19:9). Adam’s fall corrupted our entire being with sin so that every purpose of our hearts became evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). God’s Word is the seed of the righteous God, which when planted in us, sends down roots into our innermost being, and produces the good fruit of new obedience to His commands (Mark 4:8).
- Seventh, the Word nourishes us in all these ways because it is the Word of “the LORD.” Psalm 19:7–9 repeats the name of “the LORD” six times. This is God’s covenant name, Jehovah, by which He revealed Himself to Israel as the ever-living God, the faithful Redeemer and the sovereign King. He has promised salvation to His people, and all who trust in Jesus Christ will inherit it. This is the secret of God’s Word: it is not merely a collection of human words,

but the Word of the covenant Lord, and in it we meet the living God who speaks to us both of judgment and salvation. God's Word is the means by which God establishes a covenant relationship between Himself and us through Jesus Christ.

Have you opened your mouth and eaten the Word of God? That is to say, have you received the Holy Scriptures as the bread and wine of your soul? Do you believe that this Book is the Word of God, not just man's word about God but God's Word to man? Have you experienced its life-giving, life-changing, life-sustaining effects?

If the Bible is just dead letters on a page to you, that is because you lack the Holy Spirit of God. As Calvin said, it is by "the secret energy of the Spirit" that "we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits."⁵ The Holy Spirit is "the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears."⁶ If you are blind to the beauty and glory of God's Word, then you do not have the power to heal yourself. But you may be like blind Bartimaeus when he heard that Jesus was passing by. Cry out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me," and do not stop your crying until Christ opens your eyes by faith in His Word (cf. Mark 10:46–52).

If you know, believe, and have experienced that the Bible is the Word of life, then give all glory to God through Jesus Christ, who by His Holy Spirit has made the Word to be life and salvation unto you. Cherish the Word. Feed upon the Word. Beware of anything that would draw you away from the Word—which is exactly what Satan and this world labor to do. And be faithful to carry out your duty toward the Word.

5. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

6. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.4.

Our Duty toward God's Nourishing Word

God's Word does not work automatically apart from our minds and wills, but calls for a response from us—indeed, demands a response. Just as we must ingest, chew, swallow, and digest our food for it to strengthen our bodies, so we must receive God's Word, hearing it with faith in our hearts, and hiding it in our hearts, for it to save and sanctify our souls. The Lord says in Isaiah 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." What is this feast God offers for free? Verse 3 says it is the hearing of God's Word: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." Paul tells us, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Such faith is likewise nourished and sustained by the Word. Peter says to all believers, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2).

Again, we find a model of a proper response to God's Word in Psalm 19, especially verses 10–14:

More to be desired are they than gold,
yea, than much fine gold:
sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them is thy servant warned:
and in keeping of them there is great reward.
Who can understand his errors?
cleanse thou me from secret faults.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me:
then shall I be upright,
and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of
my heart,
be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength,
and my redeemer.

These words both describe the response of a true believer to God's Word, and prescribe to us our duty that we must obediently follow in order to walk with God more and more:

- First, we must love God's Word, treasuring it more "than gold, yea, than much fine gold," and delighting in it as "sweeter also than honey" (Ps. 19:10). Such love springs from faith in the gospel for salvation. Psalm 119:174 says, "I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight." If we long for Christ, then we must long also to become like Christ in obedience to God's laws. Paul wrote in Romans 7:12, 22, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.... For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." An inward pleasure or relish in the holiness of keeping God's commandments shows that we are truly converted. John wrote in 1 John 2:3, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." When obedience is born of love, then it is a delight: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Charles Bridges wrote, "Duties become privileges when Christ is their source and life."⁷
- Second, we must listen to God's Word as God's servants so that by it we may be warned of what displeases our Lord and instructed in how to obtain God's "great reward" (Ps. 19:11). Have the attitude expressed by young Samuel: "Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:9). Every time the Bible is opened, we must remember and, if we are in Christ, look forward to that day when God will open the books of judgment and call us to account for all that

7. Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119* (1827, repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 471.

we have said and done. Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 sums up the matter: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” Therefore, listen with a profound sense that you need God to teach you His ways. Psalm 25:4–5 says, “Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.” When you open the Bible, do you do so with an attitude that says, “Lord, show me Thy ways”? Approach the Bible saying, “O LORD, truly I am thy servant” (Ps. 116:16).

