

A Prospect Bright Unfailing



By Phil Coldrick

DWELLING ABOVE

What will it be to dwell above,
And with Thee, Lord of glory, reign,
Since the blest knowledge of Thy love
So brightens all this dreary plain?
No heart can think, no tongue can tell,
What joy 'twill be with Thee to dwell.

When left this scene of faith and strife,
And flesh and sense deceive no more;
When we shall see Thee, Prince of life,
And all Thy works of grace explore;
What heights and depths of love divine
Will there through endless ages shine!

And God has fixed the happy day
When the last tear shall dim our eyes,
When He will wipe these tears away,
And fill our hearts with glad surprise;
To hear Thy voice and see Thy face,
And know the fulness of God's grace.

Joseph Swain
(1761-1796)

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Read: 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17;
2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:1-6; 21:1-7.

I would like to refer to the hymn that we sang at the outset (shown on the left); I read it earlier in the week and the words just struck a chord with me. I feel very much in my heart that I don't occupy myself enough with the world to come, with the eternal day and with the wondrous prospect that we have of Jesus coming to take us to be with Him. And I felt that the writer of this hymn just captured something of the joy of that prospect that lay before him of dwelling with the Lord of glory and reigning with Him. The hymn was written in the 1700s by Joseph Swain. He was born in Birmingham; he took an apprenticeship as an engraver and then moved to London for work. It was there that he was converted as far as I understand. He was baptised when he was in his early 20s. And when he reached the age of about 30, he became a Baptist minister and ministered at a Baptist Church in London. He was there for about 5 years, until the Lord took him. His life was marked by a number of sorrows, one in particular was the death of his only son. But there was something wrought in his soul about the prospect that lay ahead of him as a believer in the Lord Jesus that coloured the hymns that he wrote. There are at least two other hymns of his that I am aware of, and I think he wrote many, many more. His heart was just so filled with the hope and joy of believing in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is the answer to many of life's troubles today. Another hymnwriter says, "Life alone is found in Jesus". I trust that our occupation with Him would encourage us today. The first Scripture I read captures what the apostle Paul has to say about this. *"For our momentary and light affliction works for us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are for a time, but those that are not seen eternal."* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

I think this is a wonderful Scripture to present to us various contrasts between this world and the new one to come. There is what is momentary and brief compared to what is eternal. You can't have a greater contrast than that. Then these afflictions, light in weight, are compared to an eternal weight of glory. What contrasts are presented to us in these verses!

The apostle is seeking to encourage the saints who might have been passing through difficulties. And he is suggesting to them that these difficulties have a purpose—they are to work something out in us in a surpassing measure for an eternal weight of glory. That's an encouragement to my heart! I trust it is to yours too.

He goes on to describe another contrast: the things that are seen versus the things that are not seen. And he points out that it's the things that are seen that are just for a time. But the things that are not seen, these are eternal. And they are the things the writer of the hymn was dwelling on. The glory that is to come, the glory that is to be displayed in a coming day and that eternal weight of glory is something that you and I can treasure in our hearts today and our appreciation of it can grow as we are occupied with the One who is coming for us—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Overview of Future Events

And so what I'd like to do now is go over some of the events described in the Bible that have not yet occurred. Believers, today, have quite mixed views about what is going to happen in the future. We'd like to be sure that we do not stray from Scripture as we explore this subject. But there is a prospect, a hope, that is in the heart of every believer, and that is that the Lord is returning. The disciples who saw Jesus ascend into heaven were told, *“This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven.”* (Acts 1:11).

Some are looking for Him to come back to this earth. And some believe that that is the next thing that is going to happen. Others have looked into Scripture and have discovered that there is something

going to happen before the Lord returns to earth. And that's the first thing I want to occupy us with. It is when the Lord comes to take His saints to be with Him in heaven. We speak of it as the rapture. The Lord will meet us in the clouds; He will not set foot on the earth at that point. When I was young, I used to think that when the Lord came in this way that I'd be straight into eternity. In one sense that is right because believers will be with Jesus forever and will be enjoying life in glorified bodies which is never going to end. But in fact, the eternal state, when there is no time anymore, will not happen for at least another 1000 years and we will still have a part in events in time and space. Let me just give a brief overview of the things that will happen and afterwards we can go into more detail with Scripture references.

