

LIVING BETWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God, and we are. Therefore, the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the children of God, and not yet is it manifested what we shall be; but we know that when it shall be manifested, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one that has this hope resting upon him purifies himself even as he is pure" (I John 3:1-3).

Imagine that we are on a journey. Within us is the spirit of the pioneers. We are going to the place where all our hopes and aspirations will be met. To get to that place, we must cross two mountains.

We have scaled one of the peaks and have been thrilled by it. We have seen the vistas, the like of which our eyes and minds had never conceived. We have been closer to God than we have ever been.

Now, we are living in the valley, a lush fertile place. Through the heart of the green valley flows a crystal-clear river. All around us, the mountains offer a sense of protection and stability.

It is quite wonderful to live in the valley between the mountains. But there is one thing wrong with it, only one complaint, the sun sets early for those in the valley between the mountains. So, we often look up to the second mountain, for beyond that is the land where all our aspirations and hopes are met, where the shore is bathed by eternal light. We are restless to continue the journey once more.

Thus, in allegory, the first three verses of the third chapter of First John might be expressed. There are two "mountains" there. The first is the mountain of faith and the second is the mountain of hope. The first is the mountain of grace, and the second is the mountain of promise. The first is Mount Calvary, and the second is Mount Olivet. The first is the incarnation and redemption in Jesus Christ. The other is the Second Coming of our Lord. Some of us, thank God, can look back upon the first mountain, and it thrills us still.

The mountain of grace is salvation. Hear the words again, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God, and we are." Marvelous words indeed! The children of God are those who have believed on the name of Christ. As John said, "As many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

He, then, who believes on Jesus Christ and receives Him as his Saviour is a child of God. Of him John is writing as having scaled the mountain of grace unto salvation. He who has come to the place where he knows that he needs a Saviour, that he is at the end of his tether, that life before him is dark until he receives the light, which he does not possess, and in the realization of that need comes to Christ alone for salvation, he is a child of God. Whoever has come to the mountain of Calvary, knelt there by the foot of the cross on which the "Prince of glory died," and received Christ as his Saviour is a child of God. I look back on that mountain and it thrills my soul. It casts a spell over my life. It directs and motivates and colors my whole experience. Mount Calvary! I have been close to God on that mountain, and it has changed me. I shall never be the same again. "If any man be in Christ, he is

a new creature: old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthinas 5:17). Look back to the mountain of grace again! Recall what Christ did for you there! Let that motivate you!

But we must look at the other "mountain" too. The second mountain is the mountain of hope, or the second coming of Christ. "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Christ shall come again "in like manner as you have seen him go" (Acts 1:11).

The glorious hope of the believer is Christ as set forth in this interesting and inspiring text is the hope of seeing Christ when He returns and being like Him. This is not a mere wish or a faint desire, but it is a real hope.

I. The Foundation Of This Hope.

1. It is based upon the love of God.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." That is the language of adoration and wonder. The word "behold" points us to something that is worth seeing. It is clearly revealed to us and lies open to our sight. To behold means to inspect closely or to look at intently.

Having written off the salvation that Christ has provided, John urged his readers to recognize it as an amazing expression of the love of God. If any man knew the measure of God's love, it was John. He had grasped the hand, looked into the eyes, listened to the voice, and felt the throbbing of the heart of Christ as he pillowed his head on the bosom of the Saviour, but all that he could say was, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be so called the sons of God." God bestowed His unspeakable love upon us in order that we might become His children. The greatest privilege and highest honor on earth are to be a child of God. No declaration can be made about man, or no title can be given to him, which bestows as much honor upon him as being a member of God's family.

Think of the love of God which gave us such a blessing as salvation and the wonderful assurance of it. When God planned for your salvation, He had more in mind than just the saving of your soul from hell. He chose you to be a member of His own family. We are the objects of God's wonderful, yea, almost incredible love. He has showered His magnificent gifts upon us. He has saved us from sin, inspired us with holy desires and purposes, comforted us in our sorrows, and enabled us to produce Christian fruit. He is deeply interested in the welfare of each of us. He invites us to live in the devout contemplation of His wondrous and infinite love. Therefore, let your gaze be turned, not inwardly on your sinful self, but outwardly on the love of God in Christ. Look at it penitently, appropriatingly, adoringly, lovingly and gratefully. His love is calculated to excite our admiration, appreciation and devotion.

"What manner of love!" Who can describe it? It is unparalleled, unmerited, unsolicited, unchangeable and unending love. It is a love beyond human conception. It surpasses all finite understanding.

"Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary!"

God did not bestow His love upon the amiable, attractive, worthy or lovable only, but upon those who were in active rebellion against Him. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). His love was not one of complacency, but of compassion; not that of admiration, but of pity and benevolence.

2. It arises out of Christian sonship.

This glorious hope is rooted in the experienced fact of Christian sonship. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," is a statement which points us to the reality of salvation. When you think of what we were, and then think of what we are now, since we have been saved by the grace of God, it is not surprising that we should marvel at the whole transaction by which He has brought us into His family. God's lavish bestowal of love upon us had as its one great object our become His children.