- Third, we must look to God’s saving grace promised in His Word. David confesses the deceitful depth of his sins (“Who can understand his errors?”), and seeks grace for justification or acquittal from his guilt: “cleanse thou me from secret faults” (Ps. 19:12).⁸ He seeks grace for sanctification: “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (v. 13). If we do not cultivate this kind of dependence upon God’s justifying and sanctifying grace, we will either neglect or turn away from God’s Word or we will become Pharisees who distort it to maintain our external self-righteousness.
- Fourth, we must long to please God by meditating on His Word, obeying His Word, and speaking His Word to others. David teaches us to pray, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight” (Ps. 19:14). Meditation is

8. The verb translated “cleanse” (*naqah*) means to be acquitted, free from guilt or punishment. See Gen. 24:8, 41; Ex. 20:7; 21:19; 34:7; Num. 5:19, 31; 14:18; Deut. 5:11.

the chewing, swallowing, and inward digesting of our spiritual food by continuing to think about what God says and how it applies to our lives. William Greenhill explained, “Digest the truths thou hearest, by serious meditation, and by faith that they may become thy nutriment, and thou mayst feel the power and efficacy of them in thy heart, and act accordingly.”⁹ We must meditate on God’s Word not only as servants, but also as sons and daughters who love their heavenly Father and desire more than anything to please Him. This is the heartbeat of the fear of the Lord. Anthony Burgess said, “There is nothing done in secret, but thy Father seeth it. There is no heart-pride, no heart-earthliness, but thy Father seeth it. There is never a time thou prayest, hearest the word, but thy Father seeth with what form of spirit it is. Oh therefore if thou art a son of God, thou wilt discover it in thy whole carriage [show it in your whole course of life]: a son feareth the frowns of his father; I dare not do this; my father will be offended.”¹⁰

- Fifth, we must lean, more and more, on the Savior revealed in God’s Word. David concludes his psalm by praying, “O LORD, my strength [literally, as the marginal note reads: “my rock”], and my redeemer” (Ps. 19:14). These are words of trust (Ps. 18:2), a personal confession of faith, indicating that our greatest duty toward God’s Word is faith in Christ. Here we find the seventh use of God’s name (“LORD”) in this psalm, showing that God’s Word calls us to rest our hearts upon the faithful Savior and only Mediator of the covenant of grace. Christ is the center of the Bible’s message from beginning to end. Let us never

9. William Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, ed. James Sherman (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 96.

10. Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or, a Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: by A. Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), 239.

fall into the grave error of searching the Scriptures to find the way of eternal life while turning a blind eye to the fact that they all, with one accord, testify of Christ, and Christ alone as the way, the truth, and the life (John 5:39; 14:6).

It is important to note that the third, fourth, and fifth duties I have mentioned all appear in Psalm 19 in the form of prayers. Prayer is faith taking hold of the Word of God, and seeking all that God promises to us in His Word. Douglas Kelly writes that all true knowledge of God “lives and breathes in an atmosphere of prayer.”¹¹ John Owen said he who studies the Scriptures must “abide in fervent supplications, in and by Jesus Christ, for supplies of the Spirit of grace, to lead him into all truth.” Owen warned that any man who undertakes to interpret any portion of Scripture without praying to God for the Holy Spirit to instruct him greatly provokes God for that man acts in pride and ignorance.¹² Therefore, pray every time you open the Bible in your devotions or family worship. Pray in preparation for public worship for the preachers of God’s Word. Pray for missionaries and Bible teachers around the world. Ask God for illumination to understand the Bible and sanctifying grace to believe and obey it. And thank God for every drop of blessing received through the Word.

One reason why we must pray is that we need supernatural strength if we will think clearly and act boldly against this wicked world. To delight in God’s Word, it

11. Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church, Volume 1, The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 48.

