

The Blessed Hope!

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;” –(Titus 2:13)

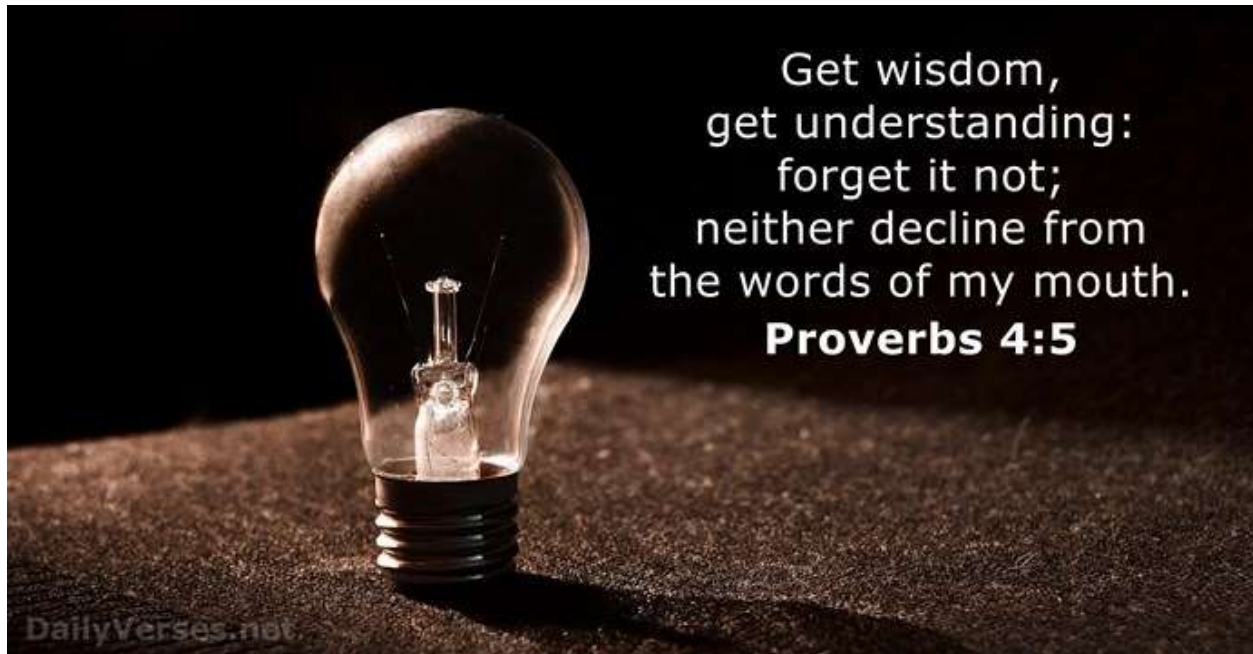
Diamond & Nugget #26

Scriptural Glimpses of Glory

Have you given much thought to what Glory has in store for you? Most people are more concerned that they do not want to go to Hell. There is nothing wrong with that desire. Others look forward to glory as an upgrade in the quality of life we have known, witnessed, as age takes its toll. Psalm 90 is a Psalm of Moses, and I reflect on Psalm 90:10 a lot. **“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”** The psalmist sums up his sad contemplations in verse 10, in which life is regarded as not only rigidly circumscribed within a poor seventy or, at most, eighty years, but as being unsatisfying and burdensome by reason of its transitory nature. The “pride” which is but trouble and vanity is that which John calls **“the pride of life”** -(1st John 2:16), the objects which, apart from God, men desire to win, and glory in possessing. The self-congratulation would be no less ridiculous or tragic if the things which evoke it lasted longer, or if we lasted longer to possess them. But seeing that they swiftly pass as we do, surely it is but “trouble” to fight for what is “vanity” when that which is won melts away so soon. Psalm 90:10 hints at our departure in Rapture language, especially the last four words of the verse.

