

Foreword

*“Labor to get a sense of the vanity
of this world. . . . Labor to be much
acquainted with heaven.”*

Jonathan Edwards

I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE who was more productive during the course of his earthly life than Jonathan Edwards. One need only glance at the twenty-six substantial volumes in the Yale University Press edition of his collected works to verify this as fact. And that does not take into account the vast number of as-yet-unpublished

sermons that we hope will one day be made available.

I cite this about Edwards merely to refute the oft-heard cliché that some people are so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good. Edwards's earthly achievements may be directly linked to his focus on, dare I say his obsession with, the glory of heaven that he had not yet experienced. Edwards was consumed with a vision of the eternal bliss that awaits God's people. Many have written on this theme, but none with the clarity and conviction that I find in Edwards. I trust that this volume will bear witness to the truth of my conclusion.

Yet there are many who still contend that contemplating the "not yet" will serve only to undermine our energy and devotion to the vast and varied needs we face in this life, on this earth. Edwards's life and ministry are a lasting testimony to the opposite conclusion. He was per-

Foreword

suaded, as am I, that our capacity for satisfaction of soul and happiness of heart in this life comes primarily from looking intently at what we can't see. The strength to endure hardship now comes from reflecting on the promise of everlasting bliss in the age to come. Students of the apostle Paul have often marveled at his remarkable capacity to persevere under the worst imaginable circumstances in this life, be it persecution, slander, imprisonment, or multiple beatings. Paul himself alerted us to the solution. We do not "lose heart," he wrote to the Corinthians, no matter what we are called to suffer. Indeed, though our "outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." How so, we ask? It is only "as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16–18).

Foreword

Paul was quick to remind us that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:20–21). Little wonder, then, that he would exhort us to “set [our] minds” on “things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2). It is the prospect that we “will appear with him in glory” (v. 4) that strengthened Paul’s resolve, and strengthens ours, to maintain vigilance in this life and to redeem every opportunity for the reward that it will reap in the coming age. There is no escaping the fact that we must take steps to intensify in our hearts a yearning for the beauty and satisfaction of eternal life in the presence of our Savior.

The greatest joy that awaits us is found in the promise of Revelation 22:4, that we “will see

his face.” The prospect of this beatific vision, as theologians so often describe it, provides the spiritual fuel to energize our commitment in this life and our resilience in the face of hardship and deprivation.

The apostle Paul was joined in this perspective by Peter, who reminds us that the ultimate purpose of our being born again is that we might lay hold of a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven” for us (1 Pet. 1:3–4). If that were not enough, Peter proceeds to exhort his readers to “set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (v. 13).

One also thinks of Abraham and the other patriarchs who were sustained in their earthly sojourn by the prospect of a “city that has foundations”

(Heb. 11:10). Their relentless determination in the face of numerous trials was fueled by their desire for a “better country, that is, a heavenly one” (v. 16).

Why? What is it about the promise of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth that fuels such perseverance in our Christian experience? Paraphrasing Edwards, as satisfying and joyful as life on earth is now, what we see and sense and savor in this life is an ephemeral shadow compared with the substance of God himself. Earthly joys are fragmented beams, said Edwards, but God is the sun. Earthly refreshment is at best a sipping from intermittent springs, but God is the ocean!

Many who suffer now in ways that we can't even begin to comprehend are empowered to remain faithful, knowing that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

The unnamed author of Hebrews reminds us that the emotional and spiritual capacity to bear the reproach of Christ in this life is grounded in the expectation of a “city that is to come” (Heb. 13:13–14), namely, the heavenly New Jerusalem.

Edwards looked to the experience of the saints in heaven to reinforce his conviction that the essence of true religion consists in holy affections. His point is that we learn the quintessential nature of anything by looking closely where that thing is found in its highest and purest expression. To know true religion, therefore, we must look at it in its heavenly expression.

If we can learn anything of the state of heaven from the Scripture, the love and joy that the saints have there, is exceeding great and vigorous; impressing the heart with the strongest and most lively sensation, of inexpressible

Foreword

sweetness, mightily moving, animating, and engaging them, making them like to a flame of fire. And if such love and joy be not affections, then the word “affection” is of no use in language. Will any say, that the saints in heaven, in beholding the face of their Father, and the glory of their Redeemer, and contemplating his wonderful works, and particularly his laying down his life for them, have their hearts nothing moved and affected, by all which they behold or consider?¹

Perhaps Edwards’s greatest insight on the reality of heaven is that it is characterized not simply by the presence of joy but by its eternal increase and incessant intensification. With each passing moment in the presence of our triune God,

1 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2. ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 114.

we will see more and more of his endless beauty and majesty. And with each insight will come a greater and more satisfying joy than was known before. And this, says Edwards, will never cease. Throughout the age to come, forever and ever, we will be the recipients each instant of an ever-expansive and more stunning, more fascinating, and thus inescapably more enjoyable display of God's grace and glory. Our delight in God will never reach a point at which there is no more for us to enjoy. If God is infinite, Edwards says, then so is the satisfaction and pleasure that will come from our beholding him moment by passing moment (see Ps. 16:11). Speaking of the saints in heaven, Edwards says,

 Their knowledge will increase to eternity; and
 if their knowledge, doubtless their holiness.
 For as they increase in the knowledge of God

and of the works of God, the more they will see of his excellency; and the more they see of his excellency . . . the more will they love him; and the more they love God, the more delight and happiness . . . will they have in him.²