12. John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 4:204–205.

is necessary that we do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way “of sinners” nor sit in the “seat of the scornful” (Ps. 1:1–2). It’s not easy being different. Greenhill said the “example of others is like a mighty torrent that carries down all before it.”¹³ Flood waters have immense force to move boulders, uproot trees, and destroy buildings and bridges. A mere six inches of fast-moving flood water can knock a man over.¹⁴ When we try to stand against popular tastes, prejudices, preferences, or practices, we are like men trying to wade upstream through a flood. But Christ is sufficient. Greenhill imagined how Christ might answer our fears about proclaiming the truth in the face of opposition. We might say, “Lord, if I do this I will lose my friends,” but Christ answers, “I am your friend, your best friend.” We might say, “I will alienate my family from me,” but Christ replies, “I am your brother, for I took your very nature to suffer for you and make you a child of God.” We might say, “Great and powerful men will become my enemies,” but Christ says, “I am greater than they, and my throne is above all thrones.” Therefore, Greenhill said, “Do not make the manners of the world the rule of your life, nor the worship of the world the rule of your worship, but look higher.”¹⁵

The Westminster divines summed up our duties toward God’s nourishing Word by saying, “The holy scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to

13. Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 93.

14. National Weather Service, “Turn Around Don’t Drown,” <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/water/tadd/tadd-intro.shtml> (accessed October 6, 2014).

15. Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 93.

the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.”¹⁶ Furthermore, if you are a preacher of God’s Word, then stand in awe of your calling and let nothing distract you from the ministry of the Word. As William Perkins wrote in the flyleaf of his books, “Thou art a minister of the Word; mind thy business.”¹⁷

Conclusion

What an unspeakable blessing we receive when we do our duty and feed upon God’s Word in a regular, humble, diligent, faithful manner! For in the Word, we find Christ, the Bread of life, who alone can satisfy us forever. And in Christ, the Mediator, we find God, who is the fountain of life and the fullness of joy.

Perhaps you do not have a regular time to read the Bible and pray. If that’s the case, then start now. Resolve that by God’s grace you will not let another day of your life pass without reading and meditating on God’s Word. Get a Bible reading plan, choose a particular time when you can concentrate, and begin immediately. If you are a child, talk to your parents about how they can help you to do this all-important duty.

It is crucial that you approach the reading and hearing of God’s Word with a right attitude in your heart. Do not do it resentfully, as a chore or a duty that you must fulfill but inwardly dislike. Do not do it like a Pharisee, abusing God’s Word as if it were a way for you to feel that you are better than other people. Instead, do it with

16. Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 157), in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693*, comp. James T. Dennison Jr., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014), 4:340–41.

17. As cited in Ian Breward, “The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602” (PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 1963), 35.

hunger, as someone who knows that this is his necessary and nutritious food. If you do not have a good appetite for God's Word, then be warned that you are not spiritually healthy, and you may be as yet dead in your sins. Pray to the Lord to give you a heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

Have the mindset present in this poem, titled, "Of the Incomparable Treasure of the Holy Scriptures," that appears in the front matter of a 1599 edition of the Bible.

Here is the spring where waters flow,
to quench our heart of sin.

Here is the tree where truth doth grow,
to lead our lives therein.

Here is the judge that stints the strife,
when men's devices fail.

Here is the bread that feeds the life,
that death cannot assail.

The tidings of salvation dear,
comes to our ears from hence.

The fortress of our faith is here,
and shield of our defense.

Then be not like the hog that hath
a pearl at his desire,

And takes more pleasure in the trough
and wallowing in the mire.

Read not this book in any case,
but with a single eye.

Read not but first desire God's grace,
to understand thereby.

Pray still in faith with this respect,
to fructify therein,

That knowledge may bring this effect,
to mortify thy sin.

Then happy thou in all thy life,
 what so to thee befalls,
Yea, double happy shalt thou be,
 when God by death thee calls.¹⁸

May God grant you the happiness, yes, the double happiness, of feasting on His Word throughout your life, and one day entering heaven to behold the glory of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Amen.

18. *The Bible* (London: Christopher Barker, 1599), no pagination.

Heaven

Rev. David Lipsy

Scripture: Isaiah 65:17–19,
2 Peter 3:11–14, Revelation 21:1–8

We will consider the glorious place we call “heaven” for at least three reasons.

