

# ONE DAY CLOSER: ANTICIPATING THE SIGHT OF CHRIST

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*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (1 Cor. 13:12).*

In John Bunyan's classic book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, recently-converted Christian is on a journey to Mount Zion, a biblical metaphor referring to heaven. He stops at a lodging place and is interviewed about his faith by the ladies of the house. The woman Prudence asks, "What is it that makes you so desirous to go to Mount Zion?"

How would you answer that question? When you think of eternal life, what is attractive about it? What are you looking forward to?

Perhaps it is the prospect of being free from pain, disease, and death. Or it might be the thought of living in a place of unsurpassed beauty. Perhaps it is being able to do things you love for time without end.

These are glorious realities promised to the believer in Christ, and they do give us hope. But if this is all that heaven holds for us, it is not hope enough. In fact, it is not even a uniquely Christian hope. Even those who don't know Christ hope to be in "a better place" and experience such things.

The Christian hope is more than that. Our hope centers on a Person. It is the

promise that we will see God *face to face* in the person of Jesus Christ and be with him forever. This, and only this, can satisfy our soul's deepest longings.

We see why as we consider what the Scriptures say about the promise, fulfillment, and anticipation of this glorious future.

### **The Promise**

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

The pure in heart are those devoted to Jesus Christ in this life. They will see God. And Jesus did not mean that we will see God like tourists at the Grand Canyon, wowed at the sight but then heading off to somewhere else. This sight is about seeing and communing with God forever in a relation-

ship of love and blessing. And the fact this is promised to us at all is a mercy and privilege beyond comprehension, given our sin.

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When Moses said to the Lord, "Please show me your glory," God's answer was, "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Exod. 33:18, 20). To see God in our sinfulness is to be ruined and undone (cf. Isa. 6:5).

Sinful man cannot see, much less dwell with God in all his glory.

This is why we need Jesus Christ.

In the person of Christ, God the Son took on human flesh to bear the punishment for our sins on the cross and to give us his perfect righteousness, thereby reconciling us to God. He has become the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5) who brings us back to God and into his favor. This reconciliation finds its full expression in seeing and being with God.

And here is a wonder of wonders: our communion will not be with God only as spirit, but with God in the person of Jesus Christ. In physical bodies, we will dwell with God, whom we can see and touch. The resurrected Christ said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). Indeed, you will touch Christ and see that it is he, your Savior.

The God-man has become for us the focal point of our communion with God forever. We will ever see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). When the Lord returns, and the dead in Christ are raised to life, we will see this glory with physical, glorified eyes.

### **The Fulfillment**

Paul alerts us to the time “when [Christ] comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed” (2 Thess. 1:10).

*Marveled at.* On the day of the Lord, we will be amazed, stopped in our tracks, mouths gaping in astonishment at the King who has returned. And we will glorify him with our immediate response of worship. What else could we do at the sight of God in the flesh! This will not be Christ in his humiliation on the cross, nor Christ in merely a resurrected body, nor even Christ on the mount of transfiguration—all sights that the apostles had. This will be Christ in his full glory.

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). This is the King coming to claim his kingdom; this is the Son of God coming to put all his enemies under his feet, destroying the last enemy of death itself; this is the Bridegroom coming to claim his bride the church; this is the Savior coming to save—fully and finally—those who are eagerly waiting for him (Heb. 9:28).

At that moment, we will be changed in order to see and enjoy his glory in its full force. “When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The appearance of Christ will transform us to become like him with imperishable bodies and perfected senses with all the sin removed so that we have the capacity to enjoy the fullness of all that he is. And this is how it will be forever. We will “meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Friends, the Scriptures do not describe eternal life as merely a “better place” that even the non-believer could imagine. Our hope is that we will always be with the Lord. That is our bliss! “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). That is the language of home and love. To commune with God through Christ is the fulfillment of our deepest longings. As the hymn says, “O the deep, deep love of Jesus,

'tis a heaven of heavens to me.”

But we must wait a little longer before we see Christ.

### **The Anticipation**

We do not know when we will see Christ in his glory. “Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows” (Mark 13:32). So, we wait. But we do not wait idly; there is something we can do in the meantime. Like Moses, who endured his trials as seeing him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27), we must do the same and see Jesus today with the eyes of faith.

Soldiers far away from home carry pictures of their loved ones with them. This keeps the fires of affection alive and increases the anticipation of the long-awaited reunion. So also, for us, the Scriptures are the picture of Christ that we carry.

*For salvation is  
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It is in them that before your eyes Jesus was publicly portrayed as crucified (Gal. 3:1). And it is in them where your eyes will behold the King in his beauty (Isa. 33:17). Such sights endear him evermore to us so that though you do not now see him, you believe in

him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory (1 Pet. 1:8). We bring the joy of our future sight of Christ into today by seeking to know him more day by day in his word. And as our love for him grows, so grows our desire to see him, not just to see heaven.

This brings us to how Christian answered the question that Prudence put to him. Why was he so desirous of going to Mount Zion? And why should you and I be so desirous? Here is his answer:

Why, is it there that I hope to see alive my Savior who hung dead on the cross. . . . For, to tell you the truth, I love Him because He eased me of my burden. I am weary of my inward sickness. I desire to be where I will die no more, with a company that will continually cry, “Holy, holy, holy!”<sup>1</sup>

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1. JOHN BUNYAN, *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* (WHEATON, ILLINOIS: CROSSWAY, 2009) 77.

Does your heart resonate with that? If so, be encouraged. We shall see him soon. “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11). Every day it is one day closer. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

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