

## A GLORIOUS HOPE

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called 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.

Hope is a combination of desire, expectation, patience and joy. It implies a desire for some good, which is future in its realization and enjoyment, attended with the possibility of obtaining it. In proportion to its vitality, hope wields an influence on motive and gives direction to life. Hope casts its radiant glories across our pathways and infuses its sweet ingredients into our enjoyments. It is the sweetener of our joys, the lightener of our cares, and the soother of our sorrows.

What is the glorious hope of the believer in Christ as set forth in this most interesting and inspiring passage of scripture? It 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 Glorious Hope.

#### 1. It is based upon the love of God.

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" Thus, this verse begins with 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 of 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 His bosom, but all that he could say was, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God!" God bestowed His unspeakable love upon us in order that we might become His children. It is the greatest privilege and highest honor on earth to be a child of the living God. No declaration can be made about man, or no title can be given to him, which puts as much honor upon him as being a member of God's family. Every possible honor and every conceivable privilege are involved in this filial relationship.

Think of the love of God which gave such a blessing as salvation and the assurance of it! When God planned for your salvation, He had something more in mind than just the saving of your soul from hell. He chose you to be a member of His own family. This wonderful plan of redemption implies a love beyond human conception. We are the objects of His 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 and habitual 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 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, the attractive, the worthy or the 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 benevolence and pity.

2. It arises out of Christian sonship.

This glorious hope is rooted in the experienced fact of Christian sonship. This statement, "Beloved, now are we the children of God," points us to the reality of salvation. When you think of what we were, and then think of what we are now 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, unspeakable as it is, has one great object which He deems worthy of such expenditure, namely, that we should 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. We no longer stand where we once stood, for we are the children of God. As His children we have a right to all the privileges of the Father's house.

II. The Features Of This Glorious 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 glory and wonder 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.

In reading the book of Revelation you will observe that much of what is said concerning 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 forever past 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 to sustain a blessed curiosity. We now have something within us, but we also have something wonderful yet ahead of us.

When Earth's Last Picture Is Painted

"When earth's last picture is painted,  
and the tubes are twisted and dried,  
When the oldest colours have faded,  
and the youngest critic has died,  
We shall rest, and faith, we shall need it--  
lie down for an aeon or two,  
Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall  
put us to work anew.

"And those that were good shall be happy;  
they shall sit in a golden chair;  
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas  
with brushes of comet's hair.  
They shall find real saints to draw from--  
Magdalene, Peter, and Paul;  
They shall work for an age at a sitting  
and never be tired at all!

"And only the Master shall praise us,  
and only the Master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money, and no one  
shall work for fame,  
But each for the joy of the working,  
and each, in his separate star,  
Shall draw the thing as he sees It, for  
the God of Things as They are."  
--Rudyard Kipling.

2. It has some revealed features.

(1) We shall be like Christ.

In this passage of scripture we are told 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. There is an amazing prejudice in the hearts of many church members against the very subject of the second coming of Christ. Yet, there is no more important doctrine in the Word of God pertaining to Christian living than that of the coming of our Lord. This glorious truth is intimately connected with every Christian doctrine, virtue and service revealed in the Word. There is no substitute for it. It is a truth which makes for better living, citizenship, relationships 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, a real and certain hope. It is something of which we can be absolutely sure. John wrote, "We know that when it shall be manifested, we shall be like him." We cannot find a more assuring word than that.

In John's writings the matter of likeness to Christ is treated in two ways. One is present and the other is future; one is a spiritual likeness and the other is a physical likeness. What then is that likeness to Christ which the future holds for us and which will be conferred upon us at His return? It is primarily a likeness to His resurrection form; in other words, 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 even 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 and literally 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 of His glory.

Frequently we think of Christ as He was and wish that we might have seen Him, but that will never be. 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 Glorious 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 all relish 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 is not seeking to purify himself, it is quite clear that he does not possess this glorious hope. 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 Him then, you will try 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 and me flirting with the world or occupied with His love letters and work. Which will it be? My hope of His return 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."