Plainly, then, man’s wisdom is to seek to know two things—the power of God’s anger and the measure of his own days. But alas for human levity and bondage to sense, how few look beyond the external, or lay to heart the solemn truth that God’s wrath is inevitably operative against sin, and how few have any such just conception of it as to lead to reverential awe, proportioned to the divine character which should evoke it! Ignorance and inoperative knowledge divide mankind between them, and only a small remnant have let the truth plow deep into their inward most being and plant there holy fear of God. Therefore, the psalmist prays for himself and his people, as knowing the temptations to inconsiderate disregard and to inadequate feeling of God’s opposition to sin, that his power would take untaught hearts in hand and teach them this - to count their days. Then we shall bring home, as from a ripened harvest field, the best fruit which life can yield, **“a heart of wisdom,”** which having learned the power of God’s anger and the number of our days turns itself to the eternal dwelling place, and no more is sad when it sees life ebbing away, or the generations moving in unbroken succession into the darkness. The Old Testament implores that one seek the Wisdom of Solomon

in 1st Kings. But the one book of the Bible where “wisdom” is most evident is the book of Proverbs, some 53X times.



In the Bible the Christian learns that there are great rewards for the faithful believer. In contrast to other beliefs, only the biblical presentations of life after death evidence the high and holy qualities that distinguish a divine revelation. It apparently is not God's plan to reveal fully what he has prepared for his children, but he does allow Christians just enough light to meet their needs of hope, comfort, and encouragement. Three witnesses have been permitted to give a glimpse of the glories to come. Here we can pier behind the curtain of life and feast our eyes on the glory to come.

Jesus Christ was as familiar with the unseen as with the seen. He had all His information firsthand. He ***"was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made"*** -(John 1:2,3).

Paul was caught up into the highest heaven, and though the Spirit would not permit him to reveal all he saw and heard, such was his experience that he testifies that to depart and be with Christ is far better than to remain in this life -(Philippians 1:23).

John was divinely appointed to reveal these things. On the island of Patmos John received a vision of heaven's glory, which, guided by the Holy Spirit, he recorded in the book of Revelation -(Revelation 1:9-11, 19).

Going to Be with the Lord

At death believers immediately depart to be with the Lord. What a reward in itself! They shall not enter a dark unknown nor a state of unconsciousness, but they will be "present with the Lord" -(2nd Corinthians 5:8).

The eternal, glorified body is given when Christ comes for His own! Then shall all the believers who have "fallen asleep" in Jesus be joined to those who are alive and remain, and together they will meet the Lord in the air, and thus be with Him forever -(1st Thessalonians 4:15-17). If eternal separation from God is hell's supreme torment, surely eternal union with Him is heaven's greatest joy.

Entering a New Home

The earthly home is temporary; but all believers shall dwell forever in the house of the Lord. The new home has been especially prepared for believers by the Lord -(John 14:1-3). Those who know the Lord will not be strangers or visitors in heaven. The experience will be unparalleled from what a person experiences when moving into a new home on earth. Moving into a new home on earth may have all the allusions of being permanent but all too often prove short lived, i.e., relocation for employment reasons, divorce, death of family member, and many of these events carry the memory of pain and great loss. The unseen future relative of our heavenly home brings many questions to mind and since there is nothing to compare it with, merely adds to our anxiety and excitement.

Paul says in his first epistle to the Corinthians -(1st Corinthians 2:9) that only the spirit of God can know the things which God has prepared for His people. Kind of like what children anticipate at Christmas time, but vastly greater.

The Holy City

The glory of man's civilization is his cities, but all these will be destroyed -(2nd Peter 3:10). The city is not only the product of man's civilization, but it is the seat of his sin. When Abraham left the decadent civilization of Ur to dwell in tents with Isaac and Jacob, "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" - (Hebrews 11:10). This was the Jerusalem of David's conquest, but also (agreeing to the law of double reference) the heavenly Jerusalem which shall be revealed in the final era. Revelation 21:1-17 allows us this view of the new home.

By Satan's final overthrow and the judgment of the great white throne, the world will be purged of evil inhabitants. A new heaven and a new earth will replace the old. Thus the stage will be set for the appearance of the Holy City. Note some features of this city:

Magnitude

The height will be equal to length and breadth, in that it will be built up like a pyramid - (Revelation 21:16,17). The greatness of Nineveh, Babylon, Rome, Paris, London, will be totally eclipsed by the city of God. It will be the center of all creation. Any attempt to describe or characterize our new home is incomplete. We have nothing here on earth that we can use to relate to or conceptualize.

The twelve gates, each with a name of a tribe of Israel, are guarded by angels so that only saints may enter. The twelve foundations of the wall bear the names of the twelve apostles who laid the foundation of the kingdom of the Lamb -(Revelation 21:12-21). This description alludes to its magnitude but becomes nebulous when we even begin to

imagine how it looks. The imagery provided by the words of the Bible does present the beauty and elegance of something along the line of the Ritz Carlton hotel and not that of, say Motel 6, where they leave the light on for you.