The first reason we’re considering heaven is because past generations of Christians thought about heaven more than most of us do. There are reasons for that which I won’t get into right now, but suffice it to say, we don’t think about something we don’t see or hear much about but instead tend to focus more on what is right in front of us. We sometimes lament, as Christians, how earth-bound we tend to be. Our busyness, materialistic tendencies, and relatively affluent lives compared with many others on earth don’t help with this struggle. Yes, we certainly are in need of genuine, Spirit-wrought revival.

Second, another related reason for considering heaven is to motivate believers to live more sacrificial, holy lives; willing to give up some present-life comfort in order to win souls, impact those around us for the kingdom, and prepare our own hearts and minds for the greater glory to come.

Third, I hope and pray—for those who do not yet have a good hope of glory—that at last you might hear something of the glory of God in that place and begin for the

first time in your life to be convicted that this life isn't all there is—that there is some thing and some One far more glorious and satisfying to live for.

Let us pray for these things, beloved, even now. The Lord is *so* gracious and merciful; who can tell if He might, in answer to our supplications, pour out His blessings upon us?

Our texts are 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4–5a and Revelation 21:1: “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.... How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory.... And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea.” Our theme is:

Heaven

1. The first heaven
2. The new heaven and new earth

As we begin to consider the glory of the hereafter, we want to distinguish between what we call “heaven” from what follows heaven, namely the new heaven and the new earth.

Heaven is that place, that state that a saved person enters into when he dies. The body, of course, remains here on earth, but the essence of who we are—which we commonly refer to as the soul—goes there, to heaven.

The *new heaven* and the *new earth*, on the other hand, is the eternal destination that a saved person's soul and body go to immediately after the final judgment, presided over by the returning glorious Lord Jesus.

To prove the existence of heaven, we need go no further than the cross of Jesus, where He answers the simple

prayer of the thief crucified beside Him, saying, “To day thou shalt be with me in paradise,” which is to say that Jesus promised the thief that, immediately after dying, he would be with Jesus in heaven. Of course Jesus’s *body* lay in the grave three days, which shows that their being with each other would take place in heaven as a fellowship of souls absent their bodies. The thief’s remains are, to this day, still somewhere on earth and will remain so until the resurrection day—the day of the Lord.

After the final judgment, however, those who are truly saved will enter into a glorious place, a place prepared by the Lord for believers’ reunited souls and bodies. This is the place John saw in Revelation 21 which he called “the new heaven and the new earth,” the final destination of all those who love the Lord in sincerity.

We have one more matter to deal with before considering glory hereafter. There are three unique places referred to as “heaven” in Scripture. In Bible times, the Jews referred to the first heaven as that which we today call the “sky.” In Genesis 1, God describes a *firmament* that divides the waters on the earth’s surface from the water in the clouds. Genesis 1:8 says, “And God called the firmament Heaven.” This would be the first heaven mentioned in Scripture.

The idea of a second heaven is also rooted in the creation history, for in Genesis 1:14, God, speaking of the sun and moon, said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night.” This second heaven refers to what we today call “outer space.” This is the place where the sun, moon, and stars are located. David refers to this in Psalm 8, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.”

But what the apostle Paul referred to as the third heaven is that which we want to consider during our time

of worship. The apostle, in reference to himself, wrote, “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago... caught up to the third heaven.” Paul went on to describe this vision: “He was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” What he saw and heard we do not know; he doesn’t say. But it’s quite clear he was speaking of what we today call “heaven.”

With these distinctions in mind, and with God’s help, let us consider this third heaven.

The Third Heaven

Would it surprise you that there are 551 references to heaven in Scripture? We remember that the word “heaven” often refers to the sky or space, but still, this is a staggering number of references! You have to wonder if God named the sky and space *heaven* to help remind us often about the other heaven, the third heaven.

As we have already briefly considered the reality of heaven, it shouldn’t surprise us that we see an awareness of it early in Scripture. Both Melchizedek and Abraham refer to God as the possessor of heaven and earth. God spoke to Abraham out of heaven. Jacob called Bethel the gate of heaven after he dreamt his famous dream. Moses said these memorable words in Deuteronomy 10: “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is,” and goes on to describe God’s blessing on obedience this way: “That your days may be multiplied and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.” What a beautiful expression and confession of faith, “as the days of heaven upon the earth.” In Deuteronomy 26, Moses prayed to God, “Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people.”