The next stage is a period of about seven years. During that time there are various things that take place on the earth and in heaven too but it's all in preparation for something that we speak of as the appearing - when Jesus reveals Himself to the whole earth in all His glory and His saints will be with Him. That appearing is what the Scriptures speak of more than anything else in relation to the future coming of the Lord Jesus. The rapture event is perhaps only touched on in one passage of Scripture, which I'll come to shortly.

The apostle Paul speaks about *"all who love his appearing"* (2 Timothy 4:8). It is what we are most looking forward to because it's when the glory of the Lord will be seen by all and we will be seen with Him. He will come with all His saints but it's really the second stage of His coming again. His appearing marks the point when He will set up His earthly kingdom. It marks the beginning of the next period which lasts for a thousand years that we speak of as the millennium.

The final aspect of what is future comes after those thousand years have been completed. It is when God sets up what we speak of as the eternal state when time will not exist anymore. Satan will finally be dealt with; God will establish a new heaven and a new earth. Sin will not exist anymore and everything will be in perfect accord with the holy righteous God with whom we have to do.

Let us now look at each of these events in a little more detail.

The Rapture

I think the Scripture that refers to the rapture will be well known to many of us. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 is a wonderful description for us of the moment when the Lord Jesus comes to take us to be with Him. That section of Scripture is actually in brackets. It's almost as if Paul added it as an appendix—just a little explanation—because he knew that there were some that were troubled about what was going to happen to the believers who had died—had it affected what they were going to enjoy in any way?

He speaks of those who have fallen asleep in Christ. I think it's far ranging. I think it includes all the Old Testament saints. It's a wonderful thing to think that the moment the Lord comes for His saints, He's going to gather all of those who in faith have looked on to His coming and have put their faith and trust in Him. What a marvellous moment it will be. Then we, the living who are still alive, will also be caught up together with them to meet the Lord Jesus in the clouds. That will be the first time I see Him face to face. It will be the first time that many of the Old Testament saints will see Jesus; some might not have appreciated exactly how it was going to happen. Take Job, for example, he's one of them. He knew his Redeemer lived. He knew that He existed, and he knew that He would stand upon the earth. He had faith. And he had a hope in his heart. He is going to meet Jesus the same time that I'll meet Jesus.

There are many saints mentioned in chapter 11 of Hebrews because of their faith; the list begins with Abel who died in faith, the next is Enoch; Scripture tells us that God took him—he simply vanished from the earth. Hebrews 11:5 describes this as a translation. At the rapture, I believe Enoch will appear again with a glorified body. Many others are mentioned and all are going to be given glorified bodies and we the living who remain will also be caught up and our bodies changed to meet Jesus in the clouds. The last verse of that chapter says of these Old Testament saints that “*God*

having foreseen some better thing for us, that they should not be made perfect without us”.

Resurrection will happen in the twinkling of an eye as described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. What a moment it will be. It is only in the epistle to the Thessalonians that Paul gives us a clear picture of what we speak of as the rapture and he says that thus we shall always be with the Lord. That's a wonderful statement, isn't it?

Speaking for myself I find, and I'm sure others do too, that we vary in our relationship with the Lord Jesus. Sometimes we feel very close to Him. Sometimes we feel He's right with us and maybe even carrying us in our pathway. Other times we sometimes stray and wander and He has to speak to us and bring us back into nearness to Himself. But this day that we're reading of is the moment we will be changed to be like Him. The apostle John says, *“What we shall be has not yet been manifested; we know that if it is manifested we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”* (1 John 3:2). That's a wonderful thing. It is speaking of this same moment.

The more we think about that moment when we shall be changed, the more it causes us to think about what we are like today. It causes us to purify ourselves. How close are we to being conformed to His image? Sadly, I know I fall far short of it. But the more I'm occupied with Jesus, the more I realise my shortcomings. But I can put things right in the power of the Holy Spirit and by turning to Jesus about it, I can become more like Him even now. It's a constant work in progress, I would say. But that's the thing; by occupying ourselves with these things that are future we can become more like Jesus. We appreciate what He is doing to bring us to Himself *“even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless.”* (Eph 5:25-27).