Yet another reason to read Edwards on the majesty of our heavenly hope is the way he describes the role of music in the age to come. One of the greatest joys of heaven will be the exalted sound of perfected souls singing their joyful praises to God. “The best, most beautiful, and most perfect way that we have of expressing a sweet concord of mind to each other,” says Edwards, “is by music.”³ Thus, in heaven, he continues, it is probable “that the glorified saints, after they have again received

- 2 Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, no. 105, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 275–76.
- 3 Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, no. 188, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, 331.

their bodies, will have ways of expressing the concord of their minds by some other emanations than sounds, of which we cannot conceive, that will be vastly more proportionate, harmonious and delightful than the nature of sounds is capable of; and the music they will make will be in a medium capable of modulations in an infinitely more nice, exact and fine proportion than our gross air, and with organs as much more adapted to such proportions.”⁴ In heaven, “there shall be no string out of tune to cause any jar in the harmony of that world, no unpleasant note to cause any discord.”⁵

If you find yourself struggling to endure, on the verge of emotional collapse, fearful that

4 Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, no. 188, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, 331.

5 Jonathan Edwards, “Heaven Is a World of Love,” in *Ethical Writings*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 371.

Foreword

the future holds only decay and death, immerse yourself in the exalted and thoroughly biblical perspective that Jonathan Edwards brings to this living hope (1 Pet. 1:3). You may well find yourself to be of more earthly good precisely by being ever more heavenly minded.

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Series Preface

JOHN PIPER ONCE WROTE that books do not change people, but paragraphs do. This pithy statement gets close to the idea at the heart of the Crossway Short Classics series: some of the greatest and most powerful Christian messages are also some of the shortest and most accessible. The broad stream of confessional Christianity contains an astonishing wealth of timeless sermons, essays, lectures, and other short pieces of writing. These pieces have challenged, inspired, and borne fruit in the lives of millions of believers across church history and around the globe.

Series Preface

The Crossway Short Classics series seeks to serve two purposes. First, it aims to beautifully preserve these short historic pieces of writing through new high-quality physical editions. Second, it aims to transmit them to a new generation of readers, especially readers who may not be inclined or able to access a larger volume. Short-form content is especially valuable today, as the challenge of focusing in a distracting, constantly moving world becomes more intense. The volumes in the Short Classics series present incisive, gospel-centered grace and truth through a concise, memorable medium. By connecting readers with these accessible works, the Short Classics series hopes to introduce Christians to those great heroes of the faith who wrote them, providing readers with representative works that both nourish the soul and inspire further study.

Series Preface

Readers should note that the spelling and punctuation of these works have been lightly updated where applicable. Scripture references and other citations have also been added where appropriate. Language that reflects a work's origin as a sermon or public address has been retained. Our goal is to preserve as much as possible the authentic text of these classic works.

Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will use these short works to arrest your attention, preach the gospel to your soul, and motivate you to continue exploring the treasure chest of church history, to the praise and glory of God in Christ.

Biography of Jonathan Edwards

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703–1758) is considered by many to be one of the greatest theologians of the church and arguably the preeminent religious philosopher in American history. He was born in East Windsor, Connecticut. Both his father and his maternal grandfather were ministers. He enrolled at Yale College (now University) at the age of thirteen, and by age twenty-one, he was ordained for ministry and held a master's degree.

He eventually succeeded his grandfather as pastor of Northampton Church. During his

time as pastor of Northampton, Edwards would, through his preaching, teaching, and writing, become one of the key figures in the American Great Awakening, a massive religious revival that swept through the American colonies in the early eighteenth century. In 1758, Edwards was appointed president of the College of New Jersey (later renamed Princeton University), a position he held for only a matter of weeks before his death.

In his prolific writing and preaching, Edwards combined philosophical precision and insight with warm devotion and spiritual application. He emphasized God's sovereignty and goodness, insisting humans were created to give God glory by delighting in him. Today Edwards is known around the world for his exceptional intellectual abilities, his powerful systematic expositions of theology, and his pious and practical preaching.

HEAVEN
IS A WORLD
OF LOVE

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

1 Corinthians 13:8–10



FROM THE FIRST OF THESE VERSES, I have already drawn the doctrine that that great fruit of the Spirit in which the Holy Ghost shall not only for a season, but everlastingly, be communicated to the church of Christ is charity or divine love. And now I would consider the same verse in connection with the two that follow it, and upon the three verses would make two observations.

First, that it is mentioned as one great excellence of charity, that it shall remain when all other fruits of the Spirit have failed.

Second, that this will come to pass in the perfect state of the church, when that which is in part shall be done away and that which is perfect is come.

There is a twofold *imperfect*, and so a twofold *perfect*, state of the Christian church. The church in its beginning, or in its first age, before it was strongly established in the world and settled in its New Testament state, and before the canon of Scripture was completed, was in an imperfect state—a state, as it were, of childhood in comparison with what it was to be in its elder and later ages, when it should have reached its state of manhood or of comparative earthly perfection. And so, again, this comparatively perfect church of Christ, so long as it remains in its militant state, that is, down to the end of time, will still be in an imperfect and, as it were, in a childish state in comparison with what it will be in its heavenly state, in which latter it is comparatively in its state of manhood or perfection.

And so there is a twofold failing of these miraculous gifts of the Spirit here mentioned. One was