What a precious thought that we are the children of God! It is not a matter of our trying to become such, or hoping to become His children in the future, but it is a fact that we are the children of God now. As such we have a right to all the privileges of the Father's house.

II. The Features Of This Hope.

1. It has an unrevealed feature.

"Not yet is it manifested what we shall be." It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The glory of our future condition has not been made public. It has not been revealed to us to what heights of joy we shall ascend, or to what heights of development we shall reach when this life is over. Oh, the wonder and glory of withheld details! The word "glory" suggests far more than it actually describes. There is about it the fascination of something superbly beautiful that one glimpses but cannot view fully.

Much of what the book of Revelation says about the heavenly destiny of which the children of God are to be the happy inheritors is given to us in the form of negatives. "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" (Revelation 21:4). No tears! No pain! No death! No sorrow! No separation! Thus we are told what will not be there, the things that will be past forever in that supernal tomorrow. While our possessions in the present are wonderful, our prospects for the future are far more glorious. Our lack of knowledge about the future life, or this element of mystery, helps us to sustain a blessed curiosity. We now have something within us, but we also have something wonderful yet ahead of us.

2. It has some revealed features.

(1) We shall be like Christ.

This passage tells us that some day our Lord is going to appear. To multitudes of people the subject of our Lord's return is so shrouded in mystery that they shrink from it. Some are prejudiced against the very subject of the second coming of Christ. Yet, this glorious truth is intimately connected with every great Christian doctrine, virtue, and service revealed in the Word of God. It is a truth which makes for better living and service.

This hope of complete likeness to Christ is not a mere wish or a faint desire, but it is a bright and glorious prospect, and a real and certain hope. It is something of which we can be absolutely sure. "We know that when it shall be manifested, we shall be like him." We cannot find a more assuring word than that.

John treats the matter of likeness to Christ in two ways. One is present and the other is future; one is a spiritual likeness and the other is a physical likeness. Which likeness to Christ will be conferred upon us at His return? It is primarily a bodily likeness. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself" (Philippians 3:20-21). Our glorified bodies, like His, will be diseaseless, painless and deathless.

While the primary likeness is that of His resurrection form, we shall also be like Him in nature, character, sympathies, happiness and glory. When we become just like Christ, our minds will be filled with heavenly light, our imaginations with heavenly purity, our wills with heavenly righteousness, our consciences with heavenly peace, and our hearts with heavenly love.

(2) We shall see Christ.

Christ is now hidden from our sight. In due time He shall appear and we shall actually look into His face. How different it will be then from what it is now! Here we see His face in the mirror of the Word -- dimly in the law, but gloriously in the gospel. Then we shall see Him in all His glory.

Frequently we think of Christ as He was and wish that we might have seen Him, but that is an utter impossibility; we shall never see Him as the Magi saw Him, as an infant. We shall never see Him under the terrible load of the sins of men, as our Substitute. We shall not see Him as He was -- tempted, despised, forsaken, mocked, scourged and crucified, -- but we shall see Him as He is -- admired, beloved, honored, crowned, exalted, worshipped and glorified. Nothing will be as satisfying as seeing Christ in His resurrected and glorified body, in all of His majesty, excellence, loveliness and splendor.

III. The Fruit Of This Hope.

"And every one that hath this hope resting upon him purifies himself even as he is pure." This glorious hope of seeing Christ and being like Him promotes self-purification. One of the greatest incentives held out for holiness of life is the hope of the coming of Christ. The truth of His coming is calculated to make for separation from the world, upright walking before men, and a closer walk with God. When a Christian is filled with the glory of this hope, he will lose the desire for the things of the world, the flesh and the devil. The hope of being with and like Christ impels to purity of life here. If one cherishes this hope of seeing Christ and becoming just like Him, he will not trifle with sin. Instead, he will abhor sin and recoil from it. Those who are anxiously awaiting the coming of Christ will strive for purity of life, so that they will not be ashamed when He appears. If you expect to be like Christ then, you will try to do your best to be like Him now.

Christian purity, includes clean imaginations, thoughts, motives, affections, conversations and conduct. When our Lord comes again He will find you flirting with the world or occupied with His love letters and work. Which will it be?

We are living between two mountains, and in God's appointed time we shall scale that other peak. While I am living between the mountains of grace and hope, they thrill me. One has my love; the other has my desire. One has my worship; the other has my anticipation. Between them my life is held in tension. It is not the kind of tension that breaks me mentally or physically, but the kind that puts my heart in tune with the Lord. My hope of the return of my Lord Jesus Christ causes me to want to be like Christ. It causes me to say, in the words of another:

"Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole;
I want Thee forever to live in my soul;
Break down ev'ry idol, cast out ev'ry foe;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Whiter than snow, yes, whiter than snow;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."