So Paul described the rapture to encourage the saints in Thessalonica who had become a little bit discouraged by the way

things were working out. Perhaps things hadn't quite gone as they expected. I'm sure that that has been the experience of many today. The apostle John outlived all of the other apostles and indeed Jesus had said to Peter about John that *"If I will that he abide until I come, what is that to thee?"* (John 21:22). I think they all were expecting the Lord to return during their lifetime. I don't think they ever imagined that it would be nearly 2000 years after the Lord ascended and He still hasn't come back.

But you know it is clear to me that the return of the Lord can't be very far off. The more we look around us and see what's going on, the signs are there, the signs of what we speak of as "the end times". And it should encourage us to think that it could be today, when the Lord comes. If you have never come to the Lord Jesus and accepted Him as your own personal Saviour then I don't know how much longer the Lord will tarry in wondrous grace, waiting for you. But the opportunity is right now, this very moment, if you haven't put your trust in Jesus; consider what He has done for you so that you can be with Him for eternity. He died on the cross for you; He shed His precious blood so that your sins can be washed away if you believe on Him. He has done that for my sins—every single one of them—the ones that I've committed in the past, in the present, and those in the future, all have been taken care of by Jesus. How wonderful it is. And I'm looking forward to when I actually see Him at the rapture. And yet that moment is not the end in view; it's a preliminary step to all that the Lord wants to bring us into.

Between the Rapture and the Appearing

After the rapture there are a number of things that will happen. I believe as soon as we are with the Lord we will experience the judgment seat of Christ. It is something that will take place for each of us individually as before the Lord to understand all that has happened in our natural life here and to receive the divine assessment, the Lord's own personal assessment of you and me. *"For we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of the Christ, that each may receive the things done in the body, according to those he*

has done, whether it be good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

He will take us through our lives, and He will show us where we've made mistakes, where we've done things that perhaps strayed from what He would have hoped we might have done. But He will also reveal to us the lengths to which He personally Himself has gone to ensure that we are brought to the point that He wants each one of us to reach. This is going to be when we learn the answer to many questions we might have as to why certain things have happened in the way they have. It is not to be punitive. We will not suffer as a result of it because the Lord has already suffered for all the wrong that you and I have done, all the mistakes that we've made. What the Lord will do is to bring out more and more of His glory and His grace to us so that we understand it, and so that we can appreciate it, and so that we can learn the way that He has brought each one of us through. That's one of the first things that will happen when we are with the Lord.

The other thing that will happen is the wonderful celebration in heaven of the union of the Lord Jesus with His bride, the church. In one sense we are already united to Him - He is the Head, we are members of the body, but then there will be a heavenly celebration enjoyed by all. It is spoken of in Revelation 19:7, *“Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. And he says to me, Write, Blessed are they who are called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb. And he says to me, These are the true words of God.”*

You know all those that have been raised will have a part in this celebration. The church that is composed of believers from Pentecost right through to when the Lord returns will form the bride of Christ. But the Old Testament saints, they don't have quite that same position as I understand it; they will be there to see and enter into the joy of Christ with His bride, which is the assembly or church that He has delivered Himself up for to secure it for Himself.

In parallel, there will be a number of events that will unfold on the earth for those that are left behind. What a time, what a terrible time that will be! We are starting to see something of a foretaste of it in events that are taking place in the world at the moment, particularly where believers are being persecuted. The tribulation described in Revelation will commence after the rapture once the power that restrains in the world today has gone. The Holy Spirit is a restraining power today on the evil that is around. Satan is waiting to unleash a tremendous power of evil upon the world. He seeks to do it all the time but is restrained today, both from the work that the Holy Spirit does but also from God's governmental ways which in part are in response to the activities of the church in prayer and in godly concern for one and another. All that acts as a restraint today, but once the church has been caught up to be with the Lord in the air, all that will cease. Then there will be no restraint and Satan will be allowed to have free reign to do what he wants on earth.

