

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. Great is the power of genuine hope. 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 passage of scripture? Every well-instructed Christian is animated by the glorious hope of seeing Christ, being with Him, and being like Him. This is not a mere wish or a faint desire, but it is a real hope.

During the remainder of this service, let us pitch our mental tents around three points: —

I. The Foundation Of This Glorious Hope.

1. It is based on the love of God.

Having written of the salvation that Jesus Christ has brought, John would have his readers to recognize it as an amazing expression of the love of God. If any man would have known the measure of God's love, it would have been John. He had grasped the hand, looked into the eyes, listened to the voice, and felt the throbbing of the heart of Jesus 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!" Thus, this verse begins with the language of adoration and wonder. The word "behold" points us to something that is worth seeing. It means to inspect closely or to look at intently. Behold it! It is revealed to us and lies open to our sight. What a tragedy that so many stupidly refuse to consider the love of God! And that in view of the fact that no other subject is so enchanting.

We are the objects of His wonderful, yea, almost incredible love. He has showered His magnificent gifts upon us. He saves us from sin, He inspires us with holy desires and purposes, He comforts us in our sorrows, and He enables us to produce Christian fruit. And here 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 Jesus our Lord. Look at it penitently, appropriatingly, adoringly, lovingly, and gratefully. His love was 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 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!"

And just to think that God did not bestow His love on the amiable, the attractive, the worthy, or the lovable, 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. We cannot estimate correctly the love of God apart from

the death of Christ. His love was not a love of complacency, but of compassion; not that of admiration, but of benevolence and pity. So, this text calls our attention to that gracious manifestation of His love whereby we are brought into the family of God.

2. It arises out of Christian sonship.

This glorious hope is rooted in the experienced fact of Christian sonship. "Beloved, now are we the children of God." God's lavish bestowal of love upon us, unspeakable as it is, has one great end which God deems worthy of even such expenditure, namely, that we should become His children. We enjoy many marvelous privileges, but the highest privilege of all is that of being children of God. No title can be given to us, and no declaration can be made about us, which places so much honor upon us as "children of God." And so we are the children of God. It is not a matter of our trying to become such now, or hoping to become such in the future, but it is a fact that we are now. As His children, we have an inalienable place in the Father's heart, we have freedom of access to the Father, and our home is in the Father's house.

II. The Features Of This Glorious Hope.

1. It has an unrevealed feature.

"It is not yet manifested what we shall be." The glory of our future condition has not been made public. It has never 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. The word "glory" as used in the New Testament suggests far more than it actually describes. There is about it the wonder of withheld details, the fascination of something superbly beautiful that one glimpses but cannot fully view. 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. No tears! No pain! No death! No sorrow! No separation! We are told what will not be there, the things that will be forever past in that supernal tomorrow. Our lack of information about many things connected with the future life creates and sustains a blessed curiosity.

2. It has come revealed features.

(1) Jesus Christ is coming again.

"He shall appear." Some day the clouds are going to split and our Lord is going to appear. "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: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

(2) We shall see Him as He actually is.

Christ is now hidden from our sight. In due time He is to be manifested and we shall see Him. 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. There we shall actually look into the face of Jesus. We shall see Him in all His glory. Nothing will be as satisfying as seeing Him as He really is. Oh, the joy of that day when we shall see Him in His resurrected and glorified body; in all His majesty, excellence, spotlessness, beauty, loveliness, and splendor.

(3) We shall be like Jesus.

The time is coming when we shall be introduced into the presence of Jesus, and be with Him, and be like Him forever. Indeed, this is a grand and glorious prospect! This hope is a great inspiration in the present life, and it will become a glorious reality. What a blessed thing to have the hope of being

like Christ!

John treats the matter of likeness to Christ in two distinct ways. One is present, and the other is future; one is clearly a spiritual likeness, and the other is a bodily likeness. What then is that likeness to Christ which the future holds for us and which the second coming of Christ will confer upon us? It is primarily a likeness to His resurrection form; in other words, bodily likeness. We shall be like Him in nature, in character, in purity, and in glory. Our future bodies are to be patterned after His. They will be diseaseless, painless, and deathless. We look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." Philippians 3:21. All of God's children shall become like Him, not only in immortality but also in moral excellence; not only in holiness but also in happiness. As Richard Baxter so well said,

"My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim;
But, 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be like Him."

We shall behold His glory and we shall share in it.

III. The Fruit Of This Glorious Hope.

John points out that the possession of this hope of seeing Christ and becoming just like Him promotes self-purification. If we really hold this glorious hope of future likeness, it will impel us to purity of life here. "And every one that hath this hope purifieth himself as He is pure." This sure and blessed hope constrains to voluntary and personal purity. If one is not seeking to purify himself, it is clear that he does not possess this glorious hope. Self-purification is the natural effect of this hope fixed on Jesus. One of the greatest incentives for purity of life is the hope of the coming of Christ. His glorious appearing is a truth calculated to make for separation from the world, upright walking among men, and a closer walk with God. It is a thrilling challenge to become more like Christ and to be all that God would have His children to be. Those who are looking for the coming of Christ have a longing to live like Him in order that they will not be ashamed at His appearing. If you hope and expect to be like Christ then, you will be trying your best to be like Him here and now. If you look forward to being like Him hereafter, strive to be like Him now.

If Christ should come today, would you be ready?