Purity

The city itself is pure transparent gold and adorned with every precious stone - (Revelation 21:18-21). The whole atmosphere is that of purity, permanency, and radiance. The Sun and Moon will no longer be necessary. The Holy City will be more dazzling than the light of the Sun, or the light of the largest stars. The glory of God will light the city and the Lamb is the lamp thereof -(Revelation 21:11, 23; 22:5). Christ will always be the one by whom the Father is made known.

Sanctuary

Because the city *is* a sanctuary there is no need of a special one. All the barriers between God and man are broken down, and the Almighty and the Lamb dwell in the midst like a temple -(Revelation 21:3, 22). It is Immanu-El, "**God with us,**" in full reality and in the highest, most intimate way.

The temple was the meeting place between God and His people, and was assigned for His honor and glory. But now that the earth has been purged from sin, God will re-enter it and dwell with His people. Instead of the temple there will be the throne. It is a solitary throne; it is an unshared throne; it is an eternal throne. Instead of bringing their offerings to the temple, the kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor to the throne of God.

Inhabitants

Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will live in the Holy City - (Revelation 21:7, 27). The "just" in Old Testament days looked for such a city. No doubt all the saints of the Lord will have their habitation there -(Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

The "Paradise of God" (Revelation 22:1-5)

The Apostle John describes in Revelation the paradise of God in which the Holy City lies. In it are found the river of the water of life flowing out of the throne, and the tree of life. The curse is removed and man may partake freely of both. Yet he is definitely dependent upon God.

On either side of the banks of this river will be growing the tree of life the leaves of which will be for the preserving of the health of nations. "**To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God**" - (Revelation 2:7). We are told that the tree of life bears twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse we are told.

People of all ages naturally have many questions about Heaven, and a very popular book that answers many of those questions is the 2004 book '*Heaven*' by Randy Alcorn.

Randy Alcorn comes closest to anyone that I can think of in answering the kinds of questions folks have on Heaven. This was one of the most challenging subjects since I would do a children's message most Sundays. Fielding children's questions is one of the greatest challenges for a pastor's ability to think on his feet to respond with an answer that any child can understand.

Receiving Rewards

While it is true that every believer will dwell in this Holy City, all will not possess the same honor, wear the same crowns, or receive the commendation, "**Well done.**" Only those faithful in life and service will receive special rewards.

Christians are adding to their accounts either works that will stand the test and be rewarded, or dross that will burn and leave them empty-handed. Actions in daily life build on the foundation of Christ - either with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, hay, and stubble -(1st Corinthians 3:12-15). Several Scripture references speak of future rewards:

"Verily there is a reward for the righteous" -(Psalm 58:11).

"He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal" -(John 4:36).

"Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord" -(Ephesians 6:8).

"Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" -(Colossians 3:24).

Basis of Rewards

One cannot work for salvation. **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"** - (Ephesians 2:8,9), but after salvation, God promises to reward every good work. There is a difference between the Bible references which deal with *salvation*, the "free gift," and those which speak of *rewards*, which are earned by works. Remember, that "free gift" is not a gift until one accepts it personally, through faith. We are not saved by works but saved to do good works. The Apostle Paul did not doubt his salvation when he feared he might be a "castaway" (or disapproved), but he did feel that, though he preached to others, he might be preaching in the energy of the flesh rather than for the glory of God, and so suffer loss of reward -(1st Corinthians 9:26,27).

Christians will be rewarded according to their walk. Notice the words of the Lord, **"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works"** -(Revelation 2:19). Christians will be rewarded for the way they live as well as for what they do. By walking **"worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work"** -(Colossians 1:10), and adding Christian living to faith in Christ, they shall have that *abundant* entrance into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord and Savior - (2nd Peter 1:5-11).

Christians will also receive rewards according to their works -(1st Corinthians 3:8, 13-15; Revelations 14:13). **"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be"** -(Revelations 22:12) is the promise of the Son of God. When believers stand before the judgment seat of Christ for the judgment of rewards, they will be rewarded not according to good intentions, holy ambitions, or large promises, but strictly in proportion to their faithfulness in multiplying the talents which they received -(Matthew 25:21). **"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully"** -(2nd Corinthians 9:6). One cannot judge what is of true worth in God's eyes, for human eyes are blinded by spectacular service and the perspective can be faulty.