The book of Revelation describes some of the things that will be unleashed upon the earth. Activities under the control of a holy righteous God will deal with the evil that exists and He will gather a remnant of His people Israel to secure them and bless them as He had promised (Revelation 7:1-8). I don't have the time to go into details but I just want to point out that there is a terrible time lasting approximately seven years and the second-half, the last 3½ years of that time, will be the worst. It's spoken of in the Old Testament. It's the final week of Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks (weeks of years) and that final week has yet to be fulfilled. (Daniel 9:25-27).

In relation to Israel, the prophetic clock, as we speak of it, has been stopped. We are in the gap between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's prophecy. The clock will commence again after the church has been caught up to be with Christ. And we see some of those events described to us in the visions that John saw that are recorded in the book of Revelation. But what it is all leading up to is that moment we speak of as the appearing when Christ will return to earth.

The Appearing

I have already said that most of the passages of Scripture that refer to the Lord's coming are about His appearing. Let me just read one from Colossians 3 verse 4. *"When the Christ is manifested who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory."*

The appearing is that day of display when the Lord will be seen in all His glory and the saints will be there with Him in glory. Jesus will be seen by the whole world (Revelation 1:7)—what's left of it after the tremendous devastation of those seven years. But Israel, the remnant that God will have recovered and brought back from all parts of the world, will be reestablished in their land. There they will see Jesus. Zechariah speaks prophetically of this, *"they shall look on me whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem"* (Zechariah 12:10-11). All those years ago, after the leaders of the political and religious world put Jesus on the cross and crucified Him, the apostle Paul suggests that they did it in ignorance, *"for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"* (1 Corinthians 2:8). We know it was part of God's plan because Jesus had to go to the cross if you and I were to be saved and have this hope before us. *"For I delivered to you, in the first place, what also I had received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures"* (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). He is alive forever, a "Man in the glory", our Forerunner, the One who is there and has prepared a place for those that believe on Him.

The other scripture I read is 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; this describes the power and the glory of His coming and we know from Revelation 19:11-21 where it is again described that the King of kings and Lord of lords is about to set up His kingdom on earth.

The Millennium

The establishment of the millennial kingdom is described in

Revelation chapter 20 which Paul speaks of (if it is Paul that wrote the epistle to the Hebrews) as the world to come (Hebrews 2:5). It is when Christ reigns in all His glory and the saints are reigning with Him. What a wonderful prospect! All those that were caught up at the rapture that we've already spoken about will appear with Him. But there are also those that have died for His Name during those seven years that we've briefly spoken about; they also live and reign with the Christ for 1000 years. All have part in the first resurrection, and they shall be priests of God and of the Christ and reign with Him a thousand years. What a wonderful thing it is to be part of the first resurrection!

During those 1000 years sin will still exist. The hearts of men, women and children that are on earth and those born during the millennium are still capable of sinning, but it will be judged righteously and immediately dealt with. During the millennium it will be normal for life to go on and death will be a rare event (see Isaiah 65:20). The old will be in the streets together with the young and even at 100 years old it will be as if they are young. And the children will be playing in the streets. You'll find much more description about the millennial period in the Old Testament. Read Zechariah 8, for example, and you'll find what a happy time it is—joy and gladness and cheerful gatherings. You will find that the animal kingdom is affected. There will be no more fighting amongst the animals; there will be harmony. The wolf and the lamb will be lying down together. The children will be playing with the serpents and come to no harm. Peace will be known throughout the world. (See Isaiah 11:6-9). What a wonderful change will come over the earth during the millennial period.

Believers will be reigning with Christ during that time and will have a part in the rule and the regulation of everything that goes on during those thousand years. We are not told exactly what those responsibilities will be but they may have some connection with the experiences that we go through today. I don't know but I think it possibly will be so. There will be many surprises and perhaps some

will have a role looking after various cities in the world. Well, you can think about it but I just feel very humbled myself as to what the Lord may possibly find for me to do. I have no idea. But Jesus, in all His wonderful glory and power, will have an influence over the whole of the world. The millennial reign will be a foretaste of what will be established next—it is still not the ultimate that God has in mind—that is reserved for the eternal state which will be brought in after the thousand years.