But not only did the saints know of heaven, they sought it earnestly! Hebrews 11 says that Abraham, “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” and he, with other Old Testament believers, desired, “a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God was not ashamed to be called their God: for he prepared for them a city.” May David’s confession be ours, beloved, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.” The early saints recognized, thought of, and sought heaven.

Second, heaven is described in Scripture as God’s dwelling place. The prophet Micah once prophesied, “I saw the LORD sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.” God gave this prophet a glimpse of heaven. Isaiah also wrote of what he was given to see of heaven, “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” God Himself calls heaven “my throne” and the earth His “footstool.” In that place of glory, Psalm 22 says God inhabits (i.e. lives in) the praises of His people, all honor and glory continuously ascribed to Him.

Third, even though heaven is God’s dwelling place, it is still a created place. Because it is a creation, just like earth, God overflows even heaven. In Solomon’s prayer, at the dedication of the first temple, he confessed, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built.” We remind one another that before creation, as hard as it is for us to fathom, there was no place. There was only God who, being a Spirit, doesn’t need a physical dwelling. This means heaven, as a creation of God, was not made for Himself, because He needed no such place to live in, but it was made for us, who are His, that we might live with Him. Just like the Garden of Eden was

specially prepared by God for the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, so heaven was prepared by God for all men and women renewed by His grace and Spirit. Heaven is proof, just like the cross, that God is willing to love, save, transform, and dwell with sinners-turned-saints forever.

Elijah is there now, carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Moses is with God there, as are Paul and all the godly persons who lived and died in faith, including so many whom we have known and loved. They are alive. They are in heaven. They are with God!

Lest we think we need to be someone great or special to be there, God gives this precious encouragement in Isaiah 57:5, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” And if we feel unfit for that holy place with God (and who doesn’t?), God gives us this precious encouragement and promise, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). Then there is Jesus’s precious prayer in John 17, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.”

So to review briefly what we have seen so far, what we call heaven is the third heaven, God’s dwelling place. Old and New Testament saints knew of it, thought about it, and sought a place there with God, and so ought we to do, earnestly. Heaven itself is a creation. God made it, not so much for Himself but so that we who believe might be with Him.

What else do we know about heaven? Believers enter it immediately after they die. There's no waiting period, no preparatory suffering, etc. We know this from the aforementioned example of the thief on the cross. There was a man, being put to death for being a criminal, who if anyone qualified for something like purgatory, he certainly would have, for he had done nothing to recommend his immediate entrance into heaven. Yet Jesus's reply tells us that, notwithstanding all his sins, on the basis of faith in the crucified Savior alone, that man was to be with Jesus that very day in heaven. So shall it be, for all who mourn over sin and cling to the Savior for grace, the very instant they die—it will be instant glory.

Fifth, heaven is not only a place where we will see and be with God but it is a place of undescribable joy and security and peace. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the saved sinner Lazarus was said to be "in Abraham's bosom," i.e. resting on Abraham. The weariness of his earthly suffering was forever past. Jesus went on to say that this Lazarus was now comforted. Immediately after he died, immeasurable comfort swept over him, and no wonder—he was with the Lord in eternal bliss. As we saw earlier, Paul wrote about a time when God gave him a glimpse of heaven, calling the place that he saw "paradise." In Daniel 12, we read, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament." Those that confessed Christ here before men will hear Christ confess them before His Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32). Imagine the comfort that will be!

But as glorious as heaven shall be, we get a sense from Revelation 6:9 and 20:4 that, although the saints shall already reign with Christ while in heaven, there will be a sense of anticipation, a desire to see justice meted out in full, with a final resolution to all things—anticipating of course the day of the Lord, when Christ shall come to

judge all persons. We are assured by the Lord Himself that that day shall come.

Sixth, though all who are in heaven will be filled with the utmost joy, Scripture teaches there will be degrees of glory in heaven. For example, concerning those who suffer for Christ's sake and the gospel, Jesus said, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." With respect to those who do and teach God's commandments, "the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." In fact, our Lord encourages us to prepare for greater glory, saying, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" going on to describe how to do so.