Regretfully so, it is possible to do much in the name of Christ or the church that is not done for Christ at all. It is also possible to perform many humble duties and hidden services of love for Christ which the world never sees. A great sermon preached in man's wisdom and oratory, to please a large congregation, may not stand at all in that day before the fire of God, whereas a simple, sincere testimony of Christ's saving power may shine forth as a gem.

Crowns As Rewards

Holy Scripture identifies five crowns as rewards the believer will receive to present before the Lord one day.

Incorruptible or the Victor's Crown -(1st Corinthians 9:25-27)

After the Grecian games (predecessor of the Olympics today) were all over, the runners, wrestlers, and successful contestants assembled before the judges' stand, an elevated seat on which the judges sat, and the winners were given a crown of laurel leaves. Although this was a corruptible crown which would soon fade, Paul probably had it in mind when he spoke of the incorruptible victor's crown. A man who would compete in those games would deny his body many indulgences in order to win the race. So, Paul tells us, this incorruptible crown is for those who "keep under their bodies;" that is, who do not yield to fleshly desires. These victors do not permit themselves to be weakened for service by selfish desires, or to be diverted from the Master's work by worldly pleasures.

Crown of Life (James 1:12; Revelation. 2:10; Matthew 5:12; Romans 8:17, 18)

This is sometimes called the martyr's crown and is mentioned in James and Revelation. However, coupled with these two are numerous passages referring to the special reward awaiting those who suffer much for Christ. God had a crown of life for all those who endure persecution, ridicule, abuse, or torment. The martyrs of every age, and of the tribulation period especially, are to receive this crown.

Crown of Glory (1st Peter 5:2-4)

This is the elder's or pastor's crown given by the Chief Shepherd when He shall appear. It is for faithful ministry. Much is said in God's Word about true and false shepherds of the flock. The faithful minister points in but one direction - toward the Cross. Many ministers today cater to the perishing praise of their audience, or the wealth of their

members, or the acknowledgment of the learned rather than seek after God's crown of glory. There are others who are faithful by preaching the infallible Word of God and the message of the shed blood of the Son of God, who are now being bitterly persecuted. But for these faithful shepherds the crown of glory awaits.

Crown of Rejoicing (1st Thessalonians 2:19; Cf. Daniel 12:3; Philippians 4:1)

All cannot win the crown of glory, but every Christian may attain to the crown of rejoicing, for this is the soul-winner's crown. Every believer is not called to preach, for obvious reasons, but everyone is called to sow the precious seed of God's Word and to be constantly seeking to win others to Jesus Christ. Great will be our rejoicing in heaven when we see those who have been led to salvation through our testimony and patient teaching of God's Word.

Crown of Righteousness (2nd Timothy 4:7,8)

This is the crown for those who love His appearing. Why a crown of righteousness for loving and looking for the second coming of the Lord? John answers this in 1st John 3:2, 3: ***"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."***

Reflection Summary

There are many promises in the Bible concerning future rewards for the righteous. Jesus Christ, Paul, and; John were able to speak of these glories—Christ knew them, Paul and John were given glimpses.

At death, believers go to be with the Lord and will remain with Him eternally. The new home with God is indescribable in beauty and specially prepared for believers. It will be a Holy City, unlike the cities on earth. Only those whose names are found in the book of life will be inhabitants. No sanctuary will be needed because God's presence fills the city. The light will be from God and the Lamb, brighter than the sun or any star. The wall and gates are made of jewels. The foundation bears the names of the twelve apostles, each gate the name of a tribe of Israel. Huge in magnitude, its length, breadth, and height will be equal. Purity permeates the city. This city lies in the Paradise of God where the water of life flows, and the tree of life gives leaves for the preserving of the health of nations.

Believers have accepted salvation and all will live in the Holy City, but individual rewards will be given according to each Christian's walk and work. Each day's actions will be burned and purified at this judgment of rewards. Some will burn up and some will remain.

Crowns are the rewards. These will be incorruptible, eternal crowns for those who did not allow selfish desires to hinder service to God. The crown of life is a special reward for martyrs and those who suffered persecution. To faithful pastors and leaders goes

the crown of glory. Soul-winners are presented with a crown of rejoicing. The crown of righteousness is especially for those who love and look for His return.

Blessings,

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