The Second Death

There will be another resurrection after the millennium. Look again at verse 5 of Revelation 20, *“the rest of the dead did not live till the thousand years had been completed”*. In verse 12 you find them brought before the great white throne. *“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is that of life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works...This is the second death, even the lake of fire. If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.”*

We might just soberly think about it. Death isn't the end. Many people deceive themselves today, or they're deluded by Satan into thinking that death is the end. But it isn't. Those that die who are not believers will be raised at this point. And they will be judged according to the record of their works. It will be checked, double checked you might say, as to whether their name is found in the book of life. Their names won't be found there because they will have rejected the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. The prospect for them is eternity in the lake of fire, the place where Satan is cast into. *“And the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are both the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for the ages of ages.”* (Revelation 20:10). What an awful prospect that is for any that do not put their trust today in the Lord Jesus. If you ever hesitate about accepting the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, just remember these verses. God has made it very clear. Don't hesitate to accept Him as your Saviour because you need Him.

He alone can save you.

The Eternal State

But there is a further glory to be revealed after the world to come and it's described in Revelation 21:1-7. This is the only detailed description we have in the Scriptures of the eternal state. The present earth and heavens will be burnt up (2 Peter 3:7,10) and God will create a new heaven and earth. This is what John saw. He saw the holy city coming down from heaven. The wonderful thing is that believers will be with the Lord Jesus as His bride, as that holy city, with Him in nearness and God will be near too. It speaks of God as tabernacling with men; *"the tabernacle of God is with men"*. That means God will be dwelling and living with men. Everything will be marked by righteousness. Sin will not exist anymore.

It will be perfect in every way. I remember a brother years ago speaking of it and as much as we think creation is wonderful, the new creation will be even more so - beyond us to describe in fact. I find it very difficult to speak about eternity because we don't have words and language to describe it. I think the apostle Paul found this when he was caught up to the third heaven and into paradise. And he was given to see and hear things which he couldn't write about (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). There were no words to describe it. And I think he experienced a little bit of what God has in store for us. The eternal day will be something that you and I can probably not even attempt to describe. So I'm not going to try and do it. All I can say is that it will be truly wonderful, the fullest display of all the glory of Christ, the riches of His inheritance in the saints. The apostle Paul speaks of it a little in his epistle to the Ephesians and it's something that we are to appreciate even now. He prays that *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of the might of his strength, in which he*

wrought in the Christ in raising him from among the dead, and he set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come; and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.” Ephesians 1:17-21)

What a prayer that was. But it's to give us, I think, a sense of the glory to come. And it will be displayed for all in the millennial day, when the Lord has this place of power and authority, and His saints reigning with Him in glory. Well, we're to have something of it in our hearts even now. And then that eternal day is when the Lord Jesus hands over the kingdom to Him who is God and Father so that God may be all and in all. *“Then the end, when he gives up the kingdom to him who is God and Father; when he shall have annulled all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that is annulled is death. For he has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when he says that all things are put in subjection, it is evident that it is except him who put all things in subjection to him. But when all things shall have been brought into subjection to him, then the Son also himself shall be placed in subjection to him who put all things in subjection to him, that God may be all in all.”* (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

Well, may something of the glory of that day that is still ahead reach into our hearts today that we might be filled and thrilled with all that is to take place. All that has been prepared for us by God that in the power of the Spirit we can have and enjoy in our hearts even now. May we be encouraged for His namesake.

An Address given by Phil Coldrick at Sevenoaks in July 2024

Scripture quotations are from the Darby translation

Lord, we can see, by faith in Thee,
A prospect bright, unfailing;
Where God shall shine, in light divine,
In glory never fading.

A home above, of peace and love,
Close to Thy holy person;
Thy saints shall there see glory fair,
And shine as Thy reflection.

O how we long to join the song
To Thee in glory rendered;
And there to flow with love's full glow,
With hearts like Thine surrounded;

No more as here, 'mid snares, to fear
A thought or wish unholy;
No more to pain the Lamb once slain,
But live to love Thee wholly;

To see Thine own (bone of Thy bone)
No more, as here, divided;
But drink in peace the living grace
That gave them hearts united.

Lord, haste the day of cloudless ray,
That prospect bright, unfailing;
Where God shall shine, in light divine,
In glory never fading.

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