

1.

“That they may behold my glory” (John 17:24)

The high priest of the Old Testament, having made the required sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, went into the holy place with his hands full of sweet-smelling incense which he put on the fire before the Lord. So the great high priest of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, having sacrificed himself for our sins, entered into heaven with the sweet perfume of his prayers for his people. His eternal desire for the salvation of his people is shown in the verse quoted above: “that they may behold my glory”. Joseph asked his brothers to tell his father of all his glory in Egypt (see Genesis 45:13), not to make a proud show of that glory but to give his father the joy of knowing his high position in the land. So Christ desired his disciples to see his glory that they might be satisfied and enjoy the fulness of his blessing for ever.

Once having known the love of Christ, the heart of the believer will always be restless until the glory of Christ is seen. The climax of all Christ’s other requests for his disciples is that they may behold his glory. So I assert that one of the greatest benefits for a believer in this world and the next is to consider the glory of Christ.

Ever since the name of Christian was known on the earth, there has never been such direct opposition to the uniqueness and glory of Christ as at the present day.¹ It is the duty of all those who love the Lord Jesus to testify according to their ability to his uniqueness² and glory. I would therefore try to strengthen the faith of true believers by showing that to see the glory of Christ is one of the greatest experiences and privileges possible in this world or the next. Here in this life, beholding the glory of the Lord, they are changed into its likeness (see 2 Corinthians 3:18). Hereafter, they will be like him for they will see him as he is (see 1 John 3:2). This knowledge of Christ is the continual life and reward of our souls. He that has seen Christ has seen the Father; the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen only in the face of Jesus Christ (see John 14:9; 2 Corinthians 4:6).

There are two ways of seeing the glory of Christ: by faith, in this world; and by sight, in heaven for eternity. It is the second way that is mainly referred to in our Saviour’s prayer — that his disciples may be where he is, to behold his glory. But the view of his glory by faith in this world is also included and I give the following reasons for emphasising this:

1. No man will ever see the glory of Christ hereafter if he does not have some view of it by faith now. We must be prepared by grace for glory and by faith for sight. Some people, who have no real faith, imagine they will see the glory of Christ in heaven but they are deceiving themselves. The apostles saw his glory, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This was not a worldly glory like that of kings or the Pope. Though he made all things, Christ had nowhere to lay his head. There was no unusual glory or beauty in his appearance as a man. His face and form became more disfigured than any man (see Isaiah 52:14; 53:2). Nor could the full glory of his divine nature be seen in this world. How then did the apostles see his glory? It was by the spiritual understanding of faith. As they saw how full of grace and truth he was in what he did and how he spoke, they “received him and believed on his name” (John 1:12). Those without such faith saw no glory in Christ.

2. The glory of Christ is far beyond the grasp of our present human understanding. We cannot look directly at the sun without being blinded. And with our natural eyes we cannot have any true view of the glory of Christ in heaven; it can only be known by faith. Those who

¹ i.e. 1683.

² See chapter three where this uniqueness is described in detail.

talk or write about the immortality of the soul but have no knowledge of the life of faith can have no conviction in what they say. There are those, too, who use images, pictures and music in a vain attempt to help them worship something they imagine is like the glory of God. This is only because they have no spiritual understanding of the true glory of Christ. The understanding that only comes by faith will give us a true idea of Christ's glory and create desires for its full enjoyment.

3. If, therefore, we would have a more active faith and a greater love to Christ, giving rest and satisfaction to our souls, we must seek to have a greater desire to see more of his glory in this life. This will mean that the things of this world will have less and less attraction for us until they become as undesirable as something dead. We should not look for anything in heaven other than what we have some experience of in this life. If we were fully persuaded of this we would be more often thinking about heavenly things than we usually are.

Before I try to lead believers into the more personal experiences of faith, love and holy meditation, I will mention some of the advantages arising from constantly thinking about the glory of Christ by faith.

1. We shall be made fit for heaven. Many think themselves already fit enough for glory, if they could reach it. But they do not know what it is. There is no pleasure in music for the deaf, nor in the most beautiful colours for the blind. So heaven would be no pleasure to persons who have not been prepared for it in this life by the Spirit. The apostle gives "thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (Colossians 1:12). The will of God is that we should know the beginning of glory here and its fulness hereafter. But we are made capable of receiving the knowledge of this glory by the spiritual activity of faith. Our present knowledge of glory is our preparation for future glory.

2. A true view of Christ's glory has the power to change us until we become like Christ (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

3. Regular meditation on the glory of Christ will give rest and satisfaction to our souls. It will bring peace to our minds which are so often filled with fears and disturbing thoughts. For "to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). The things of this life are nothing when compared with the great value and beauty of Christ, as Paul said: "I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

4. Knowledge of the glory of Christ is the source of our everlasting blessedness. By seeing him as he is, we shall be made like him (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17; John 17:24; 1 John 3:2).

God is so great that we cannot see him with our natural eyes and even when in heaven we shall not be able to understand everything about him, for he is infinite. The blessed sight we shall there have of God will always be "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6) and this will be enough to fill us with peace and a sense of rest and glory.

Yet even in this life true believers sometimes have a little experience of the pleasure to be found in knowing Christ. The scriptures and the Holy Spirit bring such a sense of the uncreated glory of God shining in Christ that it fills their souls with indescribable joy and peace. These experiences are not frequent but that is because of our idleness and lack of spiritual light. Glory would dawn in our souls more often if we were diligent in our duty of meditating on the glory of Christ. In chapters two to eleven I will try to answer the question: "What is the glory of Christ that we may behold by faith, and how do we see it?" And in chapters twelve to fourteen: "How does the knowledge of faith differ from the immediate sight of Christ in heaven?"