Seventh, we also know there will be fellowship in heaven, not only with God, but among the saints as well. In Matthew 8:11, Jesus said, "Many shall come from the east and west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter readily was able to identify Moses and Elijah who, we read, "appeared in glory," speaking with Jesus about His coming death.

But of all the joys of heaven, none will compare with fellowship with Jesus Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christ is there, beloved! "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). We are assured in 1 John 3:2 that "we shall see him as he is."

Our challenge, of course, is that all of these glories—of seeing God and enjoying perfect peace, security, joy, fellowship, etc.—are not seen with our natural eyes, but are only apprehended by faith. So we need to beseech the Lord that we might exercise faith in His description of glory in order to be more heavenly minded, even as the apostle describes in Philippians 3:20, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior,

the Lord Jesus Christ.” Heavenly mindedness would be such a great help also for life now. “How?” you might ask.

Heavenly mindedness, to name just one important benefit, would be helpful in times of affliction and loss. Hebrews 10:34 describes saints who joyfully endured the taking away of their possessions, knowing they had “in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” Along these same lines, Peter encouraged tried and troubled saints, pointing them to their “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.” Paul wrote of “the hope which is laid up for us in heaven.” So powerful can this anticipation of glory be that it was used of God to help believers endure horrible persecutions. Hebrews 11:34 relates, “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

The glories of heaven are great, far outweighing the very best we could ever have or experience here on earth. They are worthy to be pursued with the greatest desires and efforts God’s grace can work in us. Still, as magnificent as heaven shall be, more than making up for all the self-denial, suffering, and spiritual warfare endured in this life, heaven is but a prelude of that unspeakably greater glory that follows, namely, the new heaven and the new earth.

The New Heaven and New Earth

This earth is old—just over six thousand years old in fact. But it’s also old in sin, showing everywhere the scars of the Fall and particularly in its dreaded effects in the lives of people. But this old world will not continue indefinitely; there comes an end. Thankfully, Scripture gives us clarity regarding this.

In Matthew 24:35, Jesus plainly said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

In Mark 13:25 He further explained, “And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.” In addition to earlier signs that the end is near, Jesus mentions, as indicating His imminent return, “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:25–26).

Yet, at those very moments when ungodly men will recognize their folly, too late of course, Jesus comforts His disciples by saying, “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). He knows what He has prepared for His beloved people in the new heaven and new earth!

In that final day, the angels will gather the godly who will be alive on the earth. “And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven” (Mark 13:27). This day was greatly anticipated, even by the Old Testament saints. Only seven generations after Adam and Eve, Enoch foretold, “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all” (Jude 1:14). And who can forget Job’s remarkable confession of faith, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25). What remarkable foresight God gave Job!

Christ Jesus, having purchased His people’s right to glory, speaks with joy as He describes their entrance into it, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom

prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). What a wonder!

The way that final day unfolds is detailed in God’s Word. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 we read, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” Those who had long since died, trusting in Christ by faith, their souls and bodies will at last be reunited; not as they once were, but altogether fitted for the new heaven and new earth. In 1 Corinthians 15 we find these lovely couplets:

“Sown in corruption...raised in incorruption.”

“Sown in dishonor...raised in glory.”

“Sown in weakness...raised in power.”

“Sown a natural body...raised a spiritual body.”

“As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

“The dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.”

Those who are alive on earth when Jesus returns in glory will be changed in an instant from how they are to how they will be in the glory of the new heaven and new earth. Scripture is full of descriptions of the glory of what lies ahead in that final glorious place God has prepared for His redeemed. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43).

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more

death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:2-5).

Every joy on this earth is fleeting—it never lasts. The joys of sin, however pleasurable in the moment, are like a poison that eventually destroys the one who partakes of it. Even the lawful joys God gives us to enjoy—and there are many—are not meant to make us want to stay here forever. They are, as one described them, so many fingers pointing us to the God of glory and the lasting wonders He promises to His children.

As the Father loves to honor His beloved Son, so it shall be then as well, “In the dispensation of the fulness of times he will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him” (Eph. 1:10). “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). Don’t you want to hear those blessed words, beloved? You realize, of course, that it is in this life that your eternal destination is determined. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

“Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24).

“This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the

living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I give is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world" (John 6:50–51).

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:6–